

The Church

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There is much talk in this day about “the church.” This discussion is not confined to our time, but there seems to be a fresh interest in the subject. This article is not intended to be the end-all, but will look at some important aspects of the subject.

The Origin of the Church

The Real Question

The word *church* is first used in Matthew 16:13-18. “Jesus asked His disciples, ‘Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?’ So they said, ‘Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.’ He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Simon Peter answered and said, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in Heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church (*ecclesia*), and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.’”

One is reminded of the words of Jesus recorded in Matthew 11:27, “...no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and he to whom the Son wills to reveal (Him).”

This Rock

The immediate question arises, what did the Savior mean when He said, “You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it?” What is “this rock?” Many people believe it is the confession of Peter, many that it is Peter, and many that it is Christ Himself.

It seems to this writer that the reference must surely have meant Jesus Himself. The Hebrew people were familiar with God being spoken of as a Rock.

- Deuteronomy 32:3-4 “For I proclaim the name of the Lord...He (*is*) the Rock, His work is perfect...”
- 2 Samuel 22:2 “and he said, The Lord is my Rock...”
- Psalm 18:2 “The Lord is my rock and my fortress, and my deliverer...”
- Psalm 42:9 “I will say to God my Rock...”
- Psalm 94:22 “But the Lord has been my defense, and my God the rock of my refuge.”

It also is true that Peter was unstable in his Christian walk after this encounter and confession. Almost immediately after his great confession, Peter failed. Jesus told the disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, suffer many things, and be killed and rise again. Peter declared this could not happen, but Jesus rebuked him (Matt. 16:22-23). Later, Peter denied Jesus three times. He cursed and swore that he did not know Jesus. Peter remembered what Jesus had told him, and he went out and wept bitterly (Matthew 25:69-75).

The Roman Catholic Church is mistaken in its belief that the church was built on Peter, or that Peter was the head of Christ’s church. James, not Peter, presided at the meeting of the council in Jerusalem. (Acts 15:13) In Galatians 2:11, Paul withstood Peter “because he was to be blamed.” Peter

described himself as an elder when he wrote, "To the pilgrims in the Dispersion in Pontius, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia" (1Peter 1:1).

It is the opinion of this writer that there is no universal, invisible church on earth, but certainly there is a universal church in Heaven. The writer to the Hebrews wrote, "But you have come to Mount Zion and to the City of the Living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn (who are) registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect" (Hebrews 12:22-23).

Jesus used the term *ecclesia* twenty-three times. He used it three times in Matthew 16:18. He said, "...and on this rock, I will build my church (*ecclesia*)." This statement could be a reference to a universal church. However, in Matthew 18:15-17, He said, "Moreover, if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother, but if he will not hear you, take with you one or two more, that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector."

Matthew 16:18 may speak of a universal church, but not Matthew 18:15-17. In the book of Revelation, Jesus uses *ecclesia* twenty times, each time referring to a local church. For example, in Revelation 1:4, He said, "John, to the seven churches which are in Asia." In Revelation 2:1, "To the angel of the church at Ephesus write..." (see also Revelation 2:8, 2:13, 3:1, 3:7, and 3:14) In light of Jesus' consistent use of the word *church* as a local organism, it seems to be the correct use.

After Peter preached the great message on the Day of Pentecost, about 3,000 "gladly received his word," were baptized, and were added to the local church in Jerusalem. It appears that Luke says that they began immediately to study Scriptures and fellowship with the other churches. This writer believes that they began observing the Lord's Supper with the other members, and that they were involved in prayer meetings with the church (Acts 2:41, 47). The Greek New Testament has the definite article *the* before "bread" and "prayers," indicating specific bread and specific prayers.

A small number of Scriptures could speak of a universal church. (see 1 Corinthians 12:28; Galatians 1:13; Ephesians 1:22, 3:10). Hebrews 12:22-23 evidently refers to the church in Heaven: "...the heavenly Jerusalem to an innumerable company of angels..." The phrase "church of God" is used in 1 Corinthians 10:32, 11:22, and 15:9.

