



*“Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you,” Hebrews 13:17.*

## **The Church Established**

**Lesson Aim:** The study of Articles 15, 17.

15. Establishment of a visible church by Christ Himself during His personal ministry on earth. 17. Perpetuity of Missionary Baptist churches from Christ's day on earth until His second coming.

**L502. Date:** February 1960. **Text:** Matthew 3:1-8; John 1:35-42; Matthew 16:15-18. **Topic:** Church: Beginning of.

INTRODUCTION—Thank God for my church! It is the divine institution which the Lord Jesus set in the world to perpetuate the preaching of the gospel and the teaching of the saved. It is a spiritual lighthouse in my community which would suffer in heathen darkness without the witness which it gives. It was because of the witness of my church that I became conscious of sin and trusted Jesus as Saviour. Now the teachers who labor there and the pastor who preaches, are my spiritual leaders by whose efforts I have been led to grow in grace.

My church is the best method by which I can help carry out the great commission of Matthew 28:19-20. In her visitation program I can have a part in a local missionary-evangelistic program. Through her offerings and denominational affiliations I can have a part in preaching the gospel to people of other nations whom I have never seen. Through her Sunday School and Training Service I can have a part in teaching and training men and women, boys and girls. In her worship services I can be a part of a congregation of God-fearing, believing Christians who join in spiritual worship to God. Through her auxiliaries (Brotherhood and W.M.A.) I can have Christian fellowship in further study and service.

I owe my church a great debt. Money alone cannot pay it. Therefore, I dedicate my time, interests, money, and abilities to her welfare. I can do nothing less. This is not just a congregation of people—it is a group of God's children whom He has joined together to propagate His Kingdom in the world. It is a divine “institution. I can do nothing less than dedicate myself to the promotion of the purposes of my God by promoting the work of His church. (Note: In this lesson references to “the church” refers to the local church or the church as an institution, according to the context.)

## EXPOSITION

### I. The Material Prepared, Matthew 3:1-3.

1. God sent a specially commissioned man to prepare the material for the first church. John 1:6 identifies this messenger as “*a man sent from God, whose name was John.*” The Old Testament prophets had promised that one would come whose ministry would be to prepare the way for the Lord's coming. (See Isaiah 40:3-5 and related passages.) This man appeared as a baby born to Zacharias and Elizabeth, Luke 1:5-20, 57-80. He was filled with the Holy Spirit from birth, Luke 1:15. His childhood and early manhood are passed over in silence. Suddenly he is heard preaching in the wilderness of Judaea. His message was: “Men must repent of their sins and be baptized in confession of their repentance, because the promised Messiah is about to appear.” Hundreds of people from over Palestine came and were baptized of John the Baptist in the river Jordan confessing their sins. Thus when Jesus began His public ministry He found (1) a group of people who were ready and waiting for the Messiah, and (2) a group of people who had already experienced sincere repentance. These disciples of John the Baptist became the first disciples and converts of Jesus.

Occasionally the question arises as to whether John's baptism was a “Christian baptism.” There is no question as to whether it was valid or not, for John was specially commissioned of God to preach and baptize, John 1:6, 33. His baptism was not valid when performed by other men after his death and the institution of the church. This is why those who received “John's baptism” in Acts 19 were baptized again. Therefore, we conclude, John's baptism was valid and “Christian” up to the death of John and the institution of the church. After this, the authority to baptize lay entirely within the church who acted under the authority of her Head, Jesus.

2. The material was prepared by a call to sincere repentance, Matthew 3:2, 8, 11. John's basic message was a call to repentance because the

Messiah was coming. He knew that man was a sinner and could not be approved of God without repentance. His purpose was to prepare men for the Lord's coming. Therefore, he demanded repentance from all, whether "religious" or not. There was no distinction between men in his eyes. Even religious leaders must repent of sin just as the publicans and harlots. Personal experience has taught us that the man who lives in communion with God must live a life of continual repentance. The deeper is one's sin the more he has to repent of, but all men must repent just the same.

