



The Grace Proclamator and Promulgator

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

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WHY WE DO NOT APPLAUD IN WORSHIP

By Laurence A. Justice

Hebrews 12:28-29 *Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: 29 For our God is a consuming fire.*

America is an entertainment society, a culture of show business. The ability to entertain leads to the highest honors in our society. We reward the efforts of our entertainers with applause.

I read the other day about a U.S. Senator who presided over a funeral service and said, “I’m your emcee.” The family of the deceased wept but the Senator and other politicians were loudly applauded.

People today applaud during wedding ceremonies. At our son’s graduation from the university the ceremony was greatly prolonged because every graduate was loudly applauded by his family and friends as he crossed the stage to receive his diploma.

People in today’s churches have a driving desire to be entertained. Entertainment and applause have now come into Christianity and our churches. Today’s Christians thirst constantly for pleasing entertainment.

My brother, Paul Justice, was present at a Baptist youth camp in Oklahoma when several hundred teens made “decisions” during an altar call. When the service had closed the preacher said, “Let’s give these people who have made these decisions a hand!” In many churches the congregations applaud after each hymn that is sung. A friend once told me of attending a baptismal service at the First Southern Baptist

Church of Del City, Oklahoma and as each candidate was raised out of the water the congregation applauded.

In today’s churches musical performances are called worship when in fact they are entertainment. Passion plays and Christmas and Easter pageants are presented each year. Ron Owens, in his book **Return To Worship**, states that more than a hundred million dollars are spent every year by churches in the U.S. for theater productions. (**Editor’s note:** Several years ago, the Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis Tennessee spent about \$275,000 each year putting on a living Christmas tree, as they called it. **RWC**)

Most people now refer to the part of the church auditorium where the preacher stands as **the stage**. This term illustrates how infected the churches have become with the entertainment mentality. This is the vocabulary of the theater. Someone else has said that worship has now

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become a spectator sport like football for which the congregation applauds.

The question of this message is, "Should we applaud in our worship?" The answer of God's word is, "No!" In this message I want to list four reasons why Christians should not applaud in their worship services. Why don't we applaud in worship?

BECAUSE OF WHAT TRUE WORSHIP IS

True worship is biblical worship. And what is

biblical worship?

According to John 4:24 true worship is spiritual worship.

"God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."

Spiritual worship is worship that is authorized by the Holy Spirit in God's word which He has inspired. Spiritual worship is worship that is offered "in the Spirit" or prompted by the Holy Spirit.

Second, biblical worship is Theo centric worship. It is worship that focuses on God. Biblical worship is primarily concerned with the Person of God. True worship focuses on God because God is who he is and what he is, not primarily for what he does for us! God's word again and again calls on people to worship God for his attributes.

David's worship focused on God's great attributes. Look at what David said in I Chronicles 29:10-13. ***"...And David said, Blessed be thou, LORD God of Israel our father, for ever and ever. Thine, O LORD, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O LORD, and thou art exalted as head above all. Both riches and honor come of thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand is power and might; and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all. Now therefore, our God, we thank thee, and praise thy glorious name."***

Some of the many attributes of God's character that call for our worship include:

His holiness. This is God's predominate attribute. God is holy! This means that in him is all moral perfection and purity. It means that in him is the complete absence of all moral impurity and sin. Such is God's holiness that he loves good and hates and abhors all sin and all evil. Psalm 5:5 says that the holy God hates all workers of iniquity and He will cast them into hell for their sins at last if they do not repent. Our text in Hebrews 12:28-29 says we are to serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear because of who He is – holy – which is expressed in the phrase ***"For our God is a consuming fire."***

Psalm 99:9 says we are to worship God for his holiness. ***“Exalt the LORD our God, and worship at his holy hill; for the LORD our God is holy.”***

Another attribute of God that calls for our worship is ***His greatness***. Many verses speak of the greatness of God. Isaiah 57:15 for example says, ***“For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.”***

In Isaiah 66:1 we read of the greatness of God. ***“Thus saith the LORD, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest?”*** Psalm 145:3 says, ***“Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; and his greatness is unsearchable.”*** Psalm 96:3-4 says, ***“Declare his glory among the heathen, his wonders among all people. For the LORD is great, and greatly to be praised: he is to be feared above all gods.”***

