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## ***THE AUTHORITY THEORY (THEORY???)***

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I recently read an article entitled "Constitution of Churches," which was written by a beloved Brother in Christ for whom I have a great love and respect. I was privileged to spend some choice time with this dear brother and have precious memories of the fellowship we had together. He is a dear brother in Christ and an able minister of the gospel, yet I must not, I can not let this article stand without answer. I know I am the least worthy of all the Lord's ministers to make answer to the statements made in this article, but by the grace of God I feel compelled to do so.

I have watched over the past several months the unfolding of the events that has brought about yet another division among Sovereign Grace Landmark Baptists. I have, in the main, remained silent. I have no desire to get the "Voice" into an ongoing debate over this issue, and do not intend to do so. But how can we remain quiet when the scriptural principle we call "Church Succession or Link Chain Succession" is referred to as a theory? Do I believe what I will write will be an end to all strife? I am a backwoods preacher, but I am not a fool. I know what I write in this article will be examined and dissected, and analyzed, and then torn to pieces by any who do not want to believe it. I remember an old king who tore up a scroll with the Word of God written on it, because he did not want to believe it. Yet, it did not make it any less truth. I must simply give answer to the charges, for to remain silent is to give the a false impression to many that the charges are true.

In responding I pray God will help me

to show continual respect and love to the writer of the above mentioned article.

There are some things I do not understand. One is the use of the word "theory." According to an old Webster dictionary I have, the particular meaning that my brother has in mind would appear to be, "Popularly, a mere hypothesis, conjecture, or guess; as, my theory is that he's lying." The author goes as far to say, "The problem with the authority theory is that there is no scripture for it." He again makes the assertion that we who believe in link chain succession are guilty of "ink spot" interpretation. He says we see what "others cannot see." He calls on us for "proof." He says, "I mean I want scripture proof." He uses the scripture in Isaiah 8:20; "To the law and the testimony..." One of his headings is entitled "Are the scriptures a perfect rule of practice?" and refers to II Timothy 3:16. I want to make it clear that I know my brother has in mind proving his "position" by the writings of our forefathers, but if I was going to demand scripture of the opposition, then certainly I should be willing to include the scripture for my position. Yet, my dear brother has failed to do this. He has, in his own words, "ground up cog by cog" our "whole system" and with nothing more than the writings of men. I have read and reread this article to find the scriptural grounds that he has for referring to us as "authority theory" folks. I have read what five men have written, and out of the five men and what they have written, or at least, what he has included, I found one or two verses mostly unrelated to the authority issue. These are great men of God. They are even referred to as Baptist giants. They have no doubt earned such respect, and through I know that I will in all probability incur the wrath of many, I must add, that these are men. They are fallible. What they

say is not infallible. They can make mistakes, if indeed that is what they truly believed. I have seldom ever tried to justify my position in the scripture with what other men have said. If I cannot find it in the scripture, then I should remain silent. If you are going to "ground cog by cog" what I believe the scriptures to teach, then let the word of God do the grinding. When we use such language as "If Graves said this, it is the Waterloo of the authority theory." I just simply say, that if Graves said this, it should be considered, but if he said this without any scriptural references to prove his position, then at best it is the opinion of a man. If he included in his opinion scriptural proofs, then they should by all means have been included in my brother's article. We must be very careful that our confidence does not rest in the wisdom of men, no matter how great men that they were. Their thoughts are poor substitutes for the scriptures. When the word of God is used and I am convicted by it, then I may as my dear Brother said, "shake" like I had the St. Vitus' Dance, and I certainly would desire to repent if I found that I was in opposition to the word of God, but just the opinions of men without the infallible word of God to give their views foundation, will come short of the "shaking" or the "grounding."

If there is so much scripture and if it is so clear the churches are self-constituted, then why wasn't just a little bit of it used in this article. If we are going to make such an issue of the scripture being the final authority, then let it be the final authority.

My brother says, concerning his position;

"We contend for this Truth of God -- That He left no essential doctrine or practice to be inferred. Not one. We do not properly get our instructions from inference, conjecture, surmising, implication or guessing. Far from it. In fact, we can only

get essential teaching from **positive statements of Scripture**. Therefore I oppose with all my might every doctrine, every dogma, every theory that is not clearly stated in the word of God."