3. The penitent believers were required to confess their new life in baptism, Mark 1:4; Matthew 3:5-6. We are sure baptism has nothing to do with the redemption of the soul. The Bible is positive that faith alone is sufficient on our part to bring forgiveness of sins. However, one may seriously question the reality of the conversion of another who refuses to confess his faith in baptism. To John the Baptist, and in all the New Testament, it was only natural that the believer should be baptized. This was the natural expression of repentance and faith. Our Lord Jesus gave us an example in His own baptism, Matthew 3:13-17. Then He commanded that the church should make baptism a part of her worldwide ministry: (1) make disciples, (2) baptize them, (3) teach them to observe all the doctrine, Matthew 28:19-20. It is a serious error to make baptism so important as to believe it essential to salvation. It is also a serious error to make baptism so unimportant that people get a careless attitude toward it and even neglect it. Baptism is a sacred ordinance and no truly loyal Christian can afford to ignore it. It is a divine demand upon the believer! How can one be faithful and refuse to submit to it?

4. The material (people) was prepared by an announcement of the coming of Christ, Matthew 3:11-12; John 1:6-8, 15-18, 29-34. These passages are a record of John's witness to Christ Jesus. He says it was the purpose of his ministry to introduce Him to the world. His "*Behold, the Lamb of God!*" has turned the eyes of many to Jesus. He tells us that he did not recognize Jesus as the Messiah until he saw the Holy Spirit abiding upon Him. Thus he was conscious that he was not worthy so much as to unloose the shoes of Jesus. How wonderful it is to have one's whole life revolving about the central point of Jesus Christ! John's selflessness and willingness to decrease that He might increase is an inspiration to all who name the name of Christ, John 3:29-30. It challenges every modern Christian to make every life interest secondary to the purpose of God for him. The coming Christ is still the pivot of the Christian's life and the glory of his hope. It is the church's message. It must never be deserted nor neglected.

## II. The Material Gathered, John 1:35-42.

1. The first church was gathered around the person of Jesus, verse 39. While John was commissioned to prepare the people for the coming of Jesus, it was our Lord who assembled the first church. The Bible records how He went about personally gathering disciples. This is the way we would expect it. Jesus Christ is the head of the church, Colossians 1:18, and is to have preeminence therein. The church is the body (outward, visible expression) of Christ and His fulness fills it, Ephesians 1:22-23. We would not expect its institution to be left to the work of man or angel, but to be the work of its Head.

There is difference of opinion as to the exact place where the church was instituted. Some hold it was in the mountain (Mark 3:13-19), while others hold it was by the sea (Mark 1:16-20), and still others have different opinions. If the exact place was of urgent importance we can be sure it would have been more carefully recorded. It is sufficient for us to understand that the Lord Jesus personally gathered and personally instituted His church. The church is of divine institution, being set up during the earthly ministry of Jesus by the Lord Himself. It was empowered on Pentecost (but no further organization took place) and began its worldwide ministry under the Great Commission, Matthew 28:19-20.

2. The number of disciples grew by personal witnessing, verses 40-42. Those who came to know Jesus as Saviour and Messiah were anxious that their friends and relatives should know Him also. They went out to tell others and, one by one, brought them to Jesus. This is the way the Lord intended that the church should grow. Great revivals with large congregations are impressive. However, more people have been won to Christian faith by personal testimony than have been won in revivals. Our generation is in desperate need of a revival of personal witnessing within the churches. It is not enough to build church buildings and have services so the unsaved can come if they want to. The unsaved man is lost, dead in sins, and blind to the truth. We sin against God if we let him die as a sinner without seeking to win him in his home or at his work. The method which Jesus used was personal witnessing. Have you ever discovered a more effective one?

3. The disciples were gathered by the personal call of Jesus Christ, verse 43. The familiar, *"Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men,"* enlisted some who left their work to follow Jesus, Matthew 4:19. Thus the Lord selected personally those who composed the membership of the first church. The Lord is still building His churches in the same way. Paul says that God has set every member in the church as He saw fit, I Corinthians

12:18. That means if each one is in the Lord's will, every member has a place of service and is important to the life and welfare of the congregation. Membership in the church must never be taken for granted. It is a very serious undertaking. One testifies that he has been renewed by conversion, that God has added him to this particular congregation, and pledges himself to a walk of service with his brethren. To fail in this solemn agreement is to betray both God and men. He who grows negligent about church attendance is revealing he has lost that sense of personal call which membership should involve. There is little advantage to church membership if a person simply has his name on the roll and nothing else.

