

Church Autonomy

By Robert 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-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 arrangements for which there is no N.T. 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.

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.



Sunday 5:15 Kid's Class at the Building	Sunday PM College Devotional and Singing at the Pender's	Monday 7PM Ladies' Class at Laura West's	Tuesday 8 PM "Truth Seekers" at Student Center - Room 2310	Wednesday 12 Noon Ladies "Women of the Bible" class at the Rouse's	Thursday 7PM College Class at Bob Simpson's	Saturday 6-8 PM 7th-12th Grade Class at the Rouse's
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Sick			
Richard Wood (Melanie Smith's Uncle)	Eli Williams (Friend of Sarah Norman)	Frank Hand (Laura Humphrey's dad)	Sandlyn Fultz (Davis Fultz's Sister)
Gloria Detmer and Carol Dickerson (Toni Herd's Sisters)	Don Lanier (Father of Greg Lanier)	Bill Rhodes (Toni Herd's Uncle)	Philip Locke (Jeremiah Johnson's Uncle)
Josie Keith (Friend of Heath Fowler)	Bob Woodie (Countess Carswell's Father)	Easton Alexander (Phillip Box's cousin's baby)	Andrew Hagewood (Friend of Sarah Norman)
Gaylord Huffman (Jennifer Daniel's Grandfather)	Quinton Addison (April Jerkins Grandfather)	Kathryn Crawford (Hunter Crawford's Mother)	Mary Smith (Nathan Smith's Grandmother)
Gerald White (Christopher, Anna and Wesley's Father)	Dave Brown (Friend of the Lanier's)	Dale Herd (William Herd's brother)	Larry Alexander (Friend of Phillip Box)
Marty and Aubrey Meeks, Russell Dickerson (Toni Herd's Nephews)	Melissa Walker (Church Hahn's Cousin)	Ann Robinson (Sharon Bailey's Mom)	Betty Bradford

March Birthdays
2 - Chase Harrison
2 - Maddie Norman
2 - Angela Fowler
3 - Shawn Oliver
7 - Josh Pender
8 - Carmen Herd
10 - Parker Godwin
10 - Pepper Humphrey
11 - Becky Harris
12 - Brad Hartsell
14 - Tyler Claxton
17 - Susan Sullivanne
18 - Makenzie Anderson
20 - Jimmy Roberts
20 - Joy Liu
21 - Carter Hunt
24 - Jordon Toombs
24 - Audra Hargett
26 - Jared Burton
28 - Shelby Freeman
29- Rachel Simpson
30 - Amanda Stephens
30 - York Smith

News and Notes
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Ken Sullivanne's grandfather, Sam Cotten, passed away on Saturday and will be buried in Ozark on Monday.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> David Hartsell will have surgery in Texas on March 23.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> If you would like to donate to the flower fund please see Yvette Rouse.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> The Southeast church will have a meeting with Marshall McDaniel this Thurs. through Sunday. 7 PM Nightly
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> We need to move our clocks forward next weekend on March 10.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Today we will appoint Walker Davis and Larry Rouse to serve as elders. Let us pray for and support these men in this great work!

The Auburn Beacon

A weekly publication of the University church of Christ in Auburn, Alabama



Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:16)

Volume 3, Issue 18 March 4, 2012

The Spiritual Simplicity of Our Singing

By Paul Earnhart



Thoughts to Ponder

Singing focuses the heart; inspires it, and lifts it into a realm which it would not reach if it were left to itself.

In the 1940's Elmer T. Clark observed that is "a peculiar type of mind which is convinced that God is interested in whether his worshipers sing with or without instrumental music" (Small Sects in America, p. 16). Clark's words carry a twentieth century bias. The truth is that the mind which he thought so peculiar was once dominant in "Christian" thought. The use of musical instruments in the worship of the churches is a relatively recent development. Most Protestant churches in America did not yield to the practice until the nineteenth century.

Finally, faith is the substance for giving life real meaning. A life that has been lived without any connection to the life hereafter is foolish indeed. More than that, it's a terrible waste! Even the light afflictions are made easier to bear, the disappointments easier to shoulder if there is faith in the Eternal.

sacrifices a Levitical chorus was commanded to sing and a Levitical orchestra to play (II Chron. 29:25-28). But the New Testament refers to the appointments of temple worship as "carnal ordinances, imposed until a time of reformation" (Heb. 9:10). This reformation is dramatically illustrated by the total absence of any reference in the New Testament to Christians worshipping God with sacrificial animals, incense, lamps, choirs, or orchestras. There is only the admoni-

(Continued on page 2)

Do You Have a Bible Question?
Call (334) 734-2133 or E-mail: LarryRouse@aubeacon.com

SCHEDULE OF SERVICES Sunday

Bible Class9:30 AM
Worship10:20 AM
Evening Worship 6:00 PM

Wednesday

Bible Classes.....7:00 PM

Larry Rouse
Evangelist and Editor

Check Us Out On the Internet: www.aubeacon.com

(Continued from page 1)

tion for the disciples to speak to each other and to the Lord in “psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” (**Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16**).

Christian worship in song is not a choral contest. Spiritual singing has spiritual ends. Since God’s ways differ radically from our own (**Isa. 55:8-9**) it is of no consequence that in the mind of some the absence of musical instruments (or of devotional lamps and incense) diminishes the appeal of the singing. What is important is that we have sufficient trust in God to follow His instructions with the confidence that His methods achieve His purposes.

