
Article VI. The Church

A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is an autonomous local congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel; observing the two ordinances of Christ, governed by His laws, exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by His Word, and seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth. Each congregation operates under the Lordship of Christ through democratic processes. In such a congregation each member is responsible and accountable to Christ as Lord. Its scriptural officers are pastors and deacons. While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture.

The New Testament speaks also of the church as the Body of Christ which includes all of the redeemed of all the ages, believers from every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation.

Matthew 16:15-19; 18:15-20; Acts 2:41-42,47; 5:11-14; 6:3-6; 13:1-3; 14:23,27; 15:1-30; 16:5; 20:28; Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 3:16; 5:4-5; 7:17; 9:13-14; 12; Ephesians 1:22-23; 2:19-22; 3:8-11,21; 5:22-32; Philippians 1:1; Colossians 1:18; 1 Timothy 2:9-14; 3:1-15; 4:14; Hebrews 11:39-40; 1 Peter 5:1-4; Revelation 2-3; 21:2-3.

Article VII. Baptism and the Lord's Supper

Christian baptism is the immersion of a believer in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is an act of obedience symbolizing the believer's faith in a crucified, buried, and risen Saviour, the believer's death to sin, the burial of the old life, and the resurrection to walk in newness of life in Christ Jesus. It is a testimony to his faith in the final resurrection of the dead. Being a church ordinance, it is prerequisite to the privileges of church membership and to the Lord's Supper.

The Lord's Supper is a symbolic act of obedience whereby members of the church, through partaking of the bread and the fruit of the vine, memorialize the death of the Redeemer and anticipate His second coming.

Matthew 3:13-17; 26:26-30; 28:19-20; Mark 1:9-11; 14:22-26; Luke 3:21-22; 22:19-20; John 3:23; Acts 2:41-42; 8:35-39; 16:30-33; 20:7; Romans 6:3-5; 1 Corinthians 10:16,21; 11:23-29; Colossians 2:12.

Matthew 16:13-20

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." Then he warned his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Christ.

Matthew 16 is one of only two passages, three occurrences, from the mouth of Jesus in which the word church is used. Yet, Matthew 16 is one of the most important passages about the church, and it is the first one listed in the list of Scriptures found in the Baptist Faith and Message article about the church. In this passage, Jesus declared the church to be God's instrument for accomplishing His work in the world, God's victorious instrument. How should we respond to the beautiful articles we have read and the declaration of Jesus? What should be our response? We should celebrate and participate in the church. Understand it, appreciate it, adore it, applaud it! Celebrate what God has given us and then invest life in the church, because of whose it is and what it is! As I have studied these articles and this passage I want to offer to you some reasons why we should both celebrate and participate in the church.

The first reason is the origin of the church. As you study this passage, do you find the origin of the church in Matthew 16? Some would say so, but I disagree. In verse 17, the Father is described as revealing who Jesus is, but He had been doing that a long time before. When you go to Ephesians 3:9-11, Paul stated his intention, "to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery," the management, how God is working out this mystery of putting Jews and Gentiles together into one body, "which

for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.” The church has been in God’s mind, conceived in the very heart of God, since eternity. God has determined that through the church His work will be done. That has always been God’s plan. God does not have a plan B. The church is His plan A. The church’s origin is with God in eternity. In this passage, where Jesus says, “I will build,” He is pointing to the enlarging of, not the starting of. What am I trying to say to you today? The church is not some modern invention that you can determine whether you want to deal with it or not. The church is not some modern invention that you can decide that it is not relevant anymore. The church originated with God Himself! It is His! The church is not even a New Testament invention, though it is correct to describe the church as a New Testament church if it takes on New Testament characteristics. The origin is with God in eternity and because of that we ought to celebrate and participate in what He is doing through it.

Another reason is the owner of the church or the Lord of the church. In Matthew 16:18, Jesus called the church, “My church.” Does anybody want to argue with Him? The church is His and His alone! What was the purchase price? The very blood of Jesus! He has purchased us. He has purchased you, to make you a part of the church. We ought to celebrate and participate in it! The Baptist Faith and Message uses these statements, “A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ”; “each congregation operates under the Lordship of Christ”; “each member is responsible and accountable to Christ as Lord.” These wonderful statements reveal the fact that the church is an

autonomous body and that it works through democratic processes. These are good and biblical when done properly under the lordship of Jesus, but when autonomy and democratic processes are not done under the lordship of Jesus, it is a train wreck waiting to happen. They become a shame. The corporate body and individuals must be under the lordship of Jesus because He is the owner. What am I saying to you today? It is not your church! Regardless of your membership, regardless of the staff role you may hold, it is not yours! You cannot run the church. It belongs to Jesus. Jesus is Lord! You cannot have it your way. It is His. He is the Lord, and He demands it be His.