The secular word *ecclesia* was familiar to the people of that day. It meant a called out assembly. The members were chosen by the people, were representative of the people and, were expected to be qualified to attend to the affairs of the people. The Christian *ecclesia* is composed of individuals who are saved and called to represent Christ. It would be difficult to imagine an *ecclesia* which has no form, no organization, and no program.

The Scriptures speak of churches. The members of the church at Jerusalem were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria, except for the apostles. These Christians went everywhere preaching the Word and establishing churches. (see Acts 13:1. See also Acts 14:21-23 "...made many disciples... appointed elders in every church.")

Acts 8:1 says that after the death of Stephen, "They were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles." These were members of the Jerusalem church but, over time, they evidently won many to Christ and established churches. The Bible speaks of "the churches of Galatia" (Galatians 1:2), "the churches of Judea" (Galatians 1:22), and "the seven churches that are in Asia" (Revelation 1:4).

Paul writes in Romans 16 of *church* and *churches*. He writes of Phoebe "...a servant of the church at Cenchrea" (Romans 16:1). In Romans 16:3-5, he writes of Priscilla and Aquila, "... (greet) the church that is in their house." In verse 4, he speaks of "the churches of the Gentiles." Paul writes of "the churches of Christ" (Romans 16:15) and of "Gaius and (the host) of the whole church ..." (Romans 16:23).

To sum up, several ideas are suggested. The *ecclesia* is a local church. This is what Christ meant when He used the word. Would the apostles have been able to understand any other meaning? What other kind can minister the Word to lost persons as well as minister to the physical needs of poor people and

those who are ill? What other kind can preach the Gospel? The New Testament churches were independent, but helpful to other churches. (see 2 Corinthians 8:1-7)

The Officers of the Church

Pastor

The Bible uses three designations for the leader of a church: elder, pastor, and bishop. These three terms seem to be descriptions of one office. "Elder" is one who is mature in the Faith, "Bishop" is the overseer of the church, and "Pastor" is the shepherd of the flock.

In Acts 20, Paul uses the three terms to describe the leaders of the church at Ephesus. In verse 17, "From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church." In verse 29 he said, "Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood."

Paul, writing to the church at Philippi, addressed "the bishops and deacons (Phil. 1:1)." Surely, if bishops, elders and shepherds (pastors) were separate officers, Paul would not have failed to address the elders and pastors!

In 1 Timothy, chapter 3, Paul describes the offices of bishops and deacons in some detail. Nowhere does he define the qualifications of pastors and elders. There would be no need, because pastor, elder, and bishop are one office. In Titus 1:4-7, elder and bishop are used interchangeably. In 1 Peter 5:1-2, Peter wrote: "The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder..." Verse 2 speaks of the other functions of the ones being addressed. Peter wrote, "shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers..." Therefore, a study must be made of 1 Timothy, chapter 3, verses 1-7, to find the requirements for the office.

Qualifications of the Pastor

Paul is complimentary to the man who desires to be a bishop (elder, shepherd), because it is "good work." A pastor must be blameless. Charles R. Erdman says, "without reproach."¹ He should live in such a way that none can accuse him of wrong.

According to 1 Timothy 3:2, the pastor must be "the husband of one wife." There has been much discussion of this verse. Some have contended that it means a pastor can have been married only once. Others believe that it means the pastor can have only one wife at a time. However, it is probably not referring to polygamy because there is no evidence that this was a problem at that time, especially among Christians. Others believe that a pastor must be married. Some believe that if his wife died, he must not marry another.

It seems reasonable that it means one wife at a time in the case of having a wife who died. It does not rule out remarriage in such a case. However, this verse does not sanction divorce and remarriage. The home was instituted by God and is the basis of society. The pastor must set the example for the flock. This is especially true in this time when there is so much divorce, and many couples are co-habiting without being married. The home as an institution is in danger.

