

# ECCLESIOLOGY

In Search  
of  
**New Testament  
Churches**



# CHURCH TRUTH

# In Search

of

# New Testament Churches

*Revised Edition*

*But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how  
thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of  
God, which is the church of the living God, the  
pillar and ground of the truth. - 1 Timothy 3:15*

By

Mark W. Fenison

**In Search  
of  
New Testament Churches**

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**T**his book is dedicated to all those who love New Testament Church truth. It is especially dedicated to my wonderful wife who has given me up for countless hours behind the computer. Kathy is my bride of thirty-five years and I thank the Lord for her.

I would also like to thank Pastor Wilbert Ellis and Grace Baptist Church of Florence, Kentucky for undertaking the publishing of this book and for the time and patience they have had with the author.

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Dr. James B. Carlin, Professor Emeritus of Murray State University, and author of several books, including *Identifying the Lord's Kind of Churches*, read the manuscript, and made several valuable suggestions.

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My good friend, and faithful church member of many years, Gerard Griesen, (affectionally called "Jake"), contributed to the finishing of the final draft, by reading it, and providing several punctuation, and grammatical errors that I overlooked.

However, since all suggestions by those named above, depended ultimately upon my own implementation of them, I take full responsibility for any errors in form, style, grammar or theology.

This book is finally dedicated to all seekers of truth who are confused when they look at all the competing denominations,

and division, that characterizes the professing kingdom of God on earth. It is my earnest and prayerful desire that the truths provided in this book will provide easy clear Biblical principles to do away with such confusion. The Bride of Christ is precious to the Lord and should be precious to all His saints:

*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. But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. – 2 Cor. 11:2-3*

To God be the glory!

Mark W. Fenison  
October 24, 2008

## REVISED EDITION

I have added some new materials and made some corrections that were missed in the last edition.

Mark W. Fenison  
November 19, 2009

## FOREWARD

**T**here is great misunderstanding concerning the kind of church the Lord Jesus Christ personally established during His earthly ministry. This is particularly true in the denominational world where thousands of denominations claim to be Bible churches. It is obvious that Pastor Fenison has carefully researched the Holy Bible and numerous ancient historical manuscripts. His analysis provides in-depth coverage of the topics under consideration

Readers will soon be aware of the amazing efforts made to bring this treatise to completion. When students will lay aside relatives, family and friends, such a search will reveal a vast amount of factual scriptural information. You will find numerous interactive helps to keep your focus on the great truths presented. Review questions are interspersed frequently throughout the book.

In the Bible, it is easy to overlook important distinctive meanings of terminology. Fenison leaves no stones unturned in search of believers' quest for accurate understanding. An example will be found in Chapter One as one can clearly distinguish between two small terms in The Great Commission, i.e., "ye" and "them." Please take note of those words and other finer differentiations.

Fenison has found mass confusion within the religious world with some 30,000 competing denominations. In review, you will find much evidence that aids one to distinguish acceptable churches from those who are floundering in corruption.

The writer has found that individuals, who desire to enjoy Biblically correct churches, must examine the systems of doctrine and practices of such churches. This allows one to



recognize beliefs and practices which are acceptable to God and those which are not in harmony with God's standards.

This book takes you on a factual journey of both secular and Biblical church history. You will be fascinated with clarifications of spiritual and church terminology throughout the entire text. Frequent questions and reviews keep theologians and students on target.

This author has not spared time and due diligence in his exegesis of false and true churches. It is a joy to commend this book to all. It is truly one of the most thorough works I have read.

This book is a classic and will prove to be a most important addition to the literature of authentic Christian Faith in Jesus The Christ. May those who read this volume be blessed of The Lord as never before.

Sincerely, James B. Carlin, Ed.D.  
Professor Emeritus  
Murray State University, Murray, KY

## Introduction

### WHY ALL THE DENOMINATIONAL CONFUSION?

**D**id you know that in 1980 there were approximately 20,000 different Christian denominations in the world and since 2006 some estimate over 30,000? On the average five new denominations originate every week.<sup>1</sup> And did you know that every single one claims to be the true New Testament church or the closest to the apostolic model? What other motive could there be for originating another one? With each new denomination comes more and more division and confusion within Christendom.

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<sup>1</sup>According to the *Dictionary of Christianity in America* [Protestant] (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1990): "As of 1980 David B. Barrett identified 20,800 Christian denominations worldwide . . ." ("Denominationalism," page 351).

Again citing the Oxford *World Christian Encyclopedia* (1982): ". . . a projected 22,190 by 1985 . . . The present net increase is 270 denominations each year (five new ones a week)" (pp. 15-18).

Also, according to the United Nations statistics there were over 23,000 competing and often contradictory denominations worldwide (*World Census of Religious Activities* [U.N. Information Center, NY, 1989]). This was cited in Frank Schaeffer's book *Dancing Alone* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Press, 1994), page 4. Schaeffer is Orthodox.

The 1999 *Encyclopedia of Christianity* has this to say: "In 1985 David Barrett could count 22,150 distinct denominations worldwide." (Edited by E. Fahlbusch, et al., Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999, vol. 1, p. 800, s.v. "Denomination"). Barrett is the statistical editor.

Christian denominations number approximately 38,000, according to Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (2006).

Many point to this proliferation of division and confusion as proof that Christianity is no more pure or true than any other world religion; however, instead of being proof against Christianity, it is proof for the reliability of the Scriptures and for the reality of the Devil. For example, in the parable of the tares Jesus predicted that the professing kingdom of God on earth would be increasingly infested with tares or false professors that have been planted by the Devil:

*He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. - Mt. 13:37-39*

As time continued, the vast amount of “tares” would give the professing kingdom of God an unnatural and deceptive larger size just as leaven unnaturally gives dough a deceptive larger appearance (Mt. 13:33). Indeed, the “leaven” of false doctrine would permeate, corrupt and increase its apparent size due to false professions. In contrast, the true seed were like a treasure “hid” among this stuff (Mt. 13:44). This corruption would be so thorough and prevalent that in the parable of the unjust judge, Christ emphasizes how few the faithful would be when He returns:

*I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith [lit. “the faith”] on the earth? - Lk. 18:8*

This increasing apostasy within the professing kingdom of God is further emphasized by Christ in Matthew 7:13-14 by contrasting the “many” with the “few” as he says:

*Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.....many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity. - Mt. 7:13-14; 22-23*

The “many” all professed faith in Him (“*Lord, Lord*”) as well as professed to have performed all their works in His name (“*in thy name*”); yet, in spite of all that, Christ claims that he “*never*” knew them. This is the majority (“*many*”) of professed Christendom or “*tares*” at judgment day.

### **The Metaphors of “Virgin” versus “Harlot” Churches**

When the Apostle Paul predicted this same increasing last day apostasy within professing Christendom he warned about its impact upon the churches of Christ. Writing to the church at Corinth the Apostle Paul said:

*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. – 2 Cor. 11:2 (emphasis mine)*

Paul described true churches of Christ metaphorically as “*chaste*” virgins. Although it was his anticipated hope for all such churches to maintain purity of doctrine and practice, he realized, and immediately went on to warn, that they could be

“*corrupted*” from that faithful condition and thus fail to be presented as “chaste” virgins:

*But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be **corrupted** from the simplicity that is in Christ. - 2 Cor. 11:3 (emphasis mine)*

A “*corrupted*” virgin is an impure and unfaithful woman or a “*whore*” or “*harlot*.” Paul goes on to describe how such “*chaste*” churches could be “*corrupted*”:

*For if he that cometh preacheth **another Jesus**, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive **another spirit**, which ye have not received, or **another gospel**, which ye have not accepted... - 2 Cor. 11:4 (emphasis mine)<sup>2</sup>*

As you can see, Paul is not referring to minor errors, but corruption of essential doctrine so that what results is “another” in kind.<sup>3</sup> Paul claimed by prophetic foresight that he knew for certain that many true churches would be corrupted and explained the very mechanics that would cause it:

*For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves **enter in among you**, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall*

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<sup>2</sup> It is true that no church is perfect. However, Paul is not referring to minor or temporary errors but fundamental and serious departures from essential faith and practice. “Corrupted” or “harlot” churches are those who have forsaken fundamental characteristics of New Testament faith and practice.

<sup>3</sup> The difference between a “virgin” and “harlot” is a change in **kind**. Some churches in Revelation 2-3 were in danger of embracing errors or forsaking truths that would cause Christ to remove the candlestick or disclaim them as His churches.

*men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. - Ac 20:29-31 (emphasis mine)*

All churches in the New Testament were of the same kind – apostolic - and thus like faith and order. However, the above text is the Biblical explanation how competing denominations would enter into history. The instrument used by Satan to create an apostate denomination would be false teachers. The false teacher would either work from outside the church, penetrating it, and transforming it into another kind of church, or he would work from the inside, drawing disciples out of the church to form another competing kind of church. Here is the Biblical prediction, and description of how different denominations would come into existence, in opposition to the churches found in the New Testament.

However, the Apostles (Paul and John) revealed there was a deeper source of such corruption, and the Holy Spirit pressed them to reveal unto the churches what it is:

*Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to **seducing spirits**, and **doctrines of devils**. – 1 Tim. 4:1 (emphasis mine)*

*Beloved, believe not every **spirit**, but try **the spirits** whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. – I Jn. 4:1 (emphasis mine)*

Such corrupt doctrines originate with demons that use people to spread them. They also knew, as the end of the age drew

closer (“in the latter times”) that such apostasy would also dramatically increase:

*This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come....But evil men and seducers shall **wax worse and worse**, deceiving, and being deceived. – 2 Tim. 3:1, 13 (emphasis mine)*

Although the Apostle Paul implied that “chaste virgin” churches could be “*corrupted*” (which implied they became “*harlots*”), the Apostle John carried this metaphorical inference unto its consistent conclusion. John chose to describe the aggregate of both true and false churches both now and in their final state at the end of this age, under two types of women, and two types of cities. John described the true churches metaphorically as “*the bride*” (Rev. 19:6-7; 22:16-17), while he described false churches metaphorically as “*the Great Whore*” (Rev. 17:5). The true churches he metaphorically described as a heavenly city (Rev. 21:1), but perverted institutionalized religion (the false churches) as a worldly city (Rev. 17:18). Hence, here is the Biblical contrast between institutionalized apostolic (“*virgin*”) and apostate (“*harlot*”) Christianity. True New Testament churches are included under the figure of “*the bride*” while predicted apostate churches are included under the figure of a “*harlot*.”

### **The Collective Bride and Harlot Presently in this World**

John describes both kinds of churches under these metaphors as existing now, and both containing God’s people. In the final chapter of the book of Revelation “*the bride*” in her unglorified state is described as presently existent and active in this world in ministry with The Holy Spirit:

*I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star. And the Spirit and the bride say, Come.... – Rev. 22:16-17 (emphasis mine)*

The present tense verb “say” demonstrates the active presence of “*the bride*” here and now in relationship with the Holy Spirit. The “churches” in verse 16 are clearly the antecedent of this metaphor. John had already established a present working relationship between the “churches” and the Holy Spirit:

*John to the seven churches....from the seven Spirits which are before his throne -Rev. 1:4*

*....he that hath an ear let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches - Rev. 2:7*

The metaphorical “*bride*” in Revelation 22:17 are the collective<sup>4</sup> unglorified “churches” (Rev. 22:16) that work jointly with the Holy Spirit here and now in making disciples for Christ.

Paul confirms this identity of the present unglorified bride in 2 Corinthians 11:2 when he describes the local church at Corinth in the following language:

*For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I*

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<sup>4</sup> The numerical significance of “*seven*” churches in the book of Revelation is the collective fullness or completeness of all true churches then existing. In other words, what is said to these “*seven*” is applicable to all other true churches existing in that generation as well as all generations to come. It is these “churches” that John describes metaphorically and collectively as “*the bride*” in Revelation 22:16-17.



*may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.* - 2  
Cor. 11:2

The same anticipation to present this individual church to Christ is the same anticipation Paul had for all true churches of Christ collectively, and so to the Church at Ephesus he writes of that future collective presentation:

*That he **might present it** to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.* – Eph. 5:27 (emphasis mine)

In direct contrast to the present unglorified bride are the corrupted “*harlot*” churches which contain true children of God. God is presently calling His people to come out of these corrupt churches:

*And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, **Come out of her, my people**, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.* – Rev. 18:4 (emphasis mine)

The collective “*bride*” (Rev. 22:16-17) existed at the time John wrote Revelation. He predicted that Christians would be involved within the collective “*harlot*” (Rev. 17:5; 18:4). However, saints cannot exist in both at one and the same time. They are either in one or the other. Furthermore, those who are saved, but continue in the collective “*harlot*” will be outside the future glorified “*bride*” in the new heaven and earth.

*And the nations of them **which are saved** shall walk **in the light of it**: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour **into it**.* – Rev. 21:24 (emphasis mine)

Although they have access to the New Jerusalem, they do not dwell in it but they are “*of the earth*” and it is their kings that bring their glory “*into*” it. Although they have access to the tree of life in the New Jerusalem, their part is the “*leaves*” not the fruit (Rev. 22:2) as the fruit is reserved for those within the bride who dwells inside New Jerusalem:

*In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and **the leaves** of the tree were for the healing of the nations. – Rev. 22:2 (emphasis mine)*

*He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to **eat of the tree of life**, which is in the midst of the paradise of God. – Rev. 2:7 (emphasis mine)*

Hence, there is a careful distinction made in the new heaven and earth between the saved “*of the earth*” (Rev. 21:24) and the saved within the city (Rev. 22:3). To be outside the present collective unglorified bride now is to be outside the future collective glorified bride then. To be inside the present bride now is to dwell inside the New Jerusalem then. Salvation is not the issue here as both those on the new earth and those inside the New Jerusalem are equally saved. Where you are right now determines where you will dwell then.

Right now, God’s appointed public way of acceptable service is in New Testament kind of churches.

*Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, **acceptable to God** by Jesus Christ. – 1 Pet. 2:5 (emphasis mine)*

Satan cannot rob a true child of God of his salvation, but he can rob him of the privilege of acceptable service, truth and future reward. This is why Satan has produced denominationalism, in order to confuse and divide the people of God.

Therefore, 30,000 different denominations and five new ones being formed every week are in perfect harmony with what the Bible predicts will characterize the last days. However, this creates massive confusion in the minds of most people and makes it more difficult to discern between the decreasingly fewer true churches of Christ (“*the bride*”) and the increasingly more false churches (“*harlots*”) in these last days. Of course, that kind of confusion is exactly what Satan has in mind. This book was written—to enable the reader to distinguish Christ’s church from those that are corrupted. This book offers some Biblical principles that can help easily distinguish between the two. The important question for the reader to ask himself or herself is: Am I in one of the Lord’s churches, or am I in one that is corrupt or what the Bible describes as a metaphorical harlot?

### **Distinguishing between Harlot and Virgin churches?**

How can one know they are in a true New Testament “*virgin*” church or in an apostate “*harlot*” church? If a person does not want to be confused or led into error, he needs to know how to differentiate between the true and the false. Before attempting to provide more comprehensive answers to this question, there are some preliminary questions that should be asked and answered.

QUESTION #1: Do false churches contain only lost people?

ANSWER: The answer is “no.” The Bible repeatedly warns God’s people about being deceived and led away into error:

*For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, **to draw away disciples after them.** – Ac 20:29-30 (emphasis mine)*

*Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us. - 2 Thess. 3:6*

False doctrine and deception are no doubt the fundamental causes behind the explosion of contradictory denominationalism and the current confusion within Christendom. Does the Lord want His people within such false churches? No, the Lord commands them to come out of polluted forms of Christianity:

*And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, **Come out of her, my people,** that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues. – Rev. 18:4 (emphasis mine)*

Therefore, false churches can and do contain true Christians; but just because they contain true Christians does not mean they are true churches, nor does it mean that God wants His people to remain in such.

QUESTION #2: Are true churches perfect churches?

ANSWER: The answer is “no”. Not even the first church was perfect as it had a Judas, and the best of members are men at best. Hence, the difference between a true and false church is not that true churches are perfect or that false churches are without true Christians in them.

QUESTION #3: What then is the difference?

ANSWER: The difference between a false and a true church are essential characteristics that belong exclusively to true churches which are not found in false churches. Just as there are essential characteristics that distinguish between true and false Christians, there are essential characteristics that distinguish between true and false churches. There are Biblical characteristics that make a church a true church. A true church will always conform to the Great Commission essentials and pattern.

## Conclusion

The following study will focus upon what nearly all Christendom agrees is The Great Commission as found in Matthew 28:19-20. The first chapter in this study will point out essential characteristics in this commission which will help differentiate between true and false churches. Indeed, there are characteristics found in this commission that are essential to be a true church of Christ. For example, where there is no true gospel there can be no true church of Christ.

The second chapter will provide the Biblical characteristics that define the same gospel, same baptism and same faith and order that Jesus commissioned.

The third chapter will take the reader on a journey into inspired and secular church history. Biblical principles and

prophecies will be provided as a reliable inspired guide in the study of secular church history. Did New Testament writers make certain definitive predictions about the future of New Testament churches beyond the apostolic age that would distinguish them from predicted apostate Christianity?

The fourth chapter will consider the Biblical problems for all denominations that either self-originate or originate their ordinances and ministry from the Roman Catholic Church. Can something clean originate from something unclean? Does the Bible authorize self-administration of the Great Commission?

The fifth chapter will consider the historical and Biblical meaning of the term “*church*” with its primary metaphor “*the body of Christ*” as well as its relationship to “*the kingdom*” and “*the keys of the kingdom.*” Are the Kingdom of God and the Church of God one and the same? Is the Universal Invisible Church theory or Universal Invisible Body of Christ a valid Biblical doctrine or is it a mixture with and thus a misrepresentation of both the Kingdom and churches of God?

The sixth chapter will consider objections against the view expressed in this study and attempt to supply valid Biblical and reasonable responses. For example, why do we find the term “*churches*” in the plural but never find the word “*body*” in the plural? Is there just “*one*” numerical “*body*” of Christ or “*one*” in kind and then as contextually considered “*one*” in number?

The seventh chapter will consider how New Testament churches regard false churches.

The eighth and final chapter will attempt to make this study applicable in your daily witness to others.

At the close of each chapter there will be review questions to ensure that the reader has understood and retained the essential points made in that chapter.

## Chapter One

### UNDERSTANDING THE GREAT COMMISSION

*And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen. - Mt. 28:18-20*

**A**lthough the Scriptures never call this **the Great Commission**, yet nearly all Christendom calls it by that title. Why? All professed Christians recognize this is the final command given to the first church before Christ ascended into heaven, and the final words by Christ would never be trivial, but important and great. This Commission is *great* in many ways: it is great in its geographical extent—“*all nations.*” It is great in its temporal extent—“*unto the end of the world.*” It is also great in its ambition—“*teach all nations*” (literally translated it reads “make disciples of all nations”). No wonder all Christendom calls it “The Great Commission.”

However, it is great in another sense that many fail to see. It is great in furnishing the very characteristics that are essential for a true church to exist. No church can be found in the New Testament that exists without the gospel, without baptism, or without observing what Christ commanded. No true church can come into existence without these things. Where there is no scriptural gospel there is no true church. Where there is no scriptural baptism there is no true church. Where there is no scriptural observation of the commandments of Christ there can be no true church of Christ. These are the essentials of the Great Commission, and these are essential for the existence of all true Churches of Christ. If a church does not have these

Great Commission characteristics, it is clearly not a true church of Christ, but an apostate one.

Perhaps you are thinking that all churches have these characteristics. In the following study the focus will be to discover the exact nature of these Great Commission characteristics. You may be in for quite a surprise once you take a more careful look at this commission. Simple questions will be asked, and simple answers will be sought from the text, and from the immediate and overall context. As this study develops, each segment will contribute essential characteristics that will distinguish true churches of Christ from false churches.

At the conclusion of the Great Commission section, all these essential characteristics will be summarized and listed. Next, by a process of elimination, all churches and denominations failing to measure up to these essentials will be regarded as false churches. Hence, the ultimate question will be, “Is your church a Great Commission church?” Bear in mind that the Great Commission involves far more than merely preaching the gospel to “them.” It is true that any true child of God can and ought to share the gospel with others, but this commission goes far beyond sharing the gospel.

### **Review Questions**

1. Name at least three reasons why Christians call this the “Great” Commission.
2. Does the Great Commission involve more than mere evangelization?
3. Name at least two other aspects of the commission that go beyond mere evangelization?



## The Authorized Administrator “Ye” or “Them”?

“Go ye...baptizing *them*...” - Mt. 28:19

**T**here are four very simple questions that must be considered to begin our journey of discovery into this amazing commission. Those four basic questions are:

1. Who does Christ authorize to administer this commission?
2. What is Christ authorizing?
3. Unto whom is this commission to be administered?
4. Why are these questions and answers important?

**Who does Christ authorize?** The text only provides two options. The first option is defined by the pronoun “ye” while the second option is identified by the pronoun “*them*.” However, it is clear that “ye” is being addressed, and being commissioned to administer these actions, whereas, those receiving the actions are “*them*.” Thus, it is “ye” who are being commissioned by Christ. Christ was not addressing “*them*” nor did He authorize “*them*” to administer any part of this commission.

**What is Christ authorizing “ye” to do?** The primary verb or action word in this commission is “*teach*.” More literally the Greek term translated “teach” means “*make disciples*.” Hence the command is to “*make disciples of all nations*.” How are they instructed to do this? There are three participles that define what actions they are to take in order to accomplish this task. Those participles are represented by the terms (1) “go,” (2) “*baptizing*,” and (3) “*teaching*.” In the parallel account found in Mark 16:15 we are told that the command “go” has reference to preaching the gospel to all nations.

**Unto whom are they to administer these things?** The text clearly says they are to make disciples of “*all nations*.” Only those who actually receive the gospel from among the nations

are defined in the context as “*them*” (i.e. “*baptizing them.....teaching them...*”). The contextual identity of “*them*” is clear. They are all those who are converted to the gospel, but may yet be either 1) unbaptized and/or, 2) baptized but untaught. Therefore, Christ never authorized anyone to administer this commission if they were unconverted, and/or unbaptized; and/or untaught.<sup>5</sup>

**Finally, why are these questions and answers significant?**

They are important for the following reasons.

First, many believe that just anyone can administer this commission. However, it is clear that those identified as “*them*” have not been authorized by Christ to administer this commission. Neither are they authorized to administer it to themselves. Therefore Christ does not authorize any reader of the Scriptures to administer these things to themselves or to others. Thus, the idea that any true believer reading the Great Commission is authorized to administer it is proven false as that would be equivalent to denying any distinction between “*ye*” and “*them*” in the Commission.

Secondly, it proves there is an authorized administrator explicitly identified as “*ye*” that is distinct and separate from those identified as “*them*.”

Thirdly, it proves that Christ Himself does not administer these things directly to the unconverted, unbaptized or untaught, nor do such have authority to administer these things to themselves or others. Instead, it proves that He administers these things through authorized administrators identified as “*ye*” who are distinct from those that stand in need of these things.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> This rules out the vast majority of professing Christendom.

<sup>6</sup> The Great Commission “*ye*” forever denies the idea of “direct” or “vertical” authority in making disciples. The idea of “direct” authority is that Christ directly gives authority to “*them*” to administer some aspect of this commission.

But who are those identified as “ye”? In this lesson we have learned that they are not of that crowd identified as the unconverted “*nations*” or the converted but yet unbaptized and untaught “*them*.” Instead, those identified as “*them*” are the objects of this commission rather than the subjects performing these actions. In each lesson that follows further identifying characteristics will be provided. By the time you have reached the last lesson you will have no doubt about the identity of this Great Commission “ye.”

**Essential Characteristic #1:** *There is a designated authorized administrator “ye” as well as defined recipients “them” of this commission. Therefore, not just anyone is authorized to administer this commission. There is a prescribed three-fold method or pattern by which disciples are made. Therefore, disciples cannot be made just any old way. This authorized “ye” stands in a mediatory position between Christ and those who are the unconverted, unbaptized, and untaught. Therefore, there is no direct authority given unto “them” to administer any aspect of this commission.*

**Review Questions**

1. Which group did Christ commission— “*ye*” or “*them*”?
2. What three things did Christ commission “*ye*” to do to “*them*”?
3. Which of these two groups is unconverted, unbaptized, and untaught?
4. Which group is to preach the gospel, baptize, and teach?
5. Which group is dependent upon the other for these things?
6. Can churches be constituted or exist without baptized believers?
7. From whence does the power or authority come to begin and constitute a church? Is it the “*ye*” or “*them*”?

## The Qualified Administrator – “ye”

*whatsoever I have commanded you - v. 20*

**W**e have established “ye” to be the authorized administrator of this commission — not “them.” There is no Biblical authority for self-administration of this commission by “*them*,” therefore, there is no such thing as direct authority from Christ to just any believers whether baptized or not (“them”) to administer the Great Commission.

Let’s probe this text further. What kind of “ye” are being commissioned? How do we identify this “ye”? It should be obvious that they are different in kind from those designated “*them*.” Those designated “*them*” are those who received the gospel, but are yet either: 1) unbaptized and/or 2) baptized but uninstructed/unobserving people. By contrast those identified as “ye” are those who can “*make disciples*” out of “*them*” by first going to “*them*” with the gospel, then baptizing “*them*” and teaching “*them*.” The difference here is previous authority, experience and knowledge in all three areas of discipline. The command is to “*make disciple of all nations*” but all who are (1) unconverted or (2) unbaptized or (3) uninstructed/unobserving persons simply cannot make others what they have not yet experienced themselves or teach others to observe what they have not been taught to observe. Therefore, the authorized administrator cannot be a person who is yet in the process of being disciplined himself, as that person has no authority, experience or knowledge of what it is to be a disciple. If the “ye” were unconverted and/or unbaptized and/or unchurched, then, there would be no practical difference between “ye” and “*them*.”

“*Come let us reason together.*” Would it make any sense for Christ to commission the unconverted, the unbaptized or the uninstructed to make disciples? How could they convert, baptize and teach others if they themselves were unconverted, unbaptized, and untaught? Would not that amount to the Lord

commissioning the blind to lead the blind and the ignorant to teach the ignorant? Would not that amount to commissioning “*them*” to disciple themselves?

It is not only illogical but the little word “*have*” in verse 20 necessarily demands such is not the case: “*Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.*” The word “*have*” demands the authorized “*ye*”, are those who **have** already gone through this threefold process and already **have** been made “*disciples*” of Christ, before they were authorized to administer it to others. Hence, the prerequisite to make “*them*” disciples is previous authority, experience and knowledge as a disciple. This is not only demanded by the past tense “*have*,” but there is abundant biblical evidence to demonstrate they had already been made disciples previous to this commission. For example, all those being addressed as “*ye*” had not only been previously called “*disciples*” (e.g. Mt. 28:7 “*tell his disciples*”), but already were baptized believers that regularly assembled under the teaching ministry of Christ for nearly three and half years. The very first chapter of Acts summarizes this evidence:

*Wherefore of these men which have **companied with us all the time** that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection. Ac 1:21-22*  
(emphasis mine)

In the above text, Peter is explaining the qualifications for choosing another apostle to fill the vacated office of Judas. In so doing, he is also describing what prerequisites were required to be a candidate for this office.<sup>7</sup> Let’s examine Acts 1:21-22 a

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<sup>7</sup> It is a mistake to think that only the apostles had been in this state with Christ since the baptism of John. This had to include more than the twelve apostles or else there would be none qualified to fill the vacated office. We know that previous to this commission there had been at least 70

bit closer. Proper qualifications are defined by the use of three tenses. First, notice the past point of origin - "*beginning from the baptism of John.*" John had preached the gospel unto them (Mk. 1:15 with Jn. 3:36) and all had received the baptism of John (Jn. 1:35-40; 4:1; Lk. 7:29-30). Second, the present aspect is noted as they continued from that point in what can be defined as a traveling assembly under Christ: They "*companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us.*" The terms "*in and out among us*" give us a picture of a traveling church or assembly that one could enter, and exit, as a house of God. In other words, after believing the gospel, and being baptized, they habitually assembled under the teaching ministry of Christ. Such habitual assembling would be the only logical way anyone could be taught how to observe "*all things*" commanded. They had continued in this process for nearly three and half years before being commissioned by Christ. Notice the future culmination point was until his "*resurrection.*" However, they were also assembled with Christ when this commission was given *after* his resurrection. In addition, Acts 1:15-2:1 demonstrates they continued to assemble habitually in this same manner after the ascension of Christ into heaven (Acts 2:1). Hence, those authorized and identified as "*ye*" in Matthew 28:19-20 "*have*" been and still were defined by all these things that characterize what is a disciple. Hence, those commissioned had already been through the process and continued to assemble as such.

A true church of Christ by definition is a plural "*ye*" existing in such a state of discipleship that habitually assembles in order to teach and observe all things Christ commanded. Thus, disciples are not indefinable, nor do they evolve, neither are they self-made; but they are made by previous existing and definable disciples existing in a churched state who administered this commission to others or what the context

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commissioned by Christ. In Acts 1:15 there are at least 120 names on the church roll.

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defines as “*them*.” At the very minimum, this means Christ only authorized disciples to make disciples. Therefore, a true church (one that conforms to the original apostolic pattern and standard) cannot come into existence without the assistance supplied by this kind of authorized administrator simply because there is no such thing in the New Testament as a church constituted by unconverted, and/or unbaptized and/or unobserving members. Hence, by necessity, the “*ye*” of the Great Commission must exist prior to the establishment of every new true Church of Christ. Such a preexistent “*ye*” (converted, baptized and observing disciples) provide the only qualified material for church constitution (see Ac. 2:41-42) as well as the only qualified administrator of this commission. In other words, it takes a previous existing church consisting of saved, baptized and instructed disciples to originate another such church.

In the previous segment we learned there was an authorized administrator of this commission and not just anyone is commissioned. In this segment we learn that this authorized administrator is further defined as those who have already been through this same process and who presently abide as a New Testament church.

**Essential Characteristic #2:** *The authorized “ye” are disciples” which by contextual definition were previously baptized believers existing in an observing church state*



**Review Questions**

1. How are disciples made according to the Great Commission?
2. Does making disciples require more than merely preaching the gospel to “*them*”?
3. Are those designated as “*ye*” already disciples?
5. Did Christ give any authority to “*them*” to carry out this commission?
6. Whom did Christ give this authority to make disciples?
7. Unto whom then must one come to be disciple?
8. If the undiscipled attempted to make disciples, what kind of disciples would they make?

## The Orthodox Administrator

*whatsoever I have commanded you – v. 20*

**W**e have established by the immediate context that Christ has appointed an authorized agency for the administration of all these things. It is this “*ye*” who are given authority but not “*them*.”

We have also established that authorized administrators of the commission are qualified to do so by the very fact they already **have** been gospelized, they already **have** been baptized, and they already **have** been assembled together and taught how to observe all things commanded. It is this kind of plural “*ye*” existing as a New Testament church that is commissioned to bring “*them*” into this very same state of discipleship.

However, is there more to this commission than taking “*them*” through a general three-step process? For example, does it matter what kind of gospel is preached to “*them*”? Does it matter what kind of baptism is administered to “*them*”? Does it matter what they are instructed to observe? Does it matter with whom they assemble to be taught?

Is this a commission designed to reproduce a different kind of disciple or is it designed to reproduce a disciple of like faith and order? To ask this question in another way, did Christ commission anyone to go preach **another** kind of gospel other than what Christ preached and commanded (Jn. 3:16; 5:24; Gal. 1:6-9)? Did Christ authorize anyone to administer **another** kind of baptism other than what he administered (Jn. 4:1-2; Lk. 7:29-30) and commissioned? Did Christ authorize anyone to teach **another** kind of faith and practice other than what he commanded (Jude 3)? If such were the case wouldn’t **another** kind of faith and order produce **another** kind of disciple other than what Christ commanded? Consequently, wouldn’t this mean a person would be assembling with **another** kind of church than Jesus built? The answer should be

obvious. However, the Lord does not leave it up to us to guess the answer. He explicitly forbids understanding this as a commission to make any other kind of disciple when He commands them to teach “*them*” only “*whatsoever I have commanded you.*”

Consider the following five reasons why this must be a commission to make disciples of like faith and order:

1. **It is a command to “make disciples”**. A “*disciple*” is a follower. To follow Him requires adopting His gospel, baptism and doctrine. Anyone embracing **another** gospel, baptism or faith and order would not be a follower of Christ but would be the follower of the one inventing that different kind of gospel, baptism and teaching.
2. **Christ did not give permission to be an innovator** but rather restricted disciple making within the boundaries of “*whatsoever I have commanded you.*”
3. **The New Testament does not recognize another gospel** or baptism or faith as orthodox other than that delivered by Christ in this commission.

a. No other gospel but one:

*But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.... But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ. – Gal. 1:8-9, 11-12 (emphasis mine)*

b. No other water baptism but one:

*And all the people that heard him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him. – Lk. 7:29-30*

*One Lord, one faith, **one baptism**, - Eph. 4:5  
(emphasis mine)*

c. No other Faith and Order delivered but One:

*Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. – Jude 3*

*One Lord, **one faith**, one baptism, - Eph. 4:5  
(emphasis mine)*

4. **God is not the author of Confusion** – 1 Cor. 14:33. If personal preference rather than “*whatsoever I have commanded*” is the rule for making disciples, then only division and confusion can result.
5. **That would promote Apostasy** - Another gospel, another baptism, another faith and order other than what Christ commanded is exactly what the Scriptures condemn as apostasy which produces apostates and harlot churches (2 Thes. 3:6; 2 Cor. 11:3).

*Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall **depart from the faith**,*

*giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; – 1 Tim. 4:1 (emphasis mine)*

How did the apostles instruct the churches to respond to a “brother” or to those who apostatized from the faith once delivered?

*Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, **that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother** that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition [lit. Greek “things handed down”] which he received of us. – 2 Thes. 3:6 (emphasis mine)*

*Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and **avoid them**. – Rom. 16:17 (emphasis mine)*

*If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, **receive him** not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds. – 2 Jn. 10-11 (emphasis mine)*

What does this mean in our search for the Great Commission churches of Christ? It means that all true churches of Christ will be *like faith and order with Christ* simply because they originate from materials provided by the Great Commission “ye” who are *like faith and order with Christ*. All apostate Churches originate from one of four sources.

1. **They originate as a true church but later depart from the truth.** The Church at Rome is an example of this. Rome was a true church in its origin (Rom. 1:1-3) but then went into apostasy and the whole apostate

Roman Catholic denomination is the direct result of that apostasy. Hence, true churches can apostatize and become false churches.

2. **They originate by members departing from a true church to form a competing denomination.** This is how the modern denomination **The Church of Christ** and **The Christian Church** and **The Disciples of Christ** denominations all began (Ac 20:29-30).
3. **They originate from an apostate church.** For example, this is the case with Protestantism. Their baptism, ordinations and ordinances originated with what they all acknowledged to be Apostate Roman Catholicism or a “ye” that is **not** like faith and order with Christ – an apostate “ye” (Rev. 18:4).
4. **They self-originate.** For example, this is the case with all Restoration type Churches (Mormons, Seventh Day Adventists, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Pentecostals, etc.). They claim that the gates of hell did prevail against apostolic Churches and God sent prophets to restore apostolic Christianity.

The key to identifying the true churches of Christ is that they preach the **same** gospel Jesus preached and commissioned, they administer the **same** baptism Jesus submitted to and administered, and they teach the **same** faith and order Jesus commanded. This is “*the faith*” that was “*once delivered.*” They all have the **same** source – the Great Commission “ye” that is like faith and order with Christ.

**Essential Characteristic #3:** *The authorized administrators are disciples of like faith and order with Christ in the same gospel, baptism and doctrine.*

**Review Questions**

1. What kind of disciples did Christ commission?
2. What kind of disciples is Christ instructing them to make?
3. Is this a commission to reproduce after their own kind?
4. What kind of churches would this commission make?
5. What kind of churches would be produced by disobeying this commission?
6. How are churches/persons that depart from the faith to be regarded (1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Thes. 3:6; etc.)?
7. What are churches that have departed from like faith and order with New Testament Churches?

## The Church Administrator

*Teaching them to observe all things – v. 20*

**T**hus far, we have seen that authority to carry out the Great Commission is given to “*ye*” but not to “*them*.” Therefore, “*ye*” represents a specific authorized administrator or mediatory agency between Christ and “*them*.” We have seen that it was given to those who have been through this three-fold process rather than those who have not. Thus the administrator is a converted, baptized and churching “*ye*.” We have seen that the commission has been given to those who are like faith and order with Jesus Christ in the **same** gospel, baptism, and doctrine rather than those who are not. Thus the administrator is orthodox in contending for “*the faith once delivered*” (Jude 3).

### **A. The Churching “*ye*” - *Teaching them to observe all things***

Let’s continue to investigate the contextual characteristics of this “*ye*” as found in this commission. It has been duly noted that the actual commissioned “*ye*” were baptized believers who habitually assembled under the teaching ministry of Christ. Let’s explore the contextual necessity for inclusion of the New Testament congregation in this commission. For example, how is it possible to teach anyone to “**observe all things**” commanded by Christ without also habitually assembling together with “*them*” in order to **observe** all things commanded? Isn’t such observation as described in Matthew 18:15-17 part of the “*all things*” commanded by Christ? How can that instruction be **observed** apart from actual membership in a New Testament congregation?

The leaders in the first church at Jerusalem understood this commission to be inclusive of church membership. For example, if you compare Matthew 28:19-20 with Acts 2:41-42



you will see they interpreted church membership as a necessary integral part of the commission:

**Mt. 28:19-20**

1. “go teach”
2. “baptizing them”
3. “teaching them”

**Acts 2:41-42**

1. “as many as received the word”
2. “were baptized and added unto them”
3. “stedfastly continued in the apostles doctrine”

Notice particularly the phrase “*added unto them*” in Acts 2:41 and precisely where it is located in this three-step administration of the great commission. It is placed between “*baptized*” and “*stedfastly continued in the apostle’s doctrine.*” They understood the phrase “*teaching them to observe all things*” as subsequent (following) to church membership.<sup>8</sup>

In Acts 2:41-42 this addition is to an existing church – the church at Jerusalem. However, when the commission is carried out on the mission field by a church sent representative, then, the third aspect of the commission is authority to constitute such baptized believers into a New Testament church (Ac 14:22-23).<sup>9</sup>

Matthew 28:20 is authority to bring baptized believers into a covenant relationship with each other and with Christ in order to observe “all things” Christ commanded. This is the essence of church constitution. Church constitution is inherent within the Great Commission authority. In regard to an existing church this is authority to bring baptized believers into a

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<sup>8</sup> This also demonstrates that baptism is the prerequisite to church membership and designed to identify you with an administrator of like faith and order as it is the administrator who is also authorized as the one “*teaching them to observe all things.*”

<sup>9</sup> The third aspect is a covenant relationship. It is a covenant to observe all things commanded by him.

covenant church relationship (“added unto them” – Acts 2:41). In regard to organization of a new church on the mission field this is authority to bring baptized believers into a covenant relationship with each other and with Christ (Acts 13;1-4; 14:22-23).

If the above arguments don’t convince you that the Great Commission is inclusive of regular church order, then consider this. Can you think of any other possible way in those days that the third aspect of this commission could be **observed** apart from actual assembling with “them” in an organized and orderly fashion?

For example, how could they be taught to **observe** what Christ commanded them in Matthew 18:15-18 apart from membership in a church?

*Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.*

*But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.*

*And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it **unto the church**: but if he neglect to **hear the church**, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.*

*Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”*

*Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are*

*gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.* – Mt. 18:15-20 (emphasis mine)

No unchurched person can obey this command “*tell it to the church.*” This command assumes that disciples are members of such a church. Matthew 18:17 assumes that all **observing** parties involved are members in the same church they tell it to.<sup>10</sup> This procedure is part of the “*all things*” that the contextual “*ye*” is to teach “*them*” to observe. Hence, the third aspect of the commission requires habitually assembling together as a New Testament church.

In addition to Matthew 18:15-20, it is impossible to **observe** what the Lord commanded in Matthew 26:26-30 apart from physically being assembled together. In Matthew 26:26-30 the Lord commanded the observance of the Lord’s Supper. The “*ye*” of the Great Commission cannot teach “*them*” how to **observe** the Lord’s Supper unless they physically assemble together at the same time and in the same place with one another. In I Corinthians 11:18, Paul says in regard to the observance of the Lord’s Supper – “*when ye come together in the church.*” There is no example anywhere in Scripture of the Lord’s Supper being **observed** by anyone but baptized believers assembling together. No one can rationally or Biblically deny that church membership is included in the command “*teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.*” The third aspect always requires either addition to an already existing church or the formation of a new church, as that is the only way this aspect of the commission can be obeyed and **observed**.

Finally, remember that those who are addressed as “*ye*” already “*have*” been through this same process before being authorized to administer it to “*them.*” If that is true, then, they

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<sup>10</sup> The “*church*” in this context, is the same church Jesus claims as “*my church*” in Mt. 16:18. Such a command restricts the nature of this church to a local visible body of baptized believers as it is utterly impossible to obey this command if such a church were universal and invisible.

too were already members in the church at Jerusalem before being commissioned in Matthew 28:19-20. The scriptures plainly and clearly declare that they already had been assembling together with Christ for more than three years prior to being commissioned:

*Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection. – Ac 1:21-22.*

Note the language of an ongoing assembling where Jesus “*went in and out among us.*” The event described here is the selection of another man to fill the vacated “church” office of apostle. Paul says that apostles were “*set in the church*” first (1 Cor. 12:28). You cannot set an office into something that does not already first exist. How early were the apostles set in the church? The selecting and placing of apostles in the church occurred very early in the ministry of Christ (see Lu. 6:12-13). The very fact that they were chosen “*out of*” other disciples demonstrates a larger assembly existed at the time of this selection. Moreover, the office was already functioning and a newly chosen church member was selected and placed in office before Pentecost.<sup>11</sup> Hence, the church had to exist at least as early as Luke 6:12-13 according to 1 Corinthians 12:28.

Acts 1:21-22 proves that more than the twelve had been habitually assembling together with Christ over the past three and half years or else there would have been none qualified to fill the office of apostle. Acts 1:21-22 requires continued assembling together with Christ from the baptism of John

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<sup>11</sup> Paul was not chosen as part of the twelve. He was chosen as an apostle to the gentiles (Gal. 2:9)

until the ascension of Christ. We know Christ had previously sent out 70, and in Acts 1:15, there were at least 120 present during this meeting.

The church has been empowered on Pentecost but it certainly did not begin on Pentecost. Instead, it had its beginning from the ministry of John the Baptist when he supplied the very first baptized believers to assemble with Christ (Jn. 1:37-51). Peter tells the house of Cornelius that the gospel ministry of the church began after the baptism of John (Ac. 10:37). Jesus speaks of the church as presently existing in Matthew 18:15-18. The evidence is irrefutable. There can be no obedience to the Great Commission outside membership in a New Testament church. Therefore, those being commissioned were already members in the first church at Jerusalem. The third aspect of the Great Commission includes church membership (Ac. 2:41 “*added unto them*”) as well as authority to constitute baptized believers into a church if no church exists.

## **B. The Contextual “ye” is the Church of Christ – *some doubted***

Was the church present when the Great Commission was given? The immediate context in Matthew 28 demonstrates clearly that more than the eleven apostles were present at the giving of the commission. For example, beginning in verse 7 the angel says to the women:

*And go quickly, and tell his **disciples** that he is risen from the dead; and, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you. – Mt. 28:7 (emphasis mine)*

In verse 10 Jesus appears to these same women as they were going to tell “*his disciples*” and he says:

*Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid: go tell my **brethren** that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me. – Mt. 28:10 (emphasis mine)*

Notice the language used by the angel and Christ. The angel says “*his disciples*” and Jesus says “*my brethren*.” Matthew 28:7 may include the women as well. These terms are more comprehensive than “*the eleven disciples*.”

Matthew 28:16-17 spells out exactly where in Galilee “the women” and “*his disciples*” and “*my brethren*” were appointed to see Him:

*Then the eleven **disciples** went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. And when they saw him, they worshipped him: but some doubted. – Mt. 28:16-17 (emphasis mine)*

The natural flow of this context is too forceful to ignore. Verses 7-8 and 10 imply that the “*women*” and “*my brethren*” and “*the disciples*” would meet “*in Galilee*” while verse 16 identifies where in Galilee Jesus appointed, noting that the appointed leadership of the church were present. Especially note the words “*but some doubted*.” This is absolute proof that more than the eleven were present at this appointed place in Galilee. Why? Jesus had already appeared in Jerusalem several times to the eleven and to the women for the sole purpose to remove such doubts. Back in Jerusalem Jesus waited for the last doubting apostle to arrive so that He could remove any doubt among them long before going to this mountain.

Moreover, this is the only possible mentioned location that more than five hundred brethren (1 Corinthians 15:6) could see him at once. Some of those brethren could have “*doubted*” as this was their first time to see him. We can thus conclude that the very same three-fold description of persons (“*women*”, “*my brethren*”, “*the disciples*”) which both the angel, and

Christ said would meet him in Galilee are the very same persons described in Acts 1:13-15:

*And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the **women**, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his **brethren**. And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of **the disciples**, and said, (the number of names together were about an hundred and twenty - Acts 1:13-15 (emphasis mine)*

This very same group is referred to in Acts 2:1 (“*they were all*”), and this is the very same group identified in Acts 2:41 unto whom the newly baptized believers “*were added unto them*” and this is the very same group identified explicitly as “***the church***” in Acts 2:47.

The natural flow of the context in Matthew 28 beginning in verse 7 “*into Galilee*”, continuing in verse 10 “*into Galilee*”, and concluding in verse 16 “*into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them*” infers that this mountain was the fulfillment where the church (“*women*” “*brethren*” “*his disciples*”) met with, and saw Christ. Therefore, those being addressed in the Great Commission were already in a church condition, just as they were already in a saved, and baptized condition previous to being given this worldwide commission.

