

"... The church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth."
1 Timothy 3:15

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TEN BIBLE PROOFS OF BAPTIST PERPETUITY

By Rosco Brong

IF GOD'S WORD IS TRUE, THE CHURCH THAT
JESUS STARTED STILL STANDS — HAS EN-
DURED!

*"The church of the living God, the pillar and ground
of the truth." (1 Tim. 3:15)*

Recorded history often reveals more of historians' prejudices than of actual events, and the history of Christianity has been written mostly by the enemies of Baptists. Even so, there is historical evidence for the continued existence of what would now be called Baptist churches from the days when Jesus was on earth in the flesh down to the present time. This evidence is not beyond dispute but it is more than sufficient if we are willing to believe the promises of God's word.

My purpose here is to show from the Bible, APART FROM ALL HISTORICAL EVIDENCE, that we must believe in Baptist church perpetuity if we believe that God's Word is true.

1. The Gates Of Hades

His Promise of Perpetuity

"Upon this Rock," said Jesus, referring to Himself, "I will build my church; and the gates of hell [Hades] shall not prevail against it." (Matt. 16:18)

We may find various interpretations of this statement of Jesus, but despite a great variety of ideas in detailed interpretation it is fairly clear to all that we have here a PROMISE of our Lord that His church would not be overcome by the powers of evil. What-

ever this church was, it could not fail if Jesus spoke the truth. We believe that this church was what would now be called a Baptist Church, and anyone who will honestly examine the organization and doctrines of this New Testament institution in comparison with the organization and doctrines of Baptist churches today will reach the same conclusion. If the church that Jesus built was not a Baptist church, then we need to find out what kind of church it was, and join that church, if we want our service to be pleasing to Him. One thing we can be sure of: if Jesus spoke the truth, and what real Christian would deny this?, the church that Jesus built has been in the world ever since and will be here till He comes again.

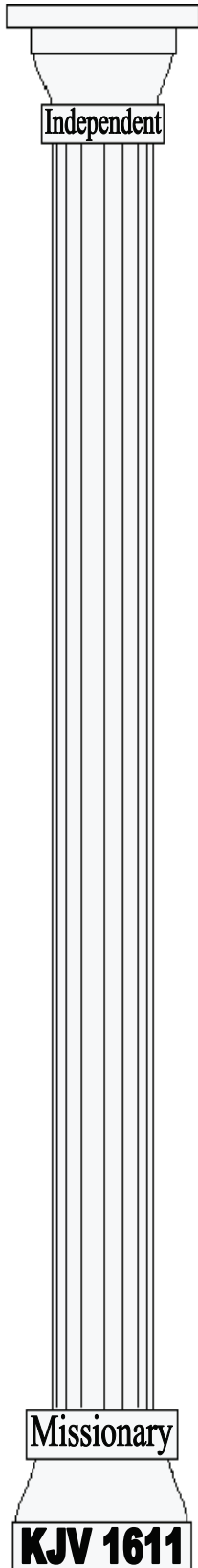
The popular Protestant dogma in this connection speaks of an "invisible" church to which all Christians belong. More on this as we go along, but for the present note a few simple facts:

a. Neither the expression "invisible church" nor the idea of such an expression can be found in the New Testament.

b. The whole purpose of the "invisible church" dogma is to justify the Protestant splits from Roman Catholicism. But since Baptists are not Protestants and were never a part of the heretical Catholic system, we have no need of any such dogma to justify our existence.

c. Most Protestants and many ignorant Baptists suppose that Christ built two churches: the "invisible church" of their own vain imagining and the organized assemblies that they cannot help recognizing in the New Testament. Then, to add insult to injury, they call their imaginary monstrosity the "true" church! But the Bible says that there is only one body

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THE WALDENSIAN CHRISTIANS

The darkness which succeeded the introduction of popery was so prevalent, that, excepting the valleys of Piedmont, which were the residence of the Waldensian churches, it soon spread over the whole of Europe, and rendered invisible every trace of the simplicity of the gospel of Christ.

The Waldensian Christians are celebrated in history for their opposition to the antichristian usurpations of the church of Rome. The learned archbishop Usher, in his book entitled *The succession and state of the Christian Churches* [p. 242], traces its succession through them, in distinction from and in opposition to the papacy. They underwent the most dreadful persecutions; and every means which malice and cruelty could invent was used to exterminate them and their principles from the earth. The crusade against them consisted of five hundred thousand men. More than three hundred gentlemen's seats were razed and many walled towns destroyed.

