

1

Liberalism and Institutionalism

# **Issues That Divide Us**

# The Issues

- **Biblical Authority**
- **Social Gospel**
- **Human Institutions**
- **Unlimited Benevolence**
- **Sponsoring Church**



**Our Focus  
Today**

# Presuppositions

- God's word is our all-sufficient **pattern** – 2 Tim. 1:13; 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:3
- We must have **Bible authority** for everything we do – Col. 3:17; 1 Pet. 4:11
- All things must be authorized by **command, statement, approved example, or necessary inference.**
- We must **not deviate** from what God has written – 1 Cor. 4:6; 2 Jn. 9-11; Rev. 22:18-19
- When God says **nothing**, He means **“No”** – 2 Sam. 7:1-7

# **Institutionalism**

The Dividing Line

## **Institutionalism:**

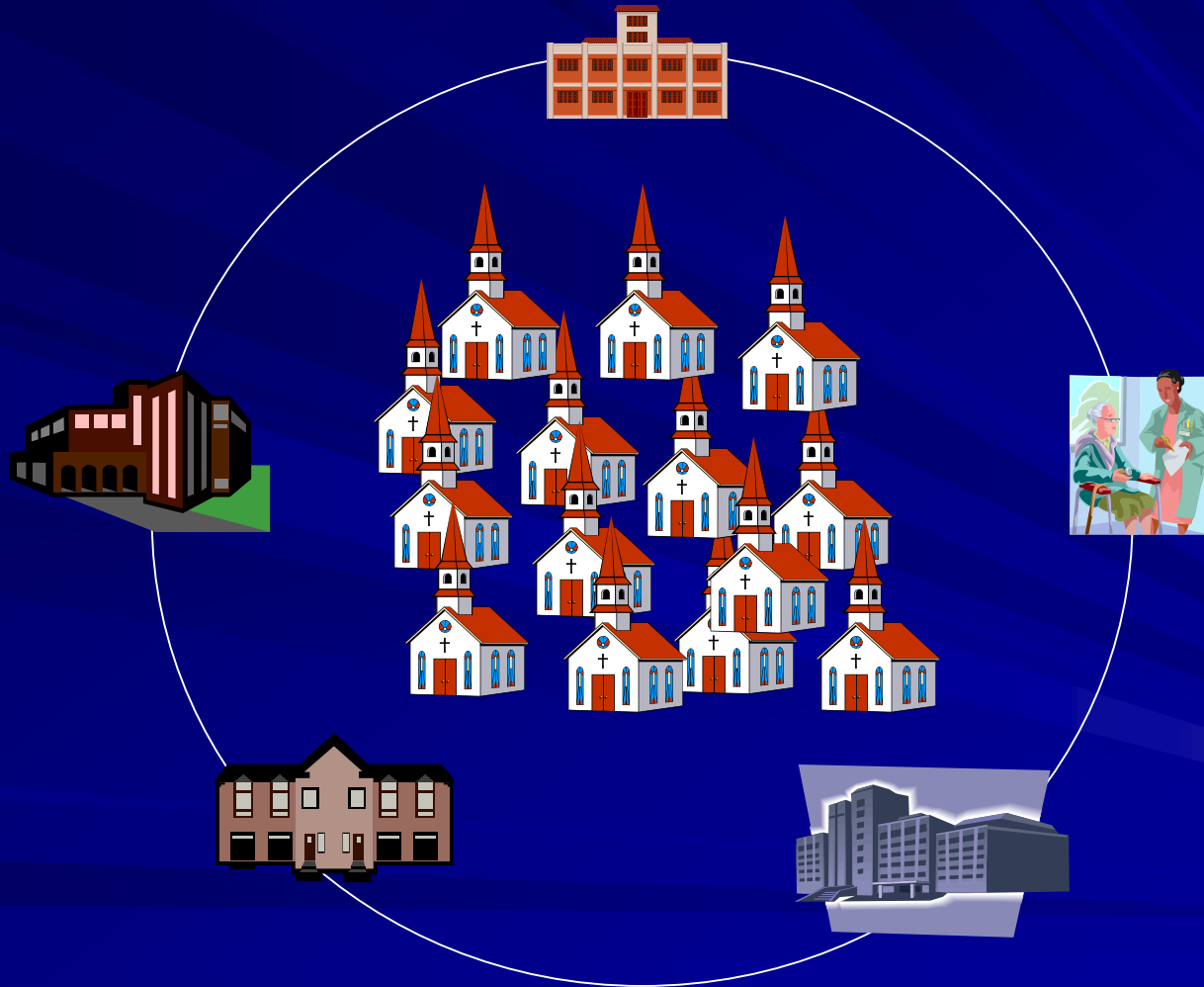
# **The Issue is NOT**

- Does the church have evangelism, edification, and benevolent responsibilities?
- May churches cooperate?
- May human institutions exist?
- May a place be provided?
- May men and methods be employed?
- What the individual Christian may do?

