

Doctrine - The Church

All who place their faith in Jesus Christ are immediately placed by the Holy Spirit into one united spiritual body, the church (1Corinthians 12:12-13), the bride of Christ (2Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:23-32; Revelation 19:7-8), of which Christ is the head (Ephesians 1:22; 4:15; Colossians 1:18).

The formation of the church, the body of Christ, began on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-21,38-47) and will be completed at the coming of Christ for His own at the Rapture (1Corinthians 15:51-52; 1Thessalonians 4:13-18).

The church is thus a unique spiritual organism designed by Christ, made up of all born-again believers in this present age (Ephesians 2:11-3:6). The church is distinct from Israel (1Corinthians 10:32), a mystery not revealed until this age (Ephesians 3:1-6; 5:32).

The establishment and continuity of local churches is clearly taught and defined in the New Testament Scriptures (Acts 14:23,27; 20:17,28; Galatians 1:2; Philippians 1:1; 1Thessalonians 1:1; 2Thessalonians 1:1) and that the members of the one scriptural body are directed to associate themselves together in local assemblies (1Corinthians 11:18-20; Hebrews 10:25).

The one supreme authority for the church is Christ (Ephesians 1:22; Colossians 1:18) and that church leadership, gifts, order, discipline, and worship are all appointed through His sovereignty as found in the Scriptures. The biblically designated officers serving under Christ and over the assembly are elders (males, who are also called bishops, pastors, and pastor-teachers; Acts 20:28; Ephesians 4:11) and deacons, both of whom must meet biblical qualification (1Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9; 1Peter 5:1-5).

These leaders lead or rule as servants of Christ (1Timothy 5:17-22) and have His authority in directing the church. The congregation is to submit to their leadership (Hebrews 13:7,17).

The importance of discipleship (Matthew 28:19-20; 2Timothy 2:2), mutual accountability of all believers to each other (Matthew 18:15-17), as well as the need for discipline for sinning members of the congregation in accord with the standards of Scripture (Matthew 18:15-22; Acts 5:1-11; 1Corinthians 5:1-13; 2Thessalonians 3:6-15; 1Timothy 1:19-20; Titus 1:10-16).

The autonomy of the local church, free from any external authority or control, with the right of self-government and freedom from the interference of any hierarchy of individuals or organizations (Titus 1:5). We teach that it is scriptural for true churches to cooperate with each other for the presentation and propagation of the faith. Local churches, however, through their pastors and their interpretation and application of Scripture, should be the sole judges of the measure and method of their cooperation (Acts 15:19-31; 20:28; 1Corinthians 5:4-7,13; 1Peter 5:1-4).

The purpose of the church is to glorify God (Ephesians 3:21) by building itself up in the faith (Ephesians 4:13-16), by instruction of the Word (2Timothy 2:2,15; 3:16-17), by fellowship (Acts 2:47; 1John 1:3), by keeping the ordinances (Luke 22:19; Acts 2:38-42) and by advancing and communicating the gospel to the entire world (Matthew 28:19; Acts 1:8).

The calling of all saints to the work of service (1Corinthians 15:58; Ephesians 4:12; Revelation 22:12).

The need of the church to cooperate with God as He accomplishes His purpose in the world. To that end, He gives the church spiritual gifts. First, He gives men chosen for the purpose of equipping the saints for the work of the ministry (Ephesians 4:7-12) and He also gives unique and special spiritual abilities to each member of the body of Christ (Romans 12:5-8; 1Corinthians 12:4-31; 1Peter 4:10-11).

There were two kinds of gifts given the early church: miraculous gifts of divine revelation and healing, given temporarily in the apostolic era for the purpose of confirming the authenticity of the apostles' message (Hebrews 2:3-4; 2Corinthians 12:12); and ministering gifts, given to equip believers for edifying one another. With the New Testament revelation now complete, Scripture becomes the sole test of the authenticity of a man's message, and confirming gifts of a miraculous nature are no longer necessary to validate a man or his message (1Corinthians 13:8-12). Miraculous gifts can even be counterfeited by Satan so as to deceive even believers (Matthew 24:24). The only gifts in operation today are those non-revelatory equipping gifts given for edification (Romans 12:6-8).

No one possesses the gift of healing today but that God does hear and answer the prayer of faith and will answer in accordance with His own perfect will for the sick, suffering, and afflicted (Luke 18:1-8; John 5:7-9; 2Corinthians 12:6-10; James 5:13-16; 1John 5:14-15).

Two ordinances have been committed to the local church: baptism and the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:38-42). Christian baptism by immersion (Acts 8:36-39) is the solemn and beautiful testimony of a believer showing forth his faith in the crucified, buried, and risen Savior, and his union with Him in death to sin and resurrection to a new life (Romans 6:1-11). It is also a sign of fellowship and identification with the visible body of Christ (Acts 2:41-42).

The Lord's Supper is the commemoration and proclamation of His death until He comes, and should be always preceded by solemn self-examination (1Corinthians 11:23-32). We also teach that whereas the elements of communion are only representative of the flesh and blood of Christ, the Lord's Supper is nevertheless an actual Communion with the risen Christ who is present in a unique way, fellowshiping with His people (1Corinthians 10:16).