The silence of the New Testament on instrumentally accompanied singing has had its impact in history. The early centuries not only reveal no use of instrumental music in worship but an expressed opposition to it as belonging to the spiritual infancy of the Old Testament church. Eusebius of Caesarea (early 4th century), commenting on **Psalms 91:2-3**: “Of old at the time those of the circumcision were worshipping with symbols and types it was not inappropriate to send up hymns to God with the psalterion and kithara...We render our hymns with a living psalterion and a living kithara with spiritual songs. The unison voices of Christians would be more acceptable to God than any musical instrument.”

Chrysostom (late 4th century): “It was only permitted to the Jews, as sacrifice was, for the heaviness and grossness of their souls. God condescended to their weakness, because they were lately drawn

from idols; but now, instead of organs, we may use our own bodies to praise him withal.” Theodoret of Cyrhus (early 5th century): “Question: If songs were invented by unbelievers to seduce men, but were allowed to those under the law on account of their childish state, why do those who have received the perfect teaching of grace in their churches still use songs, just like the children under the law? Answer: It is not simple singing that belongs to the childish state, but singing with lifeless instruments, with dancing, and with clappers. Hence the use of such instruments and the others that belong to the childish state is excluded from the singing in the churches, and simple singing is left” (Questions and Answers for the Orthodox).

The Roman Catholic Church continued this opposition at least until the time of Thomas Aquinas (1227-1274) who wrote: “Our church does not use musical instruments, as harps and psalteries, to praise God withal, that she may not seem to Judaize.” The Greek Church (Orthodox) has never used musical instruments. Several Protestant reformers held to the same sentiment. Calvin wrote that “musical instruments in celebrating the praises of God would be no more suitable than the burning of incense, the lighting of lamps, and the restoration of the other shadows of the law” (Commentary on Psalm 33). Wesley was more succinct: “I have no objection to instruments of music in our chapels provided they are neither heard nor seen.”

The use of instruments in worship is not progress but a carnal retreat to spiritual kindergarten. We should glory in the supreme spirituality of our singing,



The Bible Doesn't Say, “Don’t Do It,” Does it?

By Wayne Jackson

The issue is one of authority. While we recognize that there are many laws in the Bible that are explicitly negative, one may not draw the inference that everything is permitted that is not specifically condemned.

Solomon once wrote that “there is no new thing under the sun” (**Ecc 1:9**). Certainly that saying is true with reference to the arguments that a swelling “progressive” element within the church is employing in defense of the idea that the use of musical instruments is permissible in Christian worship. Or at the very least, they allege, the issue is not one that should prevent fellowship between churches of Christ and denominational groups that use the instrument.

Professors in several colleges are attempting to argue this case, and a number of churches already have begun incorporating the instrument into their services. An even greater number contends that the matter is of no consequence, and there is little doubt that these will have the instrument in the not-distant future.

It once was the case that those who advocated the instrument attempted to make arguments that were at least remotely related to the biblical text. But those arguments proved to be so baseless that most of them have been abandoned. The mantra now appears to be that stale quip, “The Bible doesn’t say, ‘don’t do it.’”

One cannot but believe that with some of these folks it would not matter if the Bible explicitly stated, “You must not use mechanical music in Christian worship.” They would do it anyway, for they are “will-worshippers” (**Col 2:23**) who are enamored with carnality, rather than truth.

Imagine for a moment the following scenario. A man takes his car into an automotive repair shop. He informs the proprietor that the vehicle is not running smoothly and he wants a tune-up. When the customer returns the following day, he is presented with a bill for more than \$2,000. In addition to the tune-up, the repairman installed new brakes, a muffler, a carburetor, a fuel pump, and a new set of tires. The customer is enraged and protests: “I did not authorize these extra expenditures!” “I know that,” the mechanic responds, “but you did not say **not** to do it.” Suppose the case is taken to court. How do you reckon a judge would rule?

The issue is one of authority. While we recognize that

there are many laws in the Bible that are explicitly negative, one may not draw the inference that everything is **permitted** that is not **specifically condemned**.

In the table of the Ten Commandments, the Lord said regarding “graven images,” i.e., idol gods, “you shall not bow yourself down to them” (**Exodus 20:5**). But what if some renegade Hebrew simply “stood” before an idol and prayed? Do you suppose that if he had done such, and made the defense, “He said, ‘don’t bow’; he

didn’t say, ‘don’t stand’?” Do you suppose the Lord would have been impressed with such a depraved defense?

Can reasonable people not mentally anticipate the logical consequence of this type of reasoning? It throws wide open the gates of apostasy. Consider the following questions that surely could be posed by modern innovators.

- Why can’t we pray to Mary and the saints? The Bible doesn’t explicitly condemn it.
- Why can’t we observe communion on Saturday? The Bible doesn’t say not to.
- Why can’t we have Pepsi and pizza for communion? The Bible doesn’t forbid it.
- Why can’t we baptize babies? The New Testament doesn’t censure it.
- Why can’t we smoke marijuana in worship? No text prohibits it.

It has become increasingly apparent that not only do we see a new generation emerging that knows practically nothing about the Scriptures, largely it is a people that cannot reason. Logic, to them, is like an alien language.

For many, their entire religious emphasis (under a leaky umbrella they call “spiritual”) is one of feelings, self-centeredness, and an appeal to the carnal.