# **Institutionalism:** **The Issue IS**

- May churches **build and maintain institutions** through which to do their work?
- Is the **local church** that God designed **all-sufficient** to do the work God has given it?
- **Defined: Harry Pickup, Jr.:** “What is institutionalism in terms of the Church? It is the conception that the Church of Christ is a religious organization, composed of individual congregations, being at the center of dependent and supplementary social organizations—such as schools, welfare agencies, hospitals, etc.—which **necessarily aid it** in fulfilling a collective social and spiritual mission.”  
(“*Institutionalism*,” 3-4)

# Institutionalism



# The Dividing Line?

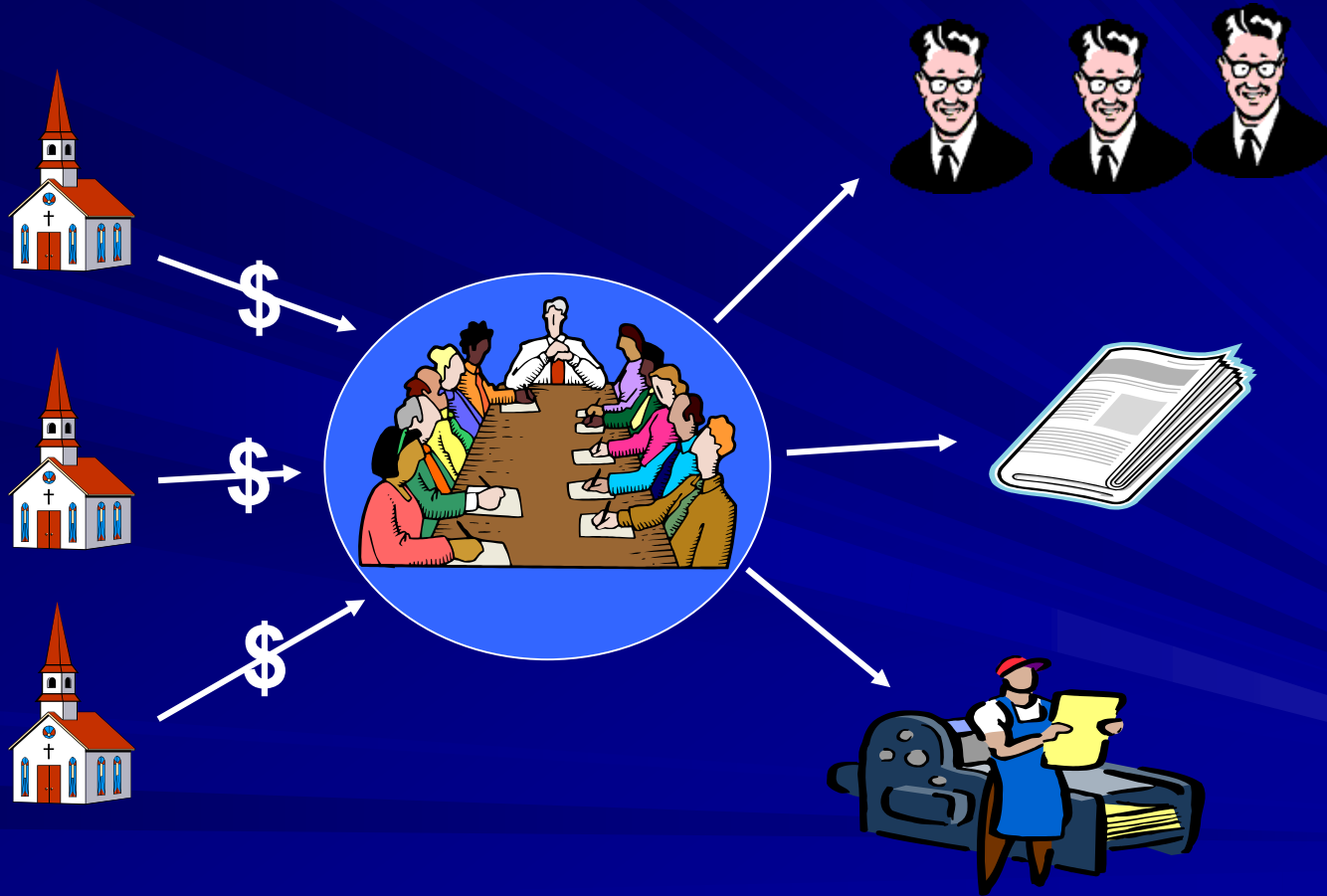
- Liberal/institutional churches of Christ support human institutions to do their work.
- Conservative/non-institutional churches of Christ believe they are to do their own work and do not support institutions to do it for them!



