

The Perpetuity and Continuity of The New Testament Church

Perpetuate means: To make perpetual or cause to last indefinitely.

Continuity means: Uninterrupted connection, succession or union.

It takes both of these words to convey the Biblical teaching of how the New Testament Church will spread throughout the whole world, and how it will last until the Second Coming of Christ. The Holy Scriptures are the only authority by which the church is to govern her beliefs and guide all her activities. The Bible, which is inspired by God, is the only trustworthy authority upon which one's faith is to rest.

THIS PAMPHLET WILL COVER TWO MAIN AREAS OF STUDY

1. An examination of the Biblical teaching on the perpetuity and continuity of the New Testament Church.
2. The methodology which the Bible gives for the spread of the church.

It is the purpose of this pamphlet to examine the Holy Scriptures and try to discover the responsibility and the methodology which the church has received from God for starting new churches. We would also like to examine the Scriptures to see if any other institution or if any individuals, apart from the church, were given this responsibility and authority.

Jesus says in Matthew 16:18 "Matthew 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." In this verse we have at least two great truths. Christ says, "I will build my church." The first New Testament church ever built was built by Christ, who is the head of the church. Every New Testament church that has been built since then is built on the foundation of Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians 3:11 says "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." The second great truth contained in Matthew 16:18 is that the church shall never be destroyed. The promise made by Christ was not that the church in Jerusalem would never be destroyed, but that the institution, "the church," would never be destroyed. The promise was that the congregation of believers, earnestly contending for the faith, would have a continual existence in the world until He returned. In Luke 18:8 Jesus asked this question: "Nevertheless when the Son of Man cometh shall He find faith on the earth?"

The promise of Christ in Matt. 16:18 confirms that the church will continue from the time He first built it until He returns. This promise is believed by faith like all the promises of God. If one requires proof from church history that the church has had a continual existence from the time of Christ, he is walking by sight and not by faith. Christ promised that the church would have a continual existence and that promise is sufficient for the child of faith. The true believer does not need a chain link succession proven by church history to believe that it is true. His faith in the Holy Scriptures is sufficient for him. Did Christ promise that the New Testament church would have a continual existence until He returned? If Christ promised it, then it is a fact!

Matthew 28:19-20 says "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 alway, even unto the end of the world." Elder Mark Green, pastor of the church at Paris, Arkansas, made the following comment in a sermon on these verses: "The

commission was given to the apostles as officers in the New Testament church. As officers of the church, they received the commission in behalf of the church. Their receiving the commission for the church is similar to the treasurer of a church receiving money for the church from an individual. The money was handed to the treasurer, but it was given to the church. The money was not for the personal use of the treasurer, but was for the church.”

Similarly, the commission to go into all the world and preach the gospel was given to the apostles, but it was given to them in their capacity as officers of the church. So the responsibility and authority in the great commission was given to the church, not just to the apostles. It was not given to the apostles as individual Christians, but as officers in the church. 1 Corinthians 12:28 says that God set the apostles in the church. Ephesians 2:20 says that the church is “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone.” The apostles received the great commission as “foundation officers” of the church.

The statement by Jesus that he would be “with you always, even unto the end of the world,” should settle to whom He was speaking. The office of apostleship ceased with the apostles, but the activity required in the great commission was to continue until the end of the world. The commission was stated again in Acts 1:8, “But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.” If the commission was given only to the apostles or only to the ministers of the gospel, we could expect them to be the only ones to receive the power to do the work. But Acts 2:4 reveals what actually did happen. “And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost.” The promised power to do the work came upon the whole church and not just upon the apostles or the ministers.

Some have promoted the idea that what God promised to perpetuate were the principles and practices of Christianity. This is to say that the principles and practices of the church are perpetuated apart from the institution, the church. Let us try this logic as we speak of something else and see how it will stand the test. For instance, would we accept the logic that democratic principles and practices have been perpetuated for 2000 years apart from democratic government? Would dictators perpetuate these principles and practices? Would communism perpetuate them? Who would perpetuate the principles and practices of democracy? Of course, the answer is that democratic government would.

God set up the institution of the family, to perpetuate the principles and practices which he gave to the family and to perpetuate the human race. All right thinking people will admit that when the institution of the family is perverted or weakened, or its responsibilities are given over to other institutions, this tends to destroy the family and to corrupt society. There is no other institution capable of doing the work of the family. The family is the backbone of society. If any family or society assigns the responsibilities of the family to any other institution, the family will inevitably be corrupted and society will be weakened.

