

Being Independent & Being Interdependent

Aug. 5, 2018 | 1689:26 ¶14-15

What we are assuming

1. Christians have professed to believe in the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church
2. Christians are invisibly united by the apostolic gospel in the holiness of justification and faith.

[Eph 4]

What we are assuming [cont.]

3. Local churches alone are invisibly united by the apostolic doctrine AND visibly united by the apostolic authority of the keys of the kingdom.
 - a. 1st unity by virtue of a Christian's membership in the new covenant.
 - b. 2nd by public ratification and administration of the new covenant.

“Apostolic doctrine unites
Christians **and** churches.
Apostolic doctrine **and**
apostolic office [authority]
unite a church.”

What does this mean?

4. Churches are formally independent.
5. Christians must be united to local churches.

“**[Autonomy]** does **not** mean
we can thumb our noses at
everybody else and claim
everything belongs to us.”

“There is a point to the doctrine of the autonomy of the church, and it is that **Christ has set within the church everything it needs to accomplish his purpose for it.**”

“Local churches are
independent
[autonomous] because
they possess authority
over their own members
and statements of faith.”

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1. Different churches shared love & greetings:

- “All the churches greet you” [Rom. 16:16]
- “The churches of Asia send you greeting”
[1 Cor 16:19]
- “All the saints greet you” [2 Cor 13:13]
- “I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus
and your love toward all the saints”
[Eph 1:15; also Col 1:4]

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2. They shared preachers & missionaries:

- “With him we are sending the brother who is famous among all the churches for his preaching of the gospel” [2 Cor 8:18]
- “Beloved, it is a faithful thing you do in all your efforts for these brothers, strangers as they are, who testified to your love before the church” [3 John 5-6]

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3. They supported one another financially with joy & thanksgiving:

- “At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints. For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contributions for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem” [Rom 15:25-26]
- “For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgiving to God” [2 Cor 9:12; & 2 Cor 8:1-2]

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4. They imitated one another in Christian living:

- “You became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia” [1 Thes 1:7]
- “For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea” [1 Thes 2:14]
- “We ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions....” [2 Thes 1:4]

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5. Churches were told to greet one another:

- “Greet also the church in their house” [Rom 16:5]

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6. They were instructed to care for one another financially:

- Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do... each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper.... I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem. ”

[1 Cor 16:1–3]

- “So give proof before the churches of your love and of our boasting about you to these men” [2 Cor 8:24]

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7. They were cautioned about whom to receive as teachers:

- “Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world” [1 John 4:1]
- “Many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist. Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward.” [2 John 1:7]

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8. They were exhorted to pray for other churches and Christians:

- “Keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints”
[Eph 6:18]

“The point is impossible
to evade:

**local congregations of
the New Testament were
very much integrated
with one another.”**

“Local churches possess **independence**, because they possess authority for representing **Christ**, pronouncing a **confession**, and initiating the Great **Commission**.”

“By a similar measure,
the **interdependence** of
local churches is founded
in the fact that they share
the
same **Christ**, the same
confession, and the
same **Commission.**”

Separate Churches Share the Same Christ

- “To the church of God that is in Corinth... called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours”
[1 Cor 1:2; cf. 2 Cor 1:1]
- “Fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God” [1 Cor 1:2; cf. 2 Cor 1:1]

Implications of Separate Churches Sharing the Same Christ

1. Christians should care about polity since it determines how unity is made visible in church
2. The names and reputations of all Christians in all churches are bound together
3. They should pray for, encourage, and support one another
4. Different levels of cooperation are possible based on different levels of doctrinal and ecclesial unity

Separate Churches Share the Same Confession

- “If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed” [Gal 1:2,9]
- John expected every church to embrace a right doctrine of the incarnation [1 John 4:1-3]

Implications of Separate Churches Sharing the Same Confession

5. Churches should partner in learning from and teaching one another
6. Churches should imitate one another in holiness (like the apostolic churches did [1 Thes 1:7; 2:4; 2 Thes 1:4; 1 Cor 4:7]; Paul often insisted on a common rule “in all the churches” [1 Cor 14:33b-34; also 7:17; 11:16, etc.]

Separate Churches Share the Same Commission

- All churches are...
 - Called to be holy [1 Cor 1:2]
 - Called to make disciples [Mat 28:18-19]
 - Tasked with guarding the name and reputation of Christ through church discipline [Mat 18:15-20; etc.]