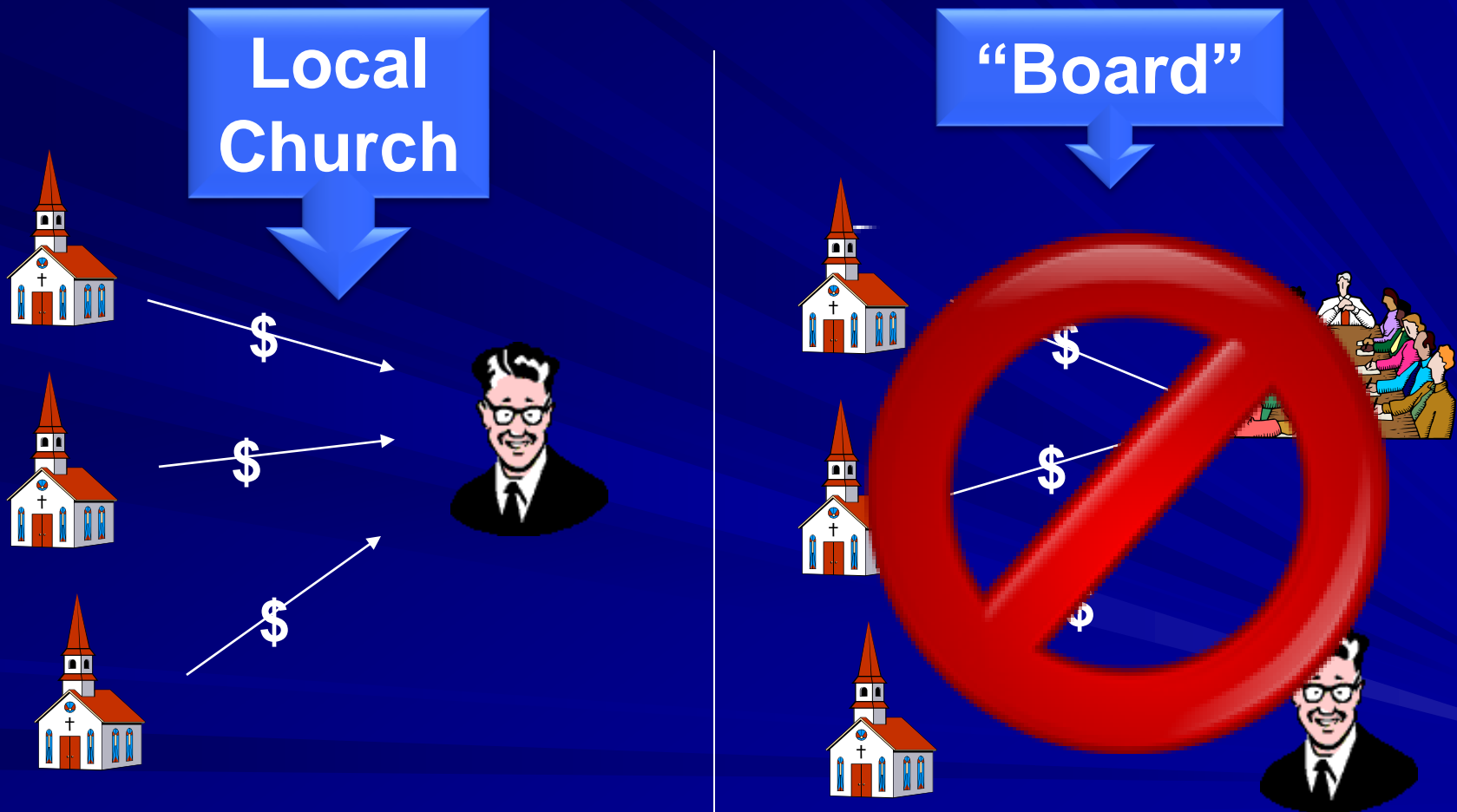
History:

