

- How does the principle of church autonomy reflect the broader biblical concept that everyone must stand before God and give account for themselves?
- In what ways might the congregation's decision-making authority create both opportunities and challenges for following God's direction as demonstrated in Acts 13 with Paul and Barnabas?
- What are the potential dangers of church autonomy without accountability to the broader body of Christ, and how can local churches balance independence with interdependence?
- How does the image of the church as a dwelling place for God's Spirit in Ephesians 2:19-22 inform our understanding of congregational governance and decision-making?
- What responsibilities come with the freedom of being an autonomous church, and how can a congregation ensure it remains sensitive to God's Spirit rather than simply doing what it wants?
- How does the Baptist emphasis on individual accountability before God shape the way we approach church membership, discipline, and communal decision-making?
- In what ways does local church autonomy enable more effective ministry to a specific community compared to hierarchical or elder-led models of church governance?
- What does the early church's practice in Acts 2:41-47 teach us about the relationship between local church autonomy and unity with the universal church?
- How can churches maintain their autonomous nature while still cooperating meaningfully with other churches locally, regionally, and globally as described in Romans 15?
- What does it mean practically for a congregation to be attuned to God's Spirit in making decisions, and how can we distinguish between God's leading and our own preferences?

5-Day Devotional: The Autonomous Church and Personal Faith

Day 1: Built Together as God's Temple

Reading: Ephesians 2:19-22

Devotional: Paul reminds us that we are no longer strangers but members of God's household, built on the foundation of Christ. This beautiful image shows us that while we gather as autonomous local churches, we are never alone—we are part of something far greater. Each believer is a living stone in God's temple, where His Spirit dwells. Reflect today on how you fit into your local church family. Are you actively participating in being "built together"? God has placed you in your specific community for a purpose. Consider how you can contribute to making your church a dwelling place where God's presence is evident to those searching for hope.

Day 2: Moving When the Spirit Says Move

Reading: Acts 13:1-3

Devotional: The church at Antioch teaches us a powerful lesson about listening to God's Spirit. They didn't wait for external permission or direction from distant authorities—they were so attuned to God's voice that when He said, "Set apart Barnabas and Saul," they immediately responded. This obedience changed the course of Christianity forever. How sensitive are you to the Holy Spirit's leading in your life? Are you listening for His direction, or are you distracted by other voices? Today, practice spiritual attentiveness. Spend time in prayer and Scripture, asking God to help you recognize His voice. When He speaks, will you have the courage to move immediately, even if it means stepping into the unknown?

Day 3: The Church in Action

Reading: Acts 2:41-47

Devotional: The early church devoted themselves to teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, and prayer. They shared everything, cared for the needy, and met together daily with glad and sincere hearts. Notice that their devotion to God and each other was so compelling that "the Lord added to their number daily." True church autonomy isn't about independence or doing whatever we want—it's about radical obedience to Christ's example. Examine your own devotion today. Are you committed to learning God's Word? Do you actively participate in fellowship? Are you generous with your resources? The early church turned the world upside down not through programs but through authentic community centered on Christ. What one step can you take today to live more like them?

Day 4: Individual Accountability Before God

Reading: Romans 14:10-12

Devotional: Paul reminds us that "each of us will give an account of ourselves to God." This sobering truth underlies the Baptist conviction about church autonomy—because individuals stand before God alone, each person must have direct access to Him without intermediaries. No pastor, bishop, or family heritage can stand in your place. This isn't meant to frighten but to empower you. You have direct access to the Creator of the universe through Christ. Your relationship with Him is personal, immediate, and unmediated. Have you accepted God's outstretched hand in Christ? Are you living as someone who will one day give an account? Don't rely on someone else's faith. Make your relationship with God your own today through confession, repentance, and surrender to Jesus as Lord.

Day 5: United Yet Distinct

Reading: 1 Corinthians 12:12-27

Devotional: Paul's image of the body beautifully captures the tension between local church autonomy and universal church unity. Each part is distinct, with unique functions and purposes, yet all belong to one body. Your local church has specific gifts, callings, and opportunities that differ from churches across town or around the world. Yet when one part suffers, all suffer; when one rejoices, all rejoice. Consider how you view other churches and believers. Do you celebrate their victories? Do you pray for their struggles? God hasn't called us to isolated independence but to interdependent cooperation. Today, pray for believers in persecuted nations, support a missionary, or encourage a sister church. Remember: we are autonomous but never alone, distinct but never disconnected from the greater body of Christ.