Implications of Separate Churches Sharing the Same Commission

7. Churches should work together regarding membership and discipline
8. Churches should work together in missions and evangelism
9. Churches should partner together in their mercy ministry work

1689 - ch26 ¶14: “As each church, and all the members of it, are bound to **pray continually** for the good and prosperity of all the churches of Christ, in all places, and upon all occasions to **further it** (every one within the bounds of their places and callings, in the exercise of their gifts and graces)”

“so the churches (when planted by the providence of God so as they may enjoy opportunity and advantage for it) **ought to hold communion among themselves**, for their peace, increase of love, and mutual edification.”

(Eph 6:18; Ps 122:6; Rom 16:1, 2; 3 John 8-10)

¶15: “In cases of difficulties or differences, either in point of doctrine or administration, wherein either the churches in general are concerned, or any one church, in their peace, union, and edification; or any member or members of any church are injured, in or by any proceedings in censures not agreeable to truth and order:”

“it is according to the mind of Christ,
that many churches **holding
communion together**, do, by their
messengers, meet to consider, and
give their advice in or about that
matter in difference, to be reported
to all the churches concerned;”

“howbeit these messengers assembled, are not intrusted with any church-power properly so called; or with any jurisdiction over the churches themselves, to exercise any censures either over any churches or persons; or to impose their determination on the churches or officers”

(Acts 15:2, 4, 6, 22, 23, 25; 2 Cor 1:24; 1 John 4:1)

“From my perspective,
the real question is not,
‘Should we have
associations?’ Because
whether formal or informal,
they already exist. The
question is simple, what kind
of associations shall we
have?”

Dr. James M. Renihan

Views on **Holding Communion Together**

For Formal
Associations:

1. Membership
Paradigm

Non-Formal Associations:

1. Violates Regulative
Principle

“While there may have been a general uniformity of opinion regarding this question in the seventeenth century, there are many Reformed Baptists today who do not believe that the practice of holding communion via formal associations is Scriptural.”

“In addition, there are Reformed Baptists who are undecided on the subject, as well as many who might agree to *some degree* of formal organization, but balk at such things as the right to hold property, ordain officers, etc.”

Pastor David J. Chanski

Views on Holding Communion Together

For Formal
Associations:

1. Membership
Paradigm
2. Confessionally
Required

Non-Formal Associations:

1. Violates Regulative
Principle
2. Communion ≠ Formal
Groups

“[These] speak of the **necessity** and functioning of associations... [its authors] are expressing their conviction that churches providentially placed together **should** associate themselves. There is an ‘**oughtness,**’ a **duty,** to this doctrine.”

“What did the original authors mean by these words, “hold communion” and, in this case, that begs an antecedent question: **Who were the original authors of the words?** The Baptists who assembled in London in 1677 borrowed the wording from the Congregationalists who framed the Savoy Platform of Church Polity in the year 1658.”

Views on Holding Communion Together

For Formal Associations:

1. Membership Paradigm
2. Confessionally Required
3. Communion = Formal Associating to Foster Profound Spiritual

Non-Formal Associations:

1. Violates Regulative Principle
2. Communion ≠ Formal Groups
3. Communion = Profound Spiritual Fellowship

“If you desire inter-church fellowship with our church, then let's get to know each other. Let's learn of each other's ministries and begin to pray for one another. Let's communicate and foster a common interest in the things of the Kingdom.”

“Let's take opportunities to deploy our resources to support one another in our respective efforts to advance the glory of Christ. Let's trust that the Spirit will direct our obedience and love to the accomplishment of His sovereign purposes.”

Pastor Alan J. Dunn

“It is a reciprocal love, friendship,
and support to cooperate together for
noble goals -
the good and prosperity of all the
churches, their peace, increase of
love, and mutual edification.”

“By coming together, confessional associations of churches agree to live with one another in order to achieve those goals... When these grow (the church’s prosperity, peace, love, and mutual edification), so do the churches and the Christians in them. May God help us to be characterized by these things...”

Pastor James M. Renihan

Selections from
the ARBCA &
TAARBC
Constitutions

Nature of Formal Associations:

“The many needs of the churches, such as mutual encouragement and support, assistance of various kinds, edification, oversight (when requested and agreed upon by the local churches involved), and cooperative efforts to advance Christ’s kingdom in and around the State of Texas, bring about the need for an Association of churches.”

