

# View

## Church Autonomy

BY ROBERT F. TURNER

"Autonomy" is a compound word, composed of *autos*, meaning "self," and *nomos*, meaning "law." An ordinary dictionary will tell us the word means "self-ruled," so that an autonomous church is "self-governed, without outside control."

There are those who reject the concept of God and revelation, saying ultimate authority is in man. To them there would be no limitations placed upon self-

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rule. Of course most of our readers accept Christ as King, and know that a church which wishes to exercise "self rule" in *all* things is not the church of Christ. But our brethren are far from clear on the legitimate (scriptural) field of self rule, and how this affects the relation of one church to another. Some seem to think "autonomy" means the right to devise organizational arrange-

ments for which there is no New Testament authority; while others think calling attention to such error violates the "autonomy" of the erring brethren.

A church can not "rule" on the importance of Christ' death, the necessity of faith, the meaning and purpose of baptism; for these are legacies of truth which Christ gave the world and by which we are called. The church is the product of the gospel, not its author. One would not violate some church's autonomy by teaching along these lines, for no church as a legitimate "say" in such things.

Does God give a local church the right to decide the day of worship? May they "rule" on the need for assembling, or the so-called "items" of acceptable worship? It is not clear that even in those things assigned as church (team) activity, a distinction must be made in that which is part of "the faith, once for all delivered unto the saints" (over which the congregation has no rule), and such details as are left to human judgement. The field of church autonomy is that of human judgement, and that only.

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9:30 AM

Sunday Evening: 5:00 PM  
Wednesday Bible Study  
7:30 PM

Classes for all ages.  
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As an example: God's word indicates the day on which saints are to partake of the Lord's Supper – but it does not specify the *time* of day. The *time* is left to human judgement, and therefore to the "rule" of brethren. A church exercises autonomy when it sets its own *time* of assembling – and we might add, that *time* rests upon human authority, not upon divine mandate. Each church has this same right and may choose different times. If one sought to unduly influence or alter another's *time* of meeting, this would be interfering with "autonomy."

But if one church should declare Thursday the Lord's Day, others could seek to teach them more perfectly the way of the Lord – and violate no legitimate "autonomy" in doing so – for no church has the scriptural right to "rule" in matters God has settled.

When brethren have honest differences in their understanding of what God has said, one church may believe their "ruling" is done in matters of judgement, while another may believe they violate plain teachings of God. If both parties are equally interested in serving God, neither will rest the case in "our rights," but will be happy to study God's word together so that God can rule supremely in all.

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## The Glorious Church

BY ROBERT F. TURNER

The "glorious church" of Eph. 5:27 has been subjected to much abuse by those who "glory" in the institution, while failing to see the necessary characteristics for such an appellation. The thought in this scripture is that Christ gave himself (upon the cross) so that individuals might be cleansed and set apart "with the washing of water by the word." The saved ones are grouped or collected by the word "church," which is "glorious" by virtue of "not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish."

From the first of the Ephesian letter GOD'S "glory" is shown to be the eternal purpose of all things. Saints are chosen in Christ "that we

should be holy and without blame before him, to the praise of the glory of his grace" (1:4-6). Verse 12 says, "That we should be to the praise of his glory;" and verse 14, "unto the praise of his glory." God is called the "Father of glory" (vs. 17), and that which saints shall inherit has glory that is rich (vs. 18). Paul's tribulations are said to be "your glory" (3:13) but the obvious reference is to their ultimate benefit, not to aggrandizement. The closing verse of chapter three says, "Unto him (GOD) be glory" and the church gives rather than receives the praise. God is glorified when His creatures are faithful unto Him; albeit such faithfulness is possible only through the forgiveness that is in Christ. Hence, the faithful church (in Christ) is the spiritual sphere for this praise-giving.

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The "glorious church" is a people who have gone back to thinking and acting as God intended from the beginning (Eph. 4:23-25). They have "put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him" (Col. 3:10). We are made to glorify God, but in our sin we have failed miserably. Now, in Christ, we can be renewed "in the spirit of your mind" and the change in conduct which accompanies such a renewal.

The "church" that is "glorious" is that body of people who have gone to Christ for sanctification and cleansing with the washing of water by the word; and, continue to glorify God by doing all to His glory (1 Cor. 10:31).

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