

We are Baptist

Autonomy of the Local Church

Acts 2:41-47 Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

Introduction

To the Jews, the church was a mystery. However, to the Gentiles it is all we have really known!

After almost 2,000 years after its inception, there are movements to try to change the church. With a dropping enrollment, some think that the church needs an overhaul in order to get people to come back. This is not what the church needs!

The church just needs to be what Jesus intended it to be and let God worry about who is coming and who is not. **There is way too much emphasis on attendance over adherence!** I am sure that Jesus Christ is more interested in us living our faith than just being a member. While we should be an active part of the church, we should be actively living out our faith through the church as prescribed by His Word.

The church is not dead! It is alive, well, and still has all the power and persuasiveness that it had at the beginning. The same Spirit that empowered it back in Acts 2 is leading us today. It is not time for real believers to abandon the church, but rather, it is time for all real believers to stand up for the church that Jesus Christ gave His life to start!

In our series on **We are Baptist**, we will cover why the doctrine of the church is a distinct Baptist doctrine. Since there are two church lines (the Independent line and Catholic line), we will see that only the independent line believes in a local church. Protestants and Catholics adhere to a universal church. This is one of our main doctrinal distinctions and needs to be understood.

I. Biblical Facts Regarding the church

A. Jesus Christ is the **head of the church**.

Ephesians 5:23 *For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body.*
Ephesians 2:20 *And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone;*
1 Peter 2:6 *Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded.*
Mark 12:10 *And have ye not read this scripture; The stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner:*

B. The church started with Jesus Christ and not at **Pentecost**.

1. Church definition - means ecclesia which is called out
2. Jesus' Baptism

Matthew 3:13-17 *Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him. And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*

I believe the church starts with Jesus' baptism. It is the beginning of His ministry.

3. Jesus called out the disciples

Matthew 4:18-22 *And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. And*

they straightway left their nets, and followed him. And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he called them. And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him.

After the temptation Jesus immediately calls His disciples. It is this calling out that shows that the church is intact and operational.

4. Jesus gave them instructions for the church

Matthew 18:15-17 *Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.*

You can see from this verse that Jesus was already talking like the church existed and giving instructions on how to handle problems in the church. This included church discipline.

As we put these verses together and in context, we see that Jesus was the start of the church and so it had to begin before Pentecost. When Jesus called out His disciples, He was calling them into the first church that He was the head. At Pentecost we see a great outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the expanding of the church. This great revival was something to behold, but when you look at the context it says that those three thousand that we saved that day were added to the church. To add them means the church already existed.

C. The church is more **powerful than Satan**.

Matthew 16:18 *And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*

1. Satan does not have power over the church!
2. The gates of hell are a symbolism for a defense, meaning that the church should be on the offensive. We too often see ourselves on the defensive when in reality we should be on the offensive!

D. The church is **primarily local**

1. It is only universal for the purpose of all believers are part of the same body! The culmination of this does not take place until the rapture!
 - a. We are all Christians
 - b. We are all a part of the family of God
 - c. We will not all be together until the thousand-year reign of Jesus Christ
2. We are **local** in authority because of the defined operations of the church.
 - a. All the letters were written to local churches.
 - Although they are inspired and are for all churches, the letters were addressed to local autonomous churches.
 - b. Each church has a pastor

Ephesians 4:11-16 *And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking*

the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

- The Bible clearly does not allow women to be pastors.

1 Corinthians 14:34-35 *Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.*

1 Timothy 2:9-13 *In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works. Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve.*

- c. Each church has deacons

1 Timothy 3:8 *Likewise must the deacons be grave, not double tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre;*

Acts 6:1-5 *And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the*

word. And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch:

- At no point did deacons get the authority to rule the church. They are servants of the church.
- d. Each church performs its own accountability and church discipline.
3. The universal model contradicts the pattern of the **New Testament church**.
4. The only universal church we see promoted until Jesus comes to reign is the **one world church**.

Note: This is why non-denominational churches pose such a great threat to biblical churches. It slowly changes peoples understanding of a Biblical church and deceives believers into thinking they are benefiting the church, when in reality they are opening the door for the one world church.

5. The hierarchy of churches with a central head began with the **Catholic church**.

Note: Although local churches are not exempt from improprieties, they are more contained and never sanctioned by the whole of Christianity.

- E. The church is significant because **Jesus started it and died** for the church!

Ephesians 5:25-27 *Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having*

spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.

1. The church will always be relevant because it is the only institution that Jesus gave His life to preserve.
2. Jesus knew that churches would not be perfect, but He designed them to lead us perfectly in following Him.

II. A Comparison Between Local and Universal Church Philosophy

- A. The local church model **matches** the churches in the New Testament.
 - It fulfills the hermeneutic circle of the parts (pastor, deacons, offerings, baptism, church discipline, electing deacons, etc) fitting the whole. When you apply the parts of the church explained in the New Testament to the universal model it is left with a lot of question marks.
 - The local church model makes sense when understanding the purpose and practice of churches. For instance, who is your pastor, who are your deacons, where do you tithe, where do you serve, how do you keep the local church going, who are you accountable to, and many more logical answers. A universal model would mean that every ordained minister is your pastor, every elected deacon – your deacon, you could give to any church – which would greatly hinder the operations of local churches, and you could attend any church anywhere at anytime leaving the local church without workers and consistency to fulfill the great commission. The universal model does not make practical sense.
- B. The universal church is set up to be a part of a one world **religion** because they are already practicing as one.
 - They unite on the grounds of claiming to believe in God, not on God's doctrines.

- C. The local church can keep **doctrinal** error out more effectively than a universal model.
- Local churches have the authority and ability to stop false doctrine. If you hold to a universal church model, then who disciplines and removes false doctrine? And under what grounds? When has it even happened, even though heresy abounds in many churches? Plus, if error enters into a church that is universal, then every part of that church is infected. That does not happen in autonomous churches. If a Baptist church gets into error, it does not affect all the others. If the Catholic church, the main proponent of universalism, gets infected, it infects the whole. Take for instance the fallacy of infant baptism or the rosary. When the hierarchy calls it truth, then everyone follows. If your church is autonomous then you are not obligated to follow doctrines that are not true.

Conclusion

- A. The church started with **Jesus Christ** and not at Pentecost.
- B. As Baptists we adhere to the belief that churches are to be **local** and are not universal.
- C. The universal church view is a **by-product** of the Catholic and Protestant faiths, of which we are neither. We are Baptist and trace our line back to Jesus Christ and not the universal church.
- D. What you believe about the church will affect how you serve, observe the **ordinances**.