

A Great Mystery

"This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church." Ephesians 5:32

A Defense of Chain-Link Church Succession from a Sovereign Grace
Landmark Baptist Perspective

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PREFACE

Throughout the Old Testament, there are many instances wherein a wife or bride is seen to be a type of a New Testament church. In the New Testament, passages such as Ephesians 5:22-33 present husband and wife as a type of Christ and church. Verse 32 of that passage says, "This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church." Other New Testament passages refer to Jesus' kind of church as a "body" and liken it and its members to a human body and its members, as in 1 Corinthians 12. We may refer to many kinds of organizations, such as a legislative body or a body of congress, as bodies; but there is something unique about Jesus' churches. They, consisting of Christ as head united with members having spiritual life, are bodies that possess spiritual life. They are not merely organizations, but are organisms. Webster's Dictionary defines an organization as "individuals systematically united for some work; a society," and an organism as "an organized body or system; a living body." The Scriptural facts stated above force a multitude of implications in regard to church truths, some of which will be considered in the pages that follow.

Being aware of much recent controversy regarding our subject, and having very dear friends with opposing views, it seems especially difficult to address the issues to the extent I feel is necessary. Recognizing that most who have been exposed to the church authority and succession

controversy may be weary from it, it is understood that this work will probably find little appreciation. It is not a matter that we can just ignore and hope to go away. We will either defend the truth or surrender it. It is of grave importance that we defend truth now and that such defense be recorded for the next generation. As we face the perilous times of these last days, when true Christianity and the Lord's churches are under attack from all about, it is desirable that there be as much unity among true Baptists as possible. We must, however, find our unity in truth or else the condition is worse than ever. When those who hold the truth compromise, they lose. It is with a desire that all Jesus' churches be united in defense of all truth that these pages are written. Every effort has been made to avoid offense or injury to anyone, without compromise of the truth or of what is felt must be said. If there is a failure in that regard, I humbly ask the reader to excuse it as the inability to adequately express myself.

Chapter 1 THE FOUNDATION

When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. 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. (Matthew 16:13-18)

The Roman Catholic interpretation of these verses is that Jesus was saying, "Peter, your name means 'a stone' (John 1:42) and upon you I will build my church." They allege that Peter was the first pope at Rome and that his authority is passed on to the popes who follow by succession. They teach that tradition and the decrees of the pope are of equal weight with the Bible and that whatever is bound or loosed by "the Church" will dictate that which is bound or loosed in heaven.

The typical Protestant interpretation is that Jesus was saying, "Peter, the truth that you have spoken is the rock upon which I will build my church." Thus, it is allowed

that all who believe and confess that Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of the living God" are in a universal invisible church.

The Baptist interpretation is that Jesus was declaring that He, Himself, was the rock upon which He would build His church. There are many verses throughout Exodus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, 1st and 2nd Samuel, the Psalms, and Isaiah that refer to Christ and to God as "the Rock" and as "my rock." In Exodus 17 and Numbers 20, the rock in the wilderness is seen as a type of Christ. That rock in the wilderness is referred to in 1 Corinthians 10:4 which says that "that Rock was Christ." The prophecy of Isaiah 8:13-15 and 28:16 refer to Christ as "a stone of stumbling," a "rock of offence," a "precious corner stone," and "a sure foundation," as is verified by Romans 9:33. Matthew 21:42 says:

Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes?

Psalm 118:22-23 says:

The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner. This is the LORD's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes.

1 Peter 2:5-8 describes a church as "lively stones" that "are built up a spiritual house," with Jesus being the "chief corner stone." Ephesians 2:20-22 speaks of a church as being "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone":

And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

It is essential that "the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth," (1 Timothy 3:15) be built upon a firm foundation. Jesus said, ". . . upon this rock I will build my church." That Rock was Christ.

Chapter 2

THE BUILDING FITLY FRAMED

John 1:6 says, "There was a man sent from God, whose name was John." In John 1:26, 31, and 33 it is shown that God sent John to baptize "with water." The baptism administered by John "with water" was "from heaven." John was sent by God to baptize with water, and he was the only one that was sent or authorized to do so. Matthew 3:13-17 says:

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. Thus 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.

John 1:32-34 says:

And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he

which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw and bare record that this is the Son of God.

John baptized "with water" and Jesus later baptized "with the Holy Ghost." The first part of verse 33 speaks of John as the administrator of a baptism and water as the element. The last part of the verse speaks of Jesus as the administrator of a baptism, with the Holy Ghost as the element. Jesus walked 60 miles to be baptized by John because he was the only one authorized to do so at that time. It was not then, and is not now, sufficient to receive baptism only from someone else that had or has been properly baptized. John had already baptized others, and if proper baptism could be obtained merely by another baptized individual, Jesus could have saved much time and travel by receiving His baptism from one of John's disciples. If baptism is to be valid, it must be administered by those with proper authority to do so. The authority to baptize is NOT passed on by baptism. Possession of scriptural baptism does not give an individual the authority to baptize. In Acts 19, Paul came across some persons that the Bible calls "disciples," who had probably been baptized by Apollos. Apollos had apparently been properly baptized by John, but had no authority to baptize others. Paul re-baptized them. There can be no succession of scriptural baptism without the succession of authority to baptize.

While on earth, Jesus organized a church (Matthew 16:18-19) with "himself being the chief cornerstone," and with "the foundation of the apostles and prophets" (Ephesians

2:19-22). That church can be seen existing and in operation in Matthew 18:15-18. Jesus ordained twelve members of that church as apostles and gave them authority to baptize. At a later time He ordained seventy others in that church. Before His ascension, Jesus gave a commission and the authority to baptize to either a person, some persons, or to something (Matthew 28:18-20). It is clear, from Matthew 28:20, that it was Jesus' intention that that authority would be perpetuated "always, even to the end of the world." If Jesus gave the authority to baptize to some person, the ordinance of baptism died with the death of that person. If Jesus gave the authority to baptize only to the apostles, as apostles, that authority died with the last apostle. An apostle had to have been an eye witness of Christ (Acts 1:21-22 and 1 Corinthians 15:8-9), so there can be no apostolic succession. The apostles were used in the foundation of the church (Ephesians 2:20) and the foundation must not be re-laid. Jesus wisely gave the authority to His church to be passed on to those churches He would later build by succession from that first one.

Man-made churches have no authority to, and cannot, administer a baptism that is acceptable unto God. To reject scriptural baptism is to reject the counsel of God (Luke 7:29-30). No man can please God while rejecting His counsel. Valid baptism is required for entrance into one of the Lord's churches. In Luke 11:23, Jesus said, "He that is not with me is against me: and he that gathereth not with me scattereth."

As was seen earlier, it was said that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Ghost. In John 1:33, John said:

And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost.

In Mark 1:8, John said:

I indeed have baptized you with water: but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost.

In Acts 1:5, it is recorded that Jesus, speaking to the church He had built, said:

For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.