The pastor must be vigilant, watchful in all things. He must be "sober." (1 Timothy 3:2) This term has nothing to do with not indulging in liquor, although a minister should not drink alcoholic beverages. A better translation, "sober minded," is found in the New King James Version and English Standard Version. The pastor should not speak without thinking and should exercise good judgement. The pastor should be a man of good behavior. The pastor must "walk the talk." Guy King wrote about a woman who was asked "Under whose preaching were you converted?" She replied, "It wasn't nobody's preaching, it was mother's practicing."² The pastor must live what he preaches.

The pastor must be hospitable. This is a wonderful way to serve the Master. The pastor's home should always be open to God's servants, although this practice sometimes becomes burdensome (especially for the wife!).

He must be able to teach. (1 Timothy 3:2) One minister was told several times that he was a teaching preacher. He later became a seminary professor. Some of his students said that he was a preaching teacher. This is what is desperately needed today. Pastors should primarily preach expository sermons, so the church members better learn the Scriptures. Even a topical sermon should be “loaded with Scriptural buckshot.”

The leader of the church should be “not given to wine.” (1 Timothy 3:3) Vincent says this verse means “not quarrelsome over wine.”³ So says Charles R. Erdman.⁴ He should not be a “striker.”⁵ Those two things seem to go together – drinking wine and brawling.

He should not be “greedy for money” (1 Timothy 3:3). One of the pitfalls of Christian ministry is the greed for money. One seminary professor always told his students, “When contacted about a new place of ministry, never ask about salary, etc. Seek the will of God for your life, go where He directs, and trust Him to provide.”

The pastor is to be gentle. The Greek word really is untranslatable, but Barclay quotes Aristotle, who said it is that which “is just and better than just.” He is to be not quarrelsome, not covetous, i.e. not a “money lover.”⁶

According to 1 Timothy 3:4, the leader of the flock must rule his own house well and have control of his children. Paul asks a penetrating question in verse 5 of that chapter – “for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?”

The leader of God’s flock should not be a novice, a new convert. This requirement may not refer to a young man, but actually is speaking of knowledge of the Word and experience with the Master.

Last of all, people who are outside the flock should speak highly of the pastor. The pastor should receive a good report from persons who are not in the family of God.

Deacon

The office of deacon was another office in the churches in apostolic times. In 1 Timothy 3:8-13, the word which is translated *deacon* literally means “through the dust” and speaks of service. The deacon is not to be exalted in his own eyes, but realize that he is a servant of God and of His church.

Many persons, including this writer, believe that the origin of the church office of deacon began early and is spoken of in Acts 6:1-7. The church was growing rapidly. An argument developed about the difference in the treatment of the Greek and Hebrew widows in the church.

Having called the many members of the church to them, the apostles said that they did not believe that they should leave the most important ministry of teaching and preaching the Word of God to serve in the needed ministry to widows. The apostles instructed the church to find of their number seven men with certain qualifications. Each of the seven men was to be “full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom: and was appointed to serve the congregation. Several matters should be noted. The congregation chose the men, and the apostles appointed them. It may be well to name the men. In verses 5 and 6 of Acts chapter 6, “They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Phillip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch, whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them.”

In the first chapter of Paul’s writing to the Philippians, he addressed the letter “To all the saints in Christ Jesus, which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons.”

The major scriptural passage dealing with deacons is 1 Timothy 3:8-13, “Likewise deacons must be reverent...” Vincent uses the word *grace* as does Charles R. Erdman. Barclay says “men of dignity.”⁷ The term used for *grace* means “respected.”

The deacon also must not be “double-tongued,” i.e., saying one thing and meaning another, or saying one thing to one person, and something different to another. He must be “not given to much wine.” This idea speaks of temperance.

