

# Restudying Issues Of The '50s And '60s: *Sponsoring Church Arrangements*



A Historical Perspective  
By: Bill Hall

## INTRODUCTION

The following three lessons were first preached on consecutive Sunday afternoons for the Pepper Road church of Christ in Athens, Alabama. They have been repeated many times. While we have revised the original text somewhat, we have tried to preserve the wording and sentence structure that is characteristic of extemporaneous public speaking. Hopefully the reader will overlook literary flaws.

This is not intended to be an exhaustive study of the problems that created so much division during the '50s and '60s. It is an effort to help people see the real issue in each of the controversies discussed, to briefly point out some of the arguments presented on both sides of the issues, and to do so in a fair and respectful way.

It is our conviction that churches of the 21<sup>st</sup> century can fulfill their God-given responsibilities in benevolence and evangelism without institutional boards or sponsoring church arrangements. Greater dedication is the need, not centralized oversight; greater sacrifice, not more complex organization.

May the Lord use this material to promote better understanding among Christians to His glory.

Bill Hall

## **THE SPONSORING CHURCH ARRANGEMENT: WHAT WAS THE ISSUE?**

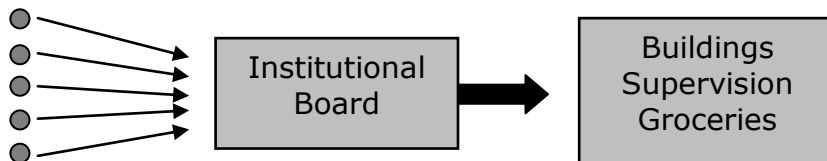
I can't say enough about the encouragement it is to me to see your continued interest in this effort that we're putting forth. Your willingness to come and study with us - it means so much to me. When this was planned, I thought we could educate those who come as to what really took place back in the '50s and '60s. But I just didn't know how much interest there would be. Your presence truly means a great deal to me.

As has been suggested, we're talking about some of the differences that arose back in the '50s and '60s that brought about division among churches of Christ. Many people never knew what the issues were about. One of our problems, when controversies arise, is that we don't listen to one another. We're so busy thinking about what we're going to say next or how we're going to answer this person that we really don't listen to what he says. And consequently, a lot of people knew there were problems but they didn't really know where the real issues lay in regard to those problems.

It was a difficult time. I'm repeating what we said last week, but I think we need to do that. It was a terribly difficult time. Anybody that didn't live back in those days and didn't go through those things just could never imagine how difficult they were. Quarantine was called for by the Gospel Advocate of anybody who objected to institutions. I don't think I stressed that enough last week. That was not just a matter of somebody writing to the Advocate and saying, "Well, you know, maybe it's a good idea if we just quit using these brethren." It was more than that. It was a call for quarantine with the total approval of B.C. Goodpasture, who was the editor of the Gospel Advocate. Last week I made mention of a book, Reviving the Ancient Faith, by Richard Hughes, who is a professor at Pepperdine University. He mentions this quarantine as being a very important event that took place among churches of Christ. Because of that quarantine, meetings were canceled, preachers were fired. I mentioned Irven Lee specifically last week as just one of the best men I ever knew. He was fired, and no longer could preach for that congregation. Churches divided. A lot of mistakes were made. I didn't say this last week, but I want to say it this week: I made some mistakes. I was so anxious for everyone to know as a young preacher, that I was sound; that I was among those ready to fight the battle for truth. I made some very serious mistakes. I look back and would change some things. Not anything I taught. But some tactics that I used. I don't know, but it may be that nearly every preacher back in those days looks back and says, "I wish I had done this different or that different." But it was a difficult time. Now we can look back with cooler heads in a more objective kind of a way, and ask the question, "What was that all about?"

Last week we talked about the orphan's home, and where the real issue lay in regards to the orphan's home controversy. The real issue lay within what I am calling "a middleman organization", a board of directors that stood between the churches and the work to be done. The money went from the churches, but the work was overseen by an institutional board.