That baptism with the Holy Ghost was NOT something that was administered by the Holy Ghost. It was an act that was performed or administered by Jesus. It was an immersion in the Holy Ghost, as the baptism administered by John was an immersion in water. The baptism with the Holy Ghost was not administered to people as individuals. It was administered to a church, corporately. It was not something that was promised to begin occurring on a regular basis "not many days hence." It was promised to occur, to be administered, "not many days hence." It is not

something that was, or is, administered to an individual at conversion, and does NOT place one into any kind of universal invisible church. There is no such thing. 1 Corinthians 12:13 is sometimes thought to teach the contrary, but it is speaking of water baptism received by the leading of the Holy Spirit. The verse teaches that by the leading of the Holy Spirit we, both Jews and Gentiles, are baptized with water into one body, a local visible church such as the one at Corinth. The verses that follow, in 1 Corinthians 12:14-27, speak of "the foot," "the hand," "the ear," "the eye," "the head," "the feet," and "the body." Those verses are obviously referring to a physical, human body as an illustration of a church. If verses 14-27 are interpreted consistently with verse 13, and "one body" in verse 13 is defined as a universal invisible body, verses 14-27 are rendered totally meaningless. The terms, "one body," and "the body" do not imply a universal invisible body any more than "the eye" or "the foot" implies universal invisible members or body parts. The terms are used generically. Similarly, in Ephesians 5:23, the terms, "the husband," "the wife," and "the church" are spoken of in a generic sense. In that verse, nothing universal and invisible is implied by "the church" any more than is by "the husband" or "the wife."

In Acts 2, we have the record of Jesus baptizing the church He had built with the Holy Ghost, just as He had promised. It was an accreditation or showing of His approval of His church before men. It was proof and assurance that He was still with it. Verse 16 says, "This is that which was

spoken of by the prophet Joel," in Joel 2:28, where God said, "I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh . . ." (Jew and Gentile, male and female). There was a similar immersion in the Holy Spirit of those Gentiles who were saved at Cornelius' house in Acts 10, to demonstrate God's approval that they also could be baptized and organized into a church of Christ's. It is Christ's design that His approval, authorization, and accreditation of His successive churches be demonstrated by the deliberate action and intention of an already existing, or "mother church." If two or three scripturally baptized believers could organize themselves into a true church, separate and apart from the action and intent or approval of another church, with the only authority coming "vertically," as many Baptists are now teaching, there would be the need of repeated demonstrations like that on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2.

Chapter 3 ADDING AND MULTIPLYING

The command to teach those who have been baptized to observe all things whatsoever Christ has commanded ultimately necessitates having the authority to correctively discipline those that are to be taught. Such authority has, of course, been given to none other than the Lord's churches. These things being so, the command to teach those baptized to observe all things whatsoever Christ has commanded necessarily and strongly implies that it is by baptism that the Lord adds believers to His churches. "For by" [the leading of] "one Spirit are we all baptized" [with water] "into one body," [like the church at Corinth] "whether we be Jews or Gentiles . . ." (1 Corinthians 12:13).

In the effort to advance, or to defend, the notion that baptism is a gospel ordinance rather than a church ordinance, it has sometimes been taught that persons are not added to a church by baptism, but that baptism is only a pre-requisite to church membership, and that the adding is done afterwards. To support that view, it is argued that the first members of the first church were not baptized into that church but that they were baptized in preparation for their being added to it. That was, of course, the case, but that does not disprove the scripture teaching that, since His departure, Christ adds persons to His churches by the administration of water baptism any more than the fact that God formed Adam from the dust of the ground

disproves the propriety and even the absolute necessity of the process by which God forms human beings today. Genesis 2:7 says, "And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." In verses 21 and 22 of that chapter, we read that God took one of Adam's ribs, "And the rib which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman" In Genesis 1:28, God gave that man and woman a commission to "Be fruitful, and multiply." Although we realize that men today are not formed from the dust of the ground in the way that Adam was, and wives are not formed from men's ribs in the way that Eve was, those who believe the Bible will agree that it is God who forms and gives life to every human being. Isaiah 44:24 says, "Thus saith the LORD, thy redeemer, and he that formed thee from the womb, I am the LORD that maketh all things; that stretcheth forth the heavens alone; that spreadeth abroad the earth by myself." So it is that, although Christ added some of the first members to His first church after they had been baptized, it is by water baptism administered by His churches that Christ has ordained as the manner in which He adds believers to His churches since His ascension.

The baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch by Philip is sometimes cited as an alleged case of one being baptized without being baptized into a church. Philip is named in Acts as one of the seven who were ordained by the church at Jerusalem. In Acts 6:6, we read that the church set the seven before the apostles, and when the church had

prayed, they laid their hands on them. In the next two chapters we see Philip and Stephen, another of the seven, preaching with the approval of the church at Jerusalem. The fact that "the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more" presents no problem. Philip was an evangelist (Acts 21:8) and was no doubt away from Jerusalem much of the time as he "preached the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans" (Acts 8:25). Immediately after baptizing the eunuch, "Philip was found at Azotus: and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Caesarea" (Acts 8:40). Considering the way God so miraculously sent Philip to the eunuch, and then caught him away afterward, it should not be so difficult to believe that God caused and enabled the church at Jerusalem to follow up in the obedience of teaching the new member to observe all things whatsoever Christ had commanded, and to take responsibility for him, until such time as he could be placed into another church. There may very well have already been a church organized near where the eunuch lived. Let us not forget that besides the twelve apostles and the seven deacons, there were the "other seventy" that Jesus Himself appointed and "sent them two and two." We have no record that their ordination was ever revoked. Whatever the case, I think the prophecy of Isaiah 56:3-8 indicates that God gave the eunuch a church to worship and serve Him in and to assemble with. The fact that Philip was not seen any more, by the eunuch, shows that the commission was given to the churches rather than to apostles or preachers.

After God saved Saul, He sent him to Damascus where he was baptized into the church there at Damascus. "Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus" (Acts 9:19). Verse 23 says that it was "many days." Verse 26 says, "And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples" (the church at Jerusalem).

Some may wish to doubt the existence of a church at Damascus, or of any churches, at that time, other than the one at Jerusalem, but verse 31 of that same chapter clearly indicates that there were a number of churches throughout a large area. Verse 31 says:

Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.

The fact that "the churches" (plural) had rest, were edified, and multiplied is proof that they existed, for they could not have had rest nor been edified and multiplied, had they not been already in existence. Members of those churches had been persecuted by Saul; now they "had rest."

Chapter 4

CHAIN-LINKED SUCCESSION

Jesus, who was the builder and the head of His church, had and does have all power and all authority. Before He ascended, He commissioned the church He had built to continue and to carry out the work He designed it to do. It was Jesus' design that His church and its successors be the sole administrators of scriptural baptism, "the baptism of John," which was "from heaven" (Mark 11:27-30). John 4:2 tells us that "Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples." It may be well to notice that we have no record of "Jesus himself" ever organizing any church but the one at Jerusalem. Jesus appointed His church and its successors as His only representatives, as His bodies, to do His business during His physical absence. The giving of a commission, with the intention that it be successfully executed, necessarily implies, even demands, the giving of the power and the authority required to accomplish the task. This does not mean that Jesus gave away any of His power or authority in the sense that He is subsequently in possession of less power or less authority than before. Some, either misunderstanding, or perhaps trying to build a "straw man" they can tear down, have attempted to caricature those who contend for the doctrine of church authority as usurping the Lord's authority. Surely no one would perceive the swearing in of a deputy and assigning him certain duties as weakening the authority of the sheriff that deputized him. Why should there be any

misunderstanding of the same principle when it comes to church authority?

The scientifically sound and proven and scriptural principle of "like begets like" should be beyond dispute by the open and honest mind. Many Landmark Baptists have properly taught the application of that principle in the perpetuity and succession of Jesus' true churches, using illustrations such as the propagation of the human race, dogs, honey bees, or some other species. Baptists of all kinds have long used and accepted the term "mother church" in the context of church organization and succession. Some who oppose the doctrine of a chain-link succession and the requirement of church authority in church organization ridicule the use of such terms and illustrations by distorting, twisting, and misinterpreting them. One brother has said, ". . . I believe, that a church is not a physical thing such as a body, and to talk of reproduction of a church as a physical body is an absurdity. Churches are formed not conceived. . . . Churches do not necessarily have a formal connection with any other church but have a connection of baptisms." Another has written, "When folks try to prove something by comparing it with something that is totally different, it ends up looking and sounding 'ridiculous'. If the pro-generation and lineage of animals and humans which requires both a father and a mother, proves the 'chain-link', vote-by-vote succession of churches, then it is appropriate to ask, 'Where is the father church?'"

