

:

God's Answers to Issues that Divide Us

These Issues Are:

- Attitudes toward Bible Authority
- The Social Gospel
- Religious Institutions
- The Sponsoring Church
- Unlimited Benevolence



**Our Focus
Today**


Sponsoring Church Programs

- In SEARCH of the Lord's Way
- House to House – Heart to Heart
- Sunset International Bible Institute
- The Gospel of Christ



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 Clark Ellis Michael Heaton
 John Holsclaw Charlie Reeves
 Steve Roberts Sam Taylor
 Bart Walker

Minister:
 Roby Ellis

Service Times:
Sunday:
 Bible Study 10:00 a.m.
 Morning Worship 11:00 a.m.
 Evening Worship 6:30 p.m.

Wednesday:
 Bible Classes 7:00 p.m.

Be Sure To Watch:
 • *Preaching the Gospel*
 Sunday at 7:00 a.m. on WEMT
 • *In Search of the Lord's Way*
 Sunday at 7:30 a.m. on WEMT
 • *Biblical Viewpoints*
 Sunday at 8:00 a.m. on WKPT
 • *T.V. Sunday School*
 Sunday at 8:30 a.m. on WJHL

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Worthy of Praise
 Allen Webster

The preacher may make us laugh and the songs may make us weep.

The fellowship may warm our souls and the communion may give us chill bumps. But if God does not enjoy the hour, the service failed. The goal of worship is to make God "high above all nations which he hath made, in praise, and in name, and in honour" (Deuteronomy 26:19). "Praise ye the Lord: for it is good to sing praises unto our God; for it is pleasant; and praise is comely" (Psalm 147:1).

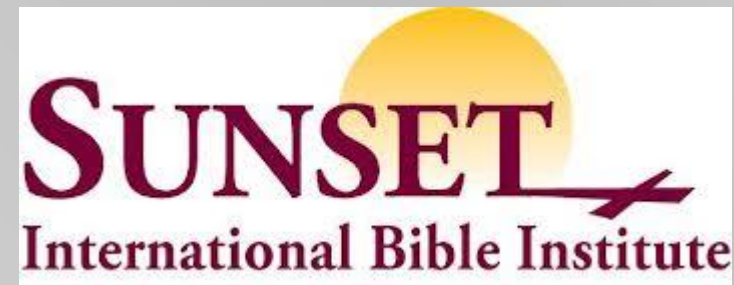
A hymn that was likely composed in the Talmudic period expresses our sentiment:

If my lips could sing as many songs as there are waves in the sea;
 If my tongue could sing as many hymns as there are ocean billows;
 If my mouth filled the whole firmament with praise;
 If my face shone like the sun and moon together;
 If my hands were to hover in the sky like powerful eagles
 And my feet ran across mountains as swiftly as the deer;
 All that would not be enough to pay you fitting tribute,
 O Lord my God.

If we had the tongues of angels, we could not praise God as He deserves to be praised. If we were born speaking praises and had breath to never cease, we could never adequately exalt His name in this life. If every rock could speak, it would praise God. If the stars could sing, their song would be in His honor. If the animals could write, their words would form new praises for their Creator. The very stones would praise Him if the need arose, and a thousand legions of angels would leap to do His will. "Let the heaven and earth praise him, the seas, and every thing that moveth therein (Psalm 69:34).

