

*A Biblical Look At Church Succession  
Through The Light Of  
God's Holy Word*

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**INTRODUCTION**

There is much discussion today concerning the fact of church succession, specifically how that succession occurs. Some see the view teaching that all true churches come from other true established churches. Some men do not see the necessity of one established church starting another new church. It is the belief of this author, that there is only one way to scripturally start a new church, and that is by the authority of an existing true New Testament Baptist church. I believe that if the Word of God was approached sincerely, and prayerfully, there would be no controversy over the one and only pattern that is given in God's Word. It is sad to say, but I fear too many good men have let the beliefs and practices of some misguided men, both of today and days gone by, lead them away from the Word of God. Today we need men that will stand for the Word of God, and not be swayed by those who do not have a clear understanding of the Bible, or even worse, are knowingly and willfully ignoring God's Holy Word. When I hear things like, "these are just traditional additional" I wonder what biblical tradition will fall next. I have even had men tell me that they saw the biblical pattern of one church starting another church, but that it was not absolutely essential for churches to be started that way today. How sad! I believe that if a person will honestly and prayerfully read this article, and along with it study the Word of God, the truth about the one true biblical pattern will clearly be seen. I also believe that if a biblical pattern is clearly present, we have an obligation before God to follow it exclusively. After all, Landmark Baptists have always claimed that the Bible was their final rule for faith and practice. I believe that it is high time for us to stand up and practice what the Bible teaches!

## I. The Fact of Church Succession

**Matthew 16:18-19** “**And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. {19} And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.**”

First, we know the Rock is Christ. Note the same Greek word, “petra” in **I Corinthians 10:4** (b)

“... **they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ.**” Clearly Peter was not the true Rock, Christ is!

Secondly, we can see that the word “**build**” means “to build up”; “the act of building”, the thought of it is “an ongoing process”. Ongoing is His church to this very day!

Next, let’s look at the phrase, “**and I will give unto thee the keys ...**” Some want to deny that there is any reference to power or authority there, but Strong says; “denotes power & authority of various kinds”. It should be clear to the reader that Christ did not give [away] His power and authority, but rather told His church to operate under His power and authority.

The next phrase we need to look at is, “**the Gates of hell shall not prevail against it**”, note that it’s the church that is on the offense. The church is to be going out and spreading the truth, and the gates of hell will never prevail against it! Also, the “**gates of hell**” is a picture of death. Now we understand that “death cannot prevail against it”, thus the death of the apostles cannot prevent the perpetuity of the church.

This proves that the promise of perpetuity was given to the church, not to a group of men. Clearly we see the perpetuity is in the CHURCH, not the design of the church. This means that any other true church must come from the original church, and not just a copy of the design. This should be easy for us to relate to as human beings. For my family name to have perpetuity, I must have some descendants that come from me, not just a copy of my appearance.

The next verse we need to examine is **Matthew 28:16-20** “**Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. {17} And when they saw him, they worshipped him: but some doubted.**

*{18}* **And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. {19} Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: {20} Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, *even* unto the end of the world. Amen.”**

The first observation here is that the eleven disciples are the church, note: **I Corinthians 12:28**, “**And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, ...**” Christ had the Authority to send the church, and He did, into “**all nations**” (verse **19**). They were commissioned to go, to teach, and to baptize; clearly these things are the work of the church. We, as the Lord’s true New Testament Baptist churches, are to be going, and going under Christ’s authority! It is obvious that no one church could go into all of the world, but from the one true church that the LORD started, other true churches could be established. Remember, because the Lord promised perpetuity to HIS church, all other true churches must come from HIS church!

Still, some try to question the extent of the “authority” of the local church to start other new churches. We saw **Matthew 16:19** and **Matthew 28:18-19**, and now look at **Mark 13:34**, “**For the Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch.**” This is clear proof that Christ “gave” His servants, (members of the church) the “authority” to operate, and carry out the great commission. To say that “**His servants**” in the passage above, has reference to only pastors, seems to be out of order. It is by the authority of the church that pastors are scripturally ordained. I personally believe the one who we see as representing the pastor in the verse currently in consideration here is the “porter”, for he is commanded to watch. Look at **Hebrews 13:17**, “**Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account ...**”. The context of **Hebrews 13** clearly teaches this to be the pastor.

At least one more passage is needed to be examined that we may see a clear picture of this power and authority. **Acts 1:8**, “**But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.**” Again, we see that the LORD said, “**and ye shall be witnesses ... unto the uttermost part of the earth.**” The only logical way for this one church to be a witness to “**the uttermost part of the earth**”, is to establish other churches

in other areas from the first church! Just so that we are all clear about the extent of this “**power**”, we will note the definition according to Strong; “strength, power, ability”. Apart from Almighty God, no church has the strength, power, or ability to do anything scriptural or lasting. Thus when men operate on their own, apart from the church and its power, it too is unscriptural and will not last.

