

The Baptist Doctrine of the Church

Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

What does the word 'church' mean?

There are three basic meanings for the original word 'ekklesia' which we will look over and then discuss the common usage of the word today.

1. Those who are called out.
 - a. Specifically any assembly of people
2. Those who are called out for a specific purpose
 - a. A democratic meeting
3. How it was attached specifically to Christianity
 - a. *From Hobbs; Jesus said, "The Hebrews have their assembly, and the Greeks have theirs. Now I will build my assembly."*
 - i. *The Hebrew version – all God's people under God*
 - ii. *The Greek version – local people assembled democratically*

What is the nature or makeup of the church?

1. All believers in Christ
 - a. Based on their confession of Christ and their allegiance to Him.
 - b. Hobbs: *In the general sense the church is not to be confused with organized Christianity or with any particular segment thereof.*
 - i. *The church is not 'the kingdom of God' although it is within the kingdom of God.*
 - ii. This is a very important distinction and one we should give some time to. As Baptists there are views that we take that separate us from other denominations or groups – this does not exclude them from the kingdom of God or even the universal church.
 - iii. We are free to make distinctions about who is or isn't within our church – but not to exclusion from the Kingdom of God. (pg 127)
2. The local group of believers
 - a. Baptism is a local ordinance
 - b. As Baptists we used to argue vehemently that the Lord's supper was a local ordinance as well. (personally I only hold that baptism is a true local ordinance but this is problematic as well due to certain churches and groups requiring rebaptism)
3. The leadership of the church
 - a. Hobbs: *the three words; overseer, elder, and pastor, refer to the same office.*
 - b. Hobbs: *deacon, probably comes from the word 'diakoneo, meaning servant or attendant*
 - c. These positions have changed and evolved but this was their original purpose and use
4. The independent democratic nature of the church
 - a. This is a primary distinction in Baptist doctrine.
 - b. Individual decisions for each church on membership and function
 - c. The way Baptist organize is by sending messengers from each church to their larger functioning bodies such as associations and denominations.

What is the function and formation of the church?

1. To make disciples
 - a. Disciple simply means follower. We are to make followers of Christ

- i. In our function
 - ii. By proximity and interactions
 - 1. *Essentially you cannot be formed into a disciple/follower without the bumping and bruising and sanding that we cause among each other.*
 - 2. As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another. Proverbs 27:17
This is not a beating into submission as you may have had this verse abused to you but rather that the strength of each individual is shaping and forming the other individual at the same time. Think of a knife sharpener. The 'iron' sharpens the 'iron'. Left unused they would both go bad.
- 2. To make up and reflect the 'body' of Christ
 - a. Through diversity of ability and gifting
 - b. Through diversity of form and function.
So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. Galatians 3:26-28
 - c. The benefits of a community church
 - i. Variety of individuals
 - ii. Variety of needs
 - iii. Variety of interests
There can be a danger of choosing a church based on our interests and our other 'clubs' and then we don't see the needs of a community while we exist in our insulated patterns.