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Dedication

This book is dedicated to the memory of a great defender of the faith who was passionate for the truth. The Lord equipped Elder Milburn Cockrell with tremendous ability to communicate the truth both in the pulpit and with the pen. Even his enemies considered him well read and a worthy advocate.

For many years Elder Cockrell was the editor of **The Berea Baptist Banner**, published by the Berea Baptist Church of Mantachie, Mississippi.

The doctrine of the New Testament Church and the doctrine of Grace were possibly the two greatest loves of Elder Cockrell for which he ardently taught and defended with all of his passion, learning and ability. One of his last great written works was the revised edition entitled, **Scriptural Church Organization**. After his departure, his book came under attack by those who opposed him. His book should be consulted and read along with my book as he covered materials I have not. He will be sorely missed by the friends of truth.

Introduction

Who has authority to administer the Great Commission upon earth? Some embrace the position that Christ directly and repeatedly redelivers this commission to believers in every generation. According to this position, the Bible is the only authority necessary for any true believers to take up this commission at any time in any generation. This is the foundation for the Reformation and all who originate their own denominations.

On the other hand, there are those who embrace the position that the great commission has been “once delivered” (Jude 3) directly by Christ to His Church at Jerusalem during His earthly ministry and that this church was also promised by Christ to reproduce after its own kind until Jesus comes again. This position argues that Biblical authority to carry out the Great Commission is found only in the Lord’s churches.

The thesis of this book is to demonstrate the following five points about the Great Commission:

First, to prove by sound principles of exegesis that Matthew 28:19-20 designates an earthly administrator (“ye”), that stands between Christ and all recipients (“them”) as the authorized administrator of this commission.

Second, this book is designed to demonstrate beyond reasonable doubt that Matthew 28:19-20 is an orderly and due process, an explicit prescription, for reproducing disciples of like faith and order that concludes with membership in a New Testament Church. As such, it is authority to bring such disciples into church membership by one of two ways. Newly baptized believers were brought into church membership by directly adding them to an existing church (Acts 2:41-42) or by being constituted into a new church by a church authorized representative (Acts 13:3; 14:22-23). New churches do not evolve but are made by this process. They are constituted under the authority of a previously existing New Testament Church and/or its ordained representatives.

Third, it is to demonstrate from credible sources of history that both English and American Particular Baptists understood the Great Commission as belonging exclusively to the visible gospel church of Christ and they applied it as such in their practice. This practice was denoted by such terms as “regular church order” or such synonymous phrases as “binding church order”

or “gospel church order” etc. Not only did these phrases make it self evident that they believed the Great Commission was given to the church alone but they repeatedly denied that it belonged to anyone but the New Testament gospel church.

Fourth, this book is written to demonstrate that “old Landmarkism” in the days of J.R. Graves practiced this same church order and fully believed that the great commission was given solely to the churches of Jesus Christ. Indeed, when William Cathcart defined old Landmarkism in regard to “scriptural authority” and the Great Commission, he worded it as follows; “*scriptural authority UNDER God FROM a gospel church.*” Old Landmarkism saw no conflict between the authority of the scriptures and church authority, as they recognized church authority to be authorized by the scriptures.

Lastly, this book was written to demonstrate conclusively that there is no Biblical authority for baptized believers to constitute themselves into a church of Christ any more than there is a Biblical basis to administer self-baptism or self-ordination. The action of church constitution must be authorized by a previously existing church and/or its ordained representatives.

Those who oppose church authority in the constitution of a new church primarily defend their position by falsely attributing church characteristics to a yet unconstituted entity; and then by circular reasoning, claim that “church” rights are being violated if an existing church authorizes and supervises this constitution. Hence, according to this circular reasoning, the unconstituted entity supposedly has its “church” autonomy and authority violated when in fact they are NOT even a church of Christ until AFTER being constituted. You must first be a church before you can claim the rights belonging to a church.

There is no state of limbo where baptized believers exist outside the authority of an existing church while still unconstituted. The so-called doctrine of “direct authority” demands this kind of ecclesiastical state of limbo and denies the horizontal and instrumental administrator identified as “ye” in the Great Commission.

New Churches do not evolve out of thin air. Church authority is exercised by an existing church in regard to constituting new churches in two distinct ways. One way is to call a church business meeting and by vote dismiss members for the express purpose to pursue constitution of a new church under the direction of a church ordained man. Another way is to call a church business meeting, and by vote, recommend a brother for ordination; and then send that man on the mission field to preach, baptize and gather the baptized believers into a church. Behind both methods of church constitution are the vote of a church and thus “church authority”; and the result is that everything is done decently and in order without confusion.

Indeed, those who embrace the “direct authority” position admit that church authority is essential to the constitution of a church. They admit that without church authorized baptism there can be no scriptural materials out of which to constitute a church. This is admission that churches cannot be constituted apart from direct linkage through baptism authorized and administered by a previous existing church. This is organic link by link church succession in its historical sense, having church authority as its basis and baptism as its linkage between a preceding church and the newly constituted church.

The direct authority movement is in essence usurping church authority, rebelling against the authority of Scriptures and providing the foundation for every form of ecclesiastical disorder and confusion imaginable. It is the recipe for schism within churches that provides the schismatic a way around church discipline by simply self-organizing.

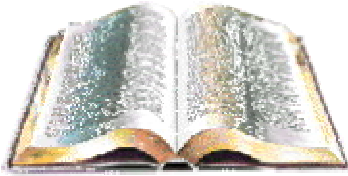
The outlined procedure this book follows is; (1) to examine Matthew 28:19-20 in order to discover who are those referred to as “ye” by their contextual characteristics; (2) to demonstrate this commission was observed in the book of Acts; (3) to show that early English and American Baptists designated the proper observance by such phrases as “gospel order” or “due binding order” or “regular church order” etc.; (4) to demonstrate that historical “Landmark” Baptists thoroughly refuted the idea of “direct” authority as they believed the Great Commission was (a)


not given to the ministry, much less merely baptized believers; (b) but was given solely to the church and (c) included authority to constitute baptized believers into churches.

Mark W. Fenison
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Chapter One

The Great Commission Credentials Or Binding Gospel Order



>  And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, **All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen. – Mt. 28:18-20.**

When someone asks “what are your credentials”, they are asking about your qualifications, authority, or credibility to support your claim to be or do something. This question should not anger anyone if they are properly qualified/authorized. For example, the Scribes and Pharisees asked this very question of Jesus:

Mt. 21:23 “And when he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him as he was teaching, and said, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority?”

If Jesus did not get angry and did not deny this was a valid question, why should those who claim to follow him get angry and deny it is a valid question? This is especially true since Christ predicts that “many” He never knew will claim to do things in His name (Mt. 7:22-23). If He never knew them, He never sent them. There are many today, like in the days of Jeremiah, to whom God said:

Jeremiah 23:21 “I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran: I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied.”

The question before us is “whom *did Christ send to carry out the Great Commission?*” Many believe the Great Commission is nothing more than a command to evangelize, and therefore anyone who is saved is authorized to administer it. It is certainly true that anyone who has experienced salvation is qualified to be a witness of the gospel. However, does the Great

Commission go beyond a mere gospel witness and thus require more than a mere salvation experience to be a qualified administer of it? The following study will examine the immediate context of the Great Commission to see if there are any inherent qualifications demanded by the context that will define exactly who is and who is not authorized by Christ to administer it.

Who is being authorized - “Ye” Versus “Them”?

“Go YE.....baptizing THEM...” – Mt. 28:19.

Who is being commissioned? There are two classes of people found in the Great Commission context. The identity of these two classes of people are represented by the pronouns “ye” and “them.” It is the “ye” who are being authorized to do certain things (*go...baptizing...teaching*) and it is the “them” who are the recipients (receivers) of those actions. Obviously, those who are the recipients of such actions are not the ones being authorized to carry out such actions, are they? If they were, then Christ would have omitted the “ye” and simply instructed “them” to “go” to themselves, baptize themselves and teach themselves. However, that is not the case is it?

Significantly, notice that Christ never authorizes those who are identified as “them” to be administrators of this commission at any stage of this commission. The Great Commission is presented in three stages; (1) “go” (2) “baptizing them” (3) “teaching them to observe.” In Mark 16:15 the “go” stage is further defined as going to “them” with the gospel. Hence, even after they have received the gospel and become believers, these believers are not authorized to baptize but are still to be the recipients of baptism by those identified as “ye”, and so we read: “baptizing THEM.” Even after the “ye” baptizes “them” they are still under the teaching authority of the “ye” in verse 20 and so we read: “teaching THEM.” In all three stages (go, baptize, teach) it is the “ye” who are authorized to administer it. At no stage in this commission does Jesus give authority to “them” to take over and administer any stage of this commission.

Do you see the difference here between “ye” and “them” in this commission and which one is being authorized and which is not? This text absolutely denies that Christ gives vertical or direct authority to “them” at any stage of this commission at any day in this age. At the second stage those designated as “them” are baptized disciples but yet are without authority to constitute themselves into a teaching assembly as described in the third stage of this commission. Christ has established the “ye” as the horizontal or instrumental authority for the administration of this commission in all three stages. The “ye” is placed between Christ and “them” at every point in this commission. This means those designated as “them” must come to those designated as “ye” in order to be discipled. The Great Commission gives absolutely no authority for “them” to gospelize themselves or others, baptize themselves or others, teach themselves or others, any more than the Scriptures give authority for the unordained to ordain themselves or others or the unchurched to church themselves or others. Jesus explicitly appoints a qualified INSTRUMENTAL authority, or administrator that others must come to in order to be disciplined in His kingdom. This distinction is very important for many reasons yet to be discussed.

“And so in regard to this commission of Christ, it was addressed, to somebody. It supposes that there will be somebody to be baptized, and it authorizes somebody to baptize them. If by commanding some to baptize, it commands others by implication to be baptized, it by

the same implication commands them to be baptized by those, and only those whom it commands to baptize.” William M. Nevins, **Alien Baptism and the Baptists**, The Challenge Press, Little Rock, Ark., 1977, p. 156.

Review Questions

1. What are the two pronouns that identify two different classes of persons in this commission? (“ye” and “them”)
2. To which class is Jesus giving this commission to? (“ye”)
3. Are those that become baptized believers in verse 19 authorized to ‘teach” in verse 20, or are they still under the administrative authority of those identified as “ye” in verse 19? (they are still under the administrative authority of “ye”)
4. Does this text establish those defined as “ye” as the administrative authority in carrying out the Great Commission? (yes)

The Grammatical Implications that establish due process and order

In order to understand the Great Commission better, one must understand some simple but significant grammatical implications of this commission. Grammar is not the favorite subject of many but a simple understanding of the grammar in this passage is essential to clearly understand both what this commission really is and to whom Christ authorized to administer it.

We want to examine the primary verb in this context which is translated “teach” in verse 19 along with its three modifying participles in verses 19 & 20 (“go”, “baptizing” and “teaching”). The primary verb tells us WHAT TO DO whereas the three participles tell us HOW TO DO IT. Let’s begin with the primary verb.

The word “teach” in verse 19 is the translation of a Greek verb that literally means “make disciples.” The idea behind this term demands that the teaching involved is far beyond communicating mere information. The making of a disciple involves the transformation of one’s beliefs so that their life and practice conforms to that of the teacher. Therefore, this very command implies that the administrator must be one already disciplined before they are qualified to disciple others.

Notice another necessary implication of the command “make disciples.” This command implies both a beginning point where one BECOMES a disciple as well as the ongoing action from that beginning point of continuing to BE a disciple.

At this point it may be helpful to understand that the term “disciple” means one who is a “follower.” The very term demands on going action of following. However, to make disciples also implies a specific point in time when they were not followers but became one. Hence, at a certain point in time one BECOMES what he formally was not – a disciple, and then from that point forward continues BEING what he is, a follower.

The grammar actually supports both aspects of becoming what one was formally not and then continuing to be what you became at a given point in time.

The tense of this verb manifests the point in time where one became what he formerly was not. It is an aorist tense verb which refers to a point in time that action was completed. Hence, in regard to the tense of the verb “make disciples” it demonstrates this occurred at a specific point

in time as a completed or finished action. The inherent action in the meaning of the verb or what grammarians call its *aktionsart* (*sort of action*) is continuous action. That is the very word “follower” denotes motion in action rather than static position. To “follow” is to move in a direction.

Therefore, the tense tells us that something occurred in a point of time in the past that is complete. At a point of time in the past we were not disciples but at a certain definitive point in the past we became what we were formally not – a follower of Christ. On the other hand, the idea of continuous motion is found inherent in the meaning of the term “disciple”. Therefore, the inherent action found in the very meaning of the verb “make disciples” (“to follow”) denotes a continuation in being a disciple but the tense of the verb points to a time when one became a disciple. This two-fold action found in the words “make disciples” is very important when we look at it in relationship to the participles that modify this primary verb.

Also, this primary verb is found in what grammarians call the imperative mode, which is the mode of command. Therefore, this is not an option or a mere suggestion, but is a direct command given by Christ to be obeyed. Remember the job of the verb is to tell us WHAT TO DO. What are we to do? We are to make disciples; and it is a command, not an option and it occurs at a given point in time and then continues forward from that point.

Now let's consider the three participles and how they modify this main verb. The KJV translates the three participles as “go”, “baptizing” and “teaching”. Remember, the verb tells us WHAT TO DO: “make disciples”, but it is the participles that explain HOW TO DO IT. In other words Christ is defining His recipe for making disciples and it involves these three participles. These are not dangling participles but they are logically and grammatically connected to the main verb. For example, you cannot make disciples without first “GOING” to them with the gospel (Mk. 16:15 defines this as going with the gospel). Therefore the first participle is logically connected to the main verb and is descriptive of the first step in the making of a disciple. This chronological and logical order is spelled out by the tenses used for these participles.

Let's consider the tenses of these three participles and how they grammatically relate to the tense of the main verb (make disciples). In this grammatical construction the “tense” reveals the chronological order in which these actions occur in relationship to the main verb. For example, the first participle translated “go” is found in what grammarians call the Aorist tense. This tense is commonly used to describe a completed action in the past. In other words, this action of “going” is considered as already accomplished before the act of baptizing and/or teaching (both of which are found in the present tense). What does this mean? It means that one must go with the gospel before one can become a disciple:

*“And he said unto them, **Go** ye into all the world, and **preach the gospel to every creature.**”*
Mk. 16:15.

Thus the Aorist tense in the first participle “go” tells us that it must be a completed action before they can be baptized. In other words, they must first become believers in the gospel before they are qualified to be baptized. Is this important? Yes, it is. This teaches us that baptism is only for those who have already believed in the gospel of Christ. This is the consistent teaching throughout the New Testament where repentance and faith in Christ always occur prior to the administration of baptism and church membership (e.g. Acts 2:41-42). The message behind the aorist tense “go” is the initial act of becoming a disciple by the gospel is a completed action prior to the administration of baptism. Hence, “blood before the water” as the old Baptists would say. It might be said this way, LITERAL salvation is completed prior to administering PICTORIAL salvation in baptism, as baptism is said to be “a like figure” of literal salvation (2 Pet. 3:21). This demonstrates one must first become a disciple INWARDLY by faith in the gospel before they can continue as a disciple OUTWARDLY by baptism and church

membership. Jesus told the Pharisees to first cleanse the inside of the cup before being concerned about the outside. Repentance and faith in the gospel reveals a change that took place at a certain point in time concerning the INSIDE of a person.

Now remember the lesson above about the aktionsart or sort of action inherent in the main verb (“make disciples”) and its tense (Aorist)? The tense of the main verb demands a point of action where one BECOMES a disciple as a finished act. The first participle “go” and its aorist tense of completed action is that point where one BECOMES a disciple by becoming a believer in the gospel. However, the inherent continuous action found in the words “make disciples” is BEING a follower from that point forward. The next two participles are found in the present tense which indicates this CONTINUOUS ACTION of following Christ is characterized by baptism and being taught to observe all things Christ commanded.

Therefore, discipleship does not stop with conversion to the gospel but it is just the beginning point and the prerequisite for baptism and church membership. The ongoing action that follows conversion to the gospel is defined as submission to baptism followed by habitual assembling together to learn how to observe the all things of Christ. A perfect example of this principle in practice occurred on the day of Pentecost. (1) They “received the word” and then (2) “were baptized” and then (3) added to the church at Jerusalem (Acts 2:41-42).

Now let’s summarize what we have learned in this grammatical lesson. Making disciples involves more than evangelism by the gospel but must begin at that point. One becomes a disciple at the point of faith in the gospel as a completed action previous to baptism. However, once being made a disciple we are to continue following Christ in baptism and in observing all things whatsoever He has commanded. Hence, the Great Commission gives a logical and chronological order to be followed: (1) gospelization; (2) baptism; (3) congregationization for indoctrination

We are first SAVED by faith in the gospel in order to SERVE the Lord by submission to baptism and church membership. It is important to keep these two aspects of the Great Commission distinctly apart (salvation versus service) and yet at the same time remember that those who are saved by the gospel are saved to serve Christ by following Him in baptism and in church membership. True Discipleship includes both the proper beginning “point” as well as following the proper “process” but does not confuse one with the other. This is the message of the three participles in their relationship to the primary verb. This is the true meaning of “make disciples.” Hence, mere gospelizing someone after the Billy Graham fashion is not carrying out the Great Commission.

Review Questions

1. Does the primary verb tell us what we are to do? (yes)
2. Do the three participles tell us how we are to do it? (yes)
3. What threefold process does this text demand for one to be made a disciple? (gospelization, baptism, participation in a teaching assembly)
4. Do the tenses of the participles tell us what must be done first? (yes)
5. What kind of action does the Greek term translated “go” indicate? (completed action)
6. Is Christ teaching that one must first become a disciple by faith in the gospel before submitting to baptism and assembled for instruction? (yes)

7. Those who refuse to be baptized or will not submit themselves to be taught how to observe all things, are they obedient to this command? (no)
8. Is it possible for para-church organizations, radio and TV churches and evangelistic associations to administer this commission? (no)

The Pre-Qualified

- *“whatsoever I have commanded you” – v. 20.*

We have established by the immediate context that it is the “ye” who are given authority to carry out this commission. We have also established the meaning of “make disciples” as both an event that began with the gospel as well as an on going process that continues with baptism and habitual assembling together in observing the commandments of the Lord. Let’s probe this text further. What kind of person is being commissioned to begin this event and to carry out this process? What did Jesus say about the blind leading the blind? They would both fall into the ditch. It takes one who can see to lead those who cannot. How does this apply to the administrator of the Great Commission? Take a look at the word “have” in verse 20. The word “have” demands that those who are authorized to administer this commission “HAVE” already been through this same three fold process BEFORE they are authorized to administer it to others. In other words, Christ never commissioned the blind to lead the blind. That is, those being authorized had already been gospelized, baptized and assembled together and instructed how to observe all things BEFORE they were authorized to administer this to others. Not only is this demanded by the word “have” in our text but it is elsewhere explicitly spelled out in no uncertain terms:

*“Wherefore of these men which have companied with us **all the time** that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, **beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day** that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection.”*
– Acts 1:21-22.

Notice the explicit language in the above text. They are described as a traveling assembly that one may go “in and out” among them. This traveling assembly began with the baptism of John, and was still continuing right up to the time after the resurrection in Acts chapter one when they were all assembled together in a called church meeting to select another church officer – an apostle. They continued to habitually assemble together right up to the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1). They had already been gospelized and baptized by John the Baptists (The gospel had already been preached to them, Mk. 1:15; Jn. 3:36); and then they assembled together around Christ for nearly three and half years for instruction BEFORE being authorized to carry out this commission.

What does this prove about those being commissioned? It proves He never authorized anyone to administer this commission that had not first been through it themselves. What does that mean? It means that the Bible gives absolutely no authority for self-administration of the Great Commission. Jesus never commissioned the blind to lead the blind or the ignorant to teach the ignorant.

Hence, the first contextual credential of those authorized to carry out the Great Commission is that they are distinguished as “ye” from “them.” The second contextual credential of this “ye” is that they “**have**” already been saved by the gospel, baptized and assembled together for

instructions and therefore know how to OBSERVE all things Christ commanded. Therefore they are a prequalified “ye”.

Review Questions

1. According to the Great Commission, is Christ authorizing SELF-administration of these things? (no)
2. According to this commission is Christ authorizing anyone who has not themselves gone through this whole threefold process first? (no)
3. Are unbaptized believers authorized to carry out this commission? (no)
4. Are unchurched baptized believers authorized to carry out this commission? (no)
5. Should anyone submit for baptism to anyone who has not been through this threefold process themselves? (no)
6. Those who profess to be saved but have never been baptized and/or do not submit to a regular assembling together for instruction, are they disobedient to this commission, or is obedience to this commission a personal option? (it is not an option but a command)

A “ye” of like faith and order

- *“whatsoever I have commanded you”*

Thus far we have seen that those authorized to carry out this commission are (1) not those referred to as “them” but rather those referred to as “ye”, (2) and it is those who have been through all three processes of this commission rather than those who have not. Therefore, the authorized administrators of the commission are qualified to do so by the very fact they have been gospelized already, they have been baptized already, and they have already been instructed to observe all things. They already know all three aspects of the Great Commission by first hand experience.

However, is this all the credentials the context demands? For example, does this commission permit/authorize anyone to make just ANY KIND of disciple or does Christ have in mind a CERTAIN KIND of disciple? To ask this question in another way, did Christ commission anyone to go preach ANOTHER KIND of gospel other than what Christ preached and commanded (Jn. 3:16; 5:24; Gal. 1:6-9)? Did Christ authorize anyone to administer ANOTHER KIND of baptism other than what he administered (Jn. 4:1-2; Lk. 7:29-30)? Did Christ authorize anyone to teach others to observe ANOTHER KIND of faith and practice other than what he commanded (Jude 3)? The answer should be obvious. However, the Lord does not leave it up to us to guess the answer. He explicitly forbids the making of any other kind of disciples when He says *“whatsoever I HAVE COMMANDED you.”* In other words, disciples are to be made just like those He is giving this commission to – just like those He made.

Before you react to this negatively, is not this the very meaning of “disciple”? A disciple is not someone who invents a new system or order but one who “follows after” or is a “learner” of a

system or order designed by the master teacher. You cannot be a disciple of another person if you do not follow them in their teaching and practice. Christ is here authorizing and establishing them to reproduce those who are LIKE FAITH AND ORDER with Him. When Jude looked back at the event of giving this commission, he understood and summarized that event in the following words: “*contending for the faith **once delivered***” (Jude 3). The apostles instructed the churches to defend the faith and order given them, as many scriptures clearly indicate (Acts 20:27-30; I Tim. 4:1; 2 Thes. 3:6; Rom. 16:17; etc.).

What is the aim of such a commission then? It is to reproduce disciples that are united by the very same doctrine and practice. Is that not exactly what is seen in the book of Acts and in the epistles? Is not that in keeping with the high priestly prayer of Christ in John 17:17: that unity among His disciples be based upon the truth of God’s Word?

What does this mean in practical terms? It means at least the following: (1) It means that Christ is not authorizing anyone to make a DIFFERENT KIND of disciple. If anyone preached another kind of gospel, administered another kind of baptism and instructed them in another kind of faith and order they would produce ANOTHER kind of disciple. (2) Therefore, it means that Christ is not giving this commission to just any kind of professed Christian. (3) It means that Christ is not authorizing the administration of just any kind of baptism. (4) It means that Christ is not authorizing the teaching of just any kind of faith and order.

Instead, the words “*whatsoever I have commanded*” limits disciple making for Christ within the boundaries of LIKE FAITH AND ORDER in all three areas of the Great Commission. To say the same thing in another way, it means He is commissioning only those who preach the SAME gospel that He preached to them (John the Baptist preached what is found in Jn. 3:36 and Christ preached what is found in Jn. 3:16; 5:25; 6:37-40). It means that He is commissioning only those who submit to and administer the SAME baptism that was administered to them (Jn. 4:1-2; Lk. 7:29-30). It means that He is commissioning only those who teach the same faith and practice He taught them (Jude 3). This is a commission to reproduce after their OWN KIND or within the restrictive limits of LIKE FAITH AND ORDER.

What are practical consequences of reproducing after their own kind? It means all of the churches found in the pages of the New Testament were of like faith and order and all the churches that would be brought into existence by their obedience to this commission would be churches of like faith and order. What do we call a bunch of churches today that are united in the same faith and order? We call them a “denomination.” Jesus limited the commission to administrators who were of like faith and order with Him and designed the commission to only reproduce those of like faith and order with Him.

This is why true New Testament Churches refuse to accept baptism administered by churches that are not of like faith and order with them. Christ never authorized the administration of anything other than LIKE FAITH AND ORDER and therefore true churches of Christ cannot accept anything but LIKE FAITH AND ORDER. Furthermore, the apostles openly corrected any departure by the churches from this same faith and order and commanded them to separate themselves from those who departed from this same faith and order, treating them as apostates and heretics rather than “brethren” of new denominations (Acts 20:29-30; I Tim. 4:1; 2 Thes. 3:6; Rom. 16:17; etc.). This is why true New Testament Churches will not fellowship or work with churches that are not LIKE FAITH AND ORDER because such are condemned as apostates by the scriptures and are to be separated from (2 Thes. 3:6) rather than supported and fellowshiped with.

This means that God is not the author of confusion or the author of multitudes of conflicting Christian denominations existing today. Satan is (I Tim. 4:1). God has only ONE WAY of salvation and only ONE WAY of service and that way is restricted to the faith and order found in the Great Commission.

Can those faithful to the Commission be identified today amongst all the various kinds of “faiths and orders” under the umbrella term “Christianity”? Can it be known which are true and which are not true to His commission? Yes! Compare their gospel, baptism and essential doctrines with that of Christ and the churches of the New Testament. If they are significantly different they cannot possibly be a true New Testament church. Compare their practice with the limitations of the Great Commission and the explicit commands of Scripture to separate themselves from those who depart from the faith once delivered. Any church that is ecumenical in practice or receives the ordinances and ordinations from any other kind of faith and order cannot possibly be a true church of Jesus Christ. True churches of Christ will fellowship only with churches of like faith and order and will separate themselves from all other kinds, as commanded by the Scriptures (2 Thess. 3:6).

*“To say this commission was left to any believer, or to some group of men who hold every heresy under the sun, is to accuse the Lord of great carelessness.” – Milburn Cockrell, **Scriptural Church Organization**, 2nd Ed. p. 29.*

Review Questions

1. What kind of disciples did Christ command the disciples to make? His kind or some other kind? (his kind)
2. Does the commission give authority to make disciples by another gospel, another baptism, or another faith and order than Christ commanded? (no)
3. Are all denominations in unity with the faith and order established by Christ? (no, see Acts 20:29-30)
4. Is God the author of denominational confusion or is this commission designed to prevent multiple kinds of faith and order as His kind of churches?? (designed to prevent it)
5. Do the scriptures predict a Christianity that will depart from the faith and order established by Christ? (yes, see 2 Thess. 3:6; Rom. 16:17; Tit. 3:10)
6. Does this commission authorize or even condone joint ecumenical evangelistic crusades in the name of the Great Commission? For example, the Billy Graham crusades, where all denominations of diverse doctrine and practice (Roman Catholics, Seventh Day Adventists, Reformed Churches, sacramental churches, etc.) are invited to work together in order to accomplish the Great Commission for Christ? (no)
7. Name two ways you can use the Great Commission principle of LIKE FAITH AND ORDER to identify a true New Testament Church. (doctrinal likeness, deny ecumenical practices)

The Church Membership Conclusion

“Teaching them to observe all things”

Thus far, we have seen that authority to carry out the Great Commission is given to “ye” and not to “them.” We have also established the meaning of “*make disciples*” as both an event that began with the gospel as well as an on going process that continues with baptism and habitual assembling together in observing the commandments of the Lord. We have seen that it was given to those who have been through this three-fold process rather than those who have not. Last, we have seen that the commission has been given to those who are of like faith and order with Jesus Christ rather than those who are not.

Let’s continue to investigate the inherent qualifications found in this commission. For example, how can anyone be taught to observe anything Christ commanded without habitually assembling with the teacher?

The third aspect of the Great Commission is the command to bring baptized believers into church membership. The leaders of the church at Jerusalem proved they understood it exactly this way when they first implemented it on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:41-42). After the first two aspects of the Great Commission were accomplished (“*as many as received the word were baptized*”) then the third aspect is described in the following manner – “*and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.*” They brought the newly baptized believers into church membership. They did not understand the third aspect apart from being “added unto them.” In the book of Acts whenever the third aspect of this commission is practiced it always, in every instance, means addition to a church and therefore church membership.

The practice of the third aspect of the commission either brought the newly baptized into an existing church as in Acts 2:41-42, or church authorized representatives (Acts 13:1-3) organized newly baptized believers into a new church as in Acts 14:22-23. Whenever the third aspect is obeyed in the book of Acts there is no exception to this rule. The third aspect of the Great Commission is authority to bring baptized believers into the membership of the Church of Christ.

If the above arguments don’t convince you, then consider this. Can you think of any other possible way in those days that the third aspect could be observed apart from the “ye” assembling together with the “them” in an organized and orderly fashion? The Great Commission requires “them” to be taught how to observe all things Christ commanded. Specifically, how could they be taught to observe what Christ commanded them in Matthew 18:15-18 apart from membership in the same church?

Matt. 18:15 “Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.

16 But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.

*17 And if he shall neglect to hear them, **tell it unto the church:** but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.*

18 Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

Proper observation of the above command is according to a due process of orderly steps which culminates with “*tell it unto the church.*” No unchurched persons can observe this

command since no unchurched person is under the authority of a church, or has a church to “tell it to.” This command in Matthew 18:17 assumes that all observing parties involved are members of the church they tell it to. This procedure is part of the “*all things*” that the contextual “*ye*” is to teach “*them*” to observe, and it cannot be done apart from actual assembling together.

In the above instructions, notice that those “two or three” in verse 16 do not constitute a church. Instead, those “two or three” are directed by Christ to “go tell it to the church” in verse 17.

