



The Grace Proclamator and Promulgator

“To testify the gospel of the grace of God.” Acts 20:24

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WILL THERE BE A BAPTIST POPE? ARE TRUE CHURCHES LOCAL, INDEPENDENT, AND AUTONOMOUS?

By Wayne Camp

Luke 22:25-26 *And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. 26 But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve.*

Revelation 2:6 *But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.*

INTRODUCTION

According to Baptist historians, one of the earliest errors to creep into the early churches was the larger churches and their pastors assuming they could

exercise authority over smaller and younger churches. Of this error J. M. Carroll writes,

The first of these changes from New Testament teachings embraced both policy and doctrine. In the first two centuries the individual churches rapidly multiplied and some of the earlier ones, such as Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus, Corinth, etc., grew to be very large; Jerusalem, for instance, had many thousand members (Acts 2:41; 4:4, 5:14), possibly 25,000 or even 50,000 or more. A close student of the book of Acts and Epistles will see that Paul had a mighty task even (See, POPE? Cont. P. 6, Left Col.)

WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

PART III

INTRODUCTION TO PART III

In the first of this three part series on the question, "What Is the Gospel?" I pointed out that the gospel is much more than a simple declaration that Christ died, was buried and rose again. Last time we saw some of the names by which the gospel is called in Scripture. This reveals that the gospel is much more than the simple declaration some make it.

In this part of the message, I wish to set forth an explanation of the gospel as set forth in Paul's first epistle to the Corinthian church.

THE EXPLANATION OF THE GOSPEL

In his first letter to the Corinthians Paul explains the gospel. He says that it is "**HOW that Christ died**

for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures" (I Cor. 15:3-4).

The gospel is not the mere preaching of three simple facts, as glorious as they are. It includes **HOW** these things occurred according to the Scriptures. It is the good news that Christ died for our sins **according to the Scriptures**, was buried and **rose again according to the Scriptures**. To explain the gospel, we must therefore see what is revealed in Scripture about his death, his burial, and his resurrection.

HOW CHRIST DIED

We must now inquire as to what the Scriptures reveal as to the **HOW** of Christ's death.

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According to the Scriptures Christ died a death that was foreordained before the foundation of the world. He was **"delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23)**. When they gathered together and crucified Christ they were there **"For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done" (Acts 4:2728)**. When Christ died he shed the blood of the Lamb of God **"who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world" (I Pet. 1:18-20)**.

He is **"the Lamb slain from the foundation of**

the world (Rev. 13:8). His death was a part of that **"hidden wisdom which God ordained before the world for our glory" (I Cor. 2:7)**. When we preach the gospel let us proclaim the good news that our salvation was no after-thought with God but was planned in the counsel halls of eternity before the foundation of the world! That is good news and gospel truth!

According to the Scriptures Christ died for a specific people. He was sent to **"save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21)**. He came to **"give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him" (Jn. 17:2)**. He declared, **"I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep" (Jn. 10:11)**. Again he said, **"I lay down my life for the sheep" (Jn. 10:15)**. To some he said, **"Ye are not of my sheep,"** yet he only laid down his life for the Sheep (Jn. 10:26). Jesus Christ paid a price that was of such infinite worth and value he could purchase the field, but it was the joy of the treasure of his elect that led him to the cross (Matt. 13:44). The limit of the atonement is not in its worth or value, it is in its purpose. In his high priestly, mediatorial prayer Christ prayed only for the welfare of those whom the Father had given him. **"I pray not for the world; but for them which thou hast given me" (Jn. 17:9)**. He prayed for those who had already come to him and for all **"which shall believe"** (Jn. 17:20). As to eternal glorification he prayed only **"that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory" (Jn. 17:24)**. In this mediatorial, high-priestly prayer of Jesus he did not pray that every last person in the human race be with him in glory. Rather, he prayed only that those given to him be with him where he is. Did Christ die for some for whom he would not pray? **"I pray not for the world; but for them which thou hast given me" (Jn. 17:9)**.

Dr. J. R. Graves wrote, "Christ took hold of a special class, and a definite number, known by the Father, to succor and to save, and whom he calls the **'Seed of Abraham;'** **'His Seed;'** **'His Sheep;'** **'The lost sheep of the house of Israel.'** To save none others was he especially sent into the world. **'I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel' (Matt. 15:24)."**

Dr. Alvah Hovey wrote, "It is plain that God purposed from the first to save certain persons of our race; that these persons were given to Christ, in a special sense to be his flock, and that he had particularly in view their actual salvation when he laid down his life."

In commenting upon John 10:11, 15, 26-28,

another great Baptist, Dr. J. P. Boyce, wrote,

- a. The sheep here are those to whom he will give eternal life.
- b. They are those for whom he lays down his life.
- c. They are not all because he tells those who are rejecting him that they are not his sheep.
- d. The whole language used implies that the salvation of the sheep alone is the object for which his life is laid down."

