

The Church

The Meaning of Church – The New Testament word “church” is *ekklesia* meaning “called out ones” or “assembly.” Jesus used the word church three times in the Gospels in Matthew 16:18; 18:17 and seven times in Revelation 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14. In the Gospels *ekklesia* refers to all future baptized believers and in Revelation to seven local congregations. The *Baptist Faith and Message* states concisely the meaning of a New Testament Church.

A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is a local body of baptized believers who are associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel, observing the two ordinances of Christ, committed to His teachings, exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by His Word, and seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth.

The church is an autonomous body, operating through democratic processes under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. In such a congregation members are equally responsible. Its Scriptural officers are pastors and deacons. The New Testament speaks also of the church as the body of Christ which includes all the redeemed of all the ages.

The Two Officers of the Church – The first office of the church is the pastor Lk 17:7; 1 Cor 9:7; 1 Pet 5:2, also called the bishop or overseer Jn 21:16; Acts 20:28; 1 Pet 5:2, and the elder Titus 1:5; 1 Pet 5:1. All three terms are synonymous. The second office of the church is the deacon, first described in Acts 6:1-7 chosen to serve the needy in the church. Qualifications for the office of deacon are described in 1 Timothy 3:8-13.

The Mission of the Church – Jesus summarized the mission of the church in His great commission in Matthew 28:18-20. The church is regularly called the “body of Christ” (Eph 1:22-23) and Christ the head (1 Cor 11:3; Eph 4:15; Col 1:18; 2:19). In this role the church is to do the bidding and work of Christ as specified in His Word, the Bible. The church also is called the “bride of Christ” (Mt 9:15; 25:1; Lk 5:34; Jn 3:29; Rev 21:2; 22:17). This role calls for love, respect, and service to Christ.

The Support of the Church – The work church is to be supported by the voluntary gifts brought weekly as an offering (see 2 Cor 8:1 – 9:15). This offering should begin with at least a tithe (Mt 23:23), but is not limited to 10% (see Acts 2:40-47).

Lamar E. Cooper, Sr.