

## REVIEW

Of Elder Curtis Pugh's Article:

*CAN A CHURCH MEMBER DISMISS HIMSELF?*

by

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## PART I

Whenever an Essential mother daughter authority (EMDA) brother writes he is sure to get around to EMDA! No matter what the title of the article or its apparent irrelevance to this subject, no matter where he starts from, no matter how far afield the subject is from EMDA, somehow they are always able to make the leap to EMDA!

A good example of this is Bro Curtis Pugh's recent article *Can a Member of A Church Dismiss Himself*. [Berea Baptist Banner, (BBB) Mar. 5, 2009 p. 41,45-46]. Glancing at this title, one would never think it had anything to do with an EMDA defense or an attack on Direct Authority (DA), but that is what it turns out to be!

This article is just another attempt to wring EMDA water out of a Baptist garment which has no EMDA dew in it. What Bro Pugh is trying to say is that those who believe DA believe church members can dismiss themselves from a church without obtaining church letters. Of course this is not our position and never has been. Bro Pugh knows this as well as we do, but any misinformation which can be hurled against DA is approved, as the cliché goes, any old stick is good enough to beat a dog. Besides, the dire circumstances of the EMDA situation compels its hapless defenders to make some kind of attack against DA and some kind of defense of EMDA no matter how impotent! This latest effort is the weakest of the weak and to measure it one must use negative numbers.

In this article Bro Pugh begins by representing the DA view of church constitution as *a new doctrine*. He says:

Lately some preachers and other persons have taken it upon themselves to promote a new doctrine called the Self-Constitution View. [Note: References to this article will be made by giving Bro Pugh's name and the page number of BBB, all from the March 5, 2009 issue. Pugh. 41].

The word *new* means *recently made, created or invented*. If it can be shown that DA is not new then Bro Pugh's whole thesis falls to the ground like a dead bird. This we attempt to demonstrate.

Before I consider the remainder of his article I will set before the reader my reasons why I believe Bro Pugh's *new* argument is an error relative to the time element. If DA is a new doctrine, then by all means it should be immediately dropped, for new doctrines are necessarily false and should be rejected as new lite! Here I need only show that DA is not new. To do this I will first quote Bro Cockrell. He said:

I do not deny there have been liberal elements of Baptists who may have practiced otherwise. [SCO. 89].

Bro Cockrell is here referring to what he calls *liberal elements* among Baptists and he admits they did not practice EMDA. He does not give any dates but it is evident that he meant this *otherwise* practice of DA had been going on for a long time in Baptist history. This short circuits Bro Pugh's claim that DA is new and if no other evidence existed, his theory is wrong according to Bro Cockrell. One or the other is mistaken. Which author is correct?

But lest we seem to skimp on support for our position as our EMDA brethren do for theirs, we will give more evidence of the longevity of DA. Crowell, a well-known Baptist, wrote a *Church Member's Manual* in which he said:

The proof is, therefore, complete, that the power which each and every church exercises is conferred directly by Christ, is continued on condition of obedience to his laws, and is withdrawn when that obedience ceases. It is also plain, that when a company of baptized believers assume these obligations in obedience to the plain will of their Master, and faithfully fulfill them, they become a church, authorized to perform all acts proper to a Gospel church. No bishop, no council of ministers, nor delegation from other churches, nor sanction of the church universal, can impart to them the least degree of church power. The reasons why it is a duty, in most cases, to call in the assistance of neighboring churches and ministers when the formation of new church is contemplated, is for mutual counsel and prayer; but they can impart no power to the new body, for they have none to spare; and what they possess is in its nature incommunicable by human agency. It must come from Christ alone. [William Crowell. *The Church Member's Manual*. 69-70].

This is our position. This is DA! Clearly, concisely, explicitly Crowell states DA! This manual was written in 1847, some one hundred sixty years ago! DA was then the standard practice of Baptists in 1847 according to Crowell! But how did Crowell know about DA if it was, according to Bro Pugh, a *new* doctrine not then known? J.R. Graves quotes this Manual in some of his books as early as 1855 and as late as 1880. [GIW. 554; OL. 41], so it could not be new! Maybe Bro Pugh has a *new* definition of the word!

T. G. Jones wrote the book *The Baptists: A Vindication* in 1860. In it he said:

That, too, the apostolic churches gathered by the process, and composed of the elements which we have indicated, were *local bodies*, outwardly and formally *independent one of another, separate from the State*, endowed by Christ with all the powers, and *performing under him all the functions of sovereign, self-controlling bodies*, is evident.... [Jones. Baptists. 26. Jones' emphasis.].

According to Jones new churches were endowed **by Christ** with **all their powers!** This sounds like DA to me. If so DA was operating in 1860, according to Jones. If so, it must have been in existence in 1860. How then could it be new in 2009?

