**Identity Crisis**: Pastor Rick Baker

Section #2-*What is a Church?* January 24 2021

**THE MARKS OF THE CHURCH**:

# A Biblical Historical Approach

*How can you know whether or not a “church” is in fact a New Testament Church