Through the previous scriptures we should be able to clearly see that the ultimate goal of the Lord’s church is reproduction! (**John 15:16**) Let us now look and see the biblical pattern for this reproduction, “like begets like”

## II. The Act of Church Succession

First, let us note when our Lord told them not to go, , **Luke 24:49** “**And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.**” We see here the church was not to go in its own power! No power means no ready and not able to go start another church! The power and authority was given to Christ’s church, and apart from this, no one should be going. Oh that ALL men would see this today! After this power which was given from on high, on the day of Pentecost, we see the Church “going”. When the church at Jerusalem heard of the believers at Antioch, we see them sending Barnabas to Antioch in **Acts 11:21-22**, “**And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord. {22} Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch.**”

The first thing we should notice is that verse **21** says that they “**believed, and turned unto the Lord**”, not that they were added to the church, for there was no church yet here at Antioch. Compare this statement then to the one made about the church at Jerusalem back in **Acts 2:47**, “**Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.**” When there was a church in the area and people were saved, the Lord added them to that local Church! It is clear that this group at Antioch was not called a church, nor functioned like a church, until atler Barnabas was sent there from the church at Jerusalem. Then we read in **Acts 11:26**, “**they assembled themselves with the church, and taught ...**” At this point in our study we must notice the word “**sent**”. According to Strong; “to send forth, send away”. Now notice “**sent**” in **Romans 10:15** (a), “**And how shall they preach, except they be sent? ...**”

The question that should cause us to think is, “sent by Who” We would say, “by the Holy Spirit” of course. Any true preacher of the Word of God will acknowledge only the Spirit of God as the “sender”. When we look into God’s Word we clearly see that the holy Spirit always sends” His preachers out of His church. Note the pattern in the Word of God, Acts 13:1-4 “Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. {2} As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. {3} And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid *their* hands on them, they sent *them* away. {4} So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus.”

Clearly we see that the Holy Spirit sent Barnabas and Saul out of one of His true churches. We go on to note that Barnabas and Saul were working in that local church. Next we see that they were sent, not of the church alone, nor apart from the church, but rather the Holy Spirit led them and the church, causing the end result. Certain men being sent from a certain church led to a certain place! Vertical leading of God, resulting in the horizontal work of men through the church. We can also see the church at Antioch as the sending church, and as having authority by observing that Barnabas and Paul came back to Antioch to give a report to the church.

We should note their message when they returned; **Acts 14:26-27**, “**And thence sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled. {27} And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles.**”

Let’s look at the word “**fulfilled**”: According to Strong; “to make full, to cause to abound, to furnish or to supply liberally, to to render full, i.e. complete; fill to the top: so that nothing shall be wanting to full measure”.

Now we must ask, was all of the work of the gospel done, or fulfilled? Had they talked to everybody in the areas they went to? Was everybody saved where they went to? This would seem very unlikely! What then had been fulfilled, completed, or finished? The churches that they started! They had proper organization and

beginning by the authority of the church at Antioch, which Barnabas and Paul had passed on to them while on their missionary trip.

God's pattern is clear, Jerusalem sent men to Antioch, and Antioch sent men to . . . , and so forth! Each individual local church may differ on the procedural details of how this business is conducted, but one thing that cannot be eliminated is the necessity of the new church being established through the authority of an existing church. With as clear of a pattern as we see in God's Word concerning how church work is to be done, some would ask, "why would anybody try to do God's work apart from God's pattern?" We will at this time try to answer this question, and many more common questions to this subject.

### III. Miscellaneous Questions Answered

Q.) Since we can see it as the Biblical pattern, why would men try to "start" churches differently?

A.) A disgruntled group of people (because of being scripturally disciplined from a church, and can't get proper authority), may try to "start" their own "church".

**Acts 20:30** – **"Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them."**

Q.) How was this succession possible during persecution?

A.) GOD is able to work out the details! (**Acts** chapters **8-11**)

Whenever I hear this question, I always think, "My God is big enough to handle it, apparently yours is not".

My God is bigger than circumstances, also He is able to cause a group to wait for this proper authority to organize.

Q.) I see the basic pattern in the Word of God, but how can we limit God to that one way?

A1.) Multiple ways would be very confusing, God is not the author of confusion.

**1 Corinthians 14:33** – **"For God is not *the author* of confusion, but of peace ..."**

A2.) If we find a pattern for a course of action on any given subject, and then choose to operate in our own methods, we are adding to the Word of God. This is a terrible place to be!

**Revelation 22:18-19** – **"For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall**

**add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: {19} And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.”**

Q.) Doesn't it bother you that many men of our day think this position is based only on tradition?

A.) Not at all. I have to answer to God for what I teach, not to men.

**1 Corinthians 4:3 – “But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man’s judgment: ...”**

Q.) Where does the Bible clearly show of a church voting to start another church?

A.) Again, a pattern of operation is present. We can clearly see the churches in the book of Acts voting on church matters in **Acts 1:26**.

