

BOLD Course: Church Membership

The Context of Our Church

Why is it important to understand our church's context?

- Gratefulness for God's faithfulness to his people
- Appreciation for the past
- Humility
- Understanding of the diversity of God's family
- Boundaries for doctrinal fidelity
- To form a true identity

The Promise to the Church Regarding Her Preservation

Matthew 16:18 And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

The Role of the Church in Her Own Preservation

Matthew 28:18-20 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

2 Timothy 2:2 what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.

Jude 3 I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.

The Reality of the Preservation of the Church

The church has a universal and local aspect

The one body of Christ, household faith, "the" church, etc. (Matthew 16, Ephesians 2-3)

Local churches (the churches of Galatia, the church at Corinth, etc)

Local churches can apostatize

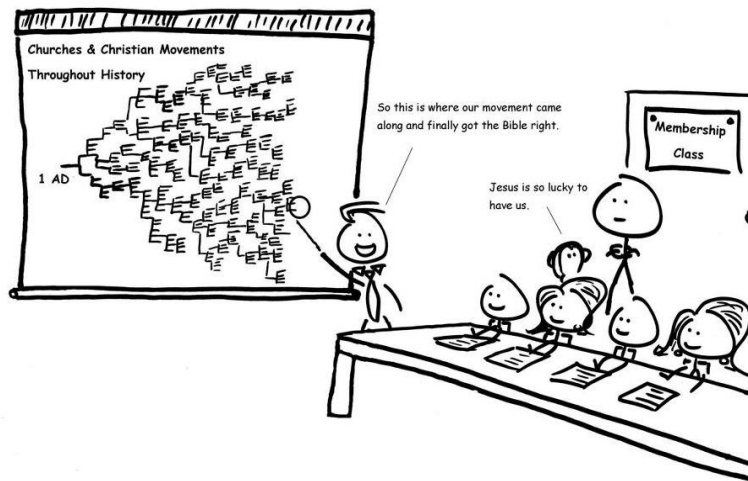
Revelation 2:5 Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.

Churches can err (Galatia - works; Corinth - immorality; Romans - disunity)

The church will be presented as a spotless bride (Ephesians 5:25-27)

How these biblical realities inform our understanding of our church's context:
Armed with God's promise of preservation, we seek to follow and proclaim Christ and all his teachings, realizing that no singular church is perfect and staying humble enough to reform based on scripture, holding fast to the hope that one day God's people will be presented as a radiant bride to Christ.

Views on Church History



Has some form of Bread of Life Fellowship always existed? Is Bread of Life the only true church? Did Bread of Life restore the church back to its original purity?

Erroneous views

Restorationism - some Christian sects and many cults believe they have restored the "true church" to its pristine or primitive nature

Problem: this view typically allows for long periods of time with no true believers, contrary to Christ's promise

Landmarkism/Trail-of-Blood - many Baptists and some other evangelicals believe that their particular expression of Christianity always existed, but under various names (Cathari, Albigensians, Waldenses, etc)

Problem: this view is contrary to history, cherry picks aspects of groups that are contrary to the mainstream church, and revises history to make false claims.

The One True Church theory - held mainly by Catholics and Orthodox, as well as various cults, that their sect is the one Christ founded and everything else is an aberration.

Problem: Christ doesn't establish unbiblical sects.

The Reality

Church history is filled with times of persecution, times of triumph, times of dark ages, and times of reform and revival. The light of the gospel never blew out, though at some times it was more dim than others. The true church underwent times of change, and while she was unfaithful to Christ in many ways, Christ remained faithful to her. Even in the midst of apostasy, God has his people. Through some time periods, depending on where someone lived, the Roman Catholic or Eastern Orthodox churches may have been the only options, even for true believers. But since the Protestant Reformation, neither of those institutions would be acceptable for a true believer, since God has given us churches that are faithful to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Where does Bread of Life Fellowship fit? Bread of Life strives to be faithful to the following . . .

<p>Biblical, Apostolic Christianity Christ's teaching Book of Acts Early Church (The Apostle's Creed, early councils, etc) Traditional, conservative Christianity</p>	<p>Protestantism Rejecting Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy Sola Scriptura Sola Gratia Sola Fide Solus Christus Soli Deo Gloria</p>	<p>Reformed Theology/Calvinism God's sovereignty in all things Total Depravity Unconditional Election Limited Atonement Irresistible Grace Perseverance of the Saints Reformed understanding of worship and sacraments</p>
<p>Baptist Ecclesiology Congregational nature Plurality of elders. Baptism by immersion Church membership and discipline</p>	<p>Evangelical Witness The gospel is central Evangelism and missions is an important part of why the church exists The church is salt and light in the world</p>	<p>Bread of Life Fellowship subscribes to the London Baptist Confession of 1689, which is thoroughly Protestant, Reformed, and Baptist (we'll explore in the next session)</p>

Each one is not enough by itself, but together is our attempt to be faithful to all that Christ has commanded.

But we reject aspects, too. We are apostolic, but reject the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches. We are Protestant, but not Anglican, Lutheran, or Presbyterian. We are Reformed/Calvinist, but we reject infant baptism and presbyterian polity. We are Baptist, but

not single-pastor or fundamentalist. We are evangelical, but not liberal, political, or ecumenical. Are we not then just picking and choosing what we like? Our goal is to weigh everything against scripture, for we believe that scripture alone is the only infallible authority, and by our faithfulness to scripture, we are faithful to Christ. So we are extremely grateful for the early church fathers who codified the doctrine of the Trinity, expanded on the two natures of Christ, gave us the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds, and helped preserve holy scripture - but, we reject their unbiblical ideas. We are thankful for Protestant Reformers, especially Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli, for bringing justification by faith alone back to where it needed to be - but, we reject their unbiblical ideas. We are thankful for the great Reformed minds who wrote beautiful systematic theologies and preached beautiful sermons (the Puritans, Spurgeon, Westminster divines, etc.) - but, we reject their unbiblical ideas. We are thankful for the Baptists, those who stood against the established church and brought Christianity to the common people, and those who dared baptize believers by immersion in the face of persecution - but, we reject their unbiblical ideas. We are thankful for the spirit of evangelicalism, the examples of the Wesleys and Whitefields and the American evangelicals of the 20th century who confronted society with the gospel - but, we reject their unbiblical ideas.

The question for us is this - are we willing to reject our unbiblical ideas? Semper reformanda!

May God keep us faithful to the truth.

(if time permits, we will hear briefly from Pastor Joe, a founding pastor, as to the decisions made early on in Bread of Life's founding to identify as this type of church)