When anyone maintains that principles and practices are important, but that the institution that God set up to support these principles and practices is not absolutely essential, he has reduced the value of the institution. Principles and practices must be wedded to the institution that God set up to support them or neither of them will long survive. If the principles and practices of the family, for example, are carried on by some institution other than the family, the family will soon lose its importance. Ephesians 6:4 says “And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” Since the father is the head of the family, God addresses this charge to him as

the responsible party. If the father turns this responsibility over to others the family will finally be destroyed. The church should not take over this responsibility. Day care centers should not take over this responsibility. Many well-meaning people might try to assume this responsibility, but the results would be less than satisfactory because this is not God's way.

What should be the response of the church when they see fathers neglecting this responsibility? Should they set up another institution to do the work? No! The word of God should be brought to focus on the problem and the father should be admonished according to the Scriptures concerning his responsibility. In Christianity we have often tried to use a Band-Aid to heal a major problem. It will not work. There must be a return to God's way which is revealed in Scripture. There are not short cuts.

The New Testament church is the backbone of true Christianity. The church alone has been given the responsibility to perpetuate the principles and practices of true Christianity. When her God-given work is assigned to other individuals or institutions, the church will be weakened and its work will eventually be corrupted. Therefore, if the principles and practices of true Christianity are found in all generations since the time of Christ and the apostles, we can say with all confidence that it is the New Testament church, set up by Christ, Himself, who has done the work.

The principles and practices do not stand apart from the institution, the church. They stand together. It is evident from the Scriptures that God purposed to spread truth throughout the whole world and that the New Testament church is the institution that Christ established to spread this truth. Paul stated this in 1 Timothy 3:15: "But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." God deposited truth, both principles and practices, in the church and made it the responsibility of the church to spread it throughout the whole world.

In order for the church to fulfill her mission of spreading the gospel and establishing churches where there are none, God places gifts in the church who are uniquely equipped to do the work. God calls men in the churches to preach the gospel. The church recognizes these gifts. The church judges when they are fully prepared to do the work. The church ordains them and sends them out to do the work. According to 1 Tim. 3:6 a novice is not to be ordained. The pattern established by Christ in Mark 6:7 was to send them out two by two. In the book of Acts this same pattern seems to have been followed. Those who were sent out by established churches to spread the gospel and to establish other churches did not go alone, but carried with them other mature believers. When Paul and Barnabas were sent out by the church at Antioch in Acts 13, they felt a responsibility toward that church. When they returned from their mission they called the church together and gave them a report of the work which they had done. (Acts 14:27).

The church has the responsibility of training the gifts which God places in her. Christ, in the great commission, says that the church is to be "teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." (Matt. 28:20).

It seems to be pride, arrogance, or self-will for an individual to say, "I was taught truth by the Holy Spirit apart from the New Testament church. Therefore I will start a church on my own by the authority given to me directly from God." Even the apostle Paul returned to the church at Jerusalem and to the other apostles "and communicated unto them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles." (Gal. 2:2). This spirit of Paul seems to be a far cry from the spirit of many ministers today.

If others are given the responsibility to train the gifts given the church and to send them out to spread the gospel and to start churches, the weight of this responsibility is removed from the church and she loses the sense of the importance of the work. The foundation of her unique work will be eroded and the very work itself will become corrupted. If it is taught that the discipleship method is only one way among others, the same sad results will follow.

If it can be shown from church history that some congregation got its start because a minister from a false religious institution taught himself the truth and subsequently gathered a congregation and founded them on true Biblical principles, this still does not make such an action Scripturally sound. If we accept this as a valid work of God and teach that this proves that God has another way other than church succession to spread the truth, we accept fallible history as equally valid with the God-inspired Scriptures. Scripture does not reveal that this is God's ordained way for the church to be perpetuated. God's law for perpetuating His church does not need to be proven by man's history. History cannot be accepted on an equal basis with Scripture. A truth must be proven by Scripture and then it must be received by faith.

The question could be honestly asked: "Has God ever called a man in a false religious institution and taught him the truth independently of the church? Has a New Testament church ever been started by such a minister?" We can only reply: "The secret things belong to God, but the things which are revealed belong to us and to our children." When we make the secret things of God (those things not revealed in Scripture) our rule of faith and practice, we most likely will go into error. God is sovereign. He can do what He pleases. He may do something one time which is not given to us as a pattern in Scripture. When we make the secret things of God a pattern for our work, we may pattern our work by something which will never be repeated by God. God has given the church the Scriptures for our only pattern and to that alone we must be faithful. The Scriptures are to guide the church into all that she is to do and believe.