These three Bible scholars held and the Scriptures clearly reveal that Christ laid hold of a specific people when he shed the blood of the everlasting covenant. He did not lay hold of the fallen angels. Nor did he lay hold of all the fallen seed of Adam. Rather, **"He took on him the seed of Abraham" (Heb. 2:16).**

According to the Scriptures Christ died for totally depraved sinners. He **"died for our sins according to the Scripture" (I Cor. 15:3).** These for whom Christ died were helpless and ungodly just as others who never come to Christ. **"When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly" (Rom. 5:6).** While we were yet in our sins, walking according to the course of this world, and by nature the children of wrath, God commended his love toward us by having his own begotten and beloved Son endure the gory ordeal of the death of the cross so that **"we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (Rom. 5:8; Eph. 2:1-3; 11 Cor. 5:19).**

According to the Scriptures Christ died a voluntary death. There were not enough demons in hell and reprobates on earth to take the life of our Lord. He came **"to give his life a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:28).** Jesus said, **"I lay down my life, that I might take it up again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself" (Jn. 10:17-18).** When Jesus stood before Pontius Pilate, Pilate asked him, **"Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee? Jesus answered, Thou couldst have no power at all against me, except it were given to you from above" (Jn. 19:10-11).**

According to the Scriptures Christ died for a called people. **"I lay down my life for the sheep . . . other sheep I have . . . them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice . . . my sheep hear my voice" (Jn. 10:15, 16, 27).** To those who are called Christ is the power and wisdom of God. **1 Corinthians 1:23-24 But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; 24 But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.**

According to the Scriptures Christ died for a people who will be saved and eternally preserved. They will be preserved because he gives them eternal, unending, spiritual life. They can never perish and no one is able to pluck them out of the hands of the Son and the Father (Jn. 10:27-29). They will be preserved because they are his people and he has saved them from all their sins—past, present, and future (Matt. 1:21). They will be preserved because Jesus has obtained eternal redemption for them and has sanctified them **"once for all,"** and has perfected them forever (Heb. 9:12; 10:10, 14). They will be preserved because he will never cast them out or down, but will save them to the uttermost and one day present them faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy (Jn. 6:37; Psa. 37:24; Heb. 7:26; Jude 24). They are preserved forever because God has made an unchangeable, unconditional covenant with Christ that his seed will endure forever (Psa. 89:27-36).

According to the Scriptures Jesus died a God-pleasing and God-satisfying death. **"It pleased the Lord to bruise him . . ." and "the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand" (Isa. 53:10).** When God beheld his Son suspended on the cross that he had determined for him, he saw **"his seed,"** he saw **"the travail of his soul,"** and he was **"satisfied" (Isa. 53:10-11).**

We can safely declare that everything the Scriptures have to say about the death of Christ is a part of the gospel. The gospel is not the fact that he died only, but it includes everything that is revealed in God's word about the manner and accomplishments of his death. It involves all that is revealed in **"how Christ died according to the Scriptures."**

HOW CHRIST WAS BURIED

Again it should be emphasized that the gospel is not a mere statement of three facts. Paul explains this aspect of the gospel, the burial of Jesus Christ, as the burial of Christ **"according to the Scriptures."** The burial was set forth in some detail in God's Word.

According to the Scriptures he made his grave with the wicked and the rich in his death. Isaiah prophesied, **"And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth" (Isa. 53:7).** He died between two thieves but had done no sin. A rich man named Joseph, who was of Arimathaea and had become a disciple of the Lord, begged the body of Jesus and **"wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in**

his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock" (Matt. 27:57-60).

According to the Scriptures the tomb of Jesus was closed with a great stone. When Joseph had carefully laid the body of our Lord in the grave that he had hewn out of the rock he then closed the tomb by rolling a great stone across the entrance. This was the first step in a series of events that would enhance the credibility of those who would later declare Christ's resurrection (Matt. 27:60).

According to the Scriptures the tomb of Jesus was sealed with an official Roman seal and a guard was set. The chief priests and Pharisees were afraid that the disciples would steal the body of Christ and claim that he had risen. They thought to assure that such could not be told. **Matthew 27:62-66 Now the next day, that followed the day of the preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate, 63 Saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. 64 Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first. 65 Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch: go your way, make it as sure as ye can. 66 So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch.**

One is amazed at how the wicked acts of unbelieving men are used to authenticate and enhance the good news of the gospel. It is good news that such precautions were taken by our Lord's enemies for it gives us the blessed assurance that Jesus did truly rise from the dead and that according to the Scriptures.