# **CHURCHES OF CHRIST AND INSTITUTIONALISM**

# Missionary Society



# M.S. Supplanted the Local Church



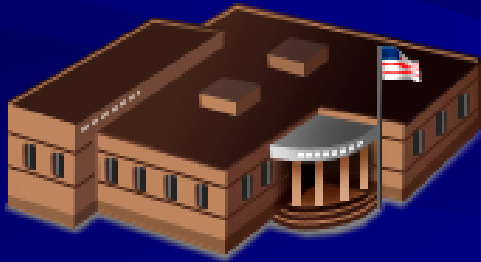
**The M.S. “board” took this work away  
from local churches!**

# Edification Society: The Christian College



# A Change in Tactics

**Focus**



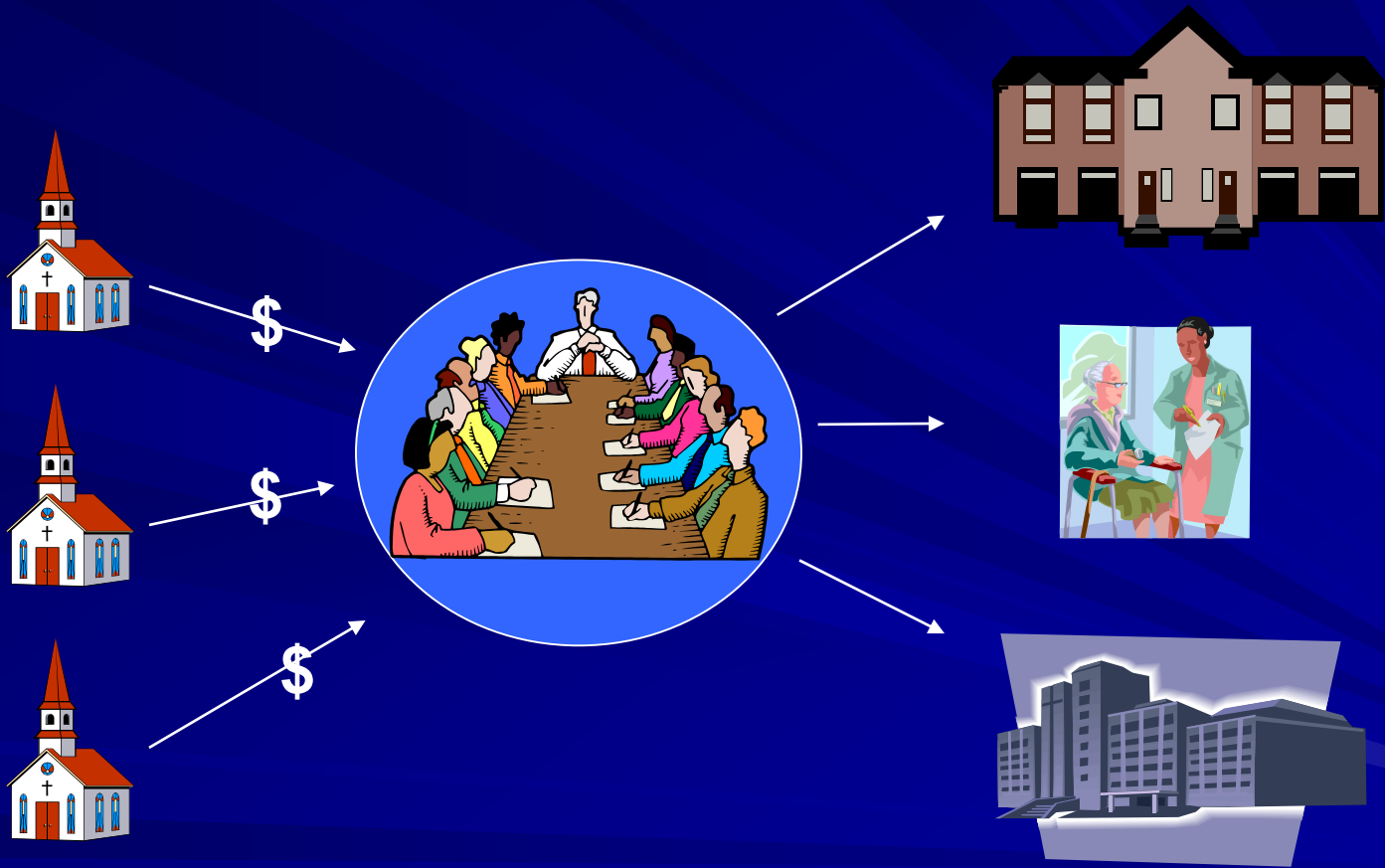
College



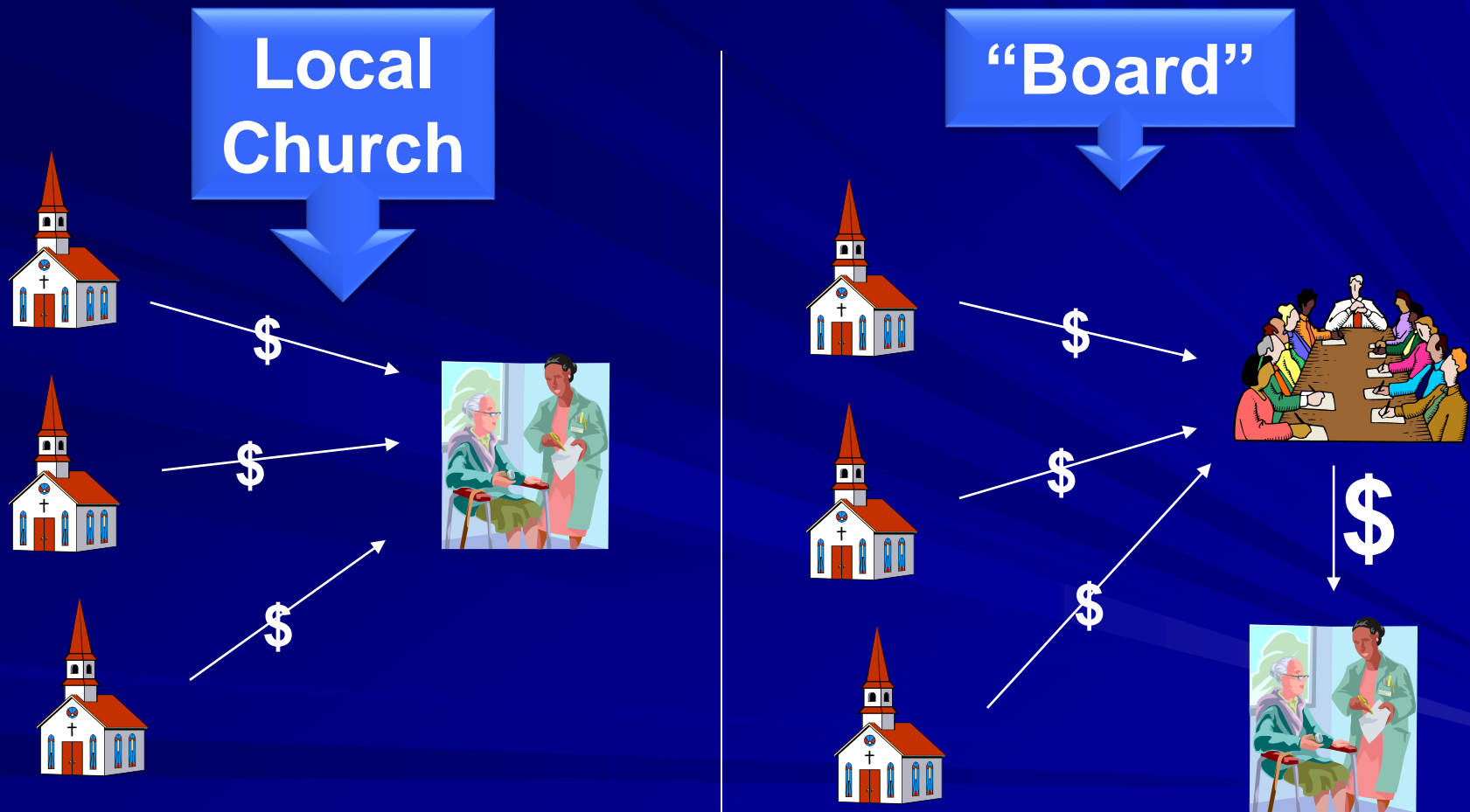
Orphan Home



# Benevolent Society



# The Benevolent Board Supplants the Local Church



**The Benevolent board took this work and oversight away from local churches!