

The Local Church

Matthew 16:13-18

Introduction

In this series we are studying the “Baptist Distinctives.” Together they spell the word “BAPTISTS” and show exactly who we are and what we believe. So far we have looked at “Bible Authority” and also defined which Bible it is that we use. The next Baptist Distinctive is “Autonomy of the Local Church.” Before we tackle that doctrine, it will be helpful to define what we mean by “Local Church,” as our definition is quite distinct from most other denominations.

I. The _____ of the Church

A. Who founded it?

1. _____ built His church. (Matthew 16:18)

B. When was it founded?

1. Many believe that the church began on the Day of _____.

2. The Bible is clear that the Lord founded the church during His _____ ministry.

3. What the apostles had prior to Pentecost:

a) They had the Gospel. (Mark 1:1)

b) They were _____ believers. (Acts 1:22, John 1:33)

c) They had an organization.

d) They had the same Head that the church of today has - Christ.

e) They had the ordinance of baptism.

f) They had the _____ of the Lord’s Supper.

g) They had the Great Commission.

h) They met _____ as a church for prayer, prior to Pentecost.

i) They had a business _____ & elected officers.

4. Other reasons the church had to exist prior to Pentecost:

a) The Bible says Christ sang praises “in the midst of the church.” (Heb. 2:12, Mark 14:26)

b) The believers who were baptized on the Day of Pentecost were “added unto them” - “added to the church.” (Acts 2:41 & 47)

- c) Jesus spoke to His apostles concerning discipline and rules of how to operate as a church. It was already in existence before Matthew 18:15-17.
- d) The apostles themselves were the first _____ of the church. (I Cor. 12:28)

C. Why does it matter?

1. The Great Commission

- a) If the Lord only gave the Great Commission to His apostles as individuals, the responsibility to fulfill it would have _____ with them.
- b) But if given to them corporately - as a church - that Commission is still binding upon any true _____ in existence today.

2. The ordinance of Baptism

- a) If it were not given to the church, any individual could go out and start baptizing people with no accountability.
- b) This is why we are very particular, not only about how someone is baptized or when, but who does the baptizing. It must be done under the _____ of a true church with true doctrine.

3. The ordinance of the Lord's _____

- a) Early Christians were told to keep the Lord's Supper, from time to time to "shew the Lord's death till he come." (I Cor. 11:26)
- b) Those Christians are dead, and Christ has not yet come. It was given to them institutionally, as a church.
- c) This is why we will practice the Lord's Supper as we do, under the authority of the church, as members of the church.

4. Authority of the Local Church to do God's work

- a) The work of God upon the earth is done by individuals _____ the institution of their local church.
- b) There are many organizations that do much good, but only one has been given the authority to evangelize the world, baptize believers, and keep the ordinances: the local _____.

II. The Definition of the Church

- A. The _____ view - the Church is _____ and visible.
1. All Catholics, anywhere in the world are a part of "the Church."
 2. It is a visible church, as all Catholics basically belong to "the Church of Rome."
- B. The _____ view - the Church is universal and _____.
1. All believers, anywhere in the world are a part of "the Church."
 2. It is invisible, with no specific headquarters or leadership.
 3. It is organized into denominations & local churches, but if you are saved, you are already a part of "the Church."
- C. The _____ view - the Church is _____ and visible.
1. The baptized believers of a particular assembly are a part of that local church. The "universal church" is not a Biblical concept. The New Testament always shows local, visible assemblies.
 2. *Ecclesia* - (Greek) "a called out _____" (Matt. 16:18)
 - a) "Among the Greeks *ecclesia* was the assembly of the citizens of a free city-state gathered by a herald blowing a horn through the streets of a town."
 - b) "It was the organized assembly of the authorized voters of the local community who met to transact business of common concern. It corresponded to the town meeting of New England of later days."
 - c) Jesus used it in the ordinary meaning of the word, but distinguished it as "my *ecclesia*."
 - d) "Since *ecclesia* in its accepted meaning carried with it the idea of locality and organization, to make it refer to a so-called 'universal, invisible' Church, possessing neither locality nor organization, is to do violence to the word and to use it in a purely arbitrary sense." Roy Mason
 3. Used _____
 - a) Acts 2:47; 8:1; 11:26; 14:27; 20:17
 - b) I Corinthians 1:2; 11:18; 16:19
 - c) Revelation 1:11

4. Used _____
- a) "The town meeting of New England..." (letter b)
 - b) "On this rock England will build her jury, and all the power of tyranny shall not prevail against her."
 - c) The horse is a magnificent animal.
 - d) Matthew 18:17 (How could this be accomplished with a universal, invisible church?)
 - e) Ephesians 5:24-33 (universal, invisible husband???)

Even when used in the abstract or generic sense, the church always finds its expression in a local, visible assembly - just as the town meeting, the jury, the horse, and the husband, or any other term we use in a generic way are ultimately expressed in a real, visible way.

III. The _____ of the Church

Some think that we Baptists believe that only Baptists are saved and going to heaven. This cannot be true! Baptists actually believe the reverse, for one must *already be saved* before he can become a Baptist!

What we believe about the church has nothing to do with anyone's membership in God's family or kingdom. The church, family, and kingdom of God are three separate and distinct things.

- A. The _____ of God - includes all of the children of God in heaven and on earth.
 - 1. Ephesians 3:15
 - 2. Galatians 3:26
- B. The _____ of God - includes all of the saved on earth at any given time.
 - 1. John 3:3-5; 18:36
 - 2. Luke 16:16
 - 3. Romans 14:17
 - 4. Colossians 1:13
- C. The _____ of God - never used of any institution, except of an assembly or congregation of baptized believers in some given locality.
 - 1. I Corinthians 1:2 "The church of God at Corinth"
 - 2. See references above at II, C, 3.

Note: Some speak of the “General Assembly” of all believers in heaven one day. That is only a future “church,” as it does not yet exist. When all believers are finally together in one place, it will be both local and visible.

The local, individual church is the only kind of church God has on this earth today.

Baptism is not a part of admission into either the family of God or the Kingdom of God; but baptism is essential to admission into a church of God. You are born into God’s family and kingdom. You are baptized into one of His churches.

IV. The Application of this Teaching *(by Mike Randall)*

A. It gives authorization to the _____ of the ministry.

There is authority for local churches to do the work of God.

B. It gives elevation to the calling of a _____.

The pastor is accountable only to Christ and his congregation. He is not under a “board.” This shows the importance of this office.

C. It gives _____ to the ministry.

In the New Testament, all ministry was done in some way through local churches. That directs us to serve through our local church. It also brings into question the validity of para-church organizations.

D. It gives clarification to the _____ of the New Testament.

The church is not “spiritual Israel” or the “kingdom of God.” When we are right on what the church is, it clears up a lot of other errors.

E. It gives _____ to ministry.

The work of world missions is given to churches. That’s why we are motivated to help plant more churches. Local churches and their members are accountable to spread the Gospel around the world.

F. It gives _____ to the ministry.

When you understand Ephesians 5:27 as referring to a local church, it causes us to be careful that right doctrine is taught, the ordinances are practiced properly and holiness is modeled. We will be accountable.

G. It provides _____ to the ministry.

Not a denominational franchise - an assembly of baptized believers.