

A BIBLICAL NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH.

It is God's intent that the local New Testament church be an integral part of the Believer's life. However, with so many various dominations, ministries and false teachings, it is necessary for a Christian to have a proper understanding of what a Biblical New Testament church is and its function. The question that must be asked is how do we know if your church is standing and operating on truth or false doctrine. Other questions that come to mind is; are we being taught Biblical doctrines, are the beliefs and practices of the church correct, was the church started Biblically, functioning properly, how is it lead, and how does it grow?

The first question that must be answered is, "what is the authority of the Biblical New Testament Church? The answer must be the Word of God, the Bible, which is God's Holy Word. It is the basis for everything we believe. The Bible must be the sole authority for faith and practice. If an organization that calls itself a church mixes or adds anything to this authority it is in error. Some add church authority, some add traditions. One such example is Infant Baptism. You do not find the practice of infant baptism mentioned in the Bible. Yet, Catholics and many Protestant denominations practice infant baptism. Another is, some "churches" believe you must be a member of their "church" to be saved, be baptized to be saved, etc. These too are not Biblical doctrines, but has been accepted by some based on tradition or the teaching of "the church"

The mode of baptism as practiced by many churches is another example of following man's traditions or opinions instead of complying literally with what God's Word says. The Greek word used in the New Testament for baptism is baptisma (bap'-tis-mah). The word means "to immerse" or dip under the water. There is no record of any church "sprinkling" or "pouring" in the New Testament. Those who use these methods get their practice from the opinions of man, not from what God has clearly stated in the Bible. The matter is settled when we accept that God, the Holy Spirit, inspired the writers of the New Testament to use the Greek word that means to immerse. There are other Greek words that mean to sprinkle or to pour that the writers could have used if that had been what they wanted to convey. For the churches who sprinkle, or

use any other form of baptism other than immersion, the word of God is not their final authority and therefore God, by his Word, exposes their error and condemns their false practices.

The Bible is the Sole Authority for the Faith And Practice of a True New Testament Church

What does the Bible say is the sole authority for the faith and practice of the New Testament church? There are two scriptures in the New Testament, which affirm that the Bible is the inspired, inerrant word of God. *"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:"* (2 Timothy 3:16) *"Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."* (2 Peter 1:20-21)

In all matters of faith and practice the New Testament church has but one authority and that authority is the Bible, the very word of God. The Bible is free from error and this doctrine is called, "verbal plenary inspiration" meaning every word God used was inspired by Him and is without error (2 Timothy 3:16). Some might conclude that since we do not have the original copies of the Books of the Bible that this makes today's Bible suspect. Nothing can be further from the truth. Note that God says He preserves His Word: *"For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.* (Matthew 5:18) Psa 12:6-7 *"The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. Thou shalt keep them, O LORD, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever."*

God not only gave us His Word, He promised to preserve it for all eternity. God absolutely keeps His Word and we have His completed word today. His Word is preserved in the Traditional Text (Byzantine or Majority Text) as represented by the "Textus Receptus" and translated in our King James Bibles for English speaking people.

Note the warning to those who would attempt to add or subtract from the Bible. *"For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto*

these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.”

(Revelation 22:18-19) God takes His Word seriously. As Believers in Christ and members of a local New Testament Baptist Church we should too. Therefore a Biblical New Testament Church should have as its sole authority the King James Bible for English speaking Churches. To identify with (membership) or worship with any “church” or individuals that does not adhere to this doctrine is compromise and contributes acceptance to their corrupted Bible version. The differences in the King James Bible compared to false versions involves hundreds of words and many differences, in meaning.

The Bible Instructs Believers and Sets the Model for A New Testament Church

“These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly: 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 3:14-15)

“I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.” (2 Timothy 4:1-4)

In order for a church to call itself a church in the true Biblical sense it must base its faith and practice solely on God's Word the Bible. No mortal man founded the New Testament church; it was Christ who instituted the church. **It was Christ that says He will build His church.**

(Matthew 16:18) It was Christ who died for the Church (Eph 5:25) Three things we can see from the Scripture above. One, Christ started the church, two the church belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ, and three, it is Jesus Christ would would build it. So a Biblical New Testament church belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ not man, not a board, not a Pastor, but is owned by Christ. He purchased it with His own blood. (Acts 20:28)