A third attribute of God that calls for our worship is ***His majesty***. God's majesty includes all his attributes and actions, everything about his nature and being. Job 37:22b says that ***“... with God is terrible majesty”*** or literally awe-inspiring majesty. Psalm 145:5 also mentions God's great majesty. ***“I will speak of the glorious honor of thy majesty...”*** I Timothy 6:15-16 speaks of God's majesty when it says that God is ***“the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honor and power everlasting. Amen.”***

God is also to be worshipped for his actions. Psalm 145:4 says, ***“One generation shall praise thy works to another, and shall declare thy mighty acts.”*** One of God's actions is his creation of all things. God is the Creator of all things and thus ***should be worshipped as the Creator.*** Look at Psalm 95:6. ***“O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker.”*** Revelation 14:7

tells of the worship of God by an angel flying across the heavens. ***“Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.”***

God should be worshipped for his actions in ***providing salvation for sinners.*** God acted in behalf of sinners for their salvation. In Galatians 4:4-5 the apostle Paul praises God for acting to save sinners by sending forth his divine Son to redeem those who were under the condemnation of the law. ***“But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.”***

The focus of the great hymns of the faith is on God, His attributes and His actions. These are hymns like Holy, Holy, Holy, Alas and Did My Savior Bleed, O God Our Help In Ages Past, Immortal, Invisible God Only Wise and A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.

Until we come to have a spiritual understanding of the God of the Bible who is the Creator, and who acted to provide redemption of sin in his Son Jesus Christ, who is holy and great and majestic in His Being we will never experience true biblical worship. The better we know God the more capable we are of worshipping him in the proper manner.

Today's preachers don't preach the God of the Bible; holy, hating sin, sending judgment on sin, sovereign in salvation, infinitely great and majestic! Instead of focusing on God's attributes and actions they focus on entertainment. People are ready for entertainment and applause and irreverence in today's churches ***because they do not know who God is!*** They do not know the God of the Bible!

The main purpose of worship is not evangelizing the lost nor the edification of God's people nor the entertaining of the worshippers. It is the glorification of God! Worship, to be biblical, must focus on God. In worship we must ***“Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name...”***

God's word not only defines worship, it also tells us how to worship. It tells us the proper

style of worship. The style of our worship is not neutral and optional! Our worship style, like everything else, is under the Lordship of Christ. God's word is our only rule of faith and practice. Thus it is our only rule for how we do worship. God is not to be worshipped in any other way than that prescribed in the word of God and what is not commanded or exemplified in scripture is forbidden in worship. God is honored **only** as we worship him according to the instructions he gives in his word.

Many people say that if God's word does not forbid something in worship then that thing is permitted but it is the opposite that is true! A scripture that is relevant here is Mark 7:7-8. Here the Lord Jesus is speaking of the Pharisees when he says, "**Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do.**" God knows better than we how he wants to be worshipped and he has not left us to guess what he wants us to do. Everything we do in worship must have either a biblical command or precedent. We must stop doing everything in our worship for which we do not have a solid biblical basis.

Without God's word to give us boundaries the churches have no problem with bringing their own ideas of style into their worship. And that is just what is happening today. People are bringing all kinds of their own ideas into their worship. Many times people defend bringing new and unbiblical practices into worship by saying they are sincere in doing so and surely God will consider their sincerity! But God will not judge us in the last day by our sincerity! He will judge us by the words of Christ. Look at John 12:48. "**He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.**"

The modern view of worship as entertainment certainly goes contrary to the idea of worship that our Baptist forefathers had. For example chapter XXII of the Baptist Philadelphia Confession of Faith says, "...the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted

by himself and so limited by his own revealed will that he may not be worshipped according to the imaginations of man...(or)...any other way not prescribed in the holy scriptures."

J.R. Graves in his booklet *What Is Conscience* says of God that "...He has left no religious act or rite of worship...to be determined by our tastes, conveniences or feelings. Every thing, the least as well as the greatest, Christ has most carefully taught and commanded, and for us to say we have a right to alter or modify by adding or taking away something that we think will do as well, is open rebellion, and is 'as the sin of witchcraft.'"

