

The Baptist Examiner

A nation-wide, independent paper, standing foursquare for the distinguishing doctrines of Baptists, and shunning not to declare all the counsel of God.

"To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isa. 8:20).

Vol. 1

MARION, KY., MONDAY, NOVEMBER 16, 1931

No. 15

The Church That Christ Loved

By C. R. Peterson, Home Missionary, Union of Regular Baptists of Michigan, St. Louis, Michigan.

"Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it."—Eph. 5:25.

What is this thing which called forth such infinite love from the Son of God? Is it a matter of small consequence? Are all of the 217 sects of this country churches? Is one church just as good as another, and are they all going the same way? These and similar ones are questions that repeatedly present themselves for consideration. Are the Scriptures sufficiently clear in their revelation concerning the church that we may be led out of the confusion and darkness that prevails today in Christendom? The writer believes they are. "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."

Christ announced (Matt. 16:18) that he would build his "ekklesia," which Greek word is translated "church" in our Bible. Let us concede that in this first use of the word we cannot be sure of the meaning of it. But we find that Christ subsequently used the same word twenty-one times, and always to indicate a local assembly. It would indeed be a strange kind of exegesis that would make Him mean a local assembly in twenty-one instances, and an altogether different thing when he used the word in Matthew 16:18. It is simply unthinkable. Hence the theory of any kind of a church except a local assembly cannot be established from the words of our Lord himself.

It is also reasonable to believe that Christ had fully instructed his disciples concerning the church before his return to the Father. The history of their labors and achievements in establishing churches are recorded in the book of The Acts of the Apostles. Here we find the word "ekklesia" used twenty-four times, and in each case clearly indicates a local assembly, including the three times that the word is used to denote the Ephesian mob in chapter nineteen. There is but one kind of a church to be found in the book of Acts, and that is a local church.

Paul was undoubtedly called to be the teacher of the churches. His use of the word "ekklesia" throws additional light on the meaning of it. He uses the word five times in Romans, twenty-one times in 1 Corinthians, nine times in 2 Corinthians, three times in Galatians, twice in Philippians, twice in 1 Thessalonians, twice in 2 Thessalonians, three times in 1 Timothy, once in Philemon, and twice in Hebrews. Paul, therefore, used the word fifty times in these epistles, and with the possible exception of the Epistle to the Hebrews, used it always to mean a local assembly. It is very probable that it has the same meaning in Hebrews. In Heb. 2:12 it most likely refers to that meeting of the church when the Lord was present and instituted the Lord's Supper. Undoubtedly Heb. 12:23 looks forward to the time when the Lamb shall take unto himself his bride, in which case it will be a local assembly. There remain, therefore, of the Pauline Epistles only the letters to the Ephesians and Colossians upon which to build a theory of an "invisible church," or any kind of a church other than a local

assembly. "Ekklesia" occurs nine times in Ephesians and four times in Colossians. Twice in the letter it denotes a local church. Of the 115 times that the word "ekklesia" is used in the Bible, we have found that 104 times it refers to a local assembly. We have, therefore, only eleven instances left upon which to build a "visible" or "invisible" church theory. These eleven uses are in Ephesians and Colossians. Let us look then into these two epistles that have been compelled to yield so much.

In Acts 20:28 Paul addresses the Ephesian elders concerning the flock over which the Holy Ghost had made them overseers, and charges them "to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with his own blood." Here he uses "the church of God" to designate the church at Ephesus—a local assembly. It seems unreasonable, then, to believe that when about four years later he writes an epistle to this church he should mean something entirely different when he speaks of "the church." At a still later date Paul writes to Timothy, whom he had left at Ephesus, concerning his behavior "in the house of God which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth," manifestly the local assembly. According to the "invisible church" theorists, Paul must have suffered frequent changes of mind, holding first to the local assembly idea, then when writing the Epistle to the Ephesians suffered a complete change of mind and embraced the "invisible church" theory, and finally coming back again to the local church (1 Tim. 3:15). If Paul uses "ekklesia" in an abstract or generic sense in the letter to the Ephesians, he has not departed from his use of the term elsewhere, as it is always a local assembly where the abstract or generic must find its concrete expression. Dr. B. H. Carroll has well said: "Because each and every particular assembly is the representative, or type, of the general assembly, to each and every one of them are applied all the broad figures which pertain to the general assembly. That is, such figures as 'the house of God,' 'the temple of the Lord,' 'the body,' or 'flock' or 'bride of Christ.' The New Testament applies these figures just as freely and frequently to the particular assembly as to the general assembly. That is, to any particular assembly, by itself alone, but never to all the particular assemblies collectively." All of this finds confirmation when the Lord addresses the "church of Ephesus" (Rev. 2:1), as a local assembly, one of the seven CHURCHES of Asia. All that has been said concerning the epistle to the Ephesians applies equally to the epistle to the Colossians.

The word "ekklesia" appears once in James, three times in 3 John, and twenty times in Revelation. In all of these cases it designates a local assembly. Clearly, then, the Scriptures reveal the church as an organized assembly of saved, baptized people in a given locality, commissioned to carry on the work of the Lord Jesus Christ during his absence in person.

It should be borne in mind that there is a clear distinction in Scripture between the church of God and the family of God.

