

The Doctrine of the Church In These Times

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INTRODUCTION

A true New Testament witness will always deny "Apostolic succession" of individuals and will always affirm "Apostolic succession" of the institution of the local Church. JESUS said, "**Upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it**" (Matthew 16:18).

Ecumenicity in ecclesiology and liberalism in theology are today walking hand in hand producing One Big Universal Church and preaching "**another gospel**" by which its members for salvation are learning lessons from the life of JESUS, instead of salvation by faith from the death of JESUS!

If the present-day New Testament Christians are descendants from the "ana-baptists" of the middle ages as history indicates, let us remember that it was the doctrine of "believers' baptism" that distinguished the "ana-baptist" from the pedo-baptist"; and it was the doctrine of "scriptural immersion" that distinguished the New Testament witness from other species of "ana-baptists"; and it was the doctrine of absolute "religious liberty" for the individual preached and taught by the independent and "sovereign local Church" that infuriated the Roman Catholic Church into such bitter and cruel persecution of these New Testament Christians.

The Roman Catholic *Visitor* in 1946 was explaining how the "Protestant Reformation" happened: This official organ of Rome declared that the Reformation was not religious in its nature; it happened at a time when the Roman Catholic Church was weak politically! All of the leading Reformers, who so heroically freed the Church from the Roman Catholic Church and the Pope, fastened a State Church upon the people wherever they went, and the true New Testament sovereign local Church that stood for absolute religious liberty was persecuted by these State Churches of the reformers: This was true of -

- Luther, who fastened a State Church upon Germany.
- Zwingli, who fastened a State Church upon Switzerland.
- John Knox, who fastened a State Church upon Scotland.
- Henry VIII, who fastened a State Church upon England.

These all became persecutors like Rome before them! John Calvin's *Consistory*, a bold-faced inquisition, in Vienna condemned Michael Servetus as a heretic to be burned at the stake June 17, 1553; Servetus fled, was apprehended in Geneva, and was burned at the stake October 27, 1553.

Liberalism in all of its nature is today more political than it is religious, and by the strain and stress of "pressure tactics," directly and indirectly, by its ecclesiastical power, is striving to force its unbiblical principles especially upon those persuasions standing staunchly and separately in sovereign local Churches!

We know of no chapter and verse in the Bible to justify an "associate member" or "probationary member" of the body of Christ, and the local earthly Church is the pattern of that heavenly body. J. D. Murphy's definition for a local New Testament Church cannot be shortened: "You have believers, baptized, joined, and hence, 'Church.'"

THE BIBLE DENIES APOSTOLIC SUCCESSION

1. Apostles should have seen JESUS CHRIST and been eye and ear witnesses of what they testified to in the world concerning Him.

"And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning" (John 15:27)

"Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us" (Acts 1:21, 22)

"Am I not an apostle? am I not free? have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? are not ye my work in the Lord?" (I Corinthians 9:1)

"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life" (I John 1:1)

2. Apostles were chosen and appointed to their offices by CHRIST Himself, and with the exception of Matthias, who was appointed by lot, there were no exceptions

"And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples: and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles; Simon, (whom he also named Peter,) and Andrew his brother, James and John, Philip and Bartholomew, Matthew and Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon called Zelotes, And Judas the brother of James, and Judas Iscariot, which also was the traitor" (Luke 6:13-16).

"But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel . . . And he said, The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth" (Acts 9:15; 22:14).

3. Apostles had the gift of plenary inspiration

"Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves . . . For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which

speakech in you" (Matthew 10:16, 20).

"If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you" (John 14:15-18).

"For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? 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. 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 1:5-8).

"But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ . . ." (Galatians 1:11, 12; cf I Corinthians 2:4-16).

4. Apostles had the gift of tongues and the power to work diverse sorts of miracles. These were their credentials cf. Acts 3:1-26; Hebrews 2:4). From these Bible qualifications which in turn becomes premises, it is obviously impossible that the apostles could have successors in office.

ECUMENICITY DISSOLVES THE NEW TESTAMENT LOCAL CHURCH SUCCESSION

1. The National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America is becoming the voice of GOD to many denominations (Constituting Convention, Cleveland, 10:59 a.m., November 29, 1950).

2. The voice of the denomination is becoming the voice of GOD to many pastors and local Churches.

3. The voice of their pastor and their local Church is becoming the voice of GOD to many Church members.

4. The voice of the Church members and professing Christians is becoming the voice of GOD to the unregenerate and godless world, who themselves have no knowledge or Bible background of Christian things.

5. Perhaps the paramount danger in all of this is a point of similarity between the Liberal Protestant Christianity and the Roman Catholic Church: Neither of these accept the Bible as a final authority for all matters of Christian faith and practice! Both are more political than religious!

Because of their age-long belief in Apostolic Succession, the Roman Catholic Church feels that

they have authority in themselves to make changes they wish in Church Government or Church Doctrine!