Some suppose that just two verses later (v. 20) Christ teaches that wherever “two or three” are gathered in His name that a church is thereby constituted. That is, some believe this verse gives authority for believers to “gather themselves together” into a church.

Such a conclusion simply ignores the context. Notice that Matthew 18:19 introduces this statement with the word “again” showing direct continuation from verses 17-18. Jesus is simply reaffirming to that “church” in verse 17, that regardless of the size of its membership, the authority given to it as described in verse 18 is final and will be blessed by the promise of His presence. Regardless of how small the majority may be (“two or three”) whenever the church assembles for prayer or any other authorized business of the kingdom, Christ will stand with them. Furthermore, Jesus uses the passive voice in verse 20 instead of the middle voice in the translation of the word “gathered.” If he had used the middle voice that would convey the idea that they “gathered themselves together” but the use of the passive voice demonstrates this is a meeting authorized by the church or appointed by the church.

The bottom line is that Matthew 18:15-20 cannot be observed by “two or three” baptized believers in an unchurched status as it requires membership in the church in order to “*go tell the church.*”

In addition to the command to church members in Matthew 18:15-17, the observance of the Lord’s Supper as instituted in Matthew 26 requires the actual assembling together for observance. The “*ye*” cannot teach “*them*” how to observe the Lord’s Supper apart from actually assembling together with them at the same time and in the same place. In I Corinthians 11:18 Paul says in regard to the observance of the Lord’s Supper, “*when ye come together IN THE CHURCH.*” There is no example of the Lord’s Supper being observed by unchurched persons anywhere in Scripture. Surely, this is part of the “*all things*” Christ is commanding the Great Commission “*ye*” to teach “*them*” to observe?

Finally, remember that those who are being addressed as “*ye*” were pre-qualified in that they “*have*” already been through this same process before being authorized to administer it to others. If that is true, then, they too had to be incorporated as members in the Church at Jerusalem already, before being given this commission in Matthew 28:19-20. If the third aspect requires membership in a New Testament Church then the Church must have existed previous to the giving of the Great Commission. The scriptures plainly and clearly declare that they were assembling together with Christ habitually for more than three years prior to being commissioned:

“Wherefore of these men which have COMPANIED with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went IN and OUT among us, Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection.” – Acts 1:21-22.

Note the language of continual assembling where Jesus “*went IN and OUT among us.*” The event described here is the selection of another man to fill the “church” office of apostle along with the eleven. Paul says that apostles were “*set in the church*” first (I Cor. 12:28). The setting of apostles in the church occurred very early in the ministry of Christ when He chose from among those assembling with Him twelve to be apostles (see Luke 6:12-13).

Acts 1:21-22 proves that more than the twelve had been habitually assembling together with Christ over the past three and half years, because if not, there would be no other persons qualified to fill this office.

Therefore, those being addressed in the Great Commission were already in a church condition just as they were already in a saved and baptized condition previous to being commissioned. He is addressing the New Testament church in Matthew 28:19-20.

It is not possible for this aspect of the commission to be administered or observed by unchurched persons even if they are baptized believers. This aspect of the commission is the command to bring them into a church state and it provides the authority to do so. The church institution is not only inseparable from obedience to the Great Commission but it is always the direct product of the third aspect of the Great Commission in the book of Acts – always.

Review Questions

1. Is it possible to obey the commission without both the “ye” and “them” being brought together in a regular habitual assembly in order to observe all things commanded? (no)
2. Is it possible to obey the third aspect of the commission outside of membership in a church of like faith and order with Christ? (no)
3. Is it possible to qualify as an administrator of this commission apart from being already saved, baptized, and a member of such a New Testament Church? (no)
4. Should you or anyone else submit to anyone for discipleship training who is not a member of a church of like faith and order with Christ? If so, by what authority from God’s Word? (no, as there is no such scriptural authority for it)

An Age Long “Ye”

- *“and, lo, I am with you always, even until the end of the world. Amen”*

Thus far, we have seen that authority to carry out the Great Commission is given to “ye” and not to “them.” We have also established the meaning of “*make disciples*” as both an event that began with the gospel as well as an on going process that continues with baptism and habitual assembling together in observing the commandments of the Lord. We have seen that it was given to those who have been through this three-fold process rather than those who have not. We have seen it has been given to those who are like faith and order with Jesus Christ rather than those who are not. Last, we have seen it is given to those in a church state rather than those who are not.

However, now the text demands they are an AGE LONG existing “ye”. Christ promises that He will be with this “*you*” until the end of the age. If this “*you*” is considered as individuals, most died before the end of that century, much less the end of the world. Christ could not have given this commission to them as individuals. Christ could only have given them this as representatives of something that could and would continue until the end of the age.

Whatever “you” represents, it must be in keeping with the inherent characteristics thus far established by the context. Thus “you” must be representative of saved, baptized, churching disciples of like faith and order with Christ.

Therefore, the inherent characteristics of this “ye” leaves only two possible options as to their age long identity. Either Christ is giving the commission to the New Testament church to be administered by its ordained members or He is addressing only the ordained members within the New Testament Church. Is He giving it to His church, or to the ordained elders?

Many believe He gave the commission to the ordained class within the churches of Christ. To support this position, they argue that only the ordained class is capable of performing all three aspects of this commission; whereas the ordinary church member is not, and if given to the church it would authorize women and children as well to administer it. They argue that in the book of Acts in every case of baptism it is performed by the ordained membership and silent passages cannot be used to contradict this conclusion. All of these things are true.

However, we believe that the same evidence supports the conclusion that the Great Commission was given to the church to be administered by its ordained membership. Indeed, the overall Biblical evidence demands this conclusion. For example, we can find explicit cases where the church is the one sending out its ordained membership to carry out this commission (Acts 11:22; 13:1-3; 15:1-3); and the one sending is superior in authority to the one being sent. We can find an explicit and clear command of Christ that appoints the church as the final authority in kingdom affairs when he instructs individual church members to “tell it to the church” rather than to its ordained membership. We can find scriptures that indicate it is the church that chooses and determines the qualifications of those to be set apart to be ordained (Acts 6:5). Don’t those who select and choose always have greater authority than those being examined and chosen? We can find scriptures where such ordained men are “set in” the church and are said to be “gifts” for the church and thus are subservient in the final analysis to the Church (Eph. 4:11; I Cor. 12:28).

However, most importantly, we can find no scriptures that promise age long continuance to the ordained ministry per se, but we do find scriptures that promise age long continuance to the church (Mt. 16:18; Eph. 3:21) in perfect harmony with the age long promise in Matthew 28:20.

Finally, we can find examples where Christ directly addresses the ordained leadership but is speaking through him to the church (“*unto the angel of the church which is at...he that hath an ear let him ear what the Spirit saith UNTO THE CHURCHES*”- Rev. 2-3). In Appendix I there is a detailed contextual analysis of Matthew 28:10-20 that demonstrates the whole church was present with its ordained representatives. It is a very common thing to address an organization or institution by addressing their appointed leadership. In Matthew 28:19-20 we believe the contextual “ye” is the Church of Christ including its ordained membership.

Review Questions

1. Can the “you” of the Great Commission represent anyone outside of the membership of a New Testament Church? (no)
2. Does the “ye” have reference to the ordained membership OR are they ordained representatives of the church? (ordained church representatives)
3. Where does authority to carry out the commission reside then? In a certain class of church members or with the church? (the church as the church sends them)
4. Do the scriptures give examples of churches sending out qualified members to perform the

tasks listed in the Great Commission? (yes, see Acts 11:22; 13:3; 15:2-3)

5. Does this commission authorize self-gospelization, self-baptism, self-instruction or self-constitution of churches? (no)

New Testament Church Succession

- *“and, lo, I am with you always, even until the end of the world. Amen.”*

We have demonstrated that there is an AGE LONG promise of continuity given to the Church as it carries out this commission. What kind of continuity is it? Does the Great Commission text define it? Yes, it does. It defines it in three ways. (1) Organic link to link contact; (2) Natural cycle of succession; (3) Supernatural promise of day in and day out organic link to link succession.

A. Organic Link to Link Contact:

The Great Commission “*ye*” and “*them*” are described in terms of direct organic link to link relationship to each other in this commission. The first link is “*ye*” and the second link in direct relationship to this “*ye*” is “*them*.” The “*them*” are the direct objects in direct contact in both time and space with the “*ye*” of this commission. It is impossible for the Great Commission to be administered without direct “hands on” contact in time and space with “*them*.” For example, preaching the gospel to “*them*” requires that the “*ye*” physically “*go*” to them. Remember, there were no TV’s and modern electronic means of communication when this commission was given. Likewise, the second and third aspects of the commission require actual physical contact between “*ye*” and “*them*” in carrying out this commission. Baptism was a physical “hands on” connection between “*ye*” and “*them*.” Furthermore, teaching “*them*” required actual assembling together with “*them*” over a period of time in order to accomplish the goal of “*teaching them to observe all things....commanded.*” Organic link to link contact cannot be successfully repudiated if we take the commission at face value. In fact there is no other possible way that such a commission could be administered but by organic link to link contact in time and space.

To deny this is to attempt to alter the text by removing “*ye*” from it and making “*them*” authorized and capable of SELF-administration in every aspect. No one has the right to alter the scripture or edit from the commission this “*ye*” or any other word provided by divine inspiration.

B. Natural Cycle of Succession:

Does the third aspect of this commission command “*them*” to observe all things whatsoever Christ commanded? Obviously! Does this include observing this commission as a New Testament Church? Who would deny that? Notice that the very nature of this commission is a NATURAL CYCLE of reproduction after its own kind:

“GO....baptizing....teaching” which demands them to “GO.....baptizing....teaching” which demands them to “GO...baptizing...teaching them...etc.etc.

So the very nature of this commission is a natural historical cycle of succession by reproduction after its own kind in organic link to link fashion.

Look at all denominations today and you will see this is exactly how they NATURALLY reproduce after their own kind. Luther started the Lutheran church and every Lutheran church was a product of previous Lutherans in doctrine and practice. Calvin started the Presbyterian church and every Presbyterian church afterwards was a product of previous Presbyterians of like faith and order. When a split occurred in a denomination, at that split a new kind of church was formed, and all following churches are products of a previous one of like faith and order. All present denominations operate according to this natural cycle.

However, it is Christ that started the very first church in Jerusalem during His earthly ministry and it was like faith and order with Himself. It is Christ that PROMISED the contextual “ye” that He would be present with them “*day in and day out*” until the end of the age reproducing churches of like faith and order. Will you suggest that Luther can start his kind of church which has naturally reproduced after its own kind for the past 400 years (without the continuing presence of Luther) but Christ cannot start, maintain and reproduce His own kind even with His continuing presence?

C. Supernatural Promise of Day in and Day out Succession until the end of the Age:

“and, lo, I am with you always, even until the end of the world. Amen.”

Literally, the Greek says “*all the days until the end of the age.*” Greek scholars say this is an idiom which means “*day in and day out*” until the end of the age (William Hendriksen, **New Testament Commentary**, Matthew, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Mich. p. 1003). Christ is promising His day in and day out presence until the end of the world for the very purpose of carrying out this kind of successive historical link by link organic cycle of like faith and order. The gates of hell shall never prevail against His church simply because He remains with it providentially making sure that this “ye” continues “*day in and day out*” reproducing like faith and order until the end of the world. This is why Jude says the faith was “*ONCE delivered*” – Jude 3. This means that the KIND of churches found in the New Testament not only continued to reproduce after their own kind in the apostolic age but did so also after the apostolic age into every generation up to the present generation. To deny this is to demand that Christ lied and in addition to lying, He failed to be with them “*always, even unto the end of the age.*” To deny this is to claim the gates of hell did prevail against His church. To deny this is to edit from the commission the prequalified “ye” at some point in time between the apostolic age and the present and demand that “them” is authorized to self-administer this commission in order to restart it. No one has the authority to edit the “ye” from this commission at ANY TIME. If this “ye” at some point in history ceased to exist, died out, then this leaves only one option: God had to violate His own Word and directly authorize those identified as “them” to resume the Great Commission. However, the promise of AGE LONG CONTINUITY found in the Great Commission denies that possibility altogether, as the object of this promise is the prequalified “ye” rather than the unqualified “them” found in the Great Commission. To say that it did cease to exist is to say that Christ did not keep His promise to His kind of church.

Therefore, it is impossible to deny organic link to link church succession without editing out and denying what Matthew 28:19-20 clearly states and promises. It provides for no authority at any time between the first and second coming for “them” to administer any aspect of this commission, nor does it allow for the possibility of complete cessation of the pre-qualified “ye” at

any time between the first and second coming. They must be here throughout this age to carry out the Great Commission.

Remember, the “ye” has been contextually defined to be those who have been through this threefold process already, thus they are members of an existing church and acting under the authority of that existing church.

Many will reject this conclusion due to their view of secular church history. However, this objection will be dealt with later (Appendix II). For the present it must be remembered that unlike the Scriptures, secular church history is (1) uninspired, (2) incomplete, and (3) often inaccurate.

The very structure and nature of this commission demands organic link to link contact that concludes in the reproduction of churches of like faith and order until Jesus comes again.

“Baptists have generally held that a church is both an organization and an organism. As an organism (a living being, or as the Bible calls the church ‘lively stones’ in I Peter 2:5) a church can bring forth after her kind (Gen. 1:24). We mean by this that a church may dismiss some of her members to form a new and separate church, or by sending forth a missionary with authority to organize a new and separate church. We do not believe in the spontaneous generation of churches any more than we believe in spontaneous generation of animal or human life. We hold, as the Scriptures teach, that all life comes from antecedent life.” Milburn Cockrell, **Scriptural Church Organization**, 2nd ed. back cover.

Review Questions

1. What are the two successive links found in the Great Commission? (Ye and Them)
2. Is it possible to carry out the great commission apart from actual organic time and space contact between the “ye” and “them” of the Great Commission? (no)
3. Does the orderly process commanded in the commission naturally produce link to link succession of like faith and order? (yes)
4. Does the supernatural promise of Christ to be with that “you” (His kind of church) in carrying out this natural cycle of organic link by link succession ensure it will be successful to the end of the age? (yes)
5. What then is a valid historical mark of a true church of Christ according to this promise? (historical continuity as a kind)
6. Do churches evolve out of nothing/out of self-constitution or are they “made” through the obedience of a previously existing church, obedient to the Great Commission by sending out qualified men to gospelize, baptize, and gather into churches? (by obedience of a pre-existing church to the Great Commission)

Summary Conclusion

Usurping authority is a grievous sin. It is stealing what does not belong to you. It is doing what you are not authorized to do. The Great Commission context defines precisely who is and who is not authorized to administer the Great Commission. The proper authorized administrator is characterized by seven factors. The administrator is (1) the contextual “ye” not “them”; (2) the qualified experienced “ye” not the unqualified inexperienced “them”; (3) the “ye” of like faith and order with Christ not those who are not; (4) the “ye” that are in a church of like faith and order not the unchurched; (5) the “ye” that represent the Church of Jesus Christ and those being sent out by that church, not anyone else; (6) the “ye” that are reproduced as the direct historical product of link to link organic succession between the first and second coming of Christ not any church unrelated to this historical link succession; and (7) The kind of churches found in the pages of the New Testament.

These seven characteristics can be summarized under three headings: (1) In regard to doctrine and practice they are churches of like faith and order with Christ. (2) In regard to origin they are the product of a preceding church of like faith and order. (3) In regard to history they are those churches that did not begin as a denomination outside of Palestine, outside the earthly ministry of Christ and outside the city of Jerusalem outside the first century.

Find churches which are doctrinally and historically like faith and order with these three summarized characteristics and you have found the churches of the New Testament. All others are usurpers and have no authority whatsoever to administer the Great Commission. All others are not churches of like faith and order with Christ. All others do not originate with a previous church that is like faith and order beginning with the church Jesus built in Jerusalem during His earthly ministry. All others are self-originated at some other point in time, some other place by some other way than authorized by Christ in the Great Commission.

In 1810 Jesse Mercer wrote the following circular letter to the churches of the Georgia Baptist Association:

“From these proposition, thus established, we draw the following inferences, as clear and certain truths,

I. That all churches and ministers, who originated since the apostles, and not successively to them, are not in gospel order; and therefore cannot be acknowledged as such.

II. That all, who have been ordained to the work of the ministry without the knowledge and call of the church, by popes, councils, &c. are the creatures of those who constituted them, and not the servants of Christ, or his church, and therefore have no right to administer for them.

III. That those who have set aside the discipline of the gospel, and have given law to, and exercised dominion over the church, are usurpers over the place and office of Christ, are against him; and therefore may not be accepted in their offices.

IV. That they, who administer contrary to their own, or the faith of the gospel, cannot administer for God; since without the gospel faith he has nothing to minister; and without their own he accepts no service; therefore the administrations of such are unwarrantable impositions in any way.

Our reasons, therefore for rejecting baptism by immersion when administered by Pedobaptist ministers, are,

I. That they are connected with churches clearly out of the apostolic succession, and therefore clearly out of the apostolic commission.

II. That they have derived their authority, by ordination, from the bishops of Rome, or from individuals, who have taken it on themselves to give it.

III. That they hold a higher rank in the churches than the apostles did, are not accountable to, and of consequence not triable by the church; but are amenable only to, or among themselves.

IV. That they all, as we think, administer contrary to the pattern of the Gospel, and some, when occasion requires, will act contrary to their own professed faith. Now as we know of none implicated in this case, but are in some or all of the above defects, either of which we deem sufficient to disqualify for meet gospel administration, therefore we hold their administrations invalid.

But if it should be said, that the apostolic succession cannot be ascertained, and then it is proper to act without it; we say, that the loss of the succession can never prove it futile, nor justify any one out of it. The Pedobaptists, by their own histories, admit they are not of it; but we do not, and shall think ourselves entitled to the claim, until the reverse be clearly shown. And should any think authority derived from the MOTHER HARLOTS, sufficient to qualify to administer a gospel ordinance, they will be so charitable as not to condemn us for preferring that derived from Christ. And should any still more absurdly plead that ordination, received from an individual, is sufficient; we leave them to shew what is the use of ordination, and why it exists. If any think an administration will suffice which has no pattern in the gospel; they will suffer us to act according to the divine order with impunity. And if it should be said that faith in the subject is all that is necessary, we beg leave to require it where the scriptures do, that is every where. But we must close: we beseech you brethren while you hold fast the form of your profession, be ready to unite with those from whom you differ, as far as the principles of eternal truth will justify. And while you firmly oppose that shadowy union, so often urged, be instant in prayer and exert yourselves to bring about that which is in heart, and after godliness. Which the Lord hasten in its season. Amen and Amen.”

A. M. MARSHALL, Moderator. JESSE MERCER, Clerk.” – Jesse Mercer, *History of the Georgia Baptist Association*, pp. 126-127.

Before the rise of J.R. Graves, Jesse Mercer spelled it out that the Great Commission reproduced churches of like faith and order in succession and would until the end of the world. He regarded the Great Commission as “the pattern” and “gospel order” for all to follow. Early English Baptists as well as the Philadelphia Baptists Association consistently referred to the Great Commission pattern as “regular church order.”

Chapter Two

The Practice of the Great Commission in the book of Acts

Did the Church at Jerusalem obey this commission? Some believe that during the period of Acts 8-11, that the third aspect of this commission was not observed. They cite cases where some were baptized but not added to an assembly or where there is no mention of an assembly. How are we to reconcile this with the explicit command of Christ in the commission? One thing is for sure, contrary examples can never replace explicit precepts as the rule for practice. We can find many examples of disobedience in the scriptures to many commands but that disobedience never replaces the precept as the rule for practice.

We believe: (1) It should be no surprise that Apostolic Churches obeyed what Christ commanded in the commission and that it is clearly and unambiguously spelled out in no uncertain terms right at the beginning. (2) If a departure from this commission is found it should be no surprise that it is due to some kind of clearly stated disruption and such a departure is the exception to the rule rather than the rule. (3) It should be no surprise that such a clearly stated disruption that gives rise to an exception is addressed by the Apostolic churches and an attempt is made to correct that departure and return to the Great Commission rule.

In this chapter we will address these issues by answering three questions: First, we will ask, "Did Apostolic Christianity Obey the Commission as a Rule?" Secondly, "Is there any exceptions to this rule and are they clearly stated?" And lastly, "How did the Church Respond to such Exceptions?"

A. Did Apostolic Christianity Obey the Commission As a Rule?

The book of Acts opens with Christ commanding them to wait in Jerusalem until they were empowered by the coming of the Holy Spirit for the purpose of carrying out the Great Commission (Acts 1:5-8). Immediately, upon being empowered by the Holy Spirit, Luke shows by no uncertain terms that the commission was obeyed step by step from the beginning.

"Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers....added to the church." – Acts 2:41-42,46.

Now compare the above with the logical procedure and aspects of the Great Commission:

1. "go" (with the gospel) - "**RECEIVED HIS WORD**"
2. "baptizing them" - "**WERE BAPTIZED**"
3. Gathered for instruction - "**ADDED UNTO THEM**"
4. "Teaching them" - "**CONTINUED STEADFASTLY IN THE APOSTLES DOCTRINE**"

Right from the very start, Luke very clearly and very carefully spells out in no uncertain terms that the church at Jerusalem obeyed this commission. Moreover, Luke uses the grammatical periphrastic construct to clearly establish before the eyes of the reader that this was not a one time thing but the continuing practice or pattern followed by the church at Jerusalem. The words

“continued steadfastly” in our KJV represent a grammatical construction consisting of two verbs. These verbs denote that what was a continuous action in the past (imperfect tense) was also a continuous action at the present time of writing (present tense). The natural implication of this grammatical construction shows what they began to practice on the day of Pentecost (imperfect tense) continued on (present tense) as a pattern of practice with this church. Hence, this was their ongoing pattern of practice with new converts.

Secondly, Luke summarizes this on going pattern of practice from this point forward by simply using the term “added” (Acts 2:47; 5:14) and when the numbers become too large to count he replaces the term “added” with “multiplied” and “greatly multiplied.” In every case they first “received the word” and then secondly were “baptized” and then “added” to the teaching assembly in full fellowship with the membership of the church at Jerusalem.

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.”

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.”

Acts 5:14 “And believers were the more ADDED to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.”

Notice that “added to them” is synonymous with the words “added to the church” as well as “added to the Lord.” When the numbers got too large to count or to be “ADDED” up he changes from addition to multiplication (“they were multiplied”).

Acts 6:1 “And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration.”

Acts 6:7 “And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.”

That such additions and multiplications were not to be thought of as something separate and distinct from church membership is clearly demonstrated by Luke when he brings both the mathematical terms and church together in one passage:

*Acts 9:31 “Then had **the churches** rest throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, **were multiplied.**”*

*Acts 11:24-26 “For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people **was added** unto the Lord. Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul: And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves **with the church**, and taught much people.”*

This “added” or “multiplied” not only contextually refers back to the procedure spelled out in Acts 2:41-42 but always concludes with church membership. This same pattern of obedience to

the Commission can be seen clearly by the practice of the second great church found in the book of Acts – the church at Antioch in Acts 13-18:

1. The Church at Antioch ordains Paul and Silas as church missionaries – Acts 14:1-3
2. These ordained missionaries are sent out to preach the gospel – Acts 14:3-19
3. They Baptize the gospelized – Acts 16:15, 33; 18:8; 19:5
4. They organize them into churches – Acts 14:20-23
5. They continue steadfastly in the apostle's doctrine – Acts 14:20-23; 16:1-4

The church at Antioch did not ordain Paul as an apostle but they did ordain him as their missionary. The word "sent" in verse 3 means one sent out as an authorized representative. The Holy Spirit confirmed what the Church did and thus they were "sent" out by the Holy Spirit (v. 4) through the instrumentality of the church as church ordained, church authorized representatives.

Therefore, the Great Commission pattern is the ordinary and normal RULE of practice by the two great Churches in the book of Acts. Should we expect any other RULE of practice other than what Christ commissioned?

B. Are there Exceptions to this Rule and if so, are there Clearly Stated Reasons given?

Some object to such a RULE of practice because of certain things recorded in Acts 8-11. What about the Samaritans, the Ethiopian Eunuch, Ananais and those believers in Antioch in Acts 8-11? Do not these events prove that the Great Commission does not necessarily include the church and/or church membership?

The book of Acts makes three things very clear. First, the normal and standard practice of the Jerusalem church as well as the church at Antioch was to obey the Great Commission as given by Christ which includes gospelization, baptism and habitual assembling of the baptized together as an observing church. Second, the writer of Acts 8-11 indicates clearly that the departure from the normal observance of all the Great Commission particulars was due to a clearly spelled out DISRUPTION in the church at Jerusalem rather than to their STANDARD practice under normal situations. The disruption was a particular persecution by Saul. Acts 8 introduces this persecution and Acts 11 closes with the mention of this particular cause of disruption.

Acts 8:1 "And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles."

Acts 11:19 "Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only."

There can be no doubt that Luke spells out clearly that this was a disruption of the normal condition and practice at the Church in Jerusalem. Some well known scholars have contended that this persecution was sent by God for the purpose to motivate the Jewish Jerusalem Church to obey the Commission by going beyond the Jewish boundaries. They note that the term "scattered" is not the Greek term that denotes a disorganized scattering as when someone throws a rock into a chicken pen and the chickens run in every direction. Rather, this is the

Greek term that is used for intentional sowing of seed in a field. Furthermore, the leadership of the church does not “scatter” but remains in Jerusalem. Secondly, the consistent grammatical gender used to describe those “scattered” preaching the gospel is masculine; and in particular, the term that excludes women and children is used (anar – Acts 11:19). Thirdly, Luke provides an example of such in the case of Philip (Acts 8) an ordained man (Acts 6). Tradition holds that even Ananias in Damascus was the first ordained Pastor of the church in Damascus. Ordained men were involved in the gathering of every church recorded in the New Testament.

C. How did the Church Respond to Such Exceptions?

Luke makes it clear that the church at Jerusalem was monitoring its missionaries and responded to any abnormality. Whenever such abnormal cases came to the ears of the church at Jerusalem they dispatched authorized representatives to investigate and oversee such believers:

Acts 8: 14 “Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John:”

Acts 11:22 “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. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.”

The term “sent” translates a Greek term that means “a sent authorized representative.” This is the verbal form for the term translated “apostle” and an apostle was an ordained representative of Christ. This verb form was used for those “sent” out under the authority of the Church. Notice that the church is the one sending Barnabas out and limiting the extent of his mission (“that he should go as far as....”)

Luke clearly shows in the Book of Acts that departures from normal Great Commission procedures were not left undone, but that the Church at Jerusalem followed up on such cases as they came to their attention.

Hence, the church at Jerusalem was committed to the Great Commission pattern and monitored any deviance from that pattern by sending out authorized representatives to ensure Christ’s commission was obeyed in every particular.

Whenever questionable news came back to the ears of the church, they authorized and sent someone to investigate it; and what followed in each case was the mention of “churches” or a “church” as the result.

Acts 9:31 “Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.”

Acts 11:23-26 “Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord. For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord. Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul: And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and

taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.”

Hence, the disruption from completing the Great Commission is rectified and Acts 11-18 returns to the normal preaching, baptizing, gathering into churches. What else should one expect other than attempted compliance with the Great Commission??? Therefore, Acts 1-8 and 13-18 demonstrate clearly that the rule of action was obedience to the Great Commission in all of its aspects.

The question to those who would argue contrary to what Luke spells out in Acts 2:41-42 is “*why would you think the early Christians would want to disobey any particular of the Great Commission?*” Why take an obvious EXCEPTION to the RULE in the book of Acts and attempt to make it the rule? Shouldn’t it be expected that the early Christians would obey the Great Commission in all of its particulars? Shouldn’t it be expected during a time of obvious disruption that the first church would attempt to follow up and confirm the due gospel order among such disciples? Does not the case of the Ethiopian Eunuch and baptism demonstrate that “silence” should not be used to prove disobedience to the commission but rather obedience? There is nothing recorded concerning Philip telling the Ethiopian Eunuch anything about baptism and yet we find him wanting to be baptized. Does silence constitute a rule here? And why would Philip tell him about his need to obey baptism but not the final aspect of the commission as well? You say the text does not say so! Neither does it say that Philip instructed him previously about baptism either! Why wouldn’t the church at Jerusalem follow up this case by sending someone to complete the commission work as they did in Samaria and all along the way, including Antioch? If one is going to make an assumption on silence, it is far better to assume a conclusion that is in keeping with what we are explicitly told is their commission and their practice, rather than something contrary to it. The fact that Luke records the case of the Ethiopian Eunuch is proof that his case was known to the church at Jerusalem, even as the church knew of the case at Samaria.

The book of Acts demonstrates clearly that under normal uninterrupted circumstances that membership into a church is the direct and immediate result of obedience to the Great Commission. The book of Acts demonstrates clearly that under abnormal and interrupted conditions it was the practice of the church to follow up any case of which they were uncertain, cases that did not seem to conform to all aspects of the commission. Whatever abnormalities came to their ears (Acts 8:14; 11:20), they followed it up. And churches were always the result of such follow ups (Acts 9:31; 11:26).

In conclusion, the RULE of Apostolic Christianity was to obey the Great Commission in all of its particulars, so that church membership completes the discipleship program; and wherever there occurs EXCEPTIONS to this rule, those exceptions are dealt with by New Testament Churches, so that they eventually conform to that end, with the result of membership in a church of Christ.

Those who interpret cases in Acts 8-11 to be contrary to the explicit command of the commission and contrary to church authority do so on the basis of assumption and silence alone. Assumption and silence are never a good basis for drawing conclusions completely contradictory to carefully explicit preceding precepts and examples.

Dr. T.G. Jones was the vice president of the board of trustees of the Louisville Southern Baptist Theological Seminary at the time when William H. Whitsitt was its president. Jones was also chosen as the president of Mercer University in Georgia and another time was chosen to be the president of Wake Forest College in North Carolina. He declined both offers. He also wrote a book defending Baptist History. In that book he claimed that the Great Commission as given in Matthew 28:19-20 was a process that included authority to constitute churches. He said:

“In this simple analysis of the commission is presented the very process by which Baptists are now made, constituted into churches, and governed. That it was the process by which the first preachers made converts, and constituted churches, is beyond question.” T. G. Jones, **The Baptists, their Origin, Continuity, Principles, Spirit, Policy, Position, and Influence, a Vindication.** (Philadelphia, American Baptist Publication Society) p. 27.