**Local Churches**

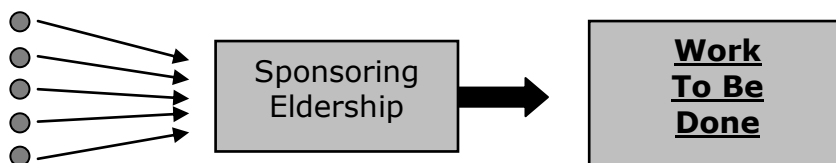


**Needed Work**

That was the issue. A lot of people never knew that. They couldn't understand why anybody would object to helping orphan children. "How could anyone object to a church helping an orphan's home?" they would ask. The objection was to an unscriptural organization standing between the churches and the work to be done. If somebody should ask, "What was wrong with this?", the answer is: there just was no authority for that institutional board. You will remember that we discussed that last Sunday.

Now, today I want to get into the question of the sponsoring church arrangement. When you talk about the sponsoring church arrangement, you just erase the words "institutional board" and you put in here instead a "sponsoring eldership".

**Local Churches**



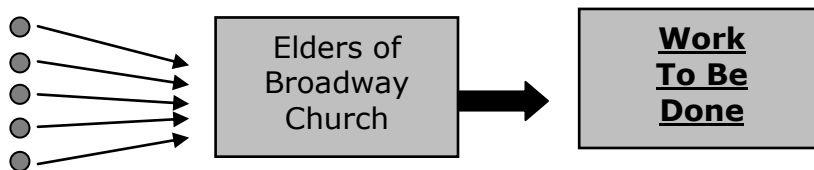
Now, many people who could see the error of the institutional board had a difficult time seeing the error of this. In fact, if I may make a personal mention, I remember my father, as soon as he realized what the organizational arrangement of the orphan's home was, immediately saw the error of that because he said, "The institutional board is an unscriptural organization; there's no authority for this institutional board." But then when he saw this, he said, "But wait, this is a scriptural body of people. How could that be wrong?" He understood when it was pointed out that, while this was a scriptural body of people - that is, an eldership - it was an eldership, a scriptural body of people, being put

in an unscriptural role. The elders had become overseers of a work of many churches of Christ to which all of these churches were equally related.

## **Sponsoring Elderships At The End of World War II**

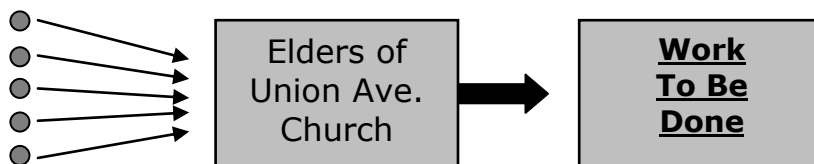
Now I think in fairness we need to say that there had been sponsoring elderships through the years on a very small basis, more or less on a local basis. But right at the end of World War II, there was a tremendous interest in missionary efforts and especially missionary efforts in some of the very nations that we had defeated in World War II. And so the Broadway church in Lubbock, Texas, became interested in evangelizing Germany. And what they said to all the churches was, "You send your money here, and the elders of the Broadway church will take on the oversight of evangelizing Germany." Some of you may remember, Otis Gatewood was the man that was sent to Germany under the oversight of the Broadway elders in Lubbock. So the German work was done by churches of Christ, but overseen by the elders of one church of Christ, the Broadway church in Lubbock.

### **Local Churches**



About the same time, there was interest in evangelizing Japan. And so one of the churches in Memphis, Tennessee, Union Avenue, took on the evangelization of the work in Japan. All the churches sent their money to that eldership and that eldership then for all of the churches took on the responsibility of evangelizing Japan. One eldership overseeing the work of many churches.

### **Local Churches**



Somebody says, "What's wrong with that?" Well, the thing that's wrong with it is: there's no authority for one eldership to oversee the work of many churches of Christ.

Let me remind you of some scriptures we used last week. 2 Timothy 3:16 and 17: "All Scripture is given by the inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." If this is a good work, then you would be able to establish it on the basis of Scripture, because Scripture furnishes us to every good work.

Colossians 3:17: "And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus." You can't do anything in the name of anybody unless he's authorized it. You may say you're doing it in somebody's name, but you can't do it in his name unless that person has given his authority behind it.

2 John verse 9: "Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son." If this is in the doctrine of Christ, then let's do it. If this is not in the doctrine of Christ, we must not go beyond the doctrine of Christ.

