

Interdependence among Independent Baptists



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The Bible's teaching that a church should be independent from the control of any type of outside human hierarchy is clear. Without a doubt, the Lord Jesus Christ *is the head of the church* (Ephesians 5:23). However, what does the Bible teach about a church's interdependence? Is it biblical for churches to work *together* in accomplishing God's will—particularly when it comes to the Great Commission?

As we consider the life and ministry of the Apostle Paul, we find a biblical pattern for missions. Although there were times when Paul had only one supporting church, this was not the norm (Philippians 4:15). We are probably safe to assume that Paul and Barnabas were supported financially by their sending church in Antioch (Acts 13:1–3). Additionally, God used the churches in Macedonia to help meet Paul's financial needs. Concerning the church in Philippi,

it is directly stated that they *sent once and again unto the Apostle's necessity* (Philippians 4:16). Paul also mentions that he *robbed other churches, taking wages of them* in order to serve the church at Corinth (2 Corinthians 11:8). Then, in the following verse we find that

which was lacking to Paul, the brethren which came from Macedonia supplied (2 Corinthians 11:9). After Paul's exhortation about giving, one would hope that the church at Corinth cheerfully joined with the other churches in financially helping to *preach the gospel in the regions beyond* (2 Corinthians 10:16).

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It is interesting to note that the collection of the offerings given by the churches was

organized. There was an unnamed spiritual *brother* who was *chosen of the churches* to help with the collection and distribution of the money that was given (2 Corinthians 8:18–19). One of the purposes for using this brother was to provide *for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men* (2 Corinthians 8:21).

The role of the spiritual brother mentioned in 2 Corinthians 8 describes one aspect of the ministry entrusted to Baptist International Missions, Inc. BIMI has been “chosen” by some 7,000+ churches to distribute the offerings given by grace to over 1,000 missionaries in approximately 100 fields around the world. Our Mission was officially started in 1960 when several local churches saw the need to coordinate and expedite the process of getting independent Baptist missionaries to the field.¹ To this day, BIMI is governed by more than 20 independent Baptist pastors who serve as Trustees.

In his book *Issues in Missions Today*, Dr. Les Frazier writes about the role of a mission board:

The autonomy of a local church and the isolation of a local church are two different things. Voluntary fellowship and cooperation among sister churches for common goals and needs have been obvious since biblical times. This practice can be seen in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 among the churches of Macedonia and Achaia. They united their hearts and efforts to meet the need of the saints in Jerusalem and Judea. There was no organization with centralized power or with control over

finances in the churches. There was simply a voluntary response to a need.... There was no coercion or united budget, but there was voluntary cooperation among autonomous churches to meet the need of others. This is, in essence, no different from a mission board that has been established by autonomous churches to accomplish the common goal and responsibility of giving a lost world the Gospel....

Not only can a missionary give accountability to the several churches supporting him but also the several churches can maintain their autonomy and accountability by not having to send their mission money from one autonomous church to another autonomous church. In such a setting autonomy, as well as mutual accountability, breaks down. One church has a tendency to become dominant. The smaller churches are eclipsed and their autonomy becomes less prominent. This is not the case through a mutually established mission board....

In conclusion, it must be acknowledged that isolation brings limitations. Cooperation within the context of mutual autonomy of the churches through a mission board established by the churches is scriptural in principle and example.²

As in Paul's day, so also today the goal of church planting is to establish indigenous, autonomous independent Baptist churches. Missionaries serving with BIMi seek support from independent Baptist churches in order to see that goal accomplished. A missionary will typically have more than 50 different supporting churches. These supporters are not only independent Baptists but they are also interdependent Baptists.

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They are relying on one another and working together to faithfully support missionaries. The common goal is obedience to the Great Commission. Indeed, it is possible for churches to enjoy interdependence and independence at the same time. This has been happening since the time when the brother mentioned in 2 Corinthians 8 began helping with the administration of the gifts given by multiple churches. Consequently, interdependence among independent Baptists is both possible and biblical. **W**

1 Dr. Mary Ray has written a book entitled *Embracing the World* that gives a detailed history of BIMi. To purchase a copy of this book, go to http://www.bimi.org/storePayPal/book_MaryRay.php.

2 Frazier, Les. *Issues in Missions Today*, pp 98–101. This book may be purchased at http://www.bimi.org/storePayPal/book_Frazier.php.