According to the Scriptures Christ would be in the grave three days and three nights. The three days and three nights that Jonah was in the belly of the whale compose a prophetic picture of Christ's time in his burial place. Jesus often spoke of the fact that he would **"be killed, and after three days rise again" (Matt. 8:31)**. Of his time in the grave he declared: **"For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matt. 12:42).**

HOW CHRIST ROSE AGAIN THE THIRD DAY

It has already been shown that Christ had declared his resurrection would take place on the third day after three days and three nights had elapsed. His resurrection was set forth in the Old

Testament in a number of ways.

According to the Scriptures Christ must rise from the dead. The Psalmist gave this assurance in the gospel as he declared it in joyous song, **"Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope. For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption" (Psa. 16:9-10)**. He who did no sin must not see his body corrupted in the grave so **"God hath raised" him "up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it" (Acts 2:24)**. Death had no rightful claim on Christ. It was therefore necessary that his sinlessness be established by his escaping the usual corruption that follows death.

According to the Scriptures Jesus must be highly exalted after his death. There is no way that this exaltation could or would take place unless he did arise according to the Scriptures. **"Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong: because he hath poured out his soul unto death" (Isa. 53:12)**. After his death and resurrection Christ **"was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God" (Mk. 16:19)**. When the leaders of Israel called him before the council Christ declared, **"Hereafter shall the Son of man sit on the right hand of the power of God" (Luke 22:69)**. On Pentecost Peter preached, **"Let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, who ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36)**.

Much more could be said about the scriptural "how" of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ but enough has been given to prove that the gospel consists of much, much more than the declaration that he died, was buried and rose again the third day. This is much too lean to be the rich gospel of Christ that is set forth in the holy record.

SOME DECLARATIONS CONCERNING THE GOSPEL

There are a number of things that have already been touched upon of which I would remind our readers before concluding this study. The gospel that we have discussed is the gospel by which men are saved (I Cor. 15:1-4). It is the gospel that is the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16).

The gospel that is to be preached into the entire world is the eternal, everlasting, unchangeable good news of the way of salvation. It is as unchangeable as the Lord himself is unchangeable (Heb. 13:8). It is the gospel that has been preached to and by both Jew and Gentile—the gospel of the circumcision and

the uncircumcision (Gal. 2:7).

The gospel that we here declare and defend is the gospel that was preached by all the prophets for the remission of sins (Acts 10:43). It is the gospel which was preached to and believed by Abraham (Gal. 3:8). It is the everlasting gospel. **"But the word of the Lord endureth forever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you" (I Pet. 1:25).** It is the everlasting gospel which the angel will declare at a season yet to come (Rev. 14:6).

The gospel which we are to preach is the glorious gospel of Christ which Satan would like to destroy by perverting it and by blinding men's hearts to it (II Cor. 4:4); Gal. 1:6-9). It is the gospel which was ordained before the world for our glory (I Cor. 2:7).

CONCLUSION

One may not know all that there is to know about the gospel when he lays hold of Christ through God-given faith. Only eternity will reveal the fullness and true extent of the exceeding riches of God's grace. Eph. 2:7. But let me say to any unsaved reading this,

- A. If you are feeling unworthy of salvation I have good news: God has chosen an innumerable multitude of unworthy sinners to be the objects of his saving grace.
- B. If you are seeing the deadness of your sinful nature I have good news for you: God can quicken and regenerate all whom he will even though they are dead in sin. Eph. 2:1-3; Jn. 5:21.
- C. If you are seeing the bondage of sin in which you are enslaved I have good news: Christ has redeemed by his blood every one who will ever come to him.
- D. If you are feeling the guilt and fearing the penalty of sin I have good news: God justifies the ungodly who believe on Jesus Christ.
- E. If you feel your enmity against God will cast you into hell, I have good news: Come to Christ for God was in Christ reconciling a world unto himself.
- F. If you feel your unrighteousness will exclude you from God's presence I have good news: Believe on Christ and you will be made the righteousness of God in him.
- G. If you fear that you cannot be enough like Christ to be accepted by the Father I have good news: God has made an innumerable multitude accepted in the beloved and has predestinated them to be conformed to the image of his Son.
- H. If you fear that you cannot be a son of God I have good news for or you: God has predestinated a great number to the adoption of sons and if you

will come to Christ, God will send forth the Spirit of adoption into your heart causing you to cry "Abba Father."

- I. If you see your inability to come to Christ, I have good news for you: When Christ calls one of his lost sheep they hear his voice and since they have been given to him they will be drawn to him by the Father.
- J. You fear that you cannot live for Christ after salvation, I have good news for you: God will work in you both to will and to do his good pleasure and, will cause you to persevere and he will sanctify you.
- K. You fear that you might fall away and be lost again, I have good news for you: If you do fall you will not be utterly cast down for the Lord will uphold you with his hand.
- L. You fear that you may not repent enough, I have good news for you: When God grants you repentance it will be sufficient.
- M. You fear you may not have enough faith, I have good news for you: "When God gives you faith he will give you all that is needed to lay hold of Jesus Christ and receive everlasting life.
- N. You fear that after you are saved you will sin, I have good news for you: We have an advocate with the Father who ever lives to make intercession for his people. He has saved his people from their sins and his blood cleanses from all unrighteousness.