Why don't we applaud in worship? Secondly

BECAUSE BIBLICAL WORSHIP CALLS FOR GREAT REVERENCE

The word reverence has within its meaning to fall down or to prostrate the body or to kiss the hand. Reverence is a condition of heart that expresses itself in outward activities. Reverence is an attitude, a spirit. It includes in its meaning to fear, to be afraid of, to revere, to respect. We are to have a special attitude in the worship of God, the attitude of reverence. God must be approached with awe and reverence. Reverence comes from an appreciation of God's majesty.

The scriptures command us to be reverent in our worship! Look at Psalm 89:7. "**God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him.**" Habakkuk 2:20 speaks of this attitude of reverence when we come into the presence of God. "**...The LORD is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him.**" Our text in Hebrews 12:28-29 speaks of this reverence in worship. "**...Let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear...**"

The first chapter of the book of Revelation tells about the apostle John who was in prison on the isle of Patmos. While there he saw something of the glory and greatness of Christ.

He saw the Lord and His eyes were like a flame of fire and his feet were like brass. His hair was like wool and his voice was like the sound of many waters. A sharp two-edged sword went out of his mouth and his face shined like the brightest sun. When John saw Him he fell at the Lord's feet like a dead man. Brother, John had no thought of entertainment here! There was no joking and playing around here! Reverent worship excludes entertainment and frivolity and superficiality in our worship!

In much of today's worship there is no spirit of reverence for the person of the God we profess to worship. In fact the conduct in much modern worship is absolutely scandalous! Reverence, or the lack of it, shows what the worshippers really think of God! Those who really know God are reverent in his presence! Until we understand God and his ways as revealed in scripture we will never worship with the proper reverence!

Why don't we applaud in worship?

BECAUSE GODS WORD DOES NOT CALL FOR APPLAUSE IN WORSHIP

Historically we Baptists have claimed that the Bible is our only rule of faith and practice. We have believed that we must have a clear biblical support for every element in worship. So, is there a New Testament command or precedent for applauding in our worship? With all the details about worship in the New Testament surely applause would have been mentioned if it were required or important! The fact is that the idea of applauding or clapping does not occur in the New Testament. The word clap does not appear in the New Testament. The silence of the New Testament concerning applause in worship is overwhelming. God's word says nothing of applauding in worship but today's worshippers too often are determined to worship God as they please and bring in applause. God will not allow anything in his worship that is not prescribed in his own word!

Why don't we applaud in worship?

BECAUSE APPLAUSE IS MOST OFTEN DIRECTED TO MEN INSTEAD OF TO GOD

Entertainers who perform for those whom

they are entertaining, feed on and are greatly gratified by applause! The thrill of applause and the glory of moments in the limelight can now be found in the churches as much as in the world. Applauding the music or the preacher gives credit and appreciation to the singer or preacher rather than to God!

The primary purpose of worship is to glorify God, not the enjoyment of the worshippers. True worship exalts God at the expense of man. The gospel tends to stain the pride of man, to humble the creature and to exalt the riches of God's grace. The gospel prevents men from glorying in anything in themselves. It excludes all our boasting. The only applause we are to seek is that of God for us. Does your singing or playing or preaching glorify God or yourself?

CONCLUSION

Let us reject these modern styles of worship as entertainment! Let us reject the applause, the performance and let us follow the biblical guidelines for worship! True worshippers should *never* applaud in worship! No matter what a person means when he applauds, it is never appropriate to applaud in worship!

Are you worshipping biblically? Or, are you including the inventions of man in your worship? If you are attempting to worship God using the inventions of man such as applauding, repent of this, change your worship to conform to that prescribed in God's word! You can't do this on your own! By nature men do not fear or honor or reverence God! They hate the God of the Bible! God in his grace must give us this reverence if we would ever worship him acceptably! Our text in Hebrews 12:28-29 says we need grace to worship God acceptably. ***"...Let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God is a consuming fire."***

ALASKA: Greetings in the blessed name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Just finished reading your message entitled "Does God Control All Events, Things and People?" Amen! Amen! Thank you, dear brother, for publishing that sermon. How encouraging to those who believe God's eternal word!