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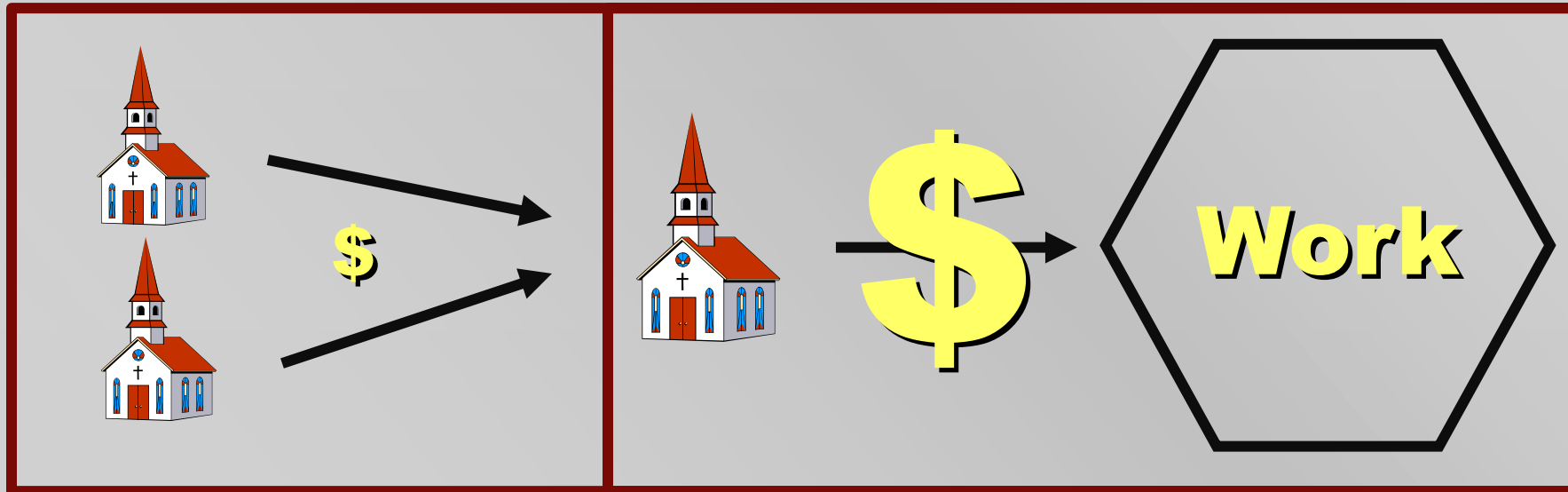


What is a Sponsoring Church?

Defined:

- **Lewis G. Hale:** “There are churches known as ‘sponsoring churches.’ Feeling that they are **not financially able** to carry on a certain program single-handedly, they **invite sister congregations to share the expense of that work**. They receive funds from other churches and add these to whatever funds they themselves provide for the work and they become **wholly responsible for the oversight of the work**.” (*How Churches Can Cooperate, God’s Work In God’s Way*, p. 3)
- **J. D. Thomas:** “Sponsoring Church Arrangement”: “One congregation that especially **oversees a project**, such as a mission activity, in which other congregations **have an interest** and to which they **voluntarily contribute regularly**....The fact that **other churches contribute to a project that is overseen by the elders of one church** is the central idea.” (*We Be Brethren*, p. 255)

Illustrated:



**Sponsoring
Church**
(assumes oversight)

Fueled by questionable motivations

History of Centralization:

- In the 1849 the **Missionary Society** was created to centralize control of churches' funds to preach the gospel...and division followed.
- In 1910 brethren attempted to centralize control of the churches' funds in a sponsoring church arrangement.
 - Met at Freed-Hardman University to work out details.
 - It was were defeated by sound, biblical reasoning by **David Lipscomb** and the **Gospel Advocate**.

David Lipscomb

- “All meetings of churches or officers of churches to combine more power than a single church possesses is wrong. God’s power is in God’s churches. He is with them to bless and strengthen their work when they are faithful to him...**But for one or more to direct what and how all the churches shall work, or to take charge of their men and money and use it, is to assume the authority God has given to each church.** Each one needs the work of distributing and using its funds as well as in giving them.” (**Gospel Advocate**, March 24, 1910)

The Sponsoring Church Takes Hold

- The SC became prominent in the late 1940's after **WWII**.
- **Broadway church** in Lubbock, TX, chose to sponsor/oversee all efforts to evangelize Germany and asked all churches of Christ in the US for funds.
- **Union Ave. church** in Memphis, TN, decided to sponsor all evangelistic efforts in Japan.
- Debates and eventually division followed!



The Sponsoring Church:

The Issues Were Not...