In addition, it should be noted that this was not the first commission given His church. Previously, they had been given a commission to go only to the nation of Israel:

*These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of **the house of Israel**. – Mt. 10:5-6 (emphasis mine)*

*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. – Luke 10:1*

Here are seventy plus the “*apostles*” that made up part (82) of the hundred and twenty names in the Pre-Pentecost church in Acts 1:15-22. It was out of these that the church chose a successor to fill the church office vacated by Judas. The “*ye*” in Matthew 28:19-20 is this assembled church with its leadership on the mount in Galilee.

Furthermore, Matthew 28:19-20 is a commission to “*make disciples*” which is inclusive of disciplinary authority (instructive, corrective and punitive). Such authority had already been given “*to the church*” in Matthew 18:15-18. The “*keys of the kingdom*” symbolize all aspects of administrative authority in the kingdom and such authority is given “*to the church*” (Mt. 18:17-18).

Later in the book of Acts it is the church that “*sent*” out its ordained men and apostles (Ac. 11:22; 15:1-3). It is common church members that call Peter to give an account of his actions (Ac. 11:1-3). It is the church that Jesus writes the seven letters in Revelation – “*let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches*” (Rev. 2-3). In these letters it is “*the church*” that



Christ holds responsible to teach and to observe all things He commands.<sup>12</sup>

The “ye” of the Great Commission is the New Testament congregation. Hence, this is a commission addressed to a plural “ye” of baptized believers existing in church membership. No authority is given by Christ to anyone existing outside the membership of a New Testament church to administer this commission. There are no clear explicit examples of anyone

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<sup>12</sup> In Matthew 18:19-20 some imagine that this text teaches that wherever two or three believers (unbaptized, immersed, sprinkled, poured, orthodox, heretical, etc.) get together “in my name” that this is a church.

*“But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of **two or three** witnesses every word may be established.*

*And if he shall neglect to hear them, **tell it unto the church**: but if he neglect to hear **the church**, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.*

*Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.*

***Again** I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.*

*For where **two or three** are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them. – Mt. 18:17-20*

However, they overlook the contextual link between verses 15-18 with verse 19-20. The link is the word “again” in verse 19. Jesus is still confirming the authority given to the church in verses 17-18 whether it meets in that capacity or any other capacity in keeping with His commandments (even if it is for prayer). The absolute proof that this text refers to the church rather than any random meeting between two or three believers is the fact that in Matthew 18:16 two or three believers meet together in his name (by his authority) and it is not considered to be a church by Christ as he goes on in verse 17 to instruct these “two or three” witnesses to “tell it to the church.” Matthew 18:20 simply confirms that the authority of the keys is committed to the church and Christ will stand behind their use of these keys regardless how large or small they may be, even if they are reduced to only “two or three” in membership.

existing outside the membership of a New Testament church administering this commission.<sup>13</sup>

**Essential Characteristic #4:** *The ultimate goal of the Great Commission is authority to bring baptized disciples into membership of an existing New Testament church or into new church constitution. Observance of the Great Commission always concludes in New Testament church membership*

### **Review Questions**

1. Can the third command in the commission be observed apart from actual assembling together?
2. Can you see the same order in Acts 2:41-42 given in the commission in Matthew 28:19-20?
3. How does the phrase “*added unto them*” in Acts 2:41 demonstrate that the apostles understood the third aspect of the Great Commission included church membership?
4. How can anyone observe “*tell it to the church*” in Matthew 18:17 apart from church membership?

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<sup>13</sup> Philip was an ordained deacon in the church at Jerusalem (Acts 6:5). Those scattered preaching the gospel in Acts 11 were members of the church in Jerusalem. Acts 9:31 indicates there were other churches constituted due to this scattering from the church at Jerusalem and Ananias is explicitly called a “disciple” who met with an assembly of plural “disciples” in Acts 9:10,19. The church at Jerusalem was also referred to as “disciples” (Acts 9:26) as the term by definition included those in a church state (Acts 2:41-42). Saul and Barnabas were “sent” by the church at Antioch (Acts 13:3 with Acts 14:26-27). Apollos, after being corrected, stopped his free lance activity and worked in and through churches (Acts 18:27).

5. How does the phrase “*tell it to the church*” in conjunction with the use of the keys of the kingdom in Matthew 18:17-18 indicate that it is the church rather than the ordained ministry that is the appointed authority by Christ for kingdom affairs on earth?
6. Why would Matthew ignore every other post-resurrection appearance of Christ consistently in Matthew 28:7-16 except one – the appearance on the mount in Galilee?
7. Don't other gospel accounts demonstrate that Christ thoroughly removed all doubt from the women and the eleven prior to his appointed meeting in Galilee?
8. When did Jesus establish the office of apostle (1 Cor. 12:28)?
9. Does not the business meeting in Acts 1:15-26 demonstrate the office of apostle was already functioning?

## The Age Long Administrator

- *and, lo, I am with you always, even until the end of the world. Amen – Mt. 28:20*

**T**hroughout this study we have established there is a proper authorized administrator of the Great Commission. That administrator is “*ye*” but not “*them*.” That administrator are those who have already been through this discipleship process, unlike the unconverted “*nations*” or unbaptized or uninstructed “*them*.” That administrator is like faith and order with Christ in the same gospel, same baptism and same faith and order, unlike those who are of a different faith and order due to a different gospel, different baptism and different doctrine and practice. That administrator is the New Testament congregation with its ordained ministry.

However, is this the extent of the defining characteristics of “*ye*” supplied by this commission? The answer is no! In addition to being the first church built by Christ, and thus a church like faith and order with Christ, there is another clear defining characteristic. This characteristic is supplied by the last phrase in Matthew 28:20. Christ promises that He will be with this “*you*” until the end of the world. In the next section of this study we will look at the language of this promise in greater detail but for the present it is sufficient to note that there is a divine promise that Christ will be with this “*you*” “*always even until the end of the world*.” Hence, whoever this “*you*” may be, they are promised existence until the end of the world. We have demonstrated previously that this plural “*ye*” of like faith and order is the New Testament Church. We believe this promise confirms that identification for the following reasons.

If this “*you*” is considered as individuals, most died before the end of that century, much less the end of the world. Therefore, Christ could not have given this commission to

them as individuals. This “ye” cannot be the Apostles as all but one was dead by the end of the first century. Therefore, this “ye” cannot be the apostolic office through succession, as taught by the Catholic Church, because of four specific reasons. First, the qualifications set forth to fill the apostolic office limit it to personal eye witnesses of the physical resurrected body of Christ (Ac. 1:22-23). Christ personally appeared to Paul and taught Paul for some years in Arabia (Gal. 1:16-18).

Second, Paul claimed that he was “*last*” of all the Apostles to have personally seen Christ. The Greek term, translated “*last*,” is **eschatos** and it is used in I Corinthians 15 three times and it means the very last with none to follow. Jesus is the “*last*” Adam and there are none to follow. The changing of our bodies occurs at the “*last*” trump and there is no such resurrection trump to follow.

Third, Paul claims that the apostles were set in the church “*first*” (1 Cor. 12:28) and were foundational (Eph. 2:20) rather than a continuing office (Eph. 2:20).

Last, when Paul lists the officers in the churches he only lists “*elders*” and “*deacons*”. The term “*elders*” (Gr. Presbuteros) are equally called “*overseers*” (or Bishops) as well as those who “*feed*” (pastors) as a comparison of Acts 22:16 with Acts 20:28 will easily demonstrate. Although, Apostles were “*elders*” as well as “*disciples*” these church “*elders*” and “*deacons*” are never called “*Apostles*” (see Acts 20:17; Philip. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:1-13; Tit. 1)

Neither are “ye” the unconverted, unbaptized, or unchurched and/or uninstructed persons, as that is the very condition of those identified as “*them*”. Neither can they be Christians in general because they are Christians of like faith and order with Christ in the same gospel, baptism and doctrine.

Only the church is promised age long existence (Mt. 16:18; Eph. 3:21; 1 Cor. 11:26).

Whatever “ye” and “you” represent, it must be in keeping with the inherent characteristics thus far established by the

context. Thus “*you*” must be representative of plural baptized believers in a church state that are like faith and order with Christ. The New Testament congregation by contextual definition is a plural *ye* of baptized believers who are like faith and order with Christ and who can and do habitually assemble together in order to observe all things whatsoever Christ commanded.<sup>14</sup> This is the promised age long “*you*” in Matthew 28:20.

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<sup>14</sup> Some attempt to avert this strong evidence by suggesting that this commission was given to the ordained class within the church. To support this position, they argue that only the ordained class is capable of performing all three aspects of this commission; whereas the ordinary church member is not, and if given to the church it would authorize women and children as well to administer it. They argue that in the book of Acts in every case of baptism it is performed by the ordained membership and silent passages cannot be used to contradict this conclusion. All of these things are true.

However, we believe that the same evidence supports the conclusion that the Great Commission was given to the church to be administered through its ordained membership under its authority. Indeed, the overall Biblical evidence demands this conclusion. For example, we can find explicit cases where the church is the one sending out its ordained membership to carry out this commission (Acts 11:22; 13:1-3; 15:1-3); and the one sending is superior in authority to the one being sent. We can find an explicit and clear command of Christ that appoints the church as the final authority in kingdom affairs when he instructs individual church members to “*tell it to the church*” but no such command can we find that says “*tell it to the ministry.*” We can find scriptures that indicate it is the church that chooses and determines the qualifications of those to be set apart to be ordained (Acts 6:5). Don’t those who select and choose always have greater authority than those being examined and chosen? We can find scriptures where such ordained men are “set in” the church and are said to be “gifts” for the church and thus are subservient in the final analysis to the Church (Eph. 4:11; I Cor. 12:28).

However, most importantly, we can find no scriptures that promise age long continuance to the ordained ministry per se, but we do find scriptures that promise age long continuance to the church (Mt. 16:18; Eph. 3:21) in perfect harmony with the age long promise in Matthew 28:20.

Finally, we can find other examples where Christ directly addresses the ordained leadership in a church for the purpose to convey His command to

What does this mean in regard to our search for the Great Commission churches of Christ? First, remember this is a commission to reproduce like faith and order. Second, this means that New Testament churches do not evolve but are reproduced after their own kind. It means that all false churches originate either by departing from this reproductive cycle or originate by **self-administrating** this commission.

### Review Questions

1. Give three reasons why the Great Commission “ye” is the New Testament Church.
2. What then is being reproduced through this Great Commission process?
3. How long will churches reproduce through this process?

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the church (“unto the angel of the church which is at....he that hath an ear let him ear what the Spirit saith *UNTO THE CHURCHES*”- Rev. 2-3). It is a very common thing to address an organization or institution by addressing their appointed leadership. If all the contextual data that strongly infers that “my brethren” and “the women” as well as the “eleven disciples” were on that mountain, then, there is other contextual warrant to suggest that Christ is addressing the church through its ordained leadership on that mountain – thus commissioning the church through its ordained leadership just as he speaks to the churches through its ordained leadership in Revelation 2-3.

This argument that the ordained leadership is authorized representatives for the church is also strengthened by the non-technical usage of “apostle” in the Scriptures (Acts 13:3 “sent” 14:4 “apostles”). The church at Antioch set apart Barnabas and Saul for the mission field by the laying on of hands in Acts 13:1-3. Paul had been appointed as a technical apostle, equal with the twelve by Jesus Christ. However, the church at Antioch had ordained him as their missionary on the mission field. The verbal form of the term “apostle” is used in Acts 13:3 and translated “sent.” Greek scholars say this term conveys the idea of an authorized representative or one sent by authority. It is the church that not only sets them apart for this mission (by the laying on of their hands) but later the same term is used as a result of a called business meeting. The church determined they should be “sent” (See A.T. Robertson, **Word Pictures**, Acts 15:2 on the word “appointed”) as authorized church representatives (Acts 15:1-3).

4. Why can't this promise apply to Christians in general?
5. Why can't this promise apply to the apostolic office?



## The Organically Reproduced Administrator

*and, lo, I am with you always, even until the end of the world. Amen – Mt.28:20*

**W**e have demonstrated that there is an age long promise that New Testament churches will reproduce after their own kind until the end of the world. What is the nature of their continuity? Does the Great Commission text define it? Yes, it does. It defines it in three ways. (1) Organic link to link contact; (2) Natural cycle of succession; (3) Supernatural promise of day in and day out continuity.

### A. Organic Link to Link Contact:

The Great Commission “*ye*” and “*them*” are described in terms of direct organic link (“*ye*”) to link (“*them*”) relationship with each other in this commission. The first link is “*ye*” and the second link in direct contact is “*them*.” The “*them*” are the direct objects in direct contact in both time and space with this commissioned “*ye*.”

Remember, there were no TV’s and modern electronic means of communication when this commission was given.

It is impossible for the Great Commission to be administered without direct hands on contact in time and space between “*ye*” and “*them*.” For example, preaching the gospel to “*them*” requires that the “*ye*” physically “*go*” to “*them*.”

Likewise, the second and third aspects of the commission require actual physical contact between “*ye*” and “*them*” in carrying out this commission. Baptism was a physical hands on connection between “*ye*” and “*them*.” Furthermore, teaching “*them*” required actual assembling together with “*them*” over a period of time in order to accomplish the goal of

“teaching them to observe all things....commanded.” Organic link to link contact cannot be successfully repudiated if we take the commission at face value. In fact there is no other possible way that such a commission could be administered but by organic link to link contact in time and space.

To deny this one must remove “ye” from not only this text but from some period in time between the first and second advent and authorize “them” (the unconverted or converted but unbaptized/untaught/unchurched) to re-originate this commission. There is no other alternative but self-administration if the “ye” is ever dropped in time and space. Is it possible for this reproductive cycle to fail in some generation so that no true disciples/churches are available to reproduce new disciples/churches for the next generation? Let us suppose this is not only true but actually has happened. If so, then there are only three possible sources from whence new disciples could be made, if at any point in time, “ye” ceased to exist:

1. After that point, the undisciplined must disciple themselves to restart this process.
2. After that point, God must make disciples directly through the scriptures.
3. After that point God must send a prophet to restart the reproductive cycle.

Nearly all of Christendom embrace one of the above alternatives,<sup>15</sup> because many believe a practical observing Christianity did fail more than once since Christ gave this commission. They believe this because they refuse to identify with any of those groups that claim historical continuity from the apostolic age (Roman Catholics, Greek Catholics, Anabaptists, etc).

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<sup>15</sup> The promise of the Great Commission is the perpetuation of *practical observance* of “all things” commanded. It is not a promise of the perpetuation of the *spirit* or isolated and unobserving *truths* of Christianity.

However, Christ never authorized the undisciplined to disciple himself or herself. There is no example in Scripture where undisciplined persons disciple themselves in these things. Furthermore, there is no precept or example where God directly used the scriptures to make disciples in these things.

There is an example in Scripture where God did send an unbaptized prophet to originate these things among men – John the Baptist. However, John was prophetically anticipated and announced by the Scriptures to do this (Mk. 1:1-4) and uniquely and directly authorized by God Himself to do this. Furthermore, any person claiming to be a prophet sent by God to originate this process must be able to pass the Biblical tests for a prophet. Up to this present day there are none yet who have been able to pass all the Biblical tests for a prophet.<sup>16</sup>

## **B. Natural Cycle of Succession:**

Doesn't the third aspect of this commission command the observance of all things whatsoever Christ commanded? Yes! Does not this include obedience to this commission as well? Notice that the very nature of this commission is a natural cycle of reproduction after its own kind:

*Go....baptizing....teaching”* which demands them to  
*Go.....baptizing.....teaching”* which demands them to  
*Go...baptizing...teaching them...etc., etc.*

So the very nature of this commission is a natural historical cycle of succession by reproduction after its own kind in organic link to link fashion.

Look at all denominations today and you will see this is exactly how they naturally reproduce after their own kind. For

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<sup>16</sup> See my book *Some Non-prophet Organizations* where I list seven Biblical tests to distinguish true from false prophets

example, Luther started the Lutheran church and every Lutheran church was a product of previous Lutheran doctrine and practice. Calvin started the Presbyterian Church and every Presbyterian Church afterwards was a product of previous Presbyterian faith and order. When a split occurred in a denomination, at that split a new kind of church was formed, and all following churches forming that new denomination are products of the previous one of like faith and order. All present denominations operate according to this natural cycle.

However, it is Christ that started the very first church in Jerusalem during His earthly ministry, which was like faith and order with Him. It is Christ that promised the contextual “ye” that He would be present with them day in and day out until the end of the age reproducing churches of like faith and order. Will you suggest that Luther can start his kind of church, which naturally reproduced after its own kind for the past 400 years all the time without the continual presence of Luther, and yet Christ start His own kind and with His continual presence cannot continue to reproduce after its own kind for more than 400 years? If the Lutheran Church can and still does reproduce after its own kind without Luther for the past 400 years then the churches of Christ can and will reproduce after their own kind with the presence of Christ from the apostolic age until He comes again.

### **C. Supernatural Promise of Day in and Day out Succession until the end of the Age**

*- and, lo, I am with you always, even until the end of the world. Amen.*

Literally, the Greek says “*all the days until the end of the age.*” Greek scholars say this is an idiom which literally means “*day in and day out*” until the end of the age (William Hendriksen, **New Testament Commentary**, *Matthew*, Baker

Book House, Grand Rapids, Mich. p. 1003). Therefore, Christ did not perceive of a single day between His first and second advent that would be void of such a explicitly qualified administrator. This is why Jude says the faith was “*once delivered*” – Jude 3. The same Greek term translated “*once*” in Jude 3 is translated “*once for all*” in Hebrews 10:14. This means that the kind of churches found in the New Testament not only continued to reproduce after their own kind in the apostolic age but will continue to do so after the apostolic age in every generation up to the present generation in which we live. This means churches consisting of such qualified disciples have been and will be reproduced in every generation from the New Testament period until Christ comes again. The gates of hell shall never prevail against His church simply because He remains with it providentially making sure there is a continuing reproduction of like kind until the end of the world.

Therefore, it is impossible to deny organic link to link church succession without editing out and denying what Matthew 28:19-20 clearly states and promises.

Many will reject this conclusion due to their view of secular church history. However, this objection will be dealt with later (See Chapter Three - **Uninspired Church History - the Biblical Approach**). For the present it must be remembered that, unlike the Scriptures, secular church history is (1) uninspired, (2) incomplete, and (3) often inaccurate. Others will attempt to deny this based upon the mistaken notion that this means every particular church must continue until the end of the age. This is not a promise that guarantees the perpetual existence of any particular church until the end of the age, but rather, a promise that guarantees that before the demise of all particular churches within any generation there will be new churches of like faith and order reproduced for the coming generation.

There is no authority given by the Scriptures for “*them*” to restart, re-originate this commission at any time between the giving of this commission until the end of the age. However,

that is what is required for Christ to fulfill His promise any other way.

Hence, the New Testament church is one of those historical groups that have existed prior to the Reformation, prior to Constantine the Great, prior to the so-called church fathers. The only groups of observing churches that lay claim to such historicity are the Roman Catholic Church and those they labeled “heretics.”

#### **D. The Test of History and Doctrine**

There are several groups of professed Christians that claim historical continuity from the apostolic age and thus claim to be the true churches of Christ today.

There can be no question that one valid test to be the true churches of Christ is historical continuity, due to divine promises of continuity in the Scriptures (Mt. 16:18; 28:20; Eph. 3:21). However, remember that this promised continuity is through the process of reproduction after its own kind. This means that historical continuity alone is not sufficient to prove groups are the true churches of Christ, but they must, as well, preach the same gospel, administer the same baptism and teach the same faith and order Jesus commissioned. Therefore, the true churches of Christ are known today by their historicity and doctrine.

These tests are not new to Christianity but are very ancient tests used as far back as the second century A.D. In the second century Tertullian recognized the same two tests. He summarizes both tests and then expounds the historical test in the following three paragraphs and then refers to the doctrinal test in the final paragraph:

*[The apostles] founded churches in every city,  
from which all the other churches, one after  
another, derived the tradition of the faith, and*

*the seeds of doctrine, and are every day deriving them, that they may become churches. Indeed, it is on this account only that they will be able to deem themselves apostolic, as being **the offspring of apostolic churches**. Every sort of thing must necessarily revert to its original for its classification. Therefore the churches, although they are so many and so great, comprise but the one primitive Church, [founded] by the apostles, from which they all[spring]. In this way, all are primitive, and all are apostolic, while they are all proved to be one in unity....*

*[W]hat it was which Christ revealed to them [the apostles] can, as I must here likewise prescribe, properly be proved in no other way than by those very churches which the apostles founded in person, by declaring the gospel to them directly themselves . . . If then these things are so, it is in the same degree manifest that all doctrine which agrees with the apostolic churches—those molds and original sources of the faith must be reckoned for truth, as undoubtedly containing that which the churches received from the apostles, the apostles from Christ, [and] Christ from God. **Whereas all doctrine must be prejudged as false which savors of contrariety to the truth of the churches and apostles of Christ and God.** It remains, then, that we demonstrate whether this doctrine of ours, of which we have now given the rule, has its origin in the tradition of the apostles, and whether all other doctrines do not ipso facto proceed from falsehood... But if there be any [heresies] which are bold enough to*

*plant [their origin] in the midst of the apostolic age, that they may thereby seem to have been handed down by the apostles, because they existed in the time of the apostles, we can say: **Let them produce the original records of their churches; let them unfold the roll of their bishops, running down in due succession from the beginning in such a manner that [their first] bishop shall be able to show for his ordainer and predecessor some one of the apostles or of apostolic men—a man, moreover, who continued steadfast with the apostles. For this is the manner in which the apostolic churches transmit their registers: as the church of Smyrna, which records that Polycarp was placed therein by John; as also the church of Rome, which makes Clement to have been ordained in like manner by Peter...***

*But should they even affect the contrivance [of composing a succession list for themselves], they will not advance a step. **For their very doctrine, after comparison with that of the apostles [as contained in other churches], will declare, by its own diversity and contrariety, that it had for its author neither an apostle nor an apostolic man;** because, as the apostles would never have taught things which were self-contradictors....*

*Then let all the heresies, when challenged to **these two tests** by our apostolic Church, offer their proof of how they deem themselves to be apostolic. But in truth they neither are so, nor are they able to prove themselves to be what they are not. Nor are they admitted to peaceful*



*relations and communion by such churches as are in any way connected with apostles, inasmuch as they are in no sense themselves apostolic because of their diversity as to the mysteries of the faith* - **The Ante-Nicene Church Fathers**, Vol. 3, Tertullian, pp. 20,21,32. (Emphasis mine)

What about the doctrinal test? Does the Bible provide essential characteristics that positively define exactly what is the same gospel, same baptism and same observances Jesus commanded? We believe the Bible provides identifying characteristics of these things so they can be easily and clearly identified and defined.

*Baptists have generally held that a church is both an organization and an organism. As an organism (a living being, or as the Bible calls the church 'lively stones' in I Peter 2:5) a church can bring forth after her kind (Gen. 1:24). We mean by this that a church may dismiss some of her members to form a new and separate church, or by sending forth a missionary with authority to organize a new and separate church. We do not believe in the spontaneous generation of churches any more than we believe in spontaneous generation of animal or human life. We hold, as the Scriptures teach, that all life comes from antecedent life.* - Milburn Cockrell, **Scriptural Church Organization**, Collierville, TN: Instant Publisher, 2nd ed., 2003, back cover.

**Essential Characteristic #5:** *The administrator of this commission is promised the presence of*

*Christ until the end of the world. True churches have a promised historicity as a denomination that originates with the personal ministry of Christ and continues until the end of the age. Thus, true churches of Christ have two distinguishing characteristics (1) New Testament faith and practice and (2) New Testament origin as a denomination.*

### **Review Questions**

1. Is it possible to administer any part of this commission apart from organic contact between “ye” and “them”?
2. Is there not direct link to link contact between “ye” and “them”?
3. Does Christ’s promise leave out even a single day from the time He gave it until the end of the world?
4. Does not the three-step commission naturally reproduce after its own kind if followed?
5. Does not the supernatural presence and promise of Christ guarantee it will be followed?
6. Is this a promise that any particular church will continue to the end of the age, or that there will be new churches reproduced by this reproductive cycle for every generation until the end of the age?
7. Is it possible according to this commission that a new church can be constituted apart from a previous existent “ye”?

Jump ahead into chapter three and read the Biblical approach to secular church history.

### **The Summary of Great Commission Essentials**

Thus far we have demonstrated that the administrator of the Great Commission has five essential characteristics:

**Essential Characteristic #1:** *There is a designated, authorized administrator “ye” as well as defined recipients, “them,” of this administration. Therefore, not just anyone is authorized to administer this commission. There is a prescribed three-fold method or pattern by which disciples are made. Therefore, disciples cannot be made just any old way. This authorized “ye” stands in a mediatory position between Christ and those who are the unconverted, unbaptized, and untaught. Therefore, there is no direct authority given unto “them” to administer any aspect of this commission.*

**Essential Characteristic #2:** *The authorized “ye” are “disciples” which by contextual definition are “previously baptized believers existing in an observing church state”.*

**Essential Characteristic #3:** *The authorized administrators are disciples of like faith and order with Christ in the same gospel, baptism and doctrine.*

**Essential Characteristic #4:** *The ultimate goal of the Great Commission is authority to bring*

*baptized disciples into membership of an existing New Testament Church or into new church constitution. Observance of the Great Commission always concludes in New Testament church membership*

**Essential Characteristic #5:** *The administrator of this commission is promised the presence of Christ until the end of the world. True churches have a promised historicity as a denomination that originates with the personal ministry of Christ and continues until the end of the age. Thus, true churches of Christ have two distinguishing characteristics (1) New Testament faith and practice and (2) New Testament origin as a denomination.*

Chapter Two

**DEFINING THE SAME GOSPEL, BAPTISM AND DOCTRINE**

**I**n the above section it has been shown clearly that New Testament churches share the same gospel, same baptism and same faith and order with Christ, the head of the church.

Therefore, all one has to do is identify the defining characteristics of the Great Commission gospel, baptism, faith and order. Once identified, then, it is merely a process of elimination. Simply compare these essential characteristics to what modern churches believe and practice in order to identify what are and what are not true churches of Christ.

**I. The Characteristics of the same Gospel?**

The Great Commission is an age long mission (“*until the end of the world*”). Therefore the gospel Jesus commissioned will be the same gospel found in the rest of the New Testament preached by the apostles and churches. For example, the apostle Paul claimed that Jesus Christ Himself communicated to him the gospel, the same gospel He communicated to the other apostles:

*But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.*

*As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed..... But I certify you, brethren that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither*

*received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ. – Gal. 1:8-9, 11-12*

In the text above there are three clear claims made by the Apostle Paul:

1. There is no other true gospel but the one he preached.
2. We are to regard or consider as accursed all who preach “*another gospel.*”
3. His Gospel was given to him directly by Christ.

When all of these factors are taken into consideration it is clear that the gospel given to Paul by Christ must be the one and same gospel Christ commissioned in Matthew 28:19. In other words, the same gospel that Jesus gave the twelve apostles to preach “until the end of the world” must be the same gospel given to the apostle of the gentiles by Christ or else Paul has placed the twelve apostles, as well as Christ, under a curse for preaching “*another gospel.*” In addition, Paul says that he went up to Jerusalem and met the Apostles and confirmed that he was preaching the same gospel Christ commissioned them (Gal. 2:2). Since no other gospel was commissioned until the end of the world and since Paul denied there was any other gospel than what he preached, then, they must be one and the same gospel.

**Gospel Characteristic #1** – *There is only one gospel commissioned until the end of the world and it is the gospel Paul received from Christ and preached. Anyone preaching “another gospel” is to be regarded as accursed. The true churches of Christ preach the Pauline Gospel and all churches that do not are to be regarded as “accursed” or false churches.*

**A. Jesus preached the only gospel of Salvation given to men:**

Before Pentecost Jesus claimed there was only one way to heaven and all other ways led to destruction (Mt. 7:13-14). This one way he described as follows:

*Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. – Jn. 14:6*

After Pentecost, Peter confirmed that this was still the only way of salvation ever given to men under heaven:

*Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved. – Ac. 4:12*

The New Testament writers unanimously claim that the same gospel was preached before and after Pentecost.<sup>17</sup> The

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<sup>17</sup> In regard to direction, the prophets looked forward by faith while we look back. In regard to substance, the gospel has always been substantially the same – (1) repentance toward God, that is, turning from rebellion to submission to His rule and (2) faith in the sufficiency of the coming promised Messiah for salvation. Progressive revelation gradually provided more details concerning the nature of this sufficiency as well as details concerning the Person of the Savior and exactly “how” he would save us. John The Baptist and all the Old Testament prophets and saints believed in the essential gospel thus far revealed to them (Acts 10:43; Isa. 53) but none knew yet unrevealed details. For example, none knew that John’s younger cousin Jesus was that Messiah until God revealed it to John. None knew that the cross would be the instrument of death until it was revealed. His disciples embraced the essentials of the gospel when they submitted to baptism and followed him. There was evidence of the minimal fruits of repentance and faith in the sufficiency of Christ as Savior. However, as progressive revelation occurred, the simple substance of the gospel took on additional details. The Old Testament saints embraced the revelation they

only differences were direction and progressive revelation. The prophets looked forward to Christ by faith as we look back.

For example, Paul claims that the gospel he preached was the same gospel preached by all the prophets before the coming of Christ. When speaking to King Agrippa Paul said;

*Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come: That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles. – Ac. 26:22-23*

After His resurrection, Jesus told His disciples that all the prophets preached this same gospel:

*Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.....And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and*

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possessed and we are now accountable to embrace the fuller revelation provided in the New Testament Scriptures.

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*to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. – Lk. 24:25-27, 44-47*

Jesus explicitly claims the prophets had spoken about His coming and dying and being raised from the dead, just as he also preached this same gospel to them - “*These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you.*” In other words, Jesus claimed to preach the same gospel preached by all the prophets before Him.

This fact can be easily seen when you compare what the prophets, John the Baptist and Jesus preached as the gospel of salvation when compared side by side:

John the Baptist preached:

*He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him. – Jn. 3:36*

Jesus preached:

*And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not*

*believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. – Jn. 3:14-18*

All the prophets preached:

*To him give **all the prophets** witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins. – Ac. 10:43 (emphasis mine)*

The essential substance of the gospel is the same before, during and after the giving of the Great Commission. Jesus had harsh words for those who refused to believe the essential gospel preached by all the prophets:

*Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself. – Lk. 24:25-27 (emphasis mine)*

The problem with many is that they are unable to see the essential gospel message in the Old Testament Scriptures. Even though Isaiah 53 very clearly preaches the gospel, apparently many of His own disciples were unable to see it in the prophets, and so we read:

*Then **opened he their understanding**, that they might understand the scriptures, And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: - Lk. 24:45-46 (emphasis mine)*

Some imagine that Jesus preached another kind of gospel or “*the gospel of the kingdom*” (Mk. 1:14). However, this is the same gospel preached by Paul all through his ministry even at the end of the book of Acts when he was in Rome.

*And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching **the kingdom of God**, shall see my face no more. – Ac. 20:25 (emphasis mine)*

*And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified **the kingdom of God**, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening. – Ac. 28:23 (emphasis mine)*

*Preaching **the kingdom of God**, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him. – Ac. 28:31 (emphasis mine)*

Preaching the kingdom of God or preaching the gospel of the kingdom is simply preaching how to presently enter into the spiritual kingdom of God as the prerequisite to enter the fullness of His kingdom yet to come (Jn. 3:3-6). It is preaching repentance and submission to the Person of the King – Jesus Christ (Jn. 3:13-19).

Finally, the ultimate proof that the very same gospel was preached by the prophets – looking forward to the coming of Christ by faith (as we look back by faith) is that Abraham is used as our model, pattern or example for being justified by faith in the gospel:

*And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also:..... Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification. – Rom. 4:11, 22-25 (emphasis mine)*

***Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.....Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ. And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect. – Gal. 3:6-9 (emphasis mine)***

*Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and **he saw it**, and was glad. – Jn. 8:56 (emphasis mine)*

It is not possible to use Abraham as our example for justification by faith in the gospel if it is not the same gospel in his case as well as ours! The writer of Hebrews settles this once and for all when speaking of the children of Israel that fell in the wilderness due to lack of faith in the same gospel preached by the Apostles:

*So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief. Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. **For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.** – Heb. 3:19-4:2 (emphasis mine)*

How important is it that there is but **one** gospel and that it is the **same** gospel preached **before**, and in anticipation of Christ, as well as, **after** the arrival of the Christ? It is very important as it clearly demonstrates that the church and its ordinances are not part of the gospel as they did not exist in the Old Testament but the gospel did exist then and it is the same gospel preached by Christ and the churches. God set first in the church “*apostles*” (I Cor. 12:28; Eph. 2:20) and therefore no Old Testament saint is in the church, and the church is no part of gospel salvation.

**Gospel Characteristic #2** - *The gospel Jesus commissioned is the same gospel the prophets preached before his coming, the same gospel he preached, and there is no other gospel of salvation given unto men, and all who preach any other gospel are to be regarded as “accursed” – Gal. 1:6-9. There is only one gospel for all the elect in all ages.*

**B. Jesus Preached a Gospel that declares only One Way to Heaven:**

*Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. – Jn. 14:6*

*I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. – Jn. 10:9*

*And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent. – Jn. 17:3*

*Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved. – Ac. 4:12*

Those who preach that good Moslems, Hindu's and members of other world religions will be in heaven without coming through Christ, without hearing the gospel of Christ, without repenting and believing in the gospel are preaching "another gospel." Billy Graham<sup>18</sup> and many others teach such a perverted gospel. Only false churches preach that some may go to heaven without coming through Jesus Christ.

If being ignorant about the gospel of Christ obtains heaven for good Moslems, Hindu's, etc., then the best thing we can do is keep the gospel a secret so all can go to heaven. However, if that were true then Christ would not have commanded them to "go" preach the gospel to every nation.

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<sup>18</sup> Nearly every other year since 1956 Billy Graham has publicly stated that he believes that there will be many sincere good Muslims, Hindu's, etc. in heaven that have never heard and believed the gospel while on earth.

**Gospel Characteristic #3:** *There is only one gospel and it is about the one and only way to heaven through Christ. Those who preach that heaven can be entered some other way than through Christ preach “another gospel” and are to be regarded and treated as “accursed” or false preachers and churches.*

**C. Jesus preached a gospel that “fulfilled” all the demands of the Law of God:**

*Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. – Mt. 5:17 (emphasis mine)*

How is the law “*fulfilled*”? What is it about the law that needs to be “*fulfilled*”? Is there some defect or insufficiency about the Law? Not according to Paul:

*Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good. – Rom. 7:12*

The only weakness of the Law is found in the inability of “*the flesh*” to fulfill it:

*For what the law could not do, in that it was **weak through the flesh**, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: - Rom. 8:3 (emphasis mine)*

It may help to understand why God gave the Law. The Law is God’s standard of righteousness and God gave it to reveal, and define what sin is:

*...for by the law is the knowledge of sin. – Rom. 3:20*

*What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet. - Rom. 7:7*

The law defines what sin is. Sin is the transgression (violating) of the Law:

*Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: **for sin is the transgression of the law.** – 1 Jn. 3:4 (emphasis mine)*

*For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet **offend in one point**, he is guilty of all. – Jm. 2:10 (emphasis mine)*

Therefore to violate “**one point**” of the law makes a person guilty of violating “**all**” the Law. Hence, to “*fulfill*” the Law would be to keep every point of the Law. It would be to perform all the Law sinlessly. Did Jesus claim He lived without sin? Did He claim that he never violated even “*one point*” of God’s Law?

*Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law. And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and **in him is no sin.** – 1 Jn. 3:4-5 (emphasis mine)*

*He that speaketh of himself seeketh his own glory: but he that seeketh his glory that sent him, the same is true, and **no unrighteousness is in him.** – Jn. 7:18 (emphasis mine)*



*Which of you **convinceth me of sin**? And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me? – Jn. 8:46 (emphasis mine)*

*For he hath made him to be sin for us, **who knew no sin**; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. – 2 Co 5:21 (emphasis mine)*

***Who did no sin**, neither was guile found in his mouth: - 1 Pe. 2:22 (emphasis mine)*

*For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, **yet without sin**. - Heb 4:15 (emphasis mine)*

He was tested “*in all points*” but was “*yet without sin*” concerning any point. The Law’s standard of righteousness is absolute sinless perfection and Christ “*fulfilled*” it.

However, why did Christ come to “*fulfill*” the Law? He could have stayed in heaven and have been just as sinless without even coming to earth?

### **1. God requires that kind of Righteousness for You to Go to Heaven:**

*For I say unto you, That except your righteousness **shall exceed** the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, **ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven**. – Mt. 5:20 (emphasis mine)*

The righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees was well known. Even Jesus said that outwardly they were without fault

however inwardly they were sinful. Jesus says that for you to enter heaven, your own righteousness must exceed theirs. To exceed theirs was to be inwardly, as well as outwardly, without fault. That is, you have to be as sinless as Jesus.

Jesus told them what kind of righteousness they had to exceed to enter heaven but at the end of this sermon he spells out in no uncertain terms what kind of righteousness they had to equal to go to heaven:

*Be ye therefore perfect, **even as** your Father which is in heaven is perfect. – Mt. 5:48*  
(emphasis mine)

Jesus says you must be “**even as**” perfect as God in heaven! How perfect is God in heaven? He has never once sinned in his past. He cannot sin presently, nor will he ever yet sin in the future. Remember to sin in just “one point” is to transgress “*all*” the Law. Therefore, to “*fulfill*” the law is to keep every point and to keep every point is to be “**perfect**” even as God in heaven is perfect. To fail “in one point” is to “*come short*” of the glory of God’s perfect righteousness.

This is God’s standard for entering heaven. All who come short of this standard can never be justified by the Law to enter heaven. Will your life be justified, and be declared good enough by God’s standard to enter heaven?

## 2. There is NONE Righteous among men

*What then? are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; As it is written, **There is none righteous, no, not one:** There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable;*

*there is none that doeth good, no, not one.....For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God – Rom. 3:9-12,23 (emphasis mine)*

Hence, can the Law of God justify entrance into heaven for any who have sinned? What is the Law's demand against those who have sinned?

*For the wages of sin is **death** – Rom. 6:23 (emphasis mine)*

*For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: – Gal. 3:10-11 (emphasis mine)*

The Law cannot justify imperfect “works” but rather condemns to death all who produce such works.

### 3. Our Dilemma

God's standard for righteousness for entrance into heaven is sinless perfection. God's penalty for sin, which is violating just “*one point*” of His Law is “*death*” – eternal death.

Our dilemma is that no man is good enough to enter heaven but all men are bad enough to spend eternity in hell. Based upon our own personal life of good works there is no hope for any man to enter heaven and no hope for any man to get out of hell.

In order to escape this dilemma you need a sinless life to enter heaven but in addition, you need hell's penalty paid in

full in order to get out of hell before you can go to heaven. Where are you going to get this sinless life? How are you going to get this eternal penalty paid in full?

#### **4. The Good News of the Gospel**

The term “gospel” means good news. It is the Good News that Christ has “fulfilled the Law” by His sinless life of good works, and has paid eternal hell by His sacrificial death, in the behalf, of repentant believing sinners.

*For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. – 2 Cor. 5:21 (emphasis mine)*

God makes the life and death of Christ to be our life and death by substitution. He takes our place before the Law of God and “*fulfills*” the Law by His own life and by His own death for us. That is why the Son of God became a man so that He could take our place before God’s holy Law and obtain what our own life and death could never obtain. Our own life could never obtain the Law’s approval as the Law only justifies a life that has not broken the law. Our own death could never obtain the final payment for sin demanded by the Law as we must pay eternally for our sin.

There are two characteristics about Christ as Savior that make Him able to obtain eternal redemption for His people. First, His righteous life makes His death acceptable for others because if he did not have a righteous life He also would have to pay an eternal consequence for his own sins. Second, He is God in the flesh and encompasses eternity. Therefore, He is able to pay an eternal penalty for His people in full. His resurrection is proof that the eternal penalty of sin has been

paid in full or otherwise He would have remained under the power of death, still in the grave, paying the penalty forever.

How can one obtain this blessing of full redemption? How do we obtain justification before God? The answer is simple and clearly stated by Jesus Christ:

*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*  
– Jn. 3:16

We are justified by faith “*in Him*” as the substitutionary satisfaction before God in our behalf. It should be obvious that we cannot be justified by the works of the law unless we are sinless:

*Knowing that a man is **not justified by the works of the law**, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and **not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.*** – Gal. 2:16 (emphasis mine)

Neither can we mix “*faith*” with the “*works*” of the Law in order to be justified before God, but we must be justified by faith alone in the finished work of Christ alone:

*For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that **continueth not in all things** which are written in the book of the law to do them. But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith. And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth [literally “keeps on doing” perfectly]*

*them shall live in them.* – Gal. 3:10-11  
(emphasis mine)

It is very simple to demonstrate that it must be by faith alone, in Christ alone, without our works. Christ died 2000 years ago. Can you get into a time machine and go back 2000 years and crawl upon a cross and help him die for sin? No, that is impossible. How then will you obtain his sin payment for you? By faith and faith alone in what He did as your substitute. Likewise, neither can you help him fulfill the righteous demands of the law as that requires sinless perfection. If you will have the righteousness of the Law fulfilled, you must have it by faith and faith alone in His life and death for you.

*For by grace are ye saved **through faith**; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.* – Eph. 2:8-9  
(emphasis mine)

*And if by grace, **then is it no more of works**: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.* – Rom. 11:6 (emphasis mine)

The gospel Jesus preached is a gospel that “*fulfills*” the Law of God by His own life and death for us. His last words on the cross were “***It is finished.***” This is the good news of the gospel that Jesus “*fulfilled*” the law for us and “***it is finished***”.

Any church that preaches an unfulfilled Law that you must help finish is preaching another gospel, an accursed gospel (Gal. 1:6-9) and that is a clear proof they are a false church.

**Gospel Characteristic #4:** – *Jesus fulfilled/satisfied all the Law’s demands in His own Person as a substitute for His people.*

*Justification before God is by grace through faith in Christ alone without our works. Those who deny this essential Biblical truth preach “another gospel” and are to be regarded as “accursed” or false preachers and false churches.*

**D. Jesus Preached a gospel that begins with the command to repent:**

*I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. – Lk. 13:3*

Jesus did not come to call the righteous but sinners. Why? The Bible clearly and repeatedly teaches that all are sinners and there are none righteous, no not one (Rom. 3:9-10). Those who perceive themselves to be righteous have a faulty view of themselves (1 Jn. 1:8-10) or a faulty understanding of the Law’s standard for righteousness (Jam. 2:10). Such do not need good news since they don’t believe the bad news about themselves. The gospel is for those who know the bad news, for those who know they have “come short” of the glory of God. It is for those who have no hope to be justified by the Law and have no hope to escape the wrath of God if their own good works are part and parcel of that hope. The Great Commission begins with, “go” preach the gospel (Mk. 1:15), and the first word of the gospel is “repent.”

*And that **repentance** and remission of sins should be preached in his name **among all nations**, beginning at Jerusalem. - Lk 24:47 (emphasis mine)*

Luke wrote both his gospel and the book of Acts for Gentile readers. At the beginning of each of his books, he addressed a

gentile reader named “*Theophilus*.” Please note that repentance is included in the age long commission to “*all nations*” and not merely something restricted to the Jewish nation. Gospel repentance is not a work of man but is something “*granted*” by God:

*When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life. – Ac. 11:18 (emphasis mine)*

It was understood that repentance had been granted to the Jews prior to Acts 11:18, as all that were saved were Jews. However, Acts 11:18 introduces that “*repentance unto life*” is also “*granted*” to the Gentiles.

*Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks [lit. “gentiles”], repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. – Ac. 20:21*

Repentance is as much a gift of God as is saving faith (Philip. 1:29; Eph. 2:8). The word **gospel** means *good news* and there is no *good news* until a person first knows the **bad** news. There is no need to be “*saved*” until you first know what it is you need to be saved from. There is no need for a Savior until first you know you are lost and under condemnation. The gospel is meaningless and worthless to a person until it finds a need within the mind and heart of the sinner.

Gospel repentance is wholly internal and fully completed prior to baptism or any other good work. It involves a change of mind and heart about you, about God and about sin and about Christ. It is the turning from unbelief to faith in Christ and turning from sin, and turning from “*dead works*” (Heb. 6:1) to the finished works of Christ.



However, one cannot turn from anything without turning to something else. Turning from unbelief in Christ is turning to faith in Christ. Turning from love for sin is turning to love for righteousness, and turning from dead works is turning to justification by faith in the finished works of Christ. Gospel repentance is an internal change of the will, mind and heart toward God. Repentance is not penance or works you do to appease God, as it is the finished works of Christ that have satisfied God. The works produced by this internal change are called “*fruits of repentance*” (Mt. 3:8) and therefore must not be confused with gospel repentance; as such “*fruits*” are the outward manifestations that prove that an inward change has already taken place. What turns you from sin to Christ is the Spirit of God in regeneration. The experience of consciously turning from sin to Christ is called gospel conversion. However, the kind of religious repentance that does not conclude in complete trust in the finished substitutionary satisfaction by Christ is called “*worldly sorrow*” (2 Cor. 7:10).

**Gospel Characteristic #5** – *Where there is no true gospel repentance there can be no true gospel salvation, as there is no need for a Savior or salvation. Where there is no such internal change there can be no regeneration. This is essential to the gospel or there is no “good news.” True churches preach this kind of gospel.*

**E. Jesus preached a gospel of eternal life now:**

*And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. – Jn. 10:28*

*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have **everlasting life**.*

– Jn 3:16 (emphasis mine)

*Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath **everlasting life**, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.* – Jn. 5:24 (emphasis mine)

In all these passages, “*eternal life*” is a present tense possession. It is in possession now and continues to be in possession forever. This does not refer to the physical body of the saint (physical life) but to their inner spiritual being. Eternal life is spiritual life. The bible says that believers were once “*dead in trespasses and sins*” but are now “*quickened*” or made alive (Eph. 2:1). Their physical bodies were not “*dead*” but it was their inner spiritual being that was spiritually dead. Spiritual death in the Bible refers to separation from God caused by “*trespasses and sins*” (Eph. 2:1). Isaiah told Israel that it was their sins that “*separated*” them from God (Isa. 59:2). Paul says that we were “*alienated from the life of God through ignorance*” or spiritual darkness (Eph. 4:18).

