

Doctrine of the of Church

- **1. Origin**

- The church began on the day of Pentecost, with the coming of the Holy Spirit in its new work of sealing and permanently indwelling believers.
- The church is built by Jesus Christ; it is not a purely human organization.
- Jesus said in Matthew 16:17-19 , "**Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.**"
- The Church is the body of Christ; it belongs to him and is an intimate part of him.

- **2. Purpose**

- The purpose of the church is clear, from the mouth of our Lord Jesus Christ himself:
- Then Jesus came to them and said, "**All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.**" (Matthew 28:18-20)
- **But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.** (Acts 1:8)
- It is a grave mistake when the church takes as its primary role the care of believers, focusing inward on building itself up and strengthening itself. The modern church's focus on self-help programs and programs for building healthy families, healthy kids, and healthy finances and the popularity of such books and videos in the stores and catalogues of Christendom is an indication of a severe lack of health in the body of Christ.
- **Certainly, the body comes together to be built up in the faith, but the purpose for all the teaching, the training and the fellowship is to empower and aid in the mission goal: evangelization.**
- **A church that forgets its prime purpose, that focuses all efforts on fortress here and now and us against the world, group hug time, has one foot in the grave.**
- **All activities of the church should be evaluated in the light of whether they aid or fail to aid or perhaps even hinder the work of spreading the gospel.**

• **3. Church Government**

- The text of Scripture is not entirely clear on just how the church was supposed to organize and structure itself. Good arguments, frankly, can be made for each form and in the history of the church and even in the current church one will find all three organizations used. Each form seems to have strengths and weaknesses.
- I favor the last of the three: congregational. But let's examine each of these three in turn, and discuss how each works in practice.
- ***a. Hierarchical or Episcopal Form of Government***
- This is the form of organization used by the Roman Catholic church; one also finds it in the Eastern Orthodox churches and for that matter in several Protestant churches, as for instance the Anglican Church (or Episcopal Church in the United States), and the Methodist Episcopal church.
- Some non-denominational churches essentially have this framework.
- Such a church recognizes a bishop or church leader by some other designation, who has power by virtue of his office of directing the local church.

- ***b. Representative or Presbyterian form of government***
- Obviously this is the organizational style used by the Presbyterian and Reform churches; it recognizes the authority of duly appointed representatives of local churches, usually grouped geographically.
- Often representatives of a local group (called a presbytery) of churches come under the supervision and direction of a larger body, or synod, and in turn the synod comes under the larger body of a general assembly. While rules and extent of power vary, the idea is that duly appointed representatives constitute the authority of the church.
- ***c. Congregational Form of Government.***
- The Baptists, the Disciples Churches, and the Congregationalists practice this style of organization, where each local church governs itself by means of democratic structures. **The authority remains with the local congregation, and important matters are decided by the congregation without respect to authority of other churches or officials.**
- While local churches may be subject to some degree to higher bodies, committees, or officials, the concept of a congregational church is **that a local congregation determines its own affairs, elects and ordains its own ministers, and directs the use of its own treasury.**

- In the early church, all three forms of church government can be discerned, and so the conclusion would seem wise that any one of the three forms can be considered appropriate and to have scriptural warrant.
- It seems likely that the reason for the disagreements over church structure are exactly because the Scriptures are ambivalent.
- Therefore, this seems to be a matter best handled according to the principles of Romans 14.
- That is, the form of government is a matter of conscience.

Officers of the church

- **A. Elders**
- 1. Who were they?
- Sometimes they are called **“elders”** (Greek – presbuteros), a term that emphasizes the qualification of spiritual maturity needed.
- Sometimes they are called **“overseers”** (Greek – episcopos), a term that emphasizes their function of leading.
- **The terms are used interchangeably of the same men (Acts 20:17,28).**