- Should the gospel be preached?
- May churches cooperate?
- Number of churches involved?
- May we use means and methods?
- May the gospel be preached in various ways?
- Whether some good is done?
- Are congregational responsibilities being fulfilled?



The Sponsoring Church:

The Issues Were...

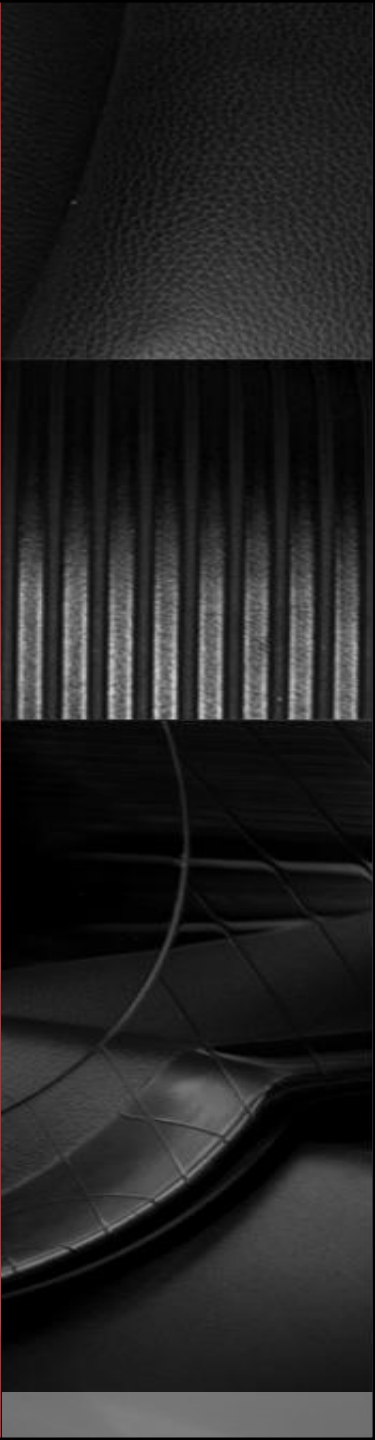
- Must we follow the N.T. pattern for preaching the gospel?
- May one church choose to take upon itself a work larger than it can support, to which all churches are equally responsible, and seek funds from other churches to do that work?
- May a church do its work *through* a sponsoring church?
- May the elders of one church oversee any part of the work of another church, or oversee a multi-church work?



God's Word and the Sponsoring Church

The Sponsoring Church Assumes...

The local church's responsibility to preach the gospel is **greater** than it can accomplish on its own.



Sponsoring Church Argument

- The Great Commission requires the local church to **preach the gospel to every person in every place**
- There is no local church of Christ on earth that **can do this alone**
- **Therefore**, churches of Christ **must pool their resources** (under the oversight of a sponsoring church) to fulfill the Great Commission

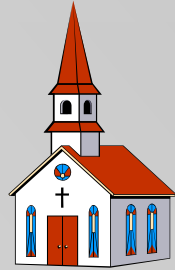
Sponsoring Church Argument

- **TRUTH:** Therefore, it is the responsibility of each church to preach the gospel as far and wide as its resources will allow.
- There is no church of Christ on earth that **can do this alone**
- **Therefore**, churches of Christ **must pool their resources** (under the oversight of a sponsoring church) to fulfill the Great Commission

TRUTH: The gospel was preached to the whole world without centralized control (Col. 1:6, 23).

Denies the Sufficiency of God's Plan

GOD



— — — — — →
Insufficient!

Evangelism

**Human
Wisdom!**

What
organization?