The persecutions, however, which they suffered were far from accomplishing the design of their enemies. The archbishop says, that "as the persecution about Stephen by that dispersion proved much for the furtherance of the gospel in other parts of the world, so was it here: for those that were not so fit for the war went up and down with more freedom into most parts of Europe. Insomuch that Aeneas Sylvius, afterwards Pope Pius II, confessed, that neither the decrees of popes, nor armies of Christians, could extirpate them."

The archbishop farther informs us, on the authority of Matthew Paris of Westminster, that "the Berengarian or Waldensian heresy had, about the year 1180, generally infected all France, Italy, and England." Guitmond, a popish writer of that time, also says, that "not only the weaker sort in the country villages, but the nobility and gentry in the chief towns and cities, were infected therewith; and therefore Lanfranc, archbishop of Canterbury, who held this see both in the reigns of William the conqueror and of his son William Rufus, wrote against them in the year 1087." The archbishop adds, from Poplinus's history of France, that "the Waldenses of Aquitain did, about the year 1100, during the reigns of Henry I and Stephen, kings of England, spread themselves and their doctrines all over Europe," and mentions England in particular. [Danvers on baptism, p. 175-178]

We learn from Fox, on the authority of Robert Gulsborne, that in the time of Henry II, about the year 1158, two eminent Waldensian preachers and barbs, Gerhardus and Dulcinus, came into England to propagate the gospel; and archbishop Usher, from Thomas Walden, says, that "several Waldenses that came out of France were apprehended, and by the king's command were marked in the forehead with a key or hot iron." "Which sect, (says William of Newbury, in his history of England,) were called the Publicani, whose original was from Gascoyne; and who, being as numerous as the sand of the sea, did sorely infest both France, Italy, Spain, and England."

Rapin, in relating the transactions of the councils of Henry II, gives the following account of these people, on the authority of the above-mentioned historian. "Henry ordered a council to meet at Oxford in 1166, to examine the tenets of certain heretics, called Publicani. Very probably they were disciples of the Waldenses, who began then to appear. When they were asked in the council, who they were; they answered, they were Christians, and followers of the apostles. After that, being questioned upon the creed, their replies were very orthodox as to the trinity and incarnation. But, (adds Rapin,) if the historian is to be depended on, they rejected baptism, the Eucharist, marriage, and the communion of saints. They shewed a great deal of modesty and meekness in their whole behaviour. When they were threatened with death, in order to oblige them to renounce their tenets, they only said, "Blessed are they that suffer for righteousness sake." [*History of England*, vol. I. p. 350]

There is no difficulty in understanding what were their sentiments on these heretical points. When a monk says they rejected the Eucharist, it is to be understood that they rejected the absurd doctrine of transubstantiation; when he says that they rejected marriage, he means that they denied it to be a sacrament, and maintained it to be a civil institution; when he says that they rejected the communion of saints, nothing more is to be understood than that they refused to hold communion with the corrupt church of Rome; and when he says that they rejected baptism, what are we to understand but that they rejected the baptism of infants? These were the errors for which they were branded with a hot iron in their foreheads, by those who had "the mark of the beast, both in their foreheads and in their hands."

Paul Stransky, *de Republica Bohemorum*, p. 272, (as quoted by David Cranz in his *History of the United Brethren*, translated by La Trobe, p. 16,) says, "the Waldenses, in 1176, arrived in Bohemia, and settled at Satz and Laun on the river Eger. These joined those Bohemians, who were still tenacious of the rites of the Greek church. They showed them the defects of their religious exercises; and introduced among them a purer knowledge of the doctrines of the Christian faith, according to the Word of God. By this means the upright were confirmed in the faith, and such as were fallen asleep, again awakened."

"These ancient Christians," says Cranz, after having made the above quotation, "(who, besides the several names of reproach given them, were at length denominated Waldenses, from one of their most eminent teachers PETER WALDUS who is said to have emigrated with the rest from France into Bohemia, and there to have died) date their origin from the beginning of the fourth century; when one Leo, at the great revolution in religion under Constantine the Great, opposed the innovations of Sylvester, bishop of Rome. Nay, Rieger goes farther still, taking them for the remains of the people of the Vallies, who, when the apostle Paul, as is said, made a journey over the Alps into Spain, were converted to Christ."

□

THE KIND OF CHURCH THAT JESUS BUILT

By Roy Mason

Chapter 2 of *The Church That Jesus Built*

We have seen that Jesus established a church, and have determined from the New Testament record that He did this during the period of His personal ministry on earth. It is now in order for us to consider the third question: "What kind of church was it that Jesus founded?" Just what did He mean when He said, "I will build my church?" If all persons were willing to accept the New Testament without bias, prejudice, or preconceived notions and theories, there need be no difference of opinion at all on this point. Unfortunately all are not willing that the New Testament should be permitted to mean what it says. The clear meaning of "ecclesia," which Christ used to designate His new institution, does not fit into the church theory of some, so they have coined a new meaning for the word. In this way, by using ecclesia in an unwarranted sense, they have invented another "Church" than the one that Jesus established.