I agree with the "Remarks on the Use of the Term 'Mother Church'" by Curtis Pugh in Three Witnesses for the Baptists. Brother Pugh wrote:

Some Brethren object to the use of the term "Mother Church." While they are correct in their point that the term is not used in Scripture, neither are such words as "the rapture," "gambling," "rape," etc., but the concepts are dealt with nevertheless. Many scholars, including non-Baptist R.C.H. Lenski, have maintained that John addressed the letter we call 2 John to a church under the simile of an "elect lady" with "children" (v.1). ("Lady" is nowhere used of a woman in the Bible, unless here). This "elect lady" had an "elect sister" who also had "children" (v. 13). If this view is correct, there can be no argument as to the propriety of the term "mother church."

Furthermore, the false church-system is given the name "Mother of Harlots." While we would disassociate ourselves completely with her, nevertheless, the concept of motherhood in relation to churches, although false ones, is set forth clearly in this instance. It seems clear that the concept of each church being or having the capability of being a "mother" is Biblical even if the term itself is not used. The reader will note that churches are likened to a "bride." Certainly the Biblical pattern is that no church was ever established without previous "church connection" or authority from an already existing church—a "mother church."

In the Old Testament, Israel is pictured as a "wife" of God, and so is Judah. Isaiah 54:5-6 says to Israel:

For thy Maker is thine husband; the LORD of hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; the God of the whole earth shall he be called. For the LORD hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth, when thou wast refused, saith thy God.

In Jeremiah 3:8 God said:

And I saw, when for all the causes whereby backsliding Israel committed adultery I had put her away, and given her a bill of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah feared not, but went and played the harlot also.

In verse 11 He said:

The backsliding Israel hath justified herself more than treacherous Judah.

Verse 14 says:

Turn, O backsliding children, saith the LORD; for I am married unto you. . . .

In Jeremiah 31:31-32, God said of Israel and Judah, ". . . I was an husband unto them." In Hosea chapters 1 and 2, Israel is pictured as the cast off wife.

Ephesians 5:22-33 clearly and unmistakably compares "the husband" and "the wife" to Christ and "the church." In 2 Corinthians 11:2, the church at Corinth is told:

For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.

Revelation 19:7 shows that there is to be a "marriage of the Lamb" to "his wife." We cannot simply dismiss the use of the term mother church and illustrations of reproduction as an absurdity and as ridiculous, without ignoring these and many other verses of Scripture. Is a church of our Lord's not spoken of and referred to as a physical body throughout the New Testament? In 1 Corinthians 12:12-30, a New Testament church is likened to a living, physical body, performing normal body functions. In 1 Peter 2:3-6, a New Testament church is spoken of as living and having life. A church of our Lord's is not merely an organization, but, having spiritual life, it is an organism.

Jesus, as head of His first church, sometimes gave special orders or instructions and sent certain individuals with certain instructions for a certain mission. In Matthew 10, He gave His twelve disciples certain power and authority.

Verse 1 says:

And when he had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out,

and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease.

Jesus sent them forth with specific instructions of where to go and where not to go. Verses 5-6 say:

These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into the city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

He told those He sent what to preach. In verse 7, He said:
And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand.

He gave instructions concerning the financial management of their work. Verses 9-10 say:

Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses,
Nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves: for the workman is worthy of his meat.

In the remaining verses of Matthew 10, Jesus gave further instructions regarding their mission. Mark 6:7-13 tells of this instructing, commanding, and sending out of the twelve:

And he called unto him the twelve, and began to send them forth by two and two; and gave them power over unclean spirits; And commanded them that they should take nothing for their journey, save a staff only; no scrip, no bread, no money in their purse: But be shod with sandals; and not put on two coats. And he said unto them, In what place soever ye enter into an house, there abide till ye depart from that place. And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear you, when ye depart thence, shake off the dust under your feet for a testimony against them. Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgement, than for that city. And they went out, and preached that men should repent. And they cast out many devils, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them.

In Luke 10:1-24, after instructing, commanding, and giving them certain power and authority, Jesus "appointed other seventy also, and sent them." Verse 1 says:

After these things the Lord appointed other seventy also, and sent them two and two before his face into every city and place, whither he himself would come.

Verses 2-16 tell of Jesus' instructing, commanding, appointing, and sending of that other seventy, and in verse 17 we read that they returned later to give a report of their mission activity:

And the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name.

We have no record of Christ ever having withdrawn or revoked the ordination of that "other seventy" whom He had ordained ("appointed") and sent out "two and two" as representatives of the church He had organized. It is most probable that many churches were organized by these thirty-five pairs of ordained men when "they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word." There may very well have been some organized by them even before then. Acts 8:1 does say that "there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem," rather than just simply saying, "against the church." Before the persecution and scattering, another seven men had been ordained. Acts 6:5-6 says:

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: Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them.

By that time, Jesus had ascended and such matters as ordaining, appointing, sending out, and church organization were delegated to His churches, with the authority to act as His body, rather than executed by Him in person, as had previously been done. Notice in Acts 6:5-6, that it was the pleasure ("the saying pleased") and

choice ("they chose") of the entire membership of the church at Jerusalem ("the whole multitude"). That chosen seven were "set before the apostles," no doubt to examine and determine their moral and doctrinal soundness, "and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them." We can be sure that that was the method prescribed by Jesus, and that He taught the apostles many things that we can know only by the teachings of the apostles and the practices of the churches in the New Testament. These are things Jesus taught the apostles while "being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God." Acts 1:1-3 says:

The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen: To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God:

Another example of the exercise of church authority by church vote after Jesus' ascension is found in Acts 1:15-26. Those verses describe the procedure followed by the church in ordaining Matthias as an apostle to take the place of Judas. In verse 20, Peter presented the need to the congregation of "about an hundred and twenty," to select a replacement. The qualifications were stated in verses 21 and 22. In verse 23, they appointed two for

consideration. In verses 24-26 we see that they prayed and then finalized the matter with a formal and official vote. Acts 1:24-26 says:

And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen, That he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place. And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

The exercise of church authority in doing the Lord's business of baptizing, ordaining and sending men, and organizing churches after His ascension is seen throughout the remaining chapters of the book of Acts. It was earlier noted that there was a number of churches around at the time of Saul's conversion in Acts 9 ("Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria"). In Acts 10, the Lord sent Peter to Cornelius' house to preach to the people there. Peter did not go by himself. Verse 23 says, ". . . certain brethren from Joppa accompanied him." Those "certain brethren from Joppa" are mentioned again in verse 45 as "as many as came with Peter." After seeing evidence of the salvation of those who were at Cornelius' house, Peter asked those "certain brethren from Joppa," in verse 47:

Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?

Those new believers were baptized into the Joppa Baptist Church and then probably organized into a new church at Caesarea. Instead of Peter just baptizing those new believers himself, verse 48 says, ". . . he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord." They were baptized by church authority, not Peter's authority. The propriety of the matter was questioned by some in the church at Jerusalem, but when Peter got there, he "rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order unto them."

Acts 11:19-21 relates how that "a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord" at Antioch. Verse 22 says:

Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch.

Here we have an example of the exercise of church authority in choosing a certain person and sending him out on a particular mission. A church was organized there, and taught by Barnabas and Saul. Verse 26 says that for "a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people."