Spiritual “*life*” is coming into spiritual union with God through the redemptive work of Christ in removing our sins between God and us. Spiritual life has to do with knowledge of God through Christ:

*And **this is life eternal**, that they might **know thee** the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.* – Jn 17:3 (emphasis mine)

This knowledge comes to a person when the communicated gospel is empowered by the Holy Spirit. When energized by

the Holy Spirit it becomes the creative word of God or the effectual call that brings into existence a new creature within:

*For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, **who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts**, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. – 2 Cor. 4:5-6 (emphasis mine)*

*For our gospel came **not unto you in word only, but also in power**, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake. – 1 Thes. 1:5 (emphasis mine)*

The Holy Spirit makes us alive to God by a creative act that occurs within us, and which produces faith in the gospel of Christ. Jesus spoke of this inner creative act as making the tree good first, before the fruit can be good (eternal life before works). He told the Pharisees that before you can cleanse the outside of the cup the inside must be first cleansed (new birth before works). The Holy Spirit comes to live within a person and cleanses them within and producing faith in Christ as their only hope of salvation. This quickening is being born from above, or born of the Spirit (Jn. 3:6), and it is something only God can do (Jn. 1:13; James 1:18). He does it in connection with the preaching of the gospel. God comes to dwell within the believer, and promises never to leave or forsake the believer (Heb. 13:5; Philip. 1:6) but to work in him to both will and to do of His good pleasure (Philip. 2:13). The inner man – the conscious self within the body never dies, never ceases to exist, as it is in union with the eternal God, and upon death of the body, it immediately and directly enters into heaven (Philip. 1:21). Do you believe this?

*And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. **Believest thou this?** – Jn. 11:26 (emphasis mine)*

If not, then the Apostle John wrote a whole book for the purpose that true believers in Christ would believe this:

*These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God. – I Jn. 5:13*

**Gospel Characteristic #6** – *The gospel of Jesus Christ is the good news of eternal life now and forever. This truth cannot be denied without denying what is essential to the gospel. No true church of Christ denies eternal life now and forever.*

## **E. Jesus Preached a Gospel that delivered men from eternal conscious existence in hell**

*Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. – Mt. 7:13-14*

*He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. – Jn. 3:17*

*And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal. – Mt. 25:46*

*And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.– Lk. 16:22-23*

*He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him. – Jn. 3:36*

The Sadducees denied any conscious existence after life. They denied the resurrection of the body from the grave. They denied the existence of angels and all bodiless existence. They believed that death ushered one into unconsciousness. Jesus (Mt. 22:23-34) and Paul (Acts 23:6-8) sided with the Pharisees against the Sadducees. Instead they taught that death ushered you into a conscious existence into either hell or heaven. They also sided with the Pharisees in teaching that at the end of the world the body that went down into the grave would be resurrected and joined with the departed spirit, either to consciously exist eternally on the new earth, or in the lake of fire (Rev. 20-21).

Take note that Christ preached only two options. He did not believe in purgatory. He did not believe in annihilation. Those who preach a third option (purgatory) or deny the conscious existence of the soul after physical death preach “another gospel” than Jesus.

**Gospel Characteristic #7** – *Just condemnation forever in the lake of fire is the first word of the*

*Gospel – “repent or perish.” No true church of Christ denies that the gospel is in part “good news” of deliverance from an eternal conscious state of punishment in addition “good news” of an eternal home in heaven.*

## **F. Jesus Preached a Gospel of Eternal Security.**

Since Christ satisfied all the demands of the law for us and in our place, we are free from all of its demands and penalties, as they have been paid in full by Christ. He acted as our substitute before God. Hence, the only way that God can condemn us is to charge our substitute with failure to “fulfill” the law of God in our behalf. Since it is impossible for God to find fault with Christ, it is equally impossible for true believers to ever be condemned by the Law of God, as all of its demands have been completely “fulfilled” and paid in full for us by Christ. This is what it means to trust “in Christ” for salvation.

In the verse below, Jesus covers the past, present and future demonstrating that none of those who truly believe on him shall ever be lost:

*Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life. – Jn. 5:24 (emphasis mine)*

The only thing that could take away the present possession of “eternal” life from the believer is if he could come under some future “condemnation” by God. Why does Jesus deny this is possible? It is impossible because He already paid the full condemnation of God for all the sins for all those who trust “in” Him. At the time He died, all our sins were yet in the future from the time of the cross. Hence, if he paid for any he

had to pay for them all since they were all future from the cross.

In the following texts, Jesus denies that any of those given to Him will fail to come to Him, and He demands that of all who come to Him, not a single one will be lost. Why? Because He has “fulfilled’ the Law of God in their behalf:

*All that the Father giveth me **shall come to me**; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father’s will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me **I should lose nothing**, but should raise it up again at the last day. – Jn. 6:37-39*

*No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: **and I will raise him up** at the last day. – Jn. 6:44 (emphasis mine)*

*As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. – Jn. 17:2*

*But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand. I and my Father are one. – Jn. 10:26-30*

However, Jesus warned of false professors among true possessors of eternal life, that he described as “*tares*,” and it is from among such “*tares*” many would fall away from their profession:

*The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but **the tares** are the children of the wicked one; – Mt. 13:38 (emphasis mine)*

*They went out from us, **but they were not of us**; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us. – 1 Jn. 2:19 (emphasis mine)*

Take note that Jesus clearly and explicitly denies that any of those given to Him by the Father will ever be lost. The denial of eternal security for any true believer is the denial of justification by grace, as well as, the declaration that final justification is by our own works. Why? If a true child of God could be lost, it cannot be due to any fault in the Person and works of Christ. Hence, that only leaves our own works as the final basis to condemn true believers in Christ. Hence, denial of eternal security is denial of the very essence of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is the denial that the substitutionary life and works of Jesus Christ satisfied the law of God completely for those who repent and believe in Him. It is a denial that Christ provided a sufficient salvation or a finished work of redemption. It is the essence of the “*accursed*” gospel ministry in Galatians 1:6-9.

**Gospel Characteristic #8** – *Eternal security of the believer is essential to the gospel message of justification by faith without works. Denial of eternal security is not only denying the*



*sufficiency of Christ's redemptive work but it is embracing works as decisive for ultimate justification before God. If salvation is lost it cannot be due to fault found in Christ but fault found in the believer – hence, denial of eternal security is embracing ultimate justification by works. All who deny eternal security preach “another gospel” and are not the true churches of Christ.*

### **G. Jesus preached a Gospel of salvation that is manifested by good works**

*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven. – Mt. 5:16*

*They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham. – Jn. 8:39*

*For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; - Tit. 2:11-12*

A profession of salvation is mere empty words unless it has a changed life to back it up (Jm. 2:14-20).

Although justification by faith is obtained without our works it is a salvation that works, for it is God that “*worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure*” (Philip. 2:13). Although we believe in justification by faith alone, it is not a faith that is alone. There are things that accompany salvation

(Heb. 6:9), such as, a “*new heart*” and a “*new spirit*” (Ezek 36:26-27), that make it work inwardly, as well as, outwardly according to the measure of grace God bestows, in keeping with His purpose for each of his elect (Eph. 2:10; Rom. 12:3,5; Heb. 6:9).

However, don’t confuse the foundation of salvation with the house of good works built upon that foundation (1 Cor. 3:11 with 1 Cor. 3:14-15). Even if all the house of works is condemned on judgment day it is the foundation that ensure the ultimate salvation of the soul (1 Cor. 3:11-15). It is the foundation that determines the difference in whether a house of good works stands or falls (Mt. 7:24-27). Only a perfect sinless life obtains heaven, while our best efforts obtain no more than blessings here and “*rewards*” in heaven. True children of God living in sin, or in a backslidden condition, cannot have assurance of salvation (2 Pet. 1:10) nor can they escape the chastening hand of God (Heb. 12:5-10) nor can they have inner peace or joy, but will be miserable people (Psa. 32). However, such abiding misery is distinguishable proof between disobedient saved persons and lost religious persons.

**Gospel Characteristic #9** – *True gospel salvation is obtained solely by the substitutionary works of Christ without our works but it is not a salvation that does not work because God’s indwelling Spirit accompanies it. There can be no true salvation apart from some measure of discernable progressive sanctification manifest in good works. Those who deny progressive sanctification as the fruit of genuine salvation distort the gospel of Christ and should not be regarded as the true churches of Christ.*

## H. Jesus Preached a Gospel of Divine Election

*All that the Father **giveth me** shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. **For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day.** – Jn. 6:37-39 (emphasis mine)*

*No man can come to me, **except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day** – Jn. 6:44 (emphasis mine)*

*But ye believe not, because **ye are not of my sheep**, as I said unto you. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: – Jn. 10:26 (emphasis mine)*

*As thou hast given him power over **all flesh**, that he should give eternal life to **as many as thou hast given him.** – Jn. 17:2 (emphasis mine)*

*But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because **God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation** through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: – 2 Thes. 2:13 (emphasis mine)*

Salvation was no accident but was by divine purpose, and Jesus made it clear that before the foundation of the world, The Father had chosen a people, and given them to Christ to save.

Their repentance and belief in the gospel reveal that God chose them:

*And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.*  
– Ac. 13:48 (emphasis mine)

*Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God. For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake.* – 1 Thes. 1:4-5 (emphasis mine)

God looked down from heaven to see if there were any of mankind, if left to their own free will, that would choose to seek him and he found not one (Psa. 14:2-3; 53:2-3; with Rom. 3:9-11,20). Hence, in justice he allowed many to freely choose to reject the truth while in grace He chose to save a great number of mankind “through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth” (2 Thes. 2:13). God not only chose those whom He would save but chose the means by which He would save them – through the preaching of the gospel (2 Cor. 3:3-6; 4:4-6; 1 Thes. 1:4-5; James 1:17; etc.).

**Gospel Characteristic #10** – *True Gospel Salvation is not an accident, but is the elective purpose of God before the foundation of the world, which is carried out in time, in connection with preaching the gospel. The elect are made known by the power of the gospel, as the gospel does not come to them in “word only” but in power and in demonstration of the*

*Spirit of God in producing repentance and faith in the gospel*

**Review Questions**

1. Is there more than one Savior, one way, one gospel, one covenant of redemption?
2. What is God's standard of righteousness?
3. If a genuine saved person could lose their salvation, would it be due to fault found in Christ or in that person? Would it be due to good works or bad works? Wouldn't that demand that works are ultimately what justifies person rather than Christ?
4. Does a person need a Savior if he has no need for repentance?
5. Did Jesus conceive of any one that the Father gave him would fail to come and be ultimately saved, according to John 6:37-40?
6. Is baptism inclusive of regeneration or the consequence of regeneration?
7. How is the language of redemption in connection with ceremonial ordinances to be interpreted? Literal or figurative according to Hebrews 10:4 and Luke 5:13-14?
8. Are we saved by faith alone but not by faith that is alone (Eph. 2:10)?

## Summary of the Ten Characteristics of the Gospel of Christ

**Gospel Characteristic #1** – *There is only ONE gospel commissioned until the end of the world and it is the gospel Paul received from Christ and preached. Anyone preaching “another gospel” is accursed. The true churches of Christ preach the Pauline Gospel and all churches that do not are “accursed,” or false churches.*

**Gospel Characteristic #2** - *The gospel Jesus commissioned is the same gospel the prophets before him preached, the same gospel he preached, and there is no other gospel of salvation given unto men, and any other gospel is the “accursed” gospel – Gal. 1:6-9. There is only one gospel for all ages.*

**Gospel Characteristic #3** - *There is only one gospel, and it is about the one, and only way to heaven through Christ. It is “another gospel,” and thus a false gospel, preached by false churches, that heaven can be entered without knowledge of the gospel of Christ.*

**Gospel Characteristic #4** – *Jesus fulfilled/satisfied all the Law’s demands for His people. Justification before God is by grace through faith in Christ alone without our works.*

**Gospel Characteristic #5** – *Where there is no true gospel repentance there can be no true gospel salvation, as there is no need for a Savior or salvation. Where there is no internal change there is no regeneration.*

**Gospel Characteristic #6** – *The gospel of Jesus Christ is the good news of eternal life, now and forever. This truth cannot be denied without denying what is essential to the gospel*

**Gospel Characteristic #7** – *The gospel of Christ began with, repent or perish in eternal agony in the Lake of fire, or repentance and faith with eternal life now, and heaven to come.*

**Gospel Characteristic #8** – *Eternal security of the believer is essential to the gospel message of justification by faith without works. Denial of eternal security is not only denying the sufficiency of Christ's redemptive work, but it is embracing works, as decisive for ultimate justification before God. If salvation is lost, it cannot be due to fault found in Christ, but fault found in the believer – hence, denial of eternal security is embracing ultimate justification by works.*

**Gospel Characteristic #9** – *True gospel salvation is obtained solely by the works of Christ without your works, but it is not a salvation that does not work, because God's Spirit within you accompanies it. The Spirit works in you both to will and to do His good pleasure according to the measure of faith, and grace given you. Any gospel that gives license to sin is not the gospel of Christ.*

**Gospel Characteristic #10** – *True Gospel Salvation is not an accident, but is the elective purpose of God before the foundation of the world, which is carried out in time in*

*connection with preaching the gospel. The elect are made known by the power of the gospel, as the gospel does not come to them in “word only” but in power and in demonstration of the Spirit of God by producing in them repentance and faith in the gospel.*



## II. The Characteristics of the Same Baptism?

*In those days came John The Baptist, preaching  
in the wilderness of Judaea - Mt. 3:1*

**W**hat kind of baptism did Jesus submit to, administer and then commission until the end of the world? There are a variety of baptisms within the realm of professing Christendom today. There are differences in regard to its mode (immersion and/or pouring and/or sprinkling). There are differences in regard to its subject (believers and/or infants). There are differences in regard to its design (public symbolic identification and/or necessary to be saved). There are differences in regard to its proper administrator (New Testament Church administrator or anyone).

### A. It is “Baptist” baptism

It is **Baptist** baptism by designation (Mt. 3:1) but more importantly by characterization. The differences between just getting wet and being baptized are four essential Baptist characteristics.

1. **Right Candidate:** It was administered only to those capable of manifesting fruits of repentance and faith in Christ (Mt. 3:6-8; Acts 19:4). John the Baptist refused to baptize anyone who could not manifest “fruits meet for repentance.” Indeed, he required repentance before he would baptize anyone and thus his baptism was called “*the baptism of repentance.*”
2. **Right Mode:** It was baptism by immersion, as he baptized “*in*” Jordon, and when Jesus “*came up out of the water*” his body was in a position that he could see

The Holy Spirit descending from the sky like a dove upon Him (Mt. 3:14-15). Both pouring and sprinkling have the head looking down, not up. In baptism we are “buried” with him (Rom. 6:5; Col. 2:12). The Greek has terms for sprinkling (*rantizo*), and pouring (*epicheo*), and these terms are found in the New Testament, but never in conjunction with this ordinance. The only Greek term used for this ordinance is **baptizo**, and its historical meaning is to “**dip, plunge, or immerse.**” Its contextual relationships and metaphorical uses harmonize only with immersion.

3. **Right Design:** Baptism is a figure of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Rom. 6:5-6; 1 Pet. 3:21). Immediately after announcing that Jesus was the “*lamb of God*” designed to take away the sin of the world, he claimed that God sent him to baptize in order that the Christ might be made “*manifest*” to Israel (Jn. 1:31). Hence, baptism is designed to manifest Jesus as the slain Lamb, and that is exactly what is pictured in baptism – the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. John refused to baptize those who did not already manifest fruits of repentance (Mt. 3:8), as well as faith in Christ (Acts 19:4). Baptism saves (Mk 16:16) and remits sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16) ceremonially or figuratively (I Pet. 3:21), but not literally or actually (1Cor. 1:17-18).<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> The same redemptive language used in the ceremonial law (“*for sin*” or “*for his cleansing*” – e.g. Lev. 6:26; 9:15; 13:7; 14:23) is used in connection with baptism and yet the scriptures make it clear that such language is never to be interpreted literally (Heb. 10:1, 4). This is illustrated by Jesus in Luke 5:12-14. The leper was instantly healed at the moment Jesus spoke the word but nevertheless Jesus instructed him to go show himself to the priest “*for thy cleansing*”. The ceremonial cleansing by the priest did not obtain healing but declared it and thus it was “*for a testimony*” (Lk. 5:14).

4. **Right Authority:** John was “*sent*” by God to administer this baptism, and Jesus acknowledged that, by submitting to the baptism of John. The Greek term that translates “*sent*” literally means “*authorized representative*,” and it is the verbal form of the noun which is translated “*Apostle*.” An authorized administrator is required (Jn. 1:33). Jesus did not reinvent baptism but continued the baptism He submitted to (Jn. 4:1-2). The authorized administrator of baptism appointed by Christ until the end of this age, is those described as “*ye*” in the Great Commission (Mt. 28:19-20). Therefore, the right authority is a plural “*ye*” of disciples of like faith and order with Jesus Christ in the same gospel, same baptism and observing the same doctrine and practice.

Consequently, the same baptism commissioned by Christ has four absolute and inseparable attributes:

1. **The Right candidate** – professing believer in Christ – (Ac. 19:4)
2. **The Right mode** – immersion only (Rom. 6:5; Col. 2:12)
3. **The Right motive** – declarative of salvation and symbolic of the gospel (Mt. 3:6-8; Acts 2:41-42; Rom. 6:5-6)
4. **The Right administrator** – Church authorized administrator – Jn. 1:33; Mt. 28:19

If you have submitted to something that is contrary to any one of these four “*John the Baptist*” characteristics – you simply got wet and need to be scripturally baptized. Any church that denies any of these four points is not the church of Christ but a false church.

## B. It is a Trinitarian Authorized Baptism

*...baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: – Mt. 28:19b*

One of the primary reasons that many theologians believe that baptism in the commission is not the baptism previously administered by John The Baptist, and by the disciples of Jesus (Jn. 4:1-2), is because, in the commission, it is to be done in the “*name*” of the Trinitarian God. But what does that mean? Does it mean baptism is to be administered by a verbal formula that includes all three Persons of the Godhead or does it mean it is performed by the authority of the Trinitarian God?

In the book of Acts there is not one single account where the Trinitarian formula is repeated as in Matthew 28:19. Every single account of baptism uses different wording:

*...be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ – Ac. 2:38 (emphasis mine)*

*...baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. – Ac. 8:16 (emphasis mine)*

*...baptized in the name of the Lord. – Ac. 10:48 (emphasis mine)*

As you can see there is no consistency in the above references and therefore these variations cannot represent a verbal formula repeated at baptism as suggested by the “Jesus Only” type of Christianity.

To do or say something in someone’s “*name*” simply means to do or speak something as instructed by the one sending or in accordance with their character and person. For example, when Peter and John stood before the Jewish Sanhedrin they were asked:

*And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, By what **power**, or by **what name**, have ye done this? - Ac. 4:7 (emphasis mine)*

They were simply asking, whom are you representing or by whose authority are you acting? To preach or teach or do some kind of action “*in the name of*” God was claiming that you were acting by His authority.

In Acts 2:38; 8:16 and 10:48 the apostles administered baptism as authorized by Christ in Matthew 28:19-20. Hence, the varying phrases of “*Jesus Christ*” or “*the Lord Jesus Christ*” or merely “*the Lord*” simply signify that they administered baptism, as authorized and instructed by Christ in Matthew 28:19. How were they instructed to administer baptism in Matthew 28:19? They were instructed to administer baptism by the authority of the One True God who is Trinitarian in nature.

Did John the Baptist administer baptism by the authority of the One True God who is Trinitarian in Nature? John recognized that the One True God that sent him to Baptize consisted of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost and claimed that his authority to administer baptism originated from that One true Trinitarian God:

*And I knew him not: but he [**the Father**] 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**. – Jn. 1:33-34 (emphasis mine)*

*He [**the Son**] that cometh from above is above all: he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth: he that cometh from heaven is above all....For he whom God hath*

*sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not **the Spirit** by measure unto him. **The Father** loveth **the Son**, and hath given all things into his hand. – Jn. 3:31, 34-35 (emphasis mine)*

John the Baptist recognized all three Person's of the Godhead, as well as, their equality with each other as One God. Jesus claimed to be God the Son in the flesh and claimed that the baptism of John was the "*counsel of God*" and those who submitted to this baptism "justified God."

*And all the people that heard him, and the publicans, **justified God**, being baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him. – Lk. 7:29-30 (emphasis mine)*

When Jesus was asked, by what authority He conducted His ministry, He responded by asking them whether the baptism of John was "*from heaven*" or **from men**. Jesus believed John's baptism originated from and thus was authorized "*from heaven*" rather than "*from men.*" When John the Baptist spoke of the origin of Jesus he said:

*he that cometh **from heaven** is above all – Jn. 3:31(emphasis mine)*

Thus the phrase "*from heaven*" signified that someone or something was sent or authorized by God. Jesus believed that God authorized Baptist baptism.

John the Baptist recognized the One true Triune God and confessed that it was this God that authorized and sent him to administer baptism. Thus he baptized by the authority of the One True Triune God. In the Great Commission we are to

baptize “in the name” or under the authority of the One True Triune God.

Some object by pointing out that we have no record of the exact verbal formula used by John when he baptized and therefore it is an assumption to claim he baptized in the name of the One Triune God. However, neither do we have a single account of any verbal formula used in baptism anywhere else in the scriptures. The varying phrases “*in the name of Jesus Christ*” and “*in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ*” and “*in the name of the Lord*” demonstrate clearly that such is not to be taken as a verbal formula. Rather these varying phrases simply declare they baptized as authorized by Christ in the Great Commission. To baptize in “*the name*” of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost is to baptize by the authority of One God Who is Three Persons in Unity. John baptized by the authority of One God, Who is Three Persons in Unity, and he recognized all Three Persons as the One True God. His baptism is the only baptism authorized by The Father, submitted to by The Son and affirmed by the presence of The Holy Spirit (Mt. 3:16-17; 21:23-25; Jn. 1:33).

### C. John’s Baptism is “Christian” Baptism

Those denominations which reject the Trinity are manifestly false churches but so are all who reject the baptism of John as Christian baptism.

To reject the baptism of John is to reject the only baptism Jesus submitted to, and no true church of Christ rejects Christ’s own baptism as **Christ-ian** baptism.<sup>20</sup> To reject the baptism of

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<sup>20</sup> Some attempt to use Acts 18:24-19:7 to prove that John’s baptism was an inferior transitory baptism that was to be replaced by “Christian” baptism. However, there is no record that Apollos was rebaptized. Further instruction led him to cease his own unauthorized ministry and proceeded to work with and under the authority of N.T. churches from that point on. Those in Acts 19 wrongly believed they had the baptism of John. Proof they did not have

John is to reject the only possible baptism existent when the commission was given, and no true church of Christ rejects the baptism in the Great Commission, as it is commissioned until the end of the world.

In addition to the above arguments are the following indisputable facts. First, all twelve apostles had the baptism of John and there is no record of any of them ever being rebaptized. Second, the qualifications for filling the vacated apostolic office of Judas required a person who had been with them “*from the baptism of John*” (Ac. 1:22-23).

Third, Jesus is said to have “*made and baptized more disciples than John*” (Jn. 4:1-2) and there is no record of any of those being rebaptized anywhere in the Scriptures.

Fourth, Jesus told those who refused to submit to the baptism of John, that they rejected the counsel of God against themselves

To reject the baptism of John is to reject the counsel of God, and no true church of Christ rejects the counsel of God.

*And all the people that heard him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him. – Lk. 7:29-30*

However, if God was going to reject the baptism of John anyway, and commission another baptism within a short three years, then, why submit to a baptism that was going to be regarded invalid by God, by the apostles and by the church? Why not just wait and get it right?

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the baptism of John was the fact they did not know about the Holy Spirit and they did not know that Jesus was the promised Christ – John the Baptist preached both (Ac 19:5 with Mt. 3:11). They had been baptized by an unauthorized administrator.

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## D. It is a Baptism of Repentance

Another reason many object to the baptism of John as the baptism commissioned in Matthew 28:19-20 is because it is called a “*baptism of repentance*.” John refused to baptize anyone who could not manifest fruits of repentance (Mt. 3:6-8). When Jesus gave the Great Commission, he worded it as follows:

*And that **repentance** and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.* – Lk. 24:47 (emphasis mine)

Repentance is the first word of the gospel and baptism always follows repentance and faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ:

*Then Peter said unto them, **Repent**, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ....* – Ac. 2:38 (emphasis mine)

Paul clearly defined the baptism of repentance to be baptism administered to those who had been told to repent and believe on Jesus Christ:

*Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the **baptism of repentance**, saying unto the people, that they should **believe on him** which should come after him, that is, **on Christ Jesus**.* – Ac 19:4 (emphasis mine)

Scriptural baptism is a “*baptism of repentance*” or a baptism for only those who repent and believe the gospel.

## E. It is an Age Long Baptism

When Jesus gave His kind of church the great commission there was no other baptism in existence but the baptism of John. Hence, the baptism in the Great Commission could be no other baptism, as Jesus had “commanded” no other baptism to be administered but John’s (Jn. 4:1-2; Lk. 7:29-30). This was the only existent baptism in the past and therefore could be the only possible baptism administered by His churches “*until the end of the world.*” The first church and apostles understood this to be the case as they required anyone filling the vacated office of Judas to be a person who had been with Christ since “*the baptism of John*” (Acts 1:22). On the day of Pentecost when three thousand received the word they “*were baptized*” (Acts 2:41) in keeping with this commission.

Every gospel reference to the baptism “*with the Spirit*” points forward to Pentecost (Ac 1:5) and every reference after Pentecost points back (Ac 11:15-16).<sup>21</sup> Paul wrote the epistle to the Ephesians long after Pentecost and in it he declared there is now only “*one baptism*” (Eph. 4:5).

Furthermore, the baptism in the Spirit was not a baptism to be administered by men and thus could not be the commissioned baptism that “*ye*” could administer “*until the end of the world.*”

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<sup>21</sup> Every previous house of God was baptized in the Spirit at its origin (Ex. 40:34-35; 2 Chron.7:2-3) never to be repeated, as this was the visible accreditation by God that He approved it as His institutional house. When Peter refers to what happened in the house of Cornelius he directly identifies it with this divine accreditation. Significantly, the nearest reference point of such is “*at the beginning*” or day of Pentecost. This proves that the baptism in the Spirit is not an ongoing repetitive act by the Holy Spirit upon individual believers or else he would have said “*since the beginning.*” A special divine accreditation by God was necessary for the Jewish church members to recognize and baptize Gentile believers on an equal basis in the church at Jerusalem. The baptism in the Spirit is exactly that – divine accreditation that visibly signifies the house of God.

Proper baptism requires the four “**Baptist**” essentials. Churches that deviate from any of these essentials are not churches of Christ, because a scriptural church cannot exist without a properly baptized membership and proper baptism does not exist apart from these four essentials. Did you just get wet or were you scripturally baptized?

### **The Characteristics of the Same Baptism**

**Characteristic #1** – *It is the Baptism of John, the counsel of God, the only baptism Jesus submitted to and administered and commissioned. Churches or denominations that deny this are not true churches of Christ.*

**Characteristic #2** – *It has four Biblical characteristics – a. the right mode – immersion only; b. the right candidate – repentant believer; c. the right design – public symbolic identification with the gospel and church of Christ; d. the right administrator – The Great Commission administrator – N.T. Church. Any so-called baptism that violates even one of these essentials is unscriptural and churches who administer such are not true churches of Christ.*

**Characteristic #3** – *It is administered in the name of the one true Trinitarian God. All churches that deny this are false churches, and not the true churches of Christ.*

**Characteristic #4** – *It is a pre-Pentecost commissioned baptism to be administered until the end of the age. All churches that deny this*

*are false churches and not the true churches of Christ.*

**Characteristic #5** – *It is a baptism of repentance, as it is administered only to those who are repentant believers in Christ.*

Even pedobaptists (baby baptizers) are agreed that where there is no scriptural baptism there can be no scriptural church. One of the greatest Pedobaptist theologians freely confessed:

*All parties are agreed, that baptism is the initiatory rite which gives membership in the visible church of Christ. . .baptism recognizes and constitutes the outward discipleship. Now if all other forms of baptism than immersion are not only irregular, but null and void, all unimmersed persons are out of the visible church. But if each and every member of a pedobaptist visible church is thus unchurched: of course the whole body is unchurched. All pedobaptist societies, then, are guilty of an intrusive error, where they pretend to the character of a visible church of Christ... it is hard to see how any intelligent and conscientious immersionist can do any act, which countenances or sanctions this profane intrusion. They (immersionists) should not allow any weak inclinations of fraternity and peace to sway their consciences in this point of high principle. . .they are bound, then, not only to practice close communion, but to refuse all ministerial recognition and communion to those intruders. . .the enlightened immersionist should treat all these societies, just as he does that synagogue of Satan. . .there may be many good,*

*misguided believers in them [pedobaptist churches], but no church character, ministry of sacraments whatever.* - R. L. Dabney: **Lectures in Systematic Theology**; Zondervan Publishing House; Grand Rapids, 1972, pp. 774, 775.

(Robert L. Dabney [1820-1898] was considered the greatest Southern Presbyterian theologian in America after the Civil War. He served as professor of church history and polity at Union Seminary from 1859- 1883 and was moderator of the Southern Presbyterian General Assembly in 1870)

### Review Questions

1. What are four scriptural prerequisites for baptism?
2. Why is it called a “*baptism of repentance*”?
3. Did Christ, or any of the apostles get rebaptized?
4. What baptism is found in the Great Commission?
5. Can there be a true New Testament church were there is no baptism?
6. How is the language of redemption when associated with ceremonial ordinances to be interpreted? Literal or figurative?

### III. The Characteristics of the Same Faith?

*Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever  
I have commanded you: – Mt. 28:20a*

**W**hat are professed churches of Christ responsible to teach their members to believe and practice? Within the professing realm of Christendom there is absolute confusion and division over the answer to that question. However, it is clear from the Great Commission that Christ provided boundaries that limit the answer to that question – “*whatsoever I have commanded.*”

#### A. Jesus gave the Church a specific body of doctrine – Acts 2:42

On the day of Pentecost, Luke records that the Apostles already had a complete body of doctrine, as he says:

*And they continued stedfastly in **the apostles’ doctrine** and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. – Ac. 2:42 (emphasis mine)*

The phrase “*the apostle’s doctrine*” obviously includes everything they put into practice in Acts 2:41-42. It is the apostolic pattern of faith and practice. Later, there would arise from within professing Christendom opposing doctrines and practices that would develop into a variety of different patterns of faith and practice and thus lead believers away from “*the faith*” once delivered. Paul warns of this when he says,

*Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall **depart from the faith,***

*giving heed to seducing spirits, and **doctrines of devils**;- 1 Tim. 4:1*

The above text should be carefully considered. The words “*the faith*” are put in direct contrast to the words “*doctrines of devils.*” This demonstrates that the words “*the faith*” have reference to a body of true doctrine in opposition to doctrines of “*devils.*” This body of doctrine was delivered by Christ to the apostles in Matthew 28:20, and then delivered to churches by the apostles, or what Luke calls “*the apostle’s doctrine*” in Acts 2:42 above.

Furthermore, Paul is not merely referring to the doctrines that comprise elementary salvation when he says some shall “*depart from the faith.*” Lost people may depart from a profession of salvation but saved people cannot depart from elementary salvation. However, truly saved people can be led by seducing spirits to teach and believe such doctrines as forbidding to marry or forbidding certain foods. But one cannot embrace either of these doctrines without “*departing from the faith.*” Why? “*The faith*” has reference to the pattern of essential apostolic doctrine and practice. Forbidding to eat certain foods is an essential of the **Levitical system of doctrine and practice** which is in direct contrast to the pattern of essential apostolic doctrine and practice. Forbidding to marry is in direct contrast to the pattern of essential apostolic doctrine and practice.

Therefore, “*the faith*” is inclusive of much more than mere gospel truths. Some may object to this conclusion because Jude uses the phrase “*common salvation*” as an apparent synonym for “*the faith*” (Jude 3):

*Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of **the common salvation**, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for **the faith** which*

*was once delivered unto the saints.* – Jude 3  
(emphasis mine)

However, a mere cursory reading of Jude demonstrates that more is involved than elementary salvation. For example the “*gainsaying of Korah*” goes far beyond mere elementary salvation. When salvation is regarded in its broadest sense (past, present, future tenses, or election, regeneration, justification, progressive sanctification, glorification, etc.) it is inclusive of all aspects of ecclesiology as well. The doctrine of the New Testament Church and its ordinances are part of progressive sanctification.

The words “*the common salvation*” refers to the whole pattern of essential apostolic doctrine and practice that was delivered to them by Christ in Matthew 28:19-20. Evidence for this is that Jude uses the aorist tense.<sup>22</sup> The aorist tense sees this delivery as a completed action at some particular point in the past. This cannot refer to the delivery of the Scriptures, as the scriptures were not yet completed when Jude wrote this. None of John’s epistles, or the book of Revelation, was written when Jude wrote this.

The only point in the past where the Scriptures define a specific delivery point is Matthew 28:20. Moreover, Jude uses the same common phrase used by Luke in the book of Acts for the essential apostolic doctrine and practice – “the faith.” The first time this designation “*the faith*” is found in the Scriptures is in Acts 6:7

*And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to **the faith**.* – Ac. 6:7 (emphasis mine)

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<sup>22</sup> The word “delivered” translates the first Aorist passive participle.



Luke provides a clear line of reasoning for interpreting what he means by “*the faith*” in the book of Acts before it occurs in Acts 6:7. This thought process begins in Acts 2:41-42 where three thousand had received the preaching of the Gospel, and were baptized and were “*added*” unto them. The word “*added*” is used consistently from this point forward to summarize the process spelled out in Acts 2:41-42, which is the Great Commission process:

*Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord **added** to the church daily such as should be saved. Ac. 2:47 (emphasis mine)*

*And believers were the more **added** to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women. Ac. 5:14 (emphasis mine)*

However, the numbers became so great that Luke shifted from the word “*added*” to using the word “*multiplied*.”

*And in those days, when the number of the disciples was **multiplied**, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations. – Ac. 6:1 (emphasis mine)*

*And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples **multiplied** in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to **the faith**. - Ac. 6:7 (emphasis mine)*

In all these cases, people were “*added*” to the church in Jerusalem exactly as first spelled out in Acts 2:41-42. The terms “*added*” and “*multiplied*” were but summary expressions

of this Great Commission pattern. However, obedience to this Great Commission pattern is now for the first time introduced in Acts 6:7, as being “*obedient to the faith.*” Why? The reason is that those under consideration are “the priests” who formerly were obedient to the Mosaic system of worship in the Jewish temple. However, there is a new temple, a new house of God – the church, and now they have forsaken the old system of worship and embracing the new system of Worship, as expressed in the Great Commission, and as it is spelled out in Acts 2:41-42. Hence, the first usage of “the faith” in Acts 6:7 refers to that pattern first spelled out in Acts 2:41-42 in direct opposition to the former Levitical pattern.

After Acts 6:7 the phrase “*the faith*” becomes the synonym for expressing the pattern of apostolic doctrine and practice. If you replace the terms “the faith” with “the pattern of apostolic doctrine and practice” you have its meaning in the following scriptures.

*Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in **the faith**, [the pattern of apostolic doctrine and practice] and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God. – Ac. 14:22 (emphasis mine)*

*And so were the churches established in **the faith**, [the pattern of apostolic doctrine and practice] and increased in number daily. – Ac. 16:5 (emphasis mine)*

*By whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to **the faith** [the pattern of Apostolic doctrine and practice] among all nations, for his name: - Rom. 1:5 (emphasis mine)*

*Him that is weak in **the faith** [the pattern of Apostolic doctrine and practice] receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations. – Rom. 14:1 (emphasis mine)*

*But they had heard only, That he which persecuted us in times past now preacheth **the faith** [the pattern of apostolic doctrine and practice] which once he destroyed. – Gal. 1:23 (emphasis mine)*

*Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in **the faith**, [the pattern of Apostolic doctrine and practice] as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving. - Col 2:7 (emphasis mine)*

*Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from **the faith**, [the pattern of Apostolic doctrine and practice] giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; - 1 Tim. 4:1 (emphasis mine)*

*I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept **the faith**: [the pattern of Apostolic doctrine and practice] - 2 Tim. 4:7 (emphasis mine)*

*This witness is true. Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in **the faith**; [the pattern of Apostolic doctrine and practice] - Tit. 1:13 (emphasis mine)*

*Whom resist stedfast in **the faith**, [the pattern of Apostolic doctrine and practice] knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your*

*brethren that are in the world.* – 1 Pet. 5:9  
(emphasis mine)

However, it is true that the words, “*the faith*,” are not always used in the New Testament for the pattern of Apostolic doctrine and practice embraced and practiced by New Testament churches. In contexts where the fruits of the Spirit are the subject, it refers merely to the character of “faith” as opposed to doubt or in distinction to other fruit of the Spirit. In contexts where salvation alone is the subject, “*the faith*” refers to possessing faith in the essential truths of the gospel.

However, in contexts where Apostolic doctrine and teaching of the church is the subject, the terms “*the faith*” and its synonyms refer to the pattern of Apostolic doctrine and practice or body of doctrine or system of faith delivered in the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20, and as further elaborated and defended by the apostles.

Paul uses other synonyms for this system of faith. These synonyms highlight different emphasis of this system of faith. For example, it is sometimes referred to as “*the doctrine*” when emphasis is upon the doctrinal content. The doctrine of Christ which he delivered to the Apostles was in direct contrast to the system of faith or doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees:

*Then understood they how that he bade them not  
beware of the leaven of bread, but of **the  
doctrine** of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.*  
– Mt. 16:12 (emphasis mine)

The Lord Jesus had a system of faith or doctrine that he taught his disciples which included not only essential truths that characterize salvation but truths that characterize acceptable service as well:

*If any man will do his will, he shall know of **the doctrine**, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself. – Jn. 7:17 (emphasis mine)*

*Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at **the doctrine** of the Lord. [the pattern of Apostolic doctrine and practice] – Ac. 13:12 (emphasis mine)*

*Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to **the doctrine** [the pattern of Apostolic doctrine and practice] which ye have learned; and avoid them. – Rom. 16:17 (emphasis mine)*

*Take heed unto thyself, and unto **the doctrine** [the pattern of Apostolic doctrine and practice]; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee. – 1 Ti 4:16 (emphasis mine)*

*If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to **the doctrine** [the pattern of Apostolic doctrine and practice] which is according to godliness; - 1Tim. 6:3 (emphasis mine)*

*Not purloining, but shewing all good fidelity; that they may adorn **the doctrine** of God our Saviour [the pattern of Apostolic doctrine and practice] in all things. – Tit. 2:10 (emphasis mine)*

In contexts that deal with the manner of how this system of faith was delivered to the churches it is called “***the tradition.***”

There are bad traditions (Mt. 15) and there are good traditions. The term “*tradition*” translates a Greek word that simply means “things handed down.”

*Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after **the tradition** [the pattern of Apostolic doctrine and practice] which he received of us. – 2 Thes. 3:6 (emphasis mine)*

*Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold **the traditions** [the pattern of Apostolic doctrine and practice] which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle. – 2 Thes. 2:15 (emphasis mine)*

In contexts where the veracity of what is handed down is emphasized it is called “***the truth***.”

*But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of **the truth** [the pattern of Apostolic doctrine and practice]. – 1 Tim. 3:15 (emphasis mine)*

*In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of **the truth** [the pattern of Apostolic doctrine and practice]; - 2 Tim. 2:25(emphasis mine)*

*Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of **the truth** [the pattern of Apostolic*

doctrine and practice]. – 2 Tim. 3:7 (emphasis mine)

*Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning **the faith** [the pattern of Apostolic doctrine and practice]. – 2 Tim. 3:8*

*And they shall turn away their ears from **the truth** [the pattern of Apostolic doctrine and practice], and shall be turned unto fables. – 2 Tim. 4:4 (emphasis mine)*

The Apostles at first orally transmitted the Doctrine of Christ from church to church. As this system of faith came under attack, the Apostles then responded in written defense of it. This written defense was later collected by the churches and is now what constitutes the New Testament Scriptures. However, contained in the New Testament Scriptures are much more than the original apostolic doctrine. There are biographical details, cultural details, geographic details, and personal details, in addition to doctrinal teaching, that comprise the New Testament Scriptures. However, “*the doctrine*” has direct reference to those things in the New Testament that define and determine teachings and practices essential to the character and pattern of New Testament Christianity as distinguished from other world religions and predicted apostasy.

## **B. The Absolute Essential doctrines and Practices**

Even a casual reading of the New Testament will reveal that the Scriptures place more emphasis upon some doctrines and practices than others. Dr. John MacArthur notes:

*All who call themselves Christian should agree that there is a body of doctrine that is non-negotiable. The articles of faith that make up this constitutional body of truth are the very essence of “the faith” which was delivered to the saints. They are doctrines so indispensable to true Christianity that we ought to break fellowship with those who profess Christianity but who deny them (2 Cor. 6:14-17).....The fundamentals of the faith are so closely identified with Christ that the apostle John used the expression “the teaching of Christ” as a kind of shorthand for the set of doctrines he regarded as fundamental. To him, these doctrines represented the difference between true Christianity and false religion.<sup>23</sup>*

All Scripture is important and essential, but yet, there are some things that one “*must*” believe in order to be saved, and there are some things that one “*must*” practice in order to serve God acceptably. On the other hand, there are other things of Christian liberty, and things concerning which good men may differ without being considered heretics. How do we distinguish the essential from the relatively non-essential? The command to “*contend for*” the faith is mute unless we can define the essential characteristics that make up “*the faith*” once delivered. The command to “*contend for*” the faith is also a point of division and confusion if we are not able to rightly define what is essential versus relatively non-essential. We cannot contend for something we cannot define.

There are three basic principles to help us discern every essential of the faith:

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<sup>23</sup> John MacArthur, **Reckless Faith**. Crossway Books, Wheaton, IL., 1994, pp. 106-107, 114



1. **The Non-Negotiable:** Whatever the Bible explicitly demands or necessarily infers to be non-negotiable must be regarded as absolutely essential.
2. **The Unique Game Changers:** Whatever is essential to distinguish New Testament Christianity from other world religions and from predicted apostate Christianity must be regarded as absolutely essential.
3. **The Preservers:** Whatever doctrine and practice necessary to preserve the above two principles must be regarded as essential.

### C. The Non-Negotiable

What is meant by **non-negotiable**? You cannot negotiate with a person who says it is my way or the highway! Such a person offers no other alternatives but his. There are things in God's Word that are explicitly said to be non-negotiable with no other options. Those doctrines and practices that are non-negotiable are fairly easy to identify. There is clear and explicit or implicit non-negotiable language attached to them.

1. They are the "*must*" doctrines and practices of the Scriptures ("*must*" – Jn. 3:7) that are given no alternatives (Lk. 13:3; Isa. 8:20).
2. They are those doctrines numerically limited ("*one*" God, baptism, Eph. 4:4-5, etc.).
3. They are those doctrines the Bible absolutely prohibits denial of (Gal. 1:8-9; 2 Jn. 9-11; etc.)
4. They are doctrines that by necessary inference cannot be denied without also denying other essential doctrines and practices (e.g., the Trinity, etc.).

5. They are those doctrines and practices that are essential to identify and distinguish the true God, true salvation and true service from the false.
6. All such doctrines and practices also have non-negotiable characteristics

#### **D. The Unique Game Changers**

There are doctrines and practices which are essential to distinguish Christianity from all other world religions and from all predicted **apostate and perverted forms of Christianity**. Without these essentials, Biblical Christianity could not be recognized or distinguished from any other world religion nor could it be distinguished from predicted **apostate Christianity**.

1. All Non-Negotiable listed above
2. The Biblical prediction, character and source of Apostate Christianity – Acts 20:29-30; 1 Tim. 4:1-5; 1 Jn. 4:1; Gal. 1:8-9; 2 Cor. 11:2-3; Rev. 17-18; Jn. 16:1-3; etc.

#### **E. The Preservers**

There are three essentials that must be embraced in order to preserve all the essentials listed above:

1. The Inspiration and final authority of the Scriptures – the word of truth – Isa. 8:20; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:19-21
2. The Age long Great Commission – the continuing reproduction of essential New Testament faith and order – the continued Practice of truth – Mt. 28:19-20; Jude 3

3. The New Testament Church and ordinances - the essential defender and guardian of truth – the pillar and ground of the truth.– 1 Tim. 3:15; Mt. 16:18; Eph. 3:21

Significantly, every essential doctrine found in all three of the above categories is defined by non-negotiable characteristics. For example, in Galatians 1:6 the non-negotiable gospel is also characterized as the gospel of “*grace*” and grace is defined in the Scriptures in equally non-negotiable terms (Rom. 11:6). Another non-negotiable characteristic of the gospel is its restriction to **one way** (Mt. 7:12-13; Jn. 14:6) with no other alternative ways but “*destruction*” (Mt. 7:12). The same can be shown concerning the unique game changers or the preservers. All of these have non-negotiable characteristics that make them essential.

#### **F. Why is it important to know the essentials of “the faith”?**

1. You cannot “*contend for*” what you cannot define – Jd. 3.
2. You cannot determine who is qualified to be ordained to the ministry if you cannot define the essentials of the faith – Tit. 1:9,13; 1 Tim. 3:9; 2 Tim. 2:2.
3. You cannot determine what it means to “*depart from the faith*” if you cannot define the faith (1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Thes. 3:6; Rom. 16:17).
4. You cannot determine true from false churches if you cannot define the faith (1 Tim. 3:15).
5. You cannot know if you have “*kept the faith*” if you cannot define the faith (2 Tim. 4:7).