That is the gospel! That is the good news! That is good tidings of great joy! I pray that God may open your heart so that you can gladly receive it. I pray that he may grant you repentance and faith so that you may repent and believe the gospel for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth!

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. (Rom. 1:16)

(BAPTIST POPE? Cont. from P. 1).

in his day in keeping some of the churches straight. See Peter's and Paul's prophecies concerning the future (II Pet. 2:12; Acts 20:29-31. See also Rev., second and third chapters).

These great churches necessarily had many preachers or elders. (Acts 20:17.) *Some of the bishops or pastors began to assume authority not given them in the New Testament. They began to claim authority over other and smaller churches. [Emp. Mine, RWC].* They, with their many elders, began to lord it over God's heritage (III John 9). Here was the beginning of an error which has grown and multiplied into many other seriously hurtful errors. Here was the beginning of different orders in the ministry running up finally to what is practiced now by others as well as Catholics. Here began what resulted in an entire change from the original democratic policy and government of the early churches. This irregularity began in a small way, even before the close of the second century. This was possibly the first serious departure from the New Testament church order [*The Trail of Blood, P. 12*].

John T. Christian also mentions this error. He wrote,

There was, however, a constant tendency towards centralization. As the pastor assumed rights which were not granted to him by the Scriptures, some of the metropolitan pastors exercised an undue authority over some of the smaller churches. Then the churches in some of the cities sought the patronage and protection of the pastors of the larger cities. Finally Rome, the political center of the world, became the religious center as well. In time the pastor in Rome became the universal pope. All of this was of slow growth and required centuries for its consummation [*A History of the Baptists, Vol. 1, P. 28*].

After discussing the trend toward this unwarranted exercise of authority by some, G. H.

Orchard wrote, "During the first three centuries, Christian congregations, all over the East, subsisted in separate independent bodies, unsupported by government, and consequently without any secular power over one another" [*A Concise History of the Baptists, P. 36*].

S. H. Ford wrote concerning the absolute independence of the early churches and said, "The first thing that strikes the reader of this paragraph (one which he had just quoted) is that the churches, even in the times of Eusebius, were separate and independent . . ." [*The Origin of the Baptists, P. 92*].

J. B. Moody deplored this race for the exercise of authority over other churches in these words,

These delegates were generally the pastors of churches, and in two or three centuries they succeeded in wrenching authority from some of the churches, and thus arose an unscriptural congregational episcopacy. But not satisfied with authority over their church, they sought and fought to extend their authority over several churches contiguous to them. When they succeeded in this, they sought and fought to conquer more churches, and to conquer them the more [*My Church, P. 7*].

Francis Wayland wrote,

"If my conscience is to be bound by my fellow men, it matters not whether these men be a conclave of bishops and cardinals, or whether they be my brethren whom I meet every day, and with whom I sit down around the same communion table. My brethren will, I doubt not, use their usurped authority more mildly, but this alters not the fact that the authority is usurped, nor does it offer any guarantee that it may not, in the end, be as oppressive as the other" (*Terms of Communion At The Lord's Table, R.B.C. Howell, p. 31, 1987 reprint by Baptist Heritage Press.*)

As indicated by Carroll and Christian, this trend eventually led to the hierarchical system of what evolved into the Roman Catholic Church with its hierarchical system that is rightly deplored by most Baptists. To one degree or another, her Protestant daughters have retained this system.

This exercise of authority by one church and pastor over other churches and pastors was totally rejected by true churches of the Lord Jesus Christ. Most Baptists were true to the doctrine of equality of the churches of the Lord Jesus Christ until the formation of the various conventions and some associations. In the SBC the equality of churches was denied. Thus they have a system whereby each church is entitled to a minimum number of delegates. But, a church gains the right to more delegates as it grows in its membership and in its contributions to the Cooperative program. Thus, a small church may have three delegates while the larger church down the road might have ten delegates. This allows the larger churches to have more say in the business of the Convention which is tantamount to lording it over the smaller churches.

Historically, other Baptists, including associations, have rejected this inequality fostered by the convention system. For instance, in the American Baptist Association, each church is entitled to three messengers regardless of its financial support of associational activities. No difference is made based on membership. Church A may have 1,000 members and give a hundred thousand dollars to the various associational endeavors and is entitled to three messengers when the annual messenger body convenes. Church B may have ten members and give nothing to the associational activities and is entitled to three messengers when the messengers meet.