Later, in Acts 13, Barnabas and Saul, as members of the church at Antioch, were set apart and sent out by that church under the guidance of the Holy Ghost. Acts 13:1-3 says:

Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

Acts 13 and 14 tell of many places that Paul and Barnabas went on that missionary journey. The people that God saved were taught, baptized, organized into new churches, and taught more, by Paul and Barnabas under the authority of the church at Antioch. Acts 14:23 says they "ordained them elders in every church." There are, of course, many details that we are not told about that missionary journey, but we do know that a full report of "all that God had done with them" was given to the sending church at Antioch. Acts 14:26-28 says:

And thence sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled. And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done

with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles. And there they abode long time with the disciples.

Every Baptist must admit that Acts 13 and 14 is an example from Scripture of churches being organized, established, and approved of by the express intentions and actions of another church, and that by the leading of the Holy Ghost. I think most would agree that that is the best method to follow.

Chain-link successionists have been criticized for dogmatically insisting upon following the pattern of Acts 13 and 14 and rejecting the possibility of alternate methods or exceptions for unusual circumstances. It has been said that if chain-link successionists were truly consistent in their patternism, they would pattern after the first church, allowing for direct or "vertical authority" coming from Christ Himself, rather than by one of His churches. We could just as well argue that the egg came before the chicken, or that we are to expect our children to come from the dust of the earth. The situation is different now. Jesus no longer physically walks and talks with us in person as He did with the first church. Jesus has left His churches to act as His "body," as His legally appointed representative until His return.

Having previously established the scriptural propriety of the use of such metaphors as "mother church," comparing a church to a physical body, and illustrating church

perpetuity with the propagation of the human race, let us consider the following analogy. Genesis 2:7 says, ". . . and the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." God made Adam a wife and in Genesis 1:28 commanded them to "be fruitful and multiply." Jesus personally organized His first church and commissioned it to be fruitful and multiply. Ephesians 5:29-32, speaking of marriage of husband and wife, says, ". . . and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church." Today, a woman should not expect to find a husband in the dust and a man does not expect to have a wife made from his rib. Neither should we expect Christ to organize churches today by a supposed "vertical authority." 1 Corinthians 11:8 says, "For the man is not of the woman, but the woman of the man," and verse 12 says, "For as the woman is of the man, even so is the man also by the woman; but all things of God."

The assertion has been made that "in times of severe persecution or unusual circumstances," true churches have been formed by two or more scripturally baptized believers covenanting together and receiving approval directly, or "vertically," from Christ. Probably the best argument from scripture to support such a theory is that the Bible does not say that it did not ever happen, so it might have. We could about as easily prove that the apostles had automobiles and computers.

Can anyone provide documentation of an instance wherein that, because of severe persecution or unusual circumstances, baptized believers have had to organize a church by covenanting themselves together without the approval of a previously organized church? Is God's will and purpose subject to circumstance? Would it not be far better to live and even die as a scripturally baptized member in good standing of a true church, although having been involuntarily severed from it by persecution or unusual circumstance, than to be guilty of perverting or disobeying God's revealed order and plan? In Genesis 15:5, God said to Abraham, ". . . and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them..., So shall thy seed be." Abraham believed God (v.6), but when it seemed apparent that his wife Sarah could not bare him a child, Abraham, thinking it necessary in order to accomplish God's plan, "went in unto Hagar, and she conceived Ishmael" (Genesis 16:4). When God's order is ignored in church organization, a spiritual "Ishmaelite" is likely to be the result, and the troubles will be many and long lasting.

Another Bible lesson that is so very relevant to the subject at hand is found in 1 Samuel 13:8-14:

And he tarried seven days, according to the set time that Samuel had appointed: but Samuel came not to Gilgal; and the people were scattered from him. And Saul said, Bring hither a burnt offering to me, and peace offerings. And he offered the burnt offering. And it came to pass, that as soon as he had made an end of offering the burnt

offering, behold, Samuel came; and Saul went out to meet him, that he might salute him. And Samuel said, What hast thou done? And Saul said, Because I saw that the people were scattered from me, and that thou camest not within the days appointed, and that the Philistines gathered themselves together at Michmash; Therefore said I, The Philistines will come down now upon me to Gilgal, and I have not made supplication unto the LORD: I forced myself therefore, and offered a burnt offering. And Samuel said to Saul, Thou hast done foolishly: thou hast not kept the commandment of the LORD thy God, which he commanded thee: for now would the LORD have established thy kingdom upon Israel for ever. But now thy kingdom shall not continue: the LORD hath sought him a man after his own heart, and the LORD hath commanded him to be captain over his people, because thou hast not kept that which the LORD commanded thee.

It is of extreme importance that we wait upon God and not alter His instructions in doing His work. God is under no obligation to honor our hasty actions and lack of faith in the precision of His plans. Like circumstance, good intentions do not validate nor excuse unauthorized methods. If there be any who are tempted to endorse an alternate or questionable method of executing the Lord's work, let us urge consideration of 2 Samuel 6, where David "set the ark of God upon a new cart" (v.3). 2 Samuel 6:6-7 says:

And when they came to Nachon's threshingfloor, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God.

As grand, glorious, and fitting as it may have seemed, God had not authorized the method of moving the ark on a cart. It was to be carried on poles. In Exodus 25:8-16, God said to Moses:

And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them. According to all that I shew thee, after the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all the instruments thereof, even so shall ye make it. And they shall make an ark of shittim wood: two cubits and a half shall be the length thereof, and a cubit and a half the breadth thereof, and a cubit and a half the height thereof.

And thou shalt overlay it with pure gold, within and without shalt thou overlay it, and shalt make upon it a crown of gold round about. And thou shalt cast four rings of gold for it, and put them in the four corners thereof: and two rings shall be in the one side of it, and two rings in the other side of it. And thou shalt make staves of shittim wood, and overlay them with gold. And thou shalt put the staves into the rings by the sides of the ark, that the ark may be borne with them. The staves shall be in the rings of the ark: they shall not be taken from it. And thou shalt put into the ark the testimony which I shall give thee.

The same diligence and attention to detail is in order when transporting "the house of God, which is the church of the living God" (1 Timothy 3:15) throughout the ages.

The covenanting of themselves together of saved, scripturally baptized persons is part of church organization, but it is by no measure the whole of it, nor the cause of it.

We may say that repentance and faith are part of salvation, yet that is not the cause of it, but is instead a result and evidence of the choosing, redeeming, quickening, calling, and drawing that has been done by God. Similarly, we may consider the "covenanting themselves together" as part of church organization, not as that which causes the group to be a church of Christ's, but, rather, a manifestation of that which God has wrought.

When opposition to a chain-linked succession is voiced, it is often accompanied with the phrase, "formal and official, vote by vote." As to formality, I do not know of any who would claim that the sending of missionaries, granting of authority for church organization, or any other church action, must always be executed in a "Robert's Rules of Order" formality in order to be valid. The mind of a church may be officially expressed by paper ballot or uplifted hands ("they gave forth their lots" Acts 1:26), or by unanimous agreement, as in Acts 13:1-4. It could be by shaking of heads, for yes or no. It may be expressed by one saying, "We ought to," another saying, "Well, let's do it," and the majority following in agreement. A church

might give its official approval of a matter by a silent response to the question, "Can any man forbid...?" as in Acts 10:44-48.

In Acts 6:1-8, the church at Jerusalem, in some manner, made an official choice of seven men to be ordained. It was not the apostles who chose the seven men. "The twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them" (v.2), explained the need, and "the whole multitude...chose" the seven to be ordained.