THE CUP OF WRATH!

By Andrew Bonar

"In the hand of the LORD is a cup full of red wine mixed with spices; He pours it out, and all the wicked of the earth drink it down to its very dregs!" Psalm 75:8

There has been only *One* who has ever drunk this cup down to its very dregs! *Cain* has been drinking it for 5,000 years and finds that his punishment greater than he can bear--but has not come to the *dregs*.

Judas had been drinking it for some 2000 years, often crying out with a groan that shakes Hell, "Oh that I had never been born! Oh that I had never seen or heard of the Lord Jesus Christ!" But he has not reached the *dregs*. The *fallen angels* have not come near the *dregs*--for they have not arrived at the judgment of the Great Day.

The only *One* who has taken, tasted, drunk, and wrung out the bitterest of the bitter *dregs*--has been the *Judge Himself*, the Lord Jesus!

You know how often, when on earth, He spoke of it. ***"Are you able to drink the cup that I shall drink of?" (Matthew 20:22). "The cup which My Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?" (John 18:11).***

The universe saw Him with it at His lips. It was *our* cup of trembling; the cup in which the wrath due to His people was mixed. What wrath, what woe! A *few drops* made Him cry, ***"Now is my soul deeply troubled!"*** In the garden, the *sight* of it wrung out the strange, mysterious words, ***"My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death!"*** Though God-man, He staggered at what He saw, and went on trembling.

The next day, on Calvary, *He drank it all!* I suppose the three hours of darkness may have been the time when He was drinking it down the very *dregs*; for then arose from His broken heart, the wail which so appealed to the heart of the Father, ***"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me!"*** As He drank the *last drop*, and cried out, ***"It is finished!"*** we may believe that the angels felt an inconceivable relief--and even the Father Himself! So tremendous was the wrath and curse!--the wrath and curse due to

our sin!

Jesus drank that cup as the substitute for His innumerable people, given Him by the Father; and thereby freed them from ever tasting even *one drop* of that fierce wrath, that "cup of red wine, mixed with spices," with its *dregs*--its unknown terrors!

"Death and the curse were in our cup,
O Christ, 'twas full for Thee!
But Thou hast drained the last dark drop,
'Tis empty now for me!"

*"Once it was mine, that cup of wrath,
And Jesus drank it dry!"*

MANY TIMES JESUS AND HIS PEOPLE PULL AGAINST ONE ANOTHER IN PRAYER

By Charles Spurgeon

"Father, I will that those also, whom You have given Me--be with Me where I am." John 17:24

O *death!* why do you touch the *tree* beneath whose spreading branches, weariness has rest? Why do you snatch away the *excellent* of the earth, in whom is all your delight? If you must use your *axe*--use it upon the trees which yield no fruit--you might be thanked then. But why will you strike down the *goodly cedars* of Lebanon? O stay your *axe*--and spare the righteous!

But no, it must not be! Death smites the goodliest of our friends! The most generous, the most prayerful, the most holy, the most devoted--must die. And why? It is through Jesus' prevailing prayer, ***"Father, I will that those also, whom You have given Me--be with Me where I am."*** It is Jesus' prayer which bears them on eagle's wings to heaven. Every time a believer mounts from this earth to paradise--it is *an answer to Christ's prayer*.

A good old divine remarks, ***"Many times Jesus and His people pull against one another in prayer.*** You bend your knee in prayer and say 'Father, I will that Your saints be *with me* where I am'; Christ says, ***'Father, I will***

that those also, whom You have given Me--be with Me where I am." Thus the disciple is at *cross-purposes* with his Lord. The soul cannot be in *both* places--the beloved one cannot be with Christ, and with you too.

Now, *which pleader* shall win the day? If you had your choice; if the King should step from His throne, and say, "Here are two supplicants praying in opposition to one another--which shall be answered?" Oh! I am sure, though it were agony, you would start from your feet, and say, "Jesus, not my will--but may Yours be done!" You would give up your prayer for your loved one's life, if you could realize the thoughts that Christ is praying in the opposite direction, **"Father, I will that those also, whom You have given Me--be with Me where I am."** Lord, You shall have them. By faith, I will let them go!