Rome, in order to justify her theory, overlooks the distinction that the Scriptures make between the church and the Kingdom, and seeks to identify the church that Jesus founded with the hierarchical organization that we today know as the Roman Catholic Church. In Catholic thought, the "Church" is the visible Kingdom of God on earth, and with them there are no churches, separate, local, independent bodies, but one great, all-embracing, world-organization under papal dominion and control. Accordingly we find Cardinal Gibbons saying (Faith of Our Fathers. p. 6), "The Church is called a Kingdom." And following this he goes on to show that the members of the Catholic Church, although many are, to use his own words, "all united to one supreme visible head, whom they are bound to obey."

I need not here take the time to discuss the difference between the church and the Kingdom. That difference is very clearly marked in the New Testament, as I will show in the next chapter.

The theories held by the various Protestant denominations (let it be kept in mind that Baptists are not Protestants) are somewhat different from that of the Catholics. Some of these denominations with the Catholics, repeat the Apostles Creed and affirm a belief in the "Holy Catholic Church," but at the same time attach to the words a different meaning. Protestants have conceded out of necessity that Jesus founded and established a church. And they have recognized the fact that if this church was a local, visible body they cannot be members of the true church, the one founded by Jesus, since the organizations that they belong to have, without exception, originated hundreds of years since Christ established His church.

In this situation only two things remain to do, either frankly admit their organization to be extra-scriptural and rivals of Christ's church or else devise some theory that will justify their separate denominational existence and still permit them a place in the ecclesia of Christ. The latter alternative is the one that has generally been taken, for there have been theories a-plenty. One of these is what is sometimes called "the church branch" theory. It is the theory that all of the various Protestant churches are but "branches" of the true church. It embraces the idea that all are headed for the same place—all are part and parcel of the same thing—the Church of Christ. However, this church "branch" the-

ory immediately raises the embarrassing question as to the identity of the trunk of the church tree to which the "branch" denominations belong. I use the word "embarrassing," and it is embarrassing in the light of the historical fact that all of the great Protestant denominations (remember again that Baptists are not Protestants) have either directly or indirectly "branched off" from the Catholic Church.

Of the theory mentioned above, Dr. R. L. Baker aptly says:

"The branch church theory has a great place in the popular thinking. It is untenable, unscriptural, and even unthinkable. Plant a water melon, let its branches run out in several directions, on one branch there grows a pumpkin, on another a melon, on another a citron, and so on until we have the various branches all covered in the Protestant melon patch. Who would not say this is a freak of nature, a real monstrosity? Yet, this is the average reasoning of today amongst the branch theory people. "Tell it to the church" would hardly work in such a wonderful monstrosity.

But, the theory that is most commonly relied upon, by those who belong to apocryphal institutions and do not wish to admit the truth of Baptist claims, is the "Universal, Invisible Church" theory. This theory, which plays exegetical tricks, employs specious arguments and minimizes the importance of the true churches of Christ, is a theory that has been and is a curse to the cause of Christ. It is one of the most widespread and hurtful heresies of our day, and yet, strange to say, without foundation and contrary to common sense once it is subjected to close scrutiny. The theory has variations, but in the main the holders of it maintain that the church mentioned in Matthew 16:18, the one that Jesus said He would build, was not the local assembly, but consisted of all believers of every church (or no church, as the case may be) everywhere. According to this view, one becomes a member of this church automatically when he becomes a Christian. To believe this one must believe that side by side today exists two churches, one local and visible, consisting of men and women organized for the carrying out of Christ's commands, the other unseen and invisible and entrusted with no work or mission. Moreover, this involves that these churches have a different membership, since some presumably belong to the universal, invisible Church who have never joined the local and visible body. Not only that, it further makes Christ the author of two churches, unless we utterly deny that He is the Founder and Head of the local, visible church.

It ought to be clear to everyone that much is involved in the meaning of Matthew 16:18, and in the correct answer to the question, "What kind of a church did Jesus build?" If the church which Jesus promised was "universal and invisible," then it follows that the Baptist claim to perpetuity is absurd, and the product of an unwarranted arrogance. This being true, the Baptist claim to church perpetuity stands or falls according to the meaning of ecclesia in Matthew 16:18, and other passages of the New Testament.