**

# **THE BIBLE AND INSTITUTIONALISM**

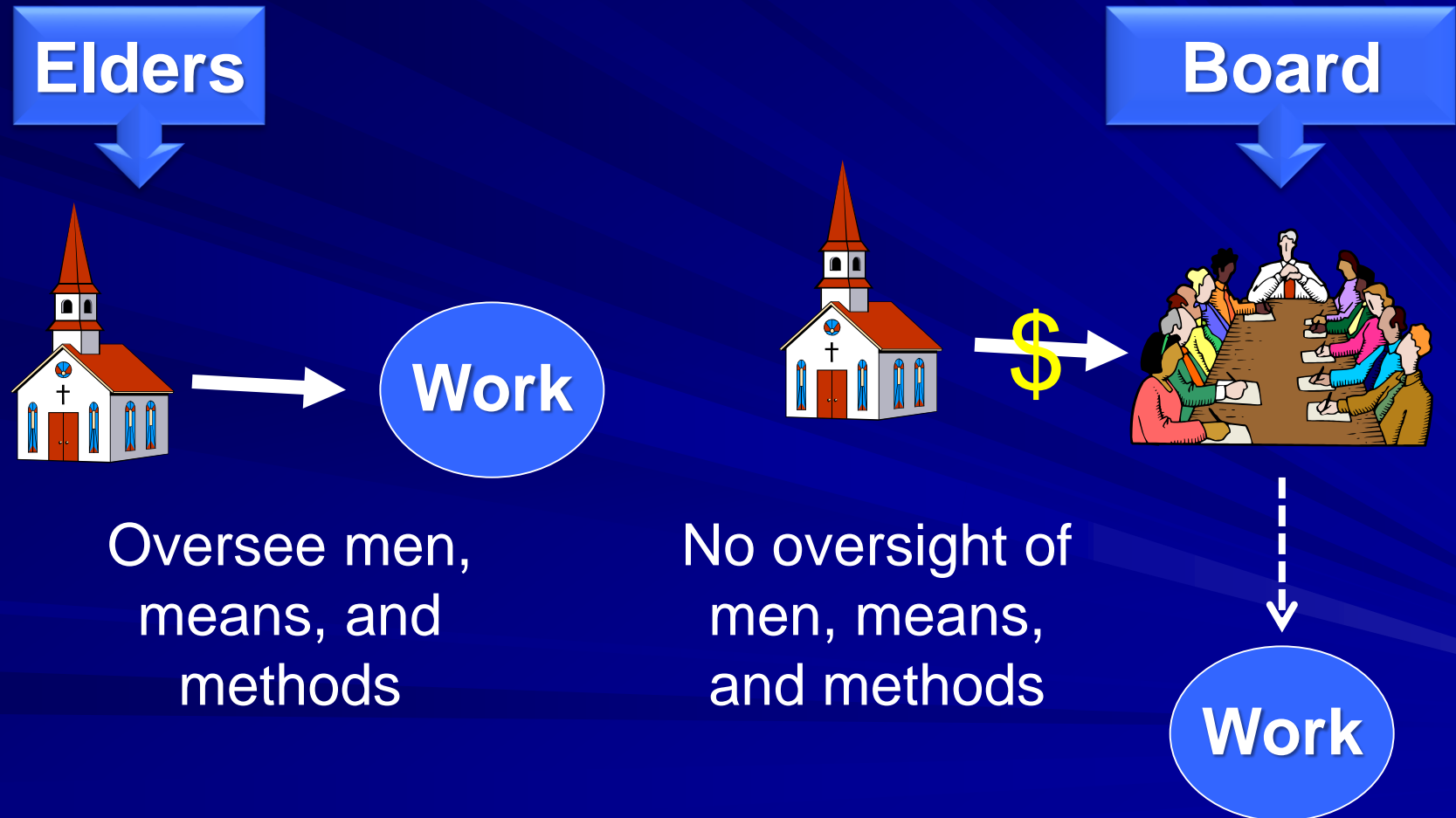


**Institutionalism  
Violates Local Church  
Autonomy**

# Local Church Autonomy

- Autonomy: Having **self-government**, the ability to make one's own decisions in doing one's work.
- God **designed** the local church to be autonomous.
  - **Elders** established in **every church** – Acts 14:23
  - Elders **oversee the local flock** and its **work** – 1 Pet. 5:1-2

# Institutionalism Violates L.C. Autonomy



# Institutionalism Defended

- Claim: Autonomy is not lost because all support of institutions is **voluntary**.
  - Autonomy can only be lost voluntarily
  - Giving to an institution is like giving to a mutual fund—you lose control of your money as long as you are contributing.
- Claim: Contributing to an institution is no different than **buying a service**.
  - Churches must either buy services or go into the business of providing these services.
  - Vast difference in buying services and creating institutions to supply these services and contributing to them!