Because Liberal Protestantism does not believe in "the faith once for all delivered to the saints," they feel that the reinterpretation of this faith should be made by each successive generation of Liberals for each successive generation of Christians.

- If Miracles insult Reason, leave them out or interpret them away.
- If Regeneration insults Education, leave it out or interpret it away.
- If Creation insults Evolution, leave it out or interpret it away.

Recently a leading Liberal in Baptist circles has written a book *Interpreters Needed! A better book would be "Declarers Needed!"*

CONDITIONS AND COMPULSIONS FOR LOCAL CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

1. All who would become members of the local New Testament Church must be renewed or begotten by the Holy Spirit through the Word of Truth

"Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5).

"Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever" (I Peter 1:23).

"For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel" (I Corinthians 4:15).

"Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures" (James 1:18).

2. They must also believe on the name of the Lord JESUS CHRIST as the Way, the Truth, the Resurrection, and the Life

"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:16).

"But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women" (Acts 8:12).

"And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house" (Acts 16:31).

"And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized" (Acts 18:8).

3. They must love CHRIST more than they love even their own lives and their most dear and

cherished earthly relations

"If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26, 27).

"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing" (I Corinthians 13:1-3).

4. They must repent of their sins

"Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:38)

"Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord" (Acts 3:19).

5. They must turn from Satan to God and become humble and meek as little children.

"And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3).

"Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord" (Acts 3:19).

6. They must call on the name of the Lord in humble and earnest prayer and supplication.

"And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16).

"For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Romans 10:13).

7. They must confess CHRIST as the Son of GOD and Saviour of sinners

"For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Romans 10:10).

"Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses" (I Timothy 6:12).

"Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession" (Hebrews 4:14).

8. They must be baptized by the authority of CHRIST in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the HOLY SPIRIT.

WHEN WE LOSE OUR FREEDOM

Chief Justice, John Marshall of the Supreme Court said at the age of 75, "*The Judicial Department comes home in its effects to every man's fireside. It passes on his property, his reputation, his all. Is it not to the last degree important that he should be rendered perfectly and completely independent, with nothing to influence or control him but God and his conscience?*"

In this great country of separation of Church and state we enjoy dual liberties: political and moral. Our political liberties are based on our democracy, but our moral liberties are based on the declaration "*That all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights. . . .*" We will lose these two freedoms when we lose our sovereign local Churches, that under God are, "**The pillar and ground of the Truth**" (I Timothy 3:15).

In Hitler's day some thirty thousand state Churches, tax supported were the tools of and supported by the German government. About the time that Hitler's government took over the Churches of Germany, Albert Einstein made the following statement:

"Being a lover of freedom when the revolution came in Germany,

- I looked to the universities to defend it, knowing that they had always boasted of their devotion to the cause of truth; but, no, the universities were immediately silenced.

- I looked to the great editors of the newspapers whose flaming editorials in days gone by had proclaimed their love for freedom; but they like the universities, were silenced in a few short weeks.

- I looked to the individual writers, who, as literary guides of Germany, had written much and often concerning the place of freedom in modern life; but they too were mute.

"Only the Church stood squarely across the path of Hitler's campaign for suppressing truth. I never had any great interest in the Church before, but now I feel a great affection and admiration because the Church alone has had the courage and persistence to stand for intellectual truth and moral freedom. I am forced to confess that what I once despised, I now praise unreservedly,"

Our author, Dr. C. E. Tulga, generously and kindly dedicated a previous volume, *The Independence of the Local Church* to me and this great Fourth Baptist Church, which I have been privileged to serve as pastor for so many years. By a like kindness I am now writing an *Introduction to The Local Church of the New Testament*. Our author has with painstaking care in this volume given us the historical, biblical pattern and purposes of the God-ordained "**pillar and ground of the truth**," the Local Church. If our freedoms are lost in this great nominally Christian nation, it will be because as enslaved citizens we can look back to the losing of the pattern and purposes of the local New Testament Church herein described.

CONCLUSION

The New Testament Local Churches that have continued since the days of the apostles are easily identified in four different ways:

1. These local Churches stood for three distinct Bible truths.
 - a. The Bible alone was .accepted for faith and practice.
 - b. The priesthood of believers made man accountable to God alone.
 - c. Every regenerate Christian was allowed to interpret the Bible for himself.

2. These Churches stood for three distinct principles and beliefs.
 - a. Autonomy and democratic government of the local Church.
 - b. A regenerated membership responsible for the local Church.
 - c. The two ordinances of the local Church were inside and inviolate.

3. These local Churches had three distinguishable connections.
 - a. With the history of the New Testament Churches from the beginning.
 - b. In any given age these local Churches had the closest connection with the true New Testament Churches of all ages.
 - c. These New Testament Churches sustained the closest connections with the New Testament Gospel: repentance, faith, confession, obedience.

4. These local Churches in all ages had three distinguishable characteristics.
 - a. Their accomplishments have been the most astonishing.
 - b. Their persecutions have been the most severe.
 - c. Their contributions to both Christianity and the governments of the world have been the most fruitful.

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