To Receive God's Greatest Blessings the New Testament Church must be Biblical

God cannot bless error or be a party to false teaching. A church that is based on false doctrine is not a biblical church and God cannot have any part in it, and neither should we. Paul, in Galatians 1:7-9, twice says that anyone who would pervert the Gospel, ". . . let him be accursed." No man or congregation that claims to be a church of God has the right to change anything God has said for any reason. A biblical church is one whom Christ is the Head, and follows the word of God. If a church does not follow the Bible, then it is not a church that belongs to God, because in refusing to obey the scriptures they separate themselves from Him. Matthew 16:18, Jesus said He would build His church. How then did Christ proceed in establishing His church? He began to instruct His disciple and entrusted them with carrying out His instructions. The New Testament is clear that they followed His instructions to the letter. Christ's has not changed His instructions to His church. The way He left it is the way He intended it to remain. Any man, church or denomination who establishes a church on any other basis, it is not a biblical church. If a church is not started Biblically, nor established with a Biblical Pastor, or the church allows tradition or the opinions of men to establish its doctrine and practice it is in grave error and is not establishing a true New Testament church. Jesus said, "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." (1 Corinthians 3:10-11) A church that is established and does not follow the New Testament example, does not have God's approval, blessings or presence.

Note: In Revelation 2:5, Jesus warned the church at Ephesus that it should repent and return to its first love. Jesus said plainly that if they did not repent, He would come quickly and remove their candlestick which means the light on which the church was founded. In other words, if the church did not repent, God's presence and power would be removed and they would be left in darkness. That is why I am of the opinion that many false churches today have turned to entertainment, worldly music, false bible versions, prosperity religion, etc. in an effort to bring people into their unbiblical church.

What is the Significance of the New Testament's use of the word Ekklesia?

The correct definition of the word "church" has great and far reaching implications. The question is not what the word can be made to mean, but what does it mean; and the witness of its usage elsewhere, its form and mode of composition, and the sense given it by its readers. First, it means there is no biblical basis for a universal or catholic church. Further, it precludes that there is no church hierarchy outside the local church or local assembly of believers. The only *ekklesia* the New Testament uses is of a local assembly of believers. It cannot be used in a universal sense, referring to all believers everywhere or what some call the "universal" or "invisible" church. A universal church cannot meet in one place together and assemble, therefore the word cannot be used in referring to all believers of all time all over the world. In Revelation 21:9, New Testament believers are not called a church, but "the bride of Christ." At the Second Coming, there are no Church Age assemblies on earth. They all will have been raptured, at the beginning of the Seven Year Tribulation and judged at the BEMA in the seven year interval preceding the Second Coming. At this point in time of Revelation 21:9, we see the body of Christ, coming with the Bridegroom to earth to reign with Him. Tribulation saints are not part of the "body" or "bride" of Christ.

Some conclude that the term "body of Christ" (1 Cor. 12:27, Eph. 4:12) refers to a universal church. However, "the body of Christ" and the *ekklesia* are two different bodies. The "body of Christ" is made up of all believers of all times from Pentecost to the Rapture. The *ekklesia* only refers to those alive and assembled together in a particular locality. In 1 Corinthians 12, the whole of the chapter is referring to the makeup and the relationship of individual members of a local assembly using the analogy of the human body. In 1 Corinthians 12:13, the verse reads, "For by one Spirit we are all baptized into one body" and the body is the local church. This is referring to water baptism and is not referring to the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. The Baptism of the Holy Spirit occurs when the individual believer receives the indwelling of the Holy Spirit at conversion. Water baptism is another matter. It is a public declaration of a born-again Christian, obeying the Lord by baptism, identifying with Christ and joining with the local assembly of believers.

Clearly, when a believer was baptized, he was baptized into a local assembly (Acts. 2:41,47). Normally, A believer becomes a member of the local church when he identifies

with Christ and the local church through his baptism (some exceptions may apply). No Believer is baptized into all churches worldwide. In Verse 24-25, Paul says the reason for this instruction was that there not be "any schism in the body" and "that the members should have the same care one for the other." This phrase limits the body to a local church and precludes it referring to a "universal" or "invisible" church. It is beyond human ability to govern a worldwide church. The overseeing of all believers on earth is an individual action done on a local level and is the sole responsibility of Christ Himself through His under shepherds. Even if you ignored the context and preclude this is referring to all believers, you must also equally conclude that the application of these verses can only be done on a local level and this verse is not teaching the concept of a universal church.