Now, let me add to that. Turn with me to 1 Peter, chapter 5, verse 1. 1 Peter, chapter 5, gives us a very definite statement concerning the extent of oversight of elders of any one church. Begin with verse 1 of 1 Peter 5: "The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by constraint but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away." Now back to verse 2, "Shepherd the flock of God **which is among you**, serving as overseers." Overseers of what? Shepherding what? "The flock of God among you."

The elders of the Pepper Road church have no oversight whatsoever outside of those who make up this congregation and the work of this congregation. They have no oversight of anything beyond this. It's the oversight of the flock "among you". Now in keeping with that, I think most of us are familiar with Paul's statement to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:28: "Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among whom the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood." Now you have a flock. What flock do you think he was talking about? The Ephesian flock. The Ephesian elders were to take oversight of that flock, but the Ephesian elders had no oversight of anything beyond the activities and work and people who made up that flock.

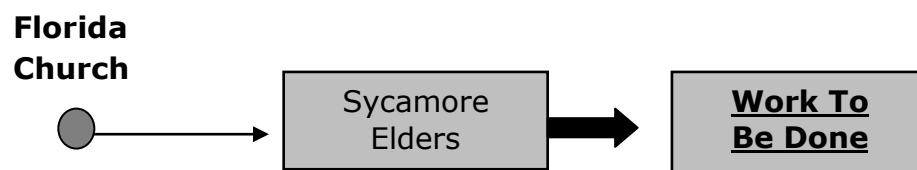
Now, there's no way we can look at this arrangement and say that the Broadway elders in Lubbock, receiving funds from all of these churches of Christ and taking oversight for them for all the work in Germany, were limiting themselves to the work and activities of the flock of God which is among them. They become more than that when they do that. There's the objection. That's the issue. We need to make sure that we see what the issue is. It was the same with the elders of

the Union Avenue church in Memphis. They took on more than what God had given them as elders.

## The "One Nation Under God" Campaign

The most recent really big program along this line was the "One Nation Under God" campaign. The Sycamore, and most of you will remember this, the Sycamore church in Cookeville, Tennessee wanted to send out literature to every home in the United States, and their original goal was to collect 17 million dollars. Do you remember that? Then they brought it down to 10 million dollars. Where was this \$10 million going to come from? Well, churches all over the country were asked to send so much money. I was living in Florence at the time, and the Shoals area really got caught up in this, and I think I would not be mistaken in saying that at least a million of those dollars came from the Shoals area. Then the next year they were going to evangelize Canada and the Caribbean Islands, and then the next year another and another.

Now, is that really an example of one church simply taking the oversight of the activities of that local church, or was it more than that? One thing I know is, I was down in Florida, and I passed by a church building that said, "Church of Christ, One Nation Under God". Now that's a city in Florida, that's not Cookeville, Tennessee. Obviously that church in Florida thought that the "One Nation Under God" ministry was a part of its work. They sent money to this Cookeville church for this work to be done. But all of this work being done, including their work, is being overseen by another eldership.



Somebody interestingly pointed out that 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?

But somebody says, "Didn't churches in Macedonia and Achaia send to the church in Jerusalem?" Weren't there occasions in the New Testament when funds went from one church to another church? Yes. In fact, we'll be talking about that more in just a few minutes.

There were funds sent from the churches in Macedonia and Achaia to the church in Jerusalem. But the church in Jerusalem was in need. That's where the

need was. Now the Broadway church in Lubbock wasn't a needy church; it was a big church. In fact, I suspect at that time it may have been the biggest church in the United States, with a huge contribution. The Union Avenue church in Memphis was not a needy church. They had all the things they needed. Jerusalem was a needy church. Now, if we're going to make Jerusalem a sponsoring church, then what you would have is: Jerusalem wouldn't have any needs at all. Jerusalem would be able to take care of all of their needy without any problems. But money would be sent to Jerusalem so the elders at Jerusalem could be the sponsoring church for all the needy in the eastern Mediterranean territory. That would make Jerusalem a sponsoring church. The churches of Macedonia and Achaia were sending to a church in need.

### **Bible Cooperation**

"Surely churches can cooperate", someone may be thinking. In fact, many referred to these issues as "questions about cooperation". Churches that objected to institutionalism were referred to as anti-cooperation churches. Yes, churches can and must cooperate. But there are two types of cooperation: **collective** and **concurrent**.

