

## BF&M 6: The Church

**Memory Verse:** "And He is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything He might be preeminent." *Colossians 1:18*

The first occurrence of the word "church" in the New Testament is found in **Matthew 16:18-19**. While much discussion has been focused on the meaning of the word "rock" in verse 18, for our purposes the most important part of the statement is that Jesus promised to build His church. The church is the only institution which Jesus promises to build. The New Testament speaks of the church as both the b\_\_\_\_\_ and the b\_\_\_\_\_ of Christ, **Colossians 1:18, 2 Cor. 11:2-3** (see also Ephesians 5:22-33). Christ is the Head of His body and the Bridegroom of His bride. It is to the church that Christ gives the keys to the kingdom of heaven, Matt. 16:19 (above), and through the church that the manifold wisdom of God is being made known to rulers and authorities in heavenly places, **Eph. 3:8-10**. (Both of these refer to the \_\_\_\_\_.)

### Meaning

The word translated "church" in the New Testament is the Greek word *ekklesia*, which means \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_. The word was used in secular Greek to refer to the assembly of the citizens of a self-governing Greek city, **Acts 19:39-41**. Thus, in its Christian use, it refers to those who are called out from the world to be in \_\_\_\_\_ with one another. In keeping with this meaning, although the word *ekklesia* is occasionally used in the New Testament to refer to the \_\_\_\_\_ church, that is, all the redeemed of all the ages, its primary use is of local congregations.

### Characteristics

The BF&M states that a church is "an a\_\_\_\_\_ local congregation...." This simply means that 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 it cannot be found in the New Testament. In this sense, every Southern Baptist Church, while voluntarily cooperating with other SBC churches, is an i\_\_\_\_\_ Baptist church.

However, there is a limit to local church autonomy. That limit is the L\_\_\_\_\_ of Jesus Christ over His church, **Col. 1:18**. Christ rules in His church through the ministry of the Word of God and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the authority to which a local church is to continually look and by which it is to organize and minister is the B\_\_\_\_\_. The Scriptures also serve as the standard by which a church evaluates and reforms itself.

R\_\_\_\_\_ m\_\_\_\_\_ is another important concept in a Baptist church. The BF&M says that a church is an autonomous local congregation of "baptized believers." While it doesn't state the mode of baptism, immersion in water was the clear practice of the church in the New Testament. This emphasis on believer's baptism, cf. **Acts 8:36-38**, along with the New Testament requirement of c\_\_\_\_\_ d\_\_\_\_\_, see, e.g., **1 Cor. 5**, emphasizes the importance of membership in the Lord's church being limited to those who are clearly regenerate.

"Associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel;" These words remind us of the mutual accountability that we have for one another in the church. As members, we pledge to one another our trust, our faith, and our desire to work together for the glory of Christ. Throughout Scripture, to enter into a covenant was a very serious matter, and so it should be for us in the church today.

## Ministry

In keeping with both the New Testament and the practice of churches following the Protestant Reformation, Baptists have seen the marks and/or duties of a true church to be the right proclamation of the gospel, the right administration of the ordinances (sacraments in some churches), and the right exercise of church discipline. The two ordinances given by Christ to His church are b\_\_\_\_\_ and T\_\_\_\_ L\_\_\_\_\_ S\_\_\_\_\_ (these will be dealt with in more detail under article 7 of the BF&M). Worship stands at the forefront of the church's ministry, and p\_\_\_\_\_ stands at the forefront of worship. A true gospel church places the highest priority on preaching and teaching, **Rom. 1:14-15, 10:12-15; 2 Tim. 4:1-2.**

## Government

"Each congregation operates under the Lordship of Christ through democratic processes." This statement teaches what we call *congregationalism* or *congregational polity*. As Baptists, we are c\_\_\_\_\_, that is, we believe that the final authority for decision-making, under Christ, is the membership. We believe that the New Testament clearly puts the responsibility for membership issues, church discipline, and even right doctrine ultimately on the shoulders of the congregation. For example, when Jesus teaches his disciples about confronting a sinful brother, the final court is not the elders, nor a bishop or a pope, but the congregation, **Matt. 18:15-17**. When the church at Corinth had disciplined a member over some sin, Paul writes that those who had disciplined him should restore him, **2 Cor. 2:5-8**. Likewise, when the apostle Paul writes a stinging rebuke to the churches of Galatia about their defection from the gospel, he addresses the congregation, not merely the leaders, **Gal. 1:1-2, 6; 3:1**.

"Its scriptural officers are pastors and deacons." Paul addresses these two offices in the beginning of his letter to the Philippians (along with "all the saints"),

**Phil. 1:1.** In laying out qualifications for leaders in the church to Timothy in 1 Timothy 3:1-13, these are the only two positions mentioned.

Baptists believe that the p\_\_\_\_\_ leadership role in a local congregation is given to men variously called *elders*, *overseers* (KJV, "bishop"), or *pastors/shepherds*, **Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Peter 5:1-2**. Qualifications for pastors or overseers are given in 1 Timothy 3:2-7:

*2Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, 3not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. 4He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, 5for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? 6He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. 7Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.*

According to scriptural teaching and the practice of the church for hundreds of years, the role of the pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture. The Bible clearly reveals a c\_\_\_\_\_ relationship between men and women. Both are equally created in the image of God. Both are gifted for service in the church. But the New Testament defines a pastor as a m\_\_\_\_\_ who is "the husband of one wife." Many other m\_\_\_\_\_ and responsibilities are available to both men and women. There is no shortage of work for the Lord's disciples to do.

*Deacon* is the other local New Testament church officer. Deacons are to devote themselves to what are often called the m\_\_\_\_\_ ministries of the church, so that pastors may devote themselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word, **Acts 6:2-4**. The qualifications for deacons, except for the ability to teach/preach, are largely the same as those for pastors:

*8Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. 9They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. 10And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. 11Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. 12Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. 13For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus. (1 Timothy 3:8-13)*

There is not a more important institution than the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Every Christian should be an involved, active member of a local church. Since God's eternal redemptive purpose is to be realized through the church, involvement in this purpose should be the center of Christian labor and loyalty.