

Institutionalism

Introduction:

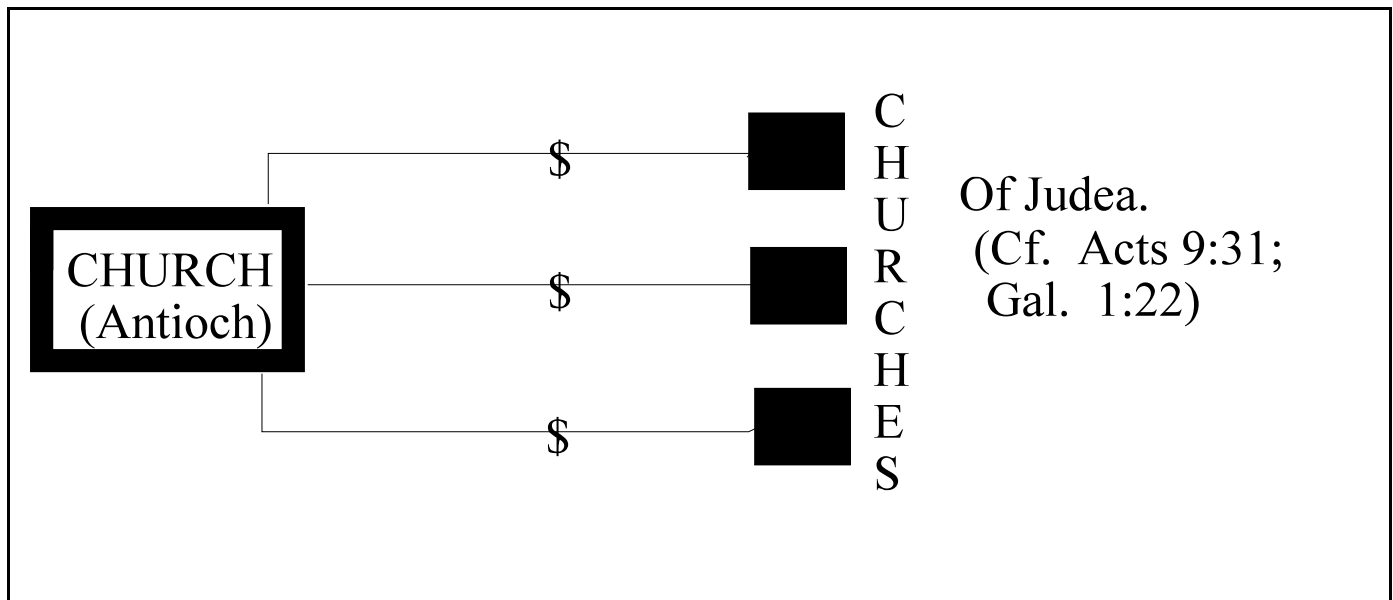
- A. "The self-sufficiency of the church in organization, work, worship and every function required of it by the Lord should be emphasized. . . The church is the **only** organization authorized to discharge the responsibilities of the Lord's people. (Guy N. Woods, Teacher's Annual Lesson Commentary on Bible School Lessons 1946, Gospel Advocate Company.
- B. The subject assigned to me tonight: Institutionalism.
 - 1. "Institutional" = "2. Organized so as to function in social, charitable, and educational activities; as, institutional religion." (Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language, College Edition, World Publishing Company, 1968)
 - 2. "Institutionalism", commonly used among us, refers to efforts of congregations to do their work by pooling their resources either under the oversight of a board of directors of a human institution or the elders of a sponsoring congregation.
 - 3. Institutionalism's most visible forms among churches of Christ in the past 200 years have been church supported:
 - a. The missionary societies (ACMS and UCMS)
 - b. The benevolent institutions (Orphan Homes, Homes for the aged, etc.)
 - c. The educational institutions (Colleges and secondary schools)
 - d. The sponsoring church arrangements (Herald of Truth, etc)
 - 4. Institutionalism's most visible side effect has been to condition churches to accept the social gospel concept in general -- the attitude toward Scriptural authority that accepted institutionalism also accepted the social gospel approach to church work.
- C. The institutional question involves a two-fold question of Scriptural Authority. Before a congregation could support any working arrangement it would need to prove:
 - 1. That the work done by the arrangement is a work the church can do. If this cannot be established, then there is no need to go on the second question. Some questions belonging to this phase of the subject would be:
 - a. Is there a difference in the work of the church and work of individuals?
 - b. Is caring to orphans the work of the church?
 - c. Is secular education the work of the church?
 - d. What is the church's responsibility in teaching, preaching and benevolence?
 - e. What, if any, is the church's responsibility in providing for the economic, social and recreational needs of its members and the community?
 - 2. That the arrangement for doing the work can be Scripturally supported by the church. Only after the first is established should this come into play. We will limit ourselves to this phase of the subject in this lesson.
- D. The institutional practice, i.e., the practice of churches turning their funds over to a another institution (be it a board or eldership) to do the work of the churches, is a violation of the fundamental principle of the silence of the scriptures (cf. Priesthood - Heb. 7; Music question) in two important areas:

Discussion:

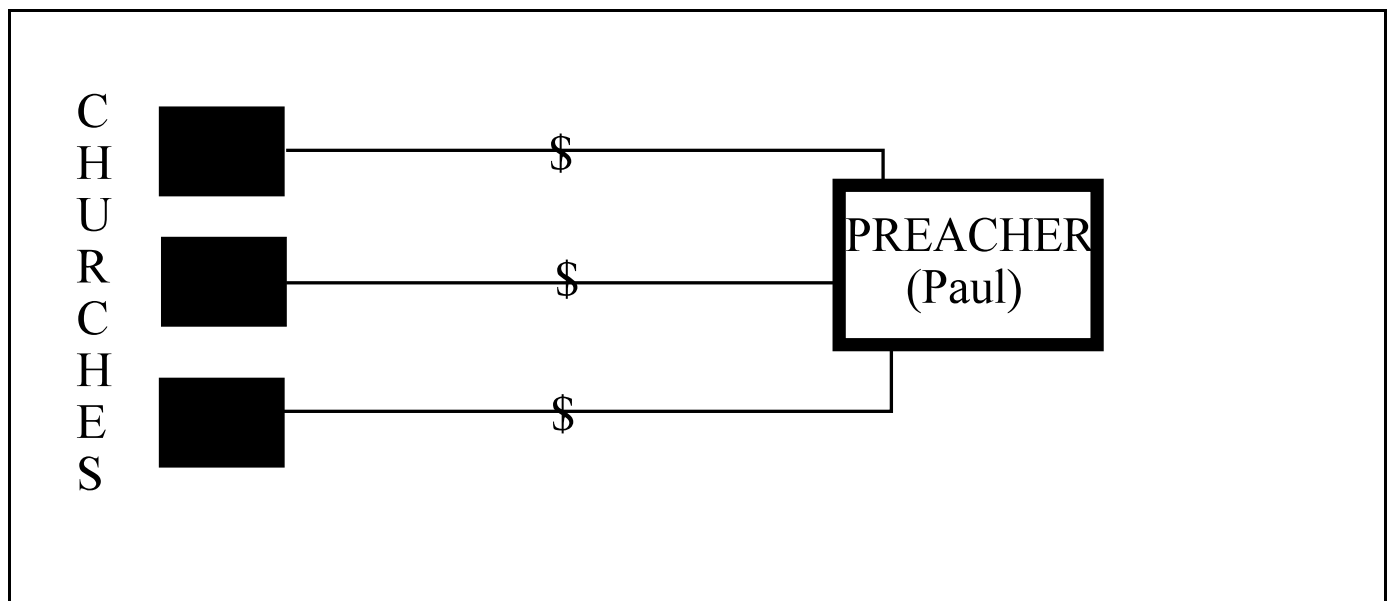
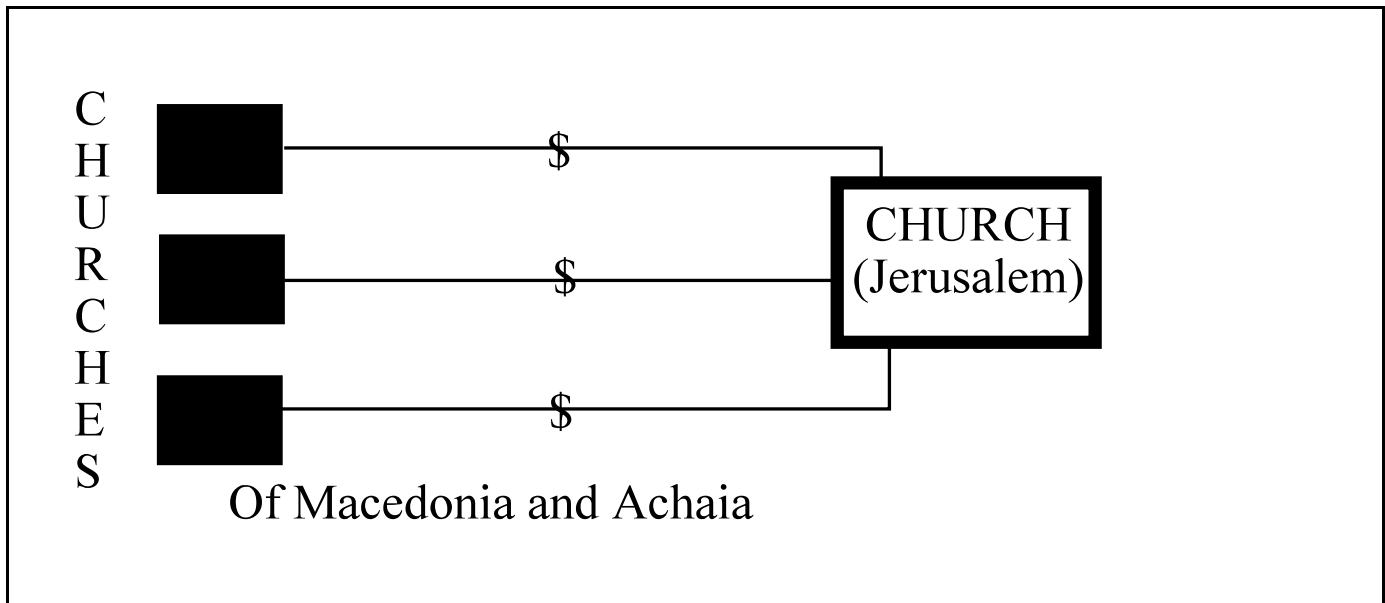
I. CHURCH ORGANIZATION

