

# The Church

## Article VI

A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is an autonomous local congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel; observing the two ordinances of Christ, governed by His laws, exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by His Word, and seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth. Each congregation operates under the Lordship of Christ through democratic processes. In such a congregation each member is responsible and accountable to Christ as Lord. Its scriptural officers are pastors and deacons. While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture.

The New Testament speaks also of the church as the Body of Christ which includes all of the redeemed of all the ages, believers from every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation.

*Matthew 16:15-19; 18:15-20; Acts 2:41-42,47; 5:11-14; 6:3-6; 13:1-3; 14:23,27; 15:1-30; 16:5; 20:28; Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 3:16; 5:4-5; 7:17; 9:13-14; 12; Ephesians 1:22-23; 2:19-22; 3:8-11,21; 5:22-32; Philippians 1:1; Colossians 1:18; 1 Timothy 2:9-14; 3:1-15; 4:14; Hebrews 11:39-40; 1 Peter 5:1-4; Revelation 2-3; 21:2-3.*

### **Key Text:**

**Matthew 16:15-19:** “He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter answered and said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus answered and said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed *this* to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”

**Matthew 18:15-20:** “Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that *‘by the mouth of two or three witnesses every*

*word may be established.* ' And if he refuses to hear them, tell *it* to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector. "Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. "Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."

**Acts 2:41-42, 47:** "Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added *to them*. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved."

**1 Corinthians 3:16:** "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and *that* the Spirit of God dwells in you?"

**Ephesians 1:22-23:** "And He put all *things* under His feet, and gave Him *to be* head over all *things* to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all."

**Ephesians 3:14, 20-21:** "For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen."

**Ephesians 5:22-32**

**Colossians 1:18:** "And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence."

**1 Timothy 3:1-13**

**Titus 1:5-9:** "For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you— if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination. For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict."

**1 Peter 5:1-4:** "The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away."

**Revelation 7:9-10:** “After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, “Salvation *belongs* to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”

### **Theological Observations**

The Church of the Lord Jesus was conceived with the calling of the apostles and birthed on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). Its nature and mission is revealed in the New Testament. Note that there are no Old Testament references in the *BF&M 2000*.

Scripture reveals the church’s form of government, its officers, its ordinances, its mission and its laws. The doctrine of the church is a revealed doctrine.

The New Testament teaches congregational church government. Such verses as Matthew 18:17; Acts 2:15-23; 6:2-6; 15:22; 1 Corinthians 5:12-13; 2 Corinthians 2:6; and Revelation 2:2, 14-16, 20 place the authority for discipline, doctrine and government in the members jointly.

Each church is a “Christo-democracy” operating under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. It is an “autonomous local congregation.” All the members jointly have responsibility to do everything that Christ commanded the churches to do and should govern the church by his laws. Thus a regenerate church and viable church membership is biblical and it matters.

The New Testament requires that the churches admit those alone who are qualified. Belief in Christ and a scriptural baptism are prerequisites to membership. Church membership is a privilege not a right.

Believers become a church of Jesus Christ when they jointly pledge to be a church

of Jesus Christ. Implicitly or explicitly (it ought to be explicit), they covenant together in the faith and fellowship of the gospel. To covenant in the faith includes teaching and upholding the truths of the gospel.

Each congregation is responsible under Christ to interpret Bible truth, proclaim it and defend it. This is not possible unless they agree together on the central truths of Scripture and gather these truths into a confession of faith (e.g. *The BF&M 2000*).

To covenant together in the fellowship of the gospel implies agreement to maintain the discipline by which Christ intended the preservation of fellowship. The discipline includes admitting those only who credibly confess faith in Christ as Savior and Lord; correcting, warning and rebuking those who stray from truth or righteousness; excluding those who refuse the church's loving entreaties to return to the path of truth and righteousness; and restoring the repentant to fellowship (Matt 18; 1 Cor 5; 2 Cor 2; Titus 3).

Other church duties include maintaining the two church observances ordained by Christ – baptism and the Lord's Supper (see Article 7) – and exercising spiritual gifts in the congregation for mutual edification.

Christ has also given the churches their mission (Matt 28:18-20; Acts 1:8; 2:40-47; Eph 4:1-16). They are to seek to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth (see Article 11). Christ gave this mission to the churches, not to boards, conventions and/or agencies.

Churches can better fulfill this mission by cooperating together and establishing such efficient channels as boards and conventions. But each congregation bears the responsibility to advance the gospel to the ends of the earth.

Boards and conventions are not the church; they are merely means to accomplish

the church's mission. There is no Southern Baptist Church or North Carolina Baptist Church. Conventions are the creation of the churches and subject to them.

Christ has ordained pastors (also called elders, bishops) and deacons as the officers of his churches. The churches elect and appoint persons who fulfill the scriptural qualifications for these offices. Qualified men alone may serve the office of elder. The gender of those serving in the office of deacon is not addressed.

Throughout history, Baptists have affirmed ecclesiology or the doctrine of the church as a major distinctive separating them from other Christian groups. *The Baptist Faith and Message* expresses explicitly and implicitly the distinctive Baptist understanding of the church, the people of God.

First, the *BF&M* identifies the church as a spiritual organism. The word "church" translates the New Testament word "*ekklesia*." The word took on the meaning of God's people. 1) The church exists by the initiative of God, the one who calls sinners to Himself. 2) The church is a people gathered by the Holy Spirit. God has called the church out from the world; consequently, the church is a people separated from the world. 3) God called the church unto Himself; the church is a people commissioned to serve the living Lord. The purpose of the commissioned people of God is to "extend the Gospel to the ends of the earth." And the church is people, not a building, a denomination, or a mere religious institution.

