

## WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

By Brother Mike Sutherland

The Bible says in *Matthew 16:13-18*:

<sup>13</sup> When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? <sup>14</sup> And they said, Some *say that thou art* John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. <sup>15</sup> He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? <sup>16</sup> And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. <sup>17</sup> And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed *it* unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. <sup>18</sup> And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. *Matthew 16:13-18*

When Christ made this statement, the church was already an established fact. Christ was telling Peter that He would build His church upon Himself. Christ is the Rock. He is our Rock. The Roman Catholics like to claim that Peter is that rock upon which the church was built because they claim him for their heresy of apostolic succession through all the popes. Scripture plainly states that the Lord Jesus Christ is our Rock. Turn in your Bibles to *Deuteronomy 32* where we see:

<sup>1</sup> Give ear, O ye heavens, and I will speak; and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth. <sup>2</sup> My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass: <sup>3</sup> Because I will publish the name of the LORD: ascribe ye greatness unto our God. <sup>4</sup> *He is* the Rock, his work *is* perfect: for all his ways *are* judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right *is* he. <sup>5</sup> They have corrupted themselves, their spot *is* not *the spot* of his children: *they are* a perverse and crooked generation. <sup>15</sup> But Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked: thou art waxen fat, thou art grown thick, thou art covered *with fatness*; then he forsook God *which* made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation. <sup>16</sup> They provoked him to jealousy with strange *gods*, with abominations provoked they him to anger. <sup>17</sup> They sacrificed unto devils, not to God; to gods whom they knew not, to new *gods that* came newly up, whom your fathers feared not. <sup>18</sup> Of the Rock *that* begat thee thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten God that formed thee. <sup>30</sup> How should one chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight, except their Rock had sold them, and the LORD had shut them up? <sup>31</sup> For their rock *is* not as our Rock, even our enemies themselves *being* judges. <sup>32</sup> For their vine *is* of the vine of Sodom, and of the fields of Gomorrah: their grapes *are* grapes of gall, their clusters *are* bitter: <sup>37</sup> And he shall say, Where *are* their gods, *their* rock in whom they trusted, *Deuteronomy 32:1-5,15-18,30-32,37*

Now, turn in your Bibles to *1 Corinthians 10:1-4* where we see:

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<sup>1</sup> Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; <sup>2</sup> And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; <sup>3</sup> And did all eat the same spiritual meat; <sup>4</sup> And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ. *Corinthians 10:1-4*

Now turn in your Bibles to *1 Peter 2:4-9* where we see:

<sup>4</sup> To whom coming, *as unto* a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, *and* precious, <sup>5</sup> Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. <sup>6</sup> Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded. <sup>7</sup> Unto you therefore which believe *he is* precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, <sup>8</sup> And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, *even to them* which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed. <sup>9</sup> But ye *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: *1 Peter 2:4-9*

Returning to *Matthew 16:13-18* we can clearly see two facts: (1) the church was founded upon the Lord Jesus Christ who is the Rock and (2) the church was formed by the Lord Jesus Christ before he went to the cross. The church was not founded on Pentecost Day. The church that the Lord Jesus Christ founded was empowered by the Lord Jesus Christ through God the Holy Ghost on Pentecost Day in fulfillment of *John 16:7-15*:

<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. <sup>8</sup> And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: <sup>9</sup> Of sin, because they believe not on me; <sup>10</sup> Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; <sup>11</sup> Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged. <sup>12</sup> I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. <sup>13</sup> Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, *that* shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. <sup>14</sup> He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew *it* unto you. <sup>15</sup> All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall shew *it* unto you. *John 16:7-15*

and *Acts 1:4-8*:

<sup>4</sup> And, being assembled together with *them*, commanded them that they should not

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depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, *saith he*, ye have heard of me. <sup>5</sup> For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. <sup>6</sup> When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? <sup>7</sup> And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. <sup>8</sup> But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. *Acts 1:4-8*

The church is not a building. The church is an assembly of people. The church is not a denomination. The church is an assembly of people. A church can assemble or meet anywhere; in a building; under an oak tree, on top of a mountain in the open air, onboard a ship, or in a jail cell. A New Testament Church is an assembly of baptized believers organized to worship the Lord Jesus Christ and to carry out the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. The church was not organized for social or political action. The church was not organized to rule the world. The church is not the Kingdom of God, but is a part of the Kingdom of God. The work of the church is to evangelize the world and to serve the Lord Jesus Christ. The privilege of the church is to worship the Lord Jesus Christ. Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. The Bible says in *Revelation 4:8-11*:

<sup>8</sup> And the four beasts had each of them six wings about *him*; and *they were* full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come. <sup>9</sup> And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever, <sup>10</sup> The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, <sup>11</sup> Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created. *Revelation 4:8-11*

Further, the Bible says in *Revelation 5:12-14*:

<sup>12</sup> Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. <sup>13</sup> And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, *be* unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever. <sup>14</sup> And the four beasts said, Amen. And the four *and* twenty elders fell down and worshipped him that liveth for ever and ever. *Revelation 5:12-14*

The church of the living God is the pillar and ground of the truth. The sole basis for the authority and doctrine of the church is the Bible and the Bible alone. Our authority does not rest in any catechism, any denominational confession of faith, any statement of faith, any church constitution, etc. Scripture and Scripture alone is our authority and guide.

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Salvation is not in the church. Salvation is in the Lord Jesus Christ. Fellowship and service are in the church. Contrary to what Roman Catholicism teaches salvation is not in the church. Neither is Roman Catholicism the dispenser of salvation. The Roman Catholic Church, the Church of Christ, and many other cults teach that there is no salvation outside of their churches. The head of the Roman Catholic Church is the pope.

The church is the bride of Christ. The head of the church is the Lord Jesus Christ and not some deacon board or outside entity. Each local assembly has as its head the Lord Jesus Christ who calls an undershepherd to take charge over that particular flock. That undershepherd is the pastor. No one within a local assembly, including a deacon board, has any scriptural authority to dictate to the pastor what he is to preach. The pastor is to preach that which is given to him by the Lord Jesus Christ under the guidance of the ministry of God the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost is the vicar of Christ on the earth and not some wicked, unbelieving, apostate heretic called the pope. The Holy Ghost is the representative of the Lord Jesus Christ in His churches. The false prophet is the representative of Satan in his churches which are the synagogues of Satan.

Conditions for church membership are regeneration, profession, and Christian conduct. By regeneration we mean one who has exercised faith in the Lord Jesus Christ leading to repentance. Repentance is a change of attitude and life style that is the work of God the Holy Ghost. Repentance is Godly sorrow. Repentance is much more than a confession of sin. If the church learns that anyone who is on their church rolls is not regenerate, they are under the obligation to the Lord Jesus Christ to remove that person from their church membership. By profession we mean publicly acknowledging that you are a believer and follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. By Christian conduct we mean behaviour and standards that conform to the teaching of the Scriptures. If a person's conduct is such that they will not repent of actions that are contrary to the Scriptures, the church is under the obligation to the Lord Jesus Christ to remove that person from their church rolls. This is called church discipline. The purpose of church discipline is to break fellowship with a sinning brother or sister with the purpose of restoration. I repeat. Its purpose is restoration and not retaliation. To exercise church discipline, we must do something that is contrary to the self esteem doctrine preached by this generation of spineless and compromising pastors and teachers who control the apostate churches of America. We must judge. We are commanded to judge. We are also commanded not to judge hypocritically. Many people who want their sin and their religion too will tell you "to judge not lest you be judged" (*Matthew 7:1*). The only problem with that is that they do not read the rest of the story; *Matthew 7:2-23*. Matthew chapter 7 is a condemnation of both those who judge hypocritically and those who will not judge! Any Scripture that is taken out of context is a pretext for false doctrine and apostasy.

According to *Ephesians 2:11-19*, the church is composed of both Jews and Gentiles. *Ephesians 2:11-19* says:

<sup>11</sup> Wherefore remember, that ye *being* in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; <sup>12</sup> That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: <sup>13</sup> But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes

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were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. <sup>14</sup> For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition *between us*; <sup>15</sup> Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, *even* the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, *so* making peace; <sup>16</sup> And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: <sup>17</sup> And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. <sup>18</sup> For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. <sup>19</sup> Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; *Ephesians 2:11-19*

There are 117 references in Scripture to either the church (80 times) or churches (37 times). Three of these references occur at the end of books. In the eyes of God, the church is the most important institution on the face of the earth. The Lord Jesus Christ died for the church. *Ephesians 5:25-27* says:

<sup>25</sup> Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; <sup>26</sup> That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, <sup>27</sup> That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. *Ephesians 5:25-27*