**Conclusion:** These three types of essentials (non-negotiable, Unique game changers, Preservation) define the contents of “*the faith*” once delivered which in turn define *the pattern of Apostolic doctrine and practice*. Truly saved people can depart from some essential aspects of the pattern of Apostolic doctrine and practice or “the faith” and not be lost people. Every aspect of the Great Commission can be defined and distinguished from **another** gospel, **another** baptism and **another** faith and order. Truly saved people are members in many professed Christian churches that embrace **another** gospel and/or **another** baptism and thus **another** faith and order. Such churches must be regarded as apostate churches or to say it another way they must be regarded as perverted and thus unauthorized systems of faith and practice. Just apply the above Biblical characteristics to churches and ministries in order to eliminate the apostate ones.

### Review Questions

1. What words found in the New Testament represent the **pattern of essential apostolic doctrine and practice**.
2. What is the significance of the repeated phrases “*added unto*” and “*multiplied*” in reference to Acts 2:41-42?
3. What three basic principles help define the essential characteristics of “*the faith*” once delivered?
4. What three foundational essentials are necessary to preserve “*the faith*” until the end of the age?
5. Can true children of God be found in such apostate systems of faith and practice (Rev. 18:4)?

## Chapter Three

### UNDERSTANDING CHURCH HISTORY

#### I. Inspired Church History – The New Testament

**I**n Matthew 28:19-20 Jesus defines the meaning of a **disciple**. In the book of Acts and in the following epistles the term **disciple** should be understood according to His definition. A disciple by His definition is a baptized believer, existing in an observing church condition. The only exception to this definition is when this term is found in contexts that would clearly indicate otherwise. For example, a clear exception to this definition would be contexts that indicate that false or invalid disciples are under discussion (e.g. Acts 19:1-3).

Did the Church at Jerusalem obey this commission and make such disciples? Some believe that the third aspect of the Great Commission (assembled observing state) during the period of Acts 8-11 was not observed in some instances. They cite cases where some were baptized but not added to an assembly or where there is no mention of baptism or an assembly. However, silence cannot be used to argue against clear precepts and examples. Moreover, contrary examples cannot be used to contradict clear precepts and examples. We can find many examples of disobedience in the scriptures to many commands, but examples of disobedience never overturn clear precepts and/or consistent examples as the rule for practice.

We believe the following three principles characterize the book of Acts:

1. The church at Jerusalem obeyed the Great Commission exactly as Christ gave it to them and this is clearly and unambiguously spelled

out in no uncertain terms right from the beginning.

2. Reasons for all departures and disruptions from this pattern of practice are clearly and explicitly provided by the context.
3. Such disruptions or departures are clearly corrected by apostolic churches.

In this chapter we will address these issues by answering three questions: First, did Apostolic Christianity obey the Commission as instructed? Second, are there any departures or incomplete examples, and are they clearly stated? And last, how did the church respond to such departures?

### **A. Did Apostolic Christianity Obey the Commission?**

The book of Acts opens with Christ commanding them to wait in Jerusalem until they were empowered by the coming of the Holy Spirit for the purpose of carrying out the Commission (Acts 1:5-8). Immediately, upon being empowered by the Spirit, Luke shows that the commission was obeyed step by step from the beginning.

*Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers....added to the church. – Ac 2:41-42,46.*

Now compare the above with the logical procedure and aspects of the Great Commission:

1. “go” (with the gospel) - ”*received the word*”
2. “*baptizing them*” - “*were baptized*”
3. Gathered for instruction - “*added unto them*”
4. “*Teaching them*” - “*continued steadfastly in the apostles doctrine*”

Right from the very start, Luke very clearly and very carefully spells out in no uncertain terms that the church at Jerusalem obeyed this commission. Moreover, Luke uses the grammatical periphrastic construct to clearly establish before the eyes of the reader that this was not a one-time thing but the continuing practice or pattern followed by the church at Jerusalem. The words “*continued steadfastly*” in our KJV represent a grammatical construction consisting of two verbs. These verbs denote that what was a continuous action in the past (imperfect tense) was also a continuous action right up to the present time of writing (present tense). The natural implication of this grammatical construction shows that what they began to practice on the day of Pentecost (imperfect tense) they continued (present tense) as a pattern of practice with this church. Hence, this was their ongoing pattern of practice with new converts.

Secondly, Instead of repeating the whole process in Acts 2:41-42 verbatim each time members were “*added*” to the church from this point forward, Luke summarizes this pattern of practice by simply repeating the term “*added*” as first used in Acts 2:41.

*Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were **added** unto them about three thousand souls. – Ac. 2:41 (emphasis mine)*

*Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord **added** to the church daily*

*such as should be saved.* – Ac. 2:47 (emphasis mine)

*And believers were the more **added** to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.* – Ac. 5:14 (emphasis mine)

Notice that “added unto them” is synonymous with the words “*added to the church*” as well as “*added to the Lord.*” When the numbers got too large to count, or to be “*added*” up, he changes from addition to multiplication (“*they were multiplied*”).

*And in those days, when the number of the disciples was **multiplied**, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration.* – Ac. 6:1 (emphasis mine)

*And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples **multiplied** in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to **the faith**.* –Ac.6:7 (emphasis mine)

That such additions and multiplications were not to be thought of as something separate and distinct from church membership is clearly demonstrate when Luke brings both the mathematical terms and the church together in one passage:

*Then had **the churches** rest throughout all Judea 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**.* – Ac. 9:31 (emphasis mine)



*For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was **added** unto the Lord. Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul: And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. - Ac. 11:24-26 (emphasis mine)*

The summary terms “*added*” or “*multiplied*” contextually refer back to the procedure spelled out in Acts 2:41-42 which always concludes with church membership. This same pattern of obedience to the Commission can be seen clearly by the authorized missionary endeavors of the second great church found in the book of Acts – the church at Antioch in Acts 13-18:

1. The Church at Antioch ordains Paul and Silas as church missionaries – Acts 14:1-3 (“*sent*” – v. 2)
2. These ordained missionaries are sent out to preach the gospel – Acts 14:3-19
3. They baptize the converted – Acts 16:15, 33; 18:8; 19:5
5. They organize them into churches – Acts 14:20-23
6. The churches continue in the apostle’s doctrine – Acts 14:20-23; 16:1-4
7. They return and report to their sending church – Acts 14:26-27; 18:22
8. They submit to the authority of the sending church – Acts 15:1-3<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> A.T. Robertson says of Acts 15:2-3 – “The brethren appointed (etaxan). “The brethren” can be supplied from verse 1 and means the church in Antioch. The church clearly saw that the way to remove this deadlock between the Judaizers and Paul and Barnabas was to consult the church in Jerusalem to which the Judaizers belonged. Paul and Barnabas had won in Antioch. If they can win in Jerusalem, that will settle the matter. The

The church at Antioch did not ordain Paul to be an apostle but they did ordain him as their missionary and “*sent*” him forth (v. 3). The Holy Spirit confirmed what the Church did and thus they were “*sent*” out by the Holy Spirit (v. 4) through the instrumentality of the church as church authorized representatives.<sup>25</sup>

Therefore, the Great Commission pattern is the ordinary and normal practice by the two great Churches in the book of Acts. Should you expect any other rule of practice from the churches of Christ other than what Christ commissioned them to do and how Christ commissioned them to do it?

**B. Are there departures, and if so, are there clearly stated reasons given?**

Some object to such a standard rule of practice because of certain things recorded in Acts 8-11. What about the Samaritans, the Ethiopian Eunuch, Ananais and those believers in Antioch in Acts 8-11? Do not these events prove that the Great Commission does not necessarily conclude with church membership?

The book of Acts makes three things very clear. First, the normal and standard practice of the Jerusalem church as well as the church at Antioch was to obey the Great Commission as given by Christ which includes gospel conversion, baptism, and habitual assembling together of the baptized as an

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Judaizers will be answered in their own church for which they are presuming to speak. **The verb *etaxan* (tassw, to arrange) suggests a formal appointment by the church in regular assembly.**” – emphasis mine

<sup>25</sup> Those laying hands on Saul and Silas acted by approval of the whole church as Acts 15:40 distinctly declares that “*the brethren*” had “*recommended*” them unto this work and they reported back to “*the church.*” They were being ordained as authorized church missionaries.

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observing church. Second, the writer of Acts 8-11 indicates clearly that the departure from the normal observance of all the Great Commission particulars was due to a clearly spelled out disruption in the church at Jerusalem rather than to a change in understanding of their standard practice. The disruption was a particular persecution by Saul. Acts 8 introduces this persecution and Acts 11 closes with the mention of this particular cause of disruption.

*And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles. – Ac. 8:1*

*Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only. – Ac. 11:19*

Thus, the entire section is encapsulated by this clearly stated problem. There can be no doubt that Luke spells out clearly that this was a disruption of the normal condition and practice at the church in Jerusalem. Some scholars contend that this persecution was sent by God for the purpose of motivating the Jewish Jerusalem church to obey the commission by going beyond the boundaries of Israel. They note that the term “*scattered*” is not the Greek term that denotes a disorganized scattering as when someone throws a rock into a chicken pen and the chickens run in every direction. Rather, this is the Greek term that is used for intentional sowing of seed in a field. Furthermore, this idea gains support from the fact that the leadership of the church does not scatter but remain in Jerusalem. Thirdly, the consistent grammatical gender, used to

describe those “*scattered*” preaching the gospel, is masculine; and in particular, the term that excludes women and children is used (Gr. *anar* – Acts 11:19). Fourthly, Luke provides an example of such preachers in the case of Philip (Acts 8) who is a church ordained man (Acts 6). Tradition holds that even Ananias in Damascus was the first ordained Pastor of the church in Damascus.<sup>26</sup> Ordained men were involved in the gathering of every church recorded in the New Testament. Silence should not be used to contradict what is commonly spelled out clearly in all other cases.

### C. How did the Church Respond to Such Disruptions?

Luke makes it clear that the church at Jerusalem was monitoring its missionaries and responded to any needs. Whenever such cases came to the ears of the church at Jerusalem they dispatched authorized representatives to investigate and oversee the mission endeavors of its members:

*Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they **sent** unto them Peter and John: - Ac. 8: 14 (emphasis mine)*

*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*

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<sup>26</sup> Ananias is explicitly described as a “*certain disciple*” (Acts 9:10) and therefore must have been a baptized church member as defined by Matthew 28:19-20. Acts 9:31 notes there were plural “*churches*” existing besides the one at Jerusalem at this time. He is separated from the rest of the “*disciples*”(Ac. 9:19) in Damascus of whom he assembled with (“*Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus*”- Ac. 9:19) and the inference is he is the ordained leader of those disciples.

*Antioch. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch. – Ac. 11:22 (emphasis mine)*

The term “sent” translates a Greek term that means “an authorized representative.”<sup>27</sup> This is the verbal form for the term translated “*apostle*” and an apostle was an ordained representative of Christ. This verb form was used for those “sent” out under the authority of the church. Notice that the church is the one sending Barnabas out and limiting the extent of his mission (“*that he should go as far as...*”). Here is the clear implication of limited authority by the sending church.

Luke clearly shows in the Book of Acts that departures from normal Great Commission procedures were not left undone, but that the Church at Jerusalem followed up such cases as they came to their attention.

Hence, the church at Jerusalem was committed to the Great Commission pattern and monitored any deviance from that pattern by sending out authorized representatives to ensure Christ’s commission was obeyed in every particular.

Whenever questionable news came back to the ears of the church, they authorized and sent someone to investigate it; and what followed in each case is the mention of “*churches*” or a “*church*” as the result.

*Then had **the churches** rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and*

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<sup>27</sup> This is a compound word that Moulton and Milligan say “*For the common Bibl. Meaning “commission”*”. In regard to the verb root they say that it “*.....may illustrate the frequent NT sense of ‘commissioning’*” - James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, **The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament**, (Erdmann’s Pub, Grand Rapids, MI, reprint 1980), pp.69, 222

*in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied. – Ac. 9:31 (emphasis mine)*

*And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with **the church**, and taught much people. And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with **the church**, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch. – Ac. 11:23-26 (emphasis mine)*

Hence, the disruption from completing the Great Commission is rectified and Acts 11-18 returns to the normal preaching, baptizing, and gathering into churches. What else should one expect other than attempted compliance with the Great Commission??? Therefore, Acts 1-8 and 13-18 demonstrate clearly that the rule of action was obedience to the Great Commission in all of its particulars as spelled out in Acts 2:41-42.

The question to those who would argue contrary to what Luke spells out in Acts 2:41-42 is *why would you think the early Christians would want to disobey any particular of the Great Commission?* Why take an obvious disruption, and thus an exception to the rule of practice in the book of Acts and attempt to make it the rule? Shouldn't it be expected that the early Christians would obey the Great Commission in all of its particulars? Shouldn't it be expected during a time of obvious disruption that the first church would attempt to follow up and confirm the due gospel order among such disciples? Does not the case of the Ethiopian Eunuch and baptism demonstrate that silence should not be used to prove disobedience to the commission but rather obedience?

There is nothing recorded concerning Philip telling the Ethiopian Eunuch anything about baptism and yet we find him asking to be baptized. Does silence constitute a rule here?

And why would Philip tell him about his need to obey baptism but not the final aspect of the commission as well? You say the text does not say so! Neither does it say that Philip instructed him previously about baptism either! Why wouldn't the church at Jerusalem follow up this case by sending someone to complete the commission work as they did in Samaria and all along the way up to Antioch? If one is going to make an assumption on silence, it is far better to assume a conclusion that is in keeping with what we are explicitly told is their commission and their practice, rather than something contrary to it. The fact that Luke records the case of the Ethiopian Eunuch is proof that his case was known to the church at Jerusalem, even as the church knew of the case at Samaria.

The book of Acts demonstrates clearly that under normal uninterrupted circumstances, membership into a church is the direct and immediate result of obedience to the Great Commission. The book of Acts demonstrates clearly that under abnormal and interrupted conditions it was the practice of the church to follow up any case of which they were uncertain, cases that did not seem to conform to all aspects of the commission. Whatever abnormalities came to their ears (Ac. 8:14; 11:20), they followed it up. And churches were always the result of such follow-ups (Ac. 9:31; 11:26).

There is connection of authority between the church at Jerusalem and the church at Antioch. Barnabas is "*sent*" by the church at Jerusalem with a limited commission "*as far as Antioch.*" Those who preached all along the way up to Antioch were baptized male members in the church at Jerusalem.<sup>28</sup> In

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<sup>28</sup> The day of Pentecost was one of the three great annual feasts that required all Jewish men and proselytes (Eunuch) to be present in Jerusalem. It was this kind of Jews who were saved on Pentecost (Acts 2:7-11) and trained (Acts 2:42). They continued in the church at Jerusalem all the way up to chapter 8-11. Of this kind were the seven deacons (Acts 6:5) and of this kind was Saul "of Tarsus" and those assemblies in Jerusalem at which Stephen entered into debate (Acts 6:9-8:1). It was these kind of believers

Acts 11:22-30 it is clear that when Barnabas came upon the scene in Antioch that there was no leader, no teacher among these believers as he gathered them around himself and instructed them. They were not called “*disciples*” nor were they called a “church” until after Barnabas gathered them around himself and began to teach them. Saul had previously “*joined*” the church at Jerusalem (Ac. 9:26, 28) and had been “*sent*” by the church to Tarsus (Ac. 9:30). Take particular notice to the phrase “*with them coming in and going out*” in Acts 9:28 in comparison with the phrase “went in and out among us” in Acts 1:21. These phrases clearly indicate Saul was in church membership activity. Barnabas saw that the job of teaching these believers was too great for one man and went and got Saul to help him carry out the third aspect of the commission. Barnabas and Saul completed the unfinished work of the Great Commission among these believers by “teaching them to observe all things whatsoever” Christ had commanded.

In conclusion, Apostolic Christianity obeyed the Great Commission in all of its particulars. Church membership completes the discipleship process. Wherever obedience comes short of the whole commission, those exceptions are dealt with by New Testament churches, so that they eventually conform to that end, resulting in church membership.

Those who interpret cases in Acts 8-11 to be contrary to the explicit command of the commission, and contrary to church authority, do so by assumption and silence alone. Conclusions based upon silence and assumption can never be valid when they are in direct contradiction to explicit preceding precepts and consistent examples.

Dr. T.G. Jones was the vice president of the board of trustees of the Louisville Southern Baptist Theological Seminary at the time when William H. Whitsitt was its

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that Saul went after to persecute and it were these kind that were sent as preachers back to their home (Acts 11:19) of which kind Phillip is given as an example.

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president. Jones was also chosen as the president of Mercer University in Georgia and another time was chosen to be the president of Wake Forrester College in North Carolina. He declined both offers. He also wrote a book defending Baptist History. In that book he claimed that the Great Commission as given in Matthew 28:19-20 was a process that not only included authority to constitute churches but obedience of this commission would conclude in the constitution of churches. He said:

*In this simple analysis of the commission is presented the very process by which Baptists are now made, **constituted into churches**, and governed. That it was the process by which the first preachers made converts, and **constituted churches**, is beyond question.* - T. G. Jones, **The Baptists, their Origin, Continuity, Principles, Spirit, Policy, Position, and Influence, a Vindication.** (Philadelphia, American Baptist Publication Society) p. 27. (emphasis mine)

### Review Questions

1. Did the Church at Jerusalem practice all aspects of the Great Commission?
2. What does the repeated terms “*added*” and “*multiplied*” after Acts 2:41-42 refer to?
3. Did the church at Jerusalem follow up Philip’s work in Samaria?

4. Did the church at Jerusalem follow up the preaching of its male members at Antioch?
5. In any of these follow-ups does the term **disciple(s)** or **church** precede the follow up?
6. Did the church at Antioch practice the Great Commission fully through its “*sent*” missionaries (Barnabas and Saul; Paul and Silas)?

## II. Uninspired Church History – The Biblical Approach

As demonstrated in chapter one, the Great Commission promises the reproduction of churches of like faith and order until Jesus comes again. In chapter two, we can see this promise being fulfilled throughout the book of Acts right up to the end of the apostolic age. The epistles are primarily written to such churches or members in such churches. The contextual “we” of the New Testament books are members of churches of like faith and order.

There can be no debate that New Testament churches were fully functioning long before Luke penned the final pages of the book of Acts. There are no accounts of any other denominational kind of churches. All churches found in the pages of the New Testament were of like faith and order.

However, when one picks up a modern secular book on “church history” there is nothing found in such books for at least fifteen hundred years after the close of the apostolic era that even comes close to resembling those churches found in the pages of the New Testament.<sup>29</sup> During that period, the only kind of church that stands out on the pages of secular church history is the Roman Catholic Church and those whom Rome persecuted and depicted as heretics.

Even though there is a radical and profound difference in theology between modern Rome and the epistle written to the New Testament church at Rome, the vast majority of secular and religious historians assume they are one and the same.

Even prominent protestant leaders such as Dr. John MacArthur and Dr. R.C. Sproul when they speak of the Roman Catholic Church during the period of the Dark Ages, call it “**The Church.**” The current host of the syndicated radio program The Bible Answer Man, Hank Hannegraff, as well as

its former host Dr. Walter Martin, espouses the idea that the Roman Catholic Church is the true apostolic church until the Reformation period, and even now continues to be “a” true church of Christ in error.

However, what evidence supports this assumption? From what sources can this assumption be supported? It is common knowledge that the writing and preservation of ecclesiastical records up to the Reformation period have been solely in the hands of Rome.<sup>30</sup> She has determined what should be preserved and what should be destroyed. She has defined what orthodoxy is and what heresy is and who are to be regarded as “heretics.”<sup>31</sup>

The question must be asked, how credible is her testimony and how accurate are her definitions? How accurate are her records? Not all scholars completely trust her definition of orthodoxy or the reliability of her records. There have been

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<sup>30</sup> “The original sources of our information are, almost exclusively, the Catholic writers – a race of men who, while they had an interest in disguising the truth, appear to have delighted themselves in culminating all that dissented themselves from their communion. And even since the Reformation...our Protestant historians have been but too implicitly led by those false guides. There is scarcely any history of the Christian Church extant in our language from which it would not be easy to exemplify the truth of this representation...But with any man with his eyes open, and capable of exercising two grains of discrimination, should have first of all permitted himself to be so far imposed upon by the Catholic writers, as to give credit to such a tissue of absurd and ridiculous fooleries, and then gravely to detail them to his readers for the truth of history, is at once a striking weakness of the author, and of the necessity of exercising continual vigilance on the part of the reader, if he would neither become the dupe of Papal slander, nor of Protestant credulity.” William Jones, *The History of the Christian Church*. (Louisville: Norwood & Palmer, 1831) Vol. I, preface.

<sup>31</sup> “Church councils often have been manipulated and ecclesiastical tradition has been falsified to give credence to some teaching entirely unknown to the New Testament.” Robert A. Baker, **The Baptist March in History** (Nashville: Convention Press, 1958) p. 2

many historians from many denominations, including some candid Roman Catholic historians that view the data preserved by Rome in a completely different light.<sup>32</sup> Many of them realize that unlike the Scriptures, secular history is; (1) uninspired, thus subject to personal bias;<sup>33</sup> (2) incomplete; and (3) often inaccurate.<sup>34</sup> These historians believe that Rome has unintentionally preserved sufficient historical data to demonstrate that apostolic Christianity continued among those whom she labeled and treated as **heretics**. Indeed, some identify those “heretics” as apostolic Christianity who are

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<sup>32</sup> “The Catholics...instead of assuming such honorable pride, the orthodox theologians were tempted, by the assurance of impunity to compose fictions, which must be stigmatized with epithets of fraud and forgery. They ascribed their own polemical works to the most venerable names of Christian antiquity; the characters of Athanasius and Augustin were awkwardly personated by Vigilus and his disciples...Even the Scriptures themselves were profaned by their rash hands...the example of fraud must cite suspicion.” Edward Gibbons, **The Decline and Fall of The Roman Empire**. (New York: Peter Fenelon Collier. 1845) Vol. 3, pp. 555,556,557

<sup>33</sup> “No men are less to be trusted then the monkish historians, when they speak of he character and doctrine of dissidents from Rome.” Benjamin Evans. **The Early English Baptists**, (Greenwood: The Attic Press, Reprint 1977) Vol. 1, p. 13

<sup>34</sup> “...no impartial reader can, I think, investigate the innumerable grotesque and lying legends that, during the whole course of the Middle Ages, were deliberately palmed upon mankind as undoubted facts, can follow the histories of the false decretals, and the discussions that were connected with them, or can observe the complete and absolute incapacity most Catholic historians have displayed, of conceiving any good thing in the ranks of their opponents, or stating with common fairness any consideration that can tell against their cause, without acknowledging how serious and how inveterate has been the evil. There have been, no doubt many noble exceptions. Yet, it is, I believe difficult to exaggerate the extent to which this moral defect exists in most of the ancient and very much of the modern literature of Catholicism.” William E. H. Lecky, **History of European Morals**. 2 Vols. (New York: D. Appleton & Co. 1887) Vol. 2, p. 212

prophetically predicted to be characterized as “*heretics*” between His first and Second Advent.

Is it a fair question to ask if the Bible predicts that apostate Christianity would characterize the apostolic true churches of Christ as “*heretics*”? Does the Bible predict that apostate Christianity would distort and persecute apostolic churches until He comes again? If it does, all one has to do is compare these predictive scriptures with the character of all churches found in secular church history to see which, if any, are the Lord’s true apostolic churches.

The Bible clearly predicts an apostate Christianity will arise in direct contrast to the characteristics of true apostolic New Testament Churches. In essence, the Bible warns us where we ought not to look for the Lord’s true churches between the close of the Apostolic Age and the Second Coming of Christ.

### **A. Don’t look among Churches who persecute**

*These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended. They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, **that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service.** And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me. - Jn. 16:1-3 (emphasis mine)*

*And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration. - Rev. 17:6*

These are predictive prophecies concerning the future of the Lord’s churches and their persecutors. Significantly, Jesus predicts that those who persecute the Lord’s churches during

that period, after the close of the Biblical era, will believe they are serving the one true God, in killing them.

*...that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service.* – Jn.16:2 (emphasis mine)

At the very minimum, this is clearly a Biblical prophecy that should warn us not to look for the true churches of Christ among those who persecute professed people of God in the name of God.

It does not take much study of secular church history to realize that the Roman Catholic Church perfectly characterizes this kind of persecuting Christianity. It does not take much study of the Reformation period right up until the declaration of Independence in America, to realize that both Roman and Reformed Catholicism (Protestantism) killed, and persecuted one another. In addition, both at times, joined forces and persecuted professed Christians, who were neither part of them, or took part in such acts of persecution.

Where then do you look for His true churches? You don't look among those known for their persecution of other professed Christians. You look among those whom Rome and Reformed Rome martyred and persecuted, as "heretics." This is the inspired predicted plight of the true churches of Christ during this time of apostasy. Their history is traced by the trail of blood of their martyrs.

## **B. Don't look among State Churches**

*And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither; I will shew unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters: **With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the***

*inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication. So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication: And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. - Rev. 17:1-5 (emphasis mine)*

Many attempt to interpret this prophetic woman as merely secular and political Rome, but that is contextually impossible. In Revelation 17:1-5, the symbolic descriptions are stated, whereas in Revelation 17:6-18, the symbolic descriptions are explained. In both the symbolic description and explanation she is clearly distinguished from secular government and kings:

*With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication. – Rev. 17:2*

*And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beast... and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled. – Rev. 17:12, 17*

The description “beast” is a common symbol for gentile governments. In Daniel such beasts are characteristic of secular



governments and their rulers (Dan. 7). Her relationship to this beast is two-fold.

1. She sits upon it – Symbolism of being supported by the beast.
2. She commits fornication with the kings of the earth – Symbolism of illicit union – marriage of state and religion – state religion

Furthermore, she is a symbolic woman identified as “*Mystery Babylon*.” The term “mystery” when attached to “*Babylon*” commonly referred to the paganized religions that originated from Babel. Babel was the first organized institutionalized religious rebellion against God. Nimrod took the truth of God written in the heavens, and transformed it into astrology, and perverted the nature of the Creator into that of the creature, making himself a god man. When God confused, and scattered the citizens of Babel, this “*mystery*” religion was scattered throughout the world. She is state institutionalized false religion.

She has been the state religion of every gentile government that has risen previous to Rome (Egypt, Babylon, Assyria, Medes and Persians, Greece). This harlot has controlled, and manipulated every one of these former gentile governments in order to persecute, and kill the people of God. Hence, John could say, she was responsible not only for the death of all the prophets and the saints “upon the earth,” but responsible for deceiving all the nations:

*for by thy sorceries were **all nations** deceived.  
And in her was found the blood of prophets, and  
of saints, and of all that were slain upon the  
earth. – Rev. 18:23-24 (emphasis mine)*

The Babylonian mystery religion had its seat of power in the city of Rome at the time John wrote this vision (Rev. 17:18). She was epitomized in Caesar, who was worshipped as a god man. John was on the island of Patmos, because he refused to offer up incense, dedicated to this deity of Rome.

However, John's message is concerning the future of this harlot. She will be destroyed by ten kings, who had not come to power when John wrote this, nor will they come to power, until just previous to the second coming of Christ.

*And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beast... and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled. – Rev. 17:12, 17*

She is not destroyed, until the time of these ten kings after they receive a kingdom. They destroy her, when they come to power “*with the beast*” for “*one hour,*” when He attempts to fight Christ at the Second Advent.

*These have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast. These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful. – Rev. 17:13-14*

Rome, as a secular government was overthrown in AD 476, and since that time has been the Vatican State. Therefore, the only government existing in Rome both before, and at the time of Second Advent, when these ten future kings unite with the beast to fight Christ, is the Vatican Roman Catholic Church State.

John is predicting the future of this Harlot in connection with the churches of God. Notice the direct contrast between this woman in Revelation 17-18, and another woman in Revelation 18 and 21! The first, is described as a metaphorical impure, and unfaithful woman (Rev. 17:5 harlot, whore), while the second, is described as a metaphorically pure and faithful woman (Rev 19:6-7 bride). The first has its seat of authority in an earthly worldly city (Rev. 17:18), whereas the second has her seat of authority in the heavenly city (Rev. 21). The contrast is too clear to miss. This is the ultimate contrast between polluted and pure institutionalized religion, right up to the second advent of Christ.

This Babylonian mystery cult had captivated, and permeated the whole Roman Empire, long before Constantine the Great came to power in the fourth century. Long before Constantine came to power, there were many churches that took in massive amounts of members, still clinging to the traditions, and beliefs of this Great Harlot. Slowly, multitudes of churches were permeated, and leavened into an apostate condition by this harlot.

During the time of Constantine the Great, the Roman Empire was beginning to crumble. Constantine rejected the apostolic churches that would have nothing to do with those paganized churches, or with any institutionalized state religion. Constantine embraced the apostate Augustine, and the paganized churches, that sided with him, to form the new state church religion. Constantine hoped this merger would prevent the collapse of the Roman Empire.

Dear reader, take note that the origin of a state church, is not to be found in the New Testament, but with paganized Christianity, three hundred years after the writing of the New Testament. Here is the beginning of an institutionalized Christian State religion. The apostate Augustine formulated the theological foundations (The City of God) to support this Christianized, Babylonian state religion. In declaring it the new state religion, all citizens in the Roman Empire were to become

part of this Christianized Babylonian state religion, just as, they had done with the previous pagan, Babylonian state religion. The very character of the religious order adopted by Roman Catholicism comes directly from Mystery Babylon:

*The College of Cardinals, with the Pope at its head, is just the counterpart of the Pagan College of Pontiffs, with its 'Pontifex Maximus,' or 'Sovereign Pontiff,' which had existed in Rome from the earliest times, and which is known to have been framed on the model of the grand original Council of Pontiffs at Babylon. – Alexander Hislop, **The Two Babylons or The Papal Worship**. Loizeaux Brothers, New Jersey, 1959, p. 206*

In the Mystery Babylon religion, can be found **Pontiff's**, **monks**, **priests**, and **Cardinals**, but no such offices are to be found anywhere in the New Testament. Roman Catholicism would continue to adopt and develop the doctrines, and practices of Mystery Babylon, under Christianized names for the next one thousand years.

This Great Whore would produce a brood of offspring, Christianized “*harlots*,” all of which would also be state churches. All of them would continue to practice Christianized Babylonian doctrines (infant baptism, sacraments, etc.).

*And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration. - Rev. 17:5*

Some of these “harlots” state churches are:

1. Lutheranism - The Church of Germany
2. Presbyterianism - The Church of Scotland;  
The Church of Switzerland
3. Episcopalian - The Church of England
4. The Reformed Church - The Church of  
Holland

We are not to look for apostolic Christianity among any kind of state church, or religion. Such, is an unholy union (harlotry – “*fornication with the kings of the earth*”). This Biblical prophecy rules out Rome, and her Reformation daughters, as possible candidates to be New Testament churches. Where are we to look then? We are to look among those condemned for refusing to join this unholy union between church and state. Those identified by state churches, as “heretics.”

**D. Don’t look among those churches which embrace predicted apostate doctrines:**

*Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. - 1 Tim. 4:1-5*

*But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed. - Gal. 1:8-9*

Roman Catholicism is well known for prohibiting its priests and nuns to marry. Seventh Day Adventism, and other apostate Christian cults, also are well known concerning their dietary laws. There are multitudes of new denominations that distort, and thus deny the gospel of grace, and teach justification by works.

There are other equally clear scriptural warnings about those who would distort the true nature of God (John 1:1; 1 Jn. 4:1-4; 2 Jn. 9-11; Mt. 28:19). Among those who fall under this category are the United Pentecostal Churches, Jehovah's Witnesses, The Church of Latter Day Saints, and scores more.

What the apostate church called truth and orthodoxy, the Bible and apostolic Christianity calls heresy. What Roman and Reformed Catholicism condemned as heretics, the New Testament defined as the churches of Christ "*contending for the faith once delivered to the saints.*"

During the period of secular church history (the period of great apostasy), we are explicitly warned not to look for the churches of Christ among those who hold to such explicitly condemned heresies. We are to look for the true churches among those who opposed these heresies and as a consequence were labeled "heretics" by the ruling state churches.

**E. Don't look among those who perverted and distorted the beliefs of others:**

*It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household? – Mt. 10:25*

*For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine; and ye say, He hath a devil. 34 The Son of man is come eating and drinking; and ye say, Behold a gluttonous man, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners! - Lk. 7:33*

*Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake. – Lk. 6:22*

Apostate Christianity at a very early date invented a slanderous term to label the true apostolic churches. They called the churches of God, **Anabaptists**. The term means to **rebaptize**. New Testament churches refused to recognize the ordinances of apostate churches, as scriptural, and therefore, would properly baptize those coming over from the apostate churches. New Testament churches denied they rebaptized anyone, but rather claimed that the apostates were never truly baptized.. Rome, early on, instituted state enforced ecclesiastical laws against “Anabaptism,” punishable by death. These laws were called the Codex Justinianus after their founder.

The fabrications, and slanders brought against the apostolic Anabaptists by Rome, and her Reformed daughters, are legion.<sup>35</sup> When apostolic Christianity used the Bible as their

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<sup>35</sup> “...The writers of that age searched out the most degrading and insulting epithets that language afforded and applied them with malignant

defense, the inquisitors used Catholic tradition, to repudiate their orthodox beliefs, labeling them “heretics” instead.<sup>36</sup>

Rome accused the ancient apostolic Anabaptist Paulicians for embracing the heresy of Manicheism even though the Paulicians openly denied it and openly condemned Manicheism as heresy themselves.<sup>37</sup> The ancient Anabaptists were accused of denying marriage, denying the Lord’s Day, denying observances of the ordinances, denying Christ, etc. simply because they denied the Roman Catholic version of these things.<sup>38</sup> The radical pedobaptists (baby baptizers) led by

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gratification.....Yet these men could appeal to those who witnessed their sufferings, and boldly declare, with the axe or the stake in view, none venturing to contradict, that they were not put to death for any evil deeds, but solely for the sake of the Gospel.” J.M. Cramp, **Baptist History**. (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication) p. 155

<sup>36</sup> “...two heresies penalized by death in the Codex Justinianus were a denial of the trinity and a repetition of baptism. This ancient legislation directed against the Arians and Donatists was revived in the Sixteenth Century and applied to Anti-Trinitarians and Anabaptists. Luther, Melancthon, and Calvin all appealed to the imperial law...In fact, the very name ‘Anabaptist,’ meaning ‘Rebaptism,’ was invented in order to subject to imperial law those who preferred to call themselves simply Baptists. They would never admit they baptized over again, for infant baptism was to them no baptism but rather a ‘dipping in the Roman bath.’” Roland H. Bainton, **The Travail of Religious Liberty** (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1958) pp. 98-99

<sup>37</sup> “The Paulicians sincerely condemned the memory and opinions of the Manichean sect, and complained of the injustice which impressed that invidious name on the simple votaries of St. Paul and of Christ.” Edward Gibbons, **The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire**. (New York: Peter Fenelon Collier, 1845) Vol. 5, p. 387

<sup>38</sup> William Jones says of the Waldeneses, “The names imposed on them in France by their adversaries, they say, have been intended to vilify and ridicule them, or to represent them as new and different sects. Being stripped of all their property and reduced by persecution to extreme poverty, they have been called ‘poor of Lynons.’ From their mean and famished appearance in their exalted and destitute state, they have been called, in



Thomas Munzer in Germany were labeled as Anabaptists by the Lutheran State Church in order to exterminate all evangelical Anabaptists by the thousands even though Munsterites were pedobaptists and not Anabaptists. Anabaptists condemned the Munsterites as heretics and denied such were ever part of the true Anabaptist movement, but that mattered little to the Lutheran or Roman Catholic state churches.

It is this kind of distortion, false accusations by the ruling State Churches that defined the Anabaptists as “heretics” and led modern historians to view them through the eyes of their enemies instead of the truth.<sup>39</sup>

We are not to look for the Lord’s churches among those who slandered, distorted and falsely accused others. Where are we to look then? We are to look for the Lord’s true churches among those who are slandered as the “*heretics*” by such state churches.

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provincial jargon, ‘Siccan,’ or pickpockets. Because they would not observe Saints day, they were falsely supposed to neglect the Sabbath also, and called ‘Inzabbatati’ or ‘InSabbathists.’ As they denied transubstantiation or the personal and divine presence of Jesus Christ in the host or wafer exhibited in the mass, they were called ‘Arians.’ Their adversaries, premising that all power must be derived from God through his vicegerent, the Pope, or from an opposite and evil principle, inferred that the Waldenses were ‘Manicheans’ because they denied the Popes supremacy over the emperor and kings of the earth.” William Jones, **The History of the Christian Church**, (Norwood & Plamer, Louisville: 1831) p. 300

<sup>39</sup> “Because of this malignant prejudice, the historians of the day dismissed these groups without attempting to gain a documentary understanding or an objective judgment. This prejudging and condemnation of the free church movement has been carried on even in later times, a truth illustrated by subsequent Protestant historical accounts of the Anabaptists in the time of the Reformation. Only in recent years has a serious research attempt been made among historians to reconstruct a true picture of the Anabaptist movement.” Earl D. Rachmacher, **What the Church Is All About** (Chicago: Moody Press, 1978) p. 67

## G. Don't Look Among the so-called Church Fathers

Few if any evangelical scholars recognize The Nicene Church Fathers and The Post-Nicene Church Fathers as true representatives of New Testament Christianity. Why? Because they are so radically different from New Testament churches and so obviously like modern Roman Catholicism. Rather, they rightly see these preserved documents to accurately reflect the doctrinal evolution of Roman Catholicism.<sup>40</sup> However, most cannot see that The Ante-Nicene Church Fathers are but the logical historical foundations for the Nicene and Post-Nicene. The Ante-Nicene Fathers records the beginning of apostasy that gradually developed into the Nicene and Post-Nicene Pagan Christianity. In The Ante-Nicene Church Fathers we find the origin of explicit errors of baptismal regeneration, and the gradual development of infant immersion, and various orders of ecclesiastical offices that are

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<sup>40</sup> <sup>40</sup> George Salmon says concerning the so-called Church Fathers, “*And then, when we search for Apostolic traditions in the writings of the Father’s, there is nothing to mark their Apostolic origin. We have no certain means, by our own ingenuity of distinguishing truth from false traditions, not one of the Father is recognized as singly a trustworthy guide, every one of them is admitted to have held some views which cannot be safely followed.*” – **Infallibility of the Church**, George Salmon; pp. 131. The so-called Church Father’s have been selectively preserved to defend their own history – a history of apostasy.

Fredrick W. Farrar in his **History of Interpretation** said of the so-called “Church Fathers” – “*There are but few of them whose pages are not rife with errors – errors of method, errors of fact, errors of history, of grammar, and even of doctrine. This is the language of simple truth, not of slighting disparagement. I should be most unwilling to speak with disrespect of the Fathers of the Church. They, like ourselves were children of their age...remember that the Fathers had been thrust into a position of autocracy which they repeatedly and emphatically disclaim, and which they ever claimed it would have been completely nullified by their own writings.*” – pp. 162-164

found explicitly in the Nicene and Post-Nicene Church Fathers but not in the scriptures.

The Ante-Nicene Church Fathers are the history of apostasy at its very root, which laid the foundation for the Nicene and Post-Nicene development. Rome destroyed the historical and doctrinal records of all other professing Christians during this period (Montanists, Novationists, Dontanists) by the power of the secular sword except for those Nicene records! Why? Those Nicene (ante, post) records are the historical roots of what gradually developed into the Nicene and Post-Nicene Roman Catholic denomination. These are writings record the historical succession of apostasy.

What is the value of the Ante-Nicene Fathers? When compared to the Post-Nicene Fathers it reveals clearly how far the Post-Nicene Fathers have departed from what they used to believe and practice. Some of the earliest Ante-Nicene fathers provide some insights into early Christianity. However, as one progresses in the Ante-Nicene Fathers, so does the progression of error until it becomes full bloom in the Post-Nicene condition of Rome. However, don't look for the true churches of Christ among the Ant-Nicene Church Fathers. Rome preserved these records while choosing not to preserve other records because these records serve Rome's claim to historical succession while helping Rome to disclaim all others as heretics or new comers.

### **G. The True History of New Testament Christianity after the Apostolic Era:**

If the Roman Catholic Church is not the true representative of New Testament Christianity, then, who is? We do find them distorted but preserved in the pages of Rome's persecuting history. They are routinely identified by Roman historians as the evangelical Anabaptists. They are recorded by their trail of blood shed by Rome. Paul said, "But as then he that was born

after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now.”

Several factors are routinely overlooked by pro-Romanists when studying what Rome recorded about those she called “*heretics*.” False religious groups lived in the same geographical areas where true churches of Christ were also located simply because there was religious freedom and safety among New Testament Churches as they were all objects of state church persecution. Consequently due to geographical and social association, the true churches of Christ were labeled by the names of those heretical groups. Another factor often overlooked is that Roman historians isolate a particular heretic and then label apostolic churches by the name of that heretic simply because there are resemblances between the two. For example, New Testament Churches believed that a true child of God possessed a new and old nature simultaneously (Gal. 5:16-19) and therefore since Manicheans also believed in two opposing forces Rome labeled the Anabaptists as Manicheans. For example, New Testament Churches believed that the membership of a church ought to be solely composed of spiritual persons who live a holy life and since individuals like Donatus and Montanus believed similarly, these churches were labeled Montanists and Donatists and ascribed every excess that these individual’s embraced. Rome played this game consistently throughout its recorded histories.

However, at times, Roman persecutors preserved what these Anabaptists actually believed because their faith was so obviously contrast to that of Rome’s and so clearly subjected them to the ecclesiastical laws established by Rome. Such glimmers of light revealed that true apostolic Christianity was still alive and thriving in spite of the horrid and bloody persecution by Rome.

These evangelical Christians, many of whom, even the Roman persecutors admitted, lived pure and godly lives; are painted for the most part, in the worst of terms, in regard to their doctrines, simply due to the word of their enemies, or

invalid associations. They were generally called “Anabaptists” by Rome but were perverted and distorted under such epithets as Montanists, Novations, Dontanists, Paulicians, Henricans, Catharists, and Waldenses. However, they preferred to call themselves simply “Baptists.” Here are the groups where you look for the churches of Christ during the predicted age of apostasy under state controlled churches.

Unfortunately, the vast majority of Church historians still accept history as recorded and viewed by Rome. However, there are many non-Baptist historians that acknowledged the antiquity of the Baptists:

1. **Sir Isaac Newton** - the greatest scientist who ever lived says:

The Modern Baptist, formerly called Anabaptists, are the only people who have never symbolized with the Papacy – William Whiston, **Memoirs of Whiston**, quoted in W.A. Jarrell’s **Baptist Church Perpetuity**. (Dallas, 1894), [reprinted by Calvary Baptist Book Store, Ashland, KY] p. 313

2. **John Clark Ridpath**, Methodist, author of the monumental work “Ridpath’s History of the World” says,

*I should not readily admit that there was a Baptist church as far back as 100 AD, though without doubt there were Baptists then, as all Christians were then Baptists.- John Clark Ridpath, personal letter to W.A. Jarrell, quoted in W.A. Jarrell’s Baptist Church Perpetuity (Dallas, 1894), [reprinted by Calvary Baptist Church Book Store, Ashland, K.Y.], p. 59*

3. **The King of Holland** appointed Dr. J.J. Dermout and Dr. Ypeij of the Reformed Church to write a history of Christianity and they say of the Baptists:

*We have now seen that the Baptists, who were formerly called Anabaptists, and in later times Mennonites were the original Waldenses, and who have long in history received the honor of that origin. On this account the Baptists may be considered the only Christian community which has stood since the days of the apostles, and as a Christian society which has preserved pure the doctrines of the gospel through all ages...* Ypeij en Dermout, *Geschiedenis Der nederlandsche Hervormde Kerk.* (Breda 1819) quoted by J.T. Christian in **A History of the Baptists** (Texarkana, AR; Bogard Press, 1922) vol. 1, pp. 95-96

4. **Mosheim, Lutheran Historian** says,

*Before the rise of Luther and Calvin, there lay secreted in almost all the countries of Europe persons who adhered tenaciously to the principles of the modern Dutch Baptists – Johann Laurenze von Mosheim, **An Ecclesiastical History**, (New York, Harper & Brothers, 1860), [Reprinted by Old Paths Book Club, Box V, Rosemead, CA., Second ed.], Vol. II pp. 119,120*

5. **Cardinal Hosius**, Roman Catholic, Ambassador of Pope to the Council of Trent says in the year 1563 AD

*For not so long ago I read the edict of the other prince who lamented the fate of the Anabaptists who, so we read, were pronounced heretics twelve hundred years ago and deserving of capital punishment. He wanted them to be heard and not taken as condemned without a hearing.* (by Carolinne White, Ph.D, Oxford University, Head of Oxford Latin) - **Tracing the Cardinal Hosius “Baptist” Quote** By Ben Townsend<sup>41</sup>

Hosius dated the Anabaptists to at least 363 A.D.

6. **Zwingli, Swiss Reformer**, writing in 1525 says of the Anabaptists:

The institution of the Anabaptists is no novelty, but for THIRTEEN HUNDRED YEARS has caused great trouble to the church. – **Christian**, op cit. p. 86

Reformers Date Baptists back to 225 AD

7. **Alexander Campbell**, founder of the Disciples of Christ says of the Baptists;

*From the Apostolic Age to the present time, the sentiments of Baptists have had a continued chain of advocates, and public monuments of their existence in every century can be produced.* – Alexander Campbell, A Debate on

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<sup>41</sup> *Nam & alterius Principis edictum non ita pridem legi, qui vicem Anabaptistarum dolens, quos ante mille ducentos annes haeretisos, capitalique supplicio dignos esse pronunciatos legimus, vult, ut audiantur omnino, nec indicta causa pro condemnatis habeantur.* (The letters of Cardinal Stanislaus Hosius, Liber Epistolarum 150, titled "Alberto Bavariae Duci" in about 1563 A.D.)