Review Questions

1. How is Acts 2:41-42 similar to Matthew 28:19-20? (same three fold pattern for making disciples with promise of continuity being fulfilled)
2. Did the church at Jerusalem obey the Great Commission in chapters 2-8? (yes)
3. Is there anything noted by Luke that would explain an interruption to the common practice of the Church at Jerusalem in Acts 8-11 (yes, the persecution of Saul)
4. Is there anything stated or implied that indicates the Church at Jerusalem took actions to conform all reported cases to full obedience to the Great Commission? (yes, see Acts 8:14; 11:22)
5. In Acts 13-18 in the missionary journeys of Paul, are there indications that the order of the Great Commission was obeyed as given by Christ. (yes)

Chapter Three

The Constitution of Churches by Early Particular English Baptists – 1640-1707

*“I say that I know by mine own experience (having walked with them), that **they were thus gathered**; Viz., Some godly and learned men of **approved gifts and abilities for the Ministry**” – Hensard Knollys: **A Moderate Answer Unto Dr. Bastwick's Book Called Independency not God's Ordinance**; London, 1645.*

*“It is well known to many and especially to ourselves, that our congregations as they are now, were **erected and framed according to the rule of Christ**” – William Kiffin: **A Brief Remonstrance of the Reasons of those People Called Anabaptists for their Separation**; London, 1645; page 6.*

The prime movers among the seven particular Baptist Churches in London did not believe they were self-originated, nor did they believe they originated as a denomination in London. They believed that church ordained men coming out of the country side “erected and framed” these churches “according to the rule of Christ.”

These early English and Welsh Particular Baptists believed there were Biblical essentials necessary for proper church constitution. They clearly distinguished between properly constituted churches and improperly constituted churches. Their basis for this distinction was found in the authority and order presented in the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20. They firmly believed that authority to constitute churches was found in Matthew 28:19-20 and it was given only to the church to be exercised through its ordained ministry according to the particular order established by the Matthew 28:19-20 text. They coined phrases to describe and distinguish the proper constitution of a church from churches which were not properly constituted according to this established order. That phrase was variously stated in such words as “gospel order” “regular church order” “rule of Christ” or “binding gospel order” etc. These phrases were passed down to American Baptists and are still used today to describe the doctrine and practice concerning the true manner in which churches are constituted.

In 1654 Thomas Patient interpreted Matthew 28:19-20 to be the binding “order” given by Christ to the church and inclusive in this commission was the authority to gather baptized believers into a constituted church. In the following article this fact is explicitly summarized in the very first paragraph below:

*“It is clear that the Ordinance of the Supper is committed to a Church, yea, to **A MINISTERIAL ASSEMBLY GATHERED ACCORDING TO CHRIST'S COMMISSION**, Matt. 28:19,20.” (emphasis mine).*

*“Here I understand **THE ORDER** binding is this:*

*First the ministers should teach the Nations, or make them disciples by teaching;
Then the command is, baptizing them, what them? such that are made disciples by teaching.
Thirdly, the Command is to teach them to observe "whatsoever I have commanded you."*

*And, I will be with you to the end of the world, that is, He will be with a people, first converted, secondly baptized, thirdly walking in the practical observation of all other administrations of **God's house, as these eleven did, and those they converted.** I say His promise is to be with His people to the end of the world."*

"This Is The BINDING GOSPEL ORDER Which Involves The Lord's Supper

*THIS ORDER IS BINDING, as a minister is commanded to baptize one who is made a disciple and not any other, so he is commanded to put them upon the practical observation of all Christ's Laws and His only. **Until they are baptized, they are not, nor cannot be admitted into a visible Church,** to partake of the Supper of the Lord.*

The Apostles Followed This BINDING GOSPEL ORDER

That this is the true meaning of Christ in the commission appears by His Apostles' ministry and practice, who, by the infallible gifts of the Holy Ghost were guided unfailingly thus to preach and practice, Acts 2:37, 38 with verses 41 and 42.

*First, he teaches them the doctrine of Jesus Christ, they, upon hearing that, were pricked at the heart, and inquiring of Peter and the rest of the Apostles what they should do, he says, "Repent and be baptized every one of you." See how he presses the SAME ORDER here as Christ does in the Commission, and afterwards in the 41 verse where it is said, "So many as gladly received the word of God, were baptized, and the same day there was **added to the Church** about three thousand souls," by faith and baptism, "and they continued in the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in breaking of bread and prayer." - **The Doctrine of Baptism by Thomas Patient, 1654.** (emphasis mine).*

By necessary inference this means that Thomas Patient believed that the third aspect of the Great Commission involved the constitution of the church out of the previously baptized believers. However, necessary inference is not needed to draw this conclusion as Patient explicitly states this to be true when he says, *It is clear that the Ordinance of the Supper is committed to a Church, yea, to ministerial assembly **gathered according to Christ's commission – Mt. 28:19-20***" and then he follows that by saying the very same order was followed by the Apostles in Acts 2:41-42 where the third aspect of the Great Commission explicitly includes membership into the church, *"and the same day there was **added to the Church.**"* Notice the placement of this phrase following baptism but preceding "continued stedfastly in the apostle's doctrine..." There can be no question in the minds of the apostles that the third aspect of the Great Commission demanded church membership as the conclusion of the Great Commission and there was no question of this in the mind of early English Baptists.

It is this threefold order in the Great Commission that these old Baptists referred to when they used the terms "gospel order" or "regular church order" or "the rule of Christ" or "the binding gospel order." Matthew 28:19-20 was viewed by the early Baptists in England and America as church authority and the precise order for constituting churches of Christ.

Church Authorized and Sent Ministers?

Did these early Particular Baptists of England and Wales (who were also instrumental in forming the Philadelphia Baptist Association in America) believe Matthew 28:19-20 was given to

the church or to its ministers? Thomas Patient said such a church was a “*ministerial assembly gathered according to the Great Commission.*” Did he mean that Matthew 28:19-20 is the authorization given to ministers to gather churches or only that they acted as authorized representatives of the church sending them to gather churches? Either way, it is clear they understood Matthew 28:19-20 as the “gospel order” for the gathering, constituting, organizing of baptized believers into churches. Do they make it clear to whom the Great Commission was given and to whom it was not given?

A. Who is authorized? The Church or the Ministry in the Church?

In the Associational records of the early English Particular Baptists in 1655 it was asked if the authority symbolized by the giving of the keys was given to the ministry or to the church.

“Query 1. Whether the power of the keys spoken of in Mat. 16:19, John 20:23, Mat. 18:18, be given to the church or to the eldership in the church?”

*Answer: the exercise of the power of Christ in a church having officers, in opening, and shutting, in receiving in, and casting out, belongs to the church with its eldership, Mat. 18:17f., I Cor. 5:4., Ill John 9ff., Acts 15:4,22” – B.R. White, ed., **Association Records of the Particular Baptists of England, Wales and Ireland to 1660.** (Association Records of the West Country, 1655), p. 60.*

When they were asked about whether it was proper for ministers to go forth under some authority other than the church they replied:

“Answer: it is unlawful. 1. Because our Lord Christ sendeth forth his ministers by his power alone, Mt. 28:19, and hee is the head of the body the Church that in all things hee might have the preheminance, Col. 1:18; Eph. 1:22

2. Because Christ hath left ALL POWER IN HIS CHURCH both to call and send forth ministers, Mt. 28:19-20, saying, I am with you to the ende of the worlde, and I. Tim. 3; Titus 1; Acts 14; Mt. 18 and 16:18f.

*3. Because wee finde the Church ONLY exercising that power both in chusing and sending forth ministers as appeareth by these Scriptures, Acts 1:23,26; 8:14; 13:2f and 11.22. Wee think fitt to adde that wee taking this question intire consider it fully answered.” – B.R. White, ed., **Association Records of the Particular Baptists of England, Wales and Ireland to 1660.** (Association Records of the Midlands, October 1655) p. 23, (Emphasis mine – MF).*

When asked if an ordained member of the church could just go out on his own accord to preach the gospel without being church sent they responded:

“Answer: we answere that such a brother soe judged of by the church ought wholly to be at its disposing. First, because that all those gifted are the church’s, I Cor. 3:22; 12:28; Eph. 4:11. Secondly, because if one brother goe forth at his owne will, then another and so a third, and by that meanes the church may be wholly neglected. Thirdly, because, if such a brother miscarry in his ministerie, it would be charged upon the church, and soe it would prove very dishonorable to the church and truth of Christ. Fourthly, because, in such a disorderly going out, he cannot expect the prayers of the church for the Spirit of God to

accompany him, Col. 4:3; Eph. 6:18f, and wee judge if any brother shall persist in such disorderly practice after admonition that it is the church's duty to deale with him as an offender." B.R. White, ed., **Association Records of the Particular Baptists of England, Wales and Ireland to 1660**. (Association Records of the West Country, 1657) p. 34.

Edward Drapes in 1649 in his treatise entitled "Gospel Glory" addressed the issue directly when he said:

"The Power is in the Church, not the Elders

Solution:

*To this I briefly answer, that the Church, viz.: the whole Church has this power, as is evident in the casting forth of the incestuous person. Paul writes to the Church, bids them, Purge out the old leaven. He does not write to the officers of the Church only, but to the whole Church. So Acts 15, when the whole Church at Antioch sent to the Church at Jerusalem to advise concerning a difference, The whole Church came together, and gave their advise. It is said, The Apostles, Elders and Brethren send greeting, verse 23. Some bring this place to prove a National Synod. But if it should prove such a thing, behold the whole Nation must be this Synod: for the whole multitude were there; viz.: of the Church with the Apostles and Elders, where every brother had his liberty to speak." – Edward Drapes, **Gospel Glory**, 1649, pp. 57-58.*

Some anti-successionist today point to Article 41 (LXI) in the 1646 London Confession of Faith to prove that baptismal administrators did not have to be church ordained members. However in the very same year that the London Confession of Faith was printed the enemies of the Baptists pointed out this "obscure" language in their own confession to them. In Response, one of the framers that very year of this Confession said:

*'We do not affirm, that every common Disciple may Baptize, **there was some mistake in laying down our Opinion, page 14**. Where it is conceived, that we hold, Whatsoever Disciple can teach the word, can make out Christ, may Baptize, and administer other Ordinances. We do not so. For though believing Women being baptized are Disciples, Acts 9:36, and can make out Christ; yea, and some of them (by their experimental knowledge and spiritual understanding of the way, order, & Faith of the Gospel) may be able to instruct their Teachers, Acts 18:26; Rom. 16:3, yet we do not hold, that a woman may preach, baptize, nor administer other Ordinances. Nor do we judge it meet, for any Brother to baptize or to administer other Ordinances; unless he have received such gifts of the Spirit, as fitteth, or enables him to preach the Gospel. And those gifts being first tried by and known to the Church, such a Brother is chosen and appointed thereunto by the Suffrage of the Church.'*
Hensard Knollys: **The Shining of a Flaming Fire in Zion, in answer to Mr. Saltmarsh and his book "Smoke in the Temple" 1646**. – (Emphasis mine)

Significantly, they made it very clear that they believed that it was the church that authorized and sent out ordained men for the purpose to gather churches:

"Query 1. Whether the setting apart of any to administer officially in the Church is not to be done by that church of which person set apart is a member?"

*Answer: 1. That it is in the power of the church to ordain and send forth a minister to the world, Acts 13:2f. Secondly, that this person sent forth to the world and **GATHERING CHURCHES**, he ought with them and they with him to ordain fit persons to officiate among them, Acts 14.23, Tit. 1.5” - B.R. White, ed., **Association Records of the Particular Baptists of England, Wales and Ireland to 1660**. (Association Records of the West Country, 1654) p. 56, (emphasis mine – MF).*

Notice that in their response they understood “gathering churches” as inclusive in the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20. They make it abundantly clear throughout their minutes that Christ gave sole authority to His church to choose out from among themselves and qualify men for ordination and sends them forth and that this sending forth included the authority to gather churches. Also, once a church is constituted under the authority of a church sent, church authorized, and church ordained man of God that the new church ought to follow the same procedure.

B. Can baptized believers Constitute a Church by themselves

They were explicitly asked if a group of properly baptized believers living far away from any New Testament Church could organize themselves into a church having no church ordained man among them. They replied that such must first seek out the assistance of the church and/or the ordained men that were instrumental in their baptism before being constituted into a church:

*“...yet they may be established a church of Christ having the assistance of others whom God hath inabled to carry on the work of God among them and to take such care for them as their necessity shall require; and that it is the duty of that church and ministry to take care that they be so provided for that was instrumental in their gathering, Acts 14:21ff, Tit. 1.5, II Tim. 2:2, Acts 11:21ff.” – B.R. White, ed., **Association Records of the Particular Baptists of England, Wales and Ireland to 1660**. (Association Records of the West Country, 1657) p. 66.*

If you question what they meant exactly, take a look at the scriptures they gave to support their answer. The first church in the Philadelphia Baptist Association existed two years from 1686 to 1688 as baptized believers in an unchurched condition because they did not believe they could organize themselves into a church apart from a church ordained and sent man to gather churches. They did not organize until Elias Keach came into their midst and gathered them into a church.

Also, they did not believe that a baptized believer who was not ordained could administer the ordinances:

“Query 6. Whether a baptized person, walking in fellowship with unbaptized persons, may administer any ordinance in the church of Christ and, if one, why not all?”

Answer: we know no rule in scripture for such a practice. And, farther, we judge the ministring brethren should walk most exactly to the rule, that they might be exemplary to others in drawing them to, and keeping them in, the truth. II Cor. 6:3; I Tim. 4:12; Philip.

3:17.” - B.R. White, ed., **Association Records of the Particular Baptists of England, Wales and Ireland to 1660.** (Association Records of the West Country, 1655) p. 59.

C. Did they believe just any church of immersed believers was a true church?

They did not believe that the churches of John Bunyan, Mr. Tombs and several other professed Baptists were properly constituted churches of Christ. They carefully considered whether a church was constituted according to the Great Commission rule before receiving it into fellowship. For example, we read:

“It was debated whether the church at Leominster and hereford that walkes distinct from Mr. Tombs were rightly constituted. It was proved and judged they were a true constituted church. It was likewise considered whether the sayd church might have association with these respective churches. It was generally judged they might only [they] left the compleating of it till the messangers had acquainted the severall churches.” – B.R. White, ed., **Association Records of the Particular Baptists of England, Wales and Ireland to 1660.** (Association of the Midlands, 1657) p. 33.

Some of their queries and answers contained expressions that indicated that a church must be rightly constituted and those who were not were not true churches:

“Query. Whether a member of a **TRUE and RIGHTLY CONSTITUTED church** may, without the consent of the church to which he belongs, joyne himself as a member of another church?” – B.R. White, ed., **Association Records of the Particular Baptists of England, Wales and Ireland to 1660.** (Records of the Abingdon Association, 1658) p. 198, (emphasis mine – MF).

*“We also desire and are perswaded that our gracious God will so helpe and guide you in entering into a solemne association with other churches that are **RIGHTLY CONSTITUTED and principled....**”* – B.R. White, ed., **Association Records of the Particular Baptists of England, Wales and Ireland to 1660.** (Records of the Abingdon Association, 1658) p. 135, (emphasis mine – MF).

D. They Believed that members who wanted to leave and join another church must first seek approval of their church:

“Query 2, Whether a member of a true and rightly constituted church, may without the consent of the church to which he belongs, joyne himself as a member of another church?”

Answer: We judge that he may not; no more then a church may require a member to joyne himselfe to another church against his owne mind and will; considering that such a breaking off of a member from a church, as it hath no warrant at all in the word so also it is contrarie to that engagement which a church member makes, or ought to make, at least implicitly, at the time of joining. And if one church member may so at his owne pleasure leave the church to which he belongs, then may others also doe the like and so a church shall have no power to retaine her members. But this would overthrow all church [rule] and order and set up confusion of which God is not the author, I Cor. 14.33.” – B.R. White, ed., **Association**

Records of the Particular Baptists of England, Wales and Ireland to 1660. (Records of the Abingdon Association, 1658) p. 125.

E. The Influence of Welsh and British Baptists of this Period on American Baptists:

"The Welsh Baptists began to emigrate to this country in very early times, and by them some of our oldest and WELL ORGANIZED churches were planted; order, intelligence, and stability marked their operations; and the number of Baptist communities which have branched out from these Welsh foundations - the number of ministers and members who have sprung from Cambro-British ancestors, and the sound, salutary, and efficient principles which by them have been diffused among the Baptist population in this country, is beyond the conception of most of our people. We shall see, when we come to the history of the American Baptists, that settlements were formed in very early times by this people, which became the center of Baptist operations in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, and South Carolina." David Benedict, **History of the Baptists**, p. 346.

Again:

"The foregoing facts show that the Baptists of Rhode Island had their origin from the English and Welsh Baptists, through the ministry of John Clarke, Thomas Griffith, Gregory Dexter, and others, that the early Baptists of Massachusetts had their origin, also, from the Welsh and English Baptists, through the ministry of John Miles, John Emblem, and others; that the Pennsylvania Baptists had their origin from Wales and England, through the ministry of Morgan Edwards, Samuel Jones, Abel Morgan, Hugh Davis, and others; that the Virginia Baptists had their origin mainly from the English Baptists, through the ministry of Robert Nordin, Richard Jones, Casper Mintz and others; and that the North and South Carolina Baptists had their origin from the English and Welsh Baptists, through the ministry of Caleb Evans, from Wales, and missionaries from the Philadelphia Association, with emigrants from the Virginia Baptists. From these early centers of Baptist operations in the Atlantic States, the tide of Baptist emigration has flowed westward, till the voice of the Baptist ministry is heard among the savages of the far West, and even on the shores of the Pacific ocean. Especially in Kentucky, do we find the descendants of the Virginia Baptists." - D.B. Ray, **Baptist Succession**, pp. 128-129.

CONCLUSION: The English Particular Baptists denied that great commission authority was given to the ordained men in the church. They explicitly taught that it was given to the church alone and that the choosing, ordaining and sending forth of such ordained men for the purpose to gather churches was under church authority. They denied that "direct authority" was given by God to baptized believers to constitute themselves into a church. Instead, as the 1800 Landmarkers would say, "scriptural authority" to send forth ministers to do the work of the Great Commission was "*under God FROM a gospel church.*" They were every bit concerned about church authority over their members, over their ordained men, over their missionaries and in the constitution of new churches as much as modern Sovereign Grace Landmark Churches are today. They were as much concerned about investigating and proving a church was properly constituted before fellowshiping with it, or exchanging members by letter, as Landmark Baptists are today.

It must be remembered that the Philadelphia Baptist Association in America was founded by these very same kind of churches and church ordained men coming to America. David

Benedict with Joshua Thomas and later Benjamin Evans all documented this fact. Below, we shall see that they had only two ways to practice “gospel order” and both were backed by church vote and church authority: (1) Church ordained and church sent men for the stated purpose to gather churches; (2) Church letters of dismission for the stated purpose for gathering a church under the guidance of a church ordained man or men.

Review Questions

1. Did the early English Particular Baptists believe the Great Commission was given to the ordained? (no)
2. Who did they believe the Great Commission was given to? (the church)
3. Did they believe the ordaining and sending by the church included the authority to gather churches as well? (yes)
4. What Text did Thomas Patient use to define “binding gospel order”? (Mt. 28:19-20)
5. Did Thomas Patient include the gathering of churches as part of “binding gospel order”? (yes)
6. Were they concerned about the proper constitution of churches? (yes)

Chapter Four

The Constitution of Churches:

The Philadelphia Baptist Association in America – 1707-1807

“The Philadelphia Association originated with churches planted by members from Wales...This Association has maintained, from its origin, a prominent standing in the denomination...In every period of its existence the Association has firmly maintained the soundest form of Scripture doctrine; nor could any church have been admitted, at any period, which denied or concealed any of the doctrines of grace.” – **The Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association from 1707 – 1807, pp. 3, 4.**

“Our Welsh brethren were great advocates for the ancient order of things” – J. Davis, **Welsh Baptists**, p. 31.

It must ever be kept in mind that the original churches established in the Philadelphia Baptist Association in America were composed of members and ordained men who came directly from England and Wales. In fact, many entire churches transferred to America and became part of the Philadelphia Association. These churches were fully established in the faith and practice in the Old Country and adopted the confession of faith of the churches in the old country. These churches arrived in America shortly within the time frame of 1686 – 1750 just a few short years after the completion of the Association Records of the Particular Baptists of England, Wales and Ireland to 1660.

There is a footnote by the editor of The Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association that is very important to our study but overlooked by most historians. That footnote reads as follows:

“As the churches that joined this Association since the year 1750 were erected and constituted after the same form and order of the Gospel with those whose constitutions are MORE AT LARGE HEREIN before related, it is thought needless to give a copious account of every particular, and to relate the time of their admission to the Association only.” **The Minutes of the Philadelphia Association from 1707 to 1807**, p. 24, (emphasis mine).

He is clearly saying that all churches erected and constituted after the year 1750 were done precisely after the same manner as those churches previously considered and it is in the accounts that are *“more at large herein related”* where that precise pattern is spelled out. His point, is that they had a regular pattern they adhered to in constituting churches and this pattern is more pronounced in the expanded accounts. Significantly, he is also saying that the readers of the Minutes should not interpret summarized descriptions of church constitutions after that date to be contrary to the fuller accounts that are earlier spelled out in great detail. These fuller accounts provide a specific order and include explicit authority of a preceding church. We will also see they designated this constitutional process as “gospel order” or “regular church order” in keeping with the doctrine spelled out in the associational minutes of the English and Welsh Baptists. Remember, according to the editor of these minutes, the shorter summarized

accounts are not to be interpreted as contradictory to the accounts that are “more at large herein related.”

When one compares two or more of the larger accounts, all the essential details are immediately clear in their constitution of Churches according to what they called “regular church order.”

A. Regular Church Order according to the Fuller Accounts:

Below there are two fuller accounts given and by comparison a total picture emerges that shows us what regular order they followed when constituting a church. To demonstrate their consistency in following one pattern, we will provide two instances of church constitution among the Philadelphia Association over 40 years apart from each other:

*“Whereas, a number of persons resided near Dividing Creek, in the county of Cumberland, in the western division of the province of New Jersey; some of whom, members of Cohansie church, some of Cap May church, and some not of any particular church; and whereas these lived at a great distance from the said churches; and at the same time our Rev. brother Samuel Heaton providentially settled at the said creek; therefore, the above said persons **made applications to their respective churches for dismissal, and leave to form themselves into a distinct church, both which they obtained.** Accordingly, we whose names are under written, **being sent by the church of Cohansie**, did meet the said people at their meeting house on the day above mentioned; and after sermon, laid hands on such persons as had been baptized, but had not joined themselves to any church; then all gave themselves to the Lord; and to each other by a solemn covenant which they signed; and **were declared by us to be a regular gospel church;** and as such we recommend them to our Association.” - **Minutes of the Philadelphia Association**, pp. 81-82, (1761). – (emphasis mine)*

Again earlier:

*“Their conclusion being approved by Mr. Morgan, a day was set apart for the solemnizing of this great work, being the 20th day of June 1719; and Mr. Abel Morgan, and Mr. Samuel Jones, being present to assist **and direct** in the work of the day, the first part being spent in fasting and prayer, with a sermon preached by Mr. Morgan, suitable to the occasion, they proceeded. Being asked whether they were desirous and freely willing to be settle together as a church of Jesus Christ, they all answered in the affirmative; and being asked whether they were acquainted with one another’s principles, and satisfied with one another’s graces and conversation, it was also answered in the affirmative; and then for a demonstration of their giving of themselves up, severally and jointly, to the Lord, as a people of God and a church of Jesus Christ, they all lifted up their right hand. Then they were directed to take one another by the hand, in token of their union, declaring, at the same time, that as they had given themselves to God, so they did give themselves also to one another by the will of God, 2 Cor. Viii. 5, to be a church of Jesus Christ, according to the gospel, according to their ability, and to edify one another. **Then were they pronounced and declared to be a church of Jesus Christ;** a right hand of fellowship was given to them as a sister church, with exhortations and instructions suitable to the station and relation they now stood in; and*

the work was finished with solemn prayer to God for a blessing on the work of the day.” **The Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association**, 1719, p. 19.- (Emphasis mine)

*“...they requested the church of Pennepek to dismiss them, and to assist them to be a distinct church; which request was granted AT A CHURCH MEETING, held April 5th.....they requested dismissal from that church...their request being granted...p. 21” – **ibid.**, pp. 20-21 – (emphasis mine)*

When these fuller accounts are considered together, the following gospel order in constituting churches is made clear.

1. Members of churches wishing to organize into a separate church first sought authority from their church which was granted at a called business meeting by church vote thus granting letters of dismissal for that stated purpose.
2. A day was set aside sanctioned by prayer and fasting for this work to be accomplished.
3. Ordained church representatives directed the constitution and those being constituted submitted to their direction.
4. Assistance by ordained men is defined as being “directed” by them and being “declared” a true church as well as giving them a charge.
5. Those being constituted were directed to adopt principles and a covenant and then directed to adopt a covenant and vote themselves into a newly constituted church.
6. After they voted, the ordained men in charge declared them to be a church
7. A right hand of fellowship was given them as a sister church.

This procedure was repeatedly called “regular church order” throughout the accounts of church constitution:

*“...church order (p. 16).....settled in Gospel church, ordered (p. 18)....to be settled in Gospel order (p. 20).....settle themselves in church order (p. 21)....they were regularly incorporated in the usual manner (p. 22)....were incorporated after the same manner (p. 23)....settle themselves in regular church order (p. 23).....**ibid.** Minutes.*

B. The first Church at Lower Dublin - 1688

Some imagine that the constitution of the church at Lower Dublin, the oldest church in this association is an exception to regular church order? David Benedict gives the account of the constitution of this church by quoting Morgan Edwards:

*“The history of this company or church, says Edwards, will lead us back to the year 1686, when one John Eaton, George Eaton, and Jane his wife, Sarah Eaton, and Samuel Jones, members of a Baptist church, residing in Llanddewi and Nautmel, in Radnorshire, whereof Rev. Henry Gregory was pastor; also John Baker, member of a church in Kilkenny, in Ireland, under the pastoral care of Rev. Christopher Blackwell, and one Samuel Vans, from England, arrived and settled on the banks of Pennepeck, formally written Pemmapeka.” – David Benedict, **The History of the Baptists**, p.596.*

The Church at Lower Dublin is also called the Pennepeck Church due to its location. They arrived in 1686 as baptized believers from churches in Wales and other parts of England but did not organize into a church until 1688. Why? Not because they were smaller than “two or three” regularly baptized believers. No, they were many times over that number. Why didn’t they self-organize then? Why did they wait until an ordained minister came into their midst? Because they practiced regular “church order” and regular church order as practiced by the English and Welsh Baptists did not permit them to organize without coming under the authority of a church ordained, church authorized representative. This agrees perfectly with the stated beliefs in the Associational Minutes of the old country which states:

*“Answer: 1. That it is in the power of the church to ordain and send forth a minister to the world, Acts 13:2f. Secondly, that this person sent forth to the world and **GATHERING CHURCHES**, he ought with them and they with him to ordain fit persons to officiate among them, Acts 14.23, Tit. 1.5” - Association Records of the West Country, 1654. – (emphasis mine)*

Therefore they waited until God sent them a church ordained man. The writer simply summarizes the constitution service in the following brief manner;

“set a day apart, and by fasting and prayer to settle themselves in a church state; which when they had solemnly accomplished, they made choice of the said Keach to be their pastor.” – The Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association, p. 11.

Remember, the compiler has already told us that such summarizations are not to be interpreted to be at odds with those “more in large” but in keeping with what the compiler repeatedly asserts was their only manner of constituting churches. Notice his repetitive words that affirm this normal and consistent procedure for church constitution:

*“they were regularly incorporated in the usual manner.....and after the usual solemnity... – ibid. p. 22.....they were constituted after the same manner as other churches” p. 23 – **ibid.**, The Minutes, pp. 22, 23.*

Since, the Philadelphia Association required that all churches joining it must have been constituted after regular church order, to assume that Lower Dublin was not would be contradictory to all available data and would be nothing but an assumption based on silence. Proof that they were constituted after the “regular order” is: (1) Although they consisted of far more than two or three baptized believers, they waited two years; (2) They were not gathered into a church until an ordained man came among them; (3) the writer of the associational records claims that all later churches were organized in keeping with the former churches and the fuller accounts provide how they organized the former churches; (4) The same summarized statement that is later used and called “church order” in other accounts is used to summarize the organization of this church; (5) Elias Keach was very well familiar with “church order” as he was raised up in the household of Benjamin Keach in England who was a leader among those Baptists; (7) The Philadelphia Baptist Association was well known for refusing to accept churches into the association who were not constituted after due “church order” and required them to be reconstituted in keeping with regular “church order.”

C. Two Church Authorized Means for constitution of churches by regular Gospel order

There is the more direct means where the church in a called business meeting votes to dismiss members for the purpose of constitution and sends ordained men to “assist and direct” them.

*“...when the brethren residing in Philadelphia requested a dismissal from the church at Pennepeck, in order to incorporate a distinct church; which being granted, Mr. Jones was dismissed with the other city members.....p. 12.....requested a dismissal from the church at Hopewell; which, being obtained, they appointed...p. 20...they requested the church of Pennepek to dismiss them, and to assist them to be a distinct church; which request was granted AT A CHURCH MEETING, held April 5th.....they requested dismissal from that church...their request being granted...p. 21.....did make their request...for a dismissal, in order to be settled a distinct church by themselves, which was accordingly granted....” p. 21, **Ibid, The Minutes**, pp. 12,20,21.*

There is the indirect means whereby a church ordains and sends out a man authorized by the church to preach the gospel, baptize the converts and then gather them into church membership. Thomas Patient summarized this method up in these words:

- ***“ministerial assembly gathered according to the Great Commission.”***

The fuller expression found in the associational minutes in the old country clearly states:

*“Answer: 1. That it is in the power of the church to ordain and send forth a minister to the world, Acts 13:2f. Secondly, that this person sent forth to the world and **GATHERING CHURCHES**, he ought with them and they with him to ordain fit persons to officiate among them, Acts 14.23, Tit. 1.5” - **Association Records of the West Country**, 1654. – (emphasis mine)*

This is far more the most frequent means used by Baptists in America to constitute churches and we read countless times that such and such a church was “gathered by” some ordained preacher. Both are backed up by a church vote and thus by church authority.