The church is not some nebulous, mystical entity that cannot be seen. The church is an autonomous, visible assembly. By visible, we mean it is gathered together into one place. By autonomous, we mean that each visible assembly must be independent and self-governing. Churches should also be indigenous of a particular country. By that we mean that churches in foreign countries must not be built and run by Americans on a permanent basis. In Scripture, there is no such thing as an invisible, universal church established upon the face of the earth. There are only churches (plural). There are several references in Scripture to the church in general, but it is obvious that these references are to Christians in general and not to a universal church. When the word “church” is used *Ephesians 4:4* teaches ONE Body and according to *Colossians 1:18* the Body of Christ and the church are **identical**

We are Baptists not because we belong to a particular denomination, but because we hold to a particular set of beliefs that Bible believing Christians have held to since the Church was founded by the Lord Jesus Christ. This set of beliefs is usually referred to as Baptist Distinctives. Bible believing Baptist churches are not yoked together in any unscriptural denominational structure including the American Baptist Convention, the Northern Baptist Convention, the Southern Baptist Convention, the Bible Baptist Fellowship International, the General Association of Regular Baptists, etc. ALL denominational structures are unscriptural.

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### I. STATEMENTS ON BAPTIST DISTINCTIVENESS

#### A. E. T. Hiscox's Distinctives

(Hiscox pp.14-19).

Hiscox points out that Baptists are distinct in the following:

1. The nature of a church
2. The mode of baptism
3. The subjects of baptism
4. The subjects for the Lord's Supper
5. The subjects for Church membership
6. The nature of church government
7. The number of church officers

#### B. J. M. Carroll's Distinctives

(Taken from "The Trail Of Blood" — amended).

1. Head — Jesus Christ
2. Regulation — New Testament
3. Nature — Visible assembly
4. Polity — Congregational
5. Membership — Baptized Believers
6. Ordinances — Baptism and Lord's Supper
7. Officers — Pastors and Deacons
8. Work — Winning, Wetting, Witnessing
9. Finances — Tithes and offerings
- 10.. Weapons — Spiritual
11. Independence — Separation from State

#### C. The Baptist Acrostic

**B** – Biblical authority: the Bible is the sole authority for all faith and practice

**A** – Autonomy of the local church: self governing

**P** – Priesthood of believers: every believer has access to the Lord Jesus Christ

**T** – Two church officers – pastors and deacons

**I** – Individual soul liberty

**S** – Saved church membership

**T** – Two church ordinances : baptism and the Lord's Supper

**S** – Separation of church and state

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Baptists are not and never have been Protestants because they have never been a part of the Roman Catholic harlot. The history of Baptists is literally a trail of blood littered with the tortured, dead, and maimed bodies of Baptist martyrs who have stood for the faith once delivered unto the saints. Baptist have suffered under the hand of Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Anglicans, and Calvinists. The greatest persecution came as a result of standing for the scriptural mode (immersion) and subjects (believers and not infants and pagans) for baptism. The followers of Martin Luther and John Calvin would chain Anabaptists together and throw them into a river to drown because they refused to baptize infants and rebaptized all who came into their churches from these groups. Immersion is the only mode of baptism that scripturally depicts the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Their next greatest persecution probably came from their stand against the Roman Catholic heresy of transubstantiation. Transubstantiation is the Roman Catholic heresy whereby they claim that their priests turn the bread and wine of the Eucharist into the literal body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Eucharist is a continual blasphemous resacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. In most Roman Catholic churches it is a continual daily resacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ.

They also suffered great persecution for their insistence that there be a separation between church and state. Anytime that churches yoke together with governments it leads to a compromise of biblical truth and authority. Absolute power corrupts absolutely. This yoking up with the state was warned against by the Lord Jesus Christ in *Mark 8:15* where it is written: "And he charged them, saying, Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and *of* the leaven of Herod". The leaven of Herod was the mixture of church and state.

In addition to numerous other heresies, most churches today hold an unscriptural form of church government because they have boards outside the local assembly that decide who is going to be pastor of the different local assemblies. Many Baptist churches today, including some independent Baptist churches, practice an unscriptural form of church government because they have deacon boards trying to run the pastor and the church. When a pastor decides that he needs deacons, the deacons must remember that they are servants and not masters. Deacons also serve at the pleasure of the pastor and not the other way around. Most churches do not need deacons anyway. If you do the math in the book of Acts, you will find that the church at Jerusalem probably had 15,000 members before the first deacons were called and then only seven were placed in those positions of service.