

**FIRST WEDNESDAY STUDIES — Wednesday, March 2, 2022**  
**Doctrine of the Church**

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. Its scriptural officers are pastors and deacons. While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture.

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.

*Matthew 16:15-19; 18:15-20; Acts 2:41-42,47; 5:11-14; 6:3-6; 13:1-3; 14:23,27; 15:1-30; 16:5; 20:28; Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 3:16; 5:4-5; 7:17; 9:13-14; 12; Ephesians 1:22-23; 2:19-22; 3:8-11,21; 5:22-32; Philippians 1:1; Colossians 1:18; 1 Timothy 2:9-14; 3:1-15; 4:14; Hebrews 11:39-40; 1 Peter 5:1-4; Revelation 2-3; 21:2-3.*

**Matthew 16:15–19** [15] He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” [16] Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” [17] 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. [18] 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. [19] I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” (ESV)

**1. The Confession of the Church**

“You are the Christ.”

**2. The Construction of the Church**

“I will build my church”

**3. The Opposition to the Church**

“the gates of hell shall not prevail”

**4. The Opportunity for the Church**

“I will give you the keys of the kingdom...”

**1 Peter 2:4–5** [4] As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, [5] you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

## THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH

1. The Church of the Lord Jesus was conceived with the calling of the apostles and birthed on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). Its nature and mission is revealed in the New Testament. Note that there are no Old Testament references in the BF&M 2000.
2. Scripture reveals the church's form of government, its officers, its ordinances, its mission and its laws. The doctrine of the church is a revealed doctrine.
3. The New Testament teaches congregational church government. Such verses as Matthew 18:17; Acts 2:15-23; 6:2-6; 15:22; 1 Corinthians 5:12-13; 2 Corinthians 2:6; and Revelation 2:2, 14-16, 20 place the authority for discipline, doctrine and government in the members jointly.
4. Each church is a—Christo-democracy, operating under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. It is an autonomous local congregation. All the members jointly have responsibility to do everything that Christ commanded the churches to do and should govern the church by his laws. Thus a regenerate church and viable church membership is biblical and it matters.
5. The New Testament requires that the churches admit those alone who are qualified. Belief in Christ and a scriptural baptism are prerequisites to membership. Church membership is a privilege not a right.
6. Believers become a church of Jesus Christ when they jointly pledge to be a church of Jesus Christ. Implicitly or explicitly (it ought to be explicit), they covenant together in the faith and fellowship of the gospel. To covenant in the faith includes teaching and upholding the truths of the gospel.
7. Each congregation is responsible under Christ to interpret Bible truth, proclaim it and defend it. This is not possible unless they agree together on the central truths of Scripture and gather these truths into a confession of faith (e.g. The Baptist Faith and Message, abbreviated as The BF&M 2000).
8. To covenant together in the fellowship of the gospel implies agreement to maintain the discipline by which Christ intended the preservation of fellowship. The discipline includes admitting those only who credibly confess faith in Christ as Savior and Lord; correcting, warning and rebuking those who stray from truth or righteousness; excluding those who refuse the church's loving entreaties to return to the path of truth and righteousness; and restoring the repentant to fellowship (Matt 18; 1 Cor 5; 2 Cor 2; Titus 3).
9. Other church duties include maintaining the two church observances ordained by Christ – baptism and the Lord's Supper (see Article 7 of the BF&M 2000) – and exercising spiritual gifts in the congregation for mutual edification.
10. Christ has also given the churches their mission (Matt 28:18-20; Acts 1:8; 2:40-47; Eph 4:1-16). They are to seek to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth (see Article 11). Christ gave this mission to the churches, not to boards, conventions and/or agencies.
11. Churches can better fulfill this mission by cooperating together and establishing such efficient channels as boards and conventions. But each congregation bears the responsibility to advance the gospel to the ends of the earth.
12. Boards and conventions are not the church; they are merely means to accomplish the church's mission. There is no Southern Baptist Church or North Carolina Baptist Church. Conventions are the creation of the churches and subject to them.

13. Christ has ordained pastors (also called elders, bishops) and deacons as the officers of his churches. The churches elect and appoint persons who fulfill the scriptural qualifications for these offices. Qualified men alone may serve the office of elder. The gender of those serving in the office of deacon is not addressed.

*The Baptist Faith and Message (BF&M)* – a statement of faith based on the Bible

Throughout history, Baptists have affirmed ecclesiology or the doctrine of the church as a major distinctive separating them from other Christian groups. The Baptist Faith and Message expresses explicitly and implicitly the distinctive Baptist understanding of the church, the people of God.

1. **First, the BF&M identifies the church as a spiritual organism.** The word —church translates the New Testament word —"ekklesia." The word took on the meaning of God's people. 1) The church exists by the initiative of God, the one who calls sinners to Himself. 2) The church is a people gathered by the Holy Spirit. God has called the church out from the world; consequently, the church is a people separated from the world. 3) God called the church unto Himself; the church is a people commissioned to serve the living Lord. The purpose of the commissioned people of God is to —extend the Gospel to the ends of the earth. And the church is people, not a building, a denomination, or a mere religious institution.
2. **Second, the BF&M characterizes the church as a believers' church—a local congregation of baptized believers.** The nature of the church as a believers' church necessitates a regenerate church membership. In other words, salvation must precede church membership.

