

A Biblical Church vs. An Institutionalized Church

1. A biblical church views itself as a theocracy with Christ as king of kings and Lord of lords. .
 - *1 Peter 2:9 But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, **an holy nation**, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.*
 - *1 Timothy 6:15 Which in his times he shall shew, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords.*

An institutionalized church views itself as a democracy.

2. A biblical church is governed by the *Word of God* and ruled over by individuals called “pastors”, “bishops” or “elders”. These terms indicate the various functions of the same person(s) in the body of Christ.

The Word of God is to guide the Church. *Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Rev 22:19 And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.*

Ministers are to rule the Church of God *Hebrews 13:7 Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation. Hebrews 13: 17 Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you. Hebrews 13:24 Salute all them that have the rule over you, and all the saints. They of Italy salute you. 1 Timothy 5:17 Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine.*

Ministers are to function as bishops, which speak of providing general oversight of the assembly. *Titus 1:7-9 For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not self-willed, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre; 8 But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate; 9 Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.*

Ministers are to function as elders, which means they are to be wise in teaching the Word of God as they pastor the people. *1 Peter 5:1-4 The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: 2 Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; 3 Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. 4 And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.*

Boards and Committees and Councils rule an institutionalized church and so become an authority unto themselves. .

3. A biblical church need never argue over money for the various ministries will find financial support in the free will offerings of the people of God as they work and give or sell their possession in order to have resources.

- *Acts 4:34 Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, 35 And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need. 4:37 Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.*
- *2 Corinthians 9:7 Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver. 8 And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work.*

In an institutionalized church members constantly quarrel over money and its allocation.

4. A biblical church consists of members who love one another, prefer one another, esteem others to themselves and so work in co-operation with the resources at hand and on the projects proposed.

- *1 John 4:7 Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.*
- *Philippians 2:3 Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.*
- *Philippians 4:2 I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord. 3 And I intreat thee also, true yokefellow, help those women which laboured with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and with other my fellowlabourers, whose names are in the book of life.*

In an institutionalized church the members are constantly angry with one another without cause, in competition with one another and will secretly or openly lobby for their various positions and projects. Emphasis is upon the individual instead of the body of Christ.

5. A biblical church seeks first and foremost to advance the gospel by personal evangelism and then by encouraging and supporting every person and every legitimate method used to take the message of redeeming grace to the ends of the earth without neglecting those local resources the Lord has entrusted for the work of the ministry.

- *Matthew 6:33 But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.*

- *Matthew 28:18 And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. 19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: 20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.*
- *2 Timothy 4:5 [Timothy, pastor] watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.*

An institutionalized church will place undue attention on the temporal.

6. A biblical church has members who consciously seek to be led by the Holy Spirit.

- *Acts 8:29 Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot.*
- *Acts 10:19 While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee.*

An institutionalized church has members who do not comprehend the mystical side of salvation, are afraid of the Holy Spirit and are not even sure if He is real.

7. A biblical church has members who enter into covenant with one another and seek to honor the terms of that covenant.

Sovereign Grace Baptist Church Constitution 1998-2011

ARTICLE FIVE Covenant

- A. As Members of Sovereign Grace Baptist Church, we desire to humble ourselves before the Lord in order to receive grace so that we might find spiritual strength to:
- ◆ uphold the *historic* doctrines of the Church as expressed in the Bible and embraced by the Church since the first century (2 John 1:9-11);
 - ◆ display no heinous sin through immoral or unethical conduct (1 Corinthians 5:9-11);
 - ◆ fulfill our responsibilities cheerfully and gratefully without causing dissension, or showing disregard for the authority structure of the Church (2 Thessalonians 3:6-15);
 - ◆ refrain from any attitudes, words, or conduct that may cause division in the Church or sow discord among the brethren (Romans 16:17);

- ◆ fulfill any position of leadership without becoming domineering, quarrelsome, sectarian or in any other way abusive of that authority (3 John 1:9-11);
- ◆ maintain a position of separation from the world and its influences (James 4:4);
- ◆ and settle all spiritual disputes within the Church structure without going to law (1 Corinthians 6:1-8).

