

WHY BAPTISTS BELIEVE WHAT BAPTISTS BELIEVE, PART 32

We are going to be discussing the church today. There may be a lot of things that as Baptists you wonder why we do things this way or that way. We will talk about that. The church is not a building, although, technically, I guess it could be. But that's not what we're talking about. The church is people. I heard it said one time, "The church is not an organization. It is a living organism." This was driven home in 2020 during the pandemic when churches suspended live services for a while. Every pastor and worship leader will tell you it just wasn't the same preaching and worshipping in front of an empty auditorium. It was not the same dynamic at all. Some churches placed cut out figures in the pews. Some even used children's hand puppets with Sesame Street characters. Look, the church is people!

THE ENTIRE BODY OF BELIEVERS

The church is often referred to as "the body of Christ" or "the body of believers." The Baptist Faith and Message under the heading "The Church" defines the church like this: "A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is an autonomous local congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel; observing the two ordinances of Christ, governed by His laws, exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by His Word, and seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth. Each congregation operates under the Lordship of Christ through democratic processes. In such a congregation each member is responsible and accountable to Christ as Lord."

So, this definition here sees the church as a local body of believers. For example, First Baptist Church of Rockwall. But then, the Baptist Faith and Message goes on to add another definition:

“The New Testament speaks also of the church as the Body of Christ which includes all of the redeemed of all the ages, believers from every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation.” In this second definition they see the church in a broader sense as being the redeemed of all time, believers in Jesus worldwide as it says here - “from every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation.”

That echoes the language found in Revelation Chapter 5. The saints are gathered around the throne in Heaven, “myriads of myriads,” thousands of thousands (you couldn’t count them all). They are singing a song to the Lamb, to Jesus: “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for You were slain, and by Your blood You ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation...” (Revelation 5:9). There in that chapter what you see is the church, people, who have been raptured to Heaven and they are around the throne worshipping Jesus.

Contrary to popular opinion the New Testament church was not established at Pentecost. Rather, Jesus Christ established it during His earthly ministry. In Matthew Chapter 16 Jesus asked His disciples this question - “Who do people say that the Son of Man [referring to Himself] is? Who do the people out there say that I am?” They replied, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” Jesus pushed the issue further. He says, “But who do YOU [My disciples] say that I am?” At that point good old Peter pipes up and makes this famous declaration: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Of course, Jesus is pleased by that response and He said, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in Heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build My church, and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:13-18).

[Question 1] What do Baptists believe that Jesus was referring to as “this rock?” I gave you several choices. It is **Peter’s**

statement of faith. The reason Baptist's believe this is based on the context of the passage. The question is asked, "Who do you say that I am?" And Peter says, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. That's who You are." Then Jesus says, "on this rock I will build My church." So, if you read the passage in context, that's what He's is talking about - Peter's correct response.

In my opinion, people who have another interpretation haven't been reading their Bible in context. They are picking a meaning out of the air. You cannot just read the scriptures in a vacuum any old way you want to. You have to interpret the Bible's meaning within context.

The New Testament church is Jesus's church. He calls it "My church" in v 18, "I will build My church." That's why the Baptist Faith and Message describes the true church as "A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ." It was founded on the fundamental truths that Jesus is, as Peter correctly stated, the Christ, the anointed One sent by God, the promised Messiah; and that He is the only begotten Son of the living God. Jesus is the foundation, He is the bedrock, the very cornerstone of the church.

"God has put all things under His [Jesus's] feet and made Him the supreme Head of the church, which is His body, filled with Himself, the Author and Giver of everything everywhere" (Ephesians 1:22-23 Living Letters). This is the reason the Baptist Faith and Message affirms the concept of the Lordship of Jesus in the lives of individual believers and of the church body as a whole. Jesus is the Supreme Head of the church.

The word, "church" in the Greek New Testament. is *ecclesia*, which comes from two Greek words with root meaning "to call out." It is used 115 times in the New Testament. Twenty-two times it refers in the broader definition of the entire body of believers worldwide, the redeemed of all ages, the universal church, every believer in Jesus Christ. [Question 2] But most of

the references to “church” in the New Testament – 93 of the 115 times – refer to the **local congregation** of Christians who meet together regularly for worship, Bible study, teaching and service.

In the Bible the word “church” never refers to the worship service itself nor to the church building. The early church assembled together for worship in people’s homes. The idea of a separate church building was a later development.