Why not have brought out the scripture that is (supposedly) so clearly stated in the word of God in defense of the "self-constituted church" position. I could easily call it a theory, but I do not want to appear negative or unkind. If the self-constituted position is so clearly stated in the Word of God, wouldn't it have been far better to give a "thus saith the Lord" than spend so much time trying to justify the position through men without almost any scripture whatsoever? I say again that I understand that my dear brother was pointing out what some Baptist writers have apparently written in support of his position, but aren't we falling short of our responsibility to God and our devotion to His word when we give men's positions without scarcely any references of support from the Word of God. If these dear brethren who are quoted gave scripture references, then by all means they should have been included so as to give support to their supposed position. It is not Brother Graves' words, or my words, or any other man's words that is the Waterloo of any position that is not grounded upon scripture, it is the Word of God. It is by God's word that my position or your position stands or falls. Our works and our positions taken in this life will not be judged by our dear brethren, no matter how great men they were, but by the word of God which liveth and abideth forever.

Now as to my position, I believe in church authority in church organization, or constitution as it is termed by my brother. I believe in church succession or link chain succession as it is called by many today. No, I cannot make all the links back to the Jerusalem church, nor would I try to, just to prove it existed. I can no more prove church succession by this than my brother can prove that all the members, (according to his position), who came together and covenanted together to "self-constitute" themselves into a church had scriptural baptism in all the organizations down through history. We know there were instances in the scriptures of those who cast out devils in the name of Jesus, (Luke 9:49-50) and the disciples were instructed to forbid them not, when as yet they did not follow with the disciples. We know that in Acts 19 there were some who had been immersed, but had need of scriptural baptism. What is it that determines scriptural baptism? Well, there are several things, but my point is on church authority. Without it there can be no scriptural baptism. Who better to determine whether a group that wants to be orga-

nized into a church has had scriptural baptism than the church herself? Without this oversight which was given to her from the Lord Jesus Christ there is no way that the line of scriptural baptism can be maintained. The Bible teaching of scriptural baptism demands authority. I will keep my position as brief as possible. We see this authority in John the Baptist.

John had the authority to preach the gospel of the **kingdom and baptize**, because he was sent from God. (John 1:6). His authority was from heaven: "And Jesus answered and said unto them, I will also ask you one thing, which if ye tell me, I in like wise will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men?..." (Matthew 21:24-25).

There had to be authority to baptize, otherwise baptism, even if it is by immersion, even if the candidate is truly saved, would not be scriptural baptism. John had this authority. That is why the Lord Jesus Christ came to John to be baptized. (Matthew 3:13-17). Not only did the Lord come to John for baptism, but He also chose and set in His church only those whom John had baptized. (Matthew 3:3 and Acts 1:22). Jesus had the authority to organize His church because He was the one who had sent John. He was the authority. According to the "self-constitution" position, this was not necessary. The folks that John baptized should have been able to "self-constitute" themselves into a church. They had scriptural baptism. They had been baptized by John the Baptist, and according to the "self-constitution" position that is all that is necessary to enable a group to organize themselves. If those who are scripturally baptized today can organize themselves into a church, then these brethren could have organized themselves into a church. The opposition would naturally say, there was no church at that time. I say to that, if all you have today in a community is a group of scripturally baptized individuals, you have no more than was present before Jesus organized His church. Just being scripturally baptized does not give authority to be "self-constituted" into a New Testament Baptist Church. It took authority to organize the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was questioned concerning His authority (Matthew 21:23 and others). He had authority. His authority was from heaven, and He was from heaven, because He was God. Surely, my "self-constitution" brethren would not say that those baptized of John could have organized themselves into a church. It took authority and the authority was the Lord Jesus Christ.

The time has come for the Lord to leave His little flock that He referred to as

"My church". (Matthew 16:18). He gives them their credentials:

"For the Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left His house, and gave authority to His servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch. Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning: Lest coming suddenly He find you sleeping." (Mark 13:34-36).