Among independent Baptists, there has existed a policy of equality among the churches. Bro. J. M. Holliday wrote, "Every New Testament Baptist church is local, sovereign and autonomous: acting under the headship of Jesus Christ, practicing the principles laid down in the Word of God, empowered by the Holy Spirit" [*The Baptist Heritage*, P. 11].

All my life as a Christian I have been a Baptist. I have never, until recently, read after any Baptist who advocated the authority of one true Baptist church over another. Nearly every independent Baptist I know has been a strong contender for the equality of churches. Recently I have read something that should be the sounding of an alarm to those who hold to the independence, and autonomy of every local, visible Baptist assembly.

This article is not intended to be a refutation of the "mother" church terminology although some may interpret it to be so. Neither is it intended to be a discussion of how churches are to be formed. It is intended to warn of a doctrine that advocates

churches exercising authority over other churches. In Scripture it is called **"the doctrine of the Nicolaitans."** *Revelation 2:6 But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. Revelation 2:15 So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.*

While I object to the terminology of "mother church" and "daughter church" because it is extra-biblical, my real objection is to the implications some draw from the terminology. Some time ago, I warned that the idea of Mother-Daughter churches could lead to churches exercising authority over other churches. Some thought that idea foolish and ridiculous. In some circles I have been severely criticized for my objection and warning. But, I personally know of two cases in which this occurred.

Twenty-five years or so ago, in a southern state, there was a young ABA church which was having some difficulties. The pastor of an older church about 20 miles away heard of their difficulties and heard that they were having a special business meeting on a Wednesday night to try to settle the matter. The pastor of this much older church showed up and announced he had come to moderate their business meeting and help them solve their problems. The young church and pastor sent him packing, and rightfully so.

Another happened in another state. An independent Baptist church was having problems and had a meeting to try to solve it. The church had been organized for a number of years but the pastor of the "mother" church showed up and when asked by what authority he was there replied that his church was their "mother" and this gave him authority to be there to assist them. If I remember correctly, he was sent packing also.

I am not suggesting that every person or church that espouses the "mother church", "daughter church", and "grand-daughter" church terminology believes in the "mother church" having authority over the "daughter church". Most who endorse and use this terminology would protest this exercise of authority of one church over another as strongly as I or any other would.

As indicated, recently I have read an article that advocates the Mother Church-Daughter Church idea. But, unlike most who espouse this idea, this article advocates the authority of a mother church over the churches formed out of her. In fact, it even claims to demonstrate that the "Mother" church, the church at Jerusalem, exercised authority over the church at Antioch. Even more astounding, the article, while affirming that Antioch sent out Paul and Barnabas as

missionaries, further claims that the church at Jerusalem exercised authority over the churches formed under the ministry of Paul and Barnabas as missionaries from Antioch, not Jerusalem. This amounts to Jerusalem exercising authority over the so-called "daughters" of Antioch who, if one espouses this scheme of "Mother-Daughter" Churches, were actually "granddaughters" of the Jerusalem congregation. But, that is not all. The article asserted that Jerusalem had authority over all churches descending from her, even if started by churches other than Jerusalem. The article said,

So, then, the Jerusalem Church, not the apostles and elders alone, sent letters of instruction to these other Churches! This was quite a high-handed thing to do if these Churches all had the relationship of "sisters," but if we understand that the Jerusalem Church was viewed not as a sister, not even a "big sister," but rather as having motherly authority over those younger Churches which came out of her, her actions were right and proper (Emp. Mine, RWC). According to the article, Jerusalem had authority over every church descending from her. Since she was the first church and all true churches have, in some sense, descended from her, if she were still in existence, she would have authority over all true churches on earth today, according to the article. Thus, I have asked the question, "**Who will be the first Baptist Pope?**" The article has provided an answer to a puzzle.

AN ANSWER TO A PUZZLE

There is something that has always puzzled me. I have often wondered why the Lord has permitted apostate Rome to continue to exist century after centuries as the old harlot has. On the other hand, all those early true churches have died out. While perpetuating his churches, the Lord has allowed individual churches to die out in one manner or another. **There is not a single church of the New Testament period still alive today!** I have been to Jerusalem, Ephesus, Antioch, Philippi, Pergamos, Thyatira, Smyrna, and several other places where churches named in Scripture were located but none exist today. Even here in the United States, most of the churches that were started in our early history no longer exist as a true church. They have either apostatized or died in one manner or another. Thus, those who love to push the necessity of a pedigree that extends back can rarely go link by link more

than two or three churches. Then they must resort to associational links. For instance, I have an alleged link by link succession of one church back to Christ. Link #6 is given as follows, "**Eld. H. Roller came from the Hilcliffe church to the Philadelphia Baptist Association 1809 (See Minutes of The Philadelphia Association, year 1809).**"

Does a man from another country and church attending an associational meeting in the U. S. A. form a legitimate link? Some think I am a heretic because I do not believe a vote is essential in the organization of each and every church and that Scriptural Baptism and ordained ministers of the gospel can compose informal links between churches. But, there are churches that claim chain-link succession back to Jerusalem merely on the basis of a minister from Hilcliffe church attending a meeting of the Philadelphia association. Folks, that is a weaker link than I have proposed must exist. In fact, it is no link at all.