Terry and I were renting a house once. We were good renters. We paid our rent right on time. We took good care of the place. Then one day I came home from work and found a note on the door. "I have sold the house. Be out in six weeks." What gave him the right to do that to us? We were good renters, but he owned the house. He could do as he pleased with the house.

Now, let us turn our attention to the foundation of the church. A third reason to celebrate and participate in the church is the foundation. In our passage, Jesus declared that the church is built on the foundation of Jesus, not Peter. All of Scripture would emphasize that the foundation is not Peter. It is Jesus. (1 Corinthians 3:11 and many other passages.) I simply want to affirm to you today that the church will either stand or fall on Jesus. Will the church stand? Absolutely yes! The church will stand because of its foundation on Jesus.

A fourth reason I want to address today is the composition of the church. Here, we are simply going to do a study of one word, the word church. The Greek word is

ekklesia. Ek means “out” or “out of.” The verb form, kaleo, means “to call.” The noun then means “called out ones,” those who are called out, called together to be His body. The Baptist Faith and Message writers pointed the word church in two different directions. First, the word points in a local direction, a local congregation of baptized believers. Also, there is a global direction, “The New Testament speaks also of the church as the Body of Christ which includes all of the redeemed of all the ages, believers from every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation.” Local and global or local and universal, two expressions of the church, but the overwhelming emphasis in the New Testament is upon the local expression of the church because that is where the action takes place and where we can make a difference.

Let me emphasize today that church is not a building. Buildings serve their purpose, but the church is not a building. That did not happen until the third century or so. The church is people, called out ones.

The writers of the Baptist Faith and Message emphasized the regenerate nature of those persons. The church is a “local congregation of baptized believers.” We have a long way to go and a lot of improving to do with the way we conduct evangelism, discipleship, and other matters, in order to emphasize regenerate church membership the way we ought.

This writers of our passage and our articles described Christianity and the church as not a spectators’ sport. Back in a younger age when I played sports I did not like sitting on the bench. Praise God, with the church you do not have to. We can be involved. It is not for spectators. It is a participating church. In the article, believers are

described as instruments to be used, exercising gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by the Word.

As you would probably know the Baptist Faith and Message was originally written in 1925, revised in 1963, a brief statement on the family was added in 1998, and then another revision in 2000. One of the major changes in 2000 was this sentence: "While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture." While that is not politically-correct nor culturally-popular, the statement is very biblical. We need to celebrate and participate in the church on this basis.

Let us turn our attention from the composition of the church to the status of the church, another reason for celebrating and participating in the church. The articles do not emphasize this much, though it is implied. Here we turn our attention back to the passage. I will address three ideas about the status of the church. First of all, the church is advancing not retreating. With the imagery in Matthew 16, do you use gates as offensive weapons or defensive weapons? You do not pick up a gate to hit anyone with it, do you? You use a gate to shut someone out when you are trying to hide behind it. Whose gates are these? They are the gates of hades or the gates of the kingdom of Satan. The picture here is the church on the offense, the church advancing, the idea of prevailing and overcoming. The whole passage pictures the church on the offense moving forward, advancing, not just surviving, not maintaining, not retreating, not just getting by. Enough already of us leading churches in such a way that we are just getting them by and maintaining! Let us lead her forward because the church is advancing not retreating.

This passage would also emphasize to us that the church is victorious not defeated. The imagery in Matthew 16 points to the idea of overcoming, prevailing, loosing, the church winning, being victorious, not losing. The church is winning presently, will win eventually, and will win ultimately. The church is victorious not defeated! While it is true that 85% of churches across America, local expressions of the church across America, are either plateaued or declining and while it is true that many local expressions are either dead or dying, the church as a whole, the church across the world, and the church ultimately is victorious not defeated. It is time, high time, that the American expression of the church and the local expressions that we have anything to do with join in on being victorious not defeated, in advancing not retreating.