- **2. What are an elder's qualifications?**
- **1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9 describe an elder's qualifications. Spiritual character is emphasized over specific functions.**
- **"Above reproach "** – no cause for just criticism
- **"Husband of one wife"** – monogamous fidelity, not divorced
- **"Temperate"** – self-control
- **"Prudent"** – wise decision-maker
- **"Respectable"** – orderly, organized
- **"Hospitable"** – willing to share his home
- **"Able to teach"** – can communicate spiritual truth
- **"Not given to wine"** – not addicted
- **"Not pugnacious but gentle"** – patient, not violent
- **"Uncontentious"** – not insistent on rights, peaceable
- **"Free from the love of money"** – not greedy or "in it for the money"
- **"Manages his household well...children under control"** – discipline, peace and order at home
- **"Not a new convert"** – to avoid pride
- **"Good reputation with outsiders"** – has the respect of unbelievers
- **"Not self-willed"** – genuine concern for others interests, not just his own
- **"Not quick tempered"** (self-explanatory)
- **"Loves what is good"** – can discern what is spiritually beneficial
- **"Just"** – law-keeping himself and fair with others
- **"Devout"** – avoids sin and is committed to God
- **"Hold fast the faithful Word"** – knows doctrinal truth

- **3. What are an elders duties?**
- **a. “Shepherd and care for the flock”** (1 Peter 5:2; 1 Timothy 3:5; James 5:14,15).
This means he takes responsibility for their spiritual care.
- **b. “Be an example to the flock”** (1 Peter 5:3).
Consciously models and disciples others in the Christian life.
- **c. “Teaching God’s Word”** (Acts 20:20; 1 Timothy 3:2; 5:17; etc.)
- **d. “Guard against false doctrine”** (Acts 20:28; Titus 1:9)
- **e. “Rule”** (1 Timothy 5:17). **This means to direct the church’s affairs.**

- **4. How many elders should there be in a church?**
- **No number is given. There are, however, clear examples that leadership in the local church is shared by a plurality of elders.**
- **It is always elders (plural)** in Antioch (Acts 14:23), in Jerusalem (Acts 15:2; 20:18), in Ephesus (Acts 20:17,28), in Philippi (Philippians 1:1), in Crete (Titus 1:5), and in all the churches who received the epistles of James (James 5:14). And Peter (1 Peter 5:1).
- **The human tendency is one-man leadership.**
- **The biblical model is leadership shared by elders.**
- **Each elder will have different gifts and roles and some will be more visible, but the responsibility must be shared (providing there is more than one man qualified to be an elder).**
- **There is tremendous advantage to shared wisdom and responsibility.**

- **B. Deacons**
- 1. Who are they?
- The word “deacon” actually means “servant” and can be used of any servant (Ephesians 6:21; 1 Corinthians 3:5, etc.).
- But in Acts 6:1-6 a group of men were officially designated as servers/deacons for a specific physical need in the Jerusalem church.
- Later, Paul used the word “deacon” in the official sense of a church office and described their qualifications (1 Timothy 3:8-13).
- So it seems that **deacons are formally established as church officers.**
- **They are to assure particularly that the physical needs of the church body are met.**

- **2. What are a deacon's qualifications?**
- **1 Timothy 3:8-13 and Acts 6:1-3 describe a deacon's qualifications.**
- **"Good reputation"** – same as elder
- **"Spiritual"** – men who consistently walk in the Spirit's control
- **"Wise"** – same as elder
- **"Dignified"** – same as elder
- **"Not double-tongued"** – honest, not telling conflicting stories
- **"Not addicted to much wine"** – same as elder
- **"Not fond of sordid gain"** – parallel to elder
- **"Holding to the mystery of the faith"** – parallel to elder
- **"Beyond reproach"** – same as elder
- **"Husband of one wife"** – same as elder
- **"Good managers of their children and household"** – parallel to elder
- - Also, deacon's wives must be "dignified, not malicious gossips, temperate and faithful in all things" (1 Timothy 3:11). These are probably "deacon's wives" and not "deaconesses" since their qualifications are found in the middle of the deacon's qualifications.
- Also, Phoebe (Romans 16:1), is called a "deaconess" or "servant" and not an officially designated officer.