The new birth makes one a member of the latter, but not of the former. The Old Testament saints, the thief on the cross, and children dying in infancy are all in the family of God, but not in the church. There will be many in heaven who were never in the church (Rev. 19:9). All who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ are saved, and will have their place in heaven. But the church, as the bride of Christ, is to be accorded a peculiar place with him who will then be "**King of kings, and Lord of lords.**" She is to reign with him. Since the church is now a local assembly on earth, one must join himself thereto in order to become a member. He can do this only by baptism. Perhaps a personal experience will illustrate this point. When the writer was pastor at Cheboygan, Michigan, some years ago, a man made public profession one Sunday evening of being saved through Jesus Christ, and was received by the church "for membership after baptism." The baptism was to take place the following Lord's Day. On the Tuesday intervening he was stricken with apoplexy and died. None can question that he became a member of the family of God by virtue of the new birth, but the fact remains that he never was a member of the church.

We have in this country today 217 different kinds of "churches." Since God is not the author of confusion, he cannot be responsible for 216 of these (Matt. 15:13). What about the remaining one? Inspired Scripture tells us that there was a man sent from God. And the Lord himself called this man a Baptist. By authority from heaven, John baptized his disciples. This would make these disciples Baptists just as those become Baptists today who are baptized by a Baptist preacher. John's mission was "**to make ready a people prepared for the Lord**" (Luke 1:7). Out of this prepared material the Lord began to build his church (1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 2:20). **It was Baptist then; it is Baptist now; and has been Baptist all the time between.** What it believed then it believes now, and has believed all through nineteen hundred years. No matter in which century you look at it, it has been the same in doctrine, belief and practice. Verily, the gates of hell have not prevailed against it. True, it was not called a "Baptist" church in the beginning. It was unnecessary to thus designate it, as there were then no churches of human origin. It would not be necessary to so designate it today if Luther, Calvin, Henry the 8th, Wesley, Alexander Campbell, Mrs. Baker Glover Eddy, Mrs. Aimee Semple McPherson Hutton, and others, had not built rival organizations and called them "churches." These rival institutions have compelled us to bear a distinguishing name, and because it is necessary we are content to be known by the only name that the Head of the Church ever bestowed upon any one, viz: Baptist.

In addition to the establishment of His church, Christ also promised the perpetuity of it (Matt. 16:18). He has fulfilled this promise, as history adequately records. It is a gruesome story, this record of the martyrdom of forty millions of Baptists during these nineteen centuries. But it is also the history of the triumph of faith in the hour of bitter persecution. These heroic Baptists, persecuted by pagans, Catholics and Protestants, counted not their lives dear unto themselves, but they did esteem as of priceless value those things which the Lord had made known concerning his church. And the world owes a debt to these pioneers of soul-liberty and freedom which it cannot pay. They have preserved intact the faith once for all delivered unto the saints in spite of dungeons, fire and sword.

Christ's love for the church is further evidenced by his present ministry at the right hand of the Father. He is "**sanc-tifying and cleansing it with the washing of water by the Word.**" But the Word would be ineffectual without the administration of the Spirit. Hence the Holy Spirit came upon the waiting church on the day of Pentecost, baptizing it for power to carry out the great commission given by the Lord. And it is only by this Divine power that the church can accomplish its three-fold task of making disciples, baptizing them, and instructing them. Whenever the church has been true to her mission, the living Lord has manifested his presence in the midst of the candlesticks, preparing her for her final and greatest triumph.

That triumph will come when His wife, having made herself ready, the Heavenly Bridegroom will descend from heaven to take her unto himself. Amidst the splendors of the glories of heaven, and the hallelujahs of the great multitudes, as the voice of many waters, the glorified Lord will present himself "**a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.**" It is the consummation of the purpose of the ages; it is the hour of the church's triumph; it is the Lord's achievement of the joy that was set before him. "**Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it.**" The sufferings of the present time will speedily be forgotten in the glory that shall be revealed. That hour seems to be at hand. The midnight cry, "**Behold the bridegroom cometh,**" is growing louder and louder. The signs of the times indicate the imminence of His coming. In spite of scoffing and apostasy, the true church loves his appearing. Arrayed in fine linen, purifying herself even as He is pure, she maintains her age-long vigil, sustained by "**that blessed hope.**" He which testifieth these things saith, "**Surely I come quickly.**" And the waiting bride replies, "**Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.**"

Mourners' Bench Discussion

Elder E. G. Sisk Makes Rejoinder and We Reply.

In our issue of Oct. 1 we published a defense of the mourners' bench by Elder E. G. Sisk, of Hopkinsville, Ky., and replied to same. Below we give Elder Sisk's rejoinder and our further reply.

"Bro. Simmons reminds me that I must be brief, fair, and not too strong, or I shall share a like fate as Bro. Barnes."

We didn't tell you not to be too strong, for we knew at best you would be very weak.

"You say that I gave no authority for my practice, but I notice that you divided my article into 61 parts and wrote nearly three lines to my one in reply."

Like all good debaters are supposed to do, we replied to everything you said. We didn't skip over about three-fourths

of your article as you did our reply. You made statements and offered little or no proof. We submitted proof in practically every section of our reply. Thus we required more space than you. Pastor Dew attempted to prove his statements, and, whereas he used 115 lines, we used only 90 in reply. Therefore, the fact that we had to use nearly three lines to your one is by no means a compliment to you. And the fact that you passed over three-fourths of our reply testifies that we used our lines quite effectively.

"You say, 'We are not opposed to sinners mourning when and where they please.' Then why not give them a seat?"

We do if they want one and there is one available. We have never forced any one to stand up in the services if a seat was available.