For example, the church at Brandywine, when it was gathered, there were no ordained men among its members; and so it requested the aide of the churches where many of its members had resided to assist it by sending their ordained men to gather them into a church.

*“having for their assistance and direction the Rev. Mr. Abel Morgan, of Philadelphia, and some brethren from the church at the Welsh Tract, were constituted and settled in Gospel church, ordered, and owned, and declared as a sister church...” **Ibid.**, p. 18.*

They were far more than two or three baptized believers, why didn't they just organize themselves and then ordain one of their members? Because self-constitution (separate from any existing church) was contrary to their practice and what they called regular church order. Because gospel order as practiced in the old country forbid them to self-organize without ordained men directing the constitution:

“...yet they may be established a church of Christ having the assistance of others whom God hath inabled to carry on the work of God among them and to take such care for them as their necessity shall require; and that it is the duty of that church and ministry to take care that they be so provided for that was ***instrumental in their gathering***, Acts 14:21ff, Tit. 1.5, II Tim. 2:2, Acts 11:21ff.” – **Association Records of the West Country**, 1657. – (emphasis mine)

Some have thought that when Baptist historians or writers claim that a group of baptized believers “gathered themselves” into a church that this means they did it without any connection whatsoever with a previous existing church or church authority. However, notice that they regarded the role of ordained men to be “*instrumental in their gathering*.” In other accounts the whole constitution of a church is attributed to an ordained man. The Philadelphia Baptist Association did not see any conflict between such statements as “*settled themselves into a church*” and a “*minister by himself undertaking to constitute a church*” (Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association, from 1707 to 1807, p. 218) or “*that our reverend brethren, Nathaniel Jenkins and Jenkin Jones...be at Cranberry, in order to settle the members there in church order*” Ibid. 49). The historical records are in abundance where it simply attributes the constitution of a church to some ordained man. There was no conflict of such statements in the mind of historical Baptists because they believed that the authority to gather churches was contained in the Great Commission which was given to the church to be administered through church ordained, church authorized, church sent men. These parallel statements are a clear denial of the doctrine of direct authority or spontaneous constitution.

All of the churches mentioned in the opening pages of the Philadelphia Baptist Association minutes were constituted under the direction and authority of a preexistent church or churches and yet at the same time are said to have “gathered themselves”. For example we read:

“*In the year 1711, they were advised to PUT THEMSELVES IN CHURCH ORDER BY THEMSELVES.....(p. 16)....to meet and SETTLE THEMSELVES in church order...*” Ibid., p. 16. – (emphasis mine)

There was no contradiction in their minds between church authority and the act of self-constitution by covenant vote. It was somewhat parallel to baptism. There is the action of baptism but there is church authority giving validity to that action. The same is true with church constitution. There is the action of self-constitution by covenant vote but there is church authority giving validity to that action. All church constitutions within the Philadelphia Association first sought Church authority to constitute themselves and obtained it either by letters of dismissal for that stated purpose and/or submitting to the direction of church ordained representatives.

D. Church Authorized men sent to gather Churches

The Philadelphia Baptist Association churches ordained their own men and sent them out in cooperation with the Association but the Association itself never ordained men and only sent them out with church approval:

“As to the request from Piscataqua, for the help of our ministering brethren...we not knowing who, nor how to bind any of them, we think it necessary that the church, where they are held, send to them, that, if possible, they may be certain of some help” – Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association, 1730, p. 31.

And again:

“The church of Newtown desired the Association to appoint time and ministers to ordain Mr. Nicholas Cox, the Association reply, that the appointment of both properly belongs to his church.” Ibid., pp. 119, 149.

The Philadelphia Baptist Association believed that authority to ordain and to baptize as well as to gather churches was given to the churches in keeping with “gospel order” handed down to them from the practice of the old country Baptists. In other words, they believed the Great Commission was a Church commission exercised by the church through its ordained representatives just like their English counterparts. They rejected baptismal administrators not ordained by the church (Ibid., pp. 28, 29, 104, 229). They rejected baptisms not administered by church ordained men (Ibid. p. 49). They rejected church constitutions performed without church ordained men (Ibid. pp. 49, 81, 82, 108, 281). They rejected ministers and churches not of like faith and order. (Ibid., pp. 35, 56, 317).

In Virginia messengers sent out by the churches of the Philadelphia Association found Baptist churches that were not organized according to regular gospel order. They preached and taught among them and Semple says

*“they were newly organized and formed into new churches, according to the plan of the Philadelphia Association, or rather according to the Baptist Confession of faith, published in London 1689, in conformity with which it seems the Philadelphia and Charleston Associations were organized” – Robert Baylor Semple, **History of Virginia Baptists**, p. 448.*

The compiler of “**The History of Grassy Creek Baptist Church**” confirms what Semple says in regard to preachers sent out of the Philadelphia Association to reorganize churches that were not organized after “church order” when he says:

*“All the Baptists in the province were included in the two Associations – Sandy Creek and Kehukee. The members of the former are doubtless able to trace their pedigree from the Welsh Baptists, through New England; and the latter, very justly, claim their descent through Virginia, from the same source. I think it could be shown, if it were necessary, from authentic history, that the Baptists of North Carolina received their ordinances from the Welsh Tract Baptists, who claim a history that runs back to the first century of the Christian era. For many years the Baptists were divided by these party names – Separates and Regulars – but after the churches in the Eastern portion of the colony called Regulars, which had fallen into loose practices in church order and discipline, were reformed and remodeled to the true Baptist standard by the labors of Elders Robert Williams, John Gano, Peter P. Vanhorn, Benjamin Miller and others [**preachers out of the Philadelphia Association - MF**], they differed from the Separates only in some small matters. There was but little difference in their views of doctrine and **church order.**” – Robert I. Devin, **The History of Grassy Creek Baptist Church**, pp. 60-61, 1880.*

Some have mistakenly claimed that the Sandy Creek Baptist Church was self-constituted without church authority either by an existing church or by the presence of a church ordained representative. This is simply not true. Semple only says that two (Joseph Breed, Daniel Marshall) of the three preachers were unordained. The third man, Shubal Stearns, who was selected as the Pastor was a formerly church ordained man (Robert Semple, **History of the Virginia Baptists**, p. 14).

Throughout this history of the Grassy Creek Baptist Church, the writer makes a distinction between groups that were not “regularly constituted” and those who were “regularly constituted” in accordance with the Philadelphia Association plan of church constitution.

The Philadelphia Baptist association practiced “regular church order” in keeping with how it was defined in the old country. They believed authority to carry out the commission was given only to the church and therefore they rejected the doctrine of direct authority. They never practiced church constitutions apart from the authorized approval of a preexisting church either in the form of letters of dismissal and/or direction under its authorized representatives.

In addition, it is necessary to correct a popular misconception of some about the Philadelphia Baptist Association. Some believe that the Association usurped the local church, and ordained men or sent out men themselves to constitute churches apart from the authority of the church wherein that ordained man was a member. These are false accusations. Some examples over a long period of time will demonstrate they did not usurp the authority of individual churches:

“As to the request from Piscataqua, for the help of our ministering brethren at their general meeting, we judge it necessary that our ministering brethren do supply such general meetings; nevertheless, we not knowing who, nor how to bind any of them, we think it necessary that the church, WHERE SUCH ARE HELD, send to them, that, if possible, they may be certain of some help” – Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association, 1730. pg. 31.

In other words, they acknowledged that the authority to send such brethren was in the church in which that minister resided.

*“The church of Newtown desired the Association to appoint time and ministers to ordain Mr. Nichoas Cox; the Association reply, that the appointment of both **PROPERLY BELONGS TO HIS CHURCH.**”* Ibid., 1771 – emphasis mine.

And again:

*“...the second was expressive of their great satisfaction in Brother Ebenezer Ward's visits, and edification under his ministry, which concludes by desiring this Association to ordain him as an itinerate. **Agreed, That this Association claim no such right,** and, therefore, resolved to encourage Mr. Ward to assist said church in all that he consistently can, **until either the church, WHEREOF HE IS A MEMBER, choose to have him ordained,** or he first becoming a member at Coram...”* Ibid., 1775 – emphasis mine.

And again:

*"Resolved, That this Association cannot take up a question that relates to an individual member of any church without **interfering with the independence of such church**" – 1805*
- emphasis mine.

Such illustrates a solid century of doctrine and practice.

Review Questions

1. Did the compiler of the Minutes of the Philadelphia Association make any statement that demanded these churches constituted new churches after a regular form and order?
(yes)
2. Did the compiler inform the reader that that regular order is spelled out more in the fuller accounts of church constitution? (yes)
3. Are there any accounts where there is not either an ordained man directing and declaring the constitution of a church and/or letters of dismissal for the purpose for constitution?
(no)
4. Was there a church vote behind both the ordination and letters of dismissal? (yes)
5. Is there a difference between the authority behind constitution and the act of constitution?
(yes, just as there is a difference between the act of baptism [immersion] and the authority that validates it).

Chapter Five

The Constitution of Churches

Among Early Landmark Baptists – 1807-1900

"The Philadelphia Association was organized, A.D. 1707, and is, therefore the oldest upon the American Continent. Its territory originally embraced all the Middle States and some churches in Virginia. Her correspondence reached to every association on the continent, and from her, as a mother body, advice was widely sought. IT WAS BY MISSIONARIES SENT OUT FROM HER and from New England, that the first churches in Virginia and North Carolina were formed. Her doctrinal sentiments and denominational policy, were stamped upon the entire denomination in America." J.R. Graves, **Old Landmarkism, What is it?** p. 136 (emphasis mine – mwf).

"The ministers, who organized ALL the first Baptist Churches in Virginia, came either from New England, or were members of the Philadelphia Baptist Association...we must believe that they impressed the churches THEY PLANTED with their own personal convictions..." J.R. Graves, **Old Landmarkism, What is it?**, pp. 132-133 (emphasis mine –mwf).

*"If the church alone was commissioned to preserve and to preach the gospel, then it is certain that no other organization has the right to preach it – to trench upon the divine rights of the church. A Masonic Lodge, no more than a young Men's Christian Association...have the least right to take the gospel in hand, select and commission ministers to go forth and preach it, administer its ordinances and **organize churches.**"* – J. R. Graves, **Old Landmarkism, What is it?** p. 36 (emphasis mine – mwf).

As you can plainly see, Dr. Graves believed that the vast majority of American Baptists were directly influenced by the beliefs and practices of the Philadelphia Baptist Association. In the previous chapter, we demonstrated that the Philadelphia Association was permeated by the beliefs and practices of the Welsh and English Particular Baptists. Among these Baptists, regular church order was not only their practice but their doctrinal belief. Church authority in the Great Commission was their doctrinal basis behind regular church order in the constitution of churches.

Today there is intense debate over this next period of Baptist history and in particular, the Landmark Baptist movement. The question is, "did the old Landmarkers constitute churches under the authority of a preexistent church"? Did they practice "regular church order"?

There are among Landmarkers today those who vigorously deny that these old Landmarkers constituted churches either directly or indirectly under the authority of a "mother" church.

We will attempt to prove the following points in regard to these Old Landmarkers: (1) Old Landmarkers believed that scriptural authority under God to carry out the Great Commission was from a gospel church alone. (2) They believed that baptism must be administered by a New Testament Church through its authorized representative, and without church authority

there was no valid baptism. (3) In regard to their practice, they organized churches just as their forefathers did according to regular church order. (4) Some, were inconsistent between their stated belief and their practice.

A. Old Landmarkism believed in church authority

There are some in the ranks of Landmark Baptists today who believe in what they call “direct” authority or “vertical” authority. They believe that authority to carry out the Great Commission comes directly from God through His Word APART FROM any gospel church. However, did the Old Landmarkers believe in “direct” authority to carry out the Great Commission?

William Cathcart lived at this time and knew these men personally and he himself was part of the Landmark movement. He wrote a Baptist Encyclopedia and included an article in it devoted to defining the essentials of Landmarkism. Many believe that Dr. J.M. Pendleton provided this written definition of Landmarkism as several phrases are word for word to be found in Dr. Pendleton’s books wherein he defended Landmarkism. Cathcart’s definition of Landmarkism is as follows:

*“The doctrine of Landmarkism is that baptism and church membership precede the preaching of the gospel, even as they precede communion at the Lord’s Table. **The argument is that SCRIPTURAL AUTHORITY to preach emanates, UNDER GOD, FROM A GOSPEL CHURCH; that as ‘a visible church is a congregation of baptized believers,’ etc., it follows that no Pedobaptist organization is a church in the Scriptural sense of the term, and that therefore SCRIPTURAL AUTHORITY to preach cannot proceed from such an organization. Hence the non-recognition of Pedobaptist ministers, who are not interfered with, but simply let alone. At the time the “Old Landmark Reset” was written, the topic of non-ministerial intercourse was the chief subject of discussion. Inseparable, however from the landmark view of this matter, is a denial that Pedobaptist societies are Scriptural churches, that Pedobaptist ordinations are valid, and that immersions administered by Pedobaptists ministers can be consistently accepted by any Baptist. All these things are denied, and the intelligent reader will see why.”** – William Cathcart, **The Baptist Encyclopedia**, p. 867-868 (emphasis mine – MF).*

Cathcart narrowly defined Landmarkism when he says, “**the argument is that scriptural AUTHORITY....emanates, under God FROM a gospel Church.**” This is the very reverse of what some modern Landmarkers teach today. According to some modern Landmarkers Cathcart ought to have defined Landmarkism by saying, “*the argument is that scriptural authority emanates DIRECTLY from God APART from a gospel church.*”

According to Cathcart’s definition, Landmarkism revolves around church authority. According to Cathcart, Landmarkism involves a circle of reasoning. The reason that Pedobaptists are not true churches, is not due to sprinkling or pouring but due to the lack of authority. They have no authority to exist and therefore they cannot ordain, and therefore all and any kind of baptism they administer are invalid. Is not this what he says?

*“it follows that no Pedobaptist organization is a church in the Scriptural sense of the term, and that therefore **SCRIPTURAL AUTHORITY to preach** cannot proceed from such an organization” – Ibid.,*

Since there is no church authority, there can be no valid ordinations, no valid baptism and therefore no valid constitution of a church. According to Cathcart, everything revolved around church authority.

*“**Inseparable, however from the landmark view of this matter, is a denial that Pedobaptist societies are Scriptural churches, that Pedobaptist ordinations are valid, and that immersions administered by Pedobaptists ministers can be consistently accepted by any Baptist.**” – Ibid.*

Dr. J. R. Graves and Church Authority

When Graves combated the idea of “pastoral authority” or the ordained possessing “authority” as elite members in and over an existing church, he said:

***“A church is alone authorized to receive, to discipline, and to exclude her own members. This power, with all her other prerogatives, is delegated to her, and it is her bounden duty to exercise it; she can not delegate her prerogatives. . . . She can not authorize her ministers to examine and baptize members into her fellowship without her personal presence and action upon each case. A minister, therefore, has no right, because ordained, to decide who are qualified to receive baptism and to administer it. Their ordination only qualified them to administer the ordinances for a church when that church called upon them to do so.”**—J.R. Graves, *Old Landmarkism*, pp. 37, 38. – (emphasis mine)*

***“It is the inalienable and sole right and duty of a Christian church to administer the ordinances, Baptism, and the Supper. That these ordinances were designed to be of perpetual observance, commemorating specific and important events or acts in the work of Christ, no intelligent Christian will deny. The rites and ordinances of an institution belong, unquestionably, to that institution, and may rightly said to be in it. I mean by these expressions that they are under the sole control of the organization; they can be administered only by the organization as such, and when duly assembled, and by its own officers or those she may appoint, pro tempore. A number of its members, not even a majority in an unorganized capacity, is competent to administer its rites, and certainly another and different body can not perform them.”**—J.R. Graves *Old Landmarkism*, p. 39. – (emphasis mine)*

***“Christian baptism . . . it is a specific act, instituted for the expression of specific truths; to be administered by a specific body, to persons possessing specific qualifications. When one of these properties is wanting the transaction is null. . . a scriptural church is the only organization He has authorized to administer the act.”**—J.R. Graves, *Old Landmarkism*, chapter VI, p. 48. – (emphasis mine)*

In another work Graves said:

“....it is the church that administers the rite and not the officer, per se, - he is but the hand, the servant of the Church. The ordinances of baptism and the Supper were not intrusted to the ministry to administer to whomsoever they deem qualified, but to the churches.....Therefore the immersions of all those societies, not scriptural churches, are as null and void as their sprinklings would be....” Dr. J.R. Graves, **The Act of Christian Baptism**, pp. 52, 56.

Dr. J.M. Pendleton said:

*“My position is that, according to the gospel, **authority to preach [and do other ecclesiastical duties] must, under God, emanate from a visible church of Christ.** Hence members of a visible church alone are eligible to do the work of the ministry; for a church has no control of those who do not belong to it. But Pedobaptist societies are not visible churches of Christ. How then can they confer gospel authority to preach?”* J.M. Pendleton, **An Old Landmark Reset**, p. 310. – (emphasis mine)

James E. Tull in his doctoral thesis entitled, **A Study of Southern Baptist Landmarkism in the Light of Historical Baptist Ecclesiology**, concluded that the very heart of Old Landmarkism centered around **local church authority** over ordained men and over the administration of baptism. (James E. Tull, *A Study of Southern Baptist Landmarkism in the Light of Historical Baptist Ecclesiology*, p. 322).

B. They believed that without church authorized Administrators there was no valid baptism.

Dr. J.R. Graves:

*“Christian baptism is not the celebration of a religious rite by modes indifferent; but it is a specific act, instituted for the expression of specific truths; **to be administered by a specific body**, to persons possessing specific qualifications. When one of these properties is wanting the transaction is null--since, unless the ordinances are observed as Christ commanded, they are not obeyed, but perverted.”* J.R. Graves, **Old Landmarkism, What is It**, p. 64. – (emphasis mine)

Many of the primary leaders of Old Landmarkism stated clearly that baptism along with the rest of the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20 was given explicitly to the church alone and not to anyone else.

D.B. Ray stated:

*“None except John himself was authorized to administer John’s baptism. The same honor and authority to administer baptism, which was conferred upon John, since the resurrection of Christ has been **conferred upon his church**, in the great commission, **and upon no***

other organization or individual. The authority to administer baptism was not conferred upon the apostles or first church members as individuals, **but upon the church** to administer baptism, **through** her official servants.” D.B. Ray, **Baptist Succession**, pp. 46-47. – (emphasis mine)

A.C. Dayton said:

“The administration of baptism is an official act, done **by authority of the Church**.....They were addressed as the representatives of the Churches **which they should establish**, and the successors of those churches ‘to the end of the world.’ **To the Churches** therefore, **the commission says**, Go ye and preach my gospel to all nations, baptizing them &c.....” A.C. Dayton, **Alien Immersion**, pp. 212, 218- 219. – (emphasis mine)

J.B. Jeter stated:

“To his church, Christ has committed the ordinances, baptism **with the rest**. I Corinthians 11:2, ‘Now I praise you, that you remember me in all things, and hold fast the traditions - ordinances - as I delivered them to you’ If baptism is to be kept as it was delivered to the church, **then it can not be properly administered but by her authority.**” **J.B. Jeter** - (emphasis mine)

(J.B. Jeter [1802-1880] was a great Baptist leader of the nineteenth century. He edited the "Religious Herald" Baptist paper in Virginia from 1865 until his death and pastored several large churches including the First Baptist Church of Richmond for thirteen years. The above quote is from the October 5, 1871 issue of the Religious Herald and shows that Jeter believed baptism must be administered under the authority of the church.)

Long before the rise of the term “Landmarkism” in 1848 the Red River Association Resolution on Authority in Baptism stated:

“Resolved, That in the opinion of this Association, a properly qualified administrator is essential to Scriptural baptism.

Resolved, That **the authority of an orderly Baptist church** is an essential qualification to authorize one to administer baptism.

Resolved, That immersions performed by administrators not authorized by such a church should not be received by Baptists.” **From Paxton’s History of Louisiana Baptists, page 332.** – (emphasis mine)

1850 Salem Baptist Association Resolution on Church authority in baptism:

“Resolved, That the churches be advised to receive none but those who have been baptized on a profession of their faith in Christ, by a legal administrator; and that we esteem legal only such as act **under the authority of the regular Baptist church as organized after the model of the gospel.**” - The minutes of the Salem Baptist Association in 1850. – (emphasis mine)

J.J. Burnett said,

*“As to the "validity" of ordinances the Baptists of the South and Southwest stand almost solidly for four necessary things: A proper subject (a believer), a proper act in baptism (immersion), a proper design (to show forth), and the proper authority (a New Testament church) -- all these being held as Scriptural requirements conditioning the valid administration of baptism and the Lord's supper alike.” J. J. Burnett, **J.R. Graves, Sketch of Tennessee's Pioneer** , 1919.*

Cathcart draws the proper conclusions to the two principles considered above. The authority to ordain ministers is derived from a gospel Church who in turn administers baptism by its authorized representatives. Hence, where there is no such church there can be no such ordinances administered and where there are no such ordinances administered there can be no proper materials for church constitution. Old Landmarkism requires first the existence of a true gospel church and then second the exercise of its authority or there can be no constitutions of new churches. This is exactly Cathcart's point when he applies it to Pedobaptist societies:

*“it follows that no Pedobaptist organization is a church in the Scriptural sense of the term, and that therefore **SCRIPTURAL AUTHORITY to preach** cannot proceed from such an organization...” – Ibid., Cathcart. (emphasis mine)*

Since SCRIPTURAL AUTHORITY cannot proceed from such an organization then her ordinations are invalid as well as her baptisms and this is exactly what Carthcart goes on to conclude:

*“... **Inseparable, however from the landmark view of this matter, is a denial that Pedobaptist societies are Scriptural churches**, that Pedobaptist ordinations are valid, and that immersions administered by Pedobaptists ministers can be consistently accepted by any Baptist.” – Ibid., Cathcart. – (emphasis mine)*

CONCLUSION: Old Landmarkism refutes “direct authority” and demands “mother” church authority in carrying out the Great Commission. It demands the previous existence of church authority in the administration of baptism without which there can be no church constitutions. According to Old Landmarkism, constitution of Churches cannot occur apart from being linked organically to the authority of a previous existent gospel church. However, some may still say this does not prove “mother” church authority in the actual constitution service. Perhaps not, but it does demand “mother church authority” in organic linkage between a preceding church and the newly constituted church through baptism. It also demands organic church succession whereby all churches are linked together through baptism.

C. Some, but not all Old Landmarkers were inconsistent concerning what they believed about church constitution and how they practiced it.

Many will complain about this proposition and say it is not true. However, come let us reason together. Let's say you reject “mother church authority.” Let's say you reject it upon the following bases: (1) You say that the historic definition of what a church is -- is properly baptized believers joined together by covenant agreement; (2) You say, that the historic definition of what church constitution is -- is self constitution; (3) You say, that church

succession violates the independency and authority of any church being constituted; (4) You say you could list many more reasons. Therefore, you conclude that a group of properly baptized persons can constitute themselves into a church apart from any other church, and apart from any kind of ordained ministry, any place and any time they wish.

Now, you have made your case, you have stated what you believed to be true have you not? Now, to be consistent, would it not be reasonable that you practice exactly what you stated you believed? Well, this is exactly what Dr. T.T. Eaton told those people who rejected organic church succession:

*“If Baptist succession be the bad thing **some** brethren say, then certainly it ought to be given up. There should be no more of it.”*

However, if they were to be CONSISTENT and give it up, what would that include and how would that have to occur among the Baptists of Dr. Eaton's day? What would it take to make an end of it according to Eaton? He goes on to explain:

*“**When a new church is organized, it should have no sort of connection with other churches, or relations to them.** Let churches be organized anywhere, anyhow, by anybody. Just let people be believers, and let them baptize each other and start a church. This does away with Baptist succession. And if it be the bad thing that is charged, it ought to be done away with at the earliest moment. Those who oppose Baptist Succession have no logical ground to stand on in organizing a church out of material furnished by other churches, and with those baptized by regularly ordained Baptist ministers.”* Dr. T. T. Eaton. (Quoted by Milburn Cockrell, **Scriptural Church Organization**, Second Edition, pp. 57-58).

Eaton understood that the actual mechanics of Baptist Church Succession was inherent not only in the Great Commission but in their actual PRACTICE of it, in how they constituted new churches. According to Eaton, the first thing they had to do was to deny any kind of “connection” between newly constituted churches and previous existent ones. Of course, this statement has no bearing on those who believe in “direct authority” does it? When Eaton said, *“Let churches be organized anywhere, anyhow, by anybody”* he was asserting what he knew none of them practiced. When he said, *“just let people be believers, and let them baptize each other and start a church”* he was asserting the very opposite of what he knew they all practiced. He did this to show the INCONSISTENCY between what they were denying and what they were actually practicing. By saying, *“when a new church is organized, it should have NO SORT OF CONNECTION with other churches”* he was saying that the only way to deny Baptist Church Succession is to take the church completely out of the Great Commission and therefore completely out of the work of constituting churches. In other words, Eaton is telling them they must change the general practice among Baptists in order to be consistent with this denial of succession.

However, today there are those among us who deny that “regular church order” was the general practice in Eaton's time or during the times of J.R. Graves until W. A. Jarrell (1860-1900). However, what do Baptist Church Manuals written during this time say the common practice was? What do Associational records confirm as the common practice?

1. The Testimony of Church Manuals as to the Common Practice:

Add to the above testimony of Eaton, the testimonies of those who wrote “Church Manual’s” during this time in history. James Pendleton, E.T. Hiscox and E.C. Dargin all wrote such manuals. All of them admit the ancient Baptist practice of “regular church order” continued to be the customary procedure for constitution of new churches at that time.

a. A Baptist Church Manual by James Pendleton:

*“When the interest of Christ’s kingdom requires the formation of a new church the CUSTOMARY mode of procedure is about this: Brethren and sisters obtain letters of dismissal from the church or churches to which they belong, FOR THE PURPOSE of entering into the new organization. It is well for this purpose to be stated in the letters” - J.M. Pendleton, **A Baptist Church Manual**, p. 15. – (emphasis mine)*

The next most popular church manual in existence today also was produced by one living in the time of Graves and Landmarkism. What does E.T. Hiscox say the customary procedure was in those days?

b. A New Directory for Baptist Churches by E.T. Hiscox:

*“Before the organization actually takes place, however, such persons as propose to constitute the body, should procure letters from the churches of which they are members, GIVEN FOR THE PURPOSE OF FORMING A NEW CHURCH.” – E.T. Hiscox, **A New Directory for Baptist Churches**, pp. 53-53. – (emphasis mine)*

In the fuller context of both Pendleton and Hiscox they spell out almost exactly the order followed by the early English Particular and Philadelphia Baptists. There is no historical evidence to demonstrate that Landmarkers baptized anyone into an unchurched state. They baptized believers into some church body. Therefore, there was always a letter of dismissal to be sought by every baptized believer when seeking to be formed into a church. The only ones not seeking a letter of dismissal would be those gathered on the mission field by an ordained man.

c. Dargin’s Church Manual

Edwin Charles Dargin was one of the most ardent foes of Landmarkers living at that time and yet he knew what the common practice among Baptists, both Landmarkers and non-Landmarkers was in the constitution of churches. He said:

“Taking all this for granted, the next step will be for the persons interested in forming the church to obtain letters of dismissal from the churches of which they are members. In such cases it is desirable that the letters should specify the purpose for which they are granted. Now, where a number of persons go out from one church for the purpose of organizing a new one, their names may all be included in a joint letter – that is, THE MOTHER CHURCH grants to the brethren and sisters named in this letter with a view of their uniting with each

other, and with others of like mind for the constituting a new church; or something to this effect.” – E.C. Dargin, **Ecclesiology**, p. 195. – (emphasis mine)

Of course, “the mother church” Dargin refers to is the church that “*grants...this letter with a view of their uniting with each other...for the constituting of a new church*”. Granting letters is an act of church authority approved by church vote in a regular called business meeting.

d. Brown’s Baptist Church Manual

J. Newton Brown, who published the New Hampshire Confession of Faith, also published “A Baptist Church Manual in 1853. This would place it right at the time when Graves began to defend and define Landmarkism. Significantly, in this manual there is a form letter for a “letter of dismission to form a New Church.” Although, the 1981 printed edition has updated the dating to the 1900’s, the original form would have used the 1800’s.

“V. LETTER OF DISMISSION TO FORM A NEW CHURCH

The _____ Baptist Church, in regular church meeting _____ 19____. On request of the following brethren and sisters, now in regular standing with us, viz. (Here follow the names), to be dismissed from us for the purpose of uniting in the formation of a new church at _____. It was voted, that we cordially grant them letters of dismission for that purpose, and when regularly constituted as a church, shall cease to regard them as under our watchcare.” – J. Newton Brown, **A Baptist Church Manual**, Judson Press, thirty-sixth printing, 1981.

Brown establishes the fact that a church vote was involved – thus church authority. That these members were still under the authority of the mother church until the new church was “regularly constituted as a church.”

2. Examples of Church Constitution In Baptist Associational Records

The following quotations are taken from Associational Minutes, Baptist Historians and church records during the period immediately before and after the time of J.R. Graves. These quotes do not reflect the personal opinion of the author but do reflect the historical practices during the time being recorded:

Ketocton Baptist Association – 1766-1808

“THE CONSTITUTION AND ORDER OF CHURCHES BELONGING TO THIS ASSOCIATION.