Christian Baptism, Between the Rev. W.L. Maccalla, A Presbyterian teacher, and Alexander Campbell, (“Buffalo,” NY., Campbell and Sala, 1824) pp. 378, 379

**8. Robert Barclay**, a Quaker says,

*There are also reasons for believing that on the continent of Europe small hidden Christian societies, who have held many of the opinions of the Anabaptists, have existed from the time of the Apostles* – Robert Barclay, **The Inner Life of the Societies of the Commonwealth**. (London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1876), pp. 11, 12

**9. Roland Bainton**, a Mennonite, author of “The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century” says of the Anabaptists:

*To call these people Anabaptists, that is re-baptizers, was to malign them, because they denied that baptism was repeated, inasmuch as infant baptism is no baptism at all. They called themselves simply Baptists.*- Rolland Bainton, **The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century**, (Boston, Beacon Press, 1956), p. 99

Nearly all early Baptist historians unanimously testify to the historicity and perpetuity of the New Testament churches. However, many (but not all) modern Baptist historians



approach historical sources through the eyes of Reformed Catholic Rome (Protestantism).<sup>42</sup>

When the Reformation occurred, the Protestants joined with the Catholics in persecuting these Anabaptists. Even in America up to the introduction of the bill of rights, Protestants publicly persecuted these Anabaptists. The “**Ana**” was dropped and they became known merely as “**Baptists**.” Historical Baptists<sup>43</sup> have always rebaptized all who came over from the ranks of Protestants and Catholics simply because baptism was the designated act to publicly identify a believer with the Baptist ministry (not a Catholic or Protestant ministry).

The Protestant Reformer Henry Bullinger confirms the fact that these apostolic churches rejected both Protestant and Catholic churches and their ordinances when he says of them:

*The Anabaptists think themselves to the only true church of Christ, and acceptable to God; and teach that they, who by baptism are received into their churches, ought not to have communion [fellowship] with [those called] evangelical, or any other whatsoever: for that our-[i.e., evangelical Protestant, or reformed] churches are not true churches, any more than the churches of the Papists.” - J.R. Graves, **Old Landmarkism What Is It?** (reprint by Calvary*

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<sup>42</sup> Dr. Robert Ashcraft points out that German Rationalism entered the halls of academia among Baptists in the late 1800’s at Louisville Southern Baptist Seminary under the guise of the “**new historical critical method**.” This method when applied to textual criticism of the Scriptures resulted in denial of Biblical inspiration and promoted evolution. When applied to church history along with a theological bias of universalism supported the view of Reformed Romanism. - Robert Ashcraft, **Contending For the Faith**. (Baptist Sunday School Committee, Texarkana, TX. 2006) pp. 601-606

<sup>43</sup> Today the term “Baptist” is generic and includes more churches than the true historic and Biblical Baptists. Historic Baptists are known by their doctrinal content rather than their label. Historic Baptists are specifically known by their identity with all five aspects of the great commission.

Baptist Church Book Shop, Ashland, KY) p.  
115

Significantly, since the time that a denominational difference occurred among apostolic churches, the name **Baptist** has always been attached to those churches which continued the ministry of John (Ana-baptists, Cata-Baptists, etc.). Today, the name **Baptist** has become a generic tag worn by many conflicting denominations which do not share either the doctrinal or historical heritage of these churches. However, it is not the name tag that defines New Testament Churches but their apostolic faith and practice as well as historical heritage that reaches back to the first church in Jerusalem.

### **G. The Great Commission Essentials and Historic Baptists:**

**Essential Characteristic #1:** There is a prescribed method and pattern by which a new church comes into existence. In Matthew 28.19,20, Christ distinguishes between “ye” and “them” thus making the church the only authorized administrator of the Great Commission. This “ye” stands in a mediatory position between Christ and those who are the unconverted, unbaptized, and untaught. Christ administers unto “them” (the unconverted, unbaptized, and untaught) the gospel, baptism, and instruction of His commandments through this mediatory “ye” (i.e. the church).

*And so in regard to this commission of Christ, it was addressed, to somebody. It supposes that there will be somebody to be baptized, and it authorizes somebody to baptize them. If by commanding some to baptize, it commands others by implication to be baptized, it by the same implication commands them to be baptized by those, and only those whom it commands to*

*baptize.* - William M. Nevins, **Alien Baptism and the Baptists**, The Challenge Press, Little Rock, Ark., 1977, p. 156.

**Essential Characteristic #2:** The authorized “ye” are “disciples” which by contextual definition are previously baptized believers existing in an observing church state.

*We cannot, for one moment conceive that Christ or His apostles committed the gospel to and commissioned it to be preserved and preached by, those who neither experientially understood, nor had themselves obeyed it, and whose teaching and practice tended directly to pervert and subvert it. – J.R. Graves, **Old Landmarkism, What Is It?** 1880, p. 35*

**Essential Characteristic #3:** The authorized administrators are disciples of like faith and order with Christ in the same gospel, baptism and doctrine.

*To say this commission was left to any believer, or to some group of men who hold every heresy under the sun, is to accuse the Lord of great carelessness. – Milburn Cockrell, **Scriptural Church Organization**, 2nd Ed. p. 29.*

**Essential Characteristic #4:** The ultimate goal of the Great Commission is authority to bring baptized disciples into membership of an existing New Testament Church or into new church constitution. Observance of the Great Commission always concludes in New Testament church membership.

*In this simple analysis of the commission is presented the very process by which Baptists are now made, constituted into churches, and governed. That it was the process by which the first preachers made converts, and constituted churches, is beyond question.* T. G. Jones, **The Baptists, their Origin, Continuity, Principles, Spirit, Policy, Position, and Influence, a Vindication.** (Philadelphia, American Baptist Publication Society) p. 27. (emphasis mine)

**Essential Characteristic #5:** The administrator of this commission is promised the presence of Christ until the end of the world. True churches have a promised historicity as a denomination that originates with the personal ministry of Christ and continues until the end of the age. Thus, true churches of Christ have two distinguishing characteristics (1) New Testament faith and practice and (2) New Testament origin as a denomination.

*From these proposition, thus established, we draw the following inferences, as clear and certain truths,*

*I. That all churches and ministers, who originated since the apostles, and not successively to them, are not in gospel order; and therefore cannot be acknowledged as such.*

*II. That all, who have been ordained to the work of the ministry without the knowledge and call of the church, by popes, councils, &c. are the creatures of those who constituted them, and not*

*the servants of Christ, or his church, and therefore have no right to administer for them.*

*III. That those who have set aside the discipline of the gospel, and have given law to, and exercised dominion over the church, are usurpers over the place and office of Christ, are against him; and therefore may not be accepted in their offices.*

*IV. That they, who administer contrary to their own, or the faith of the gospel, cannot administer for God; since without the gospel faith he has nothing to minister; and without their own he accepts no service; therefore the administrations of such are unwarrantable impositions in any way.*

*Our reasons, therefore for rejecting baptism by immersion when administered by Pedobaptist ministers, are,*

***I. That they are connected with churches clearly out of the apostolic succession, and therefore clearly out of the apostolic commission .....***

*But if it should be said, that the apostolic succession cannot be ascertained, and then it is proper to act without it; we say, that the loss of the succession can never prove it futile, nor justify any one out of it. The Pedobaptists, by*

*their own histories, admit they are not of it; but we do not, and shall think ourselves entitled to the claim, until the reverse be clearly shown. And should any think authority derived from the MOTHER HARLOTS, sufficient to qualify to administer a gospel ordinance, they will be so charitable as not to condemn us for preferring that derived from Christ. And should any still more absurdly plead that ordination, received from an individual, is sufficient; we leave them to shew what is the use of ordination, and why it exists. If any think an administration will suffice which has no pattern in the gospel; they will suffer us to act according to the divine order with impunity. And if it should be said that faith in the subject is all that is necessary, we beg leave to require it where the scriptures do, that is every where. But we must close: we beseech you brethren while you hold fast the form of your profession, be ready to unite with those from whom you differ, as far as the principles of eternal truth will justify. And while you firmly oppose that shadowy union, so often urged, be instant in prayer and exert yourselves to bring about that which is in heart, and after godliness. Which the Lord hasten in its season. Amen and Amen.* - A. M. MARSHALL, Moderator. JESSE MERCER, Clerk. – Jesse Mercer, **History of the Georgia Baptist Association**, 1838, pp. 126-127. (emphasis mine)

**Conclusion:** Some object, “these groups commonly called *Anabaptists* do not believe what Baptists believe today and so how can you claim they are Baptists?” We reply, whose word

are you basing that conclusion upon? The word of Rome! What does the Bible predict that Rome would do and say about the true churches of Christ? Why then are you surprised by what they say and why do you accept it? The New Testament anticipates and predicts that secular history will pervert the true churches and that is exactly why Baptists can take this position, because it is a Biblical position in regard to secular Church history. Therefore, according to the New Testament prophecy, apostolic Christianity will not be found among any type of Christianity:

1. That persecutes, slanders, and kills other professing Christians.
2. Among state church types of Christianity.
3. Among those who embrace explicitly predicted false doctrines condemned by the New Testament.

Hence, in reverse the New Testament predicts that apostolic Christianity will be found

1. Among those persecuted, slandered and killed by a professed Christianity.
2. Among those who oppose state churches.
3. Among those who oppose explicit heresies predicted by the New Testament.

Only the historical Evangelical Anabaptists fit these predictive prophecies concerning the future of the New Testament churches after the apostolic age. These prophecies should be the guide for every Christian historian looking for traces of apostolic Christianity.

Every historian should remember that secular history is (1) uninspired, (2) incomplete, and often (3) inaccurate; but the Bible is inspired, complete, and always accurate. When secular history is used to either undermine what the Bible clearly predicts, or to reinterpret the Bible to fit secular history, the

consequence will always be false ecclesiastical history and false doctrine.

### Review Questions

1. Does the New Testament anticipate and predict the fate of New Testament Churches after the apostolic era?
2. Does the New Testament anticipate and predict the rise of an apostate Christianity?
3. Does the New Testament predict New Testament churches to be the persecutors or the persecuted in secular history?
4. Does the New Testament predict New Testament churches to be **state** churches or is that the predicted role of apostate churches?
5. Does the New Testament predict New Testament churches will be regarded as orthodox or as **heretics** in secular history?
6. Does the New Testament predict that New Testament churches will be slandered and distorted by apostate state churches?
7. Where do you look in secular history to find New Testament churches? Do you look for them among the slandering, persecuting, apostate state churches or among those they labeled as **heretics**?



Chapter Four

**PROBLEMS FOR CHURCHES COMING OUT OF  
ROME**

*“Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one.” –  
Job 14:4*

**1. The Evangelical Dilemma** – evangelical Christianity has a historical dilemma. If Evangelical Christianity accepts the secular record of Christianity as dictated by Rome and Reformed Rome, then Apostolic evangelical Christianity as seen in the pages of the book of Acts and in the epistles has ceased to exist over fifteen hundred years. What are the consequences for embracing such a position? They face the following dilemma. They must either deny the many Biblical promises that New Testament Christianity would continue until the end of the age, or they must accept sacramental Christianity as the true and sole historical representative of apostolic Christianity between the first century and the Reformation. If they choose the latter then that would be an admission that they are apostates from the true and sole historical representative of apostolic Christianity.

On the other hand, if they reject Rome altogether and hold to the Biblical promise of the continuation of an evangelical New Testament Christianity, then they face another dilemma. They are forced to find apostolic Christianity among those condemned by Rome as heretics (the evangelical Anabaptists). However, if they accept the evangelical Anabaptists as the fulfillment of the continuation of apostolic Christianity, then they have no right or authority to originate any kind of institutionalized church apart from the authority given this Apostolic church of Christ. Hence, they are between a rock and hard place. To accept secular history is to accept sacramentalism and to reject all Biblical claims of Christ’s true

churches. To reject secular history is to accept the hated and distorted Anabaptists as the true remnant of Christ's churches; which is to reject all others as true apostolic churches of Christ, and thus to condemn their own denominations as unauthorized by God. The Bible says, "*who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean thing, not one.*" However, this is exactly how they originated – out of an unclean thing.

## 2. The Presbyterian Trilemma - "*Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one.*" – Jb 14:4 (emphasis mine)

In 1855 J.R. Graves wrote an essay addressing an issue which faced the Presbyterian General Assembly that met in 1854. The following is taken from that essay:

### ***The Protestant Trilemma***

*by Elder J. R. Graves*

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*A little history connected with the last N. S. Presbyterian General Assembly, which held its session in Buffalo, May, 1854, . . . ought not to be allowed to pass without improvement.*

*A query was introduced into that body to this effect:—Are Romish baptisms and ordinations valid? A Committee of junior and senior patriarchs was sent out to report an answer. They failed to agree. The majority reported negatively. But there were sundry gray-haired doctors who saw the logical conclusions behind such a decision, and indeed any decision they as Pedobaptists could make; and those consequences would certainly be precipitated upon them by their Baptist friends and Catholic*

*foes. The reports were read in the assembly, and a warm discussion ensued. Unfortunately, very little of that discussion has been given to the public; but the positions taken by the two parties were substantially these:*

*The majority reported that all ordinances at the hands of Romish priests were invalid, because the Romish Catholic Church was no Church of Christ, and no part or branch of Christ's Church; but manifest Anti-Christ—the scarlet harlot riding on the beast with seven heads and ten horns, drunk with the blood of saints; the baptism and ordinations of such an apostate body are null and void; and to pronounce them valid, is to pronounce the Romish Church the Church of Christ; and more, to involve Presbyterians and all Protestant sects in the guilt of schism, since they rent the body of Christ when they came out of Rome!*

*But the party who sustained the minority report, or were unfavorable to a decision, urged on the other hand:—If you deny the Church of Rome to be a true Church, and decide that her baptisms and ordinations are invalid, then do we to all intents and purposes unchurch ourselves, unless we can baptize the ashes of Luther and Calvin, from whom we have received our baptisms and ordinations! If the baptisms and ordinations of Antichrist, of the Man of Sin, and Son of Perdition are invalid, then Luther and Calvin were unbaptized as were all the members that composed the first churches of the Reformation! then were they unordained, and consequently had no authority to baptize their*

*followers, or ordain other ministers to follow them; in a word, all Protestant societies are unbaptized bodies, and consequently no Churches of Christ, since a body of unbaptized persons, however pious, cannot be considered a Church; all Protestant ministers are both unbaptized and unordained, and consequently unauthorized to preach officially and administer the ordinances.*

*Thus we see the trilemma into which the query precipitated them.*

*1. To decide that "Antichrist," "the Man of Sin," "the Mother of Harlots" is a true Church of Christ, would be a monstrous solecism. But this would convict all Protestant sects of sin, and destroy at once every claim they could set up to be churches of Christ; for they confess themselves Schismatics.*

*2. To decide that the Romish apostasy is not the true Church of Christ is to decide that all her ordinances are invalid, and consequently that all Protestant societies are bodies of unbaptized persons, and therefore not churches of Christ, and all Protestant ministers are both unbaptized and unordained, and consequently unauthorized either to preach or administer the ordinances.*

*3. To say that we cannot decide a question so manifest, will arouse the attention of the people, and awaken their suspicion, at once, that there is a great wrong and a great failure about Protestant churches somewhere. Finding that they could not extricate themselves from this*

*labyrinth of fatal consequences, they moved an indefinite postponement of the question! Their membership which they have led into their societies, and the world which they are now using every possible effort to entice into their societies, should loudly and constantly demand of them to decide whether the Romish apostasy is a true Church of Christ or not, for let Protestant societies decide it affirmatively or negatively, according to their own admissions, they equally cut off all their own claims to be considered Christian Churches!*

*This is the continuing trilemma of ALL protestants, including the so-called Reformed "Baptists" of our day.*

*The similarity of this Protestant Trilemma, with that faced by the opponents of the Lord in regards to John's baptism will not be lost to the Bible student:*

*(Mat 21:23-27) And when he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him as he was teaching, and said, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority? {24} And Jesus answered and said unto them, I also will ask you one thing, which if ye tell me, I in like wise will tell you by what authority I do these things. {25} The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men? And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say unto us, Why did ye not then believe him? {26} But if we shall say, Of men; we fear the people; for all hold John as a*

*prophet. {27} And they answered Jesus, and said, We cannot tell. And he said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things. – J.R. Graves, **The Protestant Trilemma.***

This is the same trilemma faced by all Protestants today. The only alternative to this trilemma is to “come out of her my people” (Rev. 18:4).

**Conclusion:** Professor Emeritus Dr. James B. Carlin of Murray State University well says concerning all other kinds of denominations but historical Baptists:

*All of these erroneous churches were never fully developed by any recorded history until more than 300 years after Christ had risen from the dead and ascended back to heaven. Therefore, none of these churches can be the kind of church Jesus Christ established since His kind of church was set up, organized and assembled with Him before He went back to heaven (Acts 1:1-12) – James B. Carlin, **Identifying the Lord’s Kind of Churches,** (Emmaus, PA, Challenge Press, 2nd ed., 2006) p. 89*

Even the most hard core ecumenicalist must admit that New Testament churches were fully functioning long before the apostle Luke closed out the book of Acts and certainly long before the apostle John closed out the Biblical Canon with the book of Revelation. Since that time the only thing new to originate are false denominations. Job asked, “*who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean thing?*” His answer was “*not one*” (Job 14:4), and yet this is exactly what modern evangelical Christianity must do in order to justify its existence apart from historical Baptists.

**Review Questions**

1. Can Evangelical Protestants interpret the promises of Scripture to teach any kind of continuation of the type of Christianity found in the pages of the New Testament and still accept Roman Catholicism as a valid expression of such, prior to the Reformation?
2. Can New Testament Christianity be expressed apart from the essentials of the Great Commission at any time and still be a valid expression of what we read about in the New Testament?
3. Can a clean thing originate out of an unclean according to Scripture?
4. What three things are true about inspired history that are not true about secular history?
5. Does the Scripture authorize apostates (unconverted or unbaptized or unchurched) to administer the ordinances?
6. Would not Protestantism be classified as “them” in the Great Commission? Did Christ ever authorize “them” to administer the Great Commission?

Chapter Five

**DEFINING THE NATURE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT  
CHURCH**

**I. Exposition of Matthew 16:18-19**

*The Foundation and Perpetuity of New Testament Churches*

*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. –  
Mt. 16:18*

**T**here is presently a massive effort by the Roman Catholic Church to bring Protestants back to Rome. The last decade of the 20th century saw the materialization of the ECT (Evangelicals and Catholics Together) document. In the ECT document, prominent Evangelical and Catholic theologians publicly united in basic essentials of the Christian message. However, this unity was superficial and unreal as the only thing they were unified about was the language but not the meaning of the language. They agreed on the same terminology but interpreted the words differently. The document was a triumph for Rome because in the eye of the public it gave her the appearance of orthodoxy. Because of this public document, most Christians now believe that Rome is essentially orthodox.

Another effective tool for Rome is the Internet. Rome has many websites dedicated to using the Bible to prove their dogmas. They understand that most Christians view the Bible as the only authority for doctrine and practice. Although Rome views the Bible as only one authority among many others (councils, tradition, papal decrees, etc.), she fully understands that she cannot win Protestants back to her unless she makes her case by using the Bible alone. Hence, Rome is using the Bible to demonstrate that the Bible is not the only authority and



she is using the Bible to prove all her other non-biblical dogma's are Biblical. Is this tactic working? Yes, it is winning many Protestants and other non-Catholics to her views.

One major emphasis of Rome is her interpretation of Matthew 16:18-19. She is persistently defending her claim to be the apostolic church of Christ spoken of in Matthew 16:18 and calling Protestants to submit to that claim. Protestantism already admits to that claim and acknowledges her as the original Apostolic Church of Christ. They only "protested" and came out of her because they believed she went into apostasy. Now, there is a growing number of Protestants who believe she is coming out of her apostasy and thus they are seeking to return to her.

On the other hand, historical Baptists have always claimed that text for themselves. Baptists do not believe Rome is the apostolic church of Christ but rather the old Whore of Revelation in the end times. Matthew 16:18 is at the center of this debate. It is a pivotal text for any attempt to identify the true church of Christ. In the following pages, the interpretation of Rome will be presented fairly and then the Baptist response and interpretation of Matthew 16:18 will follow.

## **A. The Roman Catholic Interpretation**

The following quotations are taken from Catholic websites in order to fairly represent the position of the Roman Catholic Church in regard to Matthew 16:18-19.

“Scriptural Evidence for the Papacy and the  
Apostolic Primacy of St. Peter as the Rock  
(Matthew 16:18)

*Matthew 16:18 And I tell you, you are Peter,  
and on this rock I will build my church, and the  
powers of death shall not prevail against it.*

*Catholics contend that the "rock" is Peter himself, not his faith, or Jesus (although arguably his faith is assumed by Christ in naming Peter "rock" in the first place). This interpretation is found in the Church Fathers at least as early as Tertullian (d.c.230). The next verse (16:19) is in the singular, which supports this view, which is in fact the consensus of the majority of biblical commentators today, according to the article on Peter in the Encyclopedia Britannica (1985 edition). (13)*

*It has often been argued to the contrary that Jesus called Peter petros (literally, "stone"), not petra (the word for "rock" in the passage), so that the "rock" wasn't Peter, but this is simply explained by the necessity for a proper male name in Greek to be in the masculine gender. In Aramaic, however (the language Jesus spoke), the name kepha would have been used for both "rock" and "Peter." Matthew could just as easily have used another Greek word for "stone," lithos, in contrast to "rock," but this would have distorted the unmistakable word-play of the passage, which is the whole point!"<sup>44</sup>*

*And what does Kepha mean? It means a rock, the same as petra. (It doesn't mean a little stone or a pebble. What Jesus said to Simon in*

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<sup>44</sup> The Evangelization Station, s.v., "The Papacy and Infallibility: 'The Keys of the Kingdom'"

[http://www.victorclaveau.com/html\\_html/Catholic%20Apologetics/Apologetics/papacy\\_and\\_infallibility.htm](http://www.victorclaveau.com/html_html/Catholic%20Apologetics/Apologetics/papacy_and_infallibility.htm) (Accessed November 1, 2008)

*Matthew 16:18 was this: 'You are Kepha, and on this kepha I will build my Church.'*<sup>45</sup>

These quotations correctly represent the Catholic position. The Catholic argument is quite simple and clear. They believe the original gospel autographs were written in Aramaic and then later translated into Greek. They also believe that Jesus spoke Aramaic and therefore He used the Aramaic term **kepha** in Matthew 16:18 for both Peter and the rock. Since **kepha** means a large rock, they argue that there is no difference between the name given to Simon and the “*rock*” upon which the church is built. They also argue that at the time of Christ there was no difference between **petros** and **petra**. They conclude their argument by pointing out the singular pronoun “*thee*” in verse 19 and with a note of triumph demand that Christ built His church upon Peter as the first Pope and that the keys belong to Peter and his successors.

## **B. A Baptist Interpretation**

Baptists have always argued that the intent of Matthew 16:18 was to point out the contrast instead of a common identity between **petros** and **petra**. Baptists would counter the above Catholic interpretation in several ways.

First, we admit that Jesus probably spoke in Aramaic as John 1:42 implies this. However, we deny that the gospels were first written in Aramaic and then later translated into Greek. There is no evidence for such a conclusion and there is sufficient evidence against it.

Second, if Matthew intended for the readers to understand that **kepha** was in the background of his thinking, he could

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<sup>45</sup> Peter the Rock by Karl Keating, [http://www.catholic.com/library/peter\\_the\\_rock.asp](http://www.catholic.com/library/peter_the_rock.asp) (Accessed November 1, 2008)

have included it as John did in parenthesis. However, he carefully avoided any reference to the Aramaic. Why? Baptists believe that the contextual intent of Matthew was different than that of John. John's intent was simply to tell the reader that Simon's new name meant "a rock." The Aramaic **kepha** satisfied John's intent. However, the intent of Matthew was to go further than merely defining Simon's new name as "a rock" but to inform the readers as to the exact character and nature of that rock. This required Matthew to avoid any mention of the Aramaic **kepha** because the Aramaic term could not convey his intent. His intent could only be conveyed by the historical and grammatical distinctive found between the Greek words **petros** and **petra**.

This interpretation is confirmed by a careful consideration of the Greek grammar. The grammar provides much evidence that a contrast was in mind rather than the Catholic view of common identity. For example, the first noun (**petros**) is without the definite article ("the" in the Greek) while the second (**petra**) is with it. The first noun is masculine gender while the second is feminine. The first noun implies a smaller rock than the second noun. The first noun is modified by a second person pronoun while the next noun is modified by a third person demonstrative pronoun. All of these contrasting distinctives indicate the Holy Spirit wanted the reader to see a contrast between these terms instead of a common identity. Such contrasts cannot be conveyed by the Aramaic **kepha**. The only thing that **kepha** conveys is "a rock." Matthew avoided **kepha** for exactly the same reason that Catholics say that he avoided the use of **lithos**. Because this would have distorted the unmistakable word-play of the passage, which is the whole point!

Yes, it "is the whole point." However, are we to believe that the whole point consists only in a "play" on words or is there a point to this "play on words"? Baptists believe there is a point to this play on words and that point is to make a clear contrast between these terms in order to complete a contextual line of

thought. Catholics believe that the only point being made by the Greek is nothing more than can be found if he had used the Aramaic as follows: “*Thou art **Kephas** and upon this **Kephas** I will build...*”

If that were the point it could have been better expressed by simply following John’s parenthetical formula and saying:

*Thou art **Peter** (being interpreted “a rock”) and upon **you** I will build my church.*

The Catholic point makes any Greek word play redundant and pointless. Not only so, but the change of gender does not help convey such a point. The Catholic point could have been made a couple of ways. For example, if Christ simply continued with the masculine **petros** (*upon petros*) or had chosen to use the masculine 2nd person pronoun (*upon you*) their point would have been made. However, Christ did not choose either but changed to a demonstrative pronoun and noun.

Roman Catholic exegetes clearly see the potential of such a contrast and vigorously attempt to explain away all historical and grammatical contrasts. However, any interpretation that depends upon explaining away the obvious is a weaker interpretation than one which incorporates the obvious. The most obvious contrast that Roman Scholars vigorously attempt to explain away is the historical distinction between **petros** and **petra**.

*There had been a distinction between the meanings of these terms in some early Greek poetry, but that distinction was gone by the time of Jesus. In the first century, when Matthew’s Gospel was composed, the two terms were synonyms (cf. D. A. Carson’s treatment of the*

passage in **The Expositor's Bible Commentary**, published by Zondervan).<sup>46</sup>

However, there is more error than truth in this statement. It is true that in ancient Greek these terms were not synonyms and they were contrasting descriptions. However, the Catholic assertion that the “*one time*” distinction was only found in “*some ancient Greek poetry, centuries before Christ, but that distinction was long gone by the time of Matthew's gospel*” is an assumption that cannot be proven. Indeed there is evidence to the contrary.

As late as 150 BC in the accounts of the Maccabees, the masculine **petros** is used to describe small stones. The accounts of the Maccabee's were well read and known in the days of Christ.

Roman Catholic exegetes feel the weight of this argument and therefore try to establish their position by appealing to the context to demonstrate that their interpretation is a better fit.

*Catholics contend that the "rock" is Peter himself, not his faith, or Jesus (although arguably his faith is assumed by Christ in naming Peter "rock" in the first place)....The next verse (16:19) is in the singular, which supports this view – Ibid., **The Evangelization Station***

However, the mention of a singular pronoun only brings to light more problems for the Roman Catholic exegete. It is the pronouns of this context that demonstrate the error of the Catholic position. When Jesus refers to Peter He uses a second person pronoun (direct address) but when He refers to the

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<sup>46</sup> Catholic Answers, s.v., “Peter and the Rock” by James Akin <http://www.catholic.com/thisrock/1998/9811chap.asp> (Accessed November 1, 2008)

“rock” upon which the church is to be built He changes to a third person pronoun (indirect address) proving that the feminine “rock” cannot grammatically refer to the masculine “Peter.”

*you* (2nd person) *are Peter but upon this* (3rd person) *rock...*

Clearly the grammatical antecedent for “*this rock*” cannot be Peter but must refer to the third person singular “it” in verse 17 which in turn refers to the content of Peter’s profession in verse 16 – “*Thou art the Christ the Son of the Living God.*”

Indeed, this interpretation is confirmed by Catholics themselves in The Confession of the New Vatican Catechism. Sections 424 and 442 make this very clear:

*424 Moved by the grace on the Holy Spirit and drawn by the Father, we believe in Jesus and confess: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." (Mat 16:16) On the rock of this faith confessed by St. Peter, Christ built his Church. (Mat 16:18, St Leo the Great - **Sermo 4,3; Sermo 51,1; Sermo 62,2; Sermo 83,3**)*

*442 ... And in the synagogues immediately [Paul] proclaimed Jesus, saying, 'He is the Son of God.'" (Acts 9:12) From the beginning this acknowledgment of Christ's divine sonship will be the center of the apostolic faith, first professed by Peter as the Church's foundation. ( cf. 1Thess 1:10, Jn 20:31; Mt 16:18)<sup>47</sup>*

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<sup>47</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church, s.v., The Profession of Faith, Chapter Two, Section Two, “I believe in Jesus Christ, the only Son of God” <http://www.christusrex.org/www1/CDHN/creed1.html#SON> (Accessed November 1, 2008)

Hence, their own catechism supports the Baptist point of view. What about the Catholic argument concerning the singular pronoun “*thee*” in verse 19? Doesn’t this pronoun prove that Peter holds the keys and therefore has a special place of authority? This singular pronoun harmonizes perfectly with the Baptist position once the contextual line of thought is made clear.

### 1. The Building Line of Thought:

It should be easy to see Matthew 16:18 outline a building context and line of thought:

There is a builder “I will build”.

There is something to build “my church” and

There is something to build on “upon this rock”.

These points clearly demonstrate a building line of thought. However, apart from the name given to Simon (“*Peter*”), there is an obvious missing ingredient in this line of thought. The ingredient missing is the material out of which Jesus builds His church. The builder is named. The building is named. The foundation for building is named. However, apart from **petros** the material Christ uses to build the church is not named?

How does the noun **petros** supply this missing ingredient? Significantly, the noun **petros** is found without the definite article (“the”) in the Greek text. This often indicates that the speaker or writer is intentionally trying to emphasize the character or quality of the term. What would be the impact of such a characterization within a building context? Such a characterization would define the nature or kind of rock suitable as building material.

For example, the characterization would amplify the contrasting word play by distinguishing the kind of rock Jesus builds the church out of from the kind of rock He builds the



church upon. What contextual evidence is there for such an interpretation? (1) The preposition “*upon*” clearly demonstrates that **petra** has reference to the foundation material. (2) The 3rd person demonstrative pronoun “*this*” demonstrates that the foundation rock (**petra**) is **not** the same kind of rock as **petros** because **petros** is identified by a 2nd person pronoun rather than a 3rd person. Therefore, **petros** must refer to another kind of rock, such as, the type used for the construction of the edifice being built upon the foundation. (3) The historical distinction in meaning between **petra** (large massive rock) and **petros** (smaller part of a massive rock) would indicate that the kind of building rocks used for the edifice are smaller in nature to that used for the foundation.

Both **petros** and **petra** refer to “*rock*” but the building context and grammar make them distinct one from the other. In such a building context, both are essential. The church must be built upon a rock but the church edifice itself must be built out of another kind of rock. Only when the two terms are understood in contrast can the building line of thought be completed.

## 2. The building “rock” characterized?

When the historical and grammatical context is all considered there is a clear picture of what kind of building rock **petros** is intended to characterize.

a. A Derived Kind: Grammatically the masculine **petros** is a derivative from the feminine **petra**. The feminine is the source of origin whereas the masculine is the derived product. Another way to illustrate the difference is by comparing **petros** to a gold nugget being derived from a larger source such as the “*mother load*.” As the Catholic theologians admit, the noun “*petros*” has a history for meaning a smaller rock derived from a larger rock **petra**. In a building context, it would suggest the

historical concept where a master builder had the rock cut out of the massive quarry to be used in his building. Contextually, this idea of a derived product from a larger source is clearly spelled out in the verse that immediately precedes Matthew 16:18:

*Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. – Mt. 16:17*

Spiritually, Simon was a derived product from a greater heavenly source. In essence he was a chip off the old rock.

b. A Prepared Kind: The builder would not only have the rock cut at the quarry but he would have it cut to the precise measurement to fit the exact place intended for it in the structure. This was the job of the Master cutter or rock mason. The rock mason was responsible to make ready such a stone prepared for the use of the Master builder. John the Baptist had been sent ahead of Christ to “***make ready a people prepared for the Lord***” (Lk. 1:17). John the Baptist prepared the material out of which Christ used to build His church. Peter and his name characterized such prepared material. He had received the gospel of Christ and then submitted to John’s baptism. His name could aptly characterize the only kind of material that the Master Builder would use to build His churches – baptized believers.

c. A Representative Kind: In the immediate context it is clear that Jesus was not directing his questions to Peter. He was addressing all his disciples. Impetuous Peter simply responded in behalf of all the rest. His response represents the kind of response that Christ would require from one and all of those whom His church would consist.

It is in this representative capacity that he is addressed in verse 19 as “*thee*” in conjunction with the keys. Positive proof

of this is that only two chapters later the authority of the keys is said to be given to the church where the plural pronoun “ye” is used (Mt. 18:17). Here is where the Roman Catholic interpretation begins to break down. The keys are not given uniquely to Peter but rather are given to him as a representative of the kind of membership or building material used to build his churches. Hence, the singular pronoun “*thee*” in verse 19 does not support the Catholic position at all.

### 3. Positive Proof for the Baptist Interpretation:

Who could be a better judge to determine whether the Roman Catholic or the Baptist interpretation is correct other than Peter himself? How did Peter understand Christ’s words in Matthew 16:18-19?

It is clear from Peter’s own epistle that He understood the Baptist interpretation to be the correct one. How is this so? Peter clearly describes the material out of which Christ builds His churches as spiritual building stones:

*Ye also, as **lively stones**, are built up a spiritual house... – 1 Pet. 2:5 (emphasis mine)*

Here is a spiritual “*house*” that is built out of living “stones.” Where did Peter get such an analogy for the church if it wasn’t from Christ’s use of Peter’s own name in Matthew 16:18?

If more proof is needed to prove that Peter understood Christ, as Baptists interpret Him, then, Peter goes on to provide it by his use of the disputed term **petra**. Peter takes the Greek term **petra** translated “*rock*” in Matthew 16:18 and positively identifies the person it is intended to be applied to:

*To whom coming, as unto a living stone,  
disallowed indeed of men.....Behold, I lay in  
Sion a chief corner stone...the stone.....a stone*

*of stumbling...a rock* (lit. Gk - *petra*) *of offense.*  
– 1 Pet. 2:4,6,8 (emphasis mine)

The intent of this context is that this “*rock*” is the object of faith and therefore correlates perfectly with the profession of faith metaphorically described as a “*rock*” in Matthew 16:16-18. The characterization of church members as “lively stones” combined with identifying Jesus Christ as the **petra** all within five verses is too clear and decisive to be viewed simply as a coincidence. However, if this is not enough, Peter denies the Catholic view of the primacy of Peter.

*...whom am also an elder...Neither being  
lord's over God's heritage... – 1 Pet. 5:1,3*

Here would be the optimal point to assert his office of primacy if that was intended by Christ in Matthew 16:18-19 and yet he denounces such an idea.

The point is namely this. Every point of the Catholic interpretation of Matthew 16:18-19 is categorically denied by Peter. On the other hand, every point of the Baptist interpretation is confirmed by Peter.

If the Catholic position were the correct one, then, the question of the context in Matthew 16:13-19 would have been, “**Whom do men say that Peter is?**” However, the question is about Christ rather than Peter. The confession of Peter is not only the answer to this contextual question but it provides the only basis for salvation which must be the foundation or beginning point upon which Christ builds His church. Any other foundation or beginning point is unreasonable, as it would give prominence to Peter over Christ and salvation.

It is interesting to note that Peter uses one term (**lithos**) in 1 Peter 2:4-8 for two distinct subjects.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Peter had learned the lesson of humility. Instead of using his own name (Gr. “*petros*”) to characterize members of the New Testament church as

#### 4. Quotations from the Vatican Council in 1870

Catholics usually argue that all the Church Fathers believed that Peter was the rock Jesus built His church upon. However, there is a speech of Bishop Strossmayer's presented in The Vatican Council Of 1870 and a paper presented at this council by Archbishop Kenrick that demonstrates differently. Strossmayer's speech is taken from the 1913 Catholic Encyclopedia online at New Advent.

*St. Cyril in his fourth book on the Trinity, says, 'I believe that by the rock you must understand the unshaken faith of the apostles.'*

*St. Hilary, Bishop of Poitiers, in his second book on the Trinity, says, 'The rock (petra) is the blessed and only rock of the faith confessed by the mouth of St. Peter;' and in the sixth book of the Trinity, he says, 'It is on this rock of the confession of faith that the church is built.' 'God,' says St. Jerome in the sixth book on St. Matthew, 'has founded His church on this rock, and it is from this rock that the apostle Peter has been named.'*

*After him St. Chrysostom says in his fifty-third homily on St. Matthew, 'On this rock I will build my church—that is, on the faith of the confession.' Now, what was the confession of the apostle? Here it is—'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.'*

*Ambrose, the holy Archbishop of Milan (on the second chapter of the Ephesians), St.*

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Jesus did, he chose “lithos.” In verse 4 he uses “lithos” to describe Christ and then in verse 5 he uses “lithos” to describe members of Christ’s church. However, in verse 8 he uses “Petra” to describe Christ.

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*Basil of Seleucia, and the fathers of the Council of Chalcedon, teach exactly the same thing.*

*Of all the doctors of Christian antiquity St. Augustine occupies one of the first places for knowledge and holiness. Listen then to what he writes in his second treatise on the first epistle of St. John: 'What do the words mean, I will build my church on the rock? On this faith, on that which said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.' In his treatise on St. John we find this most significant phrase—'On this rock which thou hast confessed I will build my church, since Christ was the rock.' The great bishop believed so little that the church was built on St. Peter that he said to the people in his sermon, 'Thou art Peter, and on this rock (petra) which thou hast confessed, on this rock which thou hast known, saying, Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God, I will build my church—upon Myself, who am the Son of the living God: I will build it on Me, and not Me on thee.' That which St. Augustine thought upon this celebrated passage was the opinion of all Christendom in his time.<sup>49</sup>*

### **Archbishop Kenrick (1806-1897)**

This next item is from a speech prepared by Archbishop Peter Kenrick of St. Louis, also to be given at the first Vatican Council (1870), in opposition to the declaration of papal infallibility as dogma. Debate was ended before Archbishop

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<sup>49</sup> Bishop Strausmeyer's Speech, [http://www.mtc.org/bishop\\_s.html](http://www.mtc.org/bishop_s.html) (Accessed November 1, 2008)

Kenrick could deliver his speech, but it was printed and distributed to the bishops at the council.

[p. 107] *The rule of Biblical interpretation imposed upon us is this: that the Scriptures are not to be interpreted contrary to the unanimous consent of the fathers. It is doubtful whether any instance of that unanimous consent is to be found. But this failing, the rule seems to lay down for us the law of following, in their interpretation of Scripture, the major number of the fathers that might seem to approach unanimity. Accepting this rule, we are compelled to abandon the usual modern exposition of the words, "On this rock I build my church."*

*In a remarkable pamphlet "printed in facsimile of manuscript," and presented to the fathers almost two months ago, we find five different interpretations of the word rock, in the place cited; "the first of which declares" (I transcribe the words) "that the church was built on Peter; and this interpretation is followed by seventeen fathers—among them, by Origen, Cyprian, Jerome, Hilary, Cyril of Alexandria, Leo the Great, Augustine.*

*The second interpretation understands from [p. 108] these words, 'On this rock I build my church,' that the church was built on all the apostles, whom Peter represented by virtue of the primary. And this opinion is followed by eight fathers—among them, Origen, Cyprian, Jerome, Augustine, Theodoret.*

*The third interpretation asserts that the words, 'On this rock,' etc., are to be understood of the faith which Peter had professed—that this*

*faith, this profession of faith, by which we believe Christ to be the Son of the living God is the everlasting and immovable foundation of the church. This interpretation is the weightiest of all, since it is followed by forty-four fathers and doctors; among them, from the East, are Gregory of Nyssa, Cyril of Alexandria, Chrysostom, Theophylact; from the West, Hilary, Ambrose, Leo the Great; from Africa, Augustine.*

*The fourth interpretation declares that the words, 'On this rock,' etc., are to be understood of that rock which Peter had confessed, that is, Christ—the church was built upon Christ. This interpretation is followed by sixteen fathers and doctors.*

*The fifth interpretation of the fathers understands by the name of the rock, the faithful themselves, who, believing Christ to be the Son of God, are constituted living stones out of which the church is built."*

*Thus far the author of the pamphlet aforesaid, in which may be read the words of the fathers and doctors whom he cites.*

*From this it follows, either that no argument at [p. 109] all, or one of the slenderest probability, is to be derived from the words, "On this rock will I build my church," in support of the primacy. Unless it is certain that by the rock is to be understood the apostle Peter in his own person, and not in his capacity as the chief apostle speaking for them all, the word supplies no argument whatever, I do not say in proof of papal infallibility, but even in support of the primacy of the bishop of Rome. If we are bound to follow the majority of the fathers in*



*this thing, then we are bound to hold for certain that by the rock should be understood the faith professed by Peter, not Peter professing the faith.*<sup>50</sup>

### **Review Questions**

1. Is Peter, or Christ, the focus of the context in Matthew 16:13-18?
2. What other text of Scripture provides any reason for Christ giving this special name to Simon Barjona other than Matthew 16:17-19?
3. Why would Christ first point out Peter's birth name in Matthew 16:17 and then point out the name given to him by Christ in the building context of Matthew 16:18?
4. Where did Peter get the analogy that the church is built of living stones in 1 Peter 2:5?
5. Whom did Peter identify as the "rock" (Gr. **petra**) in 1 Peter 2:8?
6. Did Christ ask Peter directly who He was, or did Christ ask all the disciples?
7. Did Peter respond in behalf of all the disciples?

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<sup>50</sup> Bishop Strossmayers' Extraordinary Speech on Papal Infallibility. s.v., <http://www.s8int.com/strossmayer.html> (Accessed on November 1, 2008)

8. If Christ gave the keys to Peter personally, then why does He say “*tell the church*” in direct connection with these keys in Matthew 18:17-18?

## **II. The A,B,C Diagnostic Approach to the Universal Invisible Church theory**

*And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God **in Christ**, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect.- Gal. 3:17*

- “*chosen **in him** before the foundation of the world*” – Eph. 1:4

The Universal Invisible Church advocates claim that entrance into their kind of church is by the baptism in the Spirit and they use I Corinthians 12:13 as their proof text. Thus to be in their kind of church is to be saved and to be outside their kind of church is to be lost, simply because according to their theory all the saved are in that church body.

### **A. Salvation Questions:**

1. Can Salvation be found OUTSIDE of Christ for anyone at any time? – Jn. 14:6; Acts 4:12
2. Can salvation be found OUTSIDE of Christ for Old Testament saints? – Eph. 1:4; 2 Thes. 2:13
3. Can Salvation be found in ANOTHER GOSPEL SALVATION other than that which was preached to Old Testament Saints? (Acts 10:43; 26:22-23; Heb. 4:2; I Cor. 15:4-5; Gal. 1-8-9)

**B. Salvation Facts:**

1. All the elect were CHOSEN “*in Christ*” before the foundation of the world “unto salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth”. Were Old Testament saints chosen “*in Christ*” or are they part of the non-elect? There is no third option.
2. In regard to POSITION – all mankind are either “*in Adam*” or “*in Christ*” – Rom. 5:12-21. In which position are the Old Testament saints? There is no third option
3. In regard to REPRESENTATION – all mankind are either represented “*in Adam*” or “*in Christ.*” Who represents the Old Testament saints? There is no third option.
4. In regard to JUSTICE – all mankind are either condemned “*in Adam*” or justified “*in Christ.*” Which characterizes the Old Testament saints? There is no third option.
5. In regard to SPIRITUAL STATE – “*All in Adam die*” but “*all in Christ are made alive.*” In which condition are Old Testament saints? Spiritually dead or spiritually alive? There is no third option.
6. In regard to REDEMPTION – all mankind are either unredeemed “*in Adam*” or redeemed “*in Christ.*” Are Old Testament saints redeemed or unredeemed? There is no third option.
7. In regard to SPIRITUAL UNION – all mankind are either in spiritual union with Satan (Eph. 2:2) or in Spiritual union with Christ. Who are Old Testament saints in spiritual union with? There is no third option.

8. In regard to FAMILY – all mankind are either in the family of Satan (Jn. 8:44) or in the family of God. Which family are the Old Testament saints in? There is no third option.
9. In regard to BIRTH – all mankind are only natural born or spiritual born (Jn. 3:3-9). Are Old Testament saints natural born or spiritual born? There is no third option.
10. In regard to SALVATION STATUS – all mankind are either lost or saved. Are Old Testament saints lost or saved. There is no third option.
11. In regard to HOLY SPIRIT INDWELLING – all mankind is either indwelt by an unholy spirit (Eph. 2:2) and “*in the flesh*” (Rom. 8:7-9a) or indwelt by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:9). Who indwells Old Testament saints? In Romans 8:7-9 Paul gives no third option for any man.
12. In regard to JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH “*in Christ*,” why does Paul give as our example an Old Testament saint (Abraham) if he were not justified by faith “*in Christ*”? See Gal. 3:17 and Rom. 4.