Evangelism



The Sponsoring Church
Is Without Bible Authority

- There is no **express statement, direct command, approved example, or inescapable conclusion** authorizing the sponsoring church arrangement.
- **Mark Roberts:** “The most basic objection to this sponsoring church arrangement was, and remains, that there is simply nothing said in scripture of churches ever being pulled together into such an arrangement. There is no pattern for this harness, no provision for how it is to be managed, or who is to oversee it. There is no ‘book, chapter, and verse’ for the sponsoring church arrangement.” (“Mutual Fund Christianity,” *Abundant Life*, Oct., 1996, 29:10:4)

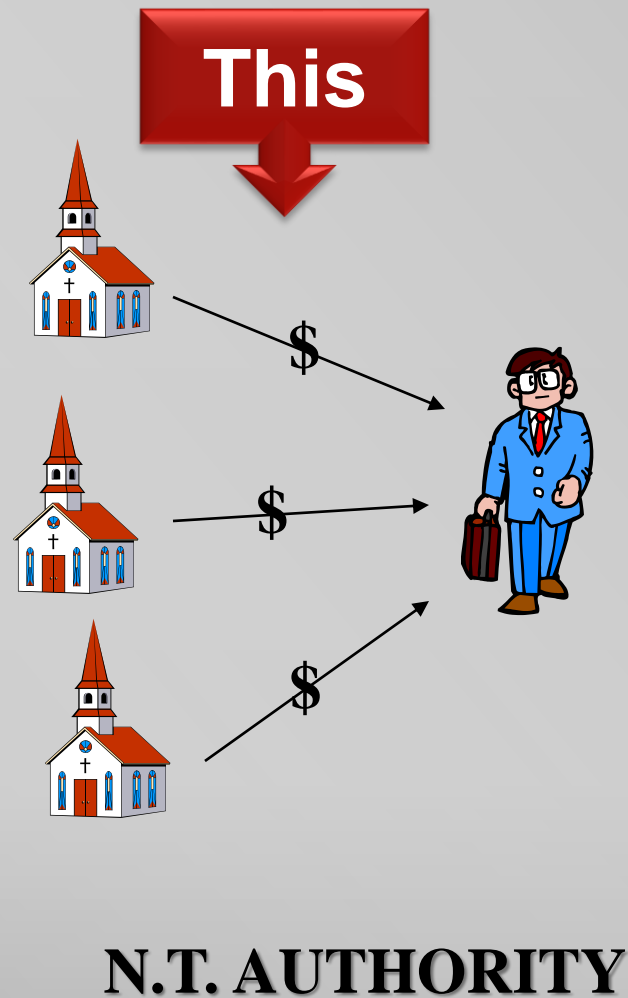
To Assume Oversight of a Project It Cannot Fund

- **Opportunity** (Gal. 6:10) + **Ability** (Acts 11:29) = **Responsibility** (2 Cor. 8:12)
- **E. R. Harper:** “A congregation has no right to build anything larger than it is able to support. It has no right whatever to bind any other congregation to any program of work of its own selection. Each congregation must retain its autonomy. Any effort that destroys the independence of a local congregation runs straight toward sectarianism, if not Romanism.” (via Britnell, “The Sponsoring Church,” p. 2)

To Work Through Another Local Church

- No church ever sponsored a work so other churches could accomplish their work **through** it.
- No church ever worked **through** another church.
- There were no middleman organizations between the local church and it completing its work.
- Churches did their work by meeting needs directly
 - Preacher support – Phil. 4:15-16; 2 Cor. 11:8
 - Benevolence – Acts 11:27-30, etc.

What's The Difference?



Direct Assistance





The Sponsoring Church

Violates Biblical Limitations of Elders

Biblical Elders

- Every local church is to develop qualified men to be elders to oversee its work.
 - Elders are to be appointed in every church – Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5
 - All elderships must meet the same qualifications – Titus 1:6-9; 1 Tim. 3:1-7
 - Each eldership's oversight is limited to the flock of God which is among them – 1 Peter 5:1-2
- **All elderships are equal in qualifications, responsibilities, and authority.**

Is Stated by Its Defenders

- The sponsoring church is a work larger than the local church.
- A **One Nation Under God** flyer: “Christians deserve the opportunity to participate in something **bigger than a [local] budget, larger than the local work.**” (“Four Months Until the Deadline”)
- Who is *qualified* to oversee a work “larger than the local work”?
 - Not elders! – 1 Pet. 5:1-2
 - Those overseeing a sponsoring church are not acting as biblical elders.