- 3. What are a deacon's duties?
- There is only the general indication that **deacons serve to meet physical needs to free up other spiritual leaders to focus on prayer and the ministry of the Word (Acts 6:4)**. But that does not limit deacons. They have spiritual qualifications and may have other spiritual gifts for significant personal ministry.
- One deacon, **Philip**, was an outstanding evangelist and preacher (Acts 8:4-8; 21:8).
- **Stephen**, another deacon, is noted for his faith and his preaching (Acts 6:5; 6:8-7:60).

- **III. The Ordinances Of The Church**
- A. Common questions about ordinances/sacraments
- **1. What is an ordinance?**
- **An ordinance is a physical ritual prescribed by Christ to illustrate a spiritual reality** (sacrament = sacred sign).
- **2. How many ordinances should be practiced?**
- **there are only two (Lord's Supper and baptism). Why?**
- **- Only these two are specifically prescribed by Christ and clearly practiced by the early church.**
- **- Only these two symbolize the saving work of Christ.**

- **3. What do they have to do with a person's salvation?**
- **- Practicing these "symbols" in no way saves or even helps a person have eternal salvation (John 3:16; Ephesians 2:8,9).**
- **- These ordinances are meaningful only to a person who has already personally trusted Christ for salvation.**

• **B. Water Baptism**

- **1. Definition:** The use of water to symbolize outwardly the inner spiritual change that took place when we trusted Christ as Savior.
- **2. The Model:** Baptism was commanded by Christ and practiced by the early church.
 - a. Christ commanded the disciples to “Go and make disciples” by means of “baptizing” and “teaching” until “the end of the age” (Matthew 28:19,20).
 - b. Starting at the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:38,41) water baptism after conversion became standard practice (Acts 8:12,36-38; 9:18; 10:47,48; 16:14,15,33; 18:8; 19:4,15).
- **3. The Meaning:** Baptism symbolizes what happened when we were saved.
 - a. It symbolizes the Holy Spirit’s work of regeneration (making us spiritually new – Titus 3:5). = “I am a Christian.”
 - - **Spirit (real) baptism is done by the Holy Spirit inwardly when we trust Christ as savior (1 Corinthians 12:13; Galatians 3:26,27).**
 - - **Water (ritual) baptism is administered by others outwardly after we’re saved (Acts 8:3).**
 - b. It symbolizes our new life of union with and identification with Christ (Romans 6:3-11). = “I intend to live like a Christian.”

- **4. The Method: Immersion in water anytime after conversion seems most appropriate.**
- a. Immersion fits the significance (Romans 6:4) and early examples of baptism (Acts 8:38,39).
- b. **New Testament examples of baptism are done immediately after a person is saved** (Acts 2:41; 8:12,36-38; 9:18; 10:47,48; 16:14,15,33; 18:8). So when a person is saved and realizes the significance of baptism, it would seem to be the right time.
- c. Young children who are saved might wisely wait until they understand the significance of baptism.
- **There is no biblical support for baptizing infants with water.**

- **There is simply no room in the Bible, Old or New Testament, for the idea that being good, or doing works (which baptism becomes if it is necessary for salvation), makes us acceptable to God.**
- **The arguments used by those who believe salvation is through baptism, or that baptism is required for salvation are similar to the arguments used by those who believed circumcision was necessary for salvation, or before becoming a Christian.**

- **C. The Lord's Supper**
- **1. Definition:** The regular use of the bread and cup to **symbolically commemorate with other believers the saving work of Christ on the cross.**
- **2. The Model: Christ initiated it at the Last Supper.**
- a. **Christ gave the final two elements of that passover meal a new significance to be practiced after His death** (Luke 22:7-20).
- b. **This ordinance is a command** (“**Do this**” – 1 Corinthians 11:24,25) to be practiced regularly (“**as often as**” – 1 Corinthians 11:25,26) throughout this church age (“**proclaim the Lord's death until He comes**” – 1 Corinthians 11:26).
- **3. The Meaning: The Lord's Supper is a memorial to Christ's saving work on the cross.**
- a. **The bread represents Christ's substitutionary death in our place** (“**for you**” – Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:24).
- b. **The cup represents Christ's fulfilling of the old covenant sacrifice system** (“**the new covenant in my blood**” – Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25).