Another noted Baptist recorded this:

The church is in things spiritual independent of the state. It is formed under authority from Christ, and owes supreme allegiance to him. [Harvey. *The Church*. 64. 1879].

This **authority from Christ** sounds an awful lot like DA! This was in 1879! How could it then be new in 2009? We give yet another:

What, then, is the Church? The context affords a satisfactory reply. "where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I. [Reynolds. *Church Polity*. 68. 1849].

EMDA men, as a rule, argue Mt. 18:20 has nothing to do with church constitution. But those who believe in DA believe it does. Was Reynolds expressing EMDA or DA?

Another great Baptist, John Gill, tells us how to constitute a church in his *Body of Divinity*.

A particular church may be considered as to the *form* of it; which lies in mutual consent and agreement, in their covenant and confederation with each other. [Gill. *B.D.* II. I. 623].

This is DA. There is not a word of EMDA found anywhere in Gill's treatment of the church. While I could give much more from Gill, it is unnecessary. All can see that Gill is here plainly stating DA in 1770! If DA is a new doctrine, how could Gill know about it and teach it in his day, as he certainly did?

Another example of DA is found in the Baptist Confession of 1644. It is believed that among the authors of this the noblest of all Baptist confessions were Spilbury, William Kiffin and Samuel Richardson.

#### Chapter XXXIII.

That Christ hath here on earth a spiritual kingdom, which is the Church, which he hath purchased and redeemed to himself, as a peculiar inheritance: which Church, as it is visible to us, is a company of visible Saints, called & separated from the world, by the word and Spirit of God, to the visible profession of the faith of the Gospel, being baptized into that faith, and joined to the Lord, and each other, by mutual agreement, in the practical enjoyment of the Ordinances, commanded by Christ their head and King. [Lumpkin. *Baptist Confessions*, p. 146].

This Confession goes on to say in Chapter XXXVI:

That being thus joined, every Church has power given them from Christ for their better well being....[Ibid].

This authority for constitution is **given them from Christ** which means the authority does not come from another church, mother church, father church, sister church, grandmother church nor

any other church relative but from Christ Himself direct! This was in 1646! This is DA! Is DA a new doctrine?

Benjamin Keach also tells how a Church is constituted:

III. The Beauty and Glory of a true *Church*, consists in the true and regular, or right *Constitution* of it; nothing being wanting that is Essential to it, upon this account. [Keach. *Glory of a True Church*.1697].

Keach says a regular or right constitution is one where nothing essential is wanting! Now if he does not include EMDA, then it was not essential in his estimation! But EMDA is not anywhere in his treatment! Then in article IX he tells how a church gets **the Divine Presence**:

IX. In their having the divine Presence with them: Or when the Glory of God fills his Temple. [Ibid. Keach gives two Scriptures as proof of article IX, Ex. 20:24 & Mt. 18:20].

Here we have DA in 1697! Yet Bro Pugh tells us DA is new in 2009! How can these things be?

Bro Pugh has made the claim that DA is a new doctrine. He gave no proof whatsoever. His assertion that DA is a new doctrine, in the light of these references (which could be greatly multiplied) has a hollow ring! Is it just possible he could be mistaken? Bro Cockrell thought so. These other writers and documents affirm DA long before our time. This means there is a serious mistake in Bro Pugh's proposition.

But on the other hand, I have for years asked EMDA men for one single **explicit** statement of EMDA by any Baptist (like these given above for DA) before 1900, [*LUV*. 166]. How many have they found? What church manual contains it? What directory? What history? What theology? What Associational record? This is a mystery unparalleled in Baptist history—a doctrine so essential that no one can constitute a church without it, and yet no one ever expressed it in any document for 1900 years! But if such records exist, then why did Bro Pugh not produce even one? Why write a roundabout article like this, attempting to prove EMDA, by such a circuitous route, when just one explicit statement would have sufficed and saved lots of paper?

Could it be that no such record exists?

Could it be that EMDA is actually the new kid on the block?

I think these quotations given above prove that is the case and the failure of these men in the EMDA camp to produce one explicit example of EMDA either from Scripture or history reinforces my position! So in effect Bro Pugh put his finger on the problem—a new doctrine! But unfortunately for his case, he got his wires crossed and the stigma he thought to put on DA he actually placed squarely on EMDA—*wittingly or unwittingly*! [Pugh. 41]. Thus when Bro Pugh reached forth to lay hold on DA (as Jeroboam did that prophet of Judah which spoke against him and his methods) his hand dried up! (1 Kings 13:4). Is this not a sign? (vs. 3). And when he pretended that EMDA was the historical Baptist position was he not doing what Jeroboam's wife did when she went to Ahijah? (1 Kings 14:6). She feigned herself someone else and Bro Pugh attempted to make his position the Baptist position, which it is not and the truth was known before his paper crossed the threshold!

EMDA is a new lite doctrine and has no history! None of these brethren can find one explicit reference to it before our own times!