The Son of man is the Lord Jesus Christ. The house is the church (I Timothy 3:15). The servants are those in the house or the church. The authority was given to the servants. These servants were the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Authority was not given to them individually, but collectively. Their work or talent or position in the church was given to them individually (to every man his work), but this was given so the church would be a complete body of Christ. There is not even the slightest hint in this passage that any individual authority was given. The authority was given to the servants collectively. What a confusion (a confusion which many of my brethren want to create today) would be created by individual authority of imperfect finite men! This collective authority was further born out in verse 35, "Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the **master of the house** cometh..." Master not only of the individual, but of the house, the church. It is even more clearly stated in Matthew 18:18-20, which we commonly call the great commission:

"And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power [authority] is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen."

The very fact that His promise was to be with them throughout all ages, is fact enough, or should be, that He was not speaking to His church as individuals, but collectively as His church. The individuals present at the time of the commission have long since died, but the church is still here and He is still with His church. Between Mark 13:34 and Matthew 28:18-20, it is evident, very clear that the Lord gave authority to His church. **AUTHORITY WAS GIVEN TO HIS CHURCH:** This is not a theory, my beloved brother, it is a fact of scripture. The quotations I have given are not of man, neither came they from man, but from the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

To what extent was this authority? It was to carry on the work of the Lord Jesus

Christ in His absence, while being in submission to and directed by His commandments. He is the Head of the church; The church is the body of Christ; The body is subject to the Head.

Our Lord Jesus Christ gave His church authority in matters of discipline. (Matthew 18:15-18). He gave His church authority to observe, keep, shew forth, and remember His death in the Lord's supper. (Matthew 26:26-30 and others). Who was it that Paul rebuked for the misuse and the misconduct of and in the Lord's supper? Was it not the Corinthian church itself? (I Corinthians 11:17). Why? Because it was the church which was at fault. It was the church which had the responsibility because it was the church which had the authority in the observance of the Lord's supper. Paul did not rebuke them as individuals, but as the church. Paul bears out the authenticity of this authority in I Corinthians 11:23-26. Surely my brethren would not hold that any except one of the Lord's churches has authority and privilege to observe this ordinance of the Lord.

The Lord gave His church authority to baptize. (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:16-17; Acts 2:41; Acts 19:3-5). All other baptism, no matter if it be immersion of saved individuals, is invalid, it is not scriptural baptism, because it was administered by those who had no authority to baptize. Baptism is an ordinance given to the Lord's church by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Surely my brethren would not hold that any except the Lord's church has authority to baptize!

Isn't this something! It takes authority to observe the Lord's supper. It takes authority to baptize. And it still takes that authority even today. Surely my brethren would not contend that those who are scripturally baptized could scripturally observe the Lord's supper or give authority to baptize until they were organized into a church! This would be putting the cart before the horse. Yet these my brethren would contend that the greater of all these exercises or works could be done by merely covenanting together to become a church without any church involvement whatsoever. If the Lord gave authority to the church to keep the two ordinances, then don't you think that same authority had to extend to church organization. A group of folks today, even if they have been scripturally baptized, have no more authority of themselves to organize themselves into a church than the converts of John the Baptist whom he baptized. It took authority then, and it still takes authority today.

Why do you think that the Holy Spirit makes it clear what the church is. He says that the church is the body of Christ. (I

Corinthians 12:27). The church is called the body of Christ because not only is it His church, but He left her here to do His work, and He is working through His church today. Now my brethren would have me believe that some preacher has authority separate from the church or that some group has authority separate from the church and they would contend that the Lord is working outside of the church He organized, sent forth and gave authority to. If that be so, then why did the Lord direct one of the greatest preachers who ever lived to the church at Antioch and at the same time directed the church at Antioch to pray and lay hands on Paul the apostle and Barnabas and send them forth? If there was ever a Baptist preacher after Jesus who should have had authority himself, it was Paul. But Paul was ordained and sent out by one of the Lord's churches because it was the church alone which had this authority. It is almost needless for me to point out that after each missionary journey Paul came back to the church which had sent him out. Why? Why? Because he recognized the authority that our brethren are trying to crawl around today. But my brethren, you can't crawl around it, the foundation is too big! You can't crawl under it, for the foundation is too solid! You can't crawl over it, for the authority is from heaven! You must go in at the door and the authority is still in the church today. It will not change for your convenience, it will not change for your whims, it will not change for hypothetical situations. The authority has always and will always be in the church until the Lord comes and raptures her away, because it was He who gave her this authority.