Chapter 5 HISTORICALLY CONSIDERED

The doctrine of a chain-linked succession has been alleged to be, and is often perceived to be, a weak position when considered from a historical standpoint. First of all, it has always been a chief and fundamental doctrine of true Baptists, that the Bible must be the absolute and final authority in all matters of faith and practice. Chain-link successionists have been accused of "Baptist popery," and of un-churching those not considered to have been properly organized. Moving the inspired word of God to the left hand, and interpreting it with a history book or writings of men in the right hand, bears far more resemblance to popery than does earnestly contending for one's Bible-based convictions. The teaching of church authority in church organization and chain-link succession does not "un-church" any more than preaching the gospel of grace "un-saves" those who profess salvation by works. They either are or they are not. What we may say, whether right or wrong, does not alter the facts.

We may have problems defending the doctrine of a pre-tribulation, pre-millennial rapture from a historical standpoint, but I believe it is taught in the Bible. There have undoubtedly been many churches with a misunderstanding in eschatology that were nevertheless true churches. There have probably been many churches with a less than desirable, or faulty, knowledge regarding church authority and succession that were still true churches. I suspect that

by God's grace many have properly acted in the establishing of other churches without a full understanding of the matter. Praise be to God, that He has many times quickened and granted repentance and faith to persons without their realizing that He had chosen to do so before the foundation of the world. The new believer may not realize that the reason he believes is that, in regeneration, God caused his stony heart to become "good ground" (Matthew 13:8). As he learns these things, he gives God the glory. So it is, too, that Christ can perpetuate His true churches in the absence of a proper understanding of it. Recorded history may speak of churches being formed when persons covenanted themselves together, or of churches having been gathered by the tireless efforts of Brother This or Reverend That, but when a chain-linked Baptist succession is taught and understood, the honor is given to God in His churches through Christ, who is the builder of them.

Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen. (Ephesians 3:21)

When the Baptist histories written by man are considered objectively and open mindedly, the so-called "problems" are far fewer and smaller than usually perceived. When speaking or writing upon a certain subject, we may often be less particular and less careful with our words that are relevant to an associated matter, when the associated matter is not being presently addressed or perceived to be an issue of dispute at the time. As a reader or listener, it is

difficult to avoid the effect of one's own opinions, bias, and background upon one's understanding and interpretation of the words of another.

On page one of *Baptist Church Perpetuity*, W.A. Jarrel quoted J.R. Graves in an effort to discredit or to disclaim the doctrine of chain-link succession. He wrote:

The late and lamented scholar, J.R. Graves, LL.D., wrote: "Wherever there are three or more baptized members of a regular Baptist church or churches covenanted together to hold and teach, and are governed by the New Testament," etc., "there is a Church of Christ, even though there was not a presbytery of ministers in a thousand miles of them to organize them into a church. There is not the slightest need of a council of presbyters to organize a Baptist church."

The book was published the year after Graves' death, so we are deprived of a specific response from him, but I believe the point that J.R. Graves was making in that statement was that there is no authority possessed by "a presbytery of ministers" in regard to church organization. There is certainly nothing in the statement that is contrary or incompatible with a chain-linked, church authority type of succession. The absence of "a presbytery" does not signify the absence nor lack of approval of another church or other churches. W.A. Jarrel's own remarks, on the next page, demonstrate his bias in regard to church succession.

On page 2, he wrote:

Every Baptist church being, in organization, a church complete in itself, and, in no way organically connected with any other church, such a thing as one church succeeding another, as the second link of a chain is added to and succeeds the first, or, as one Romish or Episcopal church succeeds another, is utterly foreign to and incompatible with Baptist church polity. Therefore, the talk about every link "jingling in the succession chain from the banks of the Jordan to the present," is ignorance or dust-throwing.

The very fact that some writers in the last century have made such remarks as that of Jarrel's is, in itself, proof that the doctrine of a chain-linked church succession is not something that "originated in Kentucky in the last fifty years," as some present day opponents of chain-link authority are declaring. A more accurate assessment of J.R. Graves' mind regarding the subject at hand must come from the consideration of all his writings. J.R. Graves and S.Adlam wrote *The First Baptist Church in America*, which presents documented proof that the first Baptist church in America was "Not founded or pastored by Roger Williams, and his invalid baptism never transmitted to any Baptist Church." On page 177 of that book, J.R. Graves wrote:

If then, the last remains of the only thing called a Baptist Church, with which Williams had any connection or anything to do, vanished from the earth so soon, having in

the days of Mather no successor, the reader must conclude that Williams' society was not the prolific mother of the Baptist Churches of New England, much less of America, for it never had a church child—it was itself an abortion.

J.R. Graves does not seem to have had any inhibition or objection toward speaking of a "mother" church or of "a church child." On the next page, Graves further concludes that Williams was not founder and never was pastor of the present church at Providence, Rhode Island:

. . . since, as has been proved above, the only "thing" like a church with which he had any connection, had but an experimental existence, without having originated another church or leaving a successor.

The "thing like a church" started by Williams was disbanded and it was several years later that the existing Baptist church at Providence was organized. Further evidence of J.R. Graves' beliefs in regard to church organization is found on pages 28 and 29 of the same book where he writes of the "destructive irregularities" associated with baptism without proper authority, and in the context of church organization:

Certainly, intelligent Baptists can not be so "bewitched" by human opinions and sophistries, or influenced by partialities and prejudices, as to surrender these fundamental principles and thereby let in a flood-tide of destructive irregularities that would, in a generation,

sweep the churches of Christ from the face of the earth.

God forever forbid it. These gross irregularities are condoned and confirmed as valid by the Providence church and its friends under the plea of necessity, and "necessity knows no law!" But there was no necessity in the case.

There was a regular Baptist Church at Newport, only twenty miles from Providence, several of whose members lived even beyond Boston. Old Father Witter resided in Lynn, Mass., and had Mr. Williams been at heart a Baptist, he and his followers could have been baptized and received regularly into its membership, and had they wished to have constituted a church at Providence, they could have been dismissed by letter and organized one in due order. . . .

There we have in his own words what J.R. Graves considered "due order" in regard to church organization and how it will be followed by those who are "at heart a Baptist." On pages 35 and 36 of *Old Landmarkism: What Is It?* , J.R. Graves declared the right to "organize churches" to be one of "The Divine and inalienable rights of a Christian Church – alone." On page 36 he wrote:

If the church alone was commissioned to preserve and preach the gospel, then it is certain that no other organization has the right to preach it—to trench upon the divine rights of the church. A Masonic Lodge, no more than a Young Men's Christian Association; an Odd-Fellows' lodge or Howard Association, no more than a "Woman's Missionary Board," have the least right to take the gospel

in hand, select and commission ministers to go forth and preach it, administer its ordinances and organize churches.

What would J.R. Graves think of an attempt by two or three scripturally baptized believers "to trench upon the divine rights of the church" in merely covenanting themselves together in disregard of church authority and "due order"? One Baptist editor has written:

Those who are trying to blow brethren out of the saddle of orthodoxy by their insistence on chain-link successionism need to read these historians and their Bibles. They need also to produce evidence that what they insist upon in others THEY CAN PROVE IRREFUTABLY from Scripture and history for their own baptism and their congregation. Will your church bear an investigation of its historical links? Can you prove link-chain succession for your church for at least 400 years? 1,000 years? 1,500 years? To what church in the New Testament can you trace your lineage? Can you show which church, if it is not the Jerusalem congregation, voted to start the church named in the New Testament to which you trace your church?