He must not be “greedy of filthy lucre.” Erdman suggests “base gain” might be a better translation. Vincent says “in a base, gain-greedy way.”⁸

The deacon must hold the mystery of the faith in a good conscience. Erdman says, “The mystery of the faith therefore means the knowledge of Christ and his salvation.”⁹ The deacon must therefore lead an exemplary life.

“Let these also first be proved...” (1 Timothy 3:10) Surely, this statement did not infer a formal examination, but rather allowing the people of God to observe the men in their day-to-day lives over an intended period of time.

Paul now turns to the wife of a deacon. He says that the wife of a deacon is to be reverent. Some believe that this verse refers to women in church who were serving. This writer believes that “wives” is the correct meaning. Why would Paul interject something about women (in general) in the midst of his word about deacons? There is one time in the New Testament where the word *diakonon* is used to refer to a woman. Most translators use “servant.” Romans 16:1 reads, “I commend to you Phoebe, our sister, who is a servant of the church at Cenchrea...” Barclay says “...it is not likely that she held what might be called an office in the church.”¹⁰

The wife of a deacon must be reverent. (1 Timothy 3:11). Barclay says, “must be dignified.”¹¹ Erdman translates the word as “grave.”¹² She must not be a “slanderer” (v.11). Barclay writes not “given to slanderous gossip.”¹³ She must be “temperate” (v. 11). Barclay uses “sober.”¹⁴ She must be “fruitful in all things” (v.11). Barclay uses “reliable.”¹⁵

The deacon is to be the husband of one wife. This requirement is the same as for the pastor. He must rule his children and his own home well. (1 Timothy 3:12)

Men who have served well as deacons will be recognized as good, faithful servants of Christ. They will have great boldness in their commitment to Christ.

The Ordinances of the Church

A Baptist church has two ordinances – baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Although the Bible does not speak of “ordinances of the church,” the idea is there. Webster defines *ordinance* as “an established rite for the administration of a sacrament; hence a sacrament, especially the communion.” Baptists do not have sacraments, but rather have two rites (baptism and the Lord’s Supper) at the instruction of God’s Word.

Baptism

Most Baptists believe that baptism is the immersing in water of a person who professes Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and who desires to be a member of a local church. Thayer defines the Greek word *baptizo* as “to dip repeatedly, to immerge, submerge; to cleanse by dipping or submerging, to wash, to make clean with water.”¹⁶ Zodhiates writes that *baptizo* means “to dip, immerse, submerge for a religious purpose, to overwhelm, saturate, baptize.”¹⁷ (see John 1:25) Beasley-Murray wrote “...*baptizo*, dip, immerse, submerge, baptize...”¹⁸

Most Baptists do not believe that infants should be baptized. It seems that every reference to baptism in the New Testament speaks of people who understood the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul stated in Romans 6:3-4, “Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we are buried with Him through baptism unto death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”

The argument that the word *household* included infants who also were baptized requires more space than is given for this article. Here, we will briefly deal with one example in Acts. Paul and Silas were released from prison in Philippi at midnight, and the jailer asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30). They told him clearly what he needed to do, and “spoke the Word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house” (Acts 16:32). After the jailer had washed their stripes, “immediately he and all his family were baptized” (Acts 16:33). It is unlikely that they would have awakened infants at midnight.

The Lord's Supper

In his first letter to the church at Corinth, Paul clearly sets forth the teaching of the Lord about the observance of His supper. In 1 Corinthians 11:23-26, he says: "For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke *it* and said, 'Take, eat: this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.' In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink *it*, in remembrance of Me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes."

Baptists generally believe that in these verses Paul shared the importance of being reminded again and again of Christ's death for our sins, and also of His coming return for His people. It would require writing a book on the subject to determine all that is contained in 1 Corinthians 11.

God's people need to set aside at intervals to participate with one another in a special time of remembrance. It is easy for people to forget what He has done for them and to think seldom of His promised return.