### **III. The Church Perpetuated, Matthew 16:15-18.**

To say the church has been perpetuated means that it has been given an enduring character or existence. It is thus preserved from extinction and caused to continue without a break. The “perpetuity of the church” means that the church has existed in its true, scriptural form and doctrines through all the years since its original institution and that it shall continue to so exist until Jesus comes again.

1. The church is perpetuated because of her membership, verses 15-18. The local church is composed of those members who are truly born again. While some who are not truly saved may have their names on the membership roll, they are not members before God. It is heartening to read the unhesitating response of Peter to Jesus' question, “*Whom say ye that I am?*” His answer is, “*Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.*” John says this confession is evidence that one is truly born of God, I John 4:2-3. In last Sunday's lesson we studied about the security of the believer in Jesus. Now if the believers are secure, and the Holy Spirit abides within each one, the assembly of believers in church capacity will continue so long as there are believers in the earth. There is a peculiar kind of strength which comes by the meeting of Christians to study and worship. God commands this gathering of each church, Hebrews 10:25. These redeemed saints will continue to obey this command. Even periods of persecution did not stop the churches from meeting, though they must meet in secret. The very fact that the members are so vitally related to God is one reason they will continue to meet and the churches will continue to exist.

2. The church is perpetuated because of her foundation, verses 17-18. This is the basic reason for the perpetuity of the church. The foundation upon which the church is built is the truth expressed by Peter: Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God! If this truth is ever lost the church ceases to be a

church and becomes an ethical-social club. This is the basic foundation of the church, I Corinthians 3:11. Jesus, the Son of God, instituted the church, taught the church, commissioned the church, and promised to abide with the church. If He is not truly the Son of God all the promises and its very message is vain. Even our hope for eternity is empty and we are still condemned sinners. The Bible becomes untrustworthy as a guide in matters relating to God. Jesus is the Son of God or the church is nothing. This is the very basis of this passage.

Some will argue that this passage means the church is built upon Peter. Such reasoning is without basis. Grammatically, it is impossible to get this meaning from the passage. While Peter (*petros*) and rock (*petra*) are related words, they are not the same in this passage. Look at the difference in spelling of their Greek form given above. They are of a different gender and so cannot refer to each other when used in the same sentence. This is contrary to the laws of Greek grammar. Moreover, the perpetuity of the church does not depend upon the papacy, priesthood, nor clergy, but solely upon Jesus Christ. This idea has been injected into Christian thought by those who wish to support Peter as the first pope and to gain power for the papacy thereby. No good Baptist ought to countenance such interpretation.

3. The church is perpetuated because of her purpose, Matthew 28:19-20. God's purpose for the churches is that they would be His witness in all the world. The Great Commission is not given to the ministry but to the church. The Holy Spirit came at Pentecost to empower, not just the preachers, but all the believers who were assembled. God intends that the church should serve as a center from which the Gospel news and influence should radiate through the community and on out to the world. The purpose of the church is a missionary purpose! The church is faithful to her Lord as she accomplishes this purpose at home and abroad. It is God's plan that the gospel witness will be given to all the world until Jesus comes again. He will not permit the "gates of hell" to overcome the church so long as that purpose is not fully realized. That means, of course, that the church will continue her missionary and evangelistic work until Jesus comes again. She shall be preserved by His power until the saints are caught away to be eternally with their Lord!

**CONCLUSION** — The church holds a central place in God's plan. He sent John the Baptist to prepare disciples for Jesus. Jesus came and instituted the church. The church was then commissioned to be the messenger of the Gospel to all the world. Through the personal supervision of Jesus the church has never ceased to exist. It cannot be traced through history by the name "Baptist" but its doctrines are evident, and Baptist churches are now

the descendants of the original New Testament church. It is a distinct privilege to be a member of a Baptist church. Those who hold membership therein have a great responsibility before God to be good stewards of their opportunity to serve Him through their church. It is a serious sin to neglect the work which the church is seeking to do. God's great purpose is: *“Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen,”* Ephesians 3:21.

### QUESTIONS

1. Define “church” in your own words.
2. Tell what your church has meant to your spiritual life.
3. Who prepared the people for the coming of Jesus?
4. Discuss the place of repentance in one's religious life.
5. Who instituted the first church? When was it instituted?
6. What does the “perpetuity of the church” mean?
7. What is the “rock” of Matthew 16:18?
8. What is the purpose of the church in the world?
9. Describe the future of the church when Jesus returns.