*FOR the convenience of public worship and direction of discipline of the Lord's house, **it is thought necessary that independent congregational churches should be constituted, being consistent with, and founded upon apostolic custom in primitive times.** When a number of persons having been baptized according to the institution of Christ, upon profession of their faith in Christ, who lie remote*

from, and inconveniences preventing their assembling with or forming in with a church of Christ, it makes it necessary that they should form into a distinct and separate society, for the purposes aforesaid.

It has been customary where individual baptized persons have labored under inconveniences as before stated, to propose a constitution, if their number be sufficient. Should they have joined any church, **a regular dismissal is necessary**; when that is obtained, a day is then appointed, which is observed as a day of fasting and prayer, **ministers being called upon to attend**. On meeting together for this very solemn and important purpose, on the day and place appointed, **enquiry is generally made by the preachers present** respecting their religious sentiments — whether an agreement in sentiment, (as it appears necessary they should be agreed in order to walk together;) whether each of them do purpose in his heart to live in obedience to the word of God, and aim to fill his place in the church of Christ. —

Sometimes there is a short written covenant, expressive of the principles on which they unite, which they severally subscribe.

This being done, they are publicly acknowledged and declared by the minister or ministers present, to be a church of Christ, and the right hand of fellowship given to each of them, accompanied with prayer to God for the prosperity and growth of his Zion, and that his dwelling may be in this temple, raised up for his name.

A church being thus formed, has certain rights granted her by the great Lawgiver and Head of the church, which no power civil or ecclesiastic has a right to deprive her of, without a gross insult offered to the bride, the Lamb's wife; she hath a right to search and peruse the holy scriptures, as the unerring rule of faith and practice, and sufficient in every instance to furnish Zion's citizens with every good work. The several members have a right to assemble and meet together for the purpose of divine worship, and go up to the Lord's house to be taught of His ways, and that they may walk in His paths, seeing the law goeth forth of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem: That she hath a right to the choice of her own officers, as was the case of the first officers chosen in the church by the direction of the apostles: That she hath a right to judge of the qualification of such as sue for admission into her communion; if qualified according to scripture, she receives such — if not so qualified, she rejects them:

That she has a right to look into and make diligent search among the members of her body, lest any thing erroneous in doctrine or immoral in practice should be imbibed by any of them, and to reprove such, and endeavor to reclaim them if possible; but if such offending members cannot be reclaimed, then to exclude them from the church, that in so doing she may purge out the old leaven of wickedness, and so be a new lump. Her privileges are many, her dignity is great; she is the ground and pillar of truth, the object of Christ's complacency, and all ministers of the Gospel and other officers in

the church, are nothing more than her servants”. – William Fritoe, **A Concise History of the Kettocton Baptist Association – 1766-1808** - (emphasis mine).

Georgia Baptist Association, 1811

“II. The Apostolic Church, continued through all ages to the end of the world, is the only True Gospel Church.

*The truth of this proposition is not only frequently intimated, but strongly affirmed by the prophets. They speak of a glorious state of religious affairs to take place at the coming of the Messiah, which they say, shall continue or endure, as the sun, or days of heaven, Psalms lxxxix. 29, 36, 37 - Shall never be cut off, Isa. lv. 14 - And shall stand forever, Dan. ii. 44. Christ affirms nothing shall prevail against His church, no, not the gates of hell, Matt. xiv. 18. But John puts this point beyond all contradiction in his prophetic history of the church, in which, tho’ he admits of various outward modifications, **he maintains an uninterrupted succession from the Apostolic Age, till the world shall end.....***

III. Gospel ministers are servants in the church, are all equal, and have no power to lord it over the heritage of the Lord.

*By the examples of a little child in the midst, and the exercise of dominion over the Gentiles by their principles, our Lord teaches humility, and denies to His apostles the exercise of lordship over His church, Matt. xviii. 2, 6 - xx. 25, 26. He calls them brethren, and directs that they should not be called masters, but servants, Matt. xxii. 8, 11. The acts and epistles of the apostles shew their observance of their Lord's commands. Here we see them the MESSENGERS AND SERVANTS of the churches, **which proves the power to be in the churches, and not in them.** - Acts vi. 5, xv. 4, 22, II Cor. viii. 23, Phil. ii. 25, II Cor. iv. 5.....*

From these propositions, thus established, we draw the following inferences, as clear and certain truths.

I. That all churches and ministers, who originated since the apostles, and not successively to them, are NOT IN GOSPEL ORDER; and therefore cannot be acknowledged as such

*II. That all, who have been ordained to the work of the ministry **without the knowledge and call of the church**, by popes, councils, &c., are the creatures of those who constituted them, and not the servants of Christ, or His church, and therefore have no right to administer for them.*

III. That those who have set aside the discipline of the gospel, and have given law to, and exercised dominion over the church, are usurpers over the place and office of Christ, are against Him; and therefore may not be accepted in their offices.”
(Circular Letter By Jesse Mercer Georgia Baptist Association, 1811).

Again, the Georgia Baptist Associations

Jesse Mercer {1769-1841} is called the father of Georgia Baptists. Besides pastoring churches there for 52 years, he was president of the Georgia Baptist Convention for 19 years, and helped to found Mercer University. In 1838, he wrote "*A History of the Georgia Baptist Association*". In his history of Georgia Baptists he said:

"Our reasons therefore for rejecting baptism by immersion, when administered by Pedobaptist ministers is that they are connected with churches clearly out of the Apostolic succession, and therefore clearly out of the apostolic commission." Jesse Mercer, **A History of the Georgia Baptist Association, p. 126.**

Notice that Mercer connected apostolic succession and apostolic commission "*with churches.*" He flatly denies that institutions can be called churches if they are "*clearly out of the apostolic succession*". In essence, he is claiming what English Baptists and the Baptists of the Philadelphia Association defined as "*regular church order*" or "*gospel order*" in regard to the great commission. This was the basis for taking a stand against the ecumenical practices that were invading the practice of Baptists in his day. Even earlier than this Jesse Mercer stated in 1811:

"That all churches and ministers, who originated since the apostles, and not successively to them, are NOT IN GOSPEL ORDER; and therefore cannot be acknowledged as such"

Here Mercer uses the old phrase "gospel order" to define his position on church succession and church authority in regard to the Great Commission.

Middle Tennessee Baptist Associations

Among the Middle Tennessee Baptist were such men as J.B. Moody, T.T. Eaton and J.H. Grime. J. H. Grime, in his History of Middle Tennessee Baptists, demonstrates that church authority in establishing churches was practiced during this time frame:

*"On January 3, 1682, we find Humphrey Churchwood, one of the members, at Kittery, Maine, with a band of brethren gathered about him. These were organized into a regular Baptist Church September 25, 1682, with William Screven as pastor. He then made a trip all the way to Boston to be ordained **by the church under whose authority they were constituted.**"* – J. H. Grime, **A History of Middle Tennessee Baptists, p. 1.**

And again, of another church:

*"March 8, 1800 they were constituted into a church.....The above is an exact copy of the letter, and from its contents it will be seen that it was given by this same church, **under whose authority Dixon's Creek Church was constituted.**"* - J. H. Grime, A History of Middle Tennessee Baptists, p. 237.

J. H. Grime reports again, at another time, in the minutes of 1844 A.D. among Middle Tennessee Baptists:

*“WHEREAS, The Freedom Association has proposed a correspondence with us; resolved, therefore, that we send a friendly letter and delegates to inform them that we are willing to correspond with them, provided they will correct the error of one of their churches, for receiving members into their fellowship who were immersed **by unauthorized administrators**. It might be remarked for the benefit of those who would brand us as “Gravesites,” that this record was made before J.R. Graves ever appeared before the public as editor. All honor to J.R. Graves; but he was simply a Baptist, such as he found when he came upon the stage.” Ibid., p. 22 (emphasis mine).*

In another place he says:

*“In the minutes of 1850 we have the following: ‘Resolved, That the churches be advised to receive none but those who have been Baptized on a profession of their faith in Christ, by a legal administrator; and that we esteem legal only such as act **under the authority of the regular Baptist Church, as organized after the model of the gospel.**’ – A History of Middle Tennessee Baptists, p. 22. – (emphasis mine)*

The minutes of the Middle Tennessee Baptist Association repeatedly use the term “mother” to describe the church under whose authority a mission was constituted. The church being constituted is repeatedly called an “offspring” of that mother church, and the authority exercised over it before its constitution is expressed by the term “arm.”

*“This church is an **offspring** of the Knob Spring Church (p. 50).....This **mother** church (p. 51)....This church is evidently the **mother** of Round Lick. An arm was extended there in April, 1803, which resulted in the constitution of that church (p. 54).....This old church is an **offspring** of Brush Creek Church (p. 56)....from this church has sprung **a family** of churches (p. 61)....This church adopted the principles and rules of **the mother** church (p. 64).....etc.” – A History of the Middle Tennessee Baptists. – (emphasis mine)*

J.H. Grime describes these churches in the following words, *“In the main her ministers are strong Calvinists, and are **strictly Landmark Baptists**” – Ibid. p. 32. – (emphasis mine)*

Significantly, it is among these Tennessee Baptists that J.R. Graves preached. Grime gives the background of the churches that were planted in Tennessee:

*“This old Welsh Tract Church which emigrated from Wales became the nucleus around which or from which were formed a number of churches which were constituted into Philadelphia Association as early as 1707. It was missionaries from this Association, viz., Benjamin Miller, Peter Vanhorn and John Gano, who first planted the true Baptist standard in North Carolina. This was about the middle of the eighteenth century. It is true some Free Will Baptist churches had been planted in the State by Paul Palmer and his converts prior to the coming of these missionaries into the State. **These Free Will or General Baptist churches were all reorganized and their irregular baptisms corrected.** (See Burkitt & Reed’s History Kehukee Association.) These missionaries were joined by Robert Williams, of South Carolina, and Shubael Stearnes, of Virginia, and together they laid the foundation for the establishment of the Kehukee Association in 1765 upon the regular London (Calvinistic)*

Confession of Faith. The first Baptist churches in the State of Virginia were planted by missionaries from the churches of London, England, and the Philadelphia Association.

I have in detail given the origin of Baptists in these States, because from these sources have come the Baptists of Tennessee.” J. H. Grimes, A History of the Middle Tennessee Baptists, p. 12. – (emphasis mine)

Grimes gives the mechanics of how churches were constituted during the time of J.R. Graves in Tennessee. Such churches were said to be “offspring” of a “mother” church and there were ordained men who gathered it and a presbytery called for its constitution. What Grimes says of the Canny Fork Seminary Church in 1879 below is repeatedly said of the constitution of churches in Middle Tennessee:

“The church was constituted in the seventies (1870’s) by Elder James Barrett, J.W. Bowen. T.A. Hudson and D. N. Jarrard....This church is an offspring of New Salem Church, which stands a few miles north on Snow Creek. They were gathered through the ministry of Elders James Barrett and D.N. Jarrad. They existed a while and kept up regular services as an arm of the mother church.” – Ibid., p. 154.

3. Autobiography of a Regular Baptist Preacher 1812-1816

The Autobiography of Elder Wilson Thompson shows the concept well established before Graves was born and while Dayton & Pendleton were "still in diapers." The following incident, according to Wilson Thompson, took place at "Caldwell's Settlement", on the river St. Francis, not far from a village called St. Michael, about sixty miles from the Bethel Church (of which he was a member). The time frame was "during the war of 1812", and "There never had been a Baptist preacher in all that part of the country." He was invited to preach there by a couple living there who were members of the Bethel Church.

*"A considerable congregation had gathered, and I delivered as plain and pointed a discourse, and as definite as I could. I then explained the circumstances which had led to that appointment, and that **I was authorized by the Bethel Church**, of which I was a member, and which was located in the district of Cape Girardeau, to give an invitation to any persons wishing to be baptized and become members of the Bethel Regular Baptist Church. I added that if they could give full and satisfactory evidence of the hope that was in them, I was ready and willing to baptize. But I would wish all to understand, **that the Baptists alone were by us considered a gospel church**, and therefore they received none into their fellowship or communion, except on public profession of their faith in Christ, according to the doctrine of His grace.*

*"No probationers of six months, no infants who were sprinkled on the profession of their parents, nor any others but believers in Jesus Christ were received. Therefore, all who joined this church must renounce alliance with all other denominations. They should treat all men friendly as men, but have no communion or fellowship with any but the Baptist Church of Christ; **for they should look upon all others as the daughters of mystic Babylon**. 'I have been thus particular, as I wish to deceive no one,' said I. 'We wish to be understood to say, as did the Lord in reference to this "Mystery, Babylon" (if any of God's people be ensnared by her), Come out of her my people, and be ye separated from her.'" Wilson Thompson, **The Autobiography of Elder Wilson Thompson, His life, travels, and ministerial labors***

(Greenfield, IN: D. H. Goble) 1867 [reprint, Old School Hymnal Co. Conley GA 1978] pp. 152-154. – (emphasis mine)

The next account relates Thompson's comments to a young Lutheran:

*"The young man related his experience and desired to join the church, but had been told by his mother "'Cursed is he that is baptized over again'. 'Sprinkling is not baptism,' said I, 'and even the immersion of an unconscious infant is no gospel baptism; nor can any man administer gospel baptism without the legal authority of Christ. **This authority He has vested in the true church, as the executive authority of His kingdom, to see to the proper execution of all His laws and ordinances. The proper authority, therefore, is indispensable to gospel baptism, and this no Lutheran has. so you need have no more trouble on that account.**"* p. 194.

The date of the second incident is not as clear, but probably occurred circa 1816. It happened before Thompson first met the missionary to the Indians, Isaac McCoy (cf. p. 196). Both took place 35 years and more before many historians date the inauguration of the Landmark movement (ca. 1851). Both incidents show that at least some of the Regular Baptists in the Midwest believed only the Baptists were valid churches. Perhaps the fact that Thompson identified with the Primitive Baptists after the missions controversy (circa 1830) has caused missionary Baptist historians to miss this source (Elder Ben Stratton provided this source).

4. Baptist Historians

David Benedict – author of “History of the Baptists”

“August, 1805, the church was formed of members dismissed for the purpose, from the mother church at Providence.” Benedicts History of the Baptists, p. 471.

J.M. Carroll – author of “A History of Texas Baptist”

Dr. J. M. Carroll the author of “The Trail of Blood” and author of “A History of Texas Baptists” records the minutes of the first church in Texas as it was written with all its spellings, punctuations and etc.

August 1836:

However, in the report of the August meeting is found this record:

*“3rd. Agreed, That as the scatured situation of the members of Regular Baptist Faith and order in Texas, are such, that in the Common and more proper corse of order, cannot reasonably be attended to in constituting Churches, etc., **and believing that Church authority is indispensable in all such work Therefore, Elders Daniel Parker, and Garrison Greenwood, are hereby authorized by authority of this Church Either or both of them, to constitute Churches under or on the regular Baptist Faith and order, ordain Preachers and deacons to their several works, calling to their assistance all the helps in counsel, in their reach, acting particularly cautious in all their works, and Report to this***

Church, all and whatever work, they may perform, **under this authority**, from time to time, as Circumstances may permit and require.”

“Saturday Sep-30-1837.”

“Elder Daniel Parker, Reported, That on the seventeenth day of September 1837, He exercised **the authority vested in him by this Church in Constituting a Church**. Said Church is Constituted on the East side of the Angeleney river in Brother Cook’s settlement — On eight members five males and three females, one deacon Wm. Sparks and on the same articles of Faith that this church is constituted, acknowledging her relationship to and with said Pilgrim Church of Regular Predistinaran Baptist.” – J. M. Carroll, A History of Texas Baptists, pp. 64,65,66. – (emphasis mine)

No question that Parker, the father of the hardshells, was involved in some serious doctrinal errors but his practice of church authority was in keeping with that generally practiced by Baptists of his day as can be seen by the quotations before and after the above date among other Baptists.

W.A. Jarrell, author of “Baptist Perpetuity”

In 1894 Dr. W.A. Jarrell writing much later than the time of Dr. J.R. Graves admits that mother church authority in constitutions was the practice of many Baptists in his own time:

*“The first church instead of building up several small churches in one locality, extended its work throughout that territory by missions. In this plan there were many pastors to the same church, so as to secure pastoral care of each mission. But these missions and their pastors continued under the care of the mother church. This gave the pastor of the mother church a pastoral care over all the missions and their pastors. **This is the case now in quite a number of Baptist churches**. Yet, as arbitrary or executive the authority was in the mother church; its pastor had only moral authority. Consequently, there was nothing in this resembling any heirarchal or Episcopal government. By the pastor of the mother church, by degrees, stealing the authority of his church, after a few centuries he became what is now known as a diocesan bishop.”* – W.A. Jarrell, **Baptist Perpetuity**, p. 198. – (emphasis mine)

Thomas Armitage – author of “A History of Baptists”

In 1890 Dr. Thomas Armitage had these kind of Baptists in mind when he wrote this polemical denial of Baptist church succession:

*“On this ground it follows, **that those who hold to a tangible succession of Baptist Churches down from the Apostolic Age**, must prove from the Scriptures that something besides holiness and truth is an essential sign of the Church of God.”* – Thomas Armitage, **A History of the Baptists**, Vol. I. p. 29. – (emphasis mine)

D. The Final Systematic Presentation of “Old Landmarkism” by Dr. J.R. Graves

Dr. J.R. Graves close to the end of his life wrote one last great work where he tried to systematically present what he believed was essential to “old Landmarkism.” In it he stated:

“I put forth this publication now, thirty years after inaugurating the reform, to correct the manifold misrepresentations of those who oppose what they are pleased to call our principles and teachings, and to place before the Baptists of America what ‘Old Landmarkism’ really is.” – J.R. Graves, **Old Landmarkism, What is it?** p. 15.

Just twice in this book does he refer directly to how churches are constituted, and in both instances he attributes it to a previous existing church rather than by “direct authority.” In the first instance he explicitly claims that authority to constitute a church is given in the Great Commission to the church:

“If the church alone was commissioned to preserve and to preach the gospel, then it is certain that no other organization has the right to preach it – to trench upon the divine rights of the church. A Masonic Lodge, no more than a Young Men’s Christian Association.....have the least right to take the gospel in hand, select and commission ministers to go forth and preach it, administer its ordinances and ORGANIZE CHURCHES.” – Ibid., p. 36. – (emphasis mine)

In the second instance, Dr. Graves is referring to the origin of the Waldenses. Concerning the Waldenses, Graves believes that they received their original church constitutions from “the apostolic churches.” He says:

*“I believe are the successors of the apostolic churches, and **from them received their constitution, their baptisms, and ordinances...**”* – Ibid., p. 112. – (emphasis mine)

It is undeniable that Dr. Graves, along with all major leaders among the Landmark movement, believed three essentials that separates them from those today which Elder Milburn Cockrell identifies as “apostate Landmarkers”.

1. They denied the so-called doctrine of “direct” or “vertical” authority in the Great Commission. In the words of William Cathcart, they believed in – *“scriptural authority UNDER God **FROM a gospel church.**”*
2. They denied that the Great Commission was given to the ministry but rather they believed it was given to the church alone.
3. They believed the authority to constitute churches is included in the Great Commission

In addition, they all practiced regular church order in the constitution of churches just as Dr. T.T. Eaton said. Remember what Eaton said? In order to deny Baptist Church succession they would have to stop organizing churches after their customary manner which involved direct connection with previous churches:

*“**When a new church is organized, it should have no sort of connection with other churches, or relations to them.** Let churches be organized anywhere, anyhow, by anybody. Just let people be believers, and let them baptize each other and start a church. This does away with Baptist succession. And if it be the bad thing that is charged, it ought to*

be done away with at the earliest moment. Those who oppose Baptist Succession have no logical ground to stand on in organizing a church out of material furnished by other churches, and with those baptized by regularly ordained Baptist ministers.” T. T. Eaton. (Quoted by Milburn Cockrell, **Scriptural Church Organization**, Second Edition, pp. 57-58). – (emphasis mine)

Certainly, some gave their opinion of how a church COULD be organized, but they all with one united voice stated clearly what Baptists actually DID as a matter of practice, and what they SHOULD DO in keeping with that practice. There can be no logical escape from Baptist church succession if you hold to the above three essentials in regard to the Great Commission. There can be no escape from the practice of regular church order if you hold to the above three essentials. You cannot possibly believe that the Great Commission is given to the church alone and at the same time believe the Great Commission teaches “direct” or “vertical” authority. You cannot possibly believe that the Great Commission is given to the church alone and at the same time believe the commission is given to the ministry. You cannot possibly believe that the Great Commission is given to the church alone and includes authority to constitute churches and yet deny regular church order. The fact that old Landmarkers believed these three essentials confirm Elder Cockrell’s correct analysis that those today who call themselves “Landmarkers” but yet oppose these essentials are indeed “apostate Landmarkers.”

E. It was the Enemies of Old Landmarkism that believed in Direct Authority in Church Constitution

It is the opponents of Landmarkism within the ranks of Southern Baptists that believed in spontaneous church constitution by direct authority from God, and today it is the opponents of Landmarkism that still believe in such a theory.

Dr. William H. Whitsitt was the president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky during the time of the Landmark controversy among Southern Baptists (1860-1900). Whitsitt researched 17th century English Baptists and wrongly concluded that they originated in 1640 with pedobaptists (baby baptizers) in England and had previously administered baptism by pouring or sprinkling. Whitsitt concluded that all English and American Baptists originated with the Church of England, especially among those who had separated from it, and were called “separatists.” He believed that early English Baptists originated by self baptism and self-constitution upon no other authority but the word of God. He believed they came into existence apart from any pre-existing New Testament Church and its authority. He is the father of the so-called “direct authority” theory. Whitsitt believed in Baptist perpetuity by “direct authority.” That is, he believed Baptist churches had sprung up this way since the time of the Apostles. He published his findings secretly in a Methodist church state paper.

Was Whitsitt’s “direct authority” origin of Baptists received by Baptists in England or America? It was so overwhelmingly rejected in England and America that Whitsitt was forced to resign as president of the Seminary. This is how opposed Baptists in America and in England were against the doctrine of Baptist Perpetuity by “direct authority”.

Who sided with William H. Whitsitt among Baptists? Non-Baptists sided with him and the vast majority of Baptists who embraced the “universal invisible church” theory. Dr. Albert

Newman was one who sided with Whitsitt. Newman recognized the majority view opposed Whitsitt when he said:

*“Some **if not all**, of Dr. Whitsitt’s opponents have committed themselves to the theory that the fulfillment of Christ’s promise involves an **unbroken succession of organized Baptist Churches**.... George A. Lofton, Albert H. Newman, Henry C. Vedder, **A Review of the Question**, p. 148, 1897. – (emphasis mine)*

The Whitsitt theory vehemently argued that the Landmark doctrine of church succession could not be validated by uninspired, incomplete, and often inaccurate secular history at *any point* in history. He insisted that Baptists did not owe their existence to any previous existing church but solely to Christ apart from no other authority but the Scriptures. This position permitted them to accept a 1641 origin of English Baptists or any other such origin in Switzerland or Germany, as they believed God could raise up a Baptist Church anywhere at any time apart from any kind of previous connection with churches and ordained men. Newman went on to explain direct authority as follows:

“The anti-Pedobaptists of the Reformation had no hesitation about introducing believers’ baptism anew. John Smyth and Thomas Helwys in 1609 introduced believers baptism (or what they considered baptism) anew.....The English Particular Baptists (1633 onward) were at first content to introduce believers baptism...anew” Ibid., pp. 150-151.

However, research by Dr. John T. Christian and others thoroughly refuted this theory and demonstrated that Baptists in England practiced immersion before 1641 and that the early Baptists claimed to be ancient in origin and that they denied starting up baptism among themselves.

Old Landmarkism consistently and continuously and vigorously denied that church constitution could occur without the pre-existence of church authority in baptism. Old Landmarkism denied “direct” authority and demanded that the Great Commission established an earthly authority that would continue until the end of the age. Dr. A.C. Dayton makes this clear when he referred to Matthew 28:19-20 in these words:

*“And so in regard to this commission of Christ, it was addressed, to somebody. It supposes that there will be somebody to be baptized, and it authorizes somebody to baptize them. If by commanding some to baptize, it commands others by implication to be baptized, **it by the same implication commands them to be baptized by those, and only those whom it commands to baptize.**” A. C. Dayton, quoted by William M. Nevins, **Alien Baptism and the Baptists**, p. 156. – (emphasis mine)*

In response to what Dayton said above, William M. Nevins goes on to say, *“If one says, ‘Dr. Dayton is here reasoning in a circle,’ our answer is, that is just what the great commission is, a closed circle for the baptizers and the baptized, and all outside this closed circle are alien, that is foreign, without Christ’s authority” Ibid., p. 156.* Both Nevins and Dayton claimed that the authorized “somebody” in the great Commission was the church as carried out by its authorized representatives. Old Landmarkism denied that the “ye” in the Great Commission was the ordained ministry in the church but rather it was church through its authorized and the ordained ministry.

Old Landmarkers, together with early English Baptists and the Philadelphia Baptist Association (PBA) saw no conflict between “*scriptural authority UNDER God FROM a gospel church.*” They understood perfectly that Christ had intentionally placed “ye” in Matthew 28:19-20 in an INSTRUMENTAL position between Him and those who would be recipients of the Great Commission. The Great Commission totally repudiates the doctrine of “direct authority” for in any aspect of the Great Commission. As long as the inspired “ye” is found in that commission there can be no other authority established by God in administering this commission – “*until the end of the world. Amen.*”

F. Did Landmarkers believe in Baptist Church link by link Succession?

There can be no question that the opponents of Landmarkism both within the ranks and outside the ranks of Baptists understood Landmarkism to teach church succession. There can be no question that all the early leaders of Landmarkism used the terms “church succession” and used examples that necessarily inferred church succession. There can be no question that the common practice in constitution of churches included direct connection with the authority of a previous existent church during this time frame.

Dr. J.L. Waller, who took somewhat the position as our opponents, understood Old Landmarkism to teach that no baptism was valid apart from a valid administrator and no church could be constituted apart from valid baptism. In response to this Landmark position he argued exactly like Landmark opponents do today. He argued that if baptism required a church authorized administrator, then, it would require it every time. Such a requirement would demand link by link administrator’s back to John the Baptist. He argued that the only way a person could know they had authorized baptism was to be able to trace it back to Christ from administrator to administrator. Since there is not, nor ever can be sufficient secular historical data to prove link by link administrators, then, he concluded that no one could know if they were properly baptized according to Landmarkism. Dr. A.C. Dayton quotes Waller as saying:

“And the first consequence claiming our attention is, that if the administrator be necessary to the validity of baptism now, he was always necessary.....If at any time since the introduction of baptism into the world, an individual received baptism in a manner contrary to the divine enactments, it was invalid to all intents and purposes...The proposition of the affirmative is, that those who have been baptized by an improper administrator, are not baptized at all. If that be true now, it is always true....If any LINK IN THE SUCCESSION BE BROKEN, the most skilful spiritual smith under the whole heaven cannot mend THE CHAIN.....” (A.C. Dayton, **Alien Immersion**, pp. 110-111). – (emphasis mine)

A.C. Dayton responds to Waller with this corrective remark:

*“First, therefore, I remark that this difficulty grows out of a mistaken view of our position, which is not that the want of baptism invalidates the act, but the want of authority from him who commanded it...It follows that unless baptism administered without Christ’s authority, and against his authority is legal and valid baptism, **no baptism can be legal and valid unless it was thus authorized BY A TRUE CHURCH OF CHRIST....**What, then, is the real difficulty in the case? It is not to ascertain whether my baptizer was himself baptized, **but whether he had authority from a true church to baptize me.** ...To know if I have been*

baptized, therefore, it is only necessary for me to know that I have been immersed in the manner required by the commission, and by the authority of a true church of Jesus Christ...