**C. Three basic Problems with the Universal Invisible Church Theory** and their interpretation of Spirit baptism as being placed in the position of spiritual union with Christ.

1. The baptism in the Spirit is fixed in time – Pentecost – Acts 1:5. Hence, no one previous to Pentecost could be baptized in the Spirit = no one could be put in spiritual union with Christ. If that is true, then either the Old Testament Saints were saved OUTSIDE of Christ OR they are still positionally and representatively “*in*

*Adam*,” which means they are still in spiritual union with Satan, in the family of Satan, in the kingdom of Satan, spiritually dead, unjustified, condemned and lost. There are no other options.

2. The Foundation of the Church is constructed wholly out of New Testament materials – “*apostles and prophets*” (Eph. 2:20) and prophets are set “*secondarily*” in the church after apostles (I Cor. 12:28). However, if spiritual union with Christ is placement into the church or body of Christ, then either Old Testament saints are saved OUTSIDE of Christ OR they are still “*in Adam*” both positionally and representatively, which means they are still in spiritual union with Satan, in the family of Satan, in the kingdom of Satan, spiritually dead, unjustified, condemned and lost. There are no other options
3. The gospel of salvation has always been the same (except for tense – forward looking to the cross in contrast to backward looking - Acts 10:43; 26:22-23; Heb. 4:2; Jn. 14:6; Acts 4:12; etc.). However, since the baptism in the Spirit and the church never existed in the Old Testament, then it cannot possibly be part of gospel salvation UNLESS Old Testament saints were saved OUTSIDE of Christ by “*another gospel*” or they are still “*in Adam*” both positionally and representatively, which means they are still in spiritual union with Satan, in the family of Satan, in the kingdom of Satan, spiritually dead, unjustified, condemned and lost. There are no other options.

## CONCLUSION

Spiritual Union “*in Christ*” is obtained exclusively by regeneration not Spirit baptism or membership into any kind of church. Spiritual position “in Christ” is obtained exclusively by justification by faith in the gospel not Spirit baptism or membership into any kind of church. The Universal Invisible Church/Body of Christ theory perverts the gospel and perverts salvation by confusing salvation “*in Christ*” with service “*in Christ*.” Salvation “in Christ” is by regeneration/conversion. Service “*in Christ*” is by water baptized into the membership of a local visible church body for service.

### Review Questions

1. Is there any kind of salvation OUTSIDE of Christ?
2. Is there any third option in addition to either being “*in Adam*” or being “*in Christ*”?
3. Is Justification by faith in the gospel really about our position “*in Christ*”?
4. Was Abraham justified by faith in the gospel?
5. How many other gospels are there?

### III. “In Christ” and what it Means

**T**he issue that divides the whole Christian world – How is one placed “*in Christ*”? Depending on the context, at times “in Christ” refers to Him as the object of faith. At other times it refers to the sphere of salvation. At other times it refers to union with Christ. There are seven distinct ways that one is “*in Christ*” by union and they fall under two primary divisions: Salvation and Service, cause and Consequences

#### A. Your Salvation Union with Christ (Causal)

1. In Christ by Divine choice – Purposed salvation union – Eph. 1:4 *According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:* - Before you existed and therefore invisible to your present state
2. In Christ by Representation – Representative salvation union – 1Co 15:22 *For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.* Before you existed
3. In Christ by Regeneration – Spiritual salvation union – Eph. 2:10 *“For we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus unto good works....”* “Christ in you” by the Holy Spirit internal and invisible (Jn. 3:8)
4. In Christ by Justification through faith – Legal or Positional salvation union – *And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness. Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we*

*believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.*<sup>1</sup> ¶ *Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: - Rom. 4:22-5:1 - internal and invisible*

## **B. Your Service Union with Christ (consequential)**

1. In Christ by baptism – pictorial service union – Gal. 3:27; I Pet. 3:21 - *For as many of you as have been baptized **into Christ** have put on Christ.* – External and visible
2. In Christ by church membership – Representative service union – I Cor. 12:27 – “*ye are the body of Christ and members in particular*” (you represent Him by membership in his church body) – External and visible
3. In Christ by Practice – experiential service union - “*As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye **in him**.*” – Col. 2:6 – External visible – manifest “walk”

The primary problem with the idea that the baptism in the Spirit places all believers into spiritual union with Christ or in the so-called universal invisible mystical body of Christ is that it perverts the Biblical doctrine of regeneration/new birth.

The Baptism in the Spirit is a date fixed occurrence (Acts 1:4-5). Previous to Acts 2:1 the baptism in the Spirit is always



referred to as a yet future prophetic fulfillment. However, spiritual union with God through Christ is inseparable from regeneration/quickenings/new birth. Spiritual death by definition is spiritual separation from God (Isa. 59:2; Eph. 4:18). Regeneration is bringing the sinner back into spiritual union with God. There is no salvation outside of Christ for anyone at anytime (Jn. 14:6; Acts 4:12; 10:43; Heb. 4:2). Yet, the Reformed Catholic doctrine of the baptism in the Spirit prohibits the new birth from occurring prior to Pentecost, leaving all pre-Pentecost people of God spiritually separated from God, thus spiritually dead. Thus, the Reformed doctrine of the church perverts essential fundamental salvational truths.

Later, it will be shown that the baptism in the Spirit is an institutional rather than an individual immersion in the Spirit.

### **Review Questions**

1. Are we “in Christ” the same way in all contexts?
2. Is “in Christ” by election different than “in Christ” by creation?
3. Is “in Christ” by baptism different than “in Christ” by justification?

#### IV. The Metaphor – The Body of Christ

*And ye are the body of Christ and members in particular – 1 Cor. 12:27*

**O**f all the metaphors used for the church there is none more abused and misunderstood than the metaphor of the human body or the body of Christ.

When the New Testament calls the church “*the body of Christ*” are we to understand the church is the literal physical flesh and blood body of Jesus Christ, or the metaphorical (representative) body of Christ? When Jesus says “*I am the door*” are we to understand He is a literal wooden door or is He a metaphorical door to heaven? The failure to distinguish the literal from the metaphorical and properly understand what is a metaphor, and how metaphors are to be properly used has produced confusion and false doctrines.

The terms “*body of Christ*” have but two clear applications in the New Testament; (1) the literal physical body of Christ; and (2) the church as the figurative/metaphorical or *representative* body of Christ.

It is the latter use that is subject to much debate. The argument rages over its membership. Does its membership include all saints in all ages, or all saints between Pentecost and the rapture, or just all saints within the context of a local church body?

##### A. Understanding the Metaphor

The key to understanding the use and right application of a metaphor is to understand what a metaphor is and how a metaphor can and cannot be used. What will a metaphor permit?

E.W. Bullinger in his book *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* defines a metaphor by comparing it to a simile:

*The simile says, “All we like sheep” while the metaphor declares that “we are the sheep of his pasture.” While, therefore the word “resembles” marks the simile: “represents” is the word that marks the metaphor. – p. 735*

The simile uses terms such as “like” and “as” whereas the metaphor uses state of being verbs such as “am” or “is” and “are.” The simile conveys resemblance whereas the metaphor conveys **representation**.

Hence, in I Corinthians 12:27, the term **represent** could be put in the place of the state of being verb “are” and you would have the proper sense intended:

*And ye **represent** the body of Christ and members in particular – 1 Cor. 12:27*

Obviously the church is not the literal body of Christ but only represents it. If this term “represent” is applied in each context it would be much clearer.

However, what kind of representation is intended by a metaphor? Bullinger defines the restrictions placed upon metaphorical representations when he says,

*Let it then be clearly understood that a Metaphor is confined to a distinct affirmation that one thing is another thing, owing to some association or connection in the uses or effects of anything expressed or understood. The two nouns themselves must both be mentioned, and are always to be taken in their **absolute literal sense**, or else no one can tell what they mean. – Ibid., p. 735 (emphasis mine)*

In other words, this means the characteristics being transferred figuratively from the first to the second noun are

those qualities that literally characterize the first noun. For example, “*the body of Christ*” refers to the physical body of Jesus Christ and those qualities that literally characterize that body. What are some literal characteristics found in his physical body that can be transferred metaphorically to the church? The physical body of Christ is **visible** and **local** and it is composed of a diversity of members performing diverse functions but all working in **unity** under the direction/authority of the head. It can convey all these things as well as organization and harmony. However, such characteristics as **universality** or **invisibility** are not qualities that literally characterize his physical body and therefore cannot be metaphorically conveyed or transferred to the church as the metaphorical “*body*” of Christ.

Finally, although there are metaphors such as “*wind*” and “*invisible*” that express invisibility, and there are terms such as “*whole world*” “*heaven and earth*” that express universality, however, such terms are never once used to describe the church or used as a metaphor for the church. Every single term and metaphor used in Scripture for the church is by nature without the ability to convey either universality or invisibility. Every single one! These facts should be regarded as quite strange if the true nature of the church was invisible and universal! However, if the true nature of the church is local and visible then these things are very supportive facts.

## **B. Two Contextual Historical Facts**

There are two historical and contextual facts that cannot be successfully denied.

The first contextual and historical fact is that in all those epistles that deal with the metaphorical “*body of Christ*” the contextual “*we*” has reference to the historical readers of these epistles. Without exception, everyone of the readers are members of churches that are like faith and order with each

other. Hence, each body of Christ (I Cor. 12:27) is “*one body*” in number as well as one in kind. It is the “*one*” where the reader’s membership resides. Therefore, the contextual and historical “*we*” does not refer to post-apostolic Christians found within and without diverse denominations which are neither “*one*” in number or “*one*” in kind.

The second indisputable fact is that in Romans 12:4 and in 1 Cor. 12:12 the literal physical human body first introduces the use of the metaphorical body of Christ (Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:13-26). Significantly, in Romans 12:4 the same historical and contextual “*we*” is used in connection with the literal and physical human body:

*For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office:- Rom. 12:4*

The readers (“*we*”) all share in common one kind of human body wherein there are many members or body parts. How does each reader understand and apply this text? He applies it to the “*one*” body he possesses which is both “*one body*” in number (his own body) and “*one body*” in kind (the same kind that all the readers share in common with each other). He does not understand or apply such a statement to refer to “*one body*” that is universal consisting of all human beings or even consisting of two or more human beings.

Likewise, when Paul makes the transition from the physical to the metaphorical the same understanding applies:

*So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. – Rom. 12:5*

The historical reader (“*we*”) all share in common one kind of metaphorical church body wherein “*every one*” within that body are “*members of another.*” How does each reader understand and apply this text? He applies it the very same way

as he does the preceding verse. He applies it to the “*one*” body where his membership resides which is “*one*” in number as well as “*one*” in kind.

This interpretation is supported by the fact that in I Corinthians chapter five and chapter ten where the metaphorical “body of Christ” is used in the Lord’s Supper the contextual “we” is used when Paul is teaching the general truth but when Paul shifts to specific application he drops “we” and uses “ye” or “you” (I Cor. 5:7-10 “we” and “us” versus I Cor. 5:1-6, 11-13 “ye” or “you”; I Cor. 10:16-17 “we” versus I Cor. 10:19-21 “ye”).

The historical and contextual “we” of the New Testament epistles always refer to their readers who are members in churches which are like faith and order with each other.

### C. One Body

Ephesians 4:4 says there is only “*one body*.” What is that “*one*” body? Many believe Paul is referring to a universal invisible body of Christ made up of all saints in all ages or at least all saints scattered all over the physical earth in all denominations. However, in the immediate context there is a practical application that Paul has in mind. In Ephesians 3:21 Paul tells the Ephesians that glory to God is to be performed in the church by Jesus Christ and Ephesians 4:1-16 explains how God is glorified in the church by Jesus Christ.

First, there is our responsibility to glorify God due to the blessings that God has bestowed upon us through Jesus Christ (Eph. 4:1).

Second, in order for God to be glorified in the Church by Christ Jesus there must be a spirit or attitude of unity between the members of His body (Eph. 2:3). Third, this unity takes on a visible expression of unity as the words “bond of unity” conveys the idea of a bundle of wheat bound together by a cord (v. 3). This visible expression is then conveyed by the

metaphor of “*one body*” (v. 4). Remember, the rules that govern the use of a metaphor restrict it to those characteristics found in the literal concept. Those bound together in a metaphorical “*body*” are members united and working together. This is what a New Testament church is. It is a visible expression of members working together in unity. The “*one body*” is the New Testament church body that the reader of the epistle identifies with. It is not only one in number but one in kind. It is the same kind mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:27 where it is specifically applied to the church at Corinth. In fact, this is the only kind of church body where it is possible that such unity can be visibly expressed in keeping with this context.

Third, for such unity to be obtained and sustained, not only must there be an attitude of unity among its members, but there must be some doctrines that bind it together as well (vv. 4-6). These are essentials for any church body to continue to exist and function as a church.

Fourth, the Lord has provided gifted men to His kind of church in order to teach these truths (vv. 7-11). Apostles and prophets provided the foundation of truth – the oral and written Word of God. The evangelist first gospelized and then organized this body with the preaching and teaching of the Word. The Pastor/teacher became the leader in this body to mature it and equip it and stabilize it so that it is not tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine (vv. 12-14). Such unity comes with teaching and equipping and maturing the members to work together in love and unity so that every member is being matured (vv. 15-16). The “*one body*” in this context is that body where the reader of the epistle resides and is being taught to work harmoniously with the other members who are in practical doctrinal unity with each other.

Significantly, this “one body” is also found in context with “*one baptism.*” Water baptism is the only baptism promised age long continuance (Mt. 28:19-20). The book of Ephesians was written long after the baptism in the Spirit at Pentecost.

Water baptism is always in conjunction with the local church body of Christ (Ac. 2:41-42). The entire sevenfold oneness of Ephesians 4:4-6 is involved in building New Testament churches. The “*one baptism*” is the one that is administered by the “*one Spirit*” through human instrumentality (1 Cor. 3:4-9) into “*one body*” upon profession of the “*one faith*” in “*one Lord*” in keeping with “*one hope*” that was provided by “*one God and Father of us all*”. Which “*body*” is this? It is the numerical **one** where the reader of this epistle resides as a member. It is the **one** that is united by these sevenfold truths. It is the **one** where practical working unity among all of its members is possible and actual (1 Cor. 12:25-26). It is the **one** that is same in kind as “*the body of Christ*” at Corinth (1 Cor. 12:27).

#### D. Compassionate Body

*...but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether **one member** suffer, **all the members** suffer with it; or **one member** be honored, **all the members** rejoice with it. – 1 Cor. 12:25b-26 (emphasis mine)*

The above passage has no practical or possible application to any other kind of “*body of Christ*” other than the local visible kind. How can “*one*” of its members in Corinth rejoice or suffer and all of its members participate if those members were scattered all over the face of the earth?

However, this was not only possible but actually occurred between all the members in the local visible church body at Jerusalem:

*And **all** that believed **were together**, and had **all things common**. And sold their possessions and*



*goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. – Ac. 2:44-45 (emphasis mine)*

*And the multitude of them that believed were of **one heart and of one soul**: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had **all things common**. - Ac. 4:32 (emphasis mine)*

This was true of the church at Rome (Rom. 15:14). At least this is possible for any local visible New Testament church body but it has never occurred among all the members of the so-called universal invisible church body and never will on earth.

### **E. Organized Working Body**

*From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted which **every joint** supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love. – Eph. 4:16 (emphasis mine)*

This description can and does fit many local visible church bodies now and in the New Testament times but it never has fit the so-called universal invisible church body. There have never been harmonious efforts between all of its members.

However, Paul praised the church at Thessalonica for their joint efforts for Christ one toward another in the local church body:

*We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of **every***

*one of you all toward each other aboundeth –*  
(2 Thes. 1:3) (emphasis mine)

Paul encouraged the divided church at Corinth toward this same kind of unity (1 Cor. 1:10-11).

*Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. (1 Cor. 1:10)*

The doctrine of the universal invisible body of Christ has been the source of division and confusion but never unity.

## **E. Purged Body**

*Know ye that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump. **Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us.** – 1 Cor. 5:6,7 (emphasis mine)*

Preparation for the Lord's Supper is the subject discussed here in lieu of a publicly unqualified member to participate in the Lord's Supper (vv. 1-4). We know it is preparation for the Lord's Supper that is under discussion because the only "*feast*" kept by Christians where Christ "is" sacrificed "for us" as "our passover" with use of "*unleavened bread*" is the Lord's Supper. Paul later informs them that when the Lord's Supper is improperly observed it ceased being the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 12:20). Obviously, there was an impropriety being addressed in this chapter in regard to eating with such a brother (v. 11).

Just as Paul later tells them “*ye are [represent] the body of Christ*” so he tells them here “*ye are [represent] unleavened*” bread. That is, the unleavened bread used in the Lord’s Supper not only represents the literal body of Christ, but it also represents the church as the representative body of Christ. There can be no question that the bread represents the church of Christ in the Supper, as Paul explicitly tells them this in 1 Corinthians 10:16-17.

Notice that the church at Corinth is represented by “*the whole lump*” and that when one of its members is purged out it becomes a “*new*” lump. Just as the removal of only one member can make it a “*new*” lump, so also the refusal to remove such a member can “*leaven the whole lump.*”

The only possible kind of church body represented by the unleavened bread in the Lord’s Supper is the local visible church body. How can only “*one*” member leaven the “*whole*” universal invisible church body? How can such a church body purge out one of its members so as to be a “*new*” lump? How can such a universal invisible church body receive back such a person (2 Cor. 2:6)?

This can only make sense if the body of Christ is a metaphorical representation of the local church body, such as the one at Corinth.

Some stumble at this because of the use of the plural pronoun “*we*” in such passages as 1 Cor. 10:16-17 and 1 Corinthians 12:13. However, the answer is quite simple. Whenever Paul is using the metaphor abstractly or generically he uses the plural pronoun “*we*” but whenever he makes a concrete application of this metaphor he always says “*ye*” and never “*we.*” Why? **As a general rule, all believers during the apostolic era were baptized members of such local churches.** Therefore when speaking of this metaphor abstractly he could say “*we*” as it applied to all members of this kind of church body. But when applying this abstract teaching to a specific church he could never say “*we*” as he was not a member of that particular church body. Hence, in 1

Corinthians 10:16-17 he speaks of it abstractly and uses the plural pronoun “we” but in I Corinthians 10:20-21 where he applies it to the church at Corinth he drops “we” and uses “ye.” Likewise, in 1 Corinthians 12:13-26, he speaks of the body metaphor abstractly and uses “we,” but when it comes to applying it concretely in 1 Corinthians 12:27, he drops “we” and inserts “ye.”

## F. Generic Body

*For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church; and he is the Savior of the body. – Eph. 5:23 (emphasis mine)*

The generic is a subclass of the abstract use of nouns. The generic use of a term is when the term is used in the singular with the definite article (the) but includes each and every individual of that kind or class. For instance, notice in the text above that “*the husband*” and “*the wife*” are used generically. No particular husband or wife is being addressed, but rather, it includes all who fit those descriptions. If the reader is “a” husband or “a” wife, it applies concretely to each as readers. No one would ever rationalize, that Paul must be referring to some new kind of universal, invisible husband, or wife, just because no specific husband, or wife, is identified. However, this is exactly the kind of rationalization used by those who embrace the universal invisible church theory.

Notice that Paul says “*even as*” the husband and the wife so is Christ and the Church. The contextual theme is submission to authority in the sphere of sanctification. The husband is the head over the wife. This does not mean that the torso of the wife has no literal physical head upon her and that the literal physical head of the husband is somehow transplanted upon her or organically united to her. No, the term “*head*” simply refers to authority. The context is simply talking about the

position of authority in the sphere of sanctification. There is no spiritual organic union between the “*head*” of the husband and the torso of the wife. Likewise, there is no spiritual organic union between Christ and the torso of the church. Christ is in the position of authority over His church. Church membership has to do with sanctification not salvation. In salvation there is spiritual union between Christ and the individual believer (obtained by regeneration and justification) but the metaphor of the body is never used for that. The metaphor of a “*body*” infers unity among the members under the authority of Christ.

In 1 Corinthians 11:3 Paul tells them that the “*head*” of “*the woman*” is “*the man*” just as the “*head*” of every man is Christ. Again, Paul is not referring to a change in the physical anatomy of the woman or some kind of organic union between the physical head of Christ and the torso of the man. No physical head is being united to, nor transplanted upon the woman or the man. Neither is Paul implying that somehow the physical head of Christ is somehow transplanted upon billions of male bodies. However, this is exactly the rationale used by those who embrace the universal invisible church theory when we say that Christ is “*the head*” of each of his churches. They ignore it is a metaphor for authority but literalize it and say that makes Christ a polygamist, or that it creates a monstrosity of many physical bodies all sharing one physical head. This is not only a failure to understand simple metaphors but a clear demonstration of abuse of metaphors.

Christ is the authority over every man just as Christ is the authority over every one of his churches even as the husband is the authority over his own wife.

It is failure to understand simple metaphors used with the generic or abstract sense that distorts such passages as Ephesians 1:22-23:

*And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church,*

*Which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all.*

Notice that Christ is “*the head*” not only to “*the church*” but also “*over all things.*” Universal invisible advocates interpret “the head” to be spiritual union between Christ and the church. However, this would teach pantheism as Christ is also said to be “*the head*” over “*all things*” as well.<sup>51</sup> If **spiritual organic union** is what Paul intends by “*the head*” then this would teach that Christ is in spiritual union with “*all things*” thus making Christ and creation to be one and that is **pantheism**. This is what happens when simple metaphors are abused and misused.

The metaphor of “*the head*” simply means **authority** and when the term **authority** is substituted for “*the head*” it makes perfect sense:

*And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the authority over **all things** to the church, Which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all. (emphasis mine)*

He is the final authority over the church as well as over all things. Some still stumble at the second phrase “*Which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all*”. The church used generically, has reference to each and every one of His churches, each of which are a metaphorical “*body*” of Christ. Christ is the final authority over all his churches, as explicitly demonstrated in Revelation 2-3 where He addresses them as the final authority. They go about doing the work of the ministry in their own locality, just as Christ went about doing the work of the ministry when he was in his own physical body while on earth. What does it mean “*the fullness of him that*

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<sup>51</sup> Much of these thoughts were borrowed from Charles L. Hunt’s excellent book, “*The Body of Christ: Separating Myth from Metaphor*” published by Grace Baptist Church Printing Outreach, Florence, KY in 2006

*filleth all and all*”? The church acts in Christ’s behalf upon earth and is the final administrative authority He has established upon earth for kingdom affairs. This is made clear in Matthew 18:17 in the words, “*tell it to the church*” in connection with the keys of the kingdom in verse 18. This is also made clear in Matthew 28:17-20 in the giving of the Great Commission. Hence, the meaning of the passage above, is that Christ is the final authority over his churches, as He is over all things, but the churches represent the fullness of His authority on earth in the administration of His kingdom affairs. Thus the authority of Christ “*filleth all in all*” over creation and in the administration of His kingdom on earth.

Some still object to the generic use of “*the church*” in these passages because they never find plural **bodies** of Christ used in Scripture. They reason, if “*the church*” is used generically in such passages as Ephesians 1:22-23, then we should read of plural “bodies” of Christ, just as we read of plural “churches” of Christ. However, this is a failure again to understand the restrictive use of metaphors. Remember, the metaphor “*body of Christ*” can only transfer concepts that characterize the literal physical body of Christ. The literal physical body of Christ does not have a plurality of **bodies** or **heads**, and therefore such language as “*bodies of Christ*” or “*Christ is the heads*” violates the limitations of a metaphor. However, the generic sense grammatically provides a way for this metaphor to be applied to each church without violating the proper rules that govern the use of a metaphor. Each church is a body of Christ with members in particular, just as Paul explicitly states in 1 Corinthians 12:27.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> There is no definite article (the) in the Greek text in 1 Cor. 12:27. Literally it reads “Now ye are **a** body of Christ and members in particular.” The same is true in Ephesians 2:20-21 “In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto **a** holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for **a** habitation of God through the Spirit.” The church at Corinth is equally called “**a**” temple of God in I Cor. 3:16 as there is no

## G. Baptized Body

*For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. – 1 Cor. 12:13*

The above text is the most singularly used text by universal invisible church advocates to support their doctrine. However, will the overall context support their application of this text?

First, we will examine the overall context of the letter and then the specific and immediate context in which this text is found.

Paul begins this letter by dealing with a specific issue that had divided the church at Corinth (1 Cor. 1:10) into party divisions. This issue was the administrator of water baptism (1 Cor. 1:10-13). Because they were so divided over the administrators of water baptism, Paul thanked God that he had not baptized many of them as he did not want to be responsible for such division (1 Cor. 1:14-16). Paul went on to demonstrate that they had their priorities confused, as it is the gospel rather than water baptism that is most significant (1 Cor. 1:15-31). However, fearing that they would further divide over the particular preacher responsible for bringing them the gospel he went on to show that there was no basis for the preacher to brag or boast, but it was the Spirit of God where the power of the gospel resides (1 Cor. 2). In chapter three he directly deals with the division over the human instruments used by God the Holy Spirit in building the church at Corinth through preaching the gospel and baptizing them. In verses 1-4 he condemns them as “*carnal*” rather than “*spiritual*” due to making such distinctions and dividing over such human instruments. In

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definite article in the Greek text. The same is true in 1 Cor. 3:9 where the church at Corinth is “a” husbandry and “a” building of God.

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verses 5-9 he directly deals with the basis for their divisions. First, he asks them this question:

*Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos? – v. 5*

Then he proceeds to give them this answer:

*but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase. – vv. 5-7*

Paul makes it clear that these administrators of baptism all work under the leadership of one boss – God the Holy Spirit. Then, he proceeds to deal a death blow to their division over the various human administrators of water baptism by stating such administrators are all “**one**”, because they work together as “**one**,” with God the Holy Spirit:

*Now he that planteth and he that watereth are **one**: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour. For we are labourers **together with** God: ye are God’s husbandry, ye are God’s building. – vv. 8-9 (emphasis mine)*

Paul immediately proceeds to illustrate this principle by the fact that he was the master builder used by God to lay the foundation for the church at Corinth in verse 10.

Therefore under the leadership of the Holy Spirit these men were used by God to gospelize, baptize and form them into “**the temple of God**” at Corinth (v. 16).

Thus excluding the human instruments Paul tells them “*Ye are God’s husbandry, ye are God’s building...Ye are the*

*temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you*” (vv. 9,16) and later he will tell them “*Ye are the body of Christ and members in particular*” (1 Cor. 12:13).

What is his point and what is his solution to their party division over the particular administrator of their water baptism? It was God the Holy Spirit that brought them to faith in the gospel, and it was God the Holy Spirit that led them to receive water baptism and it was God the Holy Spirit that sent the ministers to them and the ministry together with God the Holy Spirit acted as one because they were under the direct leadership of the Spirit of God. This truth ends all bickering and divisions over particular human instruments used by God in their salvation and baptism. What was true of the church at Corinth is true of all New Testament churches and their individual members, For under the leadership of One Spirit were we all water baptized into one kind of body, regardless of our earthly race or class distinctions and were made to partake of His indwelling presence that characterize all His true churches as temples of the Holy Spirit, houses of God and the pillar and ground of the truth.

Now, let’s look at the immediate context in which 1 Corinthians 12:13 is found. Again, we have a problem over division of spiritual gifts. They are ignorant concerning spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12:1). Previous to their salvation they were under the leadership of demonic spirits in their idolatrous worship services:

*Ye know that ye were Gentiles, carried away  
unto these dumb idols, even as ye **were led**. – 1  
Cor. 12:2 (emphasis mine)*

It is in direct contrast to this leadership of demonic spirits in idolatrous worship services that Paul proceeds to illustrate the difference between then and now. Significantly, the word used to make this contrasting parallel is the preposition “**by**” which is the translation of the Greek preposition **en** in verse 3:

*Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking **by** the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but **by** the Holy Ghost. – v. 3*  
(emphasis mine)

When they were under the leadership of demonic spirits they could say Jesus was accursed and they could not truthfully say Jesus is Lord, but now in contrast, “*by*” or **under the leadership of** The Holy Spirit they cannot say Jesus is accursed and they can say Jesus is Lord. Hence, Paul establishes what he means by the word “*by*” or the Greek preposition **en** at the very beginning of this context. He means **under the leadership of**, or **by direction of**, or **by means of**, the Holy Spirit.

Consider the above in light of John 4:1-2. In John 4:1 the apostle says that Jesus baptized and made more disciples than John. However, in John 4:2 it is clarified that Jesus Himself never baptized anyone, but that His disciples administered such baptisms. That is, these baptisms were administered under the leadership, direction and authority of Jesus Christ. They are attributed to Him (v. 1) but actually administered by those under his leadership (v. 2). Jesus promised the church that He would send “*another Comforter*” or the Holy Spirit to them (Jn. 16:13) who would “*lead them*” into all things. Like the first Comforter, the second Comforter would “*lead them*” in regard to the administration of baptism (I Corinthians 3:8-9) and building churches. Hence, just as the administration of water baptism was attributed to the first Comforter (John 4:1) but actually administered under his leadership by His disciples (Jn. 4:2) so likewise water baptism is directly attributed to the second Comforter (1 Cor. 12:13) but is actually administered under His leadership by His ministers (1 Cor. 3:8-9).

Furthermore, 1 Corinthians 3:1-16 established how the church was built as the temple of the Spirit of God. It was built by the “*master builder*” Paul and then built up by others but all

under the leadership of the Holy Spirit. They worked together with the Holy Spirit as “*one*” in building this church as the “*temple of God.*” Hence, the church at Corinth was formed under the leadership, or “*by one Spirit*” whereby they were all water baptized into one body, one temple, one husbandry, one building, by that same Spirit. The emphasis on another Comforter is leadership.

In 1 Corinthians 12:12 Paul introduces the physical human body first as a simile (“*as*”) and then as a metaphor (“*is*”) for the church, just as he did in Romans 12:4:

*For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. – I Cor. 12:12*

*For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: – Rom. 12:4*

Notice first of all that it is the physical human body that is first introduced in both passages. Notice the word “*as*” in both passages – “*For as the body is one*” and “*For as we have many members in one body*”. Second, notice that he does not use plural bodies when speaking of the human body but rather the generic sense “*the body*” (1 Cor. 12:12) and “*one body*” (Rom. 12:4) but with the plural pronoun “*we*” (Rom. 12:4). Now, does that mean Paul was trying to teach that “*we*” all share **one physical human body in common with each other** or that “*we*” all share **one common kind of physical human body with each other**? Obviously, he is using the generic sense with the plural pronoun “*we*”. Likewise he transfers this same generic use with the plural pronoun directly over to the metaphorical application to the church as the body of Christ in Romans 12:5 and 1 Corinthians 12:13, as he explicitly says “*so also is Christ.*” That is, just as New Testament believers all

shared in common one kind of physical human body with many members, they also shared in common one kind of metaphorical church body with many members as all of them had, under the leadership of The Holy Spirit, been water baptized into such a body, regardless of ethnic and class distinctions, and thereby made to partake of the special presence of the Holy Spirit, manifested in unity, in spiritual gifts and doctrinal and practical truth.

In the New Testament era all believers that Paul wrote to were members of New Testament churches that were like faith and order with each other. This is the undeniable historical context of “*we*.” Hence, Paul could say “*we*” when addressing what they all had in common. However, when Paul comes to applying this generic truth to the particular church at Corinth he drops the “*we*” and says “*ye*” (1 Cor. 12:27) because he was not a member of the church at Corinth, but his membership was in the church at Antioch from whence he was sent out (Ac. 13:1-4).

This interpretation is the only interpretation that provides a practical solution to the division in the church at Corinth, or the division that might occur within any true church of Christ. This interpretation equally applies to division over spiritual gifts. It is under the leadership of the Spirit that gifts are to be exercised. Think about this. What does the Universal Invisible church interpretation of this text provide in the way of any practical solution for division within this church at Corinth or any other church????? Can the Universal Invisible church interpretation provide any kind of practical solution for division among its members? Name any time in history that such an interpretation effected unity among all Christians living upon earth, as described in 1 Corinthians 12:25-26? No, the universal invisible church theory has never been a source for unity, but just the reverse. It has been the doctrinal source for increasing division and disunity.

In closing, let it be noted that the historic Baptist interpretation of 1 Corinthians 12:13 among Baptists before

1680 was unanimous that this text referred to water baptism and the membership in the local church.

## H. Authorized Body

*And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all. - Eph. 1:22-23*

Those who interpret the metaphorical “*head*” and “*body*” relationship between Christ and the church to be an organic union in which Christ is the physical head and the church to be the physical body have a tremendous problem with this text.

Paul uses the metaphor “*head*” to establish the authority of Christ “*over all things.*” Hence, Christ is “*the head*” over all things as much as He is the “*head*” over the church which is His **metaphorical** “*body.*” If the **metaphor** of “*head*” infers organic spiritual union with the church body then it equally infers organic spiritual union with Christ and “*all things,*” as He is equally the “*head*” over both. However, that would teach **pantheism** making Christ spiritually united with “*all things.*”

Although spiritual union is a Biblical concept that is found in the doctrines of regeneration and justification, it is not inferred or implied in the “*head*” and “*body*” **metaphors**. Remember, the proper use of **metaphors** can only convey characteristics that are actually found in the relationship between the literal “*head*” and “*body.*” In the literal physical relationship between the “*head*” and “*body*” both are mutually dependent upon each other for life. If you cut off the literal “*head*” from the literal “*body*” both mutually die as one cannot be sustained without the other. To apply these metaphors to spiritual union would teach that Jesus Christ is as much dependent upon the body for spiritual life as the body is dependent upon Christ for spiritual life. The Bible does not teach such a thing.

Spiritual union between Christ and believers may be **metaphorically** expressed by the vine and branch metaphor. If the branches are severed from the vine, only the branches die, as the vine is sustained by its own inherent and separate life principle.

The **metaphors** of “*head*” and “*body*” merely convey the idea of final authority, direction, and leadership by Christ and submission to that leadership by the church. In every context where the **metaphors** “*head*” and “*body*” are found the subject is progressive sanctification not salvation.

What Ephesians 1:22-23 actually teaches is that Christ possesses final authority over “*all things*.” On planet earth His authority is visibly manifested in and through the church. The New Testament church is the visible expression of the Kingdom (rule) of God on earth and possesses the “*keys of the kingdom*” (Mt. 18:17-18) which symbolizes Christ’s authority. Jesus expresses this authority in the church when he said:

***Tell it to the church...** Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. – Mt. 18:17, 18 (emphasis mine)*

When authorizing the church to carry out the Great Commission Jesus prefaced it by saying “*all power is given me in heaven and in earth*.” On planet earth His authority is manifested in and through the church, as His temple.

***Know ye not that ye are the temple of God,** and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? – 1 Cor. 3:16 (emphasis mine)*

***Now ye are the body of Christ,** and members in particular – 1 Cor. 12:27 (emphasis mine)*

In the preceding context of Ephesians 1:22-23 Paul has just declared that God has set Christ above all principalities in heavenly places. The extent of His authority not only reaches in this world but the world to come. The present manifestation of that authority in “*this world*” is in His institutional church which is His metaphorical body:

*And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all. – Eph. 1:19-23*

### **Review Questions**

1. Is the wife in Ephesians 5:23-25 without a physical head or does she have a physical head in addition to the metaphorical head which is her husband?
2. Is the “*man*” and “*woman*” in 1 Corinthians 11:3 without physical heads, or do they have physical heads in addition to their **metaphorical** head which is Christ?
3. Is Christ without a physical head in 1 Cor. 11:3 or does he have a physical head in addition to a **metaphorical** head which is His Father?



4. Is the **metaphorical** “*body*” in 1 Corinthians 12:12-17 without a “*head*” (see I Cor. 12:16-17, 21) or does it have a “*head*” as part of the membership in addition to Christ as its “*head*” as well?
5. What do the **metaphors** “*head*” and “*body*” express? Do they express organic spiritual union between each other, or merely a relationship of authority and submission?
6. Since Christ is the “*head*” over all things created (Eph. 1:21-22) equally as He is the “*head*” over the church, does that mean He is organically in union with creation? Or does this mean he is merely acting as final authority over all things including the church?
7. Does 1 Corinthians 12:2 provide the interpretative guide to define the use of “*by*” in the following context? Before they were saved, were they under the leadership of demons in their false worship?
8. Acts 2:43-46 demonstrate that 1 Corinthians 12:25-26 can work in a local visible church, but at what point in history has this ever worked in the so-called universal invisible body of Christ?
9. What interpretation of 1 Corinthians 12:13 actually resolve the basis for division in the church at Corinth over differences of baptismal administrators and spiritual gifts within that membership? Has the universal invisible body of Christ interpretation ever resolved division among any Christians at any time in history?

## V. The House of God

*But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. – 1 Tim. 3:15*

**T**his is the eighty-fifth mention of the phrase “*the house of God*” in the Bible. All eighty-four previous occurrences refer by context to the local visible institution for public worship – the temple. The writer of this statement is Paul, a Jew. The one being addressed is Timothy, raised by a Jewish mother and grandmother. Jews were raised with certain understandings when it came to the words “*the house of God.*” Understanding this phrase will also help understand the true nature of the churches of Christ. When this phrase was used or was heard or read by Jews there were certain specific things that immediately came to their minds.

### A. It was the appointed public place of worship:

*But unto the place which the LORD your God shall choose out of all your tribes to put his name there, **even unto his habitation shall ye seek, and thither thou shalt come:** 6 And thither ye shall bring your burnt offerings, and your sacrifices, and your tithes, and heave offerings of your hand, and your vows, and your freewill offerings, and the firstlings of your herds and of your flocks:7 And there ye shall eat before the LORD your God, and ye shall rejoice in all that ye put your hand unto, ye and your households, wherein the LORD thy God hath blessed thee.....13 Take heed to thyself that thou offer not thy burnt offerings in every*

*place that thou seest:14 But in the place which the LORD shall choose in one of thy tribes, there thou shalt offer thy burnt offerings, and there thou shalt do all that I command thee.” – Deut. 12:5 (emphasis mine)*

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

## **B. It had a qualified public ministry:**

*Speak unto Aaron, saying, Whosoever he be of thy seed in their generations that **hath any blemish**, let him not approach to offer the bread of his God. For whatsoever man he be that hath a blemish, he shall not approach: a blind man, or a lame, or he that hath a flat nose, or any thing superfluous, Or a man that is brokenfooted, or brokenhanded, Or crookback, or a dwarf, or that hath a blemish in his eye, or be scurvy, or scabbed, or hath his stones broken; No man that hath a blemish of the seed of Aaron the priest shall come nigh to offer the offerings of the LORD made by fire: he hath a blemish; he shall not come nigh to offer the bread of his God. – Lev. 21:17-21(emphasis mine)*

*This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. A bishop then must be **blameless**....” – 1 Tim. 3:1-2 (emphasis mine)*

**C. It's construction and ordinances were built after a Divine Pattern:**

*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 look that thou make them after their **pattern**, which was shewed thee in the mount. – Ex. 25:9-10 (emphasis mine)*

*All this, said David, the LORD made me understand in writing by his hand upon me, even all the works of **this pattern**. – 1 Ch 28:19 (emphasis mine)*

*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. – Mt. 16:18 (emphasis mine)*

*And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen. – Mt. 28:18-20*

The churches of Christ are reproduced by a divine pattern (Mt. 28:19-20) and each essential is defined by a divine pattern (essentials of baptism, essentials of the gospel, essentials of the Lord's Supper, essentials of qualifications for officers, etc.).

**D. It administrated everything according to a due order:**

*For because ye did it not at the first, the LORD our God made a breach upon us, for that we sought him not **after the due order**. – 1 Ch. 15:13 (emphasis mine)*

*Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. 1 Pet. 2:5 (emphasis mine)*

**E. All other places, ministries and administrations were forbidden and regarded as “*high places*.”**

*Nevertheless the people did sacrifice still in the **high places**, yet unto the LORD their God only. – 2 Chron. 33:17 (emphasis mine)*

*And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, **Come out of her**, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues. – Rev. 18:4 (emphasis mine)*

Although, the eighty-fifth mention of “*the house of God*” is found in 1 Timothy 3:15, it is the first mention in the New Testament that does not apply it to the Old Testament houses of God (tabernacle, temple and rebuilt temple). Theologians according to the laws of hermeneutics would refer to such a first mention as **the law of first mention**. The significance of such a law is that it is usually regarded by theologians as the definitive occurrence. True to this law is the fact that Paul says “*The house of God which is . . .*” demonstrating clearly that Paul is providing a definitive statement. The immediate context clearly defines it as the institution of public worship where a

qualified ministry is found (1 Tim. 3:1-13) and where the public offering (Person and redemptive work of Jesus Christ) is found (1 Tim. 3:16) and where “*the faith*” once delivered is taught (1 Tim. 4:1). In addition to all these contextual factors, it is further defined as “the church of the living God and the pillar and ground of the truth.”

The very use of the terms “*the House of God,*” to describe “*the church,*” immediately brought to mind these entire distinctions characteristic of the institution of **public** worship to the Jewish mind set. When the Jew heard the words “*the pillar and ground of the truth*” the immediate thought was the authorized visible institution for public worship where the truth was not only administered but taught (Deut. 12).

This concept clearly conveyed to the Jewish mind, the institution for public worship that was built after a divine **pattern**. The churches in the New Testament were all built after the divine pattern in Matthew 28:19-20. People were first converted to the gospel, then baptized and then assembled together and instructed how to observe all things Christ commanded. They all shared “*the faith*” which was once delivered to the saints (Jude 3). They were all warned about the rise of false teachers that would lead many to depart from “*the faith*” (1 Tim. 4:1) and they were told exactly how this would happen and how new denominations and churches that were not like faith and order would arise (Acts 20:29-30). The people were forewarned that demonic activity would be the cause for all departures from “the house of God” (1 Tim. 3:15 with 1 Tim. 4:1).

**Review Questions**

1. What would immediately come to the mind of a Jew when the phrase “*the house of God*” was heard?
2. What was a “*high place*” in the mind of a Jew?
3. Does the phrase “*the house of God*” imply a divine pattern was followed in building it, a divine pattern established for the ordinances and their administration, a divine pattern in its mission?
4. Does the phrase “*the house of God*” imply a properly qualified ministry?
5. What are the “*high places*” today?

## **VI. Old Testament Background for Baptism in the Spirit Institutional Accreditation/dedication**

Psa. 26:8 *LORD, I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honour dwelleth (Heb. “miskan”)*

Deut. 12:5 *But unto the place which the LORD your God shall choose out of all your tribes to put his name there, even unto his habitation (Heb. “shekan”) shall ye seek, and thither thou shalt come:*

Deut. 12:11 *-Then there shall be a place which the LORD your God shall choose to cause his name to dwell (Heb. “shakan”) there; thither shall ye bring all that I command you; your burnt offerings, and your sacrifices, your tithes, and the heave offering of your hand, and all your choice vows which ye vow unto the LORD:*

### **The Baptism of the First House of God in the Shekinah Glory – Ex. 40**

*So Moses finished the work. 34 ¶ Then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle(Heb. Miskan). 35 And Moses was not able to enter into the tent of the congregation, because the cloud abode thereon, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.*

**A. Designated builder** – Moses - (Ex. 40:33)

**B. Built according to a divine pattern** (Ex. 25:9,40)

**C. Only Once Covered** (immersed) in the Glory of the Spirit at the beginning



- D. Identified as the “habitation” and “house” of God by David – Psa. 26:8**
- E. Designated as the place of His name** = authorized institution for PUBLIC worship where His revealed will and ordinances are administered through a qualified ministry. – Deut 12 (“the house of God the pillar and ground of the truth” – I Tim. 3:15)
- F. Later this event is joined with “The dedication of the House of God”** – 2 Chron. 7:5 or the public divine accreditation of the House of God as the public institution for worship

Deut. 20:5 *And the officers shall speak unto the people, saying, What man is there that hath built a new house, and hath not **dedicated** it? let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle, and another man **dedicate** it.*

### **The Baptism of the Second House of God in the Shekinah Glory – 2 Chron. 7**

*Now when Solomon had made an end of praying, the fire came down from heaven, and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of the LORD filled the house. 2 And the priests could not enter into the house of the LORD, because the glory of the LORD had filled the LORD’S house. 3 And when all the children of Israel saw how the fire came down, and the glory of the LORD upon the house, they bowed themselves with their faces to the ground upon the pavement, and worshipped, and praised the LORD, saying, For he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever.... dedicated the house of God. – 2 Chron. 7:1-3,5*

- A. Designated builder** – Solomon - (1 Chron. 28:11-12)
- B. Built according to a divine authorized pattern** (1 Chron. 28:11-12,19)
- C. Only Once Covered** (immersed) at the beginning (2 Chron. 7:1-3)
- D. Joined with “The dedication of the House of God”** – 2 Chron. 7:5 or the public divine accreditation of the House of God as the designated institution for PUBLIC worship.
- E. Designated as the place of His name** = authorized PUBLIC institution for worship where His revealed will and ordinances are administered through a qualified ministry. – Deut 12 (“*the house of God the pillar and ground of the truth*” – I Tim. 3:15)

### **The Baptism of the Third House of God in the Shekinah Glory – Ezr. 6/Ze. 4**

*And they builded, and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the commandment of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia. 15 And this house was finished on the third day of the month Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king. And the children of Israel, the priests, and the Levites, and the rest of the children of the captivity, kept the dedication of this house of God with joy – Ezra 6:14-16*

*“then he answered and spake unto me, saying, This is the word of the LORD unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts.<sup>7</sup> Who art thou, O great mountain? before*

*Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain: and he shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it.<sup>8</sup> Moreover the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, <sup>9</sup> The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it; and thou shalt know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me unto you” – Zech. 4:6-9*

- A. Designated builder** – Zerubbabel - (Zech. 4:9)
- B. Built according to a divine authorized pattern** (Zech. 4:6-10; 1 Chron. 28:11-12, 19)
- C. Identified with the event in 2 Chron 7:5 called “the dedication of this house”** – Ez. 6:16
- D. Designated as the place of His name** = authorized PUBLIC institution for worship where His revealed will and ordinances are administered through a qualified ministry. – Deut 12 (“*the house of God the pillar and ground of the truth*” – I Tim. 3:15)

### **The Baptism of the Fourth House of God in the Shekinah Glory – Acts 2**

*And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.<sup>2</sup> And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.<sup>3</sup> And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. <sup>4</sup> And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. – Acts 2:1-4*

- A. Designated builder** (Mt. 16:18)
- B. Built according to a divine authorized pattern** (Mt. 28:18-20)
- C. Only Once Covered** (immersed) at the beginning
1. All scripture previous to Pentecost points forward – Mt. 3:11; Mk. 1:8; Lk. 3:16; Jn. 1:33; Ac. 1:5
  2. All scripture after Pentecost points back – Acts 11:15
  3. No command in Scripture to seek “*baptism*” in Spirit but we are commanded to seek water baptism.
  4. Only “*one*” baptism promised to end of age (water baptism)– Mt. 28:19-20
  5. Only “*one*” baptism by the time Eph. 4:5 written (water baptism)
- D. filled many times** – Acts 2:2; 4:31
- E. This event is parallel to the previous three Public Divine accreditations of the institutional House of God** by immersion in the Holy Spirit = the authorized PUBLIC institution for worship where His revealed will and ordinances are administered through a qualified ministry. – Deut 12 (“*the house of God the pillar and ground of the truth*” – I Tim. 3:15)
- F. Transition from Previous Temple to Church as the new House of God**
1. Mt. 23:38 – “*behold your house is left unto you desolate*”
  2. Mt. 27:51 – “*And behold the vail of the temple was rent in two, from the top to the bottom....*”
  3. Acts 1:5 – “*ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.*”
  4. Acts 2:1,41,47; “*...they were all with one accord in one place....added unto them....added to the church...*”

5. I Tim. 3:15 – *“But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.”*
6. 1 Cor. 3:16 – *“ye are the temple of the Spirit”*
7. 1 Cor. 12:27 *“Ye are the body of Christ”*
- 8.