- **4. The Method:**
- **a. The early Church's form**
- - **The love feast (a shared meal – 1 Corinthians 11:20-22)**
- - **The elements (a shared loaf and cup – 1 Corinthians 11:23-25).**
- - **Done weekly as the church gathered (“breaking of bread” – Acts 20:7,11).**
- **b. The basic function required**
- **The Lord's Supper should be practiced regularly by churches using similar symbols with the identical significance Christ gave them.**

- **Membership in the Church**

- ***Universal Church***

- There are a number of places in the New Testament where the term "church" (ekklesia) is clearly not used in the sense of a local congregation. In this case, the universal church (also sometimes called the invisible church and the catholic church - with catholic used in its original sense of "universal" rather than its more common modern use of the specific church headed in Rome) is a spiritual organism with Christ as its Head and all believers as its members.
- Some disagreement exists among Christians as to exactly who makes up this universal church, with some insisting it includes all believers from the creation of Adam and Eve till the end of time, and others narrowing it to encompass only those from the time of Pentecost to the moment of the Rapture.
- The decision one makes in regards to whether Old Testament believers are included (and for that matter believers from the time of the millennium) relate to the view one takes regarding the nature of Israel and its relationship to the Church. This will be discussed in some detail below.

- In any case, the Church belongs to Christ according to Matthew 16:18; He is described as its head (Ephesians 1:20-23).
- He gave the church gifts (Ephesians 4:8-11), and he is preparing the Church to become his bride without blot or blemish (Ephesians 5:26-27).
- There have been some individuals and some groups that have tried to deny that there is such a thing as a "universal" church made up of all believers of all ages distinct from local churches. Lightner writes:
 - Rarely is the term universal church used by these people. Occasionally the body of Christ may be referred to, but it is used to describe the sum total of all the New Testament local churches.
 - In this view, when one becomes a Christian, he becomes a member of the family of God, the spiritual kingdom of God, but not the universal invisible church. In other words, no one is a member of the body of Christ who is not a member of a local church. To them the local church is the body of Christ, and vice versa.

- **Local Church**

- There is a wide range of opinion over just what constitutes a functioning, New Testament Church. Generally, however, it would have to be agreed that the statement of Christ in Matthew 18 gives a minimum description:
- **"Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."** (Matthew 18:19-20)
- Beyond this, the question is how much organization is needed for this group to be considered a church and not simply an accidental gathering? Or is there a distinction?
- One would suspect that the amount of organization needed would vary depending upon the number of people that have gathered together. If it is a small group, the organizational needs would be minimal.
- The larger the group, the more complex the organization will have to become to insure that all the needs are being met. As an example, consider the calling of the six to help in the distribution of food to the poor hellenized Jews that were apparently being neglected. Need lead to an increase in the bureaucracy.
- One might give, as a minimum, the following as indications that a local church has come into existence:
 - **1) regular called meetings.** The early church met together on a regular basis for "the breaking of bread, fellowship, and instruction" (Acts 2:42)
 - **2) the membership is made up of those who are Christians, that is, those who have made a profession of faith and have been baptized** (Acts 2:41, Romans 10:9-10)
 - **3) Devotion to one another, that is a level of commitment to one another and the group which raises the gathering above an informal "getting together".** (Romans 12:10, 1 Corinthians 16:15)

- **Church as the Body of Christ**
- **1. The church is described** in Ephesians 4:11-16 **as comprising individuals who have spiritual gifts.**
- **2. The members are appointed by Christ to specific service in keeping with the gifts they've been given.**
- **3. The body is a living organism, united forever with Christ.** It is composed of people of all sexes, races, nations, cultures and social classes (Ephesians 1:23; 2:15-16; 3:6; 4:12-16; 5:30).
- **There is no division or distinction in the body of Christ between Jew, Gentile, Slave or Free, Male or Female. All are one in Christ.** (Galatians 3:28; Colossians 3:11)