The Importance of the Local Church to the Believer

It is Christ who established the local church and He has said to us that the scriptures are given by God to instruct us. They teach us doctrine, reproof, correction and righteousness (See 2 Tim. 3:16). Why? That we might be fully equipped to do the works of God. Christ established the church for His disciples or those who trust in Him as their Lord and Savior. There are many reasons why Christ established the local church. Believers are edified (built up) in the faith by the leaders and teachers of the local assembly (Eph.4:11-13). God uses the local church as a training ground to teach others the word of God. (2 Tim. 2:2) It is a place where the child of God gives his tithes and offerings to the Lord for the support of the local church and missions (Acts 4:32-37; 1 Cor. 8:1-6; 9:6-15; Phil. 4:15-19). The local church provides a place where believers come together to pray one for the other and do the work of the Lord (See 2 Cor. 1:11). The local church sends missionaries (Acts 11:19-30, 13:1-3, 14:27). One thing is clear, if Christ established the local church, then no believer should ignore it or refuse to be a part of it. To refuse to be a part of the Lord's local church is to be in disobedience. Please note, not all areas have a Biblical New Testament Baptist Church. The church is a vital and necessary part of a disciple's life. A believer outside the church, would be like a fish out of water. Christ established the "ekkleisa" for individual believers to band together in carrying out God's purposes.

In Acts 2:47, the New Testament says that those who were saved "were added to the church daily." The New Testament never refers to believers who are not a part of a local church. The word "added" in the verse is the Greek word *pros-tith'-ay-mee*; it means "to place additionally, - add, increase, lay unto, proceed further."

The verse is saying that God added to or increased the local church each time a person received Christ. In addition to being saved the believer became a member of the church in Jerusalem when he was baptized. Later, when believers returned to their cities, they became members of the local churches in the town in which they lived. For example:

". . . the church which was at Jerusalem" (Acts 8:1) "the church which was at Antioch" (Acts 13:1) "the church which is at Cenchrea" (Rom. 16:1) "the church that is in their house" (1 Cor. 16:19), (speaking of the church which met in the home of

Aquila and Priscilla) "Nymphas, and the church which is in his house" (Col. 4:15).

When a person is saved, he should immediately submit to Scriptural baptism and become a member of a local Biblical New Testament Baptist church.

1. Believers are to learn doctrine in the local N.T. Baptist Church. Ephesians 4:11-16

"And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that 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." (Ephesians 4:11-16)

In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul giving instruction on the local church says, (V18) Note in V28, the same truth is presented, that God set believers in the local assembly and gave all the

spiritual gifts in the context of the local church. *"And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues."* (1 Corinthians 12:28)

2. Believers are to serve the Lord through the local New Testament Baptist Church. The gifts that are given to believers are to be used in relation to the local church. Nowhere in the New Testament do you find believers serving God apart from the local church. Never do you find believers who are not a part of a local assembly of believers, nor ministering apart from the authority of a local church.

3. Believers are to be under the leadership of the Pastor and local church.

Pastors are called of God to oversee the local assembly of believers.

Acts 20:28 "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. (Acts 13:2)

Believers should be members of a local church and under the care of the pastor called by God to shepherd that local church. God's plan is that they are under the

supervision (overseeing) of God's under-shepherd. God says in Hebrews 13:17, that the members of a local church should be submissive and follow the local pastor

as he follows the Lord. "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you." (Hebrews 13:17)

Believers who are not a part of a local church are not obeying God by putting themselves under the leadership of God's pastor and the local church. Any "Ministry or work," outside of the local church that is not recognized by the local NT Baptist Church and sent out (ordained) by that local NT church is not Biblical. This is why Missionaries, usually state on their prayer cards, or other literature who their pastor and sending church is. We cannot support any work, ministry or individual that is not Biblical called and sent out, and accountable to a local NT Baptist Church. The Apostle Paul and Barnabas was

called out of the church at Antioch by the Holy Ghost. The church at Antioch recognized that call and after prayer and fasting, sent them out with their full blessing, prayers and support. Because of their obedience to God and submission to the local church, God blessed their ministry from Cyprus, in which they preached from town to town, all the way to Derbe. Upon leaving Derbe they returned again to Lystra, and *to* Iconium, and Antioch, Confirming the souls of the disciples, *and* exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God. And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed. At the conclusion of this missionary journey they returned to their sending church Antioch. Why? To give a report.

Act 14:26-28 “*And thence sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled. And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles. And there they abode long time with the disciples.*”

Your Pastor's role in your Christian life.