On page 85 of *Old Landmarkism: What Is It?*, J.R. Graves wrote:

Nor do we admit the claims of the "Liberals" upon us, to prove the continuous existence of the church, of which we are a member, or which baptized us, in order to prove our doctrine of church succession, and that we have been

scripturally baptized or ordained. As well might the Infidel call upon me to prove every link of my descent from Adam, before I am allowed to claim an interest in the redemptive work of Christ, which was confined to the family of Adam!

Certainly, not all Baptist writers and historians have endorsed or understood the doctrine of a chain-linked succession of church authority. Many admit to only a succession of baptism and/or doctrine. The same is true among Baptists today, but that does not negate the existence of the doctrine among us then any more than now. Some teach it, some hate it, and some just aren't sure. Truth is seldom popular. Many of the favorite quotations of those who seek to discredit a chain-linked succession with writers of the past do not dispute it, when kept within their context, but in fact, are in our favor. One such favorite is that by David Benedict on page 51 of the 1848 edition of *A General History of the Baptist Denomination in America*, where he wrote:

I shall not attempt to trace a continuous line of churches, as we can for a few centuries past in Europe and America. This is a kind of succession to which we have never laid claim; and, of course, we make no effort to prove it. We place no kind of reliance on this sort of testimony to establish the soundness of our faith or the validity of our administrations.

But there is more on that same page 51. David Benedict also stated:

The more I study the subject, the stronger are my convictions that, if all the facts in the case could be disclosed, a very good succession could be made out.

It is not my purpose to prove, nor intention to pretend, that all or even most Baptist writers of the past were in full agreement with our views on chain-link succession. I do believe that several have been misinterpreted and misrepresented by those trying to discredit chain-link successionism as something of recent origin, as hyper-landmarkism, and incompatible with historical Baptist doctrine and practice. I suspect that in many cases, Baptist writers of the past may have appeared somewhat timid of endorsing a chain-link succession in reaction to the misrepresentations of those who opposed the doctrine and made it out to be the Roman Catholic doctrine of apostolic succession. They were afraid of anything that might seem to identify them with the doctrines of Catholicism. On page 83 of *Old Landmarkism: What Is It?*, J.R. Graves wrote:

Landmark Baptists very generally believe that for the Word of the Living God to stand, and for the veracity of Jesus Christ to vindicate itself, the kingdom which He set up "in the days of John the Baptist," has had an unbroken continuity until now. I say kingdom, instead of succession of churches, for the sake of perspicacity. Those who oppose "church succession" confuse the unthinking, by

representing our position to be, that the identical organization which Christ established—the First Church of Judea—has had a continued existence until to-day; or, that the identical churches planted by the apostles, or, at least, someone of them, has continued until now, and that Baptist ministers are successors of the apostles; in a word, that our position is the old Romish and Episcopal doctrine of apostolic succession. I have, for full a quarter of a century, by pen and voice, vehemently protested against these misrepresentations, as Baptists have for twice as many more, against the charge of teaching that no one can be saved without immersion, and quite as vainly; for those who oppose us seem determined to misrepresent, and will not be corrected.

It has been said that those who make history are usually not the ones who write about it. I have observed that many historical accounts of church organization have been written by persons of a later generation at the occasion of a church anniversary, or by the historian of an association.

Those accounts are usually written in more romantic, fanciful, and sentimental language than would be used in the writing of church "minutes" and tend to give emphasis to ancestors who "covenanted together" or "formed themselves" and to the efforts of preachers who gathered them, or to the accomplishments of an association. When the actual minutes of the church organization can be read, the recognition of church authority is that which is emphasized. In the preface of A General History of the

Baptist Denomination in America, published in 1813, David Benedict wrote:

I have found it somewhat difficult to determine how to manage the business to my own satisfaction, respecting the histories of individual churches. There are now in all the Associations upwards of two thousand; to have given a detailed account of the origin, progress, and present circumstances of every one, would have made the work too voluminous and costly, and the narratives would have been so similar, that there would have been too great a sameness in them, to make them generally interesting.

For practical reasons, when writing of the finer details such as church organization, historians have been generally limited to second hand information obtained from relatives and associations of those written about. Later, in the same preface, David Benedict wrote:

My desire has been, to record on the page of history, important events, which were fast sinking into oblivion; to arrange in one view those which were already recorded, and to place the history of the American Baptists on such a foundation, that it may be continued by the future historian.

I have found it difficult in many cases, to fix the date of events, which have been taken from the enfeebled memories of the aged, or from documents in part obliterated, and throughout indefinite and obscure. Cases

have not unfrequently occurred, where aged people could not perfectly agree among themselves respecting things which transpired in their youth. Correspondents have communicated accounts, which did not always agree with each other. Young men have stated things according to tradition, and old men according to their remembrance.

The account of the church in Providence, Rhode Island, as recorded by David Benedict, favors the myth that the first Baptist church in America was founded and pastored by Roger Williams at Providence. In *The First Baptist Church in America*, J.R. Graves gave documented proof that such is not the case. On page 485, volume 1, 1813 edition, of *A General History of the Baptist Denomination in America*, David Benedict wrote:

Thus far the history of this church has been transcribed from its records, which were set in order in 1775, by Rev. John Stanford, now of New York, who was then preaching with them. This account, up to Dr. Manning's beginning in Providence, is found almost in the same form as here stated in Morgan Edward's MS. History, &c. prepared in 1771. It was published in Rippon's Register in 1802, and as it is well written, I have chosen to copy it without scarce any alteration.

J.R. Graves recognized some inconsistencies and errors in the account and in the course of his investigation and research of the matter, he visited David Benedict at his home in Pawtucket, Rhode Island. On page 21 of *The First*

Baptist Church in America, J.R. Graves wrote the following in regard to their discussion of the matter:

Touching the conflicting claims of the Newport and Providence churches above referred to, and his verdict in favor of Providence, expressed in his History, he remarked, that "it was his rule not to go behind the records of the churches. His verdict was in accordance with the records of the Providence church. If he had erred he had been misled by those records, and with no intention to disparage the claims of the Newport church. He admitted to the growing perplexities that had for years confused and unsettled his mind as to the correctness of Mr. James [John] Stanford's history of the Providence church, compiled without any church record, and a full century after its origin. It would not be strange, but indeed probable, that errors, and not a few, would occur."

The record of the organization of the Welshtract Church has been used by some in dispute of a chain-linked succession. It is a good example of how that we can so easily take the words of others and, even unconsciously, make them seem to say what we want them to. It is easy, with good intentions, to read more into what an author has written, or to what a historian has recorded, than what was intended.

In 1701, sixteen people were organized as a Baptist congregation in South Wales, and came, as a complete body with Thomas Griffith as pastor, to America on the

ship named James and Mary. In History of the Welsh Baptists, J. Davis says, on page 72:

In the year 1701, he [Thomas Griffiths] and fifteen of the members of the church went to America in the same vessel. They formed themselves into a church at Milford, in the county of Pembroke, South Wales, and Thomas Griffiths became their pastor in the month of June, 1701. They embarked on board the ship James and Mary, and on the 8th day of September following, they landed at Philadelphia. The brethren there treated them courteously, and advised them to settle about Pennepeck. Thither they went, and there continued about a year and a half. During that time twenty-one persons joined them, but finding it inconvenient to abide there, they purchased land in the county of Newcastle, and gave it the name of Welsh Tract, where they built a meeting-house, and Thomas Griffiths labored among them as their pastor till he died, on the 25th of July, 1725, aged eighty years.

