

## Article 6 – The Church Back to the Basics

Intro – “Here’s the Church, Here’s the Steeple”

- Remember when we used to sing that song and use our hands to communicate the message. We led others to believe that the **church was the building** – open it up to find the people.
- The fact is that **the church has never been a building**. The church has always been the blood-bought children of God from every tongue, tribe, and nation. The church is NOT a building, nor does it need a building to be the church.
- That being said, the church has never been a building we go to – it’s **a body we belong to**. And in this case, we’re talking about the Body of Christ. Jesus is the Head and we are the members.
- When it comes to the gathering of the church in local communities all across our land, fewer and fewer people are “going to church.”
- According to a 2019 survey, **29 percent of Americans never attend church or synagogue**, compared to 23 percent of Americans who attend every week.
- 10% say they attend “almost” every week, 12% say they attend about once a month, and 24% seldom attend. That said, **only about 1 in 5 Americans worship with a local church family on a weekly basis**.
- A large majority of Americans fall into one of two categories – “nones” or “dones.” **Nones** are those who claim no strong religious identity, while **dones** are those who once participated but now don’t.

- The church used to play a pivotal roll in communities all across the United States, but the roll of the church has been diminishing rapidly over the last few decades.
- Researchers tell us that **3,850 to 7,700 congregations close each year**, which works out to around 75 to 150 congregations a week. That means that about **1-2% of American congregations close annually**.
- Perhaps the reason our churches have been closing at an alarming rate and our influence has diminished precipitously is because we thought church was a place to go rather than a Body to be.

*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.*

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- The “church” is a New Testament concept, as the church did not exist until the Day of Pentecost. The church was born when the Holy Spirit fell on the apostles with tongues of fire as they began to preach the Gospel (Acts 2:1-13).
- The whole of the New Testament shows us that every local NT church belongs to the Lord Jesus. Speaking of His church, Jesus said, “*on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it*” (Matt. 16:18).
- As such, the church belongs to Jesus – it was created by Him, it is empowered by Him, and it lives for His glory & that of the Heavenly Father.
- Why is that important? Have you ever heard someone say, “This is my/our church.” Those are dangerous words. It’s fine to say that BOHBC is my church, in the sense that I am a member there.
- BUT when I began to act as though the church belongs to me or my family, then I’ve got a major problem. The church belongs to none of us nor should we ever seek to hijack the church.
- The church belongs to Jesus and as such it is an “autonomous local congregation of baptized believers.” Why autonomous? Autonomous means self-governing – no religious body or entity governs the local church – Jesus Christ does.
- This is where our Baptist polity is different. Just about any other mainline denomination you can think of is governed by a higher body.

- Baptists have always stood for the autonomy of every local church. Each congregation has the right to worship and operate as they see fit, under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.
- Every church is to be a congregation of “baptized believers.” The Greek word for baptize is *baptize* and throughout the Book of Acts we find new converts being baptized. That’s why we practice “believer’s baptism” – only believers are baptized.
- Some non-Baptist congregations practice sprinkling or christening, and in some cases become members of the church. I’m sure they mean well, but those are unbiblical practices.
- Having declared his/her faith through believer’s baptism, members of the church are “associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the Gospel.” Some churches have adopted the old “Church Covenant” or some newer version.
- Regardless of whether a church has created & adopted a written covenant, we have a written covenant with God and His church contained in the Scripture. Each of us has also been sealed by the Holy Spirit, demonstrating covenant with God.
- Simply put, a church’s doctrinal statement tells the world what we believe. A church’s covenant tells the world what we do as a result of what we believe. We must hold one another accountable and spur one another toward righteousness.

*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*

- Baptists have historically observed “the two ordinances of Christ” – baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Baptism we’ve already discussed – a believer professes his/her faith in Jesus by being immersed before the Body (cf. – Acts 16 – Lydia & the Philippian jailer).
- The Lord’s Supper is explained by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 11 – *“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; 24 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.” 25 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.” 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes.”*
- Local churches are also “governed by His laws.” For instance, the Bible says that all things in the church should be done “*decently and in order*” (1 Cor. 14:40). That is, our faith and practice must be determined by the Scripture, not opinion.
- We also exercise the gifts, rights, and privileges vested in us by God through His Word. His Word tells us that each member of the Body has a gift that is to be used for the welfare of the church.
- As for “rights and privileges,” there are too many to mention. Through membership in the Body, we have access to fellowship, encouragement, accountability, etc. There is much more to be gained IN fellowship than outside of fellowship.

*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.*

- Every church operates under the Lordship of Christ, clearly because the church belongs to Jesus and He is the head of the Body. Every decision we make – every action we take – should be an honest attempt at submitting to Christ.
- Here the article says that churches utilize democratic processes. That’s not to say that the church is a “democracy.” Rather it is an accurate summary of our Baptist heritage – most churches have incorporated “congregational rule.”
- And while Baptists are often given latitude in the direction of our churches, that doesn’t mean that our congregations should resist direction from its appointed leaders.
- Heb. 13:17 says, *“Obey those who [a]rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.”*
- Biblical NT polity includes shepherds who are above-reproach and decisive, and congregations that are active and submissive. Anything less will result in a dysfunctional church.
- In NT congregations, “each member is responsible and accountable to Christ as Lord.” We are **responsible** in the sense that we are bound to obey the commands of our Savior Jesus. We are **accountable** in the sense that others encourage us to obey and confront us in love when we don’t.

*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.*

- There are only two officers of the church mentioned in the NT – pastors and deacons. There are three words primarily used in the NT to designate the office and work of a pastor.
- The first word is “elder” and in Greek it is *presbuteros*, from which we get our English word Presbyterian. It means that a pastor is a man of integrity who serves as an example to the flock.
- The next word is “shepherd” and in Greek it is *poimeino*. In fact, our English word “pastor” comes from the Latin word for “pasture.” The pastor is the shepherd of the flock.
- One last NT word for pastor is “overseer,” and is sometimes translated “bishop” in the NT. The Greek word is *episkopos*, taken from two words – “to see” and “over.” Thus, the pastor is literally the overseer of the church according to Scripture.
- Deacons on the other hand are servants of the church. The Greek word for deacon is *diakonos* and it literally means “through the dust.” The idea is that a deacon kicks up the dust as he actively serves the needs of the congregation.
- Some congregations have also utilized what they call “elders” – a group of men called out from the church who basically act as a board of directors. While there is nothing in Scripture that forbids elders, the NT mentions pastors and deacons.
- The article affirms that “both men and women are gifted for service in the church.” No question!

- And yet, “the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture.” Scripture tells us that men are to function as spiritual leaders both in the home and in the church. 1 Timothy chapters 2 & 3 make that very clear.
- *“I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man...if a man desires the work of a bishop he desires a good work...the husband of one wife...”* (1 Tim. 2:12, 3:1-2).
- Some have objected that women should also be allowed to serve as pastors, and they have used the examples of women such as Phoebe (Rom. 16:1), Priscilla (Acts 18:26), and OT examples such as Deborah and Huldah.
- While God has used women in amazing ways – sometimes much more than men – God has entrusted leadership to men and it is qualified men that God has called to shepherd His church.

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- As we’ve already stated, the church is called the Body of Christ in several portions of the NT. One example is 1 Cor. 12:12 – *“For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ.”*
- Every child of God is a member of the Body of Christ, including all the redeemed of all the ages – from every tribe, tongue, and nation. All have had the blood of Christ applied to their souls.