EDITORIAL

THE KIND OF OLD LANDMARKER I AM

(First in a series published 12 years ago)

I am the kind of **Old Landmarker** who believes in a truly local church and only in the local church. I believe that to be truly local, a church must assemble in **one place**. As one **Old Landmarker** wrote, **"The ecclesia of the New Testament could, and was required to assemble in one place."**

In preparing to write this series of editorials, and in an effort to determine what are truly Landmark principles and what tenets have been added to the doctrine I have been doing a good deal of reading of **Old Landmarkers** to see what they set forth as **"Old Landmarkism."** I have also consulted others who were advocates of the local church only position.

Recently, I was reading **"Old Landmarkism—What Is It?"** by the late J. R. Graves. Surely no one will dispute the fact that Graves was a Landmark Baptist. In chapter three of that work, Graves was showing that the New Testament church was a local assembly. He first sets forth the Catholic and Protestant concepts of the **ecclesia** and then proceeds to show the Baptist belief concerning the church of the New Testament. In that discussion, Graves took the position that an **ecclesia MUST** assemble in one place.

"The ecclesia of the New Testament could, and was required to assemble in one place. This is impossible for a universal or invisible church to do. It was often required to assemble. (Matt. 18: 17; I Cor. 11:18; 14:23.) Discipline, baptism and the Lord's Supper could only be administered by the assembled church." (Old Landmarkism, P. 40).

Lest I be charged with taking Graves out of context, I am here presenting the context of the statement just quoted:

The third is the Baptist, or scriptural theory; viz., the church is a local organization. This implies that the primitive model was a single congregation, complete in itself, independent of all other bodies, civil or religious, and the highest and only source of ecclesiastical authority on earth, amenable only to Christ, whose laws alone it receives and executes—not possessing the authority or right to *enact* or *modify* the least law or ordinance, or to discipline a member, save for the violation of what Christ himself has enjoined. This church acknowledges no body of men on earth, council, conference or assembly as its head, but Christ alone, who is invisible, as "head over all things" to it.

PROOFS.—1. *The term ecclesia itself.*—The Holy Spirit selected the Greek word, *ecclesia*, which had but *one* possible literal meaning to the Greek—that of a *local* organization.

2. *New Testament use.*—It is used in the New Testament 110 times, referring to the Christian institution, and in 100 of these it undoubtedly refers to a local organization; and in the remaining 10 instances it is used *figuratively*—by *synecdoche*—where a part is put for the whole, the singular for the plural, one for all. In each of these instances what is true of all the churches is true of any one—*e. g.*, Ephesians 1:22; 3:10; 21:5, 23, 24, 25, 27, 29, 32; Colossians 1:18. There is no occasion whatever for any *misapprehension* touching this

use, nor is there one passage that affords the shadow of a ground for the idea of an invisible church in heaven, any more than for a huge universal, national or provincial church on earth, but a multitude of passages preclude the idea.

3. *Ecclesia in the plural.*—It is used in the plural thirty-six times, which fact is demonstrative that the universal or provincial idea was not then known.

4. *The ecclesia of the New Testament could, and was required to assemble in one place.*—This is impossible for a universal or invisible church to do. It was often required to assemble. (Matthew 18:17; 1 Cor. 11:18; 14:23.) Discipline, baptism and the Lord's Supper could only be administered by the assembled church.

5. *Ecclesia in a single city and house.*—"Unto the church of God which is at Corinth" (1 Cor. 1:2); "the church which was at Jerusalem" (Acts 11:22); "the churches of Asia salute you;" "Aquila and Priscilla salute you much in the Lord with the church that is in their house" (1 Cor. 16:19). "Salute . . . Nymphas and the church which is in his house" (Col. 4:15); "and to the church in thy house" (Philem. 2). Now a complete church was composed of the members of these individual households, and, probably, a few others, and were wont stately to meet in the houses of these brethren for worship and the transaction of business, and it is certain that it could have been nothing else than a *local society*.

6. *Historical testimony.*—The earliest writers knew nothing of an invisible, universal or provincial church.

CLEMENT, A. D. 217.—"To the church of God which sojourns at Rome;" "To the church of God sojourning at Corinth."