It is a Work of “the Churches of Christ”

- **The Herald of Truth** was the work of hundreds of churches acting under the oversight of the Highland church of Christ eldership.
- **James W. Nichols:** “It is the largest radio effort ever attempted by the **churches of Christ**. The entire work is **under the supervision of the elders of the Highland Church**, Abilene, Texas.” (*Preachers of Today*, 1952)
- **Where in the N.T. is there authority for an eldership to oversee the work of “the churches of Christ”? – Acts 14:23; 1 Pet. 5:1-3**
- The sponsoring church arrangement replaced the centralized control of the MS with centralized control under the men who made up the eldership of a local church!



The Sponsoring Church
Violates Local Church Independence and
Autonomy

Autonomy

- **Defined:** “The condition or quality of being self-governing”
(*The American Heritage Dictionary*)
- **Autonomy in preaching** requires a local church to decide:
 - What form of preaching?
 - Who will do the preaching?
 - Where the preaching will be done?
 - How much support for preaching will be supplied?
 - How long this support will last, etc.?

Supporting Churches Give Up Their Oversight

- **Lewis Hale** concerning the Herald of Truth: “There are hundreds of churches which send financial aid to help keep the program on the air. **They have no part in the management of the program. They have no part in the selection of the preacher, singers, nor sermon topics.** Their part is solely that of financial assistance.” (*How Churches Can Cooperate*, p. 2)
- Contributing churches willingly become dependent on the **overseers of the sponsoring church** to complete their work!
- They willingly give up their autonomy, or oversight of their work, to the sponsoring church.



The Sponsoring Church:

Defended

Participation is Voluntary

- **Argument:** Local church autonomy is maintained because churches participate in a SC arrangement *voluntarily* and can pull out of the arrangement at any time.
- **Truth:** **Voluntary participation means autonomy is willingly lost!**
- **Mark Roberts:** “An illustration may help. If I take \$5000 and invest it in a mutual fund I still have the right to pull my money out at any time. However, I have forfeited my right to manage my money. The fund manager now makes all decisions about what to do with my \$5000. I cannot call the fund manager and tell him how to invest that money, or to buy a certain stock, or stay away from a company’s stock. The fund manager does the managing (overseeing) of the money, not me. All I can do is send the fund money, or get out of the fund. I have zero authority over my money while it is in the fund. I cannot control it, or direct it.” (Quoted in Mark Roberts, “Mutual Fund Christianity,” *Abundant Life*, Oct., 1996, 29:10:5)

The Sponsoring Church Is Like a Mutual Fund

- **Mark Roberts:** “The sponsoring church arrangement creates a church mutual fund. Churches pool their money together, and the elders of the sponsoring church manage that money. The key is that while a church is in the ‘fund’ they have no control or oversight of their money. The elders of the sponsoring church do all the deciding. They decide who to put on the TV program, or what to write in the mass mail-out brochure. **In other words, they make all the decisions that each local church’s elders are supposed to make!** All the elders of the paying churches can do is get in or get out, **but while in they have given up their control and thus forfeited their autonomy.** Remember, autonomy means ‘independence and self-control’. When you have lost your control you have lost your autonomy.” (Quoted in Mark Roberts, “Mutual Fund Christianity,” *Abundant Life*, Oct., 1996, 29:10:5)

Sponsoring Church Leads to Romanism

- **Bill Hall:** “If some of the evangelistic efforts of some of the churches can be done under one eldership, then why could not all of the evangelistic efforts of all the churches be done under one eldership? **Why couldn’t we just place all the evangelistic efforts of churches of Christ under one eldership?** Why would we not be able to do that?” (*Restudying Issues Of The ‘50’s And ‘60’s,* p. 24)
- Sponsoring church opens the door for all the work of all the churches of Christ to be overseen by one church, which is Roman Catholicism!