After careful study of all the passages in which the word ecclesia occurs in the New Testament, and the Septuagint, and after examining to ascertain the use of the word in classical Greek, I submit the proposition that the church that Jesus founded was the local assembly, and that to use the word ecclesia to designate a "universal," or "invisible" Church is to pervert its meaning, and

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UNIVERSAL CHURCH

By Norman H. Wells

If the universal, invisible church theory is to be received by Baptists, then we lose our identity. We lose our mission. We lose our purpose. We become one of many branches where chaotic confusion reigns. To accept this theory is to surrender every truth we hold dear. This theory places Baptists in the same pot with every church, cult, denomination, etc. that cares to call itself Christian! Will Baptists lose themselves in apostate Christianity or stand true to God's purpose?

The greatest single weapon that God gave the church to use to maintain its identity was baptism. To open the church doors and receive baptism from a source other than a Baptist is to deny all the historic Baptist doctrines.

The mark of distinction, then, between the church that Jesus built and others is scriptural baptism. The ordinance of baptism was given to the church. To drop the line here and accept so-called baptism from other so-called churches is to cease to be Baptist. To compromise the Bible position on baptism and receive into our churches "every variety" is to become interdenominational. The first line of departure of every great Baptist group from the historic Baptist position has been on baptism.

To throw open the Lord's Supper to everyone is to lose the identity God gave the church. How can standards and discipline be maintained if this sort of thing would be practiced.

May we repeat, an individual or church is either a Baptist or they are not; there are no different kinds. The only way the world will know the difference is as Baptist brethren and churches the world around stand forth and declare themselves and stop compromising the issue. □

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to fall into serious error.

I realize full well that for me merely to make the bare statement recorded above is not enough. Proof is, of course, required. But I believe that ample proof can be produced to satisfy any mind that is open to the truth.

Since the validity of the Baptist belief in the perpetuity of their churches hinges upon the kind of church that Jesus established, it seems advisable to deal with the question somewhat at length. I trust that the reader will pardon me if I seem to spend an undue amount of time on this point. It is because the question of the kind of church that Jesus founded is absolutely fundamental to the discussion of church perpetuity. If the church that Jesus established was the local assembly, the Baptist claim that their churches are the true New Testament churches which have had a continuity of existence since the days of Jesus, is simply unassailable. I have a number of reasons to offer as to why I believe that the church founded by Jesus was the local, visible assembly.

My first reason is that the meaning of the word "ecclesia" used in Matthew 16:18 irresistibly leads one to believe that the local assembly was meant. Indeed, locality inheres in the very word, so that it is really improper for anyone to speak of the "local" or "visible" assembly, since the only kind of an assembly that can exist is both local and visible. In this book I only use the terms "local" and "visible" because of the failure on the part of so many

to recognize the truth that there can be no ecclesia or assembly anywhere without a place to meet. By using these terms so commonly used I hope to be better understood, although I realize that to do so is to use mere tautology.

The very strongest argument against the "universal, invisible church theory" is a correct understanding of the meaning of the word ecclesia or church. Indeed, to make a study of the word in the light of its usage in the time of Christ and preceding, is to see how impossible and absurd is the belief in a "universal, invisible Church." To make the word as used by Jesus in Matthew 16:18, refer to other than the local assembly is to attach a meaning to the word utterly foreign to its nature, and completely out of harmony with its ordinary use.

Let us briefly consider the word as regards meaning in classical and New Testament usage:

The word ecclesia, rendered "church" in English versions, was not a new word coined by Jesus, but a word already in current use at that time and moreover a word the meaning of which had become definitely fixed and established. This being the case, it would seem highly improbable that Jesus, speaking to the disciples, would use the word in some sense altogether foreign to its current use, and that without a single word of explanation. As one writer puts it: "It is not ingenious for a teacher without a word of explanation to use words to his pupils with a meaning entirely different from what they understand the words to have." Dr. Jesse B. Thomas says in his book, "The Church and the Kingdom": "No such difficulties attend the construction of the language—it simply supposes our Lord consistent with Himself, and with the ordinary usages of speech, assuming that He whom 'the common people heard gladly' would not wantonly use words in a strange sense that would inevitably perplex and mislead the common man."

What, then, let us ask, did the word mean as understood by the people of that day? Says Dr. Geo. W. McDaniel (The Churches of the New Testament), "Both with the Greeks and the Jews, the word denoted an assembly of the people . . . 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." Dr. Thomas says in another place, "It was the organized assembly of the authorized voters of the local community met to transact business of common concern. It corresponded to the town meeting of New England of later days." Liddell and Scott (Greek Lexicon) define the word ecclesia as follows: "An assembly of citizens summoned by the crier, the legislative assembly." Again, Dr. B. H. Carroll says: "Its primary meaning is: An organized assembly, whose members have been properly called out from private homes for business to attend to public affairs. This definition necessarily implies prescribed conditions of membership. This meaning applies substantially alike to the ecclesia of a self-governing Greek state (Acts 19:39), the Old Testament ecclesia or convocation of National Israel (Acts 7:38) and to the New Testament ecclesia. When our Lord says: 'On this rock I will build my ecclesia,' while the 'My' distinguished His ecclesia from the Greek state ecclesia, and the Old Testament ecclesia, the word itself naturally retains its ordinary meaning." (Ecclesia the Church).