Second, the *BF&M* characterizes the church as a believers' church—"a local congregation of baptized believers." The nature of the church as a believers' church necessitates a regenerate church membership. In other words, salvation must precede church membership. John Hammett, professor of theology at Southeastern Seminary,

identifies regenerate church membership as the Baptist mark of the church. To this I would add the word rightly preached, the ordinances properly administered and a disciplined body.

As a corollary to regenerate church membership, the *BF&M* affirms a believers' church is a covenanted community— “associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel.” The term “covenant” involves the making of promises of commitment to God and each other. Throughout Baptist history, the church covenant rather than a constitution functioned as the “basic church document.” The *BF&M* describes two areas in which church members make promises— “the faith and fellowship of the Gospel.” “The faith” provides the doctrinal unity of the church (Eph. 4:1-6). “Fellowship is partnership in spreading the Gospel message.

Third, the *BF&M* sets forth the ideal of a Christ-centered church. As stated earlier, “Christocentricism” is the governing principle of congregational church life. The *BF&M* contains four expressions of this Christocentric principle of congregationalism. First, the *BF&M* identifies the “church of [belonging to] the Lord Jesus Christ.” Second, the church is “governed by His laws.” Third, “each congregation operates under the Lordship of Christ.” Fourth, “each member is responsible and accountable to Jesus as Lord.” The church operates through democratic processes, but it is not a mere democracy. The autonomy (literally, “self-law”) of the local church means the freedom of each church to obey Christ unhindered by external human constraints, including other ecclesiastical or religious bodies.

The New Testament describes the church exercising the Lordship of Christ through congregationalism. The church in Jerusalem selected servant leaders (Acts 6:3, 5); the

church in Antioch set apart Paul and Barnabas for mission (Acts 13:2-3); each church is responsible for maintaining true doctrine (Gal 1:1-10; Rev. 2-3); and each church disciplines its members (Matt. 18:17; 1 Cor. 5:4-5; 2 Cor. 2:6-7).

Again, the officers, or leaders of a congregational church are pastors (elders) and deacons. Pastors are the shepherds, responsible for the feeding, protection, and care of God's people. The term "deacon" literally means "servant." Deacons function as the servant leaders of the Body of Christ (1 Tim 3:8-13).

Fourth, the *BF&M* briefly outlines an eschatological church. The local church is the concrete, visible, expression of the church. The local church is the primary emphasis of the New Testament. The *BFM* also refers to the eschatological church, the redeemed of all ages.

## KEY BIBLICAL TEXTS - ECCLESIOLOGY

Vision of the Church	Role of Women in the Church	Lord's Supper	Christian Giving
Matthew 28:18-20 Acts 2:42-47 Ephesians 4:11-16  ✓ Exaltation ✓ Edification ✓ Evangelism	Acts 18:26; 21:9 Romans 16:1-2 1 Cor. 11:2-16; 14:34-35 Galatians 3:28 1 Timothy 2:9-15 Titus 2:3-5 Proverbs 31:10-31	Matthew 26:26-28 Mark 14:22-26 Luke 22:19-20 1 Cor. 11:23-24; 10:15	1 Cor. 16:1-4 2 Cor. 8-9 Gal. 6:6-10
Officers in the Church	Church Discipline	Baptism	Preaching
<u>Pastor</u> Acts 20:28-30 1 Tim. 3:1-7 Titus 1:9 1 Peter 5:1-4  <u>Deacons</u> Acts 6:1-6 1 Tim. 3:8-13	Matthew 18:15-20 1 Cor. 5 2 Cor. 2:5-11 Galatians 6:1-2 Titus 3:9-11	Matt. 28:18-20 Acts 2:38-40 Romans 6	1 Cor. 2:1-5 2 Tim. 4:1-5 Titus 1:1-4



## Section 4: Membership Covenant

Following is the Membership Covenant which in general outlines the responsibilities of membership at Wake Cross Roads Baptist Church.

“Having been led, as we believe, by the Spirit of God to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior, and on the profession of our faith, having been baptized by immersion with believer’s baptism in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, we do now in the presence of God and this assembly, most solemnly and joyfully enter into covenant with one another as one Body in Christ:

- TO commit ourselves as members to honor, esteem, and love our staff and one another;
- TO pray for each other constantly and to manifest tender regard for our reputation;
- TO walk together in Christian love by the aid of the Holy Spirit; to strive for the advancement of this Church and its ministries; to promote its prosperity and spirituality; to sustain its worship, ordinances, discipline and doctrines;
- TO contribute cheerfully and regularly to the support of the ministry, the expenses of the Church, the relief of those in need, and the spread of the gospel throughout all nations; and to manage all the resources God has entrusted to us in such a way that He is glorified;
- TO encourage family and private devotions; to educate our children religiously; to seek the salvation of our relatives, friends and neighbors;
- TO encourage each other to abstain from all drugs, food, intoxicating drink, and practices which bring unwarranted harm to the body or jeopardize our own or another’s faith.
- TO walk worthy of our calling in the world; to be just in our dealings, faithful to engagements and exemplary in our demeanor and conduct; to avoid malicious use of the tongue; not to be a stumbling block and to keep our testimonies above reproach; and to be zealous in our efforts to advance the kingdom of our Savior;
- TO seek to identify, develop and utilize my spiritual gift(s) and abilities; and to seek a place of service within the body, with the support and affirmation of the body;
- TO watch over one another in brotherly love; to aid each other in sickness and distress; to cultivate Christian sympathy in feelings and Christian courtesy in speech; to be slow to take offense but always ready for reconciliation and, mindful of scriptural guidelines, to secure it without delay; and
- TO pledge that when we move from this place, we will unite with some other church where we can carry out the spirit of this covenant and the principles of God's Word.”