As a corollary to regenerate church membership, the BF&M affirms a believers' church is a covenanted community—associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel. The term —covenant involves the making of promises of commitment to God and each other. Throughout Baptist history, the church covenant rather than a constitution functioned as the —basic church document. The BF&M describes two areas in which church members make promises—the faith and fellowship of the Gospel. The faith provides the doctrinal unity of the church (Eph. 4:1-6). —Fellowship is partnership in spreading the Gospel message.

3. **Third, the BF&M sets forth the ideal of a Christ-centered church.** As stated earlier, Christo-centricism is the governing principle of congregational church life. The BF&M contains four expressions of this Christocentric principle of congregationalism. First, the BF&M identifies the church of [belonging to] the Lord Jesus Christ. Second, the church is governed by His laws. Third, each congregation operates under the Lordship of Christ. Fourth, each member is responsible and accountable to Jesus as Lord. The church operates through democratic processes, but it is not a mere democracy. The autonomy (literally -

self-law) of the local church means the freedom of each church to obey Christ unhindered by external human constraints, including other ecclesiastical or religious bodies.

**The New Testament describes the church exercising the Lordship of Christ through congregationalism.** The church in Jerusalem selected servant leaders (Acts 6:3, 5); the church in Antioch set apart Paul and Barnabas for mission (Acts 13:2-3); each church is responsible for maintaining true doctrine (Gal 1:1-10; Rev. 2-3); and each church disciplines its members (Matt. 18:17; 1 Cor. 5:4-5; 2 Cor. 2:6-7).

**Again, the officers, or leaders of a congregational church are pastors (elders) and deacons.** Pastors are the shepherds, responsible for the feeding, protection, and care of God's people. The term deacon literally means servant. Deacons function as the servant leaders of the Body of Christ (1 Tim 3:8-13).

4. **Fourth, the BF&M briefly outlines an eschatological church.** The local church is the concrete, visible, expression of the church. The local church is the primary emphasis of the New Testament. The BFM also refers to the eschatological church, the redeemed of all ages.

## WHY MEMBERSHIP IN A LOCAL CHURCH?

The church is *God's* idea.  
Jesus Christ *loves* the church.  
God wants us to be part of a *local* church.  
We experience God's *work* in and through us.

### **It's biblical.**

The Bible does not speak specifically about church membership, but several texts indicate the church knew who its members were.

- Those who followed Jesus and were baptized identified themselves with the church. (Acts 2:41)
- Scriptures that address a pastor's responsibilities imply a recognized congregation. (e.g., 1 Tim. 3:5, Heb. 13:17)
- Scriptures that speak of church discipline suggest some type of formal list or association with a particular church.  
(e.g., Matt. 18:15-17, 1 Cor. 5:11-13)
- Members of the church are expected to gather together.  
(Heb. 10:25)

### **It's beneficial**

Church membership is a believer's public commitment to work alongside a particular group of believers. With membership comes a church family, pastoral oversight and care, and ministry/service opportunities. Regular attendees can, of course, receive these benefits, but membership is a stronger commitment to serve God alongside other believers.

### **It's body life**

Members of God's local body share life together. It is our hope and prayer that fellow church members genuinely become family to us. They teach us and pray for us. They hold us accountable to holy living. No other organization helps us to live with such an eternal perspective.

### **Parkway Vision Statement**

***"Real people walking with Christ,  
inviting others, and serving together to reach our neighbors and the nations."***

***Walking with Christ - Exodus 33, Inviting Others - John 4, Serving Together - Phil. 4:1-2***

## **Parkway Family Church Covenant**

Having been led, as we believe, by the Spirit of God, to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior, and on the profession of our faith, having been baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, we do now, in the presence of God, and this assembly, most earnestly and joyfully enter into covenant with one another, as one body in Christ.

As new creations in Christ and modeled to be like God in true righteousness and holiness, we covenant to daily put off our “old self” and put on our “new self” through the reading of scripture and fervent prayer. In this we are devoted to deepening our relationship with God to enable us to fulfill our commitment to lead our families based on scriptural principles. Through the power of the Holy Spirit and in obedience, we further commit to give to the ministry of the Church through tithes, offerings and willing service - and do so with a generous spirit and a thankful, cheerful heart.

With Christ as our Head, we covenant as one unified body to join each other in spiritual fellowship, encouraging and edifying our brothers and sisters. We pledge to be continually reconciled one to another, forgiving each other in sincere and genuine love, as Christ forgave us. Bound together, we commit to use our God-given, spiritual gifts to build up the Body of Christ by bearing each other’s burdens and supporting each other in continual prayer.

As a family of believers, we commit to obey the Great Commission by reaching out to the communities of Central Virginia, our state, the nation and across the globe as ambassadors of Christ; ministering and bringing the message of reconciliation and the good news of the Gospel to all we encounter. We will look for opportunities to share with the purpose of making new disciples to whom we can minister and help grow in Christ.

“Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.” Ephesians 3:20-21 (NIV)