In my younger days my cousins and friends from around the community played various games. We played cowboys and Indians, good-guys and bad-guys, army. Sometimes we would divide up into teams, and each team would develop a home base. Sometimes my home base was the old storm cellar down to the east side of the house. It was a typical storm cellar that had a small door and an air vent in the top of it. My team would go inside the storm cellar and barricade the door. The other team would come and throw dirt clots and other matter down the air hole. We would say, "na-na-na. You can't get us!" Then one day it dawned on us. They're not "getting" us, but we are not "getting" them either. We had to get out of the storm cellar. So at just the right time while they were at their base, an old canvas tent down at the edge of the woods, we sneaked out of the storm cellar and went down behind them with our play guns and sticks, and we stormed their tent and captured them. We "got" them! It is time that the

church got out of the storm cellar and started being the church that is advancing and victorious. Get out of the storm cellar; advance and win with the Lord Jesus.

Another part of the status of the church is that the church is beautiful. Jesus in Matthew 16 describes the church as “My church.” This reminds me of what Paul had to say in calling the church the bride of Christ and the body of Christ. Have you noticed? Brides are beautiful. Mine is. Brides are beautiful. What about the church? She is the bride of Jesus. Is she beautiful? Certainly she has some ugly spots on her in certain places kind of like in the New Testament days. Have you ever read about the church at Corinth? She had a few bad spots. Paul wrote in Ephesians 5 that God is at work purifying the church, cleansing her, making her presentable, to be presented before the Father in heaven. Can you imagine that day when the church, the bride, will be presented before the Father in heaven. Oh, she is beautiful now, but how beautiful is she going to be there! Oh, we ought to celebrate her and participate in her because of her beauty.

Also, the idea of being beautiful and being a bride implies protection. Any husband that has any “man” in him at all is going to protect his bride. Will Jesus protect His bride? Yes, He will. You ought to be very careful what you have to say about His bride and what you do in regard to your participation in His bride. Yes, she is beautiful, and she is protected by the Lord Jesus.

We have addressed the status of the church. Now let us turn our attention to another reason, the practices of the church. The practices of the church are many including worship, maturing disciples, and many, many others. The article describes the church members functioning, empowered, and gifted. The Lord is doing His work in the

church and helping people to participate in His work. There are two practices that I want us to emphasize today as a part of the emphasis on the articles about the church, baptism, and the Lord's Supper. The first emphasis and practice is proclaiming the gospel. Matthew 16 pictures the church rescuing captives, loosing those who are bound. How do you loose the captives? How do you rescue those who are perishing? You loose the captives and rescue the perishing by proclaiming the gospel. Matthew 16:20, I have called this the most obeyed verse in all of the Bible. "Then He warned His disciples not to tell anyone that He was the Christ." He told them that for a time and reason within the context. What did He tell us later? Matthew 28, Acts 1:8, and others - - proclaim the gospel and get the word out! The Baptist Faith and Message reads, "The purpose of the church is seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth." That is the church's very purpose, and when we turn inward on ourselves and cease to do that we do not deserve to be called a New Testament church. Our very purpose, our practice that we should be engaged in, is proclaiming the gospel locally, regionally and globally.

Let us also emphasize the observing of the ordinances of the church. The articles describe baptism and the Lord's Supper as ordinances. The word ordinance means decree or command. They are ordinances as opposed to sacraments. A sacrament dispenses grace. In other words, you are saved by and benefited by the doing of the ritual if understood as a sacrament. They are not sacraments. They are ordinances. They are symbolic acts for us, acts of worship that God has given us to testify about what He has done. Baptism testifies to the death, the burial, and the resurrection of Jesus. We ought to celebrate that and participate in it. Do you realize,

in Matthew 28:19, if you understand that passage correctly, He gave us a command? We are commanded to baptize people. In our day there are those who want to downplay baptism. Do not ever be ashamed of baptizing people. Be sure to do it right when you do it, but do not be ashamed of baptizing. Do not ever lessen its importance and give it a place that is secondary. Jesus told us to baptize! Baptism is necessary, not necessary for salvation but necessary for obedience, obedience on the part of the person but also necessary for obedience on the part of the body. If the body is not baptizing, we are disobeying the command of the Lord.

The Lord's Supper is a testimony, an acting out of what Jesus did for us on the cross, His broken body, His shed blood for us. The Lord's Supper is a symbolic act of worship to help us remember and celebrate and anticipate His coming. What more noble practices could we have? What should our response be? We should celebrate it and participate in it.

Today we have investigated the church. What shall we do with the church? Celebrate and participate in her! Invest your very life in the church because it is the church of Jesus!

Dr. Robin Jumper