



FIRST BAPTIST of Hayden

3/6/2024

The Baptist Faith and Message

1 The Church

Outline

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Preface

The church is God's method for reaching the world for Christ. The church has been *called out*, (*gk. ecclesia*), of the world and into fellowship with the express purpose of glorifying God through Service - Community - Worship. When we are united in our commitment to Christ through our commitment to one another, we become a light for our community that draws those in darkness to us.

The primary purpose of the church is to reach the world with the good news that God has provided a means of returning to him through repentance of sin and faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. That comes as a free gift of God's grace, but is worked out in our lives in practical reality within the church.

It is in the church that we grow into the full measure of Christ. It is through the church that God uses us as Christians who are maturing to reach the world. There is no plan B with God's purpose; we grow in the church, we reach the world through the church.

So, tonight, let's look at The Church.

6. The Church

BFM: 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 two scriptural offices are that of pastor/elder/overseer and deacon. While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor/elder/overseer 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.

1. Autonomous local congregation of baptized believers:

Historically, Baptists have refused hierarchial systems of church rule. We do not recognize any authority other than that of the Lord Jesus Christ and his pastor, who has been called to oversee the local congregation.

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The first example we see of this sort of autonomy is found in the book of Acts.

Acts 13:1–3 (ESV): *1 Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. 2 While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” 3 Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.*

Saul/Paul has been saved miraculously, and Barnabas brings him into the church, declaring the glorious change of one who was once an enemy of Christ and the church. Over a period of time, it became obvious that both Saul and Barnabas were to be sent as itinerant missionaries to proclaim the gospel. So, this local congregation, hearing from the Holy Spirit, without any appeal to Jerusalem or any Apostle, commissions both men and then sends them out to declare the gospel.

Let me finish this section with this key point. The church is for believers, first and foremost. Those who do not know Christ as Lord and savior cannot be a member. Thus, we say a *baptized believer* is a member of a local church.

Baptism is an act of obedient submission to Christ who demonstrated that public baptism fulfills the righteousness of God. If he submitted to his Father's will regarding this act, then we should submit to him in the same act.

2. Associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel:

We are associates in the gospel. We are associates within a covenant, the New Covenant, that was inaugurated in his blood. We should not overlook this word covenant.

One of the main features that we see throughout the Bible are covenants. Covenants are not exactly contracts in the way we think of contracts today, though there is some similarity. A covenant is essentially a relationship, but it's a relationship that is formalized. There are blessings that come if the relationship is kept, and there are penalties that come if the relationship is broken; a covenant is simply the terms of that relationship. According to the dictionary, a covenant is defined this way, *"a solemn agreement between the members of a church to act together in harmony with the precepts of the gospel."*

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Within the Bible, there are two main ideas of covenant. First, there is a covenant between God and man. God makes a promise of covenant that has stipulations, or expectations.

The New Covenant was a covenant between the Triune Godhead, Father – Son – Holy Spirit, and with any who would turn to God in repentance of sin and believe the promise God made through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

This covenant is summed up in Romans 10:12–13 (ESV):
12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. 13 For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

The New Covenant is for all who call upon the name of the Lord. The church is founded upon this covenant, and it is the binding glue that holds us together as a community of faith.

Secondly, there is a covenant between man and man. This is a solemn compact or agreement, either between tribes or nations, or between individuals by which each party bound himself to fulfill certain conditions and was assured of receiving certain advantages. In making such a covenant, God was solemnly invoked as a witness and an oath was sworn.

A sign, or witness of the covenant, was sometimes framed, such as a gift, or a pillar, or heap of stones was erected. When we go through the waters of baptism, we are entering into this sort of covenantal relationship with one another. We are agreeing together that our church's gospel witness is more important than my personal preferences or my individual rights. I do not give up my autonomous voice within the church, but when the church community, in an open and democratic way, decides to move in a particular direction, my covenantal relationship calls me to move that way too.

This has been called pastorally led, congregationally directed. If the pastor is saying "Let's go this way", the majority, or the whole of the congregation must, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, join him. If they do not, then he must reconsider that perhaps God is not leading in that direction. As one man said many years ago, "If you think you are leading, but you turn around and nobody is following, you are just taking a walk."

3. Observing the two ordinances of Christ:

We will deal with these in depth when we talk about Baptism and the Lord's Supper, but here is a brief thought regarding the two ordinances: they do not save us, they do not remit our sin, they simply declare that Christ has made me alive by grace through faith. These are external actions that declare an inward change.

4. 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:

His laws are to love the Lord God with all of my heart, soul and might, and my neighbors as I love myself – meaning that I consider God before others and others before myself regarding Christian charity, service and consideration. The gifts he gave me are to be used in service to him and others, and I should use them through his local body, the church. In doing all of this, the gospel will be spread throughout the earth.

God has put us together for a reason – to change the world. We are a part of a 2,000 year old organization that never sleeps and the sun never sets upon. We, however, serve in a localized way that takes on a more personal element. We minister to one another and to our neighbors close by. We are a part of the greatest initiative in human history, and when we learn our gifts and take our place to serve him through his church, we are impacting the world for his glory!

Someone said it this way. *“The local church is more than a place. The church is the glorious gathering of the redeemed, the sanctified flock of the great Shepherd, the united household of God, the beautiful body and bride of Christ. It manifests the “manifold wisdom of God” for the display of His glory.*

We will continue the church next time we meet.

Additional Scripture:

Genesis 21:30, 31, 31:44, 50-52; Joshua 9:6 Joshua 9:15;
1 Samuel 11:1; Matthew 3:15, 28:19-20, Acts 2:38;
Romans 16:1, Ephesians 2:10; Colossians 4:15-16,
Hebrews 10:19-25; James 2:18