Consider also some facts about another alleged chain-link succession back to Jerusalem. There are many weak links but I will only deal with this. We are told that Elder Abel Morgan was one of the messengers at the annual meeting of the Philadelphia Association when the Opekon Baptist Church was officially received into the Philadelphia Association. Note that no evidence is given that Elder Abel had any connection with the Opekon church other than he was present and a messenger when she was received. Morgan, we are told, came from the Welsh Tract Baptist Church in Newcastle County, Delaware which was organized in Pembrokeshire, South Wales. Is chain-link succession established here? Can chain-link succession be maintained by some visitor being present when a church is received into the Association because the messenger was a member of a church that came to the US from South Wales? There is absolutely no chain-link succession maintained or proven here.

I believe the article I recently read gave me the key to the puzzle. Why does God permit the continued existence of the Roman Harlot? Why has he permitted all those early true churches to die, even though he has promised and maintained the perpetual existence of his churches? If Jerusalem were still alive today, and if she did have authority over all the churches descending from her, according to this article, she would have authority over all other true churches on earth. If she had authority over Antioch, and over those formed under the leadership of the missionaries sent forth from Antioch, why not all churches in the world today?

After all, in one manner or another, every true church in the world today has descended from the Jerusalem church and would, according to the article, be under the authority of Jerusalem. And, her pastor, if he were inclined to believe older churches could exercise authority over younger and smaller churches, would, among Baptists, be almost an equivalent to the Catholic pope. We would have a Baptist hierarchical system older than that of the Roman Catholic Church.

After coming to this conclusion recently (two or three weeks ago, now), I was surprised later, while doing other research for another purpose, to find this statement concerning Shubal Stearns and the Sandy Creek Church. Cathcart wrote,

He was undoubtedly one of the greatest ministers that ever presented Jesus to perishing multitudes, and one of the most successful soulwinners that ever unfurled the banner of Calvary. Had he been a Romish priest, with as flattering a record of service to the church of the popes, long since he would have been canonized, and declared the "patron saint" of North Carolina, and fervent supplications would have ascended to the most blessed of American intercessors from devout Catholics, and stately churches would have been dedicated to the holy and blessed St. Shubal Stearns, the apostle of North Carolina and the adjacent States. (P. 1100).

In the kind providence of our all-wise God, his churches have been perpetuated through the forming of new churches but have been protected from the hierarchical system that would have developed if churches such as Jerusalem and Antioch had been kept alive and active all this time. Had God, in his wise providence, not allowed the church in Jerusalem to apostatize or die out there would doubtless be those who would pay homage to her much as the Roman Catholics do the Vatican today. With the love that some Baptist preachers have for preeminence, there would end up a Baptist hierarchical system and some preachers would be competing with one another to become pastor of the Jerusalem church, making him Supreme Pastor of all Baptist churches. **3 John 9 I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not.**

UNBELIEVABLE?

Do you think it is unbelievable that an independent, Sovereign Grace Baptist preacher

would advocate the authority of churches over other churches? Consider this bold statement from the afore mentioned article called ***Mother Churches and Daughter Churches***.

Some who object to the idea of "Mother Churches" and "Daughter Churches" admit that the gender of a Church is feminine. They would have us view the Churches as all sisters. Sisters are equals. Neither has authority over another, they tell us. I will grant that sisters are equal and that sister Churches have no authority over another sister Church! But I intend to demonstrate from the Scriptures that there were Churches in the apostolic age which DID HAVE authority over other Churches! (Underlining mine, RWC). And in so demonstrating this authority one over another, I will demonstrate that some of these Churches were viewed, not as sisters and equals but as "mothers" and as having authority over the younger Churches! I submit that if I can demonstrate this authority of one Church over another, I can demonstrate the concept of "Mother Churches and Daughter Churches"!

The article further said,

I propose to ask two questions and answer them from the clear and evident practice of the apostles and the Churches of their day. 1. Was it the practice of any Church of the apostolic age to send preachers to preach and administer the ordinances in any other Church? If so, this will demonstrate that one Church had authority over another and that the "Mother Church-Daughter Church" concept was known and practiced. 2. Was it the practice of any Church of the apostolic age to give direct instructions to be obeyed by any other Church? If so, this will further demonstrate that one Church had authority over another. The "Mother Church- Daughter Church" concept will be demonstrated in this way also.