Eusebius referring to this epistle says: "There is one acknowledged epistle of this Clement, great and admirable, which he wrote

in the name of the *church of Rome* to the *church of Corinth*; sedition then having arisen in the latter church. We are aware that this epistle has been publicly read in *very many churches*—both in old times, also in our day."

IRENAEUS, A.D. 175-200—"For the churches which have been planted in Germany do not believe or hand down any thing different; nor do those [*i.e.*, churches] in Spain; nor those in Gaul; nor those in the East; nor those in Egypt; nor those in Lybia; nor those which have been established in the central regions of the world."

TERTULLIAN, A.D. 150.—Expressed the idea of a Christian church in his day in these words: "Three are sufficient to form a church, although they be laymen."

GIESLER.—Of the churches of the first and second centuries, says: "All congregations were independent of one another" (Vol. 1, chap. 3).

MOSHEIM.—"During a great part of this [second] century all the churches continued to be, as at first, independent of each other; . . . each church was a kind of little independent republic" (Vol. 1, p. 142).

Dr. OWEN.—"In no approved writer for two hundred years after Christ is mention made of any organized, visibly professing church except a *local congregation*" (By Crowell, in "Chap. Man., p. 36).

No fact is better established than this, and therefore the various Catholic and Protestant organizations can lay no just claim to be patterned after the apostolic model; and, according to Bishop Doggett's axioms, should not be considered or called Christian churches. (*Old Landmarkism—What Is It?*, J. R. Graves, Baptist Sunday School Committee, 1928, Pp. 40-42).

Grave's *Old Landmarkism* (Second Edition) was published in 1880. Did he change his mind about the necessity of a true church of Christ assembling in one place? In 1884 he published

The New Great Iron Wheel. In that monumental exposure of the ecclesiological errors of Methodism, Graves wrote again of the fact that a true New Testament type of ecclesia assembles in only one place, not two or several. The following quotes are from this later work and they show that Graves still held the same position on this matter. [Note: In the following quotes, the double underlined emphases are those of this editor. All other emphases are those of Eld. Graves.]

First. Let us first carefully notice the **structural characteristics of a N. T. Church.**

The first thing that strikes us in reading the Scriptures is

1. *That the N. T. Churches were assemblies or congregations.*

By this I mean such bodies as **could assemble, every member of them in one place;** for we find that they were commanded both by Christ and his apostles to frequently do this, — and that they did do it, for various purposes, and that every thing required of the Church was done by the **individual** local assembly, not by representatives, but by the **whole Church,** as a church acting organically. Therefore, each assembly was a **complete** Church, and being complete in itself, it was independent of all other like bodies in other localities, and being each independent it was divinely invested with **all the powers and prerogatives of a Church of Christ.**

From the above I am warranted in formulating this definition:—

A Scriptural Church is (1) a local organized assembly, (2) of professedly believing and truly baptized persons, (3) consisting of the ministers and lay men living in or near the same place, (4) organized upon terms of equality in all Church privileges, and (5) in conformity with the governmental and doctrinal teachings of Christ and his apostles, (6) united in covenant with Christ and each other for the maintenance of his worship, doctrines, and ordinances, and the universal promulgation of his Gospel; (7)

each body being complete in itself and absolutely independent of all other organizations.

A local or single assembly alone can meet in one place and act together-organically.

The term *ekklesia*, selected by Christ, has but this one meaning—an assembly, an **organized** assembly,—and in its religious sense, always an **organized congregation** of professed Christians. When I say that it has but this one specific natural or literal meaning, I do not deny that it is some times used in a **figurative** or **secondary** sense, for I know not a term in any language that is not used **figuratively, but I do assert that figurative uses of words are not definitions of those words,** else there is no limit to the meaning of words. Take the familiar text "to eat," we say, the rust eats the iron. Is "to rust," then, a definition of to eat? "men say, he is immersed in debt," in "troubles," "in wine," etc., does "to immerse" then, mean to contract debts, undergo troubles or to drink copiously of wine?