### **The Pentecostal Characteristics of Baptism in the Spirit**

**A. All scriptures previous to Pentecost point forward – Acts 1:5** *“not many days hence”*

**B. Pentecostal description of baptism in Spirit is all EXTERNAL phenomena**

1. There was a specific described sound – *“sound as of a mighty rushing wind”*
2. There were specific described sights
  - a. *“filled the room”* – immersion (cloud)
  - b. *“tongues of fire”* upon each head

**C. Neither Pentecostal or Protestant interpretation fits the Pentecostal description**

1. Pentecostal second work of grace theory - No Pentecostal sound and sights reoccurring upon individuals anywhere in the Bible, in history or today.
2. Protestant baptism into mystical body of Christ theory – No Pentecostal sound, sight, action reoccurring at regeneration of individuals anywhere in the Bible, in history or today.
3. Holy Spirit indwelt believers Before Pentecost:
  - a. Joseph - Gen. 41:38;
  - b. Caleb - Numbers 14:24; (not a Prophet)
  - c. Joshua - Numbers 27:18; (not a Prophet)
  - d. The prophets - Nehemiah 9:30;
  - e. Moses - Isaiah 63:10, 11;

- f. Part of Redemption of elect - Ezekiel 36:27;
- g. Daniel - Dan. 4:2-3,9; 5:11-14; 6:3; (far more references than to regeneration in O.T.).
- h. All His children are indwelt – Rom. 8:7-8 (no other option but to be lost).

**D. What was baptized was a PLURAL qualified body of people - “they” of Acts 1:15-17**

- 1. “they” of Acts 1:21-22
- 2. “them” of Acts 2:41
- 3. “the church” – Acts 2:47

**E. This is the divine accreditation of the institution for public worship as “the house of God”**

**Conclusions**

**A. This event is joined with “the dedication of the house of God” - It’s purpose is to publicly designate and approve of the INSTITUTION where a properly qualified ministry administers His ordinances and conducts Public worship in distinction from unauthorized public institutions for worship previously called “high places” (Deut. 12:1-13).**

**B. The phrase “house of God” is always characterized as a**

- 1. Public Institution – Deut. 12:5-11
- 2. Public Place of Worship – Deut. 12:5-11; I Tim. 3:15
- 3. Public qualified Ministry – 1 Kngs 12:31; I Tim. 3:1-13
- 4. Public administration of ordinances – 1 Kngs 12:31; I Cor. 11:17-20

**C. The House of God has a designated builder (Mt. 16:18)**

**D. The House of God is built according to a divine Pattern (Mt. 16:18; 28:19-20).**

**E. This divine accreditation occurs once “at the beginning”**  
(Acts 11:15)

**F. The House of God is not an individual or two or three individuals in less than church capacity** (Mt. 18:16 in comparison with Mt. 18:20; I Pet. 2:5). They are baptized believers in church capacity as demonstrated by noting that the plural “*ye*” and “*you*” who are promised baptism in the Spirit in Acts 1:5 are the very same baptized believers in Acts 1:14-15; 2:1, 41, called “the church” in Acts 2:47

### Review Questions

1. In the mind of a Jew did the phrase “*house of God*” mean anything other than the public institution for worship?
2. In the mind of a Jew did the phrase “*house of God*” identify with any other ministry than a properly qualified ministry?
3. In the mind of a Jew did the phrase “*house of God*” refer to the public place of administration of the ordinances?

## VII. The Promise of the Father

*And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. – Acts 1:4*

**T**he promise of the Father has to do with the **public** change from the visible Old Testament/Covenant economy to the New Testament/Covenant economy. The coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost is the **public** visible transition point between these two economies. This promise involves many different facets which must be clearly distinguished from each other as this transition involves both salvation and service aspects.

First, it has to do with a visible kingdom administrative change. On the day of Pentecost, God divinely accredited the New House of God - the church – as the new visible administrator within His kingdom on earth (Mt. 16:18; 18:17-18). The “*keys of the kingdom*” had been taken away from Israel and given to the church (Mt. 18:17-18) and on Pentecost this transfer was publicly formalized. This new house of God was not ethnic, gender or class restrictive as was the former house of God. As with former houses of God, the new house of God was divinely accredited by baptism in the shekinah glory on the day of Pentecost. The promise of the Father in regard to the new house of God consisted in the baptism and indwelling of the church institution, as the temple of God, formed of plural living stones built up together into a spiritual house (1 Pet. 2:5) a spiritual temple (1 Cor. 3:16) as the church of the Living God, the house of God, the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15) in which qualified ministers



administered the ordinances (1 Tim. 3:1-13). This coming and indwelling by the Spirit in the new house of God is not to be confused with individual indwelling and salvation. The Holy Spirit has always regenerated and indwelt his people. Anyone at any time who is without the indwelling Spirit is "*in the flesh*" and "*none of His*" (Rom. 8:7-9). There has never been a third option. Instead this indwelling has to do with equipping and empowering the church as the "*pillar and ground of the truth*" (Eph. 3:21-4:16; I Cor. 12:13-28).

Second, it has to do with the shift from the nation of Israel unto the Gentiles as the primary sphere for redemptive work by God. Formerly, God restricted His redemptive activity primarily within the nation of Israel. However, with the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost the "*witness*" of the gospel would be empowered among the Gentiles (Acts 1:8). The emphasis of God's redemptive work would shift from Israel unto the Gentile nations (Rom. 11) until the fullness of the gentiles come in (Rom. 11:25).

*Ga 3:14 That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.*

Third, it has to do with the provision of the New Testament Scriptures under the direction of the apostolic office (Isa. 8:16-17; Jn. 16:13; I Jn. 4:6; etc.) and with the sign gifts that characterize that office (2 Cor. 12:12). Such sign gifts performed by and through their hands would serve multiple purposes. First, they would serve as divine confirmation of the scriptures produced under their direction. They would "*bind up the law and seal the testimony*" among themselves (Isa. 8:16-17). Second, they would serve as temporary revelatory gifts among the churches until the scriptures were confirmed and completed (1 Cor. 13:8-13). Third, they would serve as signs

unto the nation of Israel that her Messiah had come and rejection of him would end in destruction (1 Cor. 14:20-21 with Isa. 28).

Therefore, the promise of the Spirit has to do with both salvation and service under a new dispensation to the Gentiles. The point of confusion is that the promise of the Spirit was confined to the new house of God in the first century as no other Christian institution existed. It was the only administrator of the gospel in the book of Acts that furthered the boundaries of the gospel unto the gentile world. No other denomination of Christians existed in the first century other than those of like faith and order. Today, many various conflicting denominations of Christians take the gospel unto the Gentile world. In regard to that aspect of empowerment of the gospel, the promise of the Father among the gentile nations is not confined to the true churches of Christ but rather to the true "witness" of the gospel. Thus God honors his word as it goes forth regardless of who does it and why they do it:

*Philp. 1:15-18 Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will: The one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds: But the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defence of the gospel. What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice.*

*2Ti 2:9 Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound.*

## Summary

### **A. The Promise of the Father is inclusive of a multi-facet New dispensational work by the Holy Spirit**

1. Baptism in the Spirit – dedication/identification of New Covenant House of God/administrator – the institutional church – Mt. 18:17-18 (Acts 1:4-5)
2. Empowered Salvation witness unto "world" – change from Israel to Gentiles – Rom. 11 (Gal. 3:14; Eph. 3:5).
3. Completion of Biblical Canon – Promise empowerment of the Apostolic Office – Isa. 8:16-20 with Heb. 2:13 and I Jn. 4:6; etc. (Jn. 14:16; 16:13)
4. Sign Gifts - In Regard to the Nation of Israel – confirming the Messiah and coming destruction – Isa. 28 with I Cor. 14:19-21; Acts 2:6,8,11, (Acts 2:39). In regard to the church, temporary revelatory gifts for direction until the canon is completed. In regard to the prophetic work of the apostles, confirmation of their scriptures (Heb. 2:4).

### **B. Interpretative problems result when these facets are confused with each other.**

The only salvation aspect of the promise of the Father has to do with the shift from the nation of Israel as the sphere of God's redemptive work unto the gentile nations. This has to do with the work of the Holy Spirit in connection with the gospel "witness." All other aspects have to do with service in the kingdom of God on earth.

**Review Questions**

1. Is there a visible kingdom change of the administration of divine ordinances from the Jewish house of God unto the church institution?
2. Is there a change from a restrictive Jewish commission to a gentile commission?
3. Is there incorporation of gentile believers into the new house of God on equal level with Jewish believers?
4. Is there an Old Testament identity of the baptism in the Spirit with institutionalized public worship as “*the house of God*”?
5. Does the “*promise of the Father*” involve both salvation and service issues?

## VIII. The Kingdom versus the Churches

In the following outline we entertain the idea that there is no difference between the kingdom and churches of God and then show the logical consequences of such an idea. We then proceed to demonstrate that such an idea cannot harmonize with the Scriptures.

### A. If there is No Difference

1. All who are in the kingdom of God would also be in the churches of God
2. To be outside of one would also be outside of the other
3. The same way into the kingdom of God would be the same way into the churches of God.
4. Both would share the same characterizations in scripture

### B. Some Obvious Differences

1. The Kingdom and churches are not characterized the same way:
  - a. The Kingdom of God is found only in the singular. We never read plural **kingdoms** of God but we do read plural "*churches*."
  - b. Christ said, "*tell it to the church*" (Mt. 18:17) but no such command is ever used of the kingdom.
  - c. The kingdom is said to be preached, and is "*at hand*," but the church is never attributed such actions (Acts 28:31; Mk 1:14).
  - d. We read of the "*gospel of the kingdom*," but never do we read "*the gospel of the church*". - Mt. 24:14

- e. The church is described as being built, but the kingdom of God is never described by such language (Mt. 16:18).
- f. The church is called a metaphorical "*body*," but the kingdom is never described as such.
- g. The church is called a metaphorical "*virgin*" and all the churches are collectively called a metaphorical "*bride*," but the Kingdom is never described as such (2 Cor. 11:2; Rev. 22:16-17)
- h. The church is a congregation with officers, ordinances and visible organized character, whereas a kingdom, is the domain and rule of a king, without visible organization, or officers (Lk. 17:20)

2. They are not inclusive of one another

- a. You can remove a true child of God out of the church by discipline (1 Cor. 5:5-13 with 2 Cor. 2:6; Mt. 18:17), but no earthly institution can remove a true child of God out of the Kingdom of God.
- b. The church is given the "*keys of the kingdom*" (Mt. 18:17-18) which demands the churches are not the kingdom, but the administrative authority in the kingdom of God.
- c. Church membership is subject to the democratic action of the body (Rom. 14:1; Ac. 9:26; 1 Cor. 5:5; 2 Cor. 2:6); while God, purely independent of church action adds men into his kingdom (Col. 1:13).

**C. They are not entered the same Way**

- 1. One can be in the professing kingdom of God by mere profession of faith (Mt. 13:38-41) but one cannot be in the church of God without a profession of faith and scriptural baptism (Acts 2:41)

2. All saints in all ages are born into the kingdom of God (Jn. 3:3,5), but no saint could be in the church of God until after it was built by Christ and until after the apostles were the first to be added (Mt. 16:18; I Cor. 12:28; Eph. 2:20)

Many have confused the churches of God with the kingdom and family of God. All believers are sons in the same family and subjects within the same kingdom by new birth (Jn. 3:3,11; Gal. 3:27). The kingdom of God is world wide and invisible to its true citizens (Mt. 13:38). The Family includes all the saved, departed and living (Eph. 3:15). However, the churches of God have nothing to do with salvation but with representation. Membership into the Lord's Churches begins with a public professing of faith and a public representation of it by baptism (Ac. 2:41; 1 Cor. 12:13). The churches of God visibly represent Christ as the administrative body of His doctrine and practice within His kingdom on earth (Mt. 16:18-19; 18:17-18).

### **Review Questions**

1. Are there any differences between the kingdom of God and the church of God?
2. Can you be in one and not the other?
3. Does one precede the other?
4. Is the church of God the visible administrative authority in God's kingdom on earth?

## IX. The Keys of the Kingdom

One of the great disputed subjects in the Bible is the “keys of the Kingdom”. Understanding what they are helps define the true nature of the churches of Christ. Understanding who previously possessed them and how they were abused helps understand what they are? Rome claims they represent Papal authority:

*Power of the Keys - The expression "power of the keys" is derived from Christ's words to St. Peter (in Matthew 16:19). The promise there made finds its explanation in Isaias 22, in which "the key of the house of David" is conferred upon Eliacim, the son of Helcias, as the symbol of plenary authority in the Kingdom of Juda. Christ by employing this expression clearly designed to signify his intention to confer on St. Peter the supreme authority over His Church.*  
– **Catholic Encyclopedia**

### A. The Acknowledged Symbolism

1. The symbol of “keys” universally is acknowledged to represent authority.
2. The plurality of the “keys” represents various areas of authority.
3. The sphere of authority is over “*the kingdom*” of God.
4. The one entrusted with the keys is the Custodian or position of authority.



## B. Who Is the Custodian of the Keys

1. The Previous Custodian – Mt. 21:40-43 – Israel, as represented through its authorized representatives/leaders - The visible expression of Kingdom worship and order.
2. The Position of authority abused by previous custodian – Mt. 23:1-2; Rom. 3:1-2; 9:4.
  - a. They abused the key of gospel salvation – Mt. 23:13.
  - b. They abused the key of disciple making – Mt. 23:15.
  - c. They abused the key of administration of the ordinances – Mt. 21:23.
  - d. They abused the key of discipline – Jn. 9:34.
  - e. They abused the key of knowledge or instruction – Lk. 11:52.
  - f. They abused the key of qualifying and ordaining to the ministry – Mt. 23.
3. The Present Custodian – Mt. 21:43; Mt. 16:18-19
  - a. The “nation” – The visible expression of His kingdom on earth.
  - b. The churches identified as final authority – Mt. 18:17 – “*tell it to the church.*”
  - c. The church represented through its ordained leadership – Mt. 28:18-20.
4. The Position of authority over visible kingdom Worship
  - a. Administrative Authority – Periphrastic future Perfect Indicative “shall have already been loosed.....bound” (prohibit or allow, forbid or command).

- b. Administrative Position – 1 Tim. 3:15; Mt. 18:17-18
  - (1) The key of gospel salvation – Mt. 28:19; Mk. 16:15.
  - (2) The key of disciple making – Mt. 28:19.
  - (3) The key of administration of the ordinances – Mt. 28:19.
  - (4) The key of discipline – Mt. 18:15-18.
  - (5) The key of knowledge or instruction – Mt. 28:20.
  - (6) The key of qualifying and ordaining to the ministry – Ac. 13:1-3.

### **C. The Nature of the Keys define the nature of the churches Jesus built**

- 1. The kind of church that can administer the keys – Mt. 16:18-29 with 18:15-18.
- 2. The kind of church produced by administering the keys – Mt. 28:19-20.
- 3. The kind of church that is a visible expression of the Kingdom on earth.

### **D. The churches of Christ are the localized visible expression of God's Kingdom**

**Conclusion:** There is no historical or Biblical evidence that the body of Christ which is the church of Christ, the house of God and the pillar and ground of the truth is universal or invisible. This is the doctrine of the apostate Reformed Church. New Testament churches do not embrace this false doctrine, as it is the necessary foundation and essential error to promote ecumenicalism or the predicted one world church.

**Review Questions**

1. Is the “*one*” body in Ephesians 4:4 a universal invisible body made up of all believers in heaven and earth or is it the “*one*” in number where the reader of this epistle resides and “*one*” in kind as found in 1 Corinthians 12:27?
2. Is the kingdom and church of God one and the same?
3. Is the church in Matthew 16:18 different in kind then the church that Jesus goes on to talk about thereafter by every use He makes of the term “*church*”?
4. Is the baptism under the leadership of the Spirit in 1 Cor.12:13 the same baptism and leadership of the Spirit discussed in 1 Cor. 36-16?

## X. The New Testament Usage of “Church”

*When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense; therefore, take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in the light of related passages and axiomatic and fundamental truths, indicate clearly otherwise* – **Golden Rule of Interpretation**<sup>53</sup>

In the New Testament, the word “church” is a translation of the Greek term **ekklesia**. There is much debate over the meaning of the term **ekklesia** in the New Testament. It is found 115 times in the New Testament (Textus Receptus), and scholars are united that in the vast majority of cases or at least 97 out of the 115 times, that it refers to a local visible body of baptized believers. The remaining 18 times, it is found in the singular with the definite article (the) with no geographical designation assigned to it. Many feel that these 18 times give support for a brand new definition for this term that would make it mean something universal and invisible. I say, brand new meaning, because scholars are united in the opinion that the Greek term **ekklesia**, (used prior to the New Testament), meant nothing more than a local visible assembly of people. It was never applied to any kind of universal invisible unassembled entity in Classical Greek.

Scholars are united in the fact that the translators of the Greek Septuagint never used the term **ekklesia** to translate the Hebrew term **edhah** as that term could be understood as something larger, and different than, a local visible congregation.

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<sup>53</sup> J.E. Cobb, **Brief Studies in Christian Doctrine**, Baptist Publication Committee, Little Rock, AR - 1957

Scholars are united in the fact that the translators of the Greek Septuagint version of the Old Testament used the term **ekklesia** only in the place of the Hebrew term **qahal**, but never in any instance where the Hebrew term **qahal** referred to anything more than a local visible assembly. Hence, prior to Matthew 16:18 (which is the first use of **ekklesia** in the New Testament) there never was a single solitary use of this Greek term for anything other than a local visible body of people. The Hebrew term **qahal**, whenever translated by **ekklesia**, always refers to Israel when assembled and never in an unassembled state. For example, when used of Israel, at the foot of Mount Sinai in the wilderness, there was a specified and orderly way that every tribe was assembled around the tabernacle.

Finally, there is no foundation for the popular idea that the root meanings for Greek term **ekklesia** or “*called out of*” means “*called out of the world.*” Indeed, history informs us of the very opposite meaning. The earliest usage was within the Greek culture where it referred to those called out of the citizenship of a particular city. In the ancient Greek cities none but qualified citizens were called out to take part in the assembly. Likewise, in the New Testament no one but those already translated into the Kingdom of God, as citizens of the Kingdom of God, are called out to be baptized and become members of New Testament churches (Ac. 2:41-42).

### A. The New Testament Usage

The following article is taken from Dr. J.B. Moody’s book entitled “My Church”. Dr. T. T. Eaton is the author of the article, and Dr. Eaton gave it in answer to a question by one of his readers:

*Editor of the Western Recorder: Will you not give, briefly and clearly, your reasons for*

*believing that the word ecclesia in Matt. xvi, 18, means the local assembly?*

*Fraternally,  
A Constant Reader.*

*Most readily, We have seven reasons, but here we will take space for only three, either of which we believe to be decisive.*

*1st. It is conceded that, according to the usage of classic Greek, the word, ecclesia means a local assembly. It is also conceded that it means the same thing according to the usage of the Septuagint, which is the Greek version of the Old Testament, in use in Palestine in the time of Christ. Can it be believed that our Lord, in using this word for the first time, would, without any explanation, give it a meaning entirely different from what it would be understood to mean by those to whom He spoke? It is not ingenuous for a teacher, without a word of explanation, to use words to his pupils with a meaning entirely different from what they understand the words to have. Christ knew that the Disciples would understand Him to mean a local assembly by His use of ecclesia. Knowing that, He used the word to them, without a word of explanation. To charge Him with using the word with an entirely different meaning is to charge Him with disingenuous, and this is not to be considered for a moment.*

*2nd. The usage of our Lord Himself compels us to believe that He meant local assembly when He said: 'On this rock I will build my church,*

*and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.' Christ used the word ecclesia, so far as the record tells us, just 22 times. We will set aside, for the sake of argument, this passage, Matt. xvi, 18, as doubtful, and look at the 21 passages, to determine our Lord's usage of the word. Whatever that usage is, must be applied to this passage. In Matt. xviii, 17, Jesus says: 'Tell it to the church, but if he neglect to hear the church.' This is the local assembly. In Rev. I, II and III Christ uses the word ecclesia 18 times, e.g., 'the seven churches,' 'to the angel of the church at Ephesus,' etc., and in every one of these cases there can be no sort of question that He means the local assembly. It is Christ that says this, because the one who told John to write what is here recorded, says of Himself; 'I am he that liveth and was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore, and have the keys of hell and of death.' Again, in Rev. xxii, 16, we read: 'I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches.' Certainly here ecclesia means the local assembly.*

*Thus in every one of the 21 instances in which Christ uses the word ecclesia, there can be no question that He meant the local assembly. The probabilities, therefore, are twenty-one to nothing that He meant local assembly in Matt. xvi. 18 - the passage which, for sake of argument, we set aside as doubtful. A probability of twenty-one to nothing is a certainty. Hence, it is certain that Christ meant the local assembly when He said, 'On this rock I will build my church.'*

*3rd. Christ, in Matt. xvi. 18, promised to build His church, which certainly was very dear to His heart. He did not promise to build but the one. If He meant anything else than the local assembly, then we have this result, viz: He promised to build His church and then never made the slightest reference to it afterwards; but in speaking on the subject of church twenty-one times, He, in every case, referred to something entirely different from what he promised to build. That He should speak twenty-one times about the church He did not promise to build, and never make the slightest allusion to the church He did promise to build, is simply incredible. Can there be a reasonable doubt that the church Christ spoke of twenty-one times, and the only one He did speak of, is the church He promised to build?*

*These are three of our reasons, each one of which, by itself, we think is decisive. We have four others we will not now give. 'A threefold cord is not easily broken. - T.T. Eaton as Quoted by J.B. Moody, **My Church**, pp. 69-71*

## **B. The remaining 18 questionable Cases**

Scholars admit that out of the 115 times the Greek term **ekklesia** is found in the New Testament that the vast majority of cases (97) refer to the common ordinary historical meaning of the word. The remaining 18 times are held in question because they are found in the singular with the definite article without any geographical designation (such as “*the church which is at...*”). Many believe this is sufficient to invent a new meaning that is directly opposite to the established ordinary



primary meaning. Instead of a visible congregation, they assume this provides sufficient reason to make it mean an invisible congregation in these 18 cases. Instead of a local congregation they assume this provides sufficient reason to make it mean universal in these 18 cases.

However, Dr. Eaton has already indicated that in Matthew 18:17 where it is used the second and third time by Christ it is found in the singular with the definite article without any geographical location assigned to it. However, no scholar attempts to justify any other meaning than the ordinary common meaning in this text. Why? The immediate context makes it impossible to make it mean a universal invisible church. When Jesus says “*tell it to the church*” he has reference to the church in which such persons are members. The kind of church Jesus built and gave the keys of the Kingdom unto is the kind that can administer these keys as described in this passage. After directly addressing each geographically located church in Revelation 2-3 at the end of each letter, we never read:

*he that hath an ear let him hear what the Spirit saith unto **the church**.* (emphasis mine)

Rather repeatedly seven times He says,

*he that hath an ear let him hear what the Spirit saith unto **the churches**.* (emphasis mine)

At the end of the book of Revelation when the Lord for the last time uses the term **ekklesia** he does not say;

*I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in **the church** .- Rev. 22:16*  
(emphasis mine)

Rather we read;

*I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in **the churches**. – Rev. 22:16*  
(emphasis mine)

Most of the 18 cases used to support the universal invisible church theory come from the pen of the Apostle Paul. Most of those cases are taken from his prison epistles which were written by design to be taken and passed around to each of the churches he established in his missionary journey's (Col. 4:16).

When Paul was free and on his missionary tours he would repeatedly return to each of the churches and build them up in the faith. However, once under arrest he could not return to the churches and build them up. Therefore he wrote circular letters containing language that was designed to be applied to each reader of his letters. These letters are full of generic terms such as "*the husband*" and "*the wife*" and "*the laborer*" and "*the flesh*" and "*the new man*" and "*the body of Christ*" and "*the servant*" etc. **Generic** language is terms found in the singular with the definite article without any specific application but applies to all individuals or things of a certain class or kind. Instead, this language is designed so that the reader could apply it to himself if he fit within that class or kind. If he were "a" husband then what Paul said about "the husband" applied to him. If he were "a" laborer or "a" servant then what Paul said about "*the laborer*" and "*the servant*" applied to him.

This is especially true about "*the church*" and "*the body of Christ*." When this letter came to an individual church and Paul spoke about "*the church*" or "*the body of Christ*," they knew it applied to them as "a" church. They realized when Paul said that Christ was "the head" of the Church they knew it meant that the final authority over their own church was Christ, and not the elders or members. When Paul said that the church was to act like "*the body*," they realized their particular church was to work in unity and nurture and care for all of its members. In addition, during the New Testament era all

believers were members of such churches and all the churches were like faith and order and thus the same in kind.

There is not one single passage among these supposed 18 uses where the ordinary normal historical sense of **ekklesia** cannot fit easily. In other words, there is absolutely no Biblical justification to invent a doctrine that is exactly opposite in meaning to the well known and historical usage of this word.

However, there is a theological reason to invent an opposite and contrary meaning for this word. Those who have departed from “*the faith once delivered*” have no other places to go for worship UNLESS they invent a new meaning for the term “church” that will provide a basis to create competing denominations and include such under the new doctrine of “*the church*.” The universal invisible church theory from its inception by the Reformed Catholics in the Reformation has been the basis for creating new denominations, divisions and schisms and has NEVER been the basis for creating unity.

### C. The True Church

Those who embrace the universal invisible church theory often refer to it as the so-called **true** church. Of course this degrades the churches found in the New Testament as something less than **true**. However, in response to that charge they insist that the local church is nothing more than the visible expression of the so-called **true** church which is the **ideal** or **model** church described in such passages as I Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4. Hence, according to this idea, the goal of every church should be to strive more perfectly to be the visible expression of the **true** or **ideal** church. The closer the visible church model’s the **true** church the more scriptural it will be according to this thinking.

Many Reformed Baptists are embracing this very concept in regard to their own church membership. John MacArthur and John Piper both argue for receiving members that were

sprinkled or poured. Piper says that if his church by-laws would allow it he would accept Presbyterian sprinkled R.C. Sproul and Sinclair Ferguson as members in his church. John MacArthur made the same argument in his question and answer aspect of the debate with R.C. Sproul as John Piper's church makes below:

*“10. Therefore, where the belief in the Biblical validity of infant baptism does not involve baptismal regeneration or the guarantee of saving grace, this belief is not viewed by the elders of BBC as a weighty or central enough departure from Biblical teaching to exclude a person from membership, if he meets all other relevant qualifications and is persuaded from Bible study and a clear conscience that his baptism is valid. In such a case we would not require baptism by immersion as a believer for membership but would teach and pray toward a change of mind that would lead such members eventually to baptism”-*

**[http://www.jpbc.org/pdf/Piper's\\_Baptism\\_and\\_Membership\\_Proposal-ets\\_version.pdf](http://www.jpbc.org/pdf/Piper's_Baptism_and_Membership_Proposal-ets_version.pdf)**

If the local church is designed to be the **visible expression** of the so-called **true** church and the so-called **true** church is the “ideal” or model for all local churches to strive after, then, what would be the logical consequences of such a theory?

Well, the so-called **true** church completely disregards baptism. You can be unbaptized, sprinkled, poured or immersed and be a member in the so-called **true** church. How is the local church an expression of such an idea?

The so-called **true** church completely disregards all doctrines. You can be a sacramentalist, Pentecostal, Baptist, Methodist, Seventh Day Adventist, Church of God, etc., etc. in

doctrine and still be in the so-called **true** church. How is the local church an expression of such an idea?

The so-called **true** church completely disregards all discipline exercised by local churches. You can be under church discipline, and cast out of such churches, and still be a member of the so-called **true** church. How is the local church an expression of such an idea?

The so-called **true** church completely disregards the necessity for actually assembling all of its members together on earth. You can never assemble with the so-called **true** church and yet be a member of it. How is the local church an expression of such an idea?

The so-called **true** church does not have a Pastor, deacons, treasurer or choir, takes no offerings and yet it is the so-called **true** church. How is the local church an expression of such an idea?

Therefore, if the local church is supposed to be a **visible expression** of this so-called **true** church, then, the local church should disregard baptism, disregard doctrine, disregard discipline, disregard actual assembling together, disregard church officers, disregard offerings and the like, in order to become more of a visible expression of the so-called **ideal** and so-called **true** church!

On the other hand, why would the Lord demand such things of the local visible church, such as separation and withdrawal from “*any brother*” (2 Thes. 3:6) who walks disorderly if the **true** or **ideal** church embraces them? Why would God require the local church to mark and avoid those who teach false doctrine when the so-called **true** or so-called **ideal** church embraces them? Is God the author of Confusion? No, this so-called **true** and **ideal** church is really **the Great Whore** of Revelation as this harlot is inclusive of all such confusion.

Often the Universalite says that Ephesians 4:4 and “*one body*” mean that the local is one with the universal as it is inclusive of the universal. However, it cannot possibly be inclusive of the universal if it is **different in kind**.

For example, the “*churches*” are *local in kind* but the so-called **true** church is *universal in kind*. The “*churches*” are *visible in kind*, but the so-called **true** church is *invisible in kind*. The “*churches*” are the kind that members can be removed by church discipline, but the so-called **true** church is the kind that such discipline does not remove any of its members. The “*churches*” are the kind that can assemble all of its members together, but the so-called **true** church cannot do that. The “*churches*” are the kind where if one member rejoices, all members can rejoice with it, and if one member suffers, all can suffer with it, but the **true** church cannot do this with its membership. The “*churches*” are like faith and order in the New Testament but the so-called **true** church contains heretical and orthodox. The “*churches*” are the kind that receive only baptized believers as members but the so-called **true** church contains unbaptized, immersed, sprinkled and poured.

The “*churches*” in the New Testament are not the same kind as the so-called *Universal Invisible Church*. **However, the Universal Invisible Church is the same in kind as the Great Whore in Revelation.**

Augustine is the author of all universal church theories. He based the universality of the church upon the parable of the tares in Matthew 13:38. The Lord said that the “*field*” is the world and both the good seed and the tares are scattered throughout the world. However, this was a parable concerning the nature of the professing kingdom of God on earth and not the church of God. He confused the “*kingdom*” of God with the Church of God. Martin Luther and the Reformers followed Augustine in this erroneous confusion between the church and the Kingdom. Augustine thought the “good seed” and the “*tares*” made up the visible church. Martin Luther introduced the idea that the “*good seed*” made up the true church which is invisible while the “*tares*” were only part of visible churches. The ancient Anabaptists (Donatists) repudiated Augustine’s theory and the Anabaptists of the Reformation repudiated Luther’s theory. The Anabaptists charged both Augustine and

the Reformers in creating two different kinds of Churches by confusing the Kingdom of God with the Church of God.

### Review Questions

1. Is there any historical foundation for the common belief that the Greek term **ekklesia** has ever been used to mean “called out from the world”?
2. Why would the translators avoid using the Greek term **ekklesia** whenever the Hebrew term **qahal** took on a wider meaning than an actual assembly?
3. Why would Jesus use the term **ekklesia** for the first time in the New Testament to define what he was going to build, but then every usage by him afterwards, to speak of something other than what he claimed to build?
4. How can one term also be defined to mean one thing as well as the very opposite of that definition? Visible and yet invisible, local and yet universal?

## Chapter Six

### EIGHT COMMON SENSE REASONS

*Why*

*The Universal Invisible Church theory*

*Is a False Doctrine*

#### **1. It's theory contradicts its practice**

This doctrine is commonly preached and taught to be the Biblical basis for UNIFYING God's people in actual practice. However, in reality, even though it is common that several churches embracing this doctrine are to be found in almost every city throughout this country, and yet not once, has this theory ever been able to bring such churches together as one church body/denomination even though they exist sometimes only blocks or a few miles apart. It simply does not work.

Surely if it were Biblical and if it were true, then somewhere at some time, it would achieve practical unity at least between the churches embracing that theory, which only exist within walking distance from each other in the same cities????? In truth and in reality, it is a false doctrine that promotes only division not unity.

#### **2. It promotes division and confusion rather than unity**

Without this doctrine there would have been no basis for the excommunicated Reformers (Luther, Calvin, etc.) to respectfully call themselves churches of Christ. They would have remained simply excommunicated Roman Catholics or have had to come over to the dreaded and hated Anabaptists. This doctrine gave them a way to separate from Rome **and from each other** and has been the basis for countless numbers



of such separations until this very day. Indeed, it is reported that there are now over 37,000 different Christian denominations in the world and five new ones are formed each week. This doctrine is the ONLY basis used for justifying the existence of each new one and thus creating further division and confusion. The character of this doctrine is seen in its only fruit – further division and disunity within Christendom. Its fruit manifests it to be a false doctrine.

### **3. It's Advocates cannot agree on its membership**

Its advocates cannot agree among themselves who is included in this kind of church. *Dispensational* Universal Invisible advocates deny that all the saints living before Pentecost are in this church. Amazingly the distinguishing factor according to this theory is that all saints after Pentecost to the Rapture are “in Christ” and those previous to Pentecost are not “in Christ” and therefore the very gospel is attacked demanding there is another salvation OUTSIDE of Christ.

*Non-dispensational* Universal Invisible advocates include all the elect in all ages but then contradict themselves by interpreting I Corinthians 12:13 as “*Spirit baptism*” which they also demand is the means to enter into their kind of church, when in fact, the baptism in the Spirit had no previous existence before the day of Pentecost. They have the problem of explaining how those saints living before Pentecost could enter into this kind of church one way and those after Pentecost another way???? One false doctrine can only lead and demand more false doctrines.

#### **4. It includes what God commands local churches to exclude**

New Testament churches are commanded to separate from any “brother” who walks disorderly (2 Thes. 3:6) or who lives in openly known sin (I Cor. 5:11) and have no fellowship with such (2 Thes. 3:14). New Testament churches are commanded to mark and avoid heretics (Rom. 16:17). However, what many refer to as the so-called “true” church embraces the very ones that New Testament Churches are commanded to separate, mark and avoid. Yet, the advocates of the universal invisible church theory claim that the local church is the visible expression of it!!

New Testament churches don’t receive into their membership unbaptized persons. However, the so-called “true” church receives unbaptized, sprinkled, poured or immersed persons into its membership. Yet its advocates claim that local churches are the visible expression of the universal invisible church!

This theory makes God the author of confusion. According to this theory what God demands for membership in *the visible expression* (local church) is *not expressed* in the membership requirements of the Universal invisible church. Only a false doctrine would demand such interpretations.

#### **5. It can’t be found in Church History before the Reformation**

If the so-called Universal Invisible Church is Biblical, then, why can’t it be found prior to the Reformation Period????? Why is the very first recorded discussion on the nature of the church just a few hundred years after the Apostles completely silent about this doctrine? Nearly 900 preachers from all over the known world convened to discuss the true nature of the church and the idea of a universal invisible church never

surfaced among them! It was the council of Nicaea in 425 A.D. consisting of over 400 Donatist Anabaptists and over 400 churches that ultimately became the Roman Catholic Church.

Augustine led the debate for the Catholic and tried to introduce a new concept called the Universal VISIBLE church while the Donatists rejected it and accused him of teaching two different kinds of churches, one that was local and visible and another that was universal and visible. In the Reformation the Anabaptist accused Luther of the very same thing when he introduced the “Universal INVISIBLE church” theory. If this theory is Biblical then why didn’t those closest to the time of the New Testament teach it? Why did the Donatists accuse Augustine of teaching TWO KINDS of churches if there were already two kinds of churches (one visible another invisible)????? Why? The answer is simple. It is because it is a false doctrine invented by the Reformers 1500 years after the writing of the New Testament.

## **6. It Perverts the Historical Biblical Context**

It must be remembered that during the New Testament period, all churches were like faith and order with one another and jointly referred to as “*the churches of Christ.*” The contextual “*we*” found in New Testament epistles were united in the same faith and practice within the same kind of churches. Therefore, it is a perversion of the historical and Biblical context to define or interpret the contextual “*we*” in these epistles as Christians divided into contradicting denominations. This is especially true since the contextual “*we*” found in these epistles are explicitly commanded to avoid, have no fellowship with, but place under discipline such brethren who establish another kind of faith and order or conflicting and competing denominations (2 Thes. 3:6,14; I Cor. 5:6-13; Rom. 16:17).

Therefore, in the context of the body of Christ and the churches of Christ, the contextual “*we*” at the very minimum

refers to Christians who were like faith and order existing in the same kind of churches or what today we would call the same “denomination” of churches. Yet, the universal invisible church advocates rip the pronoun “we” out of its historical context and make it apply to a post-New Testament era of professed Christians existing within conflicting denominations as well as inclusive of those who have no kind of church affiliation whatsoever. The truth is that the contextual “we” refer to all Christians who are members of the same kind of church, holding the same faith and order. The so-called universal invisible church theory is simply Satan’s tool to justify those who have departed from the faith.

### **7. It robs the New Testament Churches of any abstract Instruction**

It is common for a Pastor to make the statement, “This morning I will be preaching on the church and its ordinances.” He didn’t say what particular church or what particular ordinances but it is a common abstract statement that is commonly understood to mean the kind of church and ordinances practiced by that very Pastor and church. Most admit that the epistles written by the apostle Paul were circular letters intended to be passed from church to church (Col. 4:16) for common edification of all the churches since he was imprisoned and unable to return and build up each church. His letters are full of abstract language for teaching about “*the servant*” and “*the wife*” and “*the husband*” and “*the laborer*” and “*the old man*” and “*the new man*” and “*the body*” and “*the church*” and the list goes on. Such is common abstract language intended to instruct the particular person or church that reads it.

Yet, every passage where this same abstract use of language occurs, it is robbed from New Testament churches and applied to something that cannot possibly make any kind

of application of *practical* unity between its membership or *practical* assembling of its membership. Instead it justifies practical division and separation.

### **8. It promotes irresponsibility and disobedience to God's Word**

The Great Commission is about making “disciples” and that very term necessarily includes discipline in New Testament faith and practice. The local visible church is placed in authority over its membership for instructive, corrective and if necessary purgative discipline (Mt. 18:15-18; I Cor. 5; 2 Thes. 3:6). However, the doctrine of the Universal Invisible Church completely invalidates any kind of church discipline whether it is instructive, corrective or purgative. The disciplined person simply tells the church, “*I belong to the TRUE church and I can worship God upon the hill or at my home or go to another church of “my” choice.*” Such a person will leave and will either join some church that promotes their sin or they will meet in their home and start a new denomination to promote their sins. Yet, they will leave and justify their departure on the boast they belong to the “TRUE” Church that requires no accountability to anyone and in reality promotes disobedience to Christ. This doctrine is the safe haven for all kinds of apostasy under the guise of the “true” church of Christ.

## **CONCLUSION**

In reality the theory of a Universal Invisible Church is the doctrinal justification of the Great Harlot of Revelation 17-18. She is the inclusion of all denominational confusion and division. God calls upon His people to “come out of her my people and be

## Chapter Seven

### OBJECTIONS CONSIDERED

**T**here are many who would oppose the position taken in this book. Those who oppose the position of this book present several objections why the position in this book should be regarded wrong. Those objections need to be answered. Below, there is an attempt to answer such objections in a fair and objective manner.

**Question:** *Did John baptize in the Name of the Triune God?*

**Answer:** It is often argued that John's baptism was not Christian baptism, because Christian baptism is administered in the "name" of the Trinity (Mt. 28:19), while John's was not administered in the name of the Trinity.

However, what does it mean to baptize "*in the name*" of the Trinity? Acts 4:7 gives us a Biblical clue to what it means to do something "in the name" of someone:

*And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, By what **power, or by what name,** have ye done this? – Ac. 4:7 (emphasis mine)*

Literally the Greek text reads "*in what name*" have you done this, or by whose "*power,*" or authority have you done this.

The Apostle John says, "*there was a man **sent** by God whose name was John*". The Greek term translated "*sent*" is the verbal form of the noun commonly translated "apostle," and means an authorized representative. When Jesus was asked by what authority He conducted His own ministry, He responded by giving only two choices concerning the baptism of John; was it authorized by heaven, or by men. John the Baptist said

that the one who had "sent" (literally - apostolized or "sent by the authority of") was God (Jn. 1:33). John the Baptist believed that God "sent" him? What kind of God did John believe in? John believed in a Triune God:

*And I knew him not: but he [The Father] that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom [The Son] thou shalt see the Spirit [The Holy Spirit] descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. - Jn. 1:33*

When asked who he was, John quoted Isaiah's prophecy "He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias." The Hebrew Text uses the proper name for God, **Yahweh**, which is translated "Lord" in Isaiah. John was sent to prepare the way of **Yahweh**. John positively identified Jesus as **Yahweh** by directly applying this prophecy to him.

*Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent **before him**. - Jn. 3:28 (emphasis mine)*

*He that cometh from above **is before all**: he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth: he that cometh from heaven **is above all**. - Jn. 3:31 (emphasis mine)*

*The Father loveth the Son, and hath given **all things into his hand**. - Jn. 3:34 (emphasis mine)  
John answered them, saying, I baptize with water: but there standeth one among you, whom*

*ye know not; He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose. - Jn. 1:26-27*

The God that "sent" John was the Triune God of the Bible, and John the Baptist openly acknowledges all Three Divine Persons. In addition, the basis upon which he baptized was repentance from sin, and faith in Christ Jesus:

*Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the **baptism of repentance**, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Jesus Christ." – Ac. 19:4 (emphasis mine)*

Hence, John baptized those who believed "on Jesus Christ." He recognized all Three Persons of the Godhead, and all Three Persons of the Godhead confirmed that his baptism was divinely authorized:

*And I knew him not: but he [**The Father**] 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**. – Jn. 1:33-34 (emphasis mine)*

*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** descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven [**The Father**], saying, This is my beloved **Son**, in whom I am well pleased. - Mt. 3:16-17 (emphasis mine)*



I submit to you that John consciously and intentionally administered baptism in the name, or by the authority, of the Triune God, and openly acknowledged each in regard to his administration of baptism. I also submit to you, that Jesus baptized by the authority of the same God, and openly acknowledged it. This is evident by his response to the Scribes and Pharisees in regard to their explicit, and direct question concerning His authority. He responded by identifying Himself with the baptism of John, and offering them only two options in regard to the authority behind John's baptism:

*And when he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him as he was teaching, and said, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority? And Jesus answered and said unto them, I also will ask you one thing, which if ye tell me, I in like wise will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, whence was it? **from heaven, or of men?** And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say unto us, Why did ye not then believe him? – Mt. 21:23-25 (emphasis mine)*

In Luke 7:27-30, Jesus is preaching, and those who accepted His preaching, submitted to Him for baptism, and that baptism is called the baptism of John:

*And all the people that heard him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with **the baptism of John**. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him. – Lk. 7:29-30 (emphasis mine)*

Furthermore, the Pharisees regarded the baptisms administered by the disciples of Christ to be no different than that of John:

*When therefore the Lord knew how the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John – Jn. 4:1*

In Matthew 28:19-20, the baptism that is commissioned unto the end of the age is the same baptism Jesus formerly administered through his disciples, as it is the only baptism existent at that point in time, as Pentecost had not yet arrived. It is the same baptism that all of the Apostles submitted to, and it is the same baptism they continued to administer on the day of Pentecost, and continued to identify with (Acts 10:37), as the beginning point for the ministry of the church at Jerusalem.

If anyone objects by asking where is it explicitly recorded that either John The Baptist or Jesus administered baptism in the name of the Trinity, then, please find one place in the book of Acts where it is explicitly recorded that anyone baptized by using the formula “*in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost*”? My point is that you must infer that it was used after Pentecost as much as I have inferred it was used before Pentecost, and both inferences rely upon the same data and reasoning.