*“But some one may say: ‘This is not getting rid of the difficulty. **It simply transfers it from the minister to the church. You do not indeed have to trace the baptismal pedigree of the administrator, but you do have to trace that of the church, for which he officiates.** For if this church has been constituted of unbaptized members, or if it be the off-shoot of one that was so constituted, it cannot be a true church, since a true church must consist of baptized believers. **AND AN UNBAPTIZED CHURCH COULD NEVER GIVE ORIGIN TO A BAPTIZED ONE.** Nor is it any easier for churches to trace their pedigree, than for individuals.’” – Ibid., p. 124 – (emphasis mine).*

Dr. Dayton makes several things clear in this response to Waller. First, it is not a matter of proving the administrator was baptized himself but rather proving he was authorized to baptize by a New Testament Church. Second, neither an unbaptized church, nor a baptized church which was an offshoot of unbaptized church (thus self-baptized, de nova) are true churches. Third, true churches must originate from previous true churches as “an unbaptized church could never give origin to a baptized one.” Which indicates Dayton believed that a baptized church could give origin to a baptized one. Dayton saw true churches connected to previous churches in their origination. Fourth, Dayton concurred that Landmarkism in principle does require organic link by link succession of churches. How then does Dayton escape Waller’s historical dilemma, which denies there is historical evidence to prove such a succession of churches? If baptism requires that the administrator of baptism must be church authorized would not that also require one to prove what cannot be proven historically, that every baptism between Christ and the present to be valid must have been church authorized and thus one must prove a succession of churches in order to know for sure you have valid baptism? How does Dayton respond to this challenge? Dayton responds exactly like modern day Landmarkers who believe in chain link church succession respond to their adversaries who use the exact same argument that Waller did. Dayton said:

*“So when we find a church holding the doctrines of Christ, and ‘walking in all the statutes and ordinances of the Lord, blameless,’ **constituted to all appearance upon a heavenly model**, we are justified in taking it for granted that it is a true church, UNTIL SOME ONE CAN, AND DOES SHOW EVIDENCES TO THE CONTRARY. We are under no necessity of going back to ask by whom it was constituted, much less to trace its pedigree in all past ages. IF IT LOOKS LIKE A TRUE CHURCH, AND ACTS LIKE A TRUE CHURCH, AS IT BELIEVES ITSELF TO BE, UNTIL SOME ONE SHALL PRESENT SOME GROUND OF DOUBT. AND SUCH GROUND MUST NOT BE VAGUE AND UNCERTAIN CONJECTURE, FOUNDED ON BARE POSSIBILITIES OR EVEN UPON PROBABILITIES – IT MUST BE SOMETHING TRUE AND RELIABLE. I might say to any man: ‘Sir, you have no reliable evidence that you are the descendant of the family whose name you bear. For, even now, some people live as man and wife who are not truly married, and in past generations such things were much more common than they are now. The chances are that some time or other, nobody now, knows when, at some place or other, nobody now, knows where, in the case of some one of your ancestors, nobody now knows which, the marriage covenant was violated, and you may be the offspring of shame and sin. Such irregularities have been innumerable, and it should be strange indeed if some of them had not by some means crept into your family.’*

*He would probably knock me down for my insolence, and yet I would have quite as good ground for my dishonorable imputations as those have who say that there is now no Baptist church that can be sure that it is a true church **by regular descent from Christ and the apostles**. I say again, when we find a body of professed believers which has the ordinances and the doctrines of Christ, we are justified in the absence of proof to the contrary in taking it for granted that it came honestly by them. **IF IT LOOKS LIKE A TRUE CHURCH, BELIEVES LIKE A TRUE CHURCH, AND ACTS LIKE A TRUE CHURCH, TO ME, IT IS, AND MUST BE A TRUE CHURCH, UNTIL THE CONTRARY HAS BEEN ESTABLISHED.** The burden of proof falls upon the adversaries. We do not need to establish our pedigree. It is for them to invalidate it; and that, not by suppositions, but by facts, not by suggesting what was possible, or even probable, but by showing what most certainly was true. Whenever this is done, in regard to any particular church, it will become its duty at once to correct any wrong by seeking a **NEW ORGANIZATION** at the hands of those against whom no deficiency has been established.” (Dayton, *Ibid.*, pp. 126-127).- (emphasis mine).*

In other words, if you can absolutely prove that one link is deficient or missing then rather than denounce chain link succession it becomes your responsibility to seek out authority from another church where it is yet to be proven that one of its links are invalid. This is how Dr. Dayton answered the “what if” argument of those who are enemies to “old Landmarkism.” However, Dr. Dayton’s response assumes he believes in chain link church succession. Dayton was a partner with Dr. Graves and Dr. Pendleton in defense of Landmarkism.

Drs. William H. Whitsitt, Albert H. Newman, Henry C. Vedder, Albert Newman (Presbyterian) attempted to present historical evidence to demonstrate that all historical groups that Dr. J.R. Graves and Orchard claimed to be Baptist forefathers, held doctrines that could not harmonize with modern day Baptists. All of these men argued that for Landmarkism to be true there would have to be some kind of link by link succession between modern Landmarkers and the churches in the New Testament. Why? Because they realized the “Landmark” principle of church authority behind the Great Commission required chain link succession; and according to Landmarkism, where there is no church authority there is no valid baptism and where there is no valid baptism there can be no church constitution. That there were adversaries of this position proves that Baptists held this position.

Dr. J.R. Graves admits this was the conclusion of his adversaries when he said:

“Nor do we admit the claims of the "Liberals" upon us, to prove the continuous existence of the church, of which we are a member, or which baptized us, in order to prove our doctrine of church succession, and that we have been scripturally baptized or ordained.”
– J.R. Graves, **Old Landmarkism, What is it?** p. 85.

However, Dr. Graves did not concede that link by link succession was wrong or contrary to history but rather defended it as did A.C. Dayton when he went on to say:

“As well might the infidel call upon me to prove every link of my descent from Adam, before I am allowed to claim an interest in the redemptive work of Christ, which was confined to the family of Adam!. In like manner, we point to the Word of God, and, until the infidel can destroy its authenticity, our hope is unshaken. In like manner, we point the “liberal” Baptist to the words of Christ, and will he say they are not sufficient? When the infidel can prove, by incontestable historical facts, that His kingdom

has been broken and removed one year, one day, or one hour from the earth, then we surrender our Bible with our position. – Old Landmarkism, What is it? p. 85.

Graves supported his position by history but in the final analysis, he based his position upon the Bible alone. As many others, he regarded secular history as (1) Uninspired; (2) Incomplete and often (3) Incorrect.

Those who hold direct authority would NEVER use these kinds of examples to prove their view of Baptist perpetuity. J.R. Graves further quoted J.W. Smith's response to Dr. Albert Barnes the famous Presbyterian divine, who apparently raised the same objection to Landmarkism. Smith told Barnes:

"But our history is not thus lost. That work is in progress, which will LINK the Baptists of today with the Baptists of Jerusalem." Ibid., p. 86. – (emphasis mine)

After quoting Smith above, Graves immediately says, *"I have no space to devote to the historical argument to prove the continuity of the kingdom of Christ, but I assure the reader that in our opinion, it is irrefragable."* Ibid., p. 86.

Graves and early Landmarkers were faced with a dilemma. They believed the Scriptures taught Baptist Church succession but they could not produce historical data to prove that any current church among them had link by link succession back to the first church at Jerusalem. Their interpretation of the Scriptures was challenged; and in addition, they were confronted by the absence of sufficient historical data to support their interpretation. In debate, they were forced to a position they could defend. They could defend that Baptist churches have existed in all generations. This position they called "Baptist Perpetuity" instead of "Baptist succession." They denied that any current church must prove its connection back to Jerusalem or even could prove that or even needed to do so because in the final analysis they based their position on the Bible alone. They alleged that their true defensible position merely claimed that Baptist Churches have existed in every generation and at all times.

"Nor have I, or any Landmarker known to me, ever advocated the succession of any particular church or churches; but my position is that Christ, in the very 'days of John the Baptist,' did establish a visible kingdom on earth, and that this kingdom has never yet been 'broken in pieces,' nor given to another class of subjects – has never for a day 'been moved,' nor ceased from the earth, and never will until Christ returnsthat the organization He first set up, which John called 'the Bride,' and which Christ called His church, constituted that visible kingdom, and to-day all His true churches on earth constitute it; and, therefore, if His kingdom has stood unchanged, and will to the end, He must always have had true and uncorrupted churches, since His kingdom cannot exist without true churches." – Graves, Ibid., p. 84. – (emphasis mine)

However, it is clear that Graves believed in a continuous cycle of reproduction after its own kind in some kind of link by link church succession, as he denied that even for "one hour" has there ever been a time in history where there was ever the need to originate baptism or constitute a church by unbaptized persons.

"...it has had a continuous existence, or the words of Christ have failed: and, therefore, there has been no need of originating it, de nova, and no unbaptized man ever had

any authority to originate baptism, or a church, de nova.” – Graves, *Ibid.*, p. 84. – (emphasis mine)

Since all Landmarkers believed that baptism was not valid apart from church authority and that no new church could be constituted except with baptized materials this demanded some kind of organic link by link succession just as W.L. Waller had pointed out and as Dayton acknowledged. Where there was no preexisting church there could be no valid baptism and where there is no valid baptism there could be no constitution of a new church. John Spilsbury, an ancient English particular Baptist had stated this position as follows:

“Secondly, the ordinance of baptism instituted by Christ is so essential to the constitution of the Church under the New Testament that none can be true in her constitution without it.... So that where there is not a true constituted Church, there is no true constituted Church-ordinance: and where there is a true Church ordinance in its constitution, there is at least presupposed a true Church also.” –John Spilsbury, **A Treatise Concerning the Lawful Subject of Baptism**, London, 1652, pg. 52. – (emphasis mine)

Dr. D.B. Ray was a contemporary of men like W.A. Jarrell and Dr. T.T. Eaton and other Landmarkers. Ray wrote a book entitled “Baptist Succession” and in that book he defended chain link succession using such terms over and over again:

*“They point to Roger Williams with an air of triumph, and say, ‘Here your CHAIN OF SUCCESSION IS BROKEN...(p. 118)....In following up the Baptist succession, it has been fully shown that their historic CHAIN has neither been disturbed by the succession of the ‘Hard Shell’ Baptists, nor the apostasy of the Campbellites; and it has been abundantly shown that the Roger Williams affair has not even produced a ripple upon the FLOWING STREAM of Baptist SUCCESSION. The Atlantic CABLE OF SUCCESSION connecting the Baptists of Europe and America is composed of numerous CORDS....”(pp. 130-131). D. B. Ray, **Baptist Succession**, 1912. (emphasis mine).*

Would “direct authority” Landmarkers today defend “chain of succession” as did Ray above? Notice that Ray uses the very same analogy used by Dr. J.R. Graves of “the Atlantic Cable” as found on page 85 of Graves book (“Old Landmarkism, What is it?”) with one notable exception, he intentionally adds the word “succession” –

*“The Atlantic CABLE OF **SUCCESSION** connecting the Baptists of Europe and America is composed of numerous CORDS....”(p..131). D. B. Ray, **Baptist Succession**, 1912. (emphasis mine).*

Ray’s intentional addition in this analogy demonstrates he believed that J.R. Graves was teaching Baptist Church **succession**. The first edition of Ray’s book came out in 1870 and J.R. Graves gave his recommendation to this book. Many Landmarkers today use this same analogy to teach church succession. Another similar analogy is that if you see a white horse go into a tunnel and then see the same white horse come out of it, then the conclusion would be it was the same horse that went in. This was their analogy to explain the missing historical evidences for the churches of Christ in the Dark Ages of Popery.

J.N. Hall {1849-1905} was a noted Southern Baptist pastor and editor at the turn of the last century. He edited such Baptist papers as *The Baptist Gleaner*, *The Western Recorder*, and *The Baptist Flag*. Hall said in regard to “succession”:

“Baptists do not believe in ‘Apostolic Succession,’ for that means a succession of apostles; but we believe in the succession of churches. Christ did not promise a perpetuity to men, nor to their office, but He did promise perpetuity to His churches.” J.N. Hall, **The Peerless Defender of the Baptist Faith**, page 131. (emphasis mine)

Another prominent Landmarker that some deny practiced regular church order in the constitution of churches was Dr. J.B. Moody. Joseph Burnley Moody {1838-1931} was one of the greatest 'unknown' Southern Baptist theologians. He pastored numerous churches, edited several Baptist papers, authored a number of books, and taught at Hall-Moody College in Martin, Tennessee. Moody is quoted by some as denying succession and it is true that he did deny a certain kind of succession. He did not believe that one church must first die and then be replaced by another church as kings and popes die and are replaced by one another. However he devoted many pages to spelling out in clear detail that he not only believed in “church authority” in the constitution of churches but that they reproduced after their own kind comparable to the human specie:

*“Continuity’ is not far from the true idea, as these churches were a continuation and extension of the first church. So out of continuity there came perpetuity, **AS IN HUMAN HISTORY**. These other churches did not **spring out of the ground**, but came from the first church....**This is true of our own species**. I know I am in the succession, not because I can trace it, but because God originated the race with this law of self-propagation – a law we see in operation now, and so far as history testifies, it has thus ever operated; hence the proof and conclusion are irresistible. You may tell me I can’t trace it. You may urge variety of complexion and countenance, and customs, as unfavorable to one origin...I CLAIM TO BE IN THE SUCCESSION. Men may challenge the historical proof, and it may never be furnished, yet the proof, the right kind of proof, is abundant, and the succession is sure”* - J.B. Moody, **My Church**, pp. 133, 160,161. – (emphasis mine)

When Moody’s quote is considered along side of a modern day Landmarker notice the resemblance:

*“neither can an individual go out and establish another church **out of thin air**. Men may not create churches by individual or corporate action apart from a previously existing church. A new church is to originate by the authority of another church.”* –William C. Hawkins and Willard A. Ramsay, **The House of God**, p. 74.

However, spontaneous constitution is consistent with the phrase “spring out of the ground” and “out of thin air” but not consistent with what Moody and other Landmarkers believed about church constitution. He is explicitly denying spontaneous church constitutions apart from some kind of organic contact with preexisting churches. Moody made himself clear when he said:

“If Christ left his churches in charge of his earthly affairs, and if his mind, underwent a change in regard to church order, or ordinances, or doctrines, of course he would have affected the change through the churches instead of individuals like Luther, Calvin, Wesley, Campbell, Fox, Joe Smith, etc....These words were intended for all generations, and

*especially for the seventh, tenth, sixteenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when so many presumed to assume authority to set up churches of their own inventions. If these came from the church of God, did he authorize them to divide it into schisms? If not from the church of God, **WHAT CHURCH AUTHORITY HAD THEY? Can one have church authority without church membership?.....This never changing Christ....requires in every place and at every time, to be baptized, which forbids his baptizing himself. Not only so, but it would command him to be baptized at the hands of one authorized to administer it. ...I would not belong to a church that is NOT CONNECTED with the wilderness journey, leading through dens and caves of the earth, and though fiery and bloody baptisms of persecution.....But all believe in succession – Catholics, Protestants and Baptists. There is not an ecclesiastical history, we venture to say, in all the world, that does not start out with the ostensible purpose of proving it.....This business-doing body he called his church, and these churches were to **multiply themselves**, and thus spread the kingdom “ Moody, Ibid., pp. 177,178, 180, 182.***

Moody used many analogies from nature to prove link by link church succession (Ibid., pp. 159-191). One analogy he used in common by Graves and Dayton was that of the human race reproducing after their own kind in chain link fashion. Some quote Moody when he denies that he believed in succession in “*the sense of popes and kings succeeding each other*” or as in “*one church does not take the place of another*” (Ibid. p. 132) and think he is denying church succession. Nothing could be further from the truth. He is merely denying that succession is another church taking the place of a church that previously died as in the case of popes and kings.

Dr. W.A. Jarrell directly responded to the historical arguments that Henry C. Vedder, Thomas Armitage, Albert H. Newman, William H. Whitsitt and George A. Lofton had placed in print to disprove ANY KIND of Baptist succession, whether it be a succession of baptism or church succession. Unlike, Graves, Dayton, Ray, Moody and other earlier Landmarkers, Dr. Jarrell refused to use the term “succession” or “link” or “chain” in his definition of Baptist history. Instead, he took Graves polemical definition (used in answering the objections of the enemies of Landmarkism) which was that Baptist churches have existed in all generations, and there has never been a time when there was not Baptist churches existing somewhere, nothing more and nothing less. Such historical problems were the primary cause for retreating from the use of the term “succession” in regard to the Landmark historical position. Later Landmark writers used the same definition as Jarrell when attempting to respond to the historical problems presented by the enemies of Landmarkism.

However, the enemies of Landmarkism saw the “perpetuity” answer as only a buffer argument for church succession. If one can prove that Baptist churches existed in every generation then this would provide the basis to defend a system which at its heart required some kind of link by link successionism. There can be no escape from successionism as long as one takes the position that the Great Commission is given to the church alone and is restricted to church authority.

The truth is that the majority of Landmarkers not only believed in an historical succession of Baptists Churches but their practice of “regular church order” provided the actual mechanics for such Successionism to be practiced among them. Dr. T.T. Eaton made it evident that not all Landmarkers denied Baptist Church succession when he said:

*“If Baptist succession be the bad thing **some** brethren say, then certainly it **ought to be** given up. There should be no more of it. The churches now in existence **ought to have** no succession. When a new church is organized, it should have no sort of connection with other churches, or relations to them. **Let** churches be organized anywhere, anyhow, by anybody. Just **let** people be believers, and **let** them baptize each other and start a church. This does away with Baptist succession. And if it be the bad thing that is charged, it **ought to be** done away with at the earliest moment. Those who oppose Baptist Succession have no logical ground to stand on in organizing a church out of material furnished by other churches, and with those baptized by regularly ordained Baptist ministers.”* (Quoted by Milburn Cockrell, **Scriptural Church Organization**, Second Edition, pp. 57-58). – (emphasis mine)

This was designed by Dr. Eaton to be a rebuke to those denying church succession. It cannot be successfully denied that the greater part of Baptists believed in Baptist church succession. This alone can account for the attacks upon this doctrine that can be found in such works as Thomas Armitage's History of the Baptists and other rebuttals to Landmarkism.

CONCLUSION: The essence of Old Landmarkism requires organic church succession. According to Old Landmarkism, where there is no church exercising church authority there can be no valid baptism and where there is no valid baptism there can be no true constitution of a church. Baptist churches before, during and after the times of J.R. Graves clearly practiced the mechanics of church succession in their constitution of churches. The most that opponents can claim is that some Landmarkers were INCONSISTENT with their own practice of church constitution and demand for church authority behind baptism.

G. False Inferences and Conclusions by Apostate Landmarkers

Erring Landmarkers have made a number of false conclusions based upon invalid inferences and faulty reasoning.

1. They have concluded that since Baptist confessions, articles of faith and associational minutes define a church as independent and self-autonomous under Christ, that this contradicts the concept of mother church authority. It does not. Apparently, the objectors have never considered that a group of baptized believers are not yet a church until they have been organized and therefore they are independent and autonomous only AFTER becoming a church, not before. Before constitution they are still members of a New Testament Church and are acting in keeping with what that church has authorized and under the authority of church ordained representatives.

2. They have concluded that because all Baptists define the act of constitution to be the covenant vote by the prospective members that this is contrary to mother church authority. It is not! It is a failure to distinguish between the authority that validates the action and the action itself. For example, the act of baptism is immersion of a believer in water; however, the authority validating that act is the New Testament Church. Likewise, this is the case in gathering churches. The authority denoted by letters of dismissal, gathering under the direction of church authorized, church ordained men, validates the action of covenanting themselves to be a New Testament Church. The overwhelming account of church constitutions among Baptists is that such and such ordained man of God “gathered” such and such into a church, OR

such and such a church dismissed members to be gathered into a church under the direction of church ordained men. This is the overwhelming RULE among Baptists. No one denies that deviations can be found among Baptists in regard to anything you would like to talk about but deviations are exception to the rule rather than the rule.

3. They have attempted to pit statements that describe two or more churches and their ordained representatives cooperating together in an orderly manner in the constitution of a church as contrary to mother church authority. It is not! Most of these cooperative constitutions involve members dismissed from the churches involved. All that mother church authority demands is that church vote is behind the dismissals of those forming a church and behind the ordinations of those directing that formation.

4. They have attempted to deny mother church authority by insisting that splits in a church where one side leaves and reorganizes into a church without another church assisting it contradict mother church authority. As long as there are church ordained men among them that direct the constitution there is no contradiction at all. Reconstitution by such a splinter group is admission that either the other group is correctly constituted or that neither are and reconstitution is necessary. Often churches gathered in conference with one another to settle such a matter, but Baptists never approved of unnecessary splits.

5. They have attempted to deny mother church authority because many Landmarkers defended only Baptist Church Perpetuity rather than Church Succession. The reason that many took that position was because it is the only position that can be successfully defended by secular history. These Baptists openly debated what they believed among themselves and with non-Baptists and were forced to take the position of perpetuity rather than succession when dealing with historical data. However, in practice, they observed "regular church order" as the rule of practice. On the other hand, there are those who defended Church Perpetuity but also believed in Church succession and merely admitted that history does not provide sufficient evidence to prove the succession of any living thing. On the other hand, the enemies of Landmarkers believed in Baptist church Perpetuity defined by direct authority.

6. They have attempted to invalidate the impact and influence of such men as Dr. Roy Mason and John Gilpin and even Milburn Cockrell for the position of mother church authority by pointing out that they did not always believe what they believe now. Wow! What a discovery? I wonder if these same objectors once believed in mother church authority before what they believe now??? According to this argument erring Landmarkers should repent and return to mother church authority???? This shows you how desperate anti-Landmarkers are and to what extreme measures they will go to support an unbiblical, illogical and self-destructive position.

Review Questions

1. Does the definition of Landmarkism by Cathcart demand church authority behind ordination and baptism? (yes)
2. According to Old Landmarkism who has the authority to carry out the great commission? (the church alone)
3. According to Old Landmarkism is there any such thing as direct authority to carry out the Great Commission? (no)

4. According to Landmarkism can churches be constituted apart from materials baptized by a previous existing church? (no)
5. Is there a difference between the definition of what a church is and the authority necessary to become such a church? (yes)
6. Is there a difference between authority for constituting a church and the action of constituting a church? (yes, just as there is a difference between the act of baptism and the authority that validates that act)
7. Do plural numbers of churches or ordained men invalidate church authority behind constitutions? (no)
8. Do church splits invalidate church authority in the constitution of a splintered group into a church? (no)
9. Was it the common practice of Landmark Baptist Churches to organize new churches by what Baptists historically defined the apostolic pattern to be as “regular church order”? (yes)

Summary of the Previous Five Chapters

In our first chapter, we learned that the proper authorized administrator is characterized by seven factors. The administrator is (1) the contextual “ye” not “them”; (2) it is the qualified experienced “ye” not the unqualified inexperienced “them; (3) it is the “ye” of like faith and order with Christ not those who are not; (4) it is the “ye” that is assembled as a N.T. Church not the unchurched; (5) it is the “ye” administer it through church authorized and church sent representatives not anyone else; (6) it is the “ye” that are reproduced as the direct historical product of link to link organic succession, not any church unrelated to this historical succession; and (7) it is the kind of churches found in the pages of the New Testament. The Great Commission “ye” stands forever as a denial to the so-called doctrine of direct authority and spontaneous church constitution

These seven characteristics can be summarized under three headings. (1) In regard to doctrine and practice they are churches of like faith and order with Christ. (2) In regard to origin they are the product of a preceding church of like faith and order. (3) In regard to history they are those churches that began as a denomination inside of Palestine, during the earthly ministry of Christ and continued by reproduction after their own kind.

In the second chapter, we learned that New Testament churches as a rule practiced all three aspects of the Great Commission and that this practice is laid down explicitly in Acts 2:41-42 as their pattern. We learned that when this pattern was departed from it was due to disruptions and/or incomplete obedience to the commission (Acts 8:1; 11:19). We learned that the church at Jerusalem took steps to restore any incompletions to this pattern; and that is our rule for practice when we come into contact with a Christianity that is not in keeping with the rule of the Great Commission. Last, we found explicit terms of authority used between a sending church and the constitutions of new churches (Acts 11:22; 13:3; “sent”).

In the third Chapter, we learned from the writings and associational minutes of the early Particular English Baptists that they believed the Great Commission was given to the church alone. They believed there was a necessary and binding order contained in the Great commission which included authority to gather baptized believers into church membership. They denied that ordained ministers could carry out this commission without being authorized and sent by the church. They rejected the doctrine of direct authority and spontaneous church constitutions.

In the fourth chapter, we learned the Philadelphia Baptist Association was formed by these same early English Particular Baptist and that they followed the same pattern identified as “regular church order” in the constitution of their churches. This pattern included church authority by vote to dismiss members with letters for this express purpose and/or constitution by ordained men sent out to gather such churches. In addition, this binding order included ordained supervision, which directed the constitution and declared them to be a church. They believed such members remained under church authority until they were declared to be a church of Christ.

In the fifth chapter we learned that historical Landmarkism: (1) Denied “vertical” or “direct” authority in the Great Commission but unanimously believed it was given to the church alone. (2) Denied preacher or ministerial authority in the Great Commission but unanimously was under church authority alone. (3) Believed the Great Commission included authority to constitute churches. That the confessed general practice among Landmark Baptists and all other Baptists at the time was “regular church order” in the constitution of churches. We learned that although chain link succession was denied in theory among some Landmarkers (not all) it was observed in practice and defended by Landmarkers in general. We learned that objections to mother church authority is not based upon any real facts.

The great commission is given to the church alone and it includes authority to gather baptized believers into church membership. This is exactly the historical practice of Baptists, founded upon what they recognized as “regular church order” or the “binding order” found in the Great Commission.

Appendix #1 - Church Authority or Ministerial Authority?

In Matthew 28:7 the angel of the Lord said to the women who came to see the tomb:

Matt. 28:7 "...go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you.

8 And they departed quickly from the sepulchre with fear and great joy; and did run to bring his disciples word.

9 And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him.

10 Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me.....

16 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 always, even unto the end of the world. Amen."

A. The Commissioned on the Mountain in Galilee

Many argue that Matthew 28:17 identifies the "ye" as "the eleven disciples" as a technical expression for the Apostles. Thus, it is argued that the commission is given to the *ordained ministry* and not to the general membership of the church. Secondly, it is argued that the very characteristics of the commission restrict it to the ministry because general church members are not qualified to "teach them to observe all things." Thirdly, it is argued that it is only given to those who are able to preach the gospel as each successive aspect is directed only toward those who were first sent to preach the gospel.

Let's begin with the foundation of this three-fold argument. It is true that the subject identified as "ye" at the very minimum must refer to "the eleven disciples" in verse 17. It is true that the phrase "the eleven" or "the eleven disciples" is a technical designation for the apostolic office. However, it is also true that such a phrase ("the eleven") is never used for the ordained ministry in general but only for the apostolic office. Hence, if this argument is to be followed in a technical manner, then technically the Great Commission was given ONLY to the Apostles not to the GENERAL ordained ministry.

In keeping with this conclusion, it must be determined in what capacity it was given to the Apostles? If it were given to the apostles in any *personal* capacity then it ceased when the *persons* of the apostles died. If it was given to the apostolic *office* then it must be proven that this *office* continues today in order for this commission to continue today. However, the qualifications and evidences for the office of Apostle set forth in the Scriptures deny it is a continuing office in the church, but was only foundational during what most consider to be the "apostolic age" (Acts 1:21-22; 2 Cor. 12:12; 1 Cor. 15:8), and that it concluded with the death of John.

This leaves only one other option if it is demanded that it was given to the apostles. It was given to the apostles as official REPRESENTATIVES of the church of Jesus Christ, and thus it was given to the Church through these official representatives. Since the church is promised age long continuity, but the apostolic office is never promised such continuity, this would harmonize with the age long promise found in the Great Commission.

This would be also consistent with the use of the verbal form of the noun "apostle" as used in the book of Acts. The verbal form is used to describe those sent out under the authority of the local church (Acts 11:22; 13:3 "sent" translates the verbal form of "apostolos" and means one sent out under authority or an authorized representative). In that sense both Paul and Barnabas are called "apostles" on their missionary journeys (Acts 14:4,14); and therefore, Paul was both an Apostle by Jesus Christ in the same technical sense as the twelve were, and in addition, he was a church ordained, church sent authorized missionary as was Barnabas (Acts 13:1-3). Both are called "apostles" in the latter non-technical sense. Hence, the non-technical definition of "apostle" involves the idea of an AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE. The twelve Apostles were AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVES of Christ but also established as the first officers of His Church. All succeeding church officers have been chosen, qualified, and ordained by the church. Such church ordained men are non-technical "apostles" in the sense they are AUTHORIZED CHURCH REPRESENTATIVES. It is in this representative capacity that the Great Commission was given to them by Christ.

In addition this would harmonize Matthew 16:19 with 18:18. Both passages are contextually related to "the church" (Mt. 16:18; 18:17). Considered together, both passages clearly indicate that the apostles acted as official authorized representatives of the church. In the first passage (Mt. 16:19) Jesus gives the keys to Peter in the capacity as just previously characterized in verse 18 "thou art Peter" or "thou art characteristically a stone." In the second passage (Mt. 18:18) Jesus changes from the singular "thee" in Matthew 16:19 and uses the plural "you" in Matthew 18:18 which has for its nearest antecedent "the church" in verse 17. Church officers act somewhat like a door on a building. Christ gives instruction through them to the church and the church carries out Christ's instruction through its ordained representatives to the world as in the Great Commission. There is Scriptural support to demonstrate that the church sends out authorized representatives to carry out the Great Commission (Acts 11:22; 13:1-4) and to represent it in other matters (Acts 15:2-3).

B. The Galilee Focus of Matthew

All four Gospels record the same life of Christ but from different points of view with different emphases. Matthew is unlike any other gospel account of the resurrected appearances of Christ. Matthew has but one focus and that is on the predicted meeting in Galilee. Matthew ignores all the resurrection appearances that do not deal directly with that focus. For example look at verses 7,10 and 16 and you will see this obvious focus point:

Matthew 28:

7 *"And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and, behold, he goeth before you **into Galilee; there shall ye see him:** lo, I have told you."*

10 *"Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go **into Galilee,** and **there shall they see me...."***

16 “*Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them.*” – (emphasis mine)

The focus of Matthew climaxes with the meeting on the mountain in Galilee. They are repeatedly told about this special meeting. In verse 16 there is an “appointed” place in Galilee where this meeting would occur - “into a mountain.” Verses 16-20 form the climax to all the preceding instructions to meet Him in Galilee. Matthew ignores all other appearances before and after this mountain meeting except those which deal directly with it.

Furthermore, Matthew is quite explicit as to who would be present at that meeting. In verse 7 the angels tell the women to inform “*his disciples*” and that they shall see him in Galilee – “*there shall ye see him*”. In verse 10 Jesus tells them to go tell “*my brethren*” and “*there shall they see me.*” In verse 16, “*the eleven disciples*” went into Galilee “*where Jesus had appointed them.*” Verse 17 says in regard to some present “*some doubted.*”

Do the terms “*his disciples*” and “*my brethren*” refer only to the “*eleven disciples*”? Or, does verse 16 merely inform us that among “*his disciples*” and “*my brethren*” who would be there, that “*the eleven disciples*” also came to this appointed meeting place? Are the words, “*some doubted*” indicative of more there than the eleven?

What about those who “doubted”? Jesus had intentionally appeared to the apostles three times previous to this mountain meeting in Galilee for the express purpose to remove all doubt from their minds. John records these previous appearances (John 20). Doubting Thomas was the last to entertain doubts and Christ especially appeared to remove his doubts. All this occurred previous to Jesus entering into Galilee (John 21). On the seashore in Galilee, Jesus appeared to the seven disciples who no longer entertained doubts about Christ but entertained doubts about Christ’s love for them since they had all denied or forsaken Christ in his final hour. Jesus appeared to them to remove their doubts about his love and usefulness for them.

However, most, if not all harmonies of the gospel place the “*five hundred brethren*” mentioned by Paul in I Corinthians 15:6 among those who assembled at this mountain meeting. Most of these were seeing the resurrected Christ for the very first time.