Let's illustrate these two types of cooperation. I live in Rogersville, Alabama in the Comer subdivision. Suppose things were to get somewhat unsightly in the area and an appeal were to be made to clean up the subdivision. There are two ways all the families could cooperate. They might all bring money to Jerry, my next door neighbor, and have him to clean up the subdivision. That would be "collective" cooperation. Or, Jerry could clean up his own yard; we could clean up ours; Steve, across the street, his; Dorothy, down the street, hers; etc. But next to Steve there is an elderly widow who is unable to clean up her own yard. She is needy, dependent. So we who are able and independent go over and provide help for the dependent widow. There is no pooling of funds. There is no central oversight. Each cooperates by doing his own work. This is "concurrent" cooperation. This is Bible cooperation.

### **The Herald Of Truth**

Now, obviously the sponsoring eldership that created the greatest division was the Herald of Truth, where the elders of the Highland church in Abilene took the oversight of the Herald of Truth radio and television program. A huge number of churches sent to the Highland church. An interesting outgrowth of the sponsoring church arrangement that I had never thought of was brought to my attention recently in the book that I have already mentioned by Richard Hughes, [Reviving the Ancient Faith](#). Whenever you centralize influence and control, you open the door for a lot of problems. Richard Hughes is a professor at Pepperdine University. He and I would be poles apart in our thoughts concerning how to use the

Scriptures. But he made a point about the Herald of Truth that I never thought of. He said in his book that the anti-institution people missed this, and that the Herald of Truth people missed this; it was such a subtle thing that people were not aware of what was taking place. But he says that when the Herald of Truth began, the greatest influence among churches of Christ shifted from the brotherhood papers to the Herald of Truth. People all over the country were supporting it, and people all over the country were listening to it. He further says that a major change took place in the preaching on the Herald of Truth. He says that when the Herald of Truth first began, the preaching was focused on the one true church, baptism for the remission of sins, no instrumental music, the Lord's Supper every first day of the week. It was convincing people regarding the idea of restoring New Testament Christianity. That was the first teaching on the Herald of Truth. But by the late '60s and early '70s, they had begun to realize that the radio and TV programs that were really attracting the audiences were those that's emphasis was more on family relationships, finding inner peace for yourself, how to build a strong self-image. Eventually the preaching of the Herald of Truth shifted from this more doctrinal, controversial type of teaching into this more "finding peace for the soul and a good self-image" type of teaching. Now, he said, all of the preachers of the country were listening to Herald of Truth, and as the Herald of Truth made that shift, the preachers made the same shift, so that by the '70s and '80s you could attend most churches of Christ for months and months and months and months and never hear a sermon on the one true church, restoring New Testament Christianity, or instrumental music. You might hear the plan of salvation given, but that's about it.

And let me tell you something. There are some (I'm not going to say a lot. I believe most of the preaching I hear is good preaching) churches of Christ right now that are considered to be opposed to institutionalism that rarely ever get any sermons that are distinctive at all from what you could hear in denominations all over the country. And I want to make sure you hear me and hear me well. If you attend worship at some church where you never hear the question of instrumental music, or baptism for the remission of sins, or the Lord's Supper every Sunday, or the one true church - if you never hear teaching along some of those distinctive lines, you need to get out and you need to go somewhere else. You'll lose your conviction. If you don't hear it regularly, you'll lose your conviction. We have to give our support to the kind of preaching that helps people see that we're different from the denominational world around us. Be sure you get that point. That was a shift, and the shift was led by a centralized program. This is not me saying this; this is Richard Hughes, a professor, giving a history of churches of Christ in America.

## **What Is The Pattern?**

Now we ask the question: What is the pattern? When you read your Bible, the funds from churches always just simply went to where the need was. They never sent their funds to some "middleman organization", whether it was an institutional

board or a sponsoring eldership. The funds just always were sent to where the need was. Now, let's get our Bibles and just take five minutes or so and look at that very quickly.

Go to Acts, chapter 4. Start with verse 32: "Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need." At this point there was only the church at Jerusalem. The apostles were acting apparently in lieu of elders (there were no elders mentioned until Acts 11). People were bringing their money, laying it at the apostles' feet, so distribution might be made within that local church. A problem arose, you remember, in Acts 6. Some of them said, "The Grecian widows are being neglected in the daily distribution." The apostles didn't reply, "We need a central organization and we'll send our money to this central organization so they can see that this is done right." No. They appointed seven men, within their number, who could see after this matter. It was all done within the framework of the local congregation. The money simply went to where the need was.