The Purpose of ARBCA:

“The purpose of this Association is to advance Christ's kingdom by providing a fellowship in which churches of common confession may find mutual encouragement, assistance, edification, and counsel, and may participate in cooperative efforts such as home missions, foreign missions, ministerial training and publications all of which are often beyond the scope of one local church. Other such efforts as the Association may also

The Purpose of TAARBC:

1. To show visible unity to the world and churches (John 17:20-26; Eph. 4:4-6).
2. To gain a greater knowledge, communion and love with sister churches (Col. 4:16; Rev. 1:10-11).
3. To afford counsel and advice in difficult cases of various types (Acts 15:1-6).

The Purpose of TAARBC:

4. To help preserve uniformity of faith and practice within the confines of our Confession of Faith, especially in dealing with doctrinal and practical questions (I Cor. 14:33).
5. To detect and deal with heresies and/or heretics, and in so doing to maintain harmony and peace in the churches (I Tim. 1:18-20; Titus 1:7-11).
6. To give financial aid as God prospers our

The Purpose of TAARBC:

7. To help curb the wanton abuse of church power (III John 9).
8. To cooperate in the spreading of the gospel (Phil. 1:3-7; II Cor. 8:18).
9. To supply the pulpits of sister churches in the event one is without a pastor (2 John 1:7-11; Jude 3).
10. To advance and secure in every way the interests of Christ's kingdom (Acts 28:30-31; Col.

Limitation of Powers:

“1. All cooperation in Association efforts by member churches shall be strictly voluntary. The Association will make no demands of a member church beyond its purpose of association.”

Limitation of Powers:

“2. The Association has authority to determine whether its commendation shall be given to or withheld from an applicant church. It also has power to withdraw commendation from a member church. The Association cannot take anything from a local church but that which it gives to the church, namely, its conscientious commendation.”

Limitation of Powers:

“3. The Association may not interfere with the affairs of its member churches. The Association will only offer advice to a member church when requested to do so by a majority of duly elected officers, or by congregational request made in accordance with a church’s own constitution or by-laws...”

Limitation of Powers:

“1. ...the powers of this Association shall never be construed as being superior to, or as interfering with, the authority of a local church.

Limitation of Powers:

“2. Nevertheless, the Association has a right to call any delinquent member church to account, whether for a wanton abuse of its power towards its members, neglect of attendance at Association meetings, or any deviation from the Word of God and the Confession of Faith in teaching or practice.”

Limitation of Powers:

“If satisfactory reasons are not given by the delinquent member church’s pastors for its actions or lack of reformation thereof, the Association has the authority to exclude that church from its connection and fellowship. However, this action of exclusion neither disannuls nor destroys the independence of that church...”

TAARBC Relative to Its Member Churches:

“4. Any complaint from a member or members of an Association church regarding the abuse of pastoral authority in their own church must first be made to and through their own pastors. If, after due process, that church’s pastors refuse to make the matter known to the Association, the church member(s) may appeal to the pastor(s) of another member church.”

TAARBC Relative to Its Member Churches:

“If this brings reconciliation to the satisfaction of all parties, the complaint will be considered sufficiently resolved. However, if reconciliation is not affected, the pastor(s) must then make the matter known to the pastors of the Association.”

TAARBC Relative to Its Member Churches:

“5. The pastors of the churches in the Association will convene at the next regularly scheduled meeting to: address any request for advice; or to hear, from all parties involved, any complaint; and to make their recommendation known to all the member churches in general.”

TAARBC Relative to Its Member Churches:

“6. The pastors thus assembled are not armed with coercive power to compel the churches or their pastors to submit to their decisions. But any church or church’s pastors which does not hear the advice or recommendation of the Association in such matters demonstrates that it no longer supports the Association.”

TAARBC Relative to Its Member Churches:

“While the Association can take nothing from the transgressing church but what it gave to it (i.e. a good standing in the Association), nevertheless the Association has the prerogative to remove from membership any transgressing church and to publish the results of its findings, as deemed necessary, for the good of the cause of Christ, and the purity of the gospel.”

“May the Most Holy and Gracious
Triune God –
the Father who chose the church,
the Son who made atonement for the
church,
and the Holy Spirit who applies the
redemptive work of Christ to the
church –
Bless and enlarge our churches in
Christ Jesus’ name. Amen!”