In the previous instructions given by Christ to the women, they were to go tell “*my brethren*” and “*his disciples*” which are terms that covered much more than the mere eleven apostles. It is implied by the angel that the women would also be among them there (v. 7). The very same designations used in Matthew 28:7-16 (“disciples” “brethren” “women” “the eleven”) are the very same terms used in Acts 1:13-16 to describe those who are identified as the “church” in Acts 2:1,41,47. Hence, there were more at that Galilee meeting than just the apostles. Acts 1:21 indicates that the church “*accompanied*” with Him all the time from the baptism of John until the resurrection and it is this same church that was present on that mountain. The point being: that there were more there at that mountain in Galilee meeting than just the Apostles. The Great Commission was given to His church.

C. The Kingdom Authority Focus

Another unique focus of Matthew is on the “*keys of the kingdom*” in relationship to the Church of Christ.

Matt. 16:18 “*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."

Matt. 18:17 *"And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.*

18 Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

19 Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven."

The symbol of "*the keys*" is a common symbol of authority. It is found in the plural ("*keys*") designating several areas of authority. It has to do with the administrative authority in God's kingdom on earth. Matthew never mentions the keys apart from the church of Christ (Mt. 16:18-19; 18:17-18).

One aspect of these "*keys*" is seen by direct application to the church in Matthew 18:15-18. Here the keys are found in direct connection with authority given to the church to confront, rebuke, and correct, and apply discipline to members of the church. The church is clearly declared to be the last court of appeals, the final authority in behalf of God's people on earth in matters of discipline. After clearly defining the church as the final authority [*tell it to the church...if he neglect to hear the church, let him be....*] it would be peculiar and highly unlikely that in the very next verse this symbol of authority would be applied to something or someone else besides the final authority just established in verse 17 ("*the church*"). The plural "*you*" in verse 18 has for its nearest antecedent the noun "*church*" in verse 17. Furthermore, this is the common use of the plural pronoun "*you*" in reference to the church as by definition the "*church*" is a plurality of members that assemble together. The plural "*you*" is found in church epistles where its antecedent is the term "*church*" (I Cor. 1:2,4). Furthermore, in other passages dealing with discipline of members, only the church is addressed (I Cor. 5).

Another example of the symbol "*key*" is used by Christ in Luke 11:52 where it involves an authorized teacher of the scriptures. The church is called "*the pillar and ground of truth*" and is to qualify those who are capable of teaching in the church (I Tim. 3:1-15).

Many believe that this same authority is inferred in John 20:23 as a consequence of preaching the gospel. Those who meet the terms of the gospel are forgiven whereas those who reject it are not forgiven.

Hence, the "*keys*" have to do with the position of administrative authority whereby gospelization, instruction, correction and discipline is administered within the kingdom of God on earth by the church.

Matthew has already established the church as the final authority in kingdom affairs before he comes to Matthew 28 (*tell it to the church...if he neglect the church* – Mt. 18:17). Therefore, the apostles, who are the first officers placed in the church (I Cor. 12:28) receive the commission as authorized representatives of His Church. In Revelation 2-3 it is clear that this is the common method used by Christ. Christ addresses the churches through the "*angel*" (Gr. "*messange*" – the pastor is a messenger boy) of each church, but each letter ends by making it clear to whom Christ is speaking (*"he that hath an ear let him hear what the Spirit SAITH UNTO THE CHURCHES"*). Matthew 18:15-18 is simply the third aspect of the Great Commission put into practice whereby the church applies instructive discipline ("*teaching them*") as well as corrective discipline and if necessary purgative discipline as essentials in "*making disciples.*"

D. The Historical Baptist Position

This is also the primary historical interpretation in Baptist history. The Particular Baptists in England were asked if the Great Commission was given to the church or to the ministers within the church and they answered:

‘Query 1. Whether the power of the keys spoken of in Mat. 16.19, John 20.23, Mat. 18.18, be given to the church or to the eldership in the church?’

Answer: the exercise of the power of Christ in a church having officers, in opening and shutting, in receiving in and casting out belongs to the church with its eldership, Mat. 18.17f., I Cor. 4.4f., Ill John 9ff., Acts 15.4,22.” – Association Records of the Particular Baptists of England, Wales and Ireland to 1660, “Association Records of the West Country” – 1665, p. 60.

When asked if such ministerial brethren could go out on their own accord or be sent by some other power than the church they replied:

“Answer: it is unlawful:

1. Because our Lord Christ sendeth forth his ministers by his power alone, Mt. 28:19, and hee is the head of the body the Church that in all things hee might have the preheminance, Col. 1:18; Eph. 1:22.

2. Because Christ hath left all power in his Church both to call and sende froth ministers, Mt.28:20, saying, I am with you to the ende of the worlde, and I Tim. 3; Titus 1; Acts 14; Mt. 18 and 16.18f.

3. Because wee finde the Church only exercising that power both in chusing and sending forth ministers as appeareth by these Scriptures, Acts 1.23,26; 8:14; 12:2f and 11:22. Wee thinke fitt to adde that wee taking this question intire consider it to be fully answered.” – Association Records of the Midlands, 1655, p. 23.

The Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association (PBA) consistently teach the very same thing. Every church that initially formed and later joined the PBA was organized by a church ordained and church sent representative (see Chapter four).

It is historically undeniable that J.R. Graves and all leaders in the Landmark movement believed the Great Commission was given to the church alone and not to its ordained members (see chapter five for historical proof). Hence, one cannot identify themselves with historical Landmarkism and deny the Great Commission was given exclusively to the church. Neither can one identify themselves with historical Landmarkism and believe in “direct” authority.

E. Summary

The immediate context strongly infers more than merely the eleven would be there at this mountain meeting in Galilee. The fact that “*some doubted*” when considered with the overall context demonstrates more were there than merely the eleven. The different descriptive terms used for those who would see him “*his disciples*” “*my brethren*” “*the eleven disciples*” “*women*” are broader terms and more inclusive than to be restricted merely to “*the eleven disciples*.” The same exact descriptive terms are used of the church in Acts 1:14-16. The overall context of Matthew and the symbol of final administrative authority in God’s kingdom is found only in connection with the “*church*” (Mt. 16:18-19; 18:17-18) and applied directly only to the church (Mt. 18:17-18) long before Matthew comes to the same kind of kingdom authority in Matthew 28:18-20. The book of Acts presents the church as the sender of ordained men in connection with things dealing with the Great Commission (Acts 11:22; 13:3; 15:2-3) and the sender is greater in authority than the one sent. The church determines who is qualified to be ordained and the qualifier is greater in authority than those being qualified.

Bible chronologists can find no other recorded appearance of Christ where “five hundred brethren” could all be there to see Him together at once except at this Mount in Galilee. Only the Church is considered by Scriptures to be a plural entity that is promised age long continuance in harmony with the promise of the Great Commission. In Chapter One of this book it is demonstrated that the contextual qualifications of the text demand it is the church that is being commissioned.

Those who demand that it is only given to the apostles are caught in a dilemma. The same ones addressed in this commission, are those that Christ promised to be with “*until the end of the world*.” The apostles died as individuals and the office ceased due to its peculiar qualifications long ago. The Commission which is inclusive of (1) gospelizing; (2) baptizing and (3) congregationalizing is also “*until the end of the world*” not until the end of the apostles. Hence, it could not possibly have been given to them as individuals or be given to the apostolic office. This is one horn of their dilemma.

On the other hand, they are forced to the conclusion that it was given to the apostles as representatives of some kind of continuing entity such as “ordained men.” However, in applying it to “ordained men” they are confronted by the very same problem they have used to deny it was given to the church through its ordained representatives. They have no explicit statement of Scripture to make the leap from “the eleven disciples” to “ordained men.” They must rely on the very same kind of inferences which they have already denied are sufficient to make that connection with the church. Therefore, the very same methods of Biblical interpretation they must rely on to make that leap are the very same methods of Biblical interpretation they have denied can be used to prove the apostles were acting as representatives of the church.

However, there are more than mere inferences that support Christ was commissioning the **church** through its first officers. Such authority had already been given to the Church in Matthew 18:17-18. Such authority is seen in practice in the book of Acts by the Church (Acts 11:22;13:3; 15:2-3) over its ordained men.

Appendix II

The Biblical Approach to Secular Church History

The Biblical Key to finding and Identifying Apostolic Christianity in Secular History

As demonstrated in chapter one, the Great Commission promises the reproduction of churches of like faith and order until Jesus comes again. In chapter two, we can see this promise being fulfilled throughout the book of Acts right up to the end of the apostolic age in the book of Revelation. However, when one picks up a modern secular “church history” book there is nothing recorded for at least fifteen hundred years after the close of the apostolic era that even comes close to resembling churches in the pages of the New Testament. The only kind of church that stands out on the pages of history during that period is the Roman Catholic Church and the heretics condemned by her.

Even though there is a radical and profound difference between the contents of the epistle to the original church at Rome and the theology and historical data that characterizes the modern Roman Catholic Church, the vast majority of secular and religious historians alike, assume modern day Rome to be the historical representative of the New Testament church at Rome.

However, the writing of church history and the preservation of historical records for the first 1200 years after the apostolic era has been in the control of the Roman Catholic Church. She has preserved only what she determined to preserve and destroyed everything else.

There have been historians who realize that secular history is; (1) uninspired, thus subject to personal bias; (2) incomplete; and (3) often inaccurate. These historians view the data completely differently. Instead, they view it from the perspective of what the Scriptures predict will distinguish false Christianity from apostolic Christianity between the end of the apostolic age and the second coming of Christ.

When the inspired predictive prophecies of the future state of Christendom is considered as the basis for interpreting the secular history of Christianity, then a whole different picture emerges to the student of the Bible. The Bible clearly predicts the rise of an apostate and dominating kind of State Church. The Bible clearly defines what are her major features, as well as, what will be the characteristics of true apostolic Christianity during the same time period. In essence, the Bible forewarns Christians where not to look for the true churches of Christ after the apostolic age; and how they will be characterized during the post-apostolic period of apostasy. The following proof texts are taken from prophetic texts dealing with the future of His churches between the close of the Apostolic Age and His return.

A. Don't look among Churches who Persecute

Jn. 16:1 “These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended.

*2 They **shall** put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, **that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service.***

*3 And these things **will** they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me.”
(emphasis mine)*

Rev. 17:6 “And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration.”

During the first 1500 years after the New Testament age the Roman Catholic Church has a history written in the blood of those it killed and persecuted and distorted in the name of Christ. The Reformed Roman Catholic Church (The Reformers, Protestants) persecuted and killed

Roman Catholics and visa versa, and both killed and persecuted the evangelical Anabaptists. Hence, neither Rome nor Reformed Rome can be the Church of Christ, nor is their history the history of true Christianity.

Where do you look for His true churches then? You look among the persecuted, the defamed, those called “heretics” by the persecuting churches of Rome and Reformed Rome. This is the inspired predicted plight of the true churches of Christ during this time of apostasy.

B. Don't look among State Churches

Rev. 17:1 “And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither; I will shew unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters:

2 With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication.

3 So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns.

4 And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication:

5 And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.”

Many attempt to interpret this woman as merely secular Rome but that is contextually impossible. The context of Revelation 17 explicitly defines “the beast” as representative of secular governments rather than the harlot who rides upon it. The seven heads that she sits upon are defined as seven “kings” and their kingdoms. She is said to have committed fornication with “*the kings of the earth*” rather than being one of them. In the book of Daniel “beasts” are a common figure for secular kingdoms and the “beast” in Revelation is a composite figure taken from the book of Daniel (Dan. 7).

Neither is this woman the secular city of Rome, as the final scene of her destruction is with the rise of seven kings who had not yet risen at the time John wrote Revelation. They do not arise until the end of the age at the second coming of Christ (Rev. 17:12-16). She has committed metaphorical “fornication” with the governments of this world. She has UNITED with them in an unholy marriage. She is a STATE CHURCH which will be ultimately destroyed by the very governments she unites with. Rome claims to be the Mother Church of the churches of the Reformers, all of which were united to secular governments or state churches. There can be no question of her vicious atrocities whereby the blood of the Waldenses and ancient Anabaptists were shed by both her and her daughters.

Rev. 17:5 “And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.

6 And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration.”

In direct contrast to her is the bride of Christ mentioned in Revelation 19 and 21. This contextual contrast is too clear and too explicit to miss the connection. The false church of secular history is described in Revelation 17-18 in direct contrast to the true apostolic church in Revelation 19 and 21. The religion at Rome is metaphorically described as a HARLOT, but the religion of Christ as a BRIDE. This harlot is described as a worldly city (Rev. 17:18), but the

church of Christ as a heavenly city (Rev. 21:1-2). There are true believers within the religion at Rome. They are told to “Come out of her,” (Rev. 18:4). The term “harlot” represents Apostate religion that is neither pure nor true to God while the metaphor of a bride represents faithful and true Christianity. The Great harlot and her daughters are inclusive of all STATE RELIGIONS, whether they are Christianized or pagan (Rome, Protestantism, Islam, Hinduism, etc.).

We are not to look for apostolic Christianity among any state kind of religion. Where are we to look then? We are to look among those condemned as “heretics” by state church unions.

C. Don't look among those churches which embrace predicted apostate doctrines:

1 Tim. 4:1 *“Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils;
2 Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron;
3 Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth.”*

Gal. 1:8-9 *“But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.”*

The clerical order of the church at Rome is well known for the peculiar doctrine of forbidding its priests and nuns to marry as well as its fish on Friday ritual. Seventh Day Adventism and other cultic Christianity are characterized by the same apostate doctrines. All of these churches are characterized by their opposition to the gospel of grace and justification without works. What the apostate church called truth and orthodoxy the Bible and apostolic Christianity calls heresy and what the Roman and Reformed Churches called “heretics” are what the Bible and apostolic Christianity believed were those contending for the “faith once delivered to the saints.”

During the time of secular church history, the period of great apostasy, we are explicitly warned not to look for the churches of Christ among those who hold to such explicitly condemned heresies. We are to look for them among those who opposed these heresies and yet were labeled as “heretics” by those embracing such heresies.

D. Don't Look among those who Perverted and distorted the beliefs of others:

Matthew 10:25 *“It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household?”*

Luke 7:33 *“For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine; and ye say, He hath a devil.*

Luke 7:34 *The Son of man is come eating and drinking; and ye say, Behold a gluttonous man, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners!”*

Luke 6:22 *“Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake.”*

The fabrications and slanders brought against the historical Anabaptists by Rome and her Reformed daughters are legion. Such intentional slanders were brought against them in order to condemn them to death under secularly enforced ecclesiastical laws for heresies. The ancient Anabaptists called "Paulicians" by their enemies were accused of embracing the heresy of Manicheism even though they openly denied it and openly condemned Manicheism as heresy themselves. The ancient Anabaptists were accused of denying marriage, denying the Lord's Day, denying observances of the ordinances, denying Christ, etc. simply because they denied the Roman Catholic version of these things. The radical pedobaptists (baby baptizers) led by Thomas Munster in Germany were labeled as Anabaptists and thus all Anabaptists were hunted down and killed by the thousands even though Munsterites were pedobaptists and the Anabaptists were not. Anabaptists condemned the Munsterites as heretics and denied such were ever part of the true Anabaptist movement.

It is this kind of distortion, false accusations by the ruling State Churches that defined the Anabaptists as "heretics" and led modern historians to view them through the eyes of their enemies instead of by the glimmers of truth that survived within the testimonies of inquisitors about them.

E. Don't Look Among The So-called Church Fathers

Few if any evangelical scholars recognize the Nicene and Post-Nicene as true representatives of New Testament Christianity. Rather, they see these preserved documents to accurately reflect the doctrinal evolution of Roman Catholicism. However, most cannot see that the Ante-Nicene Church Fathers are but the logical historical foundations for the Nicene and Post-Nicene. The Ante-Nicene Fathers records the beginning of apostasy that gradually developed into the Nicene and Post-Nicene Pagan Christianity. In the Ante-Nicene Fathers we find the explicit errors of baptismal regeneration and the gradual development of various orders of ecclesiastical offices that are found explicitly in the Nicene and Post-Nicene Roman Catholic Church Fathers.

The Ante-Nicene Roman Catholic Church Fathers are the history of apostasy at its very root, which laid the foundation for the Nicene and Post-Nicene development. Rome destroyed the historical and doctrinal records of all other professing Christians by the power of the secular sword except for these records! Why? These records are the historical roots of what gradually developed into the Nicene and Post-Nicene Roman Catholic denomination.

What is the value of the Ante-Nicene Fathers? When compared to the Post-Nicene Fathers it reveals clearly how far the Post-Nicene Fathers have departed from what they used to believe and practice. The Ante-Nicene fathers provide some insights upon the apostolic truths that were not quite so blurred and destroyed when coming to the Post-Nicene condition of Rome. However, don't look for the true churches of Christ among the Ant-Nicene Church Fathers. Rome preserved these records while choosing not to preserve other records because they serve as a logical connection between the New Testament and the Post-Nicene progressive revelation doctrine of Rome.

F. The True History of New Testament Christianity after the Apostolic era:

If the Roman Catholic Church is not the true representative of New Testament Christianity then who is? We do find them distorted but preserved in the pages of Rome's persecuting history. They are routinely identified by Roman historians as the evangelical Anabaptists. They are recorded by their trail of blood which was shed by the church at Rome. In order for Rome to

use the secular sword against the Anabaptists they had to be accused of violations of the secular laws which included ecclesiastical laws in regard to doctrine and practice. Because the Anabaptists rejected baptism and the Lord's Supper administered by Rome they were accused of rejecting baptism and the Lord's Supper altogether. Because they rejected marriage by the Roman Catholic priests they were accused of rejecting marriage altogether. Because they rejected the clerical order of the Roman Catholic Church they were accused of rejecting an ordained ministry altogether. Because they believe a Christian is a born again person with both a spiritual and fleshly nature they were accused of being Manicheans or dualists. Because they believed in a regenerated and holy church membership they were called Catharists. Because they believed true believers were indwelt by the Holy Spirit they were accused of claiming to be the Holy Spirit; and the list of distortions goes on and on in order that Rome could condemn them under secular laws and kill them and destroy their records. As Paul said, "*But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now.*"

However, at times, Roman persecutors preserved what these Anabaptists actually believed because their faith was so obviously contrasted to that of Rome's and so clearly violated the ecclesiastical laws established by Rome that it was clear evidence for their conviction and condemnation by a state controlled church. Sometimes it was kept as legal documentation against them. Such glimmers of light revealed that true apostolic Christianity was still alive and thriving in spite of the horrid and bloody persecution by Rome.

Unfortunately, the vast majority of Protestant Church historians accept the view of Rome. These evangelical Christians, many of whom, even the Roman persecutors admitted, lived pure and godly lives; are painted for the most part in the worst of terms in regard to their doctrines simply due to the word of their enemies. These include the earliest Anabaptists called Monatists, Novations, Donatists, Paulicians, Henricans, Catharists, Waldenses and eventually called Baptists. Here is where you look for the churches of Christ during the predicted age of apostasy under state controlled churches.

G. The Evangelical Dilemma:

"*Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one.*" – Job 14:4. Modern evangelical Christianity has a historical dilemma. If Evangelical Christianity accepts the secular record of Christianity as dictated by Rome, then Apostolic evangelical Christianity as seen in the pages of the book of Acts and in the epistles ceased to exist for over fifteen hundred years. The dilemma is that if they embrace such a position they are faced with either denying the many promises of Scripture that demand that New Testament Christianity would continue until the end of the age, or they are forced to accept Sacramental Christianity as the true and sole representative of Apostolic Christianity. Remember, the "ye" of the Great Commission at the very least is inclusive of the institutionalized Church of Christ.

On the other hand, if they reject Rome altogether and hold to the Biblical promise of the continuation of an evangelical New Testament Christianity, then they face another dilemma. They are forced to find apostolic Christianity among those condemned by Rome as heretics (the evangelical Anabaptists). However, if they accept the evangelical Anabaptists as the fulfillment of the continuation of apostolic Christianity, then they have no right or authority to originate any kind of institutionalized church apart from the authority given this Apostolic Church of Christ. Hence, they are between a rock and hard place. To accept secular history is to reject Biblical claims of Christ's true churches and to accept sacramentalism. To reject secular history is to accept the hated and distorted Anabaptists as the true remnant of Christ's churches; which is to reject all others as true apostolic churches of Christ, and thus to condemn their own denominations as unauthorized by God.

H. The Presbyterian Trilemma - “Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? *not one.*” – Job 14:4.

In 1855 J.R. Graves wrote an essay addressing an issue which faced the Presbyterian General Assembly that met in 1854. The following is taken from that essay:

“The Protestant Trilemma

by Elder J. R. Graves

A little history connected with the last N. S. Presbyterian General Assembly, which held its session in Buffalo, May, 1854, . . . ought not to be allowed to pass without improvement.

A query was introduced into that body to this effect:—Are Romish baptisms and ordinations valid? A Committee of junior and senior patriarchs was sent out to report an answer. They failed to agree. The majority reported negatively. But there were sundry gray-haired doctors who saw the logical conclusions behind such a decision, and indeed any decision they as Pedobaptists could make; and those consequences would certainly be precipitated upon them by their Baptist friends and Catholic foes. The reports were read in the assembly, and a warm discussion ensued. Unfortunately, very little of that discussion has been given to the public; but the positions taken by the two parties were substantially these:

The majority reported that all ordinances at the hands of Romish priests were invalid, because the Romish Catholic Church was no Church of Christ, and no part or branch of Christ's Church; but manifest Anti- Christ—the scarlet harlot riding on the beast with seven heads and ten horns, drunk with the blood of saints; the baptism and ordinations of such an apostate body are null and void; and to pronounce them valid, is to pronounce the Romish Church the Church of Christ; and more, to involve Presbyterians and all Protestant sects in the guilt of schism, since they rent the body of Christ when they came out of Rome!

But the party who sustained the minority report, or were unfavorable to a decision, urged on the other hand:—If you deny the Church of Rome to be a true Church, and decide that her baptisms and ordinations are invalid, then do we to all intents and purposes unchurch ourselves, unless we can baptize the ashes of Luther and Calvin, from whom we have received our baptisms and ordinations! If the baptisms and ordinations of Antichrist, of the Man of Sin, and Son of Perdition are invalid, then Luther and Calvin were unbaptized as were all the members that composed the first churches of the Reformation! then were they unordained, and consequently had no authority to baptize their followers, or ordain other ministers to follow them; in a word, all Protestant societies are unbaptized bodies, and consequently no Churches of Christ, since a body of unbaptized persons, however pious, cannot be considered a Church; all Protestant ministers are both unbaptized and unordained, and consequently unauthorized to preach officially and administer the ordinances.

Thus we see the trilemma into which the query precipitated them.

1. To decide that "Antichrist," "the Man of Sin," "the Mother of Harlots" is a true Church of Christ, would be a monstrous solecism. But this would convict all Protestant sects of sin, and destroy at once every claim they could set up to be churches of Christ; for they confess themselves Schismatics.

2. To decide that the Romish apostasy is not the true Church of Christ is to decide that all her ordinances are invalid, and consequently that all Protestant societies are bodies of unbaptized persons, and therefore not churches of Christ, and all Protestant ministers are both unbaptized and unordained, and consequently unauthorized either to preach or administer the ordinances.

3. To say that we cannot decide a question so manifest, will arouse the attention of the people, and awaken their suspicion, at once, that there is a great wrong and a great failure about Protestant churches somewhere. Finding that they could not extricate themselves from this labyrinth of fatal consequences, they moved an indefinite postponement of the question! Their membership which they have led into their societies, and the world which they are now using every possible effort to entice into their societies, should loudly and constantly demand of them to decide whether the Romish apostasy is a true Church of Christ or not, for let Protestant societies decide it affirmatively or negatively, according to their own admissions, they equally cut off all their own claims to be considered Christian Churches!

This is the continuing trilemma of ALL protestants, including the so-called Reformed "Baptists" of our day.

The similarity of this Protestant Trilemma, with that faced by the opponents of the Lord in regards to John's baptism will not be lost to the Bible student:

(Mat 21:23-27) And when he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him as he was teaching, and said, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority? {24} And Jesus answered and said unto them, I also will ask you one thing, which if ye tell me, I in like wise will tell you by what authority I do these things. {25} The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men? And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say unto us, Why did ye not then believe him? {26} But if we shall say, Of men; we fear the people; for all hold John as a prophet. {27} And they answered Jesus, and said, We cannot tell. And he said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things." – J.R. Graves, *The Protestant Trilemma*.

This is the same trilemma faced by all Protestants today. The only alternative to this trilemma is to "come out of her my people" (Rev. 18:4).

I. The Baptismal Dilemma

There is another dilemma based upon common ground embraced by both pedobaptists and Baptists alike. It is agreed that where there is no scriptural baptism there can be no scriptural church. One Pedobaptist scholar openly admits that if the practice of baptism by Baptists is

correct then all Pedobaptist churches are not churches of Christ but nothing more than false churches and religious societies. If Baptists are right this would unchurch all churches that practice sprinkling or pouring. Consider these words:

"All parties are agreed, that baptism is the initiatory rite which gives membership in the visible church of Christ. . .baptism recognizes and constitutes the outward discipleship. Now if all other form of baptism than immersion are not only irregular, but null and void, all unimmersed persons are out of the visible church. But if each and every member of a pedobaptist visible church is thus unchurched: of course the whole body is unchurched. All pedobaptist societies, then, are guilty of an intrusive error, where they pretend to the character of a visible church of Christ... it is hard to see how any intelligent and conscientious immersionist can do any act, which countenances or sanctions this profane intrusion. They (immersionists) should not allow any weak inclinations of fraternity and peace to sway their consciences in this point of high principle. . .they are bound, then, not only to practice close communion, but to refuse all ministerial recognition and communion to those intruders. . .the enlightened immersionist should treat all these societies, just as he does that synagogue of Satan. . .there may be many good, misguided believers in them [pedobaptist churches], but no church character, ministry of sacraments whatever." - R. L.Dabney: **Lectures in Systematic Theology**; Zondervan Publishing House; Grand Rapids, 1972, pp. 774, 775.

(Robert L. Dabney [1820-1898] was considered the greatest Southern Presbyterian theologian in America after the Civil War. He served as professor of church history and polity at Union Seminary from 1859- 1883 and was moderator of the Southern Presbyterian General Assembly in 1870).

Such is the baptismal dilemma not only for the Presbyterians but for all pedobaptist churches including Rome. The Church at Rome during the 1500 year period was a pedobaptist institution and therefore if immersion of believers is scriptural, then Rome cannot be considered the true representative of New Testament Christianity and cannot be considered a church of Christ at all and neither can any that follow her practice. Hence, this leaves only the hated Anabaptists as the only option to be recognized as the true apostolic churches of Christ.

CONCLUSION: Therefore, according to the New Testament prophecy, apostolic Christianity will not be found among any type of Christianity that (1) persecutes, slanders, and kills other professing Christians; or among (2) state church types of Christianity; or among (3) those who embrace explicitly predicted false doctrines condemned by the New Testament.

Hence, in reverse the New Testament predicts that apostolic Christianity will be found among (1) those persecuted, slandered and killed by a professed Christianity; and (2) will be found among those who oppose state churches; and (3) among those who oppose explicit heresies predicted by the New Testament.

Only the Evangelical historical Anabaptists fit the predictive prophecies concerning the future of the New Testament churches after the apostolic age. These prophecies should be the guide for every historian looking for traces of apostolic Christianity. Every historian should remember that secular history is (1) uninspired, (2) incomplete, and often (3) inaccurate; but the Bible is inspired, complete, and always accurate. When secular history is used to either undermine what the Bible clearly predicts or used to reinterpret the Bible to fit secular history, the end is false doctrine.

Finally, modern evangelical Christianity has several dilemmas facing it. Job asked, “who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean thing”? His answer was “NOT ONE” (Job 14:4), and yet this is exactly what modern evangelical Christianity must do in order to justify its existence apart from historical Baptists.

Review Questions

1. Does the New Testament give any principles to guide us in finding true Churches of Christ between the end of the Biblical canon and the second coming of Christ? (yes)
2. Name four Categories where you should not look for the true churches of Christ in secular Church History? (among persecutors, among distorters of other Christians, among those who embrace predicted apostate doctrines, among the so-called church fathers)
3. What dilemma are Protestants faced with? (Roman Controlled Church History versus promised continuance of evangelical Christianity)
4. What is the Evangelical Dilemma? (evangelicalism out of sacramentalism)
5. What Trilemma were the Presbyterians faced with according to J.R. Graves?
6. What is the Baptismal dilemma? (where there is no scriptural baptism there can be no scriptural church and scriptural baptism cannot come forth from pedobaptists)
7. What is the only option for all the above problems? (Landmark Baptists ecclesiology)

Appendix III The Origin of Particular English Baptists

“The origins of the Particular Baptists are unclear. Some have contended that they developed from Continental Calvinistic congregations who migrated to England in the 1630's. Some have argued for pro-Calvinists English separatist congregations who migrated back to England. Members of John Robinson's congregation at Leyden are often mentioned as possible sources.

Another theory is that the Particular Baptist's developed directly from dissident radical congregations in London during the 1630's. The Jacob-Lathrop-Jessey congregation in London is often cited as the mother congregation. Some of its splinter congregations may have formed the basis of the original Particular Baptist movement.....

There were early Independent congregations with Baptist leanings. Among these were: Mr. Hubbard ca. 1621 at Deadman's Place (London), they left for Ireland and returned about

1630. John Canne was their pastor on their return to London ca. 1630-33. Canne left the congregation under unspecified conditions for Amsterdam, Holland about 1633. Samuel Howe (d. 1640) became their new pastor until his death.

A number of small quasi-Baptist or primitive Baptist congregations developed in London between 1630-1645. Among these early congregations were: Samuel Eaton (d.1639) from 1633-36; John Spilsbury by 1638; Praise-God Barebon(e) (1596-1679) have all been cited as possible sources for the original union of London Particular Baptist congregations.