It is mind boggling to me that the Lord would give only His church authority over the observance of the Lord's supper, and over the administration of baptism, and over discipline in the church, and even over the choosing of the seven deacons, and yet that he would leave the organization of the church itself up to the whims of a few men without any church involvement. It is just a coincidence that the church at Jerusalem heard of the revival in Samaria, and why would they send down to them Peter and John? (Acts 8:12-15). Were these folks not scripturally baptized? If so, what need did they have of anything from the church at Jerusalem? We find this again in Acts 11:20-24. Is this just another coincidence? The church at Jerusalem sent Barnabas to Antioch because of the many who had believed. Is it just a coincidence that these folks were not even called a church until after Barnabas had come to them? (Acts 11:26). Then in Acts 13:1-3, the authority of the church is recognized in the ordaining and sending forth of Paul and Barnabas.

Their authority is further recognized by Paul himself as he reports back to the church which sent him (Acts 14:26), not just one time, but after each journey. Why? Because Paul recognized that not only the authority to preach, baptize, and observe the Lord's supper lay with the church, but also the authority of organizing other churches. My Brethren might say, well what about the eunuch, or Cornelius? What about them? The Bible does not indicate that there were any sent from the church at Jerusalem, or any other church after they believed and were baptized. Neither does it indicate they were not. The scripture gives at least three clear evidences of church involvement in organization. How many do you need? The Bible does not say, do not baptize infants, yet we know by the precepts and examples of scripture that the word of God forbids such practice. Just because it doesn't say clearly in a few instances that there was church involvement, it does not mean there was not church involvement, especially since it does give us at least three clear instances of church involvement in organization.

My dear brother, there is so much confusion in the world today caused by so many man-made organizations touting the supposed authority given their leaders by the Lord Jesus Christ. When did He give them this authority? He never did. If the supposed authority came anywhere this side of Matthew 28:18-20, then they do not have it. What makes your position any different from them, except for your insistence on scriptural baptism. Where and when did any group this side of the church in Matthew 28:18-20 receive any authority from the Lord Jesus Christ? They did not. When you try to break down the wall of church authority in organization, then it will be only a matter of time before that which you call scriptural baptism and the so-called baptism of man-made churches will run together and be indiscernible. Even with church authority in organization, look at the confusion Satan has caused with his man-made organizations. What would it be without this authority? Why did the Lord Jesus Christ not only leave His church with authority over Baptism and Lord's Supper, but also church organization? Because He promised His church, "...upon this Rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." (Matthew 16:18). He promised the church perpetuation. He promised He would be with His church. How has anything been perpetuated without the involvement of itself. Man's continued existence upon this earth is because of man's continued involvement. Yes, there has been times when God has had to open up wombs, and cause them to bring forth,

but the involvement of man was still there. The involvement of the church in bringing forth other churches is a fact of perpetuation. Yes, they could not do it without the Lord keeping His promise to be with them always, and opening up all the doors that needed to be opened, but the perpetuation has not been accomplished without the direct involvement of the church in organization, because it was the Lord who gave her this authority and He has never relieved her of this authority, nor has He given it to any other.

My brother, I do not expect this short treatise, from such a weak and unworthy servant as myself to bring an end to all strife or division. I simply write it so that no matter what you do with it, please know that I do not submit to your position on the "Constitution of Churches." It will take more than the positions of men, no matter how great, and I, since meeting you have considered you one of the pillars among Sovereign Grace Landmark Baptist preachers. You will not "ground cog by cog" my position on church authority with the mere statements of men. If what I believed were clay, then certainly you could grind it with clay, but I am persuaded that which I stand for is gold and not only gold, but gold tried in the fire, which also I believe at one time you considered gold, and you cannot destroy gold with clay, no matter how noble the clay is.

I have not used any quotes from men to strengthen my position. I have tried to use only the Word of God, and the lessons derived from such. If the "self-constitution" position is so clearly taught in the word of God, then teach it from the word of God. No matter what you or I or any other man might say or write, it is only for time. It is the Word of God that liveth and abideth forever and is forever settled in heaven. Call it a theory if you please. I thank my God that the position of church authority in organization does not become theory because any would call it so. I love you in the Lord, my brother, and I pray that you will return to the church truths which you seemed to stand for in the past.