To his credit, the author did point out that the apostles did not start "missions." This editor has pleaded for the biblical basis for starting "missions"

for 25 or more years but no one has ever provided one instance of an apostle, church, or missionary of New Testament times ever starting a mission. On this the author of the article wrote,

Let me submit also, as an aside, that I think we should be careful to observe that the apostles did not purpose to start "missions." Their purpose was to start Churches! They did indeed start "Churches." I believe there is a great evil done when we start a "mission" and in spite of spiritual, numeric and financial growth, continue to retain such "missions" as "missions" when they could be organized into "Sister Churches." I am not quibbling about words or terms. I am trying to be concerned about Scriptural concepts and practices!

Though I have long advocated the incorrectness of starting "missions", I have never been so bold as to say, "I believe there is a great evil done when we start a 'mission' . . ." This statement of this brother is especially interesting since I have before me a picture on the back of which the name of his work appears. It is _____ Baptist Mission. If he considers it a great evil to start a mission, why did he ever agree to start one? Why did he send out pictures labeled _____ Baptist Mission? When his work was organized, did it become a "sister church" to the sending church or did it become a "daughter church", still under the authority of the sending church? Did it become an independent and autonomous church or is it neither independent nor autonomous?

That does not puzzle me as much as does his statement, "I believe there is a great evil done when we start a "mission" and in spite of spiritual numeric and financial growth, continue to retain such 'missions' as 'missions' when they could be organized into 'Sister Churches'." In the article he advocates that churches do not start "Sister churches"; they start "Daughter churches". Yet, here he seems to suggest that if they are first started as "missions" they should be "organized into "Sister Churches." Since he says that "Sister Churches" are equals, it seems to me it would be better to start missions and organize them into "Sister Churches" than it would be to start "Daughter Churches" and have a "mother church" continue to exercise authority over that daughter church.

The article further argues that the assembly of baptized believers gathered under the ministry of Philip was a "daughter church" of the "mother church" at Jerusalem. He argues that the church at Jerusalem exercised authority over this assembly by sending Peter and John down there. The writer asked, "Was it the practice of any Church of the apostolic age to send preachers to preach and administer the ordinances in any other Church?" He definitely considered the assembly at Samaria to be a church before Peter and John arrived there. While he had argued that the folks in Samaria were actually members of the church at Jerusalem, he called them a "daughter church." He wrote, "Looks like to me what we have here is a 'Daughter Church'!" How can a church be a "Daughter Church" if she has no members? Or, do the members of the "Daughter Church" have dual membership—membership in the "Mother Church" and also membership in the "Daughter Church"? If the members of this "Daughter Church" the writer found in Samaria are members of the "Mother Church" at Jerusalem, are they also members of the "Daughter Church" in Samaria? The writer said, "I believe these converts were baptized into the only body ("local" Church) that Philip had any connection with—the body of which he was a member, that is, the Jerusalem Church." Yet, he argues just as forcefully that there was already a church in Samaria and that the Jerusalem church sent Peter and John down there to baptize converts or whatever, the Bible doesn't say, and thereby exercised authority over her. If the folks Philip baptized became members of the church in Jerusalem, who were the members of the church in Samaria? Either he has a church at Samaria with no members, or he has a church at Samaria whose members have dual church membership. Personally, I have never found the idea of dual church membership in Scripture. The brother wrote, "I am not quibbling about words or terms. I am trying to be concerned about Scriptural concepts and practices!" Can he show us Scriptural concepts and practices that answer the questions I have suggested and restate.

1. If the folks baptized by Philip were members of the Jerusalem assembly, who were the members of the church he found in Samaria?
2. Can a church exist without any scripturally baptized members?
3. If the folks in Samaria were members of the

"Mother" church in Jerusalem and members of the "Daughter" church in Samaria, where is the Scripture for folks holding dual church membership?

There is still another problem. I believe the author of the article claims to be a strictly local church believer. Yet, he has two assemblies here—one meeting in Jerusalem and the other meeting in Samaria—all of whom are members in Jerusalem. This is certainly something other than a local church. Is a church truly local if it has members who regularly, and purposely assemble in two different cities? Is a church truly local if it has members who regularly and purposely congregate in two different countries?

In Hebrews we are admonished be faithful in attendance at the assembling of the church of which we are members. **Hebrews 10:25** *Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.* This verse does not refer to occasionally missing church but to totally absenting one's self from the assembling of the church. According to Strong, the word translated **forsaking**, as used here, means **"totally abandoned, utterly forsaken."** I wonder if any can show any Biblical evidence that the members of the church in Jerusalem who were assembling in Samaria (according to the article they were members in Jerusalem) had ever assembled, or ever did assemble with the church in Jerusalem. Were they members of a church with which they had never assembled? Had they not done worse than totally abandoning and utterly forsaking the assembling? They had never assembled with them the first time as far as any biblical record is concerned. In the effort to prove the authority of Jerusalem over this body of Scripturally baptized believers in Samaria which he himself declares is a church, it would seem the brother has painted himself into a corner on some of his assertions and assumptions.