So a **few** and, considering the number of the uses of *ekklesia* in the N. T., a **very few** instances of the figurative uses of this word are found—as where the singular is used for the plural,—a part for the whole. In justification of this I call your attention to the fact that the term **Church,** is used in a religious sense as referring to Church institutions one hundred and ten times in the New Testament and ninety-six times it confessedly refers to a local organized assembly, that could, and did, and was required to assemble in one place and act organically.

The irresistible conclusion from this is that a religious organization that can not assemble in one place, and all its members act as a unit, can not be a Scriptural Ekklesia or Church of Christ!!! (*The New Great Iron Wheel*, J. R. Graves, Originally published 1884, Baptist Sunday School Committee republished 1928, Pp.

125-127)

Scriptural features. The Apostolic churches embraced their elders and deacons—were composed of all the ministers and laymen in a given place or locality. (*Ibid.*, P. 131).

Let me note again the statements I have emphasized in these quotes from Graves. He said, “. . . **every member of them in one place**”. Not two places or three or more places! Not every member of the one ecclesia that assemble in Arkansas, Mexico, and Brazil. But, **“every member of them”** that assemble **“in one place.”** Surely a wayfaring man, though a fool can understand what Graves meant.

Again we saw that Graves held that a New Testament kind of church was **“a local organized assembly.”** This does not allow for an alleged local assembly that is not local but interstate or even international.

Graves also indicated that an ecclesia of the New Testament type was a local organized assembly **“consisting of the ministers and lay men living in or near the same place.”** Graves did not believe that a local organized assembly could consist of some members living and assembling in Jerusalem, some members living and assembling in Antioch, and some members living and assembling in Ephesus. This was one of the errors that he was pointing out concerning the Methodist Episcopal Church, South in ***The New Great Iron Wheel***.

Graves also insisted that to be a true ecclesia, **“A local or single assembly alone can meet in one place and act together—organically.”** Could Graves have made it any clearer than this? A local or **SINGLE** assembly is the only kind that can meet in one place and act together—organically.

Graves says that the word ecclesia is used 110 times in the New Testament of church institutions and that 96 of those times it refers to **“a local organized assembly, that could, and did, and was required to assemble in one place and act organically.”** It should be unequivocally obvious to the simplest of minds that Graves did

not believe the members of a church could assemble in more than one place for worship and service and be a true New Testament type of ecclesia. To the ***Old Landmarker***, J. R. Graves local assembly meant just that, local assembly.

Graves did not stop there. He argued that **“a religious organization that can not assemble in one place, and all its members act as a unit, can not be a Scriptural Ekklesia or Church of Christ!!!** Need I comment? I think it unnecessary. Graves position is unequivocally clear. A local assembly is a local assembly is a local assembly! It is an ecclesia that assembles in one place with all its members acting as a unit, and if it cannot or does not do that it does not qualify as a true New Testament kind of ecclesia.

Finally, the ***Old Landmarker***, James Robinson Graves, declared that the Apostolic churches **“were composed of all the ministers and laymen in a given place or locality.”** Graves did not buy the notion that a true New Testament type of ecclesia (a local church) could have some ministers/minister and laymen who assemble in Ohio, other ministers/minister and laymen who assemble in Tennessee, other ministers/minister and laymen who assemble in Mexico, other ministers/minister and laymen who assemble in Korea.

If J. R. Graves were alive today, he would probably be calling for some Baptist churches that wear the Landmark name to return to this distinctive of ***Old Landmarkism***—**“The ecclesia of the New Testament could, and was required to assemble in one place.”**

Please note again the statement I made in the beginning. **“I believe that to be truly local, a church must assemble in one place.”** Note also the statement of J. R. Graves, the author of ***Old Landmarkism—What Is It?*** **“The ecclesia of the New Testament could, and was required to assemble in one place.”**

Graves was giving the marks of a true ecclesia in the New Testament sense. He said, **“The ecclesia of the New Testament could, and was required to assemble in one place.”**

This is not something new that I have recently espoused. I have pointed out on these pages in past issues that to be truly local in nature, a church must assemble in one place, not in two or

more places. In October, 1998, I wrote, "According to the popular tradition, if Antioch were not an independent church at this time, Paul and Barnabas would still be members at Jerusalem. If, in fact, Antioch was not truly a church at this time, the entire assembly, according to the tradition, would be members of the international church that was headquartered in Jerusalem. Antioch would only be a branch of the body in Jerusalem. Therefore, it seems the Holy Spirit would have instructed Jerusalem [rather than Antioch] to send forth these missionaries whom he had called."