The pastor is the leader of the church, not the "lord" of the assembly. The New Testament instructs pastors to, "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock." (1Pet. 5:2-3)

"Feeding the flock," means to teach them the Word of God. "Taking the oversight," refers to providing spiritual and administrative leadership or oversight. He is the Lord's servant doing the Lord's work. His first responsibility is to the Lord, to preach, to teach and live by the Bible, God's word. He and the congregation alike are to obey the Word of God and if so there will be unity in the assembly. He has the responsibility to: "*Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.*" (2 Timothy 4:2). He is not to "lord" over the congregation in the sense of acting as the boss, master or dictator of the people. He leads by example and by the word of God. He does have the responsibility to reprove and rebuke false teaching and

practices in accordance with what the Bible teaches and to make sure his congregation is pure in doctrine and deed. The basis of his authority is the word of God, which he is called to uphold without compromise. Pastors and congregations who follow the word of God will be in harmony. The pastor is to do this willingly, which refers to his calling to the position and responsibility from God. He is not to choose being a pastor as having a vocation because of its financial benefits or position. A man does not choose to be a pastor as one chooses an occupation, but is chosen by God. The pastor is to serve the church because God called him to shepherd the flock and he wants to do God's will for his life. It does not mean he is not to live by the ministry and receive financial support. (See 1 Tim. 5:17-18, 1 Thess. 5:12-17, 1 Cor. 9:14, 2 Cor. 11:7-9)

4. Believers have a responsibility to Missions as a part of the local NT Baptist Church.

A believer ought to be a part in supporting missions through their local church. The clear New Testament example is that it was the local church which sent forth missionaries. In the New Testament there are no para-church organizations.

Organizations that operate outside of the local NT Baptist Church. Further, no church has the authority to delegate this responsibility to anyone else which would include mission boards, conventions, or any agency outside the local congregation.

Mission boards can only function biblically when they are under the direct supervision and direction of local church and function as a missions support agency.

Missionaries were supported spiritually and materially by the assembly of believers, both individually and collectively. (See Acts 15:3, 20:38, 21:5, Rom. 15:24, 1

Cor. 16:6,11, 2 Cor. 1:16, Titus 3:13, 3 John 6) Missionaries were ordained and sent out by the local church. (Acts 13:2-3) Mission boards have no authority to call missionaries or send missionaries. To be a part of God's plan for the propagation of the Gospel it is important that the local church follow the biblical example.

5. Believers are given the responsibility and privilege of supporting the local NT Baptist Church financially.

God's instructions concerning the believer's responsibility to support the work of God are given to the local church. In Corinthians, Paul says, "Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come." (1 Corinthians 16:1-2) (See 2 Cor. 8-9) Paul is commanding the Corinthians, as well as the Galatians, to take on Sunday (the day they met) the collections for the saints at Jerusalem. The use of God's tithe and offerings was a matter for the local church. An individual believer can support any ministry or cause he desires providing it does not contradict the church of which he is a member, this causes confusion and division, and he is not to do it with God's tithe or offerings. The church collectively has that responsibility. Tithes and offerings were commanded by God to carry on the work of God.

6. Believers who need healing are to call for the Elders of their local NT Baptist Church for prayer.

The prayer for the sick was also clearly a function of the local church. James says, *"Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven."* (James 5:14-15) After the church was begun in Acts 2, those who received the miracle healings were always a part of the local church. Peter and John, who performed the first miracles after the church was begun were Apostles and elders in the church at Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas were missionaries ordained and sent out by the church at Antioch. Everywhere you find miracle healings after Pentecost, it was always related to the ministry of a local church.

Clearly, God's plan is that born again Christians be a part of a local church. Nowhere in the New Testament, after the institution of the local church was established, do you find believers serving God outside the authority or rule of the local church. Those who served the Lord were sent out and supported in prayer and materially by the local churches. The New Testament gives no example of any ministry outside the local church and that is an important and vital truth

everyone who professes Christ should understand. Present day ministries should be directed from and under the authority of a local church. The biblical example is that God always organizes everything he begins and establishes clear lines of responsibility. God will never lead a local church or Believer contrary to His Holy Word. Please note, there are Unbiblical churches and ministries that have results, but it is the result of God's word not the work. For a church or ministry to have God's full blessing and participation, it must follow Biblical instruction and qualifications.

THE DISTINCTIVES OF A BIBLICAL NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

These are the distinctives of true Baptist churches. Traditionally it has been Baptist churches who practiced all these Bible principles. A church must believe and practice all of these distinctives to truly be a Biblical New Testament church. If it fails to accept even one of these principles it is not a New Testament church and certainly not a Baptist church. Groups throughout history going back to the church at Antioch, can be traced that followed these distinctives. Baptists have not always been called Baptists, at different times in history those that followed these distinctives have been called, Montanists, Novationists, Donatists, Paulicians, Waldenses, Arnoldists and others. In the thirteenth century through the seventeenth century Baptists were called Anabaptists, and then in the seventeenth century the name "Baptist" finally emerged. Therefore, Baptists are not Protestants; The Baptists never came out of the Catholic Church. Nor has a single individual that started the Baptists.

