

The Church

Article 6

“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.”

THE FOUNDATION

Jesus Christ—Matthew 16:13-19

THE BODY

1 Corinthians 12:12-27

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

- Jesus' Lordship
- Autonomy
- Covenant
- Baptized Believers

The Lordship of Jesus

“And He is the head of the body, the church...” (Colossians 1:18)

Christ rules through the ministry of the Word, by the Holy Spirit. The church is not a gathering of selfish, independent people seeking their own satisfaction.

The Lordship of Jesus (cont.)

Baptists congregations work through democratic processes, but under the lordship of Christ.

Sadly, churches sometimes stray from God when they work under democratic processes instead of the lordship of Christ.

Autonomy

“Every local congregation is invested with full authority to fulfill its ministry. Baptists do not believe in a hierarchical system above the local church because none is found in the New Testament” (p. 88).

Covenant

A covenant is a sacred pledge that describes the nature and boundaries of a relationship.

A local church is not a religious or social organization. Instead, it is a group of baptized believers in a covenant with one another.

Covenant (cont.)

“A covenant binds church members to one another in a sacred bond of love and mutual accountability before Christ. Members pledge to one another their trust, their faith, and their eagerness to work together for the glory of Christ” (pp. 88-89).

The covenant nature of the church explains one of the reasons that the vast majority of references in the New Testament refer to the local church. A Christian cannot be in a meaningful biblical covenant with people he/she does not know, or who live out of the range of meaningful love and accountability.

Baptized Believers

“Baptism is the believer’s public profession of faith in Christ, a sign and symbol of the new birth. Our common baptism binds us together as believers and establishes the boundary of membership in the congregation” (p. 89).

THE MINISTRY OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

1. The Great Commandment
(Mark 12:30).--Heart
2. The Great Commission
(Matthew 28:18-20).--Hands

Ministry Marks:

1. Preaching the Word (expository)
2. Observing the ordinances
3. Disciple Members (both corrective and instructive)
4. Serve according to the Bible's instructions
5. Worship in Spirit and in truth (regulative principle)

“The New Testament gives no support to spectator Christianity. Christians are to invest themselves in the ministry of the local congregation” (p. 90).

THE STRUCTURE OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

1. Pastor
2. Deacon

The Pastor

Titles that Baptists identify with this office:

- Bishop/overseer (Acts 20:28; Philippians 1:1)
- Elder (Acts 20:17; Titus 1:5)
- Pastor (Ephesians 4:11; 1 Peter 5:2)

The Pastor (cont.)

1. The central task of the Pastor/Elder is to preach and teach the Word of God.
2. The office of the Pastor is limited to men (1 Timothy 3:1-2).
3. As overseer, the Pastor is to be the leader of leaders, though the congregation has the final say about whether or not it will follow.

Two models of leadership NOT found in the New Testament:

1. A church that is led by committees or by deacons.
2. A Pastor who leads harshly and/or uses the congregation for his own gain.

How Can This Style of Leadership Work?

1. Follow the leadership of your pastor and pastoral staff (Hebrews 13:17).
2. Be gracious toward Pastors as God's shepherds, but refuse ungodly instructions or sinful leadership.

Deacons

1. High spiritual standards (1 Timothy 3:8–13).
2. Serve the congregation through ministry, so that Pastors can devote themselves to preaching, teaching, and prayer (Acts 6:3–6).

Deacons (cont.)

Some Baptist churches do have women deacons. However, the fact that deacons are to be “husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well” (1 Timothy 3:12), seems to speak against this practice.

Deacons (cont.)

At the same time, the high biblical qualifications for deacon wives (1 Timothy 3:11) show that the wife of a deacon is a ministering partner with her husband for the good of the church.

The offices of Pastor and Deacon are simply two leadership offices.

There is plenty of ministry to do outside of these two offices. There is a role for every follower of Christ in the ministry of the church.

Let's take a quick quiz on these offices of the church by looking on page 92 of your workbook.

How did you do?

WHY IS THE STUDY OF THE CHURCH IMPORTANT?

1. It is the only organism ordained by God to fulfill the Great Commandment and the Great Commission.
2. As a member, you invest a lot of time and resources in your local church. This practice is biblical and worth it!

Pastor Mark Dever says:

“The local church is the Gospel made visible.”

Pastor Rick Warren says (paraphrase):

“Christianity is not just about believing; it is also about belonging.”

WHEN REPENTANCE IS NEEDED CONCERNING YOUR CHURCH:

1. When you replace the local church with your own favorite “ministry”
2. When you fail to implement your spiritual gifts in your local church
3. When you disregard the covenant you have made with the local church, and throw it away like a dirty garment

4. When you participate in talk and attitudes that hurt the testimony and effectiveness of your church
5. When you become the harsh critic of the leadership of your church
6. When you demand your agenda for your church, rather than following the agenda that Jesus has already given us in the Bible

“There is nothing more unchristian than a solitary Christian”—John Wesley

“About the only church member worth having is the one who knows that he/she is not worthy to be a member.”—TC

“A lot of churches will eventually run into trouble because they have membership requirements lower than those of the high school booster club.”—TC

“Those people who are so infatuated with the “invisible church,” are usually invisible regarding fulfillment of a covenant with one local church.”—TC

No church can soar high than the
worship of its people.

No church can go farther with the
gospel than the feet of its people.

No church can grow deeper than the
love of its people.