On to Acts, chapter 11. We've already read this but we'll read it again. Acts 11, starting with verse 27: "And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar. Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. This they also did, and sent it to the elders..." What elders? The elders where the need was. They didn't send it to some "middleman organization", some board of directors, or some wealthy large eldership somewhere. They sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul. The money went to where the need was.

Romans chapter 15. Paul in Romans 15 talks about his plans to go to Spain, but he says in verse 25, "But now I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints. For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem." Where did the money go? Churches of Macedonia and Achaia sent to the elders in Jerusalem. Somebody will say, "Now wait a minute. This doesn't say anything about the elders in Jerusalem." Well, go to Acts, chapter 21. A study of the chronology of the life of the apostle Paul helps us. This collection of funds from Macedonia and Achaia for the saints in Jerusalem took place at the end of the third missionary journey. Now keep that in mind. All this took place during

the third journey of Paul. Now when we get to Acts 21, the third journey ends. At this point, Paul is coming into Jerusalem. What is he coming into Jerusalem with? The money that has been collected from these churches for the poor saints. Who's with him? Representatives from all those churches are with him. Now they're coming into Jerusalem. Look at verse 15: "And after those days we" - **we** - Who's in the number? Luke? Yes, Luke's in the number. He must have joined them at Philippi. "We packed and went up to Jerusalem. Also some of the disciples from Caesarea went with us and brought with them one, Mnason of Cyprus, an early disciple, with whom we were to lodge. And when we had come to Jerusalem..." Who is this "we" that came to Jerusalem? Paul and his company with this money for the poor saints in Jerusalem. That's what the last of the third journey is about. So they came into Jerusalem. "The brethren received us gladly, and on the following day, [the very next day after they got to Jerusalem - BH] Paul went in with us to James and all the elders were present." The day after they arrived in Jerusalem with these funds from the churches of Macedonia and Achaia - the day after they arrived in Jerusalem, they met with the elders. Now look at verse 19: "When he had greeted them, he told in detail those things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry." What had God done among the Gentiles through his ministry? Numbers of things. But one of the things He had done is He had brought them to make this contribution for the poor saints in Jerusalem, and when they arrived in Jerusalem, they met with the elders. This money went to where the need was.

Philippians 4, let's go to it quickly. Look at verses 15 and 16: "Now you Philippians know also that at the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only. For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities." The church in Philippi sent to Paul. The money went to Paul where the need was. The money just always went where the need was. That is the New Testament pattern.

What should we do today? Find out where the need is and send directly to the need, not to some "middleman organization". If we do this, we might make some mistakes. We're going to err in judgment all along. But we will be staying with the New Testament pattern. What is the issue? The issue has to do with "middleman organizations" standing between supporting churches and the work to be done. It may be a board of directors, as with the orphan homes, or an overseeing eldership, as with the sponsoring church arrangement. But wherever you have a "middleman organization", you have left the pattern of sending directly to where the need is.

All right, you've listened well. Next week I want to get into the question of the fellowship halls, kitchens, other things that churches of Christ are doing now that they were not doing when I was a young man. I am amazed at some of the things that are going on now, at some of the practices taking place among many

churches of Christ. But you have listened well; we'll talk about that next week. And if you can come back and study with us that question, we would appreciate your presence very much.

And please, let's all have the best attitude we can have. I'm certainly not wanting to just cram something down people's throats and I hope you can see that. I do want to reason with you and help you to see why I take the position that I take in regards to these things.

Maybe there's somebody that needs to obey the gospel. What we've talked about this afternoon and last Sunday afternoon is trying to keep the local church free of anything for which there is no authority. Surely that appeals to you. We want to stay with Christ. We want to stay with His Word. And if you want to be a Christian, then what you need to do is pledge allegiance to Jesus Christ. Put your trust in Him, believing in Him, repenting of your sins, confessing your faith in Christ, being baptized, buried with Him. And then become a part of a local church that is determined to pattern itself according to the teaching of the New Testament. Then serve the Lord faithfully unto death. We invite you to come. Come to Christ and obey the gospel as we stand and sing.