B. When the conditions of this Covenant have been breached, we will strive to acknowledge our shortcomings (Proverbs 28:13), and seek the forgiveness of those who have been hurt (Matthew 5:23-24);

If we *know* of another person who has grievously violated this Covenant, we will endeavor to approach that person privately (Proverbs 25:9), in a spirit of genuine love (Galatians 6:1), having first corrected our own attitudes and actions (Matthew 7:3-5).

An institutionalized church has members who enjoy the social status of membership in a religious organization but they have no serious intent to keep any covenant agreement.

8. A biblical church avoids party spirit and inter-fractions.

- *1 Corinthians 3:21 Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are yours; 22 Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; 23 And ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's.*

An institutionalized church has members who thrive on infighting, maneuvering and lining up votes for a particular position in order to speak authoritatively on behalf of “*a lot of people*” etc.

9. A biblical church reflects evangelical love as defined in 1 Corinthians 13. Of particular note is what love *will* and will *not* do.

What love *will* do

- Love is long suffering
- Love is kind
- Love is not boastful
- Love delights in hearing the truth
- Love will bear all things
- Love will believe all things
- Love will hope in all things
- Love will endure all things
- Love will never fail

What love will *not* do

- Love does not envy
- Love does not exalt itself
- Love does not act in an inappropriate manner (be angry without a cause, be petty, retaliate etc)
- Love does not put its own interests first
- Love is not easily provoked
- Love does not think the worse thing first only to discover the truth later
- Love is not happy with sin in self or others

An institutionalized church has members who pretend to love but then when the opportunity is given there is an unleashing of a spirit contrary to love.

10. A biblical church loves the *Scriptures* and the law of God with a view to personal holiness.

- *Psalm 119:162 I rejoice at thy word, as one that findeth great spoil.*
- *Psalm 119:133 Order my steps in thy word: and let not any iniquity have dominion over me.*

An institutionalized church consists of members who are careless about personal holiness and have no fundamental interest in learning all they can about the Bible when the various opportunities are given to study the *Scriptures*.

11. A biblical church has members who are pre-occupied with God and His glory. The most important question it holds up for examination is not, “*What must I do to be saved?*”, but the more ultimate one, “*How can I live unto the glory of God?*” Man’s salvation has as its end goal a God-glorifying life in God’s world. God rather than man is the focus of attention.

When the angels came to announce the birth of Christ they praised God saying, “*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men*” (Luke 2:13-14). What the angels in heaven do constantly the true church also wants to do, give glory to God.

An institutionalized church degenerates into playing games and holding gossip sessions when it people meet for various social functions or outings. The antidote to such conversation is found in 2 Corinthians 10:5, Malachi 3:16 and Philippians 4:8.

- *2 Corinthians 10:5 Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.*
- *Malachi 3:16 Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name.*

- *Philippians 4:8 Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.*

When dark thoughts are not arrested, institutionalized church members will go on with secret whisperings and constant murmuring instead of praising God for His many gifts and graces.

Of particular perverse delight will be the registering of one complaint after another against leadership.

There will be constant self-induced anger over what is done or not done; what is said or not said. Only temporary moments of happiness will be found from this emotional bondage of sin.

12. A. W. Tozer once wrote that, “A church that is soundly rooted cannot be destroyed, but nothing can save a church whose root is dried up. No stimulation, no advertising campaigns, no gifts of money and no beautiful edifice can bring back life to the rootless tree.”

Conclusion

The conclusion of the matter is this. Born in faith and nurtured in biblical principles a biblical church has a chance to be and remain a distinct work in this area for the good of the community and the glory of God. But this will only happen as Christians love one another, stay very close to the Word of God, seek first the kingdom of God, and live our lives by the power of the Holy Spirit. To that end let the church welcome new members.