Baptists do not believe that the bread and wine are miraculously changed into Christ's literal body and blood, but are representative of them. They believe that the Lord's Supper is not a sacrament, but a reminder.

The Lord's Supper is a church ordinance. People today are taking the bread and the fruit of the vine in all sorts of settings. Some are observing the supper at weddings; some in small groups in various settings; some are even taking elements to sick people in the hospitals or homes. Paul gave his instructions to a local church. It is a time for the local church collectively to remember what Christ has done and that He is coming again.

Orders to the Church

The Risen Christ met His disciples, as he had promised, in Galilee. Matthew 28:16-20 records what happened: "Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them. When they saw Him, they worshipped Him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age.' Amen."

The Lord Jesus gave three orders to His churches before He ascended to His Father. He told them to make disciples, baptize believers, and teach believers.

Make Disciples

Making disciples of all the nations is the primary task of the church. The Father desires that every person love and serve Him. The church is the body that He chose to take the message to everyone, everywhere. "He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." (2 Peter 3:9) Every member of a local church is ordered by God to make disciples, and the outreach is to be to every person. Every child of God should be able to share what God has done for him or her, and, with Scripture, share the gospel with a person who does not have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. At the very least, believers should be consistent in sharing what God has done for them as they talk with people who are without God in their lives.

The church does not need more organizations. It needs more committed members. Think again about the members of the church in Jerusalem who were scattered by persecution all over Judea and Samaria. They went everywhere preaching the Word. (see Acts 8:1) Someone has said that they "went

everywhere gossiping the Gospel.” The great need in this day is for the children of God to witness faithfully to others.

Baptizing Them

In Matthew 28, Jesus is showing the importance of baptism. The church has the responsibility of baptizing the new converts. It seems to be evident that some of those believers who were scattered abroad remained in other places, and those who were led to Christ joined them in establishing churches. Baptism is a testimony to persons who are lost. It has been said that joining a church is similar to joining an army, and baptism is similar, for a Christian, to putting on the uniform.

Baptism is symbolic of what has happened to the new believer. He has died to the old life. The old man has been buried, and the believer has been raised to a new life. In Romans 6:4, Paul said, “Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism unto death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”

Teaching Them

Jesus said, “Teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded, and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20). Matthew added, “Amen.”

The church dare not leave newborn babies in Christ out in the world, but welcomes them into the home for the children of God. The church is to “make disciples, and teach them to observe all things that Christ has commanded.”

It seems logical to think that no invisible church, without structure, or form, or visible members, could carry out the orders that Jesus gave to His disciples (see Mark 16:15. See also Luke 24:47-48; John 15:9).

¹Charles R. Erdman, *The Pastoral Epistles of Paul* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1923) 38.

²Guy H. King, *A Leader Led* (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, Ltd., 1957) 59.

³Marvin R. Vincent, *Word Studies of the New Testament* (McLean, VA: MacDonald Publishing Company, Volume IV, N.D.), p. 230-231.

⁴Erdman, *The Pastoral Epistles of Paul*, 5.

⁵William Barclay, *The Daily Bible Study Series, The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, Revised Edition (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975) 83.

⁶Vincent, *Word Studies of the New Testament*, 230-231.

⁷Vincent, *Word Studies of the New Testament*, 234; Erdman, *The Pastoral Epistles of Paul*, 42; Barclay, *The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, 34.

⁸Vincent, *Word Studies of the New Testament*, 34; Erdman, *The Pastoral Epistles of Paul*, 43.

⁹Erdman, *The Pastoral Epistles of Paul*, 43.

¹⁰Barclay, *The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, 86; Erdman, *The Pastoral Epistles of Paul*, 40.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Joseph Henry Thayer, *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1968), 94.

¹⁷Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 1992), 309.

¹⁸G.R. Beasley-Murray, *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, Volume I* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1971) “Baptism in the New Testament,” 143-150.

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