Again I wrote in the same issue, "It is unequivocally evident that the church in Antioch was a local, visible, independent, autonomous body carrying out the Lord's work, not some distant part of a dissected, divided, international body headquartered in Jerusalem."

In November, 1997, I wrote the following,

The question is, ***"Is A Church Truly Local When It Has Congregations Meeting In Several Different Locations?"*** According to current tradition, when a church sends forth a missionary he goes where the Lord has called him to go and to which his sponsoring church sends him, preaches the gospel, and baptizes those who are saved into the church back home. Let me set up a scenario of how this may work. Pilgrims Hope is a local, visible church of the Lord Jesus Christ which meets in Memphis, Tennessee, more specifically, at 3084 Woodrow St., Memphis, Tennessee. We assemble visibly each Sunday morning and evening, and Wednesday evening (except on rare occasions).

Let's suppose that in time, PHBC sends a missionary to Canada who sets up a "mission", in time some are saved and baptized into PHBC. This "mission" that assembles regularly in Canada is, according to the current tradition, said to be a part of the local, visible assembly at 3084 Woodrow, Memphis, TN. We then send a missionary to Mexico and he does as the missionary in Canada. We send yet another to some city in Africa, and another to India, and then another to the Philippines. All of these make disciples, baptize those disciples, and

hold regular assemblies in their respective localities. But, they cannot be called a local, visible assembly because they have not yet been organized into a church and are members of the local (?), visible assembly which regularly assembles at 3084 Woodrow, Memphis, TN.

A part of PHBC assembles in Canada; a part of PHBC assembles in Mexico; a part of PHBC assembles in Africa; a part of PHBC assembles in India; and, yet another part of PHBC assembles in the Philippines. Pilgrims Hope Baptist Church is no longer a local assembly, it is an international assembly which regularly assembles in several different countries. How could we claim to be a local, visible assembly when we are actually six local assemblies which meet in six different countries? How can we claim to be a visible assembly when we are actually six visible assemblies which may be seen in six different countries. To the congregation in Canada, the assembly in Memphis is not visible. To the congregation in Mexico none of the other five are visible. There is a sense then in which Pilgrims Hope has ceased to be a visible assembly.

A VERY GENEROUS GIFT FROM A VERY MISSION MINDED CONGREGATION

I was preparing a sermon when my phone rang. The person calling asked, "Would you be interested in a 2003 Buick LeSabre with only about 55,000 miles on it?" Since my 2001 Buick LeSabre had 284,000 miles on it and my wife and I had been discussing replacing it, I was certainly interested. I asked how much was being asked for the automobile. To my great surprise Pastor J. C. Fulton responded something to this effect, "Coweta Baptist Church will buy it for you if you want it."

I was overwhelmed so much that I am not sure that I'm giving an exact word for word of the conversation. In 55 years in the ministry such a thing had never happened to me.

Churches that I pastored were very good to me but none had ever bought me an automobile. I was scheduled to go to Oklahoma about Roythree weeks later so I determined we would pick up the car at that time. Ruth and I are trying to decide on whether to rent a car that we could leave in Oklahoma or should we drive our car out there and drive two cars back.

Shortly before we were to make the trip, Brother Fulton called me again and told me to get tickets to fly to Tulsa, Oklahoma, and the church would also pay for the tickets.

We made reservations and flew to Tulsa at the appointed time. When we arrived at the airport a couple from the church met us with the car. It looked like a brand-new automobile as you can see from the picture below. When we got in it and were driving to a restaurant where Brother Roy and his wife were taking us for dinner, I was absolutely amazed and how quiet the car was. I had gradually become accustomed to the sound of our old car and did not realize it was as noisy as it was. Of course, in 284,000 miles, an engine gets a little loose and the body develops a few rattles.

Let me again express our heartfelt gratitude to the Coweta Baptist Church for their generosity. According to his promises, I am sure God will greatly bless this congregation and pastor for what they have done. ***Hebrews 6:10 For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.***



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