Historical Testimony of the Baptists

Thomas Armitage, "A History of the Baptists", page 149, says something about the same fact. *"...the Baptists may be considered as of old, the only religious community which has continued from the times of the Apostles; and evangelical doctrines of religion. The uncorrupted inward and outward condition of the Baptist community afford proof of the truth contested by the Romish church of the great necessity of a reformation of religion such as that which took place in the sixteenth century, and also a refutation of the erroneous notion of the Roman Catholics that their denomination is the most ancient."*

He goes on to say, concerning the model of the New Testament church in Scripture, *"Having found the model of the New Testament church, the question is forced upon us: whether or not this pattern is retained in any of the churches of the present day? Without casting ungenerous reflections upon any Christian body whatever, it may be said that as to substance and form, the most accurate resemblance to this picture of the Apostolic church, is now found in the Baptist churches of Europe and America."*

J. Newton Brown, Editor of the Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, listed a quote from Graves in Old Landmarkism, page 127. "The ancient Waldenses, Cathari, Peterines and Donatists were our historic ancestors, and ...a succession of whom continued up to the Reformation."

J. R. Graves said something else in the Great Carrollton Debate on page 841. "One thing is certain, of churches, now known as Baptists, holding essentially the same doctrines, administering the same ordinances for the same purpose, and to the same subjects, are not the true church of Christ; then Christ has never held a church on this earth."

Cardinal Hosius, a Catholic dignitary, spoke these words at the Council of Trent in 1554. *"If*

the truth of religion were to be judged by the readiness of cheerfulness which a man of any sect shows in suffering, then the opinions and persuasion of no sect can be truer or surer than those of the Ana-Baptists; since there have been none for these twelve hundred years past that have been more grievously punished." Orchard's History, page 364

Cardinal Gibbons and Patrick J. Healy, in a book titled "Crossing the Centuries", published in 1912, said this. "Of the Baptists, it may be said that they are not Reformers. These people comprising bodies of Christian believers known under various names in different countries, entirely distinct and independent of the Roman and Greek "churches", have had an unbroken continuity of existence from apostolic days down through the centuries....."

DISTINCTIVES:

I. THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH ACCEPTS ONLY THE NEW TESTAMENT AS IT SOLE AUTHORITY IN ALL MATTERS OF FAITH AND PRACTICE.

This means that a true Biblical church does not accept any authority for its faith and practice, outside the New Testament Scriptures. This in no way lessens the importance of the Old Testament Scriptures. The church is not found in the Old Testament because it is the record of God's dealing with Israel. Only in the New Testament do you find the pattern and instructions from God concerning the church. This is why we call them New Testament Baptist Churches. It also means that the true New Testament church does not accept for doctrine or practice the councils of men, dominations or tradition. The New Testament church believes the Word of God, the Bible is complete and is the sole authority. God says "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." (2 Timothy 3:16-17) The New Testament church rejects the idea that God is giving supposed "new" revelations, believing that God forbids any adding to or taking away of the canon of Scriptures (John 14:26, 16:13, I Cor. 13:8-10; Heb. 1:1-2, Jude 3, Rev. 22:18-19) We do not accept any authority over the local New Testament Church, but Christ Himself, including any hierarchy to include popes, councils of churches, priests or any other group of men outside the local church. Christ is our Head, and the New Testament Scriptures are the true churches sole authority.

II. THE AUTONOMY OF THE LOCAL CHURCH.

"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) "Autonomy" means: self-governing, and independent of its other parts. The autonomy of the local church means that the church governs itself. The Biblical example of a New Testament church is one that is not ruled by any board, hierarchical system or another church. The local church has been defined as a body of believers immersed based upon their credible profession of faith in Jesus Christ. It has two ministry positions that being a pastor(s) and deacon(s) (appointed servants). The local

assembly is sovereign in polity, and banded together for work, worship, the observance of the ordinances and the worldwide proclamation of the Gospel."

FORMS OF CHURCH GOVERNMENT IN PRACTICE TODAY

1. Papal - Roman Catholic: The church is viewed as being universal with a hierarchical totalitarian authority beginning with the Pope.

2. Episcopalian: The word means "bishop." The authority of the church as a denomination rests with the bishops. This is a hierarchal system of church government. The bishops make up a board which rules over the churches which are under them. Episcopal and Methodist churches use this system.

3. Presbyterian: The word means "elder." A board of elders elected by the congregation rules over the church as well as the denomination. These elders may or may not be preachers.