Notice that Davis stated that "they formed themselves into a church," a statement similar to that which is often made in the various "Baptist histories" that we read. On pages 106 and 107 of The American Baptist Heritage in Wales, we have, preserved by Joshua Thomas, the following account of the "extracts" translated into English by later members of that congregation from their records which were kept in Welsh until 1732:

In the year 1701, there was a number of the members of the Baptist churches in the counties of Pembroke, Carmarthen, and Cardigan inclined to emigrate to Pennsylvania. Having consulted among themselves, they laid the case before the churches, who agreed to grant them leave to go. But the churches considered that as they were sixteen members and one of them a minister, it would be better for them to be constituted a church in their native land; they agreed and did so. Being thus formed into a church, they gave them a letter of recommendation for their reception as brethren, should they meet any Christians of the same faith and practice. They sailed from Milford-Haven in June that year, and arrived in Philadelphia in September.

They met with kind reception from the church meeting at Pennepeck and Philadelphia. They spent about a year and a half in that vicinity, in a dispersed way. These new comers kept their meetings weekly and monthly among themselves: but held Christian conference with the other church, with which they wholly agreed but in the article of Laying on of hands, to which the newcomers strictly adhered: but the majority of the other church opposed it. In the year and a half that way they had two and twenty added to them, which probably made 38. But at the end of this term, these with others from Wales, purchased a large tract of land in Newcastle county on Delaware, which in their own language, they called Rhandiry cymrn, but being turned into English, Welshtract. This was in the year 1703, and in the same year they built their meeting house. In

the extract the names of the sixteen are given, there Thomas Griffiths is called pastor; and Elisha Thomas is called Elijeus Thomas. There also they give the names of the two and twenty added, as above. . . .

The record that ". . . they laid the case before the churches, who agreed to grant them leave to go. But the churches considered that as they were sixteen members and one of them a minister, it would be better for them to be constituted a church in their native land; they agreed and did so. Being thus formed into a church, they gave them a letter of recommendation for their reception as brethren, should they meet any Christians of the same faith and practice" is very consistent with the beliefs of chain-link succession and the doctrine commonly referred to as "church authority." It sounds formal and official to me. They very well may not have voted by an up-lifted right hand, they may have nodded their heads, taken turns speaking their minds on the matter, signed their names, or whatever, but we can see that that church was organized with the intention and approval of already existing churches. As to such questions as whether that the consent of two churches gave them "double authority," surely common sense reveals the absurdity of the question.

And on the next page:

There were thirteen added to them the first after their abode at the Tract, two by letters from Wales, and eleven

by Baptism, and in a few years they became numerous, many were added to them from different churches in Wales, and large additions yearly by personal profession before the church; so that in a few years a hundred and twelve were added to the first thirty-eight, and many of these were gifted brethren, in all 150. But probably some had died.

Also on page 108, Thomas says:

Mr. Morgan Edwards, author of the Materials [Materials Toward a History of the Baptists of Pennsylvania], in a letter to the writer of this dated 5th Nov. 1784, says "Mr. Joshua Edwards was born in Pembrokehire Feb. 11th 1703, landed (in America) about 1721, was ordained July 15th 1751, was alive in 1772, had eleven children, but had not the particular care of any church." Then in the same letter he informs, that about the year 1737, about thirty members from Welshtract removed to Peedee, in South Carolina, and there formed a church in 1738, which church is now (said he then) shot into five branches, that is Cashawa, Catfish, Capefear, Linches Creek, and Mar's Bluff or Cliff. Mr. Joshua Edwards is one of the ministers who served those churches lately.

Mr. (now Dr.) J. Jones, in a letter of June 1784, said that he assisted at the constitution of a branch of Welshtract church, in Nov. 1780. That new church is called London tract; the minister Mr. Thomas Fleeson. He mentions

another church formed out of it, but does not give the name.

Statements above, such as that the church at Peedee "shot into five branches," and "he assisted at the constitution of a branch of Welshtract church," and "he mentions another church formed out of it," are consistent with the teachings of a chain-link church succession.

For several years, many Baptists came to America from Wales and England. Many Baptist preachers were sent from the congregations there, to work in America. From pages 76 and 77 of The American Baptist Heritage in Wales is the following letter of recommendation, which is a sample of the order practiced among the Lord's congregations:

South Wales in Great Britain

The church of Jesus Christ meeting at Swansea, in Glamorganshire, teaching believers baptism, laying on of hands, the doctrine of personal election, and final perseverance. To any church of Christ Jesus in the province of Pennsylvania, in America, of the same faith and order to whom this may concern. Send Christian Salutation: Grace, mercy, and peace be multiplied unto you from God the Father through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Dearly beloved, Brethren in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Where as our dearly beloved brethren and sisters by name, Hugh David, an ordained minister, and his wife Margaret, Anthony Matthew, Simon Matthew, Morgan Thomas, Samuel Hugh, Simon Butler, Arthur Melchoir, and Hannah his wife, design by God's permission to come with Mr. Sereney to the fore said province of Pennsylvania: This is to testify unto you, that all the above names are in full communion with us, and we commit them, all of them to your Christian care, beseeching you therefore to receive them in the Lord, watch over them, and perform all Christian duties toward them as becometh Christians to their fellow members. So we commit you and them to the Lord, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you and them up in the most holy faith. May the God of peace ever sanctify you wholly, and that your, and their spirits, souls, and bodies, may be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ shall be the earnest prayers of your brethren in the faith and fellowship of the Gospel.

Dated the 30th of the 7th month 1710: signed at our meeting by a part for the whole:

Morgan Jones, John David, William Matthew, Jacob Morgan, Owen Dowle, Morgan Nichols, John Howell, Hugh Matthew, Robert Edwards, John Hughs, Philip Matthew, Thomas Morgan, William Morgan, (and another name not legible).

Now, notice the next paragraph, which was written by me on page 299 of Fully After the LORD. It was written in support of the belief of chain-link church succession and in reference to the churches mentioned above. I held the same beliefs then that I do now in that matter. I can now see that some day someone could take such a statement as that and try to show that I believed that a number of baptized believers could form themselves into a church without the intent and approval of an already existing church. That is not, and was not, my belief.

By migration, sometimes by choice and many times by persecution, and the mission efforts of these and other congregations and their descendant congregations, God used them to take the truth into New York, Ohio, Kentucky, Virginia, the Carolinas, and other surrounding territories. People who were saved by God's grace and baptized under the authority granted these congregations by Jesus, covenanted themselves together and were organized into new congregations of Jesus' after the New Testament pattern.

My statement there that "people who were saved by God's grace and baptized under the authority granted these congregations by Jesus, covenanted themselves together and were organized into new congregations of Jesus' . . ." was in no way meant to imply that they did so without the intentional efforts and approval of other churches, but assumed as a given that "after the New Testament

pattern" demands the presence of proper church authority in the matter.

There may be instances wherein Jesus has removed the candlestick from a congregation by causing His true disciples to "come out from among them" (2 Corinthians 6:17). That being the Lord's doing, the authority came out with them even though they may have been a small minority and dispossessed of the property. Even in such a case, the wise and God honoring action is to unite with another church that is sound, or to seek its approval and guidance, and reorganize.

Chapter 6

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

With most Bible doctrines, there is a ditch on each side of the road that is to be avoided, and the subject at hand is no different. The doctrine of salvation can be so perverted as to portray God as subject to the total sovereignty of man's supposed "free will." It can also be perverted so as to teach that there will be sinners saved without repentance and faith. Baptism may be falsely taught as unimportant, or, at the other extreme, it may be taught as being essential to salvation. Error is harmful whether it results from adding to, or taking from, the truth. Some have erred in declaring chain-link church authority to be extra-biblical. In the other ditch, there is grave danger in the attitude that a good pedigree is an unconditional, irrevocable franchise of true church-ship. On page 31 of *The Baptist Faith and Roman Catholicism*, Wendell H. Rone wrote:

. . . the truest succession should always be based on an identity with and a conformity to the doctrines of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Apostles as revealed in the New Testament, and that the simple faith and practices of the New Testament should be maintained and propagated. No amount of rattling of historical chains, worshipping of tradition, or loud and long claims to apostolicity can take the place of a real identity with and conformity to the will of our Lord Jesus Christ revealed in the New Testament. When any Churches depart from this norm the name

"Ichabod" [1 Samuel 4:21] (the Glory has departed) will most certainly be written over the door, and Christ will "remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent" [Revelation 2:5]. It is only as Baptists remain faithful to Jesus Christ and His Word that they can honestly claim apostolicity.

