



Faith Pulpit

The Doctrine of the Church and Its Identifying Marks

There is much confusion these days over what the Bible teaches about the church. Here at Faith Baptist Bible College and Theological Seminary we are often asked what we believe in this area, and we are glad for the opportunity to set forth our convictions. There is much more that could be said about the church but these comments reflect our basic understanding of what the Scriptures teach.

Significance

We believe that the doctrine of the church is just as significant as any of the other grand teachings of Scripture. Furthermore, we believe that the doctrine of the church is vital and important for a proper understanding and observance of the plan of God for believers in this age.

Nature—Distinct from Israel

We believe that the church began on the day of Pentecost with the unique indwelling and baptizing ministries of the Spirit of God, and that all genuine believers during this age (from Pentecost until the Rapture) comprise this body, with Christ as its Head. The church is distinct from national Israel, and the promises, prophecies and destiny of each group should be kept separate. The church will be completed when our Lord returns in the air to take us to be with Himself in the Rapture before the tribulation period begins on earth.

Nature of its Commission

We believe that the commission entrusted to the church is not one primarily of a social, political, or economic nature but rather is one of evangelization and the establishing of local churches where biblically baptized believers associate “by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the Gospel.”

Water Baptism

We believe that it is the will of God for believers in this age to publicly express their faith in Christ, their identification with His death and resurrection, and their desire to walk in holiness by undergoing water baptism—the single immersion of a believer in the name of the triune God. While baptism is a symbol of an inward reality, its outward observance has been commanded by our Lord. Baptism is the identifying badge of a Christian, and is therefore a prerequisite to local church membership and its privileges (including regular participation in its programs, and its observance of the Lord's supper).

The Lord's Supper

We believe that the Lord's supper is a memorial picture of our Lord's death on our behalf, a testimony of our present identification with Him and His people, and a reminder that while He is absent from us presently, the day awaits when we shall be together forever ever with Him at His return. Participants should be genuine believers who have been scripturally baptized and are walking in obedience and fellowship with Him.

The Church's Importance and Definition

We believe that the local church has been established by God as the institution through which He normally carries out His work in this age. Therefore it has a sacred preeminence over other religious organizations and is described in Scripture as “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15). Its members are baptized believers who are united in doctrinal conviction, godly walk, and intend to carry out the church covenant and the purposes for which the local church exists. Those purposes include evangelism at home and around the world, the observance of the ordinances, the building up of the saints, maturing them and equipping them for ministry through fellowship, encouragement, the systematic preaching and teaching of God's Word, and opportunity for ministry.

The Church's Government

We believe that our Lord has entrusted to each church the right to govern itself through congregational action, and that no one person or organization—whether from within or without the church—should assume or exercise such authority. Each congregation, therefore, is the sole decision-making body, and its will is final. It is the privilege of God's people to seek the mind of Christ and then to act accordingly.

The Church's Officers

Our Lord has given to His churches two specific officers, and these are the pastor (elder, bishop) and deacons. The pastor is a man called by God who functions as the shepherd of the flock by providing a mature and godly example for them to follow, by faithfully preaching and teaching the Word of God,

and by using his overseeing office to alert his people to danger and to give them leadership and direction. Deacons are men who function as helpers to the pastor. Their responsibility is to serve and minister within the local church under the direction of the pastoral office. We reject the concept of a plurality of ruling elders.

Churches which follow these biblical guidelines should not be ashamed of their distinctive Baptist qualities nor should their people hesitate to use the designation “Baptist” in identifying themselves, their convictions, or their local church.

Dr. George Houghton

Former VP of Academic Services at [Faith Baptist Bible College](#) | [Other Articles](#)

George Houghton, former vice president for academic services and college dean at Faith Baptist Bible College and Theological Seminary, is a graduate of Bethel College, Central Conservative Baptist Theological Seminary, and holds a Master's and a Doctor of Theology degree from Dallas Theological Seminary. He retired in 2010 after serving for 36 years at the institution.