- A. The only organization for church work is local. (Acts 14:26; Tit. 1:5)
 - 1. Local congregations existed for a time without complete organization.
 - 2. Local congregations were given overseers for each congregation. ("every church")
 - a. Ephesus had its overseers. (Acts 20:17,28).
 - b. Philippi had its overseers. (Phil. 1:1)
 - c. Overseers were to oversee folk among them. (1 Pet. 5:1-5).

3. Local churches maintained control of its own work. (cf. 1 Cor. 16:1-3).
 - a. Each church given instructions to take up collection.
 - b. Each church maintained control in the work. (v. 3)
 - B. The Scriptures say nothing about any other kind of organization - smaller than, larger than nor other than the local church to do church work.
 - C. The History books show the sad results of ignoring the autonomy and sufficiency of local churches in doing church work.
 1. It gradually led to Catholic church organization.
 2. It gradually led to "Christian Church" of today.
- II. **CHURCH COOPERATION**
- A. There are two basic kinds of cooperation in accomplishing a common work: Combined (or joint) action - Concurrent (independent) action.
 1. Snaking logs is a good example. Two men with two mules in same woods cooperate in the common work of getting the logs to the spot to be loaded on the truck to be carried to the mill.
 - a. If they hooked both mules to one or more logs that would be combined or joint cooperation. One or the other or both would surrender some of his control to the other.
 - b. If each hooked his mule to one or more logs that would be concurrent cooperation. Each maintains his control, though working for a common goal.
 - B. There is evidence that New Testament churches did cooperate, so there is authority for church cooperation.
 1. In Benevolence New Testament churches cooperated helping needy churches meet their responsibility to their needy members.
 - a. Acts 11:27-30



2. Romans 15:15-26; 1 Corinthians 16; 2 Cor. 8,9



3. In Evangelism several churches cooperated in the wages of a gospel preachers. (2 Cor. 11:8)

4. Notice that in both Benevolence and Evangelism that the support went directly to the work done and not through some middle institution. They cooperated by acting concurrently rather than in

combination or joint action.

Conclusion:

- A. Institutionalism is an addition to New Testament authority in both the areas of organization and cooperation.
- B. A church had just as well use another kind of music (instrumental) as to use another kind of organization or another kind of cooperation. Each is an addition to the kind authorized by the Scriptures.