

**Welcome to the 2017 edition of
*The Journal of Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary***

Some readers may wonder why we need to consider anew the issue of Ecclesiology (the doctrine of the church). Haven't evangelicals, particularly Baptists and other congregationalists, settled these matters long ago? In a "Back to the Future" experience, the battle of a previous generation looms large on the doctrinal horizon in recent years.

A generation has risen that did not know the struggles their forefathers experienced striving for the right of local congregations to follow biblical patterns of church polity. Numerous Baptist or congregationalist churches have moved to a more presbyterian form of government – employing pastors, elders, and deacons even though such a triumvirate is never mentioned together in Scripture. Even the basic issues of church ordinances – baptism and the Lord's Supper – have suddenly become the subjects of debate and restructuring. Whether the cause is following the lead of popular pastors, the lure of pragmatism, or legitimate parsing of theological positions, the result is a need for restudying the biblical teachings about the church.

Over the past two decades, even the North American Mission Board and the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention found it necessary to define "church" more formally for the purpose of missions strategy and reporting. Is a church merely a group of people meeting for worship or Bible study or does it follow a pattern of organization and purpose? Who decides how the church will operate or what its members will believe?

This issue of *The Journal* will not answer every question, certainly not to everyone's satisfaction. However, we have brought together pastors, theologians, and denominational leaders to share their thoughts about what comprises Biblical Ecclesiology. In addition, you will find a few articles that address other issues of interest. These articles do not necessarily represent the positions of Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary or the editorial committee, but they should pose important questions and, perhaps, share some possible answers.

Dr. Michael Spradlin, President

and

The Editorial Committee

Jere Phillips, Editor

Terry Brown, Book Review Editor

Tanner Hickman

John Mahony

Steve Miller

Timothy Seal