4. Congregational: The Biblical form of church government. The authority in a true New Testament church is God's word and it is absolute. The final human authority in a church rests with the congregation as they follow God's word. Each member has a vote and the rule is democratic. The church does not answer to any authority outside of itself. The Pastor is the administrative and spiritual leader of the congregation being called and appointed by God to the position. The church recognizes that Christ is the Head of the local church and the Bible is God's instruction and authority.

The Book of Acts gives two clear examples of congregational government. In Acts. 6:1-7, the appointment of the first appointed servants (English Bibles: deacons) was done by the whole church following the apostle's recommendation. In Acts 15, there arose a dispute over whether Gentile believers should be required to keep the Law of Moses and be circumcised. The two churches involved were the assemblies at Antioch and Jerusalem. The pastors from Antioch were sent to Jerusalem and held a council with the church there. The pastors, apostles and the whole church met together and made the recommendation (Acts 15:7, 12, 22, 25).

THE TRUE NEW TESTAMENT IS LED BY THE LORD'S UNDERSHEPHERD

First, we must understand that a church is an organization instituted by God as Acts 2 records on the Day of Pentecost. Any organization must have leadership, and in a local church that calling and position of God has been divinely given to the pastor. God has given us clear instructions as to how His assembly is to be governed. If a church follows God's plan, He will bless and guide them in accomplishing His will for the church and for its members. The word "pastor" is poimen which refers to a shepherd who takes care of sheep or flocks. It means more than one who feeds them, but who protects, looks out for, and will give his life for them. The pastor is to guide and set the example as well as feed the flock. (See 1 Tim. 4:12) Ephesians 4:11 gives the New Testament lists of leading servants or ministers in the churches. The last position stated as given by the Lord to the churches is "pastors and teachers." Note that the wording of the verse reads, "*And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;*" (Ephesians 4:11) In referring to the apostles, prophets, and

evangelists, the verse states that God "gave some" followed by the name. However, the verse omits the word "some" in referring to "pastors and teachers." Most believe the reason for the omission is that pastor and teacher are the same position of "pastor-teacher." The pastor is a shepherd to the Lord's flock and also their teacher. True pastors refer to themselves as "under shepherds" because they recognize that Jesus is the True Shepherd and the flock, the local assembly of believers, a church belongs to him. The concept is that the pastor, as shepherd, is the overseer who feeds the church members that the Lord has placed him to lead. Peter, to whom the Lord commanded to "feed His sheep" (John 21:15-17) wrote this in his 1st Epistle.

"The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock." (1 Peter 5:1-3) Paul also addressed the calling of a pastor as an overseer of Christ's flock. *"Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood."* (Acts 20:28) He is literally to pay close attention to himself, and his congregation that God has given him charge of. It means he is to vigilantly superintend the group. The position of pastor is referred to by several titles and each denotes the traits and responsibilities of the calling. The terms used to refer to God's leader are the titles Pastor, Elder and Bishop, which all refer to the same office. Bishop is the Greek word episkopos and means an overseer as Acts 20:28 shows. The word episkopos Means: *epi* = over and *skpeo* = to look or watch. Philippians 1:1, 1 Timothy 3:2, Titus 1:7, 1 Peter 2:25 all use this title. In many churches the position of a bishop is an official over the local church. Our English New Testaments read, "This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work." (1 Timothy 3:1) In our English Bibles the single word episkope is translated "the office of a bishop." However, the Greek phrase literally translated reads "If a man *ei tis* desire *oregomai* bishop *epithumeo* ." This is important to understand because it defines the position of a pastor as being a minister and servant to the congregation. The verse says if a man desires to be a *epithumeo* it means to be a superintendent or overseer, he desires a good work. There was no hierarchy among the New Testament churches and certainly no popes, or prophets leading a universal body. No reference in scripture indicates apostolic session of authority. When the apostle died, his authority ended. Paul was used to lay the foundation of the church and wrote most of our New Testament under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Once the scriptures were complete, the scripture inspired of God became the authority. (See 2 Tim. 3:14-15) On a subject as important as the organization of His church, surely the Lord would have given some instructions on the make-up or hierarchy if He desired one to exist.

It is improper to use the title "Reverend" and never in God's word is a preacher called "Reverend." Psalm 111:9 is the only time that title is used in God's word, and it refers to Almighty God. "He sent redemption unto his people: he hath commanded his covenant for ever: holy and reverend is his name." (Psalms 111:9) This title had its origins in Roman Catholicism. It was a title given to the "clergy" to distinguish their authority and high position over the "laity" or the common people. You should never call your Pastor

Reverend, but at the same time is he is to be esteemed highly. It is recommended to call your Pastor, Pastor, or Brother.

