

ECCLESIOLOGY
THE LOCAL CHURCH
Lesson 10

Indigenous But Connected Churches

- I. DEFINITION OF INDIGENOUS:** A local church that is self-governing, self-supporting, self-teaching and self-propagating and yet is connected with the visible church on earth.
- II. SELF-SUSTAINING CHURCHES UNDER THE SUPERVISION OF THE APOSTLES**
- A. The Apostles preached. The Apostles would go where the gospel was never preached and began to tell others about Christ. They usually went to key cities, beginning at the Jewish synagogue, and then to the Gentiles (Acts 14:1-7).
- B. The Apostles instructed Christians. When people responded to Christ, the Apostles gathered them together in a very loose-knit group and instructed those new converts. “Preached . . . and taught a large number of disciples” (Acts 14:20-22).
- C. The Apostles rapidly organized a local church and stayed only a short while. Having instructed the believers in basic Christian truths, the Apostles would establish a local church and leave it, committing the church to the Lord. Occasionally an Apostle would stay in an area for a longer period of time (Acts 18:11, 19:10).
- D. The Apostles returned to confirm their work and appoint elders. The Apostles would go back to the churches they had established and further instruct the saints and appoint qualified elders for that assembly of believers (Acts 14:21-23; Acts 15:36, 41; 16:4-5; 18:23). NOTE: The reason for the delay in appointing elders in a church was that this method gave the Holy Spirit time to work in the hearts of those He wanted for leadership in the local church, and the Apostles, who were mature, Spirit-filled men, simply recognized these men for this office.
- E. The Apostles left the church again. Having organized the churches, the Apostle left them to carry out their own work for reaching the area for Christ. For sure, the Apostles still exercised some kind of oversight of the churches but the churches were left to become self-governing, self-teaching, self-supporting and self-propagating. The Apostles had oversight of the churches by occasional visits, sending Apostolic representatives or by writing letters. NOTE: It is logical to assume that the churches in different cities were bound together by doctrinal beliefs and by Apostolic connectionalism. While they were self-sustaining churches, they were not disconnected.

F. Points to Ponder

1. During the short stay of the Apostles, they were able to establish a sound organization. This was a key to their success because leaders had to assume responsibility and forced the local church to realize they could not depend upon the Apostles to do their work (Eph. 4:11-16).
2. All of the converts were new, relatively immature Christians, but it was the plan to release responsibility to them. The Apostles had confidence in this method because they believed the Holy Spirit had chosen the leaders.
3. The Apostles had limited control over the local churches. They exercised their right to intervene in disciplinary matters (1 Cor. 4:17-21), and their letters to the churches show their Apostolic authority.
4. The local church became the hub for all the Lord's work in a given area, especially evangelism.

III. THE PASSING OF THE APOSTOLIC OFFICE

- A. Importance. If it can be proven that the Apostolic office with extra-ordinary men, with extra-ordinary gifts, passed away, then there is no direct Apostolic authority today over the church. If the Apostolic office is still in existence today, then the Episcopalian form of government is correct.
- B. The Apostles and the Early Church. Apparently every local church was subject to an Apostle, for the Apostles started most of the early churches. The one exception to this is the Church of Rome. The Roman church was founded by Paul's converts but they obviously recognized Paul as their Apostle because his authority is stated in the Book of Romans (Rom. 1:1; 1 Cor. 1:1; 1 Pet 1:1).
- C. The Apostolic Office.
 1. The word "apostle" means literally a delegate, messenger or one sent forth with orders. In its broadest sense, anyone sent with a message was an apostle. This is why Barnabas (Acts 14:14 cf. Gal. 2:9), James (1 Cor. 15:7; Gal. 1:19) and Apollos (1 Cor. 4:6, 9) could be called Apostles without being one of the original twelve apostles appointed by Jesus (Rom. 16:7; Phil. 2:25).
 2. The word "apostle" in its strictest sense does refer to the original twelve, who were given special authority by God for the establishment of the Church in the first century (Eph. 2:20; Matt. 19:28).
 3. The qualifications for being part of this original twelve are as follows:
 - a. He had to be a witness of the Lord's earthly ministry and resurrection (Luke 24:46-48; Acts 1:21-22).
 - b. He had to be directly called and commissioned to the office by Christ Himself (Luke 6:13; John 20:21).
 - c. He performed miracles to substantiate the office that Christ gave him (2 Cor. 12:12; Acts 5:12; Heb. 2:3-4). NOTE: The power of miracles was bestowed on others besides the Apostles, although there is no reason to think that others possessed it in the same degree as the Apostles.

D. The Apostolic office was temporary.

1. The foundation of the church was laid by the Apostles (Eph. 2:20). When the foundation was laid, there was no need for the Apostolic office.
2. The office was temporary, suited to the transitional and incomplete state of the church in its infancy.
3. No human being, after the first century, could meet the requirements as stated above for the Apostolic office.

The apostleship was the Divine expedient to meet the emergencies of the Church at its first establishment and outset in the world, and not the method appointed for its ordinary administration; and the peculiarities distinctive of the office, to which I have now referred, could not, from their very nature, be repeated in the case of their successors or be transmitted as a permanent feature in the Christian Church.” (Bannerman, *The Church of Christ*, p. 223).

4. Therefore it may be concluded that the office of Apostle passed away after the first century. It did not, therefore, pass by succession or transmission to ordinary office-bearers in the Christian church. NOTE: We still have Apostolic authority in the inspired Bible but no Apostolic succession.

E. Apostolic oversight of local churches ended.

1. When the Apostolic office passed away in the first century, each local church lost Apostolic oversight. Local churches were governed by elders who were appointed by the Apostles or the Apostles’ representatives.
2. The elders had an important part in the governing of the early church even when the Apostles were living, i.e. the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:4, 6; 16:4). With the passing of the Apostolic office, the leadership of the local church was placed solely in the hands of the elders.

F. Apostolic authority for the local church has not passed away.

1. The local church, under the headship of Christ, is still subject to Apostolic authority even though the office is no longer in existence. The Apostolic authority is found in the writings of the New Testament.
2. The Apostles have given the local churches instructions on how to operate their present churches.

IV. **CONNECTED CHURCHES**

A. The first century churches were connected or linked together by certain ties.

1. Doctrinal unity (Col. 4:16).
2. Common practice unity (1 Cor. 7:17; 11:16; 14:34; 16:1-2).
3. Missionary unity (2 Cor. 11:9; Phil. 4:15-16).
4. Common concern unity (2 Cor. 8, 9).
5. Helping unity (Acts 18:27-28).

B. These first century churches were not only a fellowship of churches but were bound together as voluntary churches in government, fellowship and beliefs.

C. It is very difficult to prove unconnected, independent churches in scripture. Independency may not be sin but it does not follow the scriptural pattern.