Therefore, 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

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(church), that is, one kind of body, just as there is only one baptism, that is, one kind of baptism. (Eph. 4:4, 5)

d. Since there is no just reason to do otherwise, we must understand that Jesus used the word “church” (Greek “ekklesia”) in Matt. 16:18 in the same general sense that it has everywhere else in the New Testament: that is, an assembly, almost always an organized assembly. The word here is used abstractly; that is, it expresses an idea whose realization is to be found in a particular organized assembly.

2. Church Discipline

“And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican. Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” (Matt. 18:17-18)

This text suggests three simple questions that believers in an “invisible” church might try to answer:

a. How can a wronged brother tell his grievance to an “invisible” church?

b. How can an “invisible” church decide an issue, make known its judgment to a trespassing brother, or execute that judgment “if he neglect to hear?”

c. Is not the authority to “bind and loose,” whatever this means, in verse 18 given to the same church that is in view in verse 17?

Obviously the reference here is to an organized assembly; and obviously such organized assemblies must always have existed from that time to this in order that faithful followers of Jesus might obey His instructions here given.

3. Baptized Into One Body

“For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling?” (1 Cor. 12:13-17)

“Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.” (1 Cor. 12:27)

Verse 27 of this quotation tells what kind of body is meant in verse 13: the kind of which the church at Corinth was an example. 1 Cor. 1:13-17 shows what kind of baptism is meant: namely, baptism in water. In fact, there is only one kind of baptism recognized in the New Testament as an ordinance of Christ: all other so-called baptisms are figurative or symbolic, deriving their significance from this baptizing in water to declare the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ and all that this means to us.

Almost all Christians recognize baptism, or some substitute for it that they call baptism, as sprinkling or pouring, as a church ordinance. But if it is a church ordinance, then there must always have been churches to administer the ordinance. If the church to which Jesus entrusted the ordinance passed out of existence as an institution, then the ordinance lapsed with the church, and no-

where in the Bible is anyone authorized to start it up again.

4. “Till He Come”

“For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, do shew the Lord’s death till he come.” (1 Cor. 11:26)

Again, practically all Christians recognize the Lord’s Supper as a church ordinance. But how could the ordinance be continued if at any time there were no true churches to observe it? Note that the Scriptures give no hint of any possible lapse of failure of our Lord’s churches to declare or show forth His death by eating this bread and drinking this cup “till He come.”

5. Church Officers

“This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work ... For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree.” (1 Tim. 3:1, 13)

The context of the two verses shows that bishops and deacons are church officers, and to this fact practically all Christians agree, however far they may depart from Scriptural ideas of the duties of these offices. Even believers in an imaginary “invisible” church become at least temporarily realistic and operate in some kind of organized assembly in naming bishops and deacons.

But if bishops and deacons were officers in the kind of church that Jesus built, and if this kind of church passed out of existence, as Protestants allege and as ignorant Baptists admit, then by whose authority are such officers named today?

6. A Holy Temple

“Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God, and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto a holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for a habitation of God through the Spirit.” (Eph. 2:19-22.)

Paul was writing to the church at Ephesus and he reveals here the glorious fact that a true New Testament church is a holy temple in the Lord, and that one purpose for which the Lord built His church at Ephesus, and, we believe, every other true New Testament church, is that God in the Spirit might dwell therein.

Can anyone believe that God, having chosen to manifest His presence in a special way in the churches of the Lord Jesus, allowed His purpose to be frustrated, so that for centuries He had no such habitation on earth? But Protestants do so declare, and countless Baptists, ignorant of or indifferent to their blood-bought heritage, are deceived by or are silent in the face of this monstrous lie!

7. A Dead Bride?

“Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead...” (Rom 7:4)

“Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;” (Eph. 5:25, read on through

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nor organization, is to do violence to the word and to use it in a purely arbitrary sense.

“But,” someone objects, “does not the actual use of ecclesia in certain New Testament passages indicate a broader usage than to designate a local organized assembly?” In reply to this it may be said that in the Christian usage of the word there were three ideas, an institution, a particular congregation, and the redeemed of all time considered in the light of a church in prospect. In each case where the word is used there is nothing that argues against the general usage. To particularize:

The word is used fourteen times to denote an institution. When it is used in this way it is, according to Dr. Carroll, used in either an abstract or generic sense. “This follows,” he says, “from the laws of language governing the use of words. For example, if an English statesman, referring to the right of each individual citizen to be tried by his peers, should say: ‘On this rock England will build her jury, and all the power of tyranny shall not prevail against her,’ he uses the term jury in an abstract sense, in the sense of an institution. But when this institution finds concrete expression or becomes operative, it is always a particular jury of twelve men and never an aggregation of all juries into one big jury.”