**Question:** *How can the words “my church” in Matthew 16:18 be understood in the “generic” sense, as that would require what is true and characteristic of that church, to be true of each, and every one of His churches, as well. Hasn’t the gates of hell prevailed against many local churches?*

**Answer:** In Matthew 16:18, Jesus is using the word abstractly, in the institutional sense of the word. Other abstract uses may include the generic sense (e.g. the horse is a useful animal), or

the collective use (the army, orchestra, etc.), but here it is found in the institutional sense (the school...the home...etc.). As an institution, the gates of hell have never prevailed against it, although individual churches have gone out of existence, just as individual schools, or homes have gone out of existence. The term “*church*” is found in all three abstract senses in the New Testament (generic, collective and institutional).

***Question:*** *Jesus uses the singular “church,” and singular pronoun “it” rather than “churches” or plural pronouns as demanded by the local church position. Does not this prove the church spoken of in Matthew 16:18 is the universal invisible church of all the elect?*

***Answer:*** Our response is very simple, when a noun is used in the abstract sense (generic, institutional or collective), it will always be singular and call for pronouns with same case and number. Nevertheless, the abstract sense is inclusive of a plurality, as it includes all of the same kind. For example, “the horse is a wonderful animal” or “the American home is a wonderful thing.” No particular horse or home is specified, but the singular is inclusive of all horses and homes as though it were in the plural. Hence, the singular pronoun “*it*” in Matthew 16:18 is grammatically correct and consistent with the abstract use of “*my church*.”

It should be pointed out that not only does this first use by Christ have the singular with the definite article, but also so does the second and third uses by Christ in Matthew 18:17. Although we have the very same singular with the definite article in Matthew 18:17, yet no one denies Matthew 18:15-18 refers to the local assembly, as a kind, or class.

***Question:*** *The Church in Acts 20:28 is one that has been redeemed by the blood of Christ, who is God in the flesh. Does not this prove that this church must be inclusive of all the elect,*

*as all the elect have been redeemed by His blood? Local churches have lost members in them, such as Judas.*

*Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. – Ac. 20:28*

**Answer:** First, the immediate context demands it has particular reference to the church at Ephesus. For example, the pronouns "yourselves" and "you" found in verse 28 are contextually identified, as the particular "elders" located in the church at Ephesus;

*And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church. And when they were come to him, he said unto them, ye know... - vv. 16-17*

Second, it is these elders that the Holy Ghost made overseers over the church in verse 28. The Universal Church advocates must embrace the idea that this church is of such a nature that it required human overseers other than the Holy Spirit and Christ. In addition to requiring human overseers, it requires the specific overseers contextually located at Ephesus!

Third, verse 28 says "*all the flock*," and continues to refer to this very same "flock" in verse 29, out of which some shall depart. How can the so-called universal invisible church, composed only of elect, lose members without denying both eternal security, and perseverance of the saints?

Fourth, New Testament writers commonly use what is called the language of accommodation. That is, they address, and describe the members of local churches, according to their profession, and according to what characterizes the requirements for membership. Why wouldn't Paul address the

church at Ephesus according to their profession of salvation, and why wouldn't he address the Ephesus church as made up of redeemed, since the basis for baptism, and church membership, is profession of redemption?? Every single member of every New Testament church must make such a profession to be baptized and become a member. Theologians call such language, the language of accommodation.

We use this language all the time. For example, on a Christian symposium when you first read a letter from a new person who claims to be a Christian and signs off as "Brother," how do you address him in return? Don't you address him as "Dear brother" so and so? Until you have a valid basis to reject his profession you have no reason not to address him as such. The apostle Paul established this church and knew these brethren first hand. He had no reason to address in any other way than in redemptive terms. He is the one who preached the gospel to them, heard their professions, baptized them, and therefore, there was no reason for Paul not to address them in redemptive language, according to their profession, according to the requirements for baptism, and church membership.

All the proof texts used by the Universalist in this manner can be easily explained by the language of accommodation. We would inquire of the Universalist, **Why would Paul address those local churches which He founded by any other way than in redemptive terminology?** What reason would there be for him not to address them as such?

***Question:** If the body of Christ can refer to each and every local church then why do we find plural "churches" of Christ, but never find the mention of plural "bodies" of Christ? Does not this prove there is one universal invisible body of Christ?*

**Answer:** This argument is based upon ignorance of the rules that govern the use of a **metaphor**. The phrase "*body of Christ*" in reference to the church is a **metaphor**, or figurative

expression, rather than a literal expression, as no one believes the church is literally the flesh, blood, and bones, of the physical Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

A **metaphor** is defined, as the transfer of characteristics found in one noun (body) unto another noun (church). Both must first be understood in their literal sense in order to determine what literal characteristics may be transferred figuratively to the second noun. That is, when "*body*" is used **metaphorically** to characterize the church, it has reference to literal characteristics found in a literal "*body*" that form the basis for what can be transferred in figure to the church.

For example, a literal "*body*" is composed of individual but diverse members, which are visibly assembled, and under the direction of, its literal head. Hence, literal characteristics such as *members*, *unity*, *visibility*, and *submission*, under *authority* are all legitimate characteristics that can be transferred **metaphorically** to the church.

It would be an illegitimate use of a **metaphor**, to transfer characteristics not found in the literal body, to the church. Things such as plurality of heads over one body or plurality of *bodies* under one head cannot be found. Moreover, such things as *invisibility*, or *unassembled scattered members* are directly opposed to such a literal body. Hence, the phrase "*the body of Christ*" could never convey universality, or invisibility, or scattered, unassembled, body parts. The singular expression could never convey either plurality of *bodies*, or plurality of *heads*. The metaphor cannot express such and therefore cannot be used for such.

Second, this is ignorance of **metaphorical** significance. The metaphor of "*head*" simply conveys authority, and when used in conjunction to a **metaphorical** "*body*" infers the *submission* of the body to that authority. Who is the "*head*" or "authority" over each singular of New Testament church body? Isn't it Christ? Hence, each individual church is a **metaphorical** "*body of Christ*," if Christ is its **metaphorical** *authority*, or "*head*". If the local church is not a **metaphorical** "*body of Christ*" then

composing it, should never be described as "*individual members thereof*" (1 Cor. 12:27), as the term "*members*" is a metaphor of body parts under the same "*head*".

Third, the term "*church*" is not a **metaphor**, and so there is no violation in using it in the plural. The "*body*" is a **metaphor**, and as such cannot be used, or found in the plural without violating the rules that govern the proper use of **metaphors**. However, both can be used generically without violating any rules. The generic use of "*the church*" is the singular expression for a plurality of individuals within one class, or kind. Likewise, "*the body of Christ*" is the singular expression of the metaphor for all within one class or kind. Just as the singular "*the church*," finds concrete expression in a particular "*church*" (Mt. 18:17), so the singular "*the body*," finds its only concrete expression in a particular "*body of Christ*" (1 Cor. 12:27).

Fourth, every single **metaphor** in Scripture used for the church is always found in the singular, and such metaphors are applied by context to an individual local church "*body*." For example, in I Corinthians 3, where Paul is directly speaking about those ministers God used to build the church at Corinth, he describes the church at Corinth by the following **metaphors**, all of which, are found in the singular - "*Ye are God's husbandry...Ye are God's building..Ye are the Temple of the Holy Spirit.*"

Therefore, if the argument by the universalist was correct, we should never find any of these singular **metaphors** used for the local church, but all such singular **metaphors**, including the **metaphor** of "*the body*" should exclusively apply only to the supposed universal invisible church. However, we do find such **metaphors** used for the local church. Moreover, none of these **metaphors** are found in the plural. Why? The rules that govern the use of **metaphors** do not allow the plural to be used, but will allow them to be used in the generic sense, so it can be applied in the singular to each of that class. Therefore,

the universal argument is wrong, and based upon improper understanding of the correct use of **metaphors**.

**Question:** *In the book of 1 Corinthians 10 and 12, as well as, Romans 12:4-5, does not Paul use the plural pronoun “we,” indicating that all true Christians make up the body of Christ?*

**Answer:** In Romans 12:4, and in 1 Corinthians 12:12, Paul also uses the plural pronoun “we” when introducing the literal physical human body, as the basis for its metaphorical application to the church. Do any rational minded theologians draw the conclusion that the use of the plural pronoun, with the singular literal physical human body, demands that all believers compose one big literal physical human body? No, as that would be nonsense.

Paul clearly means that “we” all share in common, one kind of literal physical human body, rather than, we all share one numerical literally physical body. Likewise, he brings the plural pronoun “we” right over to the metaphor, as well as, indicating that “we” all share in common one kind of church body. Most of the New Testament was written to churches, as all believers were baptized into the membership of churches that were like faith and order – one kind.

However, when Paul addresses a particular church body (1 Cor. 12:27), and a particular “*espoused virgin*” (2 Cor. 11:2), he always drops the “we,” and says “ye,” as He was not a member of that particular church body, or espoused virgin.

During the Apostolic era there was no other kind of churches, other than those, instituted under the direction of the apostles. Hence, Paul when speaking of the institution that was common among them, he would say “we”. However, today that is not possible, as there are many different kinds of churches of different faiths and orders.

Now, as to the particular passage in 1 Corinthians 10:16-17, where “we” is found, it is clear from the context that this



passage is a generic truth, applicable to all churches, and members in particular. However, when Paul changes from abstract teaching, applicable to all members in all churches, to a concrete application of this truth, he drops the “we” and uses “ye.”

*But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils. Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils.*

Unfortunately, the universal invisible church error has robbed God's people of Biblical abstract teaching concerning the institutional church. Abstract teaching is something very common, even in the pulpits of those who embrace the universal invisible church error. Abstract teachings, is when you take a subject, and teach it without making any particular concrete application. For example, a pastor introduces his subject as “*the ordinances and ministry of the church.*” Obviously, it is the local church that he is teaching about. In his teaching, he uses the pronoun “we” to refer to their particular denominational view when expressing what he believes to be the true view point of the ordinances and ministry. This kind of teaching is very common now, as well as, when the New Testament was written. 1 Corinthians 10:16-17 is abstract (“we”), whereas, 1 Corinthians 10:20-21 is concrete application (“ye”). 1 Corinthians 12:12-16 is abstract (“we”), whereas, 1 Corinthians 12:27 is concrete application (“ye”). The prison epistles (Ephesians, Colossians, etc.) were written to be circular letters, to be read among the churches (Col. 4:16), and thus the Apostle purposely used abstract terms (“*the husband*” and “*the wife*” “*the laborer*” “*the flesh*” “*the children*” “*the body*” “*the church*” “*the old man*”, “*the new man*” etc.), in an

abstract form of teaching, so that it would be applicable, to everyone reading it that fit those abstract descriptions. However, universal invisible church advocates have taken every single Biblical abstract instruction that reveals what kind of relationship there should be between the church and Christ, internal relationship between the members, as well as, external relationship between the church and the world, and perverted it, by applying it to the so-called universal invisible church instead of the institutional church. Absolute proof of this distortion is seen by simply trying to apply 1 Corinthians 12:25-26 to “*all*” members of the so-called universal invisible church!

*That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.*

It cannot apply to a universal invisible body of Christ, but is applicable, and was applied in Acts 2:44-45, to the local visible kind of church such as the one at Jerusalem:

*And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.*

This is exactly what Paul has in mind for the church at Corinth (1 Cor. 1:10).

*Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.*

This is possible for the local church institution, but it never has occurred among the membership of the so-called universal invisible body of Christ. Why? In reality the so-called universal invisible body of Christ is The Great Whore of Revelation. This harlot pretends to be the bride and church of Christ, but no such unity has ever been found in her or can be found in her.

***Question:*** *Don't many ancient Baptists and Christians understand, and use "the church," to refer to the collective whole or gathered mass of churches, or saints in aggregate?*

***Answer:*** Yes. The so-called Apostolic Fathers used the terms **catholic church** in this sense. They had in mind all the churches throughout the world, unified by the same apostolic faith, and order, as a collective whole.

*The church of God which sojourns at Smyrna, to the church of God sojourning in Philomelium, and to all the congregations of the Holy and catholic church in every place; – Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., The Ante-Nice Fathers, (Erdmann's Pub. Grand Rapids, MI, 1973), Vol. I, p. 39, "The Encyclical Epistle of the Church at Smyrna concerning the Martyrdom of the Holy Polycarp."*

Each individual church of like faith and order was also called, **the catholic church.**

*Polycarp was one, having in our own times been an apostolic and prophetic teacher, and bishop of the catholic church which is in Smyrna. - Ibid., p. 42 (emphasis mine)*

Ancient Baptists claimed to be the one true **catholic church** in this sense, while denying that Roman Catholics, and/or schismatic's were part of this “*church*” and “*bride.*” Hence, the aggregate sense was applied to the collective unity of all churches that were like kind throughout the world.

Many historical Baptists in England and America applied “*the church*” abstractly, to convey the idea of a collective unity of all churches of like faith and order on earth at any given moment. This is close to the generic use of that term. The early English Baptists used it this way in their associational minutes when defining what they called “*assemblyes of Zion*”.

*That persons soe baptized ought to walk together by free consent as God shall give oppertunitie in distinct churches or assemblyes of Zion continuing in the apostles doctrine and fellowship and breaking of bread and prayers....* White. B.R. ed. **Association of The Particular Baptists of England, Wales and Ireland to 1660**, “Part 1, South Wales and Midlands” p. 20

To them, “*Mount Zion*” expressed the world wide collective unity of all churches of like faith and order. Significantly, they denied all state churches (Rome and Protestants) were included in “*Mount Zion*” (Ibid. pp. 154, 169). They also denied that “*disorderly*” churches, or churches that were not “*rightly constituted*” (e.g. John Bunyan’s mixed membership church) were in this “*Zion.*” This concept they also called “*The church in generall.*”

*Because in respect to union in Christ there is like relation betwixt the particular churches each towards other, as there is betwixt particular members of one church. For the churches of Christ doe all make up but one*

*bodye or church in generall under Christ their head, as Eph. 1:22f., Col. 1.24, Eph. 5:23., I Cor. 12.13 ff., as particular members make up one particular church under the same head, Christ and all the particular assemblyes are but one Mount Syon. – Ibid.* “Part 3, Abingdon Association” p. 128 (emphasis mine)

This concept of “*the church in general*,” or “*Mount Zion*,” consisting of all churches of like faith and order in aggregate, can be found among American Baptists right up to the Landmark movement.

*Dear Brethren, — Your letters have excited in us mingled emotions of joy and sorrow; while we rejoice at the general stability and soundness in the faith of our Churches, it is to be lamented that error has made partial ravages in our Zion.* — Jesse Mercer, **History of the Georgia Baptist Association**, 1838, “circular letter written to the churches in 1805” p. 104, The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc. Version 1.0 © 2005 (emphasis mine)

Another common historical use of “*the church*” in aggregate had to do with the collective unity of all the redeemed, when the future glory church will be gathered. Dr. J.M. Pendleton, a prominent Landmark Baptist, believed that the future glory church, when presented to Christ, will consist of “*the redeemed in aggregate*.”<sup>54</sup> However, he did not believe this glory church presently existed. An article written by J.N. Hall in *An Old Landmark Reset*, originally edited by James Pendleton says:

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<sup>54</sup> J.M. Pendleton, **Christian Doctrines**, (Judson Press, Valley Forge PA) 1971, p. 329

*But in my judgment the positions taken by bros. Pendleton, Graves and Taylor, in the body of this book, and by Bro. Moody in the introduction, are Scriptural, logical and charitable....For our part we deny this whole “invisible, universal church” idea. There is but one sort of a church in the New Testament and that is a local and visible church. – J.M. Pendleton, **An Old Landmark Reset**, Truth Pub, West Virginia, pp. 73,75 (emphasis mine)*

Although Hall admitted they believed “*all the saved*,” when collectively assembled, will make up the future glory church, he denied this church presently existed.

*The aggregate of the saved is considered as being collected in one meeting, and they thus constitute a church. But there is not a passage in the Bible where the word “church” is so used as to embrace all the saved, in their divided, scattered, uncollected dispersion. When all the saved are included they are considered as assembled together. When they are scattered they are never spoken of as a church. There is, therefore no such thing known in the Bible as an “invisible, universal church.” – Ibid., pp. 75-76*

This is the way it is used in the London Baptist Confession of Faith in 1689. Few realize that article 26, and sections 1-2, in the 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith was patterned after the Westminster Presbyterian Confession of Faith. When this is understood, the stark contrasts that the Baptists made, in regard to the nature of the church, can be clearly seen. Article one in the London Baptist Confession is almost a carbon copy of article one in the Westminster Confession. Both refer to the aggregate church of all the redeemed, as “*the Catholic or*

*Universal Church.*” However, they disagree over the use of the term “*invisible.*” The Westminster simply states this aggregate church, “is invisible”, whereas the Baptist Confession qualifies it by saying, “(with respect to the internal work of the Spirit and truth of grace) may be called invisible.”

### ***Westminster Confession***

I. The catholic or universal Church, which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the Head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fulness of Him that fills all in all.[1]

II.

### ***London Baptist Confession***

1.\_\_\_\_\_ The catholic or universal church, which (with respect to the internal work of the Spirit and truth of grace) may be called invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ, the head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.

However, it is the second article where the stark contrasts between the Presbyterian Universal Invisible church theory and the Baptist view of the church is clearly seen.

### ***Westminster Confession***

2.The visible Church, which is also catholic or universal under the Gospel (not confined to one

nation, as before under the law), consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion;[2] and of their children:[3] and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ,[4] the house and family of God,[5] out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation.[6]

### *London Baptist Confession*

2.\_\_\_\_\_ All persons throughout the world, professing the faith of the gospel, and obedience unto God by Christ according unto it, not destroying their own profession by any errors everting the foundation, or unholiness of conversation, are and may be called visible saints; and of such ought all particular congregations to be constituted.

Notice that the Westminster Confession defines “*catholic*” when applied to the visible church to mean “not confined to one nation, as before under the law,” rather than like faith and order. Notice also, that the Westminster defines the term “*church*” to consist “of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion.” The Baptist Confession takes issue with both of these points. (1) Baptist refused to call all believers in the world “the church,” instead, they said, “*all persons through the world, professing the faith of the gospel...may be called visible saints.*” (2) They defined the church as being constituted of such saints, who did not embrace essential errors contrary to the faith, or were ungodly. They said, “*not destroying their own profession by any errors everting the foundation, or unholiness of conversation....and of such ought all particular congregations to be constituted.*” In sections three, and four, they condemned all churches that



contained such errors, or without holiness as “*no churches of Christ*” but “*synagogues of Satan*,” and called the Pope, “*the antichrist*.” These Baptists rejected the Protestant concept of a universal invisible church made up of all saints, in all denominations worldwide.

Many Baptists,<sup>55</sup> including myself, deny that the future glory church is the aggregate of all the redeemed, but rather believe it is the aggregate of all the faithful redeemed, who served God in the institutional house of God in all ages.<sup>56</sup> For example, there will be people of God living outside the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:24), as well as inside the New Jerusalem (Rev. 22:1-3), and the difference is not salvation. There are guests invited to the wedding of the Lamb (Psa. 45:9,12,14; Rev. 19:8-9), and angels are not guests in heaven, nor do they need an invitation. Finally, only New Testament churches are metaphorically described as “*espoused*” unto Christ, and presently called “*the bride*” (Rev. 22:17 – present tense “say”) with hope to be presented unto Christ as a Bride (2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:25-27).

***Question:*** *If Matthew 28:18-20 demands that those authorized are baptized believers in church condition, does not that mean that every individual church member is thus authorized to administer the Great Commission and constitute churches?*

***Answer:*** This text does not address the individual church member but rather a plural “ye” in church capacity. In the very same book, such authority is never given to the individual church member (Mt. 18:15) or even plural church members (Mt. 18:16) in less than church capacity (Mt. 18:17-18).

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<sup>55</sup> Roy Mason, Milburn Cockrell, Oscar B. Mink, M.W. Hall, Roscoe Brong, James Carlin, etc.

<sup>56</sup> Mark W. Fenison, **The Bride of Christ**, (Challenge Press, Emmaus , PA) 2008

To suggest that every individual church member is being given this authority in Matthew 28:18-20 is to suggest that women and children members are given the authority to preach the gospel, baptize and administer the ordinances and teach. That concept contradicts other scriptures (1 Tim. 2:11; I Cor. 14:33-35; 1 Tim. 3:1).

To suggest that it refers to individual qualified church members who are ordained to evangelize, baptize and teach is to admit to one of two positions: (1) It refers to those whom the church qualifies, ordains and sends forth as authorized representatives or (2) It refers to the ordained ministry in distinction from the church and thus the Great Commission is preacher authority.

The latter (preacher authority) flatly contradicts Matthew 18:15-18, and the authority symbolized in the use of the “keys” since the keys of the kingdom represent authority in various areas other than merely church discipline. If it were preacher authority the text should read “*tell it to **the elders***” rather than “*tell it to **the church***.”

Furthermore, in the book of Acts we find the church sending out the missionaries, and exercising authority over them (Acts 11:22; 11:1-5; 15:1-2). We find the church selecting, and qualifying men to be ordained (Acts 6:4-5).

Finally, it is unwise to place such authority in the individual as there is no accountability, and power corrupts and total power totally corrupts. It promotes an oligarchy. There are many more scriptural arguments and practical arguments that could be set forth.

**Question:** *Does the Greek term “ekklesia” translated “church” mean “called out of the world”?*

**Answer:** No! Prior to the writing of the New Testament this term has never been understood to mean “called out of **the**

*world.*” It is never used this way in either classical Greek or in the Septuagint Greek Old Testament.

It’s etymological meaning is simply “called out of” (ek = out of, kaleo = called) and its meaning by usage referred to *qualified citizens “called out”* to assemble in order to conduct citizen affairs in the Greek cities.

When this historical usage and etymology is applied to the New Testament, then it will be seen that only those who are qualified citizens of the Kingdom of God are called out to conduct kingdom affairs. This involves the use of the “*keys of the kingdom.*” The local **ekklesia** is the visible representation of the Kingdom of God.

### Review Questions

1. Did John the Baptist administer baptism “*in the name*” of the Triune God?
2. What kind of flock and ministry is described in Acts 20:28-29
3. When a term is used in the abstract sense (generic, institutional, collective) will it always be found in the singular with the definite article?
4. How did early Baptists understand and use the term “catholic”?
5. How does the London Baptist Confession of Faith distinctly differ with the Westminster Confession in regard to what may be defined as, “*the church.*”
6. Why does Paul use “we” in some cases but “ye” in other cases when dealing with the body of Christ?
7. Why can’t we ever find the plural **bodies** or **heads** in Scripture? What rule forces Paul to use the generic singular “*body*” and “*head*”?

Chapter Eight

**HOW DO NEW TESTAMENT CHURCHES VIEW AND TREAT FALSE CHURCHES?**

**W**e believe that many good and godly saved people are found in most all denominations. They are members in the family of God and citizens in the kingdom of God. We believe many in such churches are like the Apollos of old, mighty in the scriptures, and eloquent preachers, and know much in regard to salvation, and other practical truths for godly living (Ac. 18:24-25), but they need instruction in the church and its ordinances. Therefore, the issue is not salvation but the true character and essentials to constitute a church.

We rejoice in the truth they know, and proclaim, and can learn from them as they can from us. We are not called by God to forbid them to serve according to their own conscience but neither are we called by God to join or support them in what we perceive to be a disobedient way of service.

We believe that such disorderly assemblies of saints are outside the revealed will of God. How is that so? They are not authorized assemblies, as they did not originate from the authorized source found in the Great Commission. If they were, they would be of like faith and order with churches of the New Testament. Such churches are products of schisms as predicted by the New Testament (Acts 20:29-30). They are without divine authority to exist and are in opposition to the true churches of Christ in both doctrine and order. Their perversion of the ordinances and other truths of Scripture classify them with the harlot in Revelation, which God commands His people to come out of (Rev. 18:4). The figure of a harlot simply conveys the idea of unfaithfulness and contamination in essentials of the faith once delivered. Their ecclesiology promotes confusion rather than unity in faith and practice. True New Testament churches are characterized as

the Bride simply because she is faithful to the essential doctrine and practice of the New Testament. Furthermore, she maintains that purity through (1) church discipline of unworthy members and heretics, and (2) reproduction through the authorized source (churches of like faith and practice).

The Scriptures clearly teach that as we enter into the “*last days*” that a revival of apostasy will abound (2 Thes. 2:3). Of course the religious world will view this as a spiritual revival rather than an apostasy. New Testament churches will dwindle and be scarce as the end draws near. Apostate churches will abound. Professions will dramatically increase in this miracle age of apostasy (Mt. 24:24-25; 2 Thes. 2:9) but true believers will be fewer and fewer (Mt. 13:2 Pet. 3:10). Indeed, apostasy shall increase so much that even Christ asks in a rhetorical fashion “*shall I find faith when I come*” (Lk. 18:8). However, this note of sadness is also a note of gladness “*And when ye see these things begin to come to pass, lift up your head and look up for your redemption draweth nigh*” – Lk. 21:28. In the mean while we are to “*contend for the faith once delivered*” (Jude 3) and rejoice that we are chosen to be worthy to suffer for His name (Ac. 5:41). We need more young people in our ranks that will lift up the banner for the next generation. Our history is a trail of blood, but the red of that crimson blood is the color of royalty. The bride of Christ is presently despised and rejected by the religious world, but one day she shall “*walk in white*” with the King of kings and Lord of lords. Be sure that you keep your garments from defilement so that you too can walk in white with Him (Rev. 3:5).

Believers are specifically instructed to “*come out of*” such institutions (Rev. 18:4) and not to be “*partakers with*” such institutions. At the very minimum, this forbids physical participation in her ministries, conferences and churches. It absolutely forbids bringing her ministers and ministries into our assemblies. Ecclesiastical separation is demanded by this text and others (2 Thes. 2:15; 3:6; Rom. 16:17; etc.).

## Identifying Marks

On one of the official Roman Catholic web sites the writer raised the question as to “**what are the marks of the true church.**” His answer was as follows:

*“What is a Mark?*

*We need to keep in mind there are two aspects to a mark: First, it must be an outwardly visible sign. If it's not, it's useless as a means of identification. Your house number is useful only because it's on the outside of your house and visible from the street. If it were posted on a wall of the living room, it wouldn't be a sign that this is your house. In short, a mark must be evident to everyone. It can't hide under the bushel basket (cf. Matt. 5:15). That's the first requirement.*

*The second is that the mark must be an essential characteristic, one without which the Church couldn't even exist as Christ's Church. Marks of the Church don't exist only as a means of identification, as does a watermark on paper, but must be parts of the very nature of the Church.”<sup>57</sup>*

Unquestionably, the most prominent outward visible mark of all true New Testament churches is the baptism of John. Every essential truth that characterizes New Testament churches is directly related to their administration of baptism.

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<sup>57</sup> [catholicwitness.com/cwlibrary/tracts/Church/marksofchurch.htm](http://catholicwitness.com/cwlibrary/tracts/Church/marksofchurch.htm)  
– (accessed 11/12/08)

Historical Baptists, openly and unashamedly profess to be the New Testament churches. They do not try to hide it. They place it out front for everyone to see. Those churches who claim to be “baptistic,” but hide behind protestant names (e.g. “community church” etc.), are usually not historic Baptists in faith and practice.

However, baptism alone is not the only obvious mark of true New Testament churches. Historical Baptists believe that the Great Commission provides four essential marks that identify all true New Testament Churches. Indeed, the other three marks in the Great Commission are directly related to baptism. All true churches of Christ will embrace all of the following principles:

1. **Preach the right gospel**, the same gospel preached by Christ. Those who do not are “accursed” according to the Scriptures (Gal. 1:8-9).
2. **Administer the right baptism**. The pre-Pentecost baptism of John. This baptism has four essential scriptural marks.
  - a. It is to be administered to professed believers only (Mt. 3:6).
  - b. Its salvation character is only symbolic (Mt. 3:15-17; 2 Pet. 3:21).
  - c. It must be administered by immersion only (Rom. 6:4-5) in order to symbolically identify the candidate with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
  - d. The church ordains qualified members to administer it (Mt. 28:17-20, Ac. 2:41).

All who do not submit to this baptism “reject” the counsel of God against themselves (Lk. 7:29-30).

3. **Teach like faith and order with Christ.** New Testament churches have been commissioned with the “apostles doctrine” (Ac. 2:42) which consist of a body of essential teachings, also called “*the faith*” (Jude 3). There are three principles that clearly identify the content of “*the faith*.”
  - a. All Doctrines that are non-negotiable: Every doctrine and practice the Bible explicitly or implicitly demands, or limits by definition, or forbids to transgress, must be considered part of the “*all things*” and essential to “*the faith*.”
  - b. All Permanent, and Unique Features of Original Christianity that distinguish it from other World Religions, and predicted apostate Christianity. All Christians should agree, that there are permanent, and abiding features of Christianity that separate it, from all other “*ways*.”
  - c. All Doctrines necessary to preserve “*the faith*.” Every doctrine, or practice that the Bible requires, for the continued existence of “*the faith*” unto the end of the age, must be considered, an essential of “*the faith*.”
4. **New Testament churches originate with a church of like faith and order.** Any other origin is without authority and therefore unbiblical.

These are the essential marks of New Testament churches. Churches that do not possess these marks should not be recognized, or treated as New Testament churches. How many



churches are like this? There are literally thousands of such New Testament churches in the world today. “*Seek and ye shall find.*”

### **Review Questions**

1. Are there godly and saved people in unauthorized and disorderly assemblies?
2. Are there many great preachers, eloquent and learned who are not in true churches?
3. Is the proper administration of baptism a clear and visible mark of true churches?
4. What four essential scriptural requirements distinguish baptism from just getting wet?
5. What three principles define the contents of “*the faith*” once delivered?
6. What four essentials of the Great Commission define true churches?

## Chapter Nine

### GOING BEYOND THE GOSPEL WITNESS

**T**he Great Commission requires going beyond the gospel witness in order to “*make disciples.*” It requires us to baptize, and bring the baptized believer into the membership of a New Testament church. However, when we are witnessing to people, and discover they are saved, many times it is difficult to make the transition from a gospel witness to the next two aspects of the Great Commission, or a church witness.

The following approach is based upon two Biblical truths. There are two basic arguments to define, and defend the Lord’s kind of churches; (1) the argument of like faith and order and, (2) the argument of historicity.

#### **Part I: The Argument of like faith and order**

#### **A. Get their attention, and interest, by asking the following questions:**

**Question:** *Did you know that there are literally thousands of different contradictory, and conflicting kinds of “Christian” denominations in the world today, and that they are growing at a rate of 270 per year, or 5 new ones every single week?*

**Question:** *According to 1 Corinthians 14:33, do you think that God is the author of this mass confusion?*

**Question:** *How can you know the difference between true and false denominations? How can you know, whether your particular denomination is authorized by Christ to make disciples for Him?*

What these questions have brought to the discussion is:

- (1) there are thousands of different kinds of Christian denominations;
- (2) The Word of God clearly denies that God is the author of such confusion;
- (3) How can you know the true from the false?
- (4) How can you be sure that their denomination has authority from Christ to make disciples?

Now, it really doesn't matter how they answer the above questions. You have effectively raised the issue. Just listen to their answer and proceed to the next question below.

## **B. Defining Who Christ authorized to make disciples**

**Question:** *Do you believe that Christ authorized anyone to go preach another gospel, or administer another baptism, or teach another faith and practice than what He commanded in the Great Commission?*

Now, this person is where you want to bring them. If they say it does not matter what gospel, baptism, or doctrine may be used to make disciples, then simply point out the following problems to that answer:

1. Any other gospel is accursed - Gal. 1:8-9; 2 Cor. 11:4

2. There is only “*one*” baptism – Eph. 4:4
3. We are to contend for “*the faith*” once delivered – Jude 3
4. Those who depart from the faith are regarded as heretics – 1 Tim. 4:1; Rom. 16:17; 2 Thes. 3:6

On the other hand, if they agree that Christ would never commission anyone to go preach **another** gospel, administer **another** baptism, or teach **another** faith and practice other than what he commanded, then proceed to point out the following obvious conclusions.

### C. The Necessary Conclusions

1. Therefore this is a commission to make disciples of **like faith and order** by the same gospel, same baptism, and same faith and practice, as He commanded.
2. Therefore those who preach another gospel are “accursed” (Gal. 1:6-9). Those who administer another baptism, and teach another faith and practice have departed from the faith once delivered (1 Tim. 4:1), and Christ would never authorize them to make disciples.

Now, you have brought them to the restrictive limitation that Christ has placed upon the administration of the Great Commission, “whatsoever I have commanded.” It is time to make the application to them.

## D. The Application

**Question:** *Does your denomination/church preach the same gospel, administer the same baptism, and teach the same faith and order that Jesus commanded, and if so, how do you know?*

At this point, go to the section in this book that defines the essential characteristics of Christ's gospel, baptism, and doctrine (Chapter Two). Point out the essential characteristics of each, and compare what Christ teaches with what they say their church/denomination believes and practices.

## Part II: The Argument of Historicity

If you make no progress by the above approach, then, proceed to this next approach. The next following set of questions will lead the person to the same conclusion as you attempted to do above.

### A. Ye versus them approach

**Question:** *There are two classes of people mentioned in the Great Commission, those identified as “ye,” and those identified, as “them.” Which class of people did Christ authorize to make disciples?*

This question draws an easy and obvious response. Christ commissioned those identified as “ye.” However, you have brought this question up to really define who Jesus did **not** authorize (“them”).

Point out that those identified, as “them” are those still unbaptized and unassimilated into the teaching assembly thus

untaught. Therefore you have defined “**them**” as those who are **not** like faith and order with Christ in the **same** baptism and **same** faith and practice.

Since Christ has only authorized those identified as “**ye**” rather than those identified as “**them**” to administer this commission then the following must be true:

1. No unbaptized believer has authority from Christ to administer the Great Commission to themselves or to others.
2. No unassimilated and untaught believer has authority from Christ to administer the Great Commission to themselves or to others.

## **B. Draw the obvious Conclusions**

1. This means that “**ye**” cannot be unconverted, unbaptized, or unchurched, or unobserving, or apostate people, because if they were, there would be no difference between “**ye**” and “**them**.”
2. This means that the only ones commissioned to make disciples for Christ are converted, baptized, and churched persons, who are like faith and order with Christ in these things.
3. This means that no apostate churches (another gospel and/or another baptism and/or another faith and practice) have authority from Christ to make disciples for Him (as that would only reproduce apostate churches).

Now you have eliminated all (“**them**”) who are not like faith and order with Christ, as possible authorized administrators of this commission. You have eliminated “self-administration” of

this commission, or apostate administration of this commission.

### C. Ask the definitive Questions

**Question:** *What would happen if between the time Jesus gave this commission, and the time he returns, if this kind of “ye” ceased to exist?*

Point out that such a complete cessation of authorized administrators would leave only **“them”** (the unconverted, unbaptized, unobserving or apostate). Christ has never given authority to such people (**“them”**), and thus if those authorized ever ceased to reproduce themselves, there would be no one authorized by Christ to administer this commission. Now, on to the next question:

**Question:** *Did you know that Christ promised those whom He commissioned that they would never cease to reproduce after their own kind, even for one single day, until the end of the world?*

Point out that the phrase *“alway, even unto the end of the world”* is a translation of the Greek text, which literally reads *“all the days until the end of the age.”* This was a colloquial expression, which meant *“day in and day out until the end of the age.”*

Therefore, those Christ authorized to make disciples are not only like faith and order with Him in the same gospel, same baptism, and same doctrine, and practice, but they are not “Johnny come lately.” They are those churches in the pages of the New Testament which Christ promised would reproduce after their own kind in every generation until He comes again. All true churches of Christ originate with a proceeding **“ye”** as

no others are authorized in the Great Commission, and no true church of Christ originates with “*them*” (self-administrators or apostate Christianity). The faith was “*once*” delivered (Jude 3).

#### **D. Make the Final Application**

**Question:** *When did your denomination begin?*

If a denomination did not begin with the personal ministry of Christ in the apostolic age, in the land of Palestine, with the first church at Jerusalem, and if it has not continued to reproduce after its own kind up to this present day, then it has originated by “*them*” (self-administration or apostate Christianity).

Go to chapter three and provide historical quotations by non-Baptists to demonstrate that historical Baptists churches have continued since the first century.

#### **Part III: Conclusion – Two Characteristics**

The Great Commission provides two essential characteristics to identify those Christ authorized to make disciples for Him.

1. **The Doctrinal Identity:** They are like faith and order in the same gospel, same baptism, and same faith and practice – the test of like faith and order
2. **The Historical Identity:** They were commissioned and authorized to reproduce after their own kind continuously from the time He gave this commission, until the end of the world – the historical test.



Hence, out of the 37,000 plus denominations in the world today, the true churches of Christ are clearly identified by these two essential characteristics.

This is an argument by process of elimination. Start this process with the gospel, proceed to baptism, and then to orthodox essential doctrines. Conclude by historically eliminating all new denominations, as any new denomination could only come into existence through “*them*” (unconverted and/or unbaptized and/or unchurched), or through those who apostatized from the “**once**” delivered faith (Jude 3).

## Conclusion

**D**ear reader, it should be fairly obvious that God is not the author of such denominational confusion found in this world (I Cor. 14:33). It also should be fairly reasonable to suggest that God does not want His people confused in this matter, and therefore would provide clear precepts and principles in His Word to avoid such confusion. Just as there are basic Biblical characteristics that distinguish between true and false Christians, there are basic Biblical characteristics that distinguish between true and false churches. We believe such principles are inherently found in what all acknowledge as The Great Commission.

More specifically, we believe the Bible provides explicit and definitive characteristics of what are the same gospel, same baptism, and same faith, commissioned by Christ. Such doctrinal characteristics distinguish true from false churches. In addition to doctrinal character, true churches of Christ have also the character of historicity. This commission is also a divine promise that ensures that churches with these characteristics would never cease to exist until Jesus comes again. This historical character is essential, as only New Testament Churches have authority to make disciples for Christ, and if true churches ever ceased to exist, between the first and second coming, there would be no one authorized to make disciples, as that vacuum would leave only those identified as “them” in the Great Commission. All churches without these two essential characteristics are false churches, and part of that collective harlot in Revelation.

Consider these characteristics, and then please prayerfully consider what kind of church you are now a member. If you are not a member of the kind of church Jesus built, then, please seek out a church that identifies with both doctrinal and historical characteristics furnished in the Great Commission.

Appendix One

**GRAMMATICAL INSIGHTS TO THE GREAT COMMISSION**

**W**e have learned that the first characteristic of the Great Commission is that it has a designated administrator identified as “*ye*” but not “*them*.” The “*ye*” is the authorized administrator of the Great Commission. The “*ye*” are previously baptized believers in a church state. They are like faith and order with Christ in the same gospel, baptism, and doctrine. They represent the New Testament church, and they are promised to reproduce after their own kind, in link by link organic succession, until the end of this age.

In order to understand the Great Commission better, one must understand some simple, but significant grammatical implications found in this commission. Grammar is not the favorite subject of many, but a simple understanding of the grammar in this passage, is essential to clearly understand both what this commission really is, and exactly to whom Christ authorized to administer it.

**A. The Primary Verb – “teach”**

We want to examine the primary verb in this context, which is, translated “*teach*” in verse 19, along with its three modifying participles in verses 19-20 (“*go*”, “*baptizing*” and “*teaching*”). The primary verb tells us what to do, whereas the three participles, by the very nature of the context, tell us how to do it.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> The participles have adverbial force – thus explaining how disciples are to be made.

Let's begin with the primary verb. The word “*teach*” in verse 19 is the translation of a Greek verb that literally means **make disciples**. The idea behind this term, demands that the teaching is far more than, communicating mere information. The making of a disciple involves the transformation of one's beliefs so that their life and practice conforms to that of the teacher. In other words, make disciples who will “*observe all things whatsoever I have commanded*”.

## **B. Two Kinds of Action in the main verb**

This primary verb (**make disciples**) conveys two different kinds of action; (1) a completed action; (2) an ongoing progressive action. There is a point in time when the person identified as “*them*,” was not a disciple, but became one. This point in time is a completed action, identified by the Aorist tense of this verb. However, once becoming a disciple, at that point in time, they are to continue to follow Christ from that point forward for all the rest of their lives. This progressive, ongoing following, is inherent in the very nature of the term “*disciple*,” as a disciple is a “*follower*” or “*learner*” which is ongoing action. Grammarians refer to this inherent action as *aktionsart* or “*sort of action*.”

The aspect of this verb that indicates a certain point in time they became a disciple is the tense of the verb. It is an Aorist tense verb which may refer to a punctiliar (point) action at a particular point in time, or a least a completed action in the past. The aspect of this verb that indicates on going or incompleting action is the *aktionsart* or sort of action inherent in the meaning of the term “*disciple*.”

Therefore, the tense of this verb tells us that the completed action of being made a disciple occurred at a point in the past. Prior to that point, they were not disciples of Christ, but at a specific point, they became what they formerly were not - His disciples – a follower of Christ. Having once become a

follower at that point in time, there is a continuation from that point forward, implied by the definition or meaning of the term itself – learner or follower. This two-fold action found in the words “make disciples” is very important when we look at it in relationship to the participles. This two-fold action is illustrated in the following verse where numerals 1 and 2 are inserted, to point out both kinds of action:

*Then said Jesus to those Jews which [1] believed on him, [2] If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; – Jn. 8:30 (emphasis mine)*

### **C. Command not a Suggestion**

In addition, this primary verb is found in what grammarians call the imperative mode, which is, the mode of command. Therefore, this is not an option, or a mere suggestion, but is a direct command given by Christ, to be obeyed. Remember the job of the verb is to tell what is to be done. What are we to do? We are to make disciples; and it is a command, not an option, and it occurs at a given point in time but then continues as a process as well.

### **D. Three Participles – “go...baptizing....teaching”**

Now let’s consider the three participles, and how they relate to this main verb. The KJV translates the three participles as “go,” “baptizing” and “teaching”. Remember, the verb tells us what to do - **make disciples**, but it is the participles that explain how it is to be accomplished. In other words, Christ is giving His recipe for making disciples, and it involves these three participles. Acts 2:41 demonstrates that the Great Commission was administered in exactly the order it is given:

*Then they that gladly [1] received his word were [2] baptized: and the same day there were [3] added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. (emphasis mine)*

The numerals 1, 2, 3 are inserted into the text above to show you that the apostles administered the three participles in the Great Commission in the precise order they were given – “go preach the gospel,” “baptizing,” and “teaching,” proving that the exact order in which these participles are found in Matthew 28:19-20, is not only the logical order, but the precise order, as understood by the church, and how this commission is to be carried out.

### **E. Tenses demand this Chronological Order**

In this grammatical construction, the tense reveals the chronological order in which these actions occur in relationship to the main verb. For example, the first participle, translated “go” is found in what grammarians call the Aorist tense, or the same tense in which the main verb is also found. This tense is commonly used to describe a completed action in the past. What does this mean? It means that they must first “go” preach the gospel, before they administer baptism, and/or teach them how to observe all things commanded. Mark 16:15 demonstrates this clearly:

*And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. - Mk. 16:15 (emphasis mine)*

At the precise point in time, when they believe the gospel, they are made a disciple of Christ, and from that point forward, they follow him in baptism, and continue in church

membership, wherein, they are instructed how to observe all things whatsoever commanded. Again, look at John 8:30, and it will be clearly seen that believing in him comes first, at a point in time, and from that point forward they continue to obey the word (baptism and instruction):

*Then said Jesus to those Jews which [1] believed on him, [2] If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; – Jn. 8:30 (emphasis mine)*

Again, consider the order given in Acts 2:41-42, which was, the first instance in the book of Acts, that the exact order of the commission was administered:

*Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. (emphasis mine)*

Peter preached the gospel, and only after they had “*received the word*” are they baptized, and then added to the teaching assembly. Therefore preaching, and believing in the gospel, must occur first.

### **E. Salvation through faith in the gospel before baptism Confirmed by Paul**

The Apostle Paul confirms this theological fact in Ephesians 2:8-10. The phrase, “*For by grace are ye saved through faith and that not of yourself, for it is a gift of God, not of works...*” is based upon the Greek perfect tense. This tense demands that this action “are ye saved through faith” occurred at a particular point in the past, and that it was a completed action. This completed action is described in verse 10, as the creative work

of God, before the believer performs any good works – “*For we are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus unto good works...*” Hence, belief in the gospel is a completed action prior to baptism and church membership. To the Corinthians, Paul made it obvious that the gospel did not include baptism, when he said,

*For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. – 1 Cor. 1:17-18 (emphasis mine)*

This means, conversion to the gospel is finished, before commencing with the act of baptism and assembling. There must be a finished inward work of salvation before there can be an outward work of service. Disciples are first made in conjunction with the gospel, and then, baptized and absorbed into the congregation:

*Now when the Pharisees heard how Jesus [1] made and [2] baptized more disciples than John... – Jn. 4:1 (emphasis mine)*

In other words, full gospel conversion precedes baptism and church membership. Is this important? Yes, it is. This teaches us that baptism is not part of the gospel, but is only for those who have already believed in the gospel of Christ.

This is clearly affirmed by Phillip in response to the question asked by the Eunuch, in regard to baptism:

*And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Phillip said, If thou believest with all thine heart,*



*thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. – Ac. 8:36-38*

Literal salvation comes through faith in the gospel of Christ, and pictorial salvation comes in the act of baptism which follows (1 Pet. 3:21 “*like figure*”). The Biblical order is always, (1) Gospel salvation obtained; followed by (2) baptism, and (3) assimilation into the church body for instruction.

## **G. Summarization**

Now let’s summarize what we have learned in this grammatical lesson. True Discipleship includes, both the proper beginning point, as well as, following the proper process, but does not confuse one with the other. The completed action of gospel conversion must occur previous to baptism and church membership. The Great Commission gives a logical and chronological order to be followed: (1) conversion; (2) baptism; (3) assembled to observe all things

In this lesson, we have obtained another essential characteristic of Biblical churches of Christ. Biblical churches, teach that a disciple is made at the point one believes in the gospel, before baptism is administered, and before membership into a local church. Is this an important essential characteristic of the true churches of Christ? Yes, very important. Biblical churches do not exclude any aspect of this commission, but require all three aspects.