III. THE EARLY CHURCH ELECTED ITS OWN MINISTERS.

Acts 6:1-7, records that the early church elected special men to do a particular task. These men were the first deacons. They were not officers or leaders in the church, but men chosen by the congregation to perform a particular administrative menial task that needed to be done. The apostles and pastors were the leaders of the church.

IV. THE LOCAL CHURCH IS THE FINAL AUTHORITY IN DISCIPLINE.

In Matthew 18:15-17 the Lord Jesus taught the local church has the final authority in disciplining an erring member. 1 Corinthians 5:1-5, and 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15, teach that it is the local church that has the responsibility to discipline members.

V. THE LOCAL CHURCH HAS THE ABSOLUTE RIGHT OF SELF-GOVERNMENT.

In Acts 1:23, Jesus's disciples chose two men from among them, Barsabas and Matthias to replace Judas who betrayed Christ. The Greek word used for "appointed" is histemi. It means to put forward or "to propose." They proposed two men and then sought God's choice by casting lots. We do not cast lots today for two reasons. First, we have the complete New Testament with instructions as to how we are to chose men for service. Second, they were choosing an apostle and we do not have apostles today. Christ called each apostle. There is no record of the assemblies after the death of the apostles appointing men to replace them. God gave Paul instructions as to qualifications of pastors and deacons. (See 1 Tim. 3:1-7, 3:8-13, Titus 1:5-9) John was the last apostle. But they did begin the procedure of choosing men from among their congregation. In Acts 1:6 they chose seven men as special servants (diakoneo deacon). The assembly was instructed to chose from among them seven men of good report, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom to elect to the position of administering over the distribution of food to the widows. In Acts 15:2, the Antioch assembly elected Paul and Barnabas with several other men to go to Jerusalem and question the apostles about the matter of the Gentiles. After the matter was decided, the Jerusalem church sent men of their assembly with Paul and Barnabas, to convey the message. The message was that the Holy Spirit had directed them in their decision and the local church agreed. It was not a command, but was a recommendation. It is scriptural for local churches to associate with each other for fellowship and the propagation of the Gospel as seen in Romans 16:1-2, 1 Corinthians 16:1-2, Acts 15:2-4, 22-27, 30-33, 18:27. The local church sends out missionaries. In Acts 13:1-4, the local church at Antioch under the direction of the Holy Spirit commissioned and sponsored the first missionaries. In Acts. 14:26-27, they returned and reported to the church what God had done. The local church is pictured in Scripture as autonomous, meaning it governs itself under the direction of the scriptures and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The local congregation rules itself led by the Holy Spirit with no hierarchy of individuals or organization over it in or out of the local assembly.

VI. THE PRIESTHOOD OF THE BELIEVER

The New Testament church is made up of individual born-again baptized believers who can go directly to God in prayer without the intercession of any man or institution. Christ is our only Intercessor and is our High Priest. (See Heb. 2:17; 3:1; 4:14-15; 5:1,5,10; 6:20; 7:1,26; 8:1,3; 9:7,11,25; 10:21; 13:11) In 1 Tim. 1:20, Paul instructs individuals to pray, and describes various subjects of prayer. In Verse 5, he states, "For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5). There is both private (Matt. 6:6) and public prayer (Acts 4:24-31). Hebrews 4:14-16, states Christ is our High Priest who knows our every emotion and need personally. We are boldly going to the throne of Grace (God the Father), to find help in a time of need. In Jesus's model prayer, Luke 11:1-4, Christ instructed us to pray to the Father. All prayer in the Bible is addressed to God the Father. When we pray to God the Father, we are praying through Jesus Christ, being led by the Holy Spirit. We address our prayer to the Father because He is the Head of the Trinity. Nowhere in the Scriptures are we instructed to pray to a "saint" or anyone but the Father. Christ is our sole Intercessor, no other exists. We are to confess our sins directly to God and personally ask Him for forgiveness (1 John 1:9). It is unbiblical, degrading, and disrespectful for a person to pray to anyone, but directly to God the Father through our Intercessor Jesus Christ, who is the Savior. In the Old Testament the priest offered sacrifices and interceded for the Children of Israel. Everything they did was a picture of the coming Messiah and Intercessor Christ Jesus. After Christ has come we no longer need the picture or symbol, we have the reality of Christ as Intercessor. Every believer is a priest. *"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. . . . But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light:"* (1 Pet. 2:5,9)

VII. THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH HAS ONLY TWO ORDINANCES.

Baptism and the Lord's Supper are the only two ordinances given to the local church. We call these two symbolic acts "ordinances" because the Lord ordained or appointed them. They are not sacraments or a means of dispensing grace. Grace is only obtained by faith in Christ Jesus. Believers are to follow the ordinances because Christ commanded us to. (See Matthew 28:19-20).