Then he cites Matthew 16:18 as an example of the abstract use of ecclesia. Matthew 18:17 he cites as an example of the generic use of the word. Then he adds these words: “Whenever the abstract or generic finds concrete expression or takes operative shape it is always a particular assembly.”

It is permissible for us to use the word “church” abstractly as did Jesus in denoting the institution He founded. But, as Dr. Carroll points out, when we begin to particularize we must, according to the very laws of language, settle upon a particular assembly of baptized believers in Christ. So we can see that the abstract or generic use of the word is, after all, at bottom, no different in meaning from the use of it to denote a particular assembly. And it is to denote a particular local body of believers that the word is mostly used, indeed by actual count, ninety-three times out of a little over a hundred times that the word occurs in Christian usage.

And now for the third idea contained in the Christian usage of ecclesia, the use of it to denote the redeemed of all time, considered in the light of a church in prospect. At least two passages seem to use ecclesia in this sense, and these two in no wise militate against the general use, since this is an assembly that exists only in prospect. Dr. Carroll states the whole case very clearly in his booklet, as follows: “This ecclesia is prospective, not actual. That is to say, there is not now but will be a general assembly of Christ’s people. That general assembly will be composed of all the redeemed of all time. Here are three indisputable and very significant facts concerning Christ’s general assembly: First, many of its members properly called out, and now in Heaven. Second, many others of them, also called out, are here on earth. Third, indefinite millions of them, probably the great majority, yet to be called, are neither on earth nor in heaven, because they are yet unborn. and therefore non-existent. It follows that if one part of the membership is now in Heaven, another part yet unborn, there is as yet no assembly, except in prospect. We may, however, properly speak of the general assembly now, because, though part of it is yet non-existent, and though there has not yet been a gathering together of the other two parts, yet the mind may conceive of that gathering as an accomplished fact. In God’s pur-

poses and plans, the general assembly exists now and also in our conceptions or anticipations, but certainly not as a fact.”

I have quoted Dr. Carroll somewhat at length because his booklet is one of the sanest, most careful and scholarly examinations of the New Testament church that has ever been written. Many scholarly men fully accord with his position as here outlined. For instance, Dr. J. G. Bow, in his “What Baptists Believe,” writes as follows: “The general assembly and church of the first-born’—this last will evidently be local when they shall have assembled.”

A second reason as to why Matthew 16:18 refers to the local assembly and not to the Church universal, is that Christ’s own use of the word prohibits us from believing that He meant any thing else. Suppose that one should hear a speaker use a certain term, the meaning of which seems doubtful. Later on in his address the speaker uses the same word at least a score of times, and in such a way as to be perfectly clear as to his meaning. Would it be wise for one to judge that he meant something totally different in his first use of the word than in the twenty times in which he subsequently used it? Or would it be the part of common sense to interpret the meaning connected with the first use of the term, in the light of his subsequent use? This illustration sets forth the exact situation as regards the interpretation of Matthew 16:18.

Let us, for the sake of argument, say that we are in doubt as to what Christ meant by “church” in this passage just mentioned, which is the first in which the term occurs. Let us look at the other places in which He uses the word, and see what He meant there. We find, upon making a careful search that He subsequently used the word ecclesia or church twenty-one times. Following the first place in which church is mentioned, we find that the next, and the last place in which church is mentioned in the Gospels, is Matthew 18:17, where Jesus says: “Tell it to the church, but if he neglect to hear the church ...” To affirm that Jesus was here speaking of a universal, invisible Church would be to descend to absurdity, since it would be impossible for a church member to bring a matter before a universal, invisible, unorganized “Church” not possessing locality. Jesus plainly meant local assembly; nothing else would fit the case at all.

The other instances in which Christ used the word ecclesia are found in Revelation. Examples are as follows: “To the angel of the church at Ephesus;” “Hear what the Spirit, sayeth to the churches;” “The seven churches;” etc. With reference to the last example, Sir William Ramsey, world-renowned scholar, affirms that the seven churches mentioned were actual, local churches that existed at that time. In each of the twenty-one times that Jesus used ecclesia, subsequent to his utterance recorded in Matthew 16:18, He plainly and unmistakably referred to the local assembly. As Dr. T. T. Eaton remarks, in commenting on this question: “The probability therefore is twenty-one to nothing that He meant local assembly in Matthew 16:18. A probability of twenty-one to nothing is a certainty. Hence it is certain that Christ meant the local assembly when He said: ‘On this rock I will build my church.’”