Baptists have no more right to re-invent God or re-define truth than the Pope has.

There may be churches through which we would trace succession that were lacking in knowledge regarding church authority, but, by God's grace, were scripturally organized by the authority of a true church. There are probably many in that condition today. Some may charge us with inconsistency if we decline to correspond or fellowship with churches today who oppose chain-link authority. There is no inconsistency. There is a great big difference between not understanding something and advancing false doctrine. It is not our purpose, nor desire, to place or remove candlesticks. It IS, however, the responsibility of every Landmark Baptist to, diligently and jealously, defend the truths of God's Word and to avoid bidding god-speed to false doctrine. It is bad to be in error, but it is worst of all to teach it to others. Those who have been entrusted with truth have a greater responsibility. Luke 12:47-48 says:

And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be

beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.

Some may oppose chain-link succession out of a fear of or distaste for being linked with arminianism. That is a valid concern. When the message preached is that of a god whose plan, purpose, and will is subject to the sovereignty of man's free will, or to the skill of an evangelist, it is another gospel. I do not advocate tracing succession through the General Baptists, or Free-Will Baptists. We should strive for and desire absolute purity in doctrine, and especially that of soteriology, but, recognizing the reality that no person and no church on earth can perfectly understand all the things of God, we must allow some degree of liberality. Acknowledging the fact that our own growth in grace and knowledge is a continual and on-going process, we must assume that there is to be some measure of tolerance in the qualification of a true New Testament church. It is every bit as true that lines have to be drawn and defended somewhere. One thing leads to another, and error that is left unchallenged soon becomes the accepted standard. Some times there may appear to be "gray areas." We should be very careful that those "gray areas" are not the product of closed eyes or closed minds. Are there any "gray areas" with God? There is grave danger in becoming too comfortable with a supposed

"gray area." Satan, the god of this world, would have us believe that truth is relative. Truth is absolute.

Assuming their having been properly organized, a great degree of liberality may well be in order in regard to a church that is willing to learn and to follow the Lord in obedience and submission to His Word. Such a condition can be recognized by the scriptural truth that Jesus' "sheep" will "hear" His voice and "follow" Him when they are taught the truth. On the other hand, Jesus' churches have the obligation and duty to draw lines in defense of the truth when the truth is rejected and openly disputed. Can a church credibly and consistently teach that God is totally sovereign in salvation while openly and officially certifying, by the exchange of letters, that those who continue to dispute and attack the same gospel are of like faith and order? Does not such act confirm and bid god-speed to those in error when they should be taught and rebuked? Sometimes there is reluctance toward taking such a stand because of an awareness of our own lack of knowledge and understanding, in time past, in matters of God's grace. We all begin our Christian lives as babes in Christ, and have no room to boast. Whatever knowledge of truth we possess, it was received and by the grace of God. There is a great difference between passive ignorance and actively avowed arminianism, and it is important that we make that distinction.

There may be many churches that were once Jesus' true churches but are not now. We must not allow past

affiliations to cause us to be blind to present realities. We must not be biased by sentiment or by what family and friends may think. Sound practice cannot be based upon popular opinion nor good intentions.

The water is often muddied, in regard to the exchange of letters, by concerns about judging of when a church is not a true church or of when a church ceases to be a true church. The rejection of alien baptism does not indicate a church's judgement as to whether or not God has saved the person who is in need of scriptural baptism. Why should a church's decision not to grant nor request letters of recommendation be construed as a judgement of whether or not Christ has removed the candlestick? An unacceptable membership does not necessarily mean an unacceptable baptism. Should not each be considered separately?

One of Satan's methods is to introduce error a little at a time, so as not to alarm anyone. It is his style to have false churches look so sufficiently similar to the true that no one will notice the difference. It is in his best interest to find one already organized, bearing the right name, complete with building, members, and all. Just a little change here and a little change there and soon it is just the way he wants it.

If we have a glass of drinking water, and see two drops of raw sewage added, should we pour it out or argue over whether it is still, technically, water? Should we tell a

friend that it is ok? If the cow gets into wild onions and the milk stinks, should we pour the milk out, or should we debate whether or not it is still milk? When a church bears little resemblance to the New Testament pattern, and demonstrates an unwillingness to accept the Bible as final authority in its faith and practice, should we debate over whether it is a church in error or has ceased to be a church, or should its ordinances and actions be rejected? God forbid that we would recommend anyone to unite with it.

One very visible convention of Baptists has publicly acknowledged having more than 1200 women ordained as ministers of the gospel in their churches. Some churches of the same convention have ordained homosexuals as ministers. Generally, most of the churches in the convention have become very arminian in doctrine and practice. Daily, we witness the fact that, in their own literature and press releases, they declare themselves Protestants. It seems that there is at least one of their churches in every area that openly and unashamedly accepts alien baptism. It is a very unusual exception to find one of their churches that would dare to question the validity of a baptism administered by another church in their own convention. Does that not make each one of them a willing participant in their collective errors? Can one of the Lord's true churches ask such a church for a letter of recommendation without expressing and implying a considerable degree of approval and equality? Is there any expression of love or sense of responsibility in

recommending the union of one of our own members with such a body? By such inconsistent practice, while claiming the Bible to be our final authority, we teach a multitude of contradictions; and we teach our children and the world that there is no essential difference between the doctrines held and propagated by those churches and our own. Is not the influence and result of all this to fill those apostate churches with our children, our neighbors, and the world, and to effectually obliterate Sovereign Grace Landmark Baptist churches from the earth, by destroying all doctrinal distinctives? If we are so much alike, shouldn't there be a greater degree of fellowship and cooperation? If there is a real difference, should it not be manifest? Surprise, shock, and disgust are sometimes expressed when an Independent Baptist church or school moves to officially affiliate with that convention and to support its programs with their tithes and offerings. There should be no surprise. We reap what we sow. The shock and disgust should sound the alarm "that it is high time to awake out of sleep." Lines must be drawn and defended.

It may seem that we have gotten way off the subject and on to a totally different matter. A thorough and logical consideration of the former does, however, ultimately lead to the latter. On page 102 of *Old Landmarkism: What Is It?*, JR. Graves wrote:

The principles that distinguish us as Baptists are so intimately connected and like a chain interlinked, that we may as well break or give up every link as any one, and

we can not consistently hold to one without holding to all. Dear reader, decide here and now, to give up all or to hold to all, and may God help you; for an inconsistent "half-and-half" Baptist is as offensive to God as to man-- Rev. 3:16.

In Revelation 3:16, Jesus says:

So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.

These issues are not set forth with any pretense of having all the answers. Perhaps more questions have been raised than answers provided. It is, however, an urgent and imperative necessity that we as Sovereign Grace Landmark Baptists deal with these questions, answers, and issues before we lose our identity and purpose.

The Bible teaches that, at Christ's return, there will be one or more of His kind of church still in existence. It does not promise that there will be one in every community or every country. May God deliver us from lukewarm-ness, and let us earnestly and diligently seek to be found in His kind of church.