Christ commissioned the church to practice the ordinances, not individuals, schools, Christian youth groups, camps and etc. There is no record in the Bible of an individual or anyone apart from the church taking the Lord's Supper. How often it is to be done is left up to the pastor. The only instruction is in 1 Corinthians 11:26, as *"For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come."*

VIII. THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH PRACTICES SOUL LIBERTY.

"But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him." (1 John 2:27)

Every believer has the responsibility and right to interpret the Scriptures, to hold and profess and to worship God as the Bible teaches. No church or religious organization has God's authority to direct believers to obey it or recognize it as their authority to any further degree other than directing them to follow the scriptures. In other words, each individual has the right to worship God as they believe the Scriptures teach. No one should be forced to hold to a particular religion or church. The word of God is one's authority, not the church organization. A true New Testament church will carefully teach its members God's word. The Holy Spirit deals with and teaches the believer as an individual. *"But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ."* (Ephesians 4:7) The gift of God is given to believers as individuals, being used in the context of the local assembly. *"But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal."* (1 Corinthians 12:7) [See Romans 12:3-8.] Christians will be individually judged at the BEMA judgment of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10). Romans 14:10, says we shall all stand before judgment. 1 Corinthians 3:13-15, shows the examination of Christians is based on one's individual work. 2 Peter 1:20 states, *"Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation."* (2 Peter 1:20) As believers, we have the personal responsibility to God to know what the Bible teaches and to follow it alone. We cannot at the judgment plead that we were misled by our church, pastor or anyone else. We have the right to believe the Bible without regard for the creeds or traditions of churches.

IX. THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH IS MADE UP ONLY OF SAVED BAPTIZED INDIVIDUALS.

"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. . . . Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." (Acts 2:41-42, 47) The church is an assembly of people who have received Christ as their Lord and Savior. It is made up of those who have made a public declaration of their faith in Christ by being baptized. The Bible teaches one should be a member of a local assembly of believers. This is demonstrated in the definite step the first Christians followed. This order is always the same.

1. Believers receive Jesus Christ as their Savior by believing the Gospel. The grammatical construction of the phrase "they gladly received his word" meaning they believed the Gospel message of Peter, were baptized βαπτισθησαν baptizo. The word is first aorist passive indicative, constative aorist. This denotes that "received the word" is an action that takes place before the action of the main verb "baptized." It means that only those who had already received the word and were saved were baptized. "Receiving the word" came first and based on that they were baptized.

2. Following salvation the believer gives a public declaration of his faith by submitting to baptism.

Jesus said He would be ashamed before His Father of those who were ashamed of Him, and His word before this adulterous and sinful generation. (Mark 8:38) Many other verses in the New Testament speak of the fact believers are not to be ashamed of Christ before men. (See Rom. 1:16, 5:5,9:33,10:11, 2 Tim. 1:8,12,2:15) Baptism a God's assigned way believers can show they are saved, not ashamed of Christ, and are in agreement and fellowship with the local assembly.

3. Following conversion and baptism the believers were "added" to the church.

The fact that Christ died for the church as Ephesian 5:25 states, "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;". This reveals the importance of the local church. The gifts were given in the context of the local church and are never shown as existing apart from the ministry of the assembly. (1 Corinthians 12:7,11,18,28).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Each believer has a great responsibility to know what God's will is and what He wants His *ekklesia* His local congregation, to believe and practice. Even though Christ said the gates of hell would not prevail against His church, the fact is Satan has made great inroads among those who have not been vigilant. Yet, in spite of the Devil's cunning devices there have always been believers from when Jesus started His church, who joined themselves together in Biblical New Testament Baptist Churches to honor and serve the Lord. It is imperative that each pastor and church member be vigilant in protecting, with the Lord's help, the purity of his local church. That means the word of God must be studied and following and applied without spot or blemish to the Lord's flock. God's plan and desire are stated in Ephesian 5:25-27.

"Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, 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." (Ephesians 5:25-27)

May God grant His saints, the diligence and the fortitude to ". . . exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints."(Jude 1:3) Paul wrote *"That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God."* (1 Corinthians 2:5)

Easy Reminder of the Baptist Distinctives:

B

Bible Authority

A

Autonomy of the local church (Self-governing)

P

Priesthood of the Believer.

T

Two ordinances of the local church: Believer's Baptism & Communion.

I

Individual Soul Liberty

S

Saved and Baptized Church membership.

T

Two Biblical offices in the local church: Pastor & Deacon