Again, a third reason for believing that Matthew 16:18 refers to the local assembly is that Christ only promised to build one kind of church. He never intimated in any way that He would found the local assembly and also a universal, invisible Church, composed of the redeemed of all the so-called churches. Consequently when we turn to the book of Acts and the Epistles, and find local assemblies of believers springing up here and there, we

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READING THE BIBLE WILL MAKE YOU A BAPTIST

Taken from the Baptist Reporter, October, 1858

To the Editor of the Baptist Reporter.

Dear Sir, — I am a young Baptist, and have only seen your Reporter for Jan., 1858. Having recently joined the body, I inquired for one of the publications published by the Baptists, and a minister directed me to the Reporter, with which I am quite delighted. It occurred to me that I would mention a few of the objections to believers' baptism which I met with whilst I was among the Independents. I am a young man, and am occasionally engaged in giving a word of exhortation to my neighbours; but I am what is called a "self-educated man," for I have had to pick up what little knowledge I have obtained; and therefore I trust you will excuse the imperfections which you may discover in this communication.

When among the Independents, in conversations with my fellow-members, the subject of baptism was at times introduced, when one or another would say, "Well; I do think that the Baptists are right, and that their mode of administering the ordinance is scriptural." "Well," was my reply, "if you consider that the Baptists are right, and that their mode is scriptural, why not join them, and be right too, and observe that which you say is scriptural?" The reply they generally gave was, "Oh, it is so inconvenient; and if we are baptized, we shall be expected to join the Baptist body, and then what will our minister and the people say? I do not think it matters much."

It appeared to me an odd thing for them so to acknowledge their duty, and then give such feeble reasons for declining. I could not but wonder what there could be in believers' baptism that made the ordinance so objectionable.



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immediately identify these with the church that Jesus spoke of. To do otherwise would be to assume that something else came into existence other than the institution which Jesus promised.

Therefore, since Jesus only spoke of one kind of church, and since the kind of church which we find in apostolic times is the local assembly, for one to seek to introduce a universal or invisible Church is to seek to create a second ecclesia, another than Christ began. This is to breed confusion.

A fourth reason for believing that the church referred to by Jesus was the local assembly is that the universal, invisible theory is not only unscriptural but according to history is post-apostolic in its origin. Harnack, the church historian, in his "History of Dogma," makes this clear. He says: "The expression, invisible Church, is found for the first time in Hegessipus. Eusebius, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Hiero, Cornelius, and Cyprian, all used the term holy churches and never the Catholic or Universal Church," Again in Vol. 2, p. 83, he says: "No one thought of the desperate idea of an 'invisible Church;' this notion would probably have brought about a lapse far more rapidly than the idea of the Holy Catholic Church."

A fifth reason for believing that Jesus founded the local assembly is that the local assembly is not only the only kind of an assembly that can exist; it is the only kind to which Jesus could have entrusted the Commission and the ordinances. Christ's chief purpose in forming His church was in order that it might reach

I talked with other friends on the matter, but was annoyed by their ignorance. They knew not so much as he who was enquiring. Some said, "Oh, these Baptists think all wrong but themselves. Have nothing to do with them." Others said, "Such a mode would suit a warm climate very well, where the people are in the habit of constantly bathing, but not a cold country like ours." Others "thought that there was something very indecent about it." I then spake to a more intelligent class, and they informed me "that Christ only intended the ordinance to be observed by his servants in heathen lands, where Christianity was unknown, so that the converts to the gospel, by that ordinance, might publicly disown and cast off all their old heathenish practices." Others reminded me, "that if I was going to enquire into such a subject, perhaps I would inform them why Christians do not recline at the table and take the bread and break it into pieces, instead of having it partly cut."

Such were some of the helps I met with in the path of enquiry, from persons who professed to make the New Testament their rule of practice.

There are many in the Independent and other bodies who can say no more than the above. Why? Because, like those I have already mentioned, they have never thoroughly and impartially examined the subject. Ask them whether they have looked through the New Testament for instances of Infant Baptism; they reply, "No". Ask them whether they have for evidence of believers' baptism; they give the same reply.

Dissatisfied with such evasions, I resolved to search the New Testament for myself, with prayer for Divine guidance, and the result was that I became a Baptist. □

the lost with the gospel, and then might build up those saved by teaching and training them in all things He commanded. The functions of a church as outlined by Jesus can only be performed by a local assembly. A universal, invisible Church composed of an unorganized throng of "members of all the churches," is, from the functional point of view, simply inconceivable.