**“And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.”**

This is a scriptural way of finding the Lord's will about a matter, Proverbs **16:33**.

**“The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD.”**

Also it fulfills our duty to do things orderly.

**1 Corinthians 14:40 – “Let all things be done decently and in order.”**

Q.) Where does the Bible show any group of believers as less than a true church?

A.) Believers at Antioch were not called a church until after Barnabas was sent. **Acts 11**.

Q.) If this is so clear in the Bible, why didn't more of our “great” Baptist forefathers see it?

A1.) I Many of them never saw the truth about the “local” visible church. How could they see it?

A2.) Some of our Baptist forefathers did see it - Paul, Barnabas, Peter, JoIm, Philip, etc.

Q.) Why can't proper baptism be the “link”?

A1.) If baptism were the proper “link”, what would stop a properly baptized, but also scripturally disciplined people from leaving, and starting their own “church”?

**Acts 20:30 – “Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.”**

A2.) Proper baptism is a result of a scriptural church, it cannot be the “link” to start one.

Q.) Doesn't the Bible teach of a purely “vertical” transfer of power or authority?

A.) Yes. Once, in the empowerment of the Lord's Church in **Acts 2**. Then after that we see the Lord leading in the “horizontal” efforts of the church.

**Acts 8:14-17** – “Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: {15} Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: {16} (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) {17} Then laid they *their* hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost.”

(Also in **Acts 13**, where we have already studied.)

Q.) Where else in Scriptures do we see this kind of “horizontal” transfer of power or authority?

A1.) In several places. All power and authority, including Governmental authority comes only from God, **Romans 13:1** “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.” Even so we hold elections to place people in office.

A2.) Marriage is another good illustration. We cannot simply live together, rather we must go to someone that has the authority, to get married properly.

A3.) Probably the most obvious illustration is in man himself. God created man, then from man He created the woman. Then clearly, all people come from people.

Q.) Is it true, that if God chooses not to “come down” and take up residence with a group, they aren't a true church'?

A.) Absolutely! **Ephesians 2:22** – “**In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.**”

This is why we must follow the biblical pattern, so that God will be with us as we serve Him!

Q.) Is it wrong for an ordained preacher to consider his ordination all the authority he needs, to baptize a group in “prospect” (meaning not into any church) then “organize” them into a so called “church” at some later date?

A.) Yes this is wrong! First, the preacher needs the authority from a true New Testament church to scripturally baptize. Second, the Bible teaches that believers



are always baptized into a church. **1 Corinthians 12:13a** – ‘**For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether *we be* Jews or Gentiles ...**’

This truth is also seen in **Acts 2:41** – “**Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added *unto them* about three thousand souls.**”

Q.) doesn't the Bible teach, that “**where two or three are gathered**” in Christ's name, He will be with them?

A.) if they are truly gathered “in Christ's name”, they will be following biblical patterns!

Q.) Can't we consider this just a matter of, “individual soul liberty”, as some other “secondary” issues?

A.) No we can not! This is a foundational truth of our Lord's church. **1 Corinthians 3:11** – “**For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.**”

Where there is no scriptural beginning there is no church, just a group of deceived people!

The following are some questions for those that believe it is possible to start a church, apart from church authority, and true church succession.

1.) Why would some say that mission giving, baptism, the Lord's Supper, discipline, etc. must be done only in and through the authority of a local church, then go on to say that a new church can be scripturally established apart from the authority of an existing local church?

2) Concerning the “vertical authority only” theory: If our churches have no tangible proof of who the other true churches are, such as an organized church granting the authority to start a new one, how will we ever guard against “alien immersion”? (Baptism outside of like faith and order.) To say it another way, if we have no definite way to start churches we then have no definite way to know which ones are true churches, this leaves us with no definite way to guard against alien immersion. How then, will keep our churches pure?

3.) Will you go on doubting God and His ability to carry out His promise to His church, or claim His promise to His church as your very own? Give Him all the

honor and glory through His true church! Remember, through his power, true church succession will never fail!

I will conclude this article with these thoughts:

**Ephesians 3:21, “Unfo him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.”** When we see a pattern as clear as this one in God’s Word, what right do we have to say that there could be “other” ways? Beloved, let the Protestants do things their own way, but let Independent Landmark Baptists start churches the scriptural way, by the authority of a properly established church! It is truly high time that we put our actions where our words are, and make the Bible our final rule for faith and practice! If any say they see the biblical pattern and are still teaching others that there are multiple ways to start a new church, I respectfully submit that you are teaching men to go astray from the truth. That is something that a person will have to answer to God for!

Beloved, the church is the pillar and ground of the truth (**1 Timothy 3:15**). Let us always endeavor to operate the church within the guidelines set forth by the God’s Word!

Special thanks to the preachers that have boldly stood for this truth, and have through their preaching gave me many of the thoughts found in this booklet.

Respectfully,  
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