If the church does not have the exclusive authority and responsibility to spread the gospel beyond her local sphere of influence, it is clear why the Baptists in the early 1800's set up a separate institution, the mission board, to do the work. If men who are called to preach have authority and responsibility as individuals apart from the church to spread the gospel, we could well suppose that they needed an organization to finance the work.

It is clear to me why a perversion and a corrupt practice was established. If Satan wanted to corrupt the work it would be much easier for him to corrupt an individual than it would be for him to corrupt the New Testament church. It would be much easier for Satan to place his false teachers into this most important work outside the influence of the New Testament church. A false teacher cannot stand the scrutiny of a New Testament church. A true man of God does not object to any honest person examining what he is doing. He especially delights to have the New Testament church examine what he is doing, because he knows how easy it is to fall into error.

When our forefathers in 1832 took a stand against the false practice of how the gospel is spread and how churches are established, they said in the Black Rock Address under the subject of missions: "Previous to stating our objections to the mission plans, we will meet some of the false charges brought against us relative to this subject, by a simple and unequivocal declaration, that we do regard as of the first importance the command given of Christ, primarily to His apostles, and through them to His

ministers of every age, to ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature,’ and do feel an earnest desire to be found acting in obedience thereunto, as the providence of God directs our way, and opens a door of utterance for us...1st. In reference to the medium by which the gospel minister is to be sent forth to labor in the field, agreeable to prophecy going before, that out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the work of the Lord from Jerusalem, the Lord has manifestly established the order, that His ministers should be sent forth by the churches.” It seems that our forefathers in 1832 did not immediately unchurch those assemblies where error had entered. (Errors such as Sunday Schools, colleges, and theological schools to train ministers, mission boards, Bible societies, etc.). When these assemblies did not purge themselves of these errors after several years, our forefathers considered them as not being New Testament churches and would not receive their baptisms as valid. At first, their errors centered around practices, but false practices will lead to false doctrine. Also, false doctrines will lead to false practices.

The question that we must answer in our generation is this: Were our forefathers right? If we take the position that our forefathers were wrong and that those churches which they declared against were just churches in error, then we should try to help purge them of their error and return them to the true Biblical position. If we take the position that our forefathers were right and that those churches had lost their identity as true churches, then we should leave them alone lest their errors corrupt our assemblies. From the warnings given in the Revelation to the seven churches, it is most doubtful that God would allow an assembly to go on in gross error for more than 150 years and still call it His church. For the New Testament church today to have church fellowship with the assemblies our forefathers declared against is to take a stand on behalf of those whom our forefathers opposed.

As is pointed out in *Hassell’s History of the Church of God*, p. 356:

When the Fullerite heresies had been introduced among the Baptists and produced great discord and turmoil, some of the old veterans of the cross met at Black Rock, Maryland in 1832 and published a solemn protest against all the newly introduced innovations upon our former faith and order and made the rejection of the new departure a test of fellowship...

The Old School Baptists never did consent to any of the antichristian doctrines and institutions of the new order, even when mixed up with in denominational connections, they protested against every practice for which there was no ‘thus saith the Lord’, and after laboring to reclaim the disorderly until they found their labors were unavailing, they withdrew fellowship from them. Christ has commanded us to withdraw from every brother that walks disorderly.

There are at least two great dangers which the church faces:

1. Assuming duties and responsibilities which have not been given to her by Christ, her head.
2. Farming out or assigning to others the duties and responsibilities which belong only to her.

Those who usurp the authority and responsibility which Christ gave to the church because the church is not doing her work, are not doing the church any favors. Their efforts would be more profitable if such would bring the Word of God to the church and lead her into obedience to that Word.

To be orthodox is not wrong. Orthodoxy should not be a hated word. For some to claim to be orthodox may be hypocrisy because they claim to be the church and exclude all who do not line up with their particular “political” group. But those not in that particular little group of Old Baptists could easily overreact and decide that almost any Christian group is a true New Testament church.

It is not my purpose to add confusion to the problems in Christendom, but to try to find the light of Scripture to walk by.

The New Testament church will continue in one place from generation to generation so long as she remains faithful to truth. The New Testament church is going to spread throughout the world by God ordained means-His church!

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