Another question comes to mind. I believe the Bible teaches that we are to support the church with our tithes and offerings. I am sure the writer would agree. If the folks in Samaria were members in Jerusalem, would they not be supposed to support the church in Jerusalem? If they held dual membership, were they supposed to split their tithes and offerings between the two bodies? I ask again in closing, "If there truly existed a 'Daughter Church' in Samaria, but, the folks baptized by Philip were members in Jerusalem, who were the members of the church in Samaria?"

Next time we will look at the problem of diminishing authority.

(This review will continue next issue, if the Lord wills).

SWALLOW ME UP

Henry Ward Beecher, 1870.

Psalms 57-3 He shall send from heaven, and save me from the reproach of him that would swallow me up. Selah. God shall send forth his mercy and his truth.

Ver. 3. Him that would swallow me up. If I were to take you to my house, and say that I had an exquisite fat man, and wished you to join me in eating him, your indignation could be restrained by nothing. You would pronounce me to be crazy. There is not in New York a man so mean that he would not put down a man who should propose to have a banquet off from a fellow man, cutting steaks out of him, and eating them. And that is nothing but feasting on the human body, while they will all sit down, and take a man's soul, and look for the tender loins, and invite their neighbours in to partake of the little tidbits. They will take a man's honour and name, and broil them over the coals of their indignation, and fill the whole room with the aroma thereof, and give their neighbour a piece, and watch him, and wink as he tastes it. You all eat men up... You eat the souls, the finest elements of men. You are more than glad if you can whisper a word that is derogatory to a neighbour, or his wife, or his daughter... The morsel is too exquisite to be lost. Here is the soul of a person, here is a person's hope for this world and the world to come, and you have it on your fork, and you cannot refrain from tasting it, and give it to some one else to taste. You are

cannibals, eating men's honour and name and rejoicing in it—and that, too, when you do not always know that the things charged against them are true; when in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred the probabilities are that they are not true.

Bouquets and Brickbats

OKLAHOMA: I just read your articles, "Setting The Records Straight" and "My Position Pungently Stated," and want you to be aware of my agreement. I was recently told what you believed and I answered, "That is not my understanding of what he believes at all." I have followed your articles on this issue and had concluded your position to be exactly as you stated it in these two articles. I had concluded, accurately I hope, that your are not even fighting with the way other churches organize, but rather with men trying to force this format upon others as Scriptural necessity. I really do not see how you can be misunderstood, unless it is the desire of the misunderstander to misquote, rather than to openly argue these issues with you.

As I told you before, I carry out the organizing of a church much as Pilgrim's Hope was organized, though with a little less polish and fanfare, but I feel

the format is much more influenced by tradition than by Scripture.

I also question the propriety of one congregation being in subjection to another, that is, "A Mission." I have practiced it because when starting with a group of new converts, or no group at all, and trying to build one, it seems the financial help and thus oversight is practical. However, I know God does not need "Practical," and I have wondered if it may not actually be wrong for any congregation to have authority over another one, even temporarily. I want to do things scripturally and would truly appreciate your prayers in this matter.

Even though I think you may be butting a stone wall, which I have learned is a common defense mechanism in the hearts of many brethren, I do appreciate your courage and forthrightness in dealing with the matter. May God continue to bless your ministry, giving you wisdom to select the right battles and courage to face them scripturally and charitably.

ARKANSAS: Just a few lines to thank you for your paper . . . I have kept your articles on the Promise Keepers, along with a lot of other information. Several people have asked me for copies of the material I have collected. Several of our pastors have gotten deceived by this movement and also some B.M.A. pastors here in the state. It has not been my desire to interfere with a pastor's church but when people ask me about it, I gladly furnish them with ample information about them (PKs).

Also your articles on the beginning of a church have been very good. I passed this information to _____ at _____ where _____ and I are members (But don't get to be there much). He basically agrees with your information.

LOUISIANA: On "Setting the Record Straight" and "My Position Pungently Stated", Keep it up. You will find out that this fight will go on and on for there are those out there that would tag all that do not agree with them as one without the truth.

I have been fighting this fight for 50 years. The sad fact is Brother, they have their mind set and no amount of Scripture will change it. They do not study, nor do they wish to. They will not read Acts 13, that is, read it as it speaks for it would not agree with them.

So fight on, Dear Brother, fight on. Stand fast. The Lord knows who stands right.

Yes, on the Promise Keepers. Right on!!

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