Again, when Christ promised the church, He promised that the "Gates of hades shall not prevail against it." Slight difference of opinion as to the exact meaning of the "gates of hades" does not obscure the fact that Jesus meant that His church would have foes and would encounter opposition. The history of Baptists as they were imprisoned, martyred, driven into the dens and caves of the earth, shows that His church has had to contend with the organized forces of evil. Baptist churches can be and have been persecuted, but a universal, invisible Church cannot be. Men cannot persecute an invisible something. Christ's promise is meaningless if applied to such.

A sixth reason that suggests itself is this: The conception of a universal, invisible Church usurps the place reserved in the New Testament for the Kingdom of God. Those who hold this theory practically identify church and kingdom. This is wholly out of accord with the Scriptures, for they make a very clear distinction between the two, as will be shown in the next chapter.

When I think along the line that I have tried to carry the thought of the reader, and am led to see the lack of any sort of

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(Ten Bible Proofs continued from page 5) verse 32.)

These and other Scriptures compare the spiritual relationship of Christ and His church to the human marriage relationship. That the "wedding" is still future is shown by Matt. 22:1-13; 25:1-13; and Rev. 21:2.

Was our Lord at any time betrothed to a dead bride? After He gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her by the washing of water in the Word, that He might present her to Himself in glory, after all this, was there ever a time when nowhere on earth could be found a church that could be truly called His bride? Was there ever a time when the only "Christianity" on earth was the religion of spiritual harlots? Perish the thought! But if it be so, what are all the churches today but harlots and offspring of harlots?

8. "I Am With You Always"

"And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen." (Matt. 28:18-20)

Practically all Christians recognize that Jesus was speaking here to His church. The only real question is, what kind of church was it?

Of course, an imaginary "invisible" church cannot go anywhere, it cannot disciple any nations, it cannot baptize anybody in any way, it cannot teach anybody anything, and being nonexistent, it would not know the difference whether the Lord were with it or not.

But an organized assembly of baptized believers, such as Jesus had constituted His disciples, can do what He commanded and in doing so can claim the promise of His continuing presence, and it is the only organization on earth that can do so.

Jesus promised this kind of church that He would always be with it, even to the end of the age. But He could not be with it unless it existed to be with. Therefore if Jesus spoke the truth He has had His churches in the world ever since and He has been with them all the time, and so it will be to the end of the age.

9. Glory In The Church

"Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus through all ages, world without end. Amen" (Eph. 3:21)

Therefore we understand that God gets glory in the church in Christ Jesus. This was true in Paul's day and it was to continue an expression of eternity beyond our comprehension. But He could not get glory in the church unless the church continued to exist. And of course He is far from getting glory in an imaginary "invisible" church whose advocates reject and deny the plain, simple, straightforward teachings and promises of His Word.

10. Pillar And Ground

"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

From Our Mailbox

Sunday, October 28, 2007

Subject: Prayer

I am a 65 year old retired Baptist minister (Southern Baptist Convention), living in G..., USA. I ran across your church's web page on the Internet and will pray for you daily that God will enhance and enlarge your ministry to people W.D.

***** (Church that Jesus Built continued from page 7)

foundation for the theory of an invisible, universal Church, I can heartily join with Dr. J. Lewis Smith in saying: "Here, then, is the inevitable and irreversible conclusion. This Catholic or Universal Church as well as the Invisible Church idea are things of man's devising, and when we say, I believe in the holy Catholic Church, we are placing a figment of the imagination—a chimera—a misnomer above the real local church idea which Christ Himself used, and one of which churches He built and to which He gave His great Commission and His ordinances, baptism and the Lord's Supper." □

Editor's Note

In The Baptist Pillar we use articles taken from many different publications and written by many different authors. Please realize that this does not necessarily mean we agree with the doctrinal position of the publication or the author of the article, but that the particular article presents a scriptural truth we do agree with.

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truth." (1 Tim. 3:14-15)

Speaking of the church as an organized assembly, as the context clearly shows, Paul here calls it "the pillar and ground of the truth." That is, the church not only, as a pillar or column, upholds the truth, but it is the foundational support of the truth.

Here we have the explanation for the wholesale loss of Bible truth by false churches and unattached Christians. It has pleased God that His church should be the pillar and ground of the truth, and so it has been through the centuries.

A Solemn Warning

When men reject Bible truth about the church, and refuse to recognize its rightful place as the body and bride of Christ, the house of God, the pillar and ground of the truth, they quickly lose other truth as well.

The truth of God's Word is still upheld in the world today because of the faithfulness and the martyrs' blood of the true churches of God through the dark ages, and this truth will still be upheld to the end of the age because there will still be some churches, the true churches of our Lord, to serve as the pillar and ground of the truth. □