John Spilsbury has often been cited as the first of the Particular Baptist congregations..... This congregation may have been a possible splinter group that defected from the depleted Lathrop congregation between 1632-37 or may be a off shoot of the earlier Duppa congregation (1630). Its relationship to the Jacob-Lathrop congregation is unclear.” – ExLibras.com

Although modern historians speculate that the English Particular Baptists may have originated with the Separatist movement in England between 1630-1645, the earliest known leaders denied they originated from the Separatists or any other denomination. The three earliest and most well known leaders were John Spilsbury, William Kiffin and Hensard Knollys. Both Kiffin and Knollys had been members of the pedobaptist Jacob-Lathrop-Jessey Separatist Church but there is absolutely no proof that John Spilsbury was. The earliest information is that both Kiffin and Knollys left the Separatist church and joined the church organized by John Spilsbury. If anyone knew the denominational origin of John Spilsbury it would be Kiffin and Knollys. However, they deny that this church was gathered by a Separatist. Knollys says concerning the origin of the seven Particular Baptist Churches of London:

“I say that I know by mine own experience (having walked with them), that they were thus gathered; Viz., Some godly and learned men of approved gifts and abilities for the Ministry, being driven out of the Countries where they lived by the persecution of the Prelates [Episcopalians-R.E.P] came to sojourn in this great City, and preached from house to house, and daily in the Temple, and in every house they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ; and some of them having dwelt in their own hired houses, and received all that came unto them, preached the Kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concerns the Lord Jesus Christ. And when many sinners were converted by the preaching of the Gospel, some of them believers consorted with them, and of professors a great many, and of the chief women not a few. And the condition which these Preachers, both publicly and privately, propounded to the people, unto whom they preached upon which they were to be admitted into the church was by Faith, Repentance and Baptism. And whosoever. . . .did make a profession of their Faith in Jesus Christ, and would be baptized with water, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, were admitted Members of the church; but such as did not believe, and would not be baptized, they would not admit into Church communion.” - Hensard Knollys - **A Moderate Answer Unto Dr. Bastwick's Book Called Independency not God's Ordinance**; London, 1645. – (emphasis mine)

Hensard Knollys could not have said this if John Spilsbury and the church at Wapping Street was of Separatist origin. William Kiffin says of these churches:

“It is well known to many and especially to ourselves, that our congregations as they are now, were erected and framed according to the rule of Christ BEFORE WE HEARD OF ANY REFORMATION EVEN AT THE TIME WHEN EPISCOPACY WAS AT THE HEIGHT OF ITS VANISHING GLORY.” Wm. Kiffin: **A Brief Remonstrance of the Reasons of those People Called Anabaptists for their Separation;** London, 1645; page 6.

Albert H. Newman supposed that Kiffin had intended the Presbyterian reformation begun in 1640. However, Dr. John T. Christian researched this quotation and found out that it had been written to a Mr. Joseph Richart who understood Kiffin to refer to the Episcopal Reformation in the time of Henry VIII:

“Mr. Joseph Richart, who says he wrote the queries to which Kiffin replied, affirmed that he understood the Episcopal and not the Presbyterian Reformation. ‘You allege,’ he says, ‘your practice, that your congregations were erected and framed in the time of the Episcopacy, and before you heard of any Reformation’ (Richart, A Looking Glass for Anabaptists, p.7. London, 1645)

Here were Baptists churches, according to Kiffin, before the times of Henry VIII. And this fact was well known to the Baptists. Further on Kiffin makes the claim that the Baptists outdated the Presbyterians.” - John T. Christian, **A History of the Baptists**, Vol. II, p. 255.

Moreover, all of these Baptists commonly used the same texts that later Landmark Baptists would use to prove the continued succession of Baptist Churches from the Apostles. As early as 1649 Edward Drapes said:

“I shall now in the last place show you, how long the Ordinance of baptism was, and is to continue; wherein I shall also show, the continuance of Churches, and other Ordinances of Christ, which is, Till Christ come again the second time, without sin to salvation. Till he comes to raise up our vile natural bodies, and make them like his own glorious body, which I shall first evidence to you from the Scriptures, and then answer those objections that seem to have weight in them against it.....

*Again, consider what says the Scriptures, Matt. 16:18. 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. **Now the Church of Christ were a company of Disciples baptized, professing the doctrine of the Gospel**, as I shall show more clearly afterwards. Now against **this Church** the gates of hell should not prevail, because it was built upon a Rock.....*

And though we cannot see a Church successively from the Apostles, yet I shall prove there has been a Church in all ages, Eph. 3:21. Unto him be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus, throughout all ages, world without end, Amen. Behold here a Church, in all ages. The Churches, and so the Ordinances of the Churches were not to abide only in the Apostles days, but to the end of the world, in all ages” – Edward Drapes, **Gospel Glory**, pp. 33, 35, 1649. – (emphasis mine)

Albert Garner as early as 1645 defended the doctrine of church succession and claimed that any teaching that denied it was Satanic:

“The Scriptures do Not Teach the Cessation of the Church or Her Ordinances

Sixthly, the Holy Spirit makes no mention in this Scripture of the not appearing of the Church, nor the loss of her Ordinances; neither will it agree to the condition of the Church of Israel in the wilderness, from whence (as I said) I conceive the allusion to be chiefly taken.

Because the Church and Her Ordinances Have Not Been Lost - We Can Know and Do the Things of Christ

Wherefore I see no reason why such a conclusion should be received: to wit, that the Church is lost, and her ordinances are lost, and therefore that we can neither know, nor do any thing until the consummation of that time of the churches being in the wilderness.

Cessation of the Church and Ordinances is a Policy of Satan

Surely such an opinion does arise, and is maintained from the policy of Satan, and not from the teaching of the Holy Spirit. Other things might have been spoken by way of answer to that objection, but what I have said (I conceive) may suffice.” – Albert Garner, A Treatise on Baptism, 1645. – (emphasis mine)

Throughout the 1650's there were printed defenses of Baptist Church Succession:

John Spittlehouse, **A Vindication of the Continual Succession of the Primitive Church of Jesus Christ, now scandesly called Anabaptists**, London; 1652

Daniel King, **A Way to Sion Sought Out and Found for Believers to Walk In**, London, 1650 and Edinburgh, 1656

Samuel Fisher, "**Christianismus Redivium**," London; 1655.

John Spilsbury and other Particular Baptist's accused their opponents (Quakers, Separatists, Presbyterians, Church of England, etc.) of originating their ordinances and ordination from the Great Whore and thus were polluted and invalid. John Spilsbury said:

“All which grounds being well considered, I cannot see by any rule of truth to approve of the baptism administered in a false Antichristian church to be God's ordinance, instituted by Christ in his New Testament. That being there administered under a false power, by a false Ministry upon a wrong subject, in a false body, and yet the same God's ordinance, this is more than I can find by the Word of God from which rule I dare not go...” John Spilsbury, **A Treatise Concerning the Lawful Subject of Baptism**, London, 1652 pp. 53 & 54. – (emphasis mine)

“Again, Secondly, God is said in the Scriptures to give or to send the vessels of His House to Babylon, as 2 Chron. 36:17, 18, 21; Jer. 27:21, 22; Dan. 1:2. Now let the like be showed, wherever God is said to give or send His ordinance of baptism unto Antichrist, until then the vessels of God's house remaining His ordinance in Babylon, shall make nothing for them to prove Antichrist's sprinkling of water on the face of an infant, to be God's ordinance of Baptism, and for her being the MOTHER OF HARLOTS IS TRUE, Rev. 17.5 WHO HAS ALL FOR HER DAUGHTERS THAT DERIVE HER BAPTISM FROM HER, AS

DO ALL THAT UPHOLD HER DOCTRINE OF INFANT-BAPTISM...” John Spilsbury, ***A Treatise Concerning the Lawful Subject of Baptism***, London, 1652, pg 58.

“I speak in subjection, I think THE LAST CHURCH OR CHURCHES, THAT IS, ALL THE REFORMED CHURCHES, STILL RETAINING INFANT'S BAPTISM, ARE AS MUCH AGAINST THE RULES OF THE NEW TESTAMENT AS THE FORMER...” – John Spilsbury, ***A Treatise Concerning the Lawful Subject of Baptism***, London, 1652, pg. 62.
– (emphasis mine)

Their opponents seized upon this statement believing the Baptists had furnished evidence for their own demise. They challenged the Baptists to prove historically that they could bridge the gap between themselves and the Apostles without going through the church at Rome. If they could not, then they had placed themselves in a dilemma. Either they too came out of the Great Harlot or they were a “new” sect.

In regard to the charge of being “new” they denied it and responded as described above in much the same way as do modern Landmarkers today. John Spilsbury and others approached this dilemma from a unique point of view. They conceded that they did not have historical evidence to connect them to the Apostles but denied they needed anything other than the Bible to support their claims. Using the Bible, they denied that the New Testament church went out of existence during the dark ages. They denied it apostatized, and interpreted Revelation 12 and the woman hid in the wilderness for 1260 days (which they interpreted as years) to furnish them support in lieu of historical evidences.

However, at this period in history, Baptists had no written history to support their Biblical claim to perpetuity. Since they had no historical data to support their position, by way of concession, they approached the problem as though their opponents (especially the Seekers) were correct in affirming the true churches had been lost in the dark ages. Although they denied this was true, they conceded it and then went to demonstrate how the church and ordinances could be restored based upon the Biblical example of John the Baptist. Prior to John the Baptist there was no church and no ordinances. God used an unbaptized man to originate them in the world. Spilsbury and others responded to their opponents that this is exactly how God COULD restore the church and ordinances IF they ever died out, without going through the old Harlot. Spilsbury developed this unique response in great detail but perhaps the best presentation of this argument by concession was given by Daniel King in his published work entitled “*A Way to Sion*.” In this treatise, King made it clear that this was an argument by way of concession only and that in reality they never believed the churches ever completely died out.

“SOME CARP AND CAVIL AT THIS WORD LOST, BUT I WOULD HAVE IT NOTED, I MEAN, AS TO THE PURITY OF PRACTICE IN RESPECT OF THE SUBJECT, NOT IN RESPECT OF THE RULE; AND I SPEAK IN THE NOTIONIST'S SENSE, GRANTING IT BY WAY OF CONCESSION ONLY.” – Daniel King, a pamphlet: ***“A Way to Sion” Sought Out and Found for Believers to Walk in***, Printed in London, 1650; reprinted at Edinburgh by Christopher Higgins, 1656. – (emphasis mine)

King made it clear that he used the term “lost” only by way of concession. None of the Baptists believed true churches had ever been “lost” during the dark ages and quoted scriptural promises concerning the perpetuity of the church. However, by way of concession, he demonstrated how the true ordinances and the church could be regained IF they had become lost in regard to practice. Just as God used an unbaptized man to originate baptism and then furnish baptized believers to form a church, so likewise, God could do it again without going through the Old Harlot **IF** the churches ever went out of existence. Their point was that the

Scriptures were completely sufficient. They were sufficient as divine authority to repudiate the idea that the Lord's churches went out of existence. They were sufficient to explain how God could restart the ordinances and churches apart from going through the Great Harlot **IF** true churches ever did go out of existence. Notice that these two propositions were contradictory to each other. They believed the former (church perpetuity), but being without historical confirmation to support the continued perpetuity of Baptists from the Apostles, they resorted to the latter in polemical debate by way of concession only. Either way, they contended that the Scriptures were sufficient and there was no excuse to trace the Lord's churches through the Great Harlot of Rome.

However, there were some among them that wanted to put to silence the historical charge of their enemies by going to the continent and get authority from those who were well recognized by all to have historical succession back to the Apostles. On the other hand, John Spilsbury and others rejected this believing they needed no other proof than the Bible.

A. John Spilsbury's view on Church Succession

There is no question that Spilsbury believed in the historical continuance of New Testament Churches as he explicitly used Revelation 12 and the woman hid in the wilderness for 1260 days (he interpreted to be years) in regard to the church during the time of the dark ages. In principle, he could not envision the existence of baptism without the previous existence of a New Testament Church nor could he envision the constitution of a New Testament church without the previous existence of baptism:

*“Secondly, the ordinance of baptism instituted by Christ is so **essential to the constitution of the Church under the New Testament that none can be true in her constitution without it...** For the ground and pillar that bears up the truth, and that truth so born up, stands and falls together, as I Tim. 3:15. **So that where there is not a true constituted Church, there is no true constituted Church-ordinance: and where there is a true Church ordinance in its constitution, there is at least presupposed a true Church also.**” –John Spilsbury, **A Treatise Concerning the Lawful Subject of Baptism**, London, 1652, pg. 52. – (emphasis mine)*

He also made it clear that Particular Baptists did not believe that one could start up baptism among themselves by self-baptism when he said:

*“**No Place For Schism Or Self-Baptism.** I think by the same rule, I must disclaim them, and so separate away from them, if they do not repent, and not to leave a true Church, and true ordinances, and go apart and erect another Church, ordinances and worship of ourselves apart from it, in opposition to it, this in my judgment is as far from any Rule in the Gospel of Christ, as for a **MAN TO BAPTIZE HIMSELF.** Neither of which do I approve of”. – John Spilsbury, **A Treatise Concerning the Lawful Subject of Baptism**, London, 1652. pg 53. – (emphasis mine)*

When John Spilsbury spoke of the Great Commission as given by Christ in Matthew 28:19-20 he regarded it as the *“rule and order which Christ left...for the constituting of His church.”* In

other words, Matthew 28:19-20 was designed and given by Christ for the purpose of constituting churches according to a given “rule and order.” He said:

“Christ Left His Rule and Order For The Constitution of His Church, Faith and Baptism. And lastly, I dare not go from that *RULE AND ORDER WHICH CHRIST LEFT IN HIS LAST TESTAMENT, FOR THE CONSTITUTING OF HIS CHURCH, AND TAKING MEMBERS INTO THE SAME, WHICH IS BY FAITH AND BAPTISM.*” – John Spilsbury, A Treatise Concerning the Lawful Subject of Baptism, London, 1652, pg 53. – (emphasis mine)

Moreover, it is just as clear, that Spilsbury did not need historical evidence to sustain his belief in the perpetuity of New Testament Churches. He believed the Bible alone was sufficient evidence for that and IF EVER true churches did go out of existence God could raise them up again apart from any harlot Christianity as he did by John the Baptist.

B. The First Baptist History was written in 1674

In 1674 Henry D’Anvers wrote a book entitled “Treatise of Baptism” wherein he provided historical evidence to trace Baptists back through the dark ages to the apostolic age. In that book he said:

“By all which you see by plentiful Evidence, that Christ hath not been without His Witnesses in every age, not only to defend and assert the true, but to impugn, and to reject (yes, even to death itself) the false Baptism. In so much that we are not left without good testimony of a *SERIES OF SUCCESSION, THAT BY GOD’S PROVIDENCE HATH EVEN KEPT AFOOT, OF THIS GREAT ORDINANCE OF BELIEVER’S BAPTISM EVER SINCE THE FIRST TIMES.*” Treatise of Baptism, 1674; pp. 321-322. – (emphasis mine)

And, when speaking of other historians such as John Fox and Twisk, D’Anvers makes it plain that it is Baptists that had existed in all ages when he says:

“who have especially recorded the Doctrines and Suffering of the Baptists in all ages since our Savior’s time, brought down to the year 1660;...” Ibid., last page of appendix.

As soon as this book was published, the Baptists dropped the argument of concession (John the Baptist argument) altogether, and from that point on defended their Biblical position with Bible and history supplied by their first historian. This should demonstrate clearly that the John the Baptist argument was simply a polemical means to answer their enemies rather than reflective of either their practice or belief.

The book by Henry D’Anvers enraged the enemies of Baptists insomuch as they had D’Anvers falsely charged and then exiled where he died in exile.

C. The Whitsitt Controversy

With this kind of evidence, why then do most modern historians claim they originated around 1640 and from pedobaptists (Separatists)? No one made such a claim until nearly two centuries

later in the 1880's. This theory began with a man named William H. Whitsitt, who was the president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. Whitsitt had gone to England to do some research in regard to Baptist origins in England. He discovered that not much was said about Baptists or immersion before the year 1640 in the early writings. In fact, it seemed as if all of a sudden in 1640 there came a burst of writings defending immersion of believers and in many of these writings this doctrine was referred to as "new." In addition, Whitsitt discovered a copy of what was claimed to be an account of the Jacob-Lathrop-Jessey Separatist church in London, as well as references to the constitution of the church pastored by John's Spilsbury which also referred to believer's immersion as something "new."

In addition to these things, the defenders of Whitsitt pointed out that the English Baptists seemed to be split over "succession" as some denied that it was necessary to be organically connected to previous churches or even have a succession.

Whitsitt speculated that Particular, as well as, General English Baptists were former pedobaptists among the Separatists. He speculated that through personal Bible Study these former pedobaptists came to the conclusion of believer's immersion around 1640. He first published his views in a Methodist paper and then later published them in a book entitled "A Question in Baptist History."

However, the overwhelming majority of Southern Baptists and Baptist scholarship opposed his view insomuch that he had to resign from office at the Seminary. A written debate pursued primarily between George A. Lofton and Dr. John T. Christian. Lofton and a few others defended the position of Whitsitt while Dr. John T. Christian, Dr. B.H. Carroll, Dr. T.T. Eaton, Dr. W.A. Jarrell and scores of others, including the then current professor of Church History at Southern seminary opposed the views of Whitsitt.

By the time that Dr. John T. Christian wrote his comprehensive two volume work on "*A History of the Baptists*", the Southern Baptists as a whole, including their leading scholars, no longer regarded Whitsitt's theory as valid. However, the professor's at Southern Seminary kept his views alive until all seven Southern Baptist Seminaries today embrace the views of Whitsitt either in part or in whole.

D. The Problems with the Whitsitt Theory

Dr. John T. Christian methodically exposed the weaknesses of the Whitsitt theory. First, Whitsitt overlooked the political factors that surround the date of 1640. In that year toleration was granted and dissenters from the state church were for the first time permitted to publish their views. Formerly, it was not only illegal to print anything contrary to the state church but it was illegal to even assemble apart from the state church. From 1640 up to 1660, the Baptists took full advantage of this liberty and expressed their views in print. Of course, such views had been formerly hidden from the public eye and they were "new" to the public media and thus to much of the populace of England. Dr. Tom Nettles, who is currently one of the foremost opponents of Landmarkism today, admits that Baptist ecclesiology and general theology was fully mature at that date:

"John Spilsbury, William Kiffin, and Hensard Knollys presented to the seventeenth-century English Christianity a mature ecclesiology....Not only did they argue clearly for the distinctive Baptist views of church membership, ordinances, officers, and liberty of conscience, their view of the church stood firmly on a platform of resolutely articulated theological ideas." – Tom Nettles, "The Baptists" Vol. I, p. 111, "Mature from the Start".

As for the document Whitsitt found in Boston, called the "Gould Kiffin manuscript" there is no absolute proof that Kiffin ever wrote it. Moreover, there are contradictions between this late copy and the copy used by Thomas Crosby in his history of English Baptist a hundred years earlier.

Significantly, this supposed letter by Kiffin is in direct contradiction to what we know Kiffin stated about the origin of the London Baptist Churches:

"It is well known to many and especially to ourselves, that our congregations as they are now, were erected and framed according to the rule of Christ BEFORE WE HEARD OF ANY REFORMATION EVEN AT THE TIME WHEN EPISCOPACY WAS AT THE HEIGHT OF ITS VANISHING GLORY." Wm. Kiffin: **A Brief Remonstrance of the Reasons of those People Called Anabaptists for their Separation**; London, 1645; page 6. – (emphasis mine)

In regard to the difference over succession among early Particular Baptists, this debate occurred during that period when they possessed no secular historical data to demonstrate what they all believed the Scriptures taught. As soon as Henry D'Anvers supplied them with historical data in 1674 this difference was immediately dropped along with the argument of concession using John the Baptist. Neither side denied Baptist church succession. One side wanted to go to the continent and get authority from those recognized with such historical documentation in order to shut the mouths of their opponents. The other side refused to do so because they believed that the Scriptures alone were sufficient then and at all times to support Baptist Church perpetuity regardless of what secular historians may or may not confirm.

Spilsbury argued that even if his opponents were right and true churches with their ordinances had been lost during the dark ages, that God could restart both the ordinances and church and gave the example of John the Baptist as an unbaptized administrator of baptism to prove it. Significantly, they never claimed that this is how they started, nor did they claim that true churches and the ordinances had ever been lost. They simply argued that if such did happen this is how they could be restarted at any time without going through polluted churches. This argument was effective because their opponents could not deny it without denying their own basis for leaving the Catholic Church. In practice, the Protestants not only believed this but put it into practice to originate their separate existence from Rome. However, in practice, the Baptists never put it into practice and did not believe it was ever necessary, because the Scriptures promised it would never happen. In practice, they followed regular church order.

Finally, it should be noted that those who took the side of Whitsitt had certain things in common. They all without exception embraced the Universal Invisible Church theory. Baptists who were ecumenical in practice and liberal in doctrine followed Whitsitt's view as it vindicated their apostasy. Those churches that practiced closed communion, rejected alien immersion, and rejected other ecumenical practices embraced Landmarkism. In essence, the Whitsitt controversy divided the sheep from the goats, and is still the dividing line today.

What is known to few today is the fact that William H. Whitsitt believed in Baptist Church Perpetuity on the basis of "direct" or "vertical" authority. Unlike Spilsbury, Whitsitt actually believed Baptists disappeared in England altogether and regenerate Separatist baby baptizers came to see the truth of immersion of believers only, and thus by "direct" authority from the scriptures, originated baptism and the church among themselves. Whitsitt's view is consistent

with the idea of "direct authority". It is inconsistent to believe the scriptures cannot authorize self-baptism but can authorize self-constitution. If one, why not the other?

However, Particular English Baptists rejected the idea of "direct" authority in the Great Commission as they believed the Great Commission was given solely to the Church and it was administered by church authority.

William Cathcart says of these Baptists:

"The English Baptists will not grant that John Smyth or Thomas Helwysse was their founder. The Welsh Baptists strenuously contend that they received their creed in the first century, from those who obtained it, direct, from the apostles themselves." (pp. 34-35 - **The Testimony of the Baptists**, by Curtis A. Pugh quoting William Cathcart, **the Baptist Encyclopedia**, 1881, pp. 620-621.)

Every English Baptist Historian (Evans, Crosby) claims that Baptists can be traced back to the apostolic era. The Welsh Baptist historians (Davis, Thomas) claim this. In addition there are church records of distinct churches that claim that their existence can be traced as far back as to the 14th century (Hillcliff Church, Church of the Hop Garden, etc.) but also believe they actually go back to the apostolic era.

While the leaders of the Particular Baptists were engaged in public debates and polemical writings sometimes involving theoretical responses to their adversaries, the exact belief and practice of Baptists were being spelled out in the Associational Meetings and Minutes. In these associational meetings they answered all questions in regard to their actual beliefs and practices. They especially made it clear what they believed in regard to proper church constitution and church authority, and it was not apart from the existence and authority of a previous New Testament church.

Review Questions

1. When did English Particular Baptist leaders believe they originated? (before the reformation)
2. What was William H. Whitsitt's major flaw in forming his 1641 theory of the origin of Baptists? (he did not understand the change of public printing law that occurred in 1640)
3. Did any of the Particular Baptists deny Baptist Succession or only deny the necessity to prove it? (denied the necessity to demonstrate it from secular uninspired, incomplete and often inaccurate church history)
4. Why did the Particular Baptists use the John the Baptist argument for baptism? (as a concessionary argument only)
5. When did they drop this argument altogether? (after secular historical evidence was produced to substantiate their beliefs and interpretation of the Scriptures concerning the perpetuity of the Lord's churches)
6. Who was the first Baptist Historian who attempted to document Baptist Succession to the apostles? (Henry D'Anvers)

Appendix IV – The Constitution of Salem Baptist Church in Mississippi

Examples where pure “direct authority” is involved in the constitution of a church are extremely rare in American Baptist History. So rare that Elder Milburn Cockrell in his book entitled “*Church Constitution*” challenged his opponents to find cases where no ordained minister, or letters of dismission, or mother church was connected to a constitution. Bro. Cockrell was not denying it could be done, but it would be difficult to find.

After the decease of Elder Cockrell, Bro. J. C. Settlemoir wrote a book entitled, “*Landmarkism Under Fire*” and in that book attempted to meet this challenge by Bro. Cockrell. However, Settlemoir could only produce two examples, after scouring the pages of Baptist history, proving how rare indeed it was among Baptists. But one of the examples furnished by Bro. Settlemoir does not support “direct” authority or self-organization at all, apart from any existing church or church authority. The example has to do with the constitution of Salem Baptist church in Mississippi as recorded by Elder John Bond. Bro. Settlemoir says:

“Let the reader bear in mind that Elder John Bond the author of this history referred to by Christian was a noted Baptist and a co-laborer with J.R. Graves and other leading men of that day.. And this opinion of Bond was not an isolated opinion” – J.C. Settlemoir, **Landmarkism Under Fire**, p. 60.

Bro. Settlemoir goes on to quote Dr. J.T. Christian in “**A History of the Baptists**” where Dr. Christian quotes Elder John Bond in regard to this constitution where Bond says:

“This community was called the Salem Baptist Church; but it was constituted, not only without a presbytery of ministers, but without the presence of a single ordained minister. ‘They simply agreed to meet together statedly’, says Bond, ‘and worship God according to his Word, and to exercise good discipline over one another, and called Elder Curtis to preach to them.” – John T. Christian, **A History of the Baptists**, Vol. II, p. 333.

However, Bro. Settlemoir simply picks and chooses what source material he wants in order to prove his point. There are two sources that record this church constitution and both of them admit to a “parent church” authorizing and directing the actions that resulted in the constitution of this church:

*“The matter was postponed until by letter they could consult **the parent church** in Carolina.”* (John. T. Christian, **A History of the Baptists**, Vol. 2, p. 334).

*“They prudently postponed the matter until they could correspond with the **parent church** in South Carolina, **from WHOSE AUTHORITY** they held their letters of church membership. **In the mean time** the young converts were recognized as candidates for membership in the church, and were properly cared and encouraged in the discharge of all their Christian duties.”* (Milburn Cockrell, **Scriptural Church Organization**, 2nd ed., p. 74 quoting “A Complete History of Mississippi Baptists, Vol. 1, p. 24). – emphasis mine

Bro. Settlemoir has grossly misrepresented this case. The whole truth of the constitution of this church is obtained only when both histories are considered together. Curtis and some other

baptized persons were already members of this “**parent church**” *before* constituting Salem Baptist church. Settlemoir must have read and knew this since he quoted both sources! The history cited by Christian clearly demonstrates that this constitution did not occur apart from seeking the authority and direction of the parent church and only after obtaining it. In the mean time while they waited upon the “parent church” for authority to act, the unbaptized converts were recognized as candidates for membership “in the church” – referring to the **parent church** as no other church was yet constituted. Here is another thing, anti-landmarkers oppose: they do not believe that unbaptized and unconstituted believers can be “candidates for membership in the” parent church! However, Settlemoir argues that this example ought to be recognized as the general rule among Landmark Baptists in that day. I agree with him! Mother church authority is written all over this example when both histories are consulted for the fuller picture. The parent church considered the uniqueness of their plight and gave them special authority as already valid church members to constitute themselves into a church and to select a member and ordain that member to administer baptism to the new converts. J.T. Christian quotes the letter from the parent church authorizing their constitution in these words:

“That there was no law against necessity, and under the present stress of circumstances the members ought to assemble and formally appoint one of their number, by election, to baptize the converts.’ This advice was acted upon and Richard Curtis baptized the converts. Thus the first church in Mississippi was organized without a presbytery of ordained ministers.” – John T. Christian, **A History of the Baptists**, Vol. II, p. 334. – (emphasis mine)

They were not constituted apart from church authority but the very reverse. They did not act before contacting their “parent church” and they did not constitute themselves into a church without being authorized by the parent church in writing. However, was this kind of constitution the norm among Baptists? The absolute uniqueness of this constitution is clearly inferred in the wording of the church letter which views it as a “*necessity...under the present stress of circumstances.*” What this church is loudly saying is that this is an unusual case, implying that normally churches were constituted or gathered more directly by the church during that time. This example proves that church constitution in the days of J.R. Graves was normally according to “regular church order” just as Pendleton, Hiscox and Dargin all admit.

Appendix V - Does Matthew 18:20 Authorize the Constitution of Churches?

Mt. 18: 15 “Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.

16 But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.

17 And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.

18 Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

*19 **Again** I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.*

20 For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”

The proponents of “New Whitsittism” (direct authority advocates) argue that Matthew 18:20 is quoted by many historical Baptists in order to justify the constitution of two or three baptized persons into a church. However, most of these quotes refer to this text as only a basis for the minimum number of persons needed to constitute a church rather than a text for authority to constitute a church.

It is not sufficient to simply state that some Baptists believed Matthew 18:20 provided authority for such an action. They must prove contextually that this text is not being addressed to, nor refers to, an already constituted church described in the immediate preceding verses (vv. 15-18). Note the word “**Again**” in verse 19 which demands connection with the previous statement where the church is called upon to exercise the authority of the keys. It is this previously stated authority of the keys that Jesus refers to by the phrase “in my name.” There is not one syllable concerning baptism or authority to constitute churches or any kind of commission in this text. It only has to do with meeting together as an already existent church in the name of Christ, as instructed previously to conduct church matters. The designed purpose of this text is to give assurance that regardless how small a church may be, whenever it assembles, whether to exercise discipline or any other matter (prayer) in obedience to His revealed will (in my name) that Christ will honor them and be present with them. This text may be used contextually to demonstrate what may be the minimum number a church is composed of but it has no contextual relevance to authority to constitute churches. The necessary order and authority to constitute churches is the subject matter of the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20 alone rather than Matthew 18:20.

On the other hand, the “direct authority” interpretation of this verse is exactly how proponents of the Universal Invisible Church theory understand and apply this text. The majority of quotations from history in regard to this text have to do with nothing more than determining the minimum number needed to constitute a church. It has nothing to do with the procedure or the authority to constitute a church.

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