Next we have a series of True-False questions...

“That He [God the Father] worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And He put all things under His feet and gave Him as Head over all things to the church” (Ephesians 1:20-22)

[Question 3] True or false? Jesus Christ is the Head of the church. **True.**

“Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her” (Ephesians 5:25).

True or false? Christ liked the church very much. **False.** He LOVES the church and He gave Himself for her. In other words, He died for her. He died for the people. That is an amazing love.

“And Jesus answered him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in Heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build My church, and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it’” (Matthew 16:17-18).

True or false? The word “church” was first coined in the Book of Acts by the apostles. **False.** Jesus used the word “church here first, in Matthew Chapter 16.

“To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours” (1 Corinthians 1:2).

True or false? The church is comprised of individual believers whom God has called and set apart for His use. Well, the word “sanctified” means set apart. So, that is **True**.

The next verse talks about Barnabas going to Tarsus to get Saul, who had been converted and has been away for a while.

“And when he [Barnabas] had found him [Saul], he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians” (Acts 11:26).

True or false? The disciples were first called “Baptists” in Antioch (Acts 11:26). **False**. They were called “Christians.” As far as I know the disciples were never called Baptists!

“For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of His body” (Ephesians 5:29-30). “Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it” (1 Corinthians 12:27).

[Question 4] According to these verses, Christians are members of what? **The body of Christ**.

That’s the church in the broader sense. Now we are going to focus our attention on the local church.

THE LOCAL CHURCH

“Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing” (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

[Question 5] Complete the verse: “Therefore **encourage** one another and build one another up...” Paul pays the church at Thessalonica a compliment. He says that’s what you’ve been doing. Keep up the good work!

The primary function of the local church is to provide encouragement and support for believers. I’m not saying we always do a good job of it, but that is supposed to be our primary function. We are to nurture our brothers and sisters. And sometimes we might need nurturing. We are to be using our spiritual gifts and talents to carry out the mission that God has for us in the context of and with the support of the local church.

There are a lot of parachurch organizations out there - Promise Keepers, Campus Crusade for Christ, The Gideons, Samaritans Purse, and more. They do wonderful work and we need them. But they do NOT take the place of the local church. We are not to operate as “islands” apart from the local church.

I feel like one of the responsibilities of a local church’s leadership is to be able to recognize the various spiritual gifts, talents and ministry callings that exist among its own members. Then they should point people in the right direction where these can be used effectively.

Do *[Question 6]* on your own. You see various phrases used to describe the New Testament church in the left column: “the body of Christ,” “loved by God,” “sanctified in Christ Jesus,” “the household of God,” “children of God,” “God’s elect,” “fellow heirs with Christ,” “called to be saints,” “lights in the world.”

In 1 Corinthians Chapter 12 Paul is talking about the church. He says that the church is made up of many individual believers. Each person has a specific part to play in the body as a whole. If one member does not function properly, then that will adversely impact the entire body. Then Paul says this: “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body,

though many, are one body, so it is with Christ" (1 Corinthians 12:12). He goes on to use the analogy of the human body and how the different parts function together for the good of the whole body. He uses the analogy of the human body to describe the body of Christ. At the heart of Paul's message is this: We may come from different backgrounds and have unique personalities, but when we come together as a church body, we each exercise our spiritual gifts, talents and abilities. Together we function properly as one body of Christ.

[Question 7] Paul describes the church as a **body** made up of many **members (parts)** arranged by **God** so that every part is **essential (necessary or important)** to the other. We are all needed in the body of Christ. ALL parts of the body are important!!

This is how God designed a local body of believers. It's important to note that Paul establishes this fundamentally important point before he goes on to list the various workers, the specific roles that are in the church, which he does in v 28 and 29. God wants to use you.

Since Paul uses the analogy of the human body, I want us to think about it this way... Look at your own life whenever you had an ailment, an injury or just ached. It may have been the result of getting sick or getting older. Some of it could be the need to lose weight. What happened when you had a part of your body that just wasn't functioning right? Which part of your body suffered? The whole body! Believe me, the whole body is affected when one part is not functioning properly. That is Paul's point here. The whole body of Christ is going to hurt if you are not functioning properly in your part. So, it's not just about you.

When you're sick, your body may still function in the sense that it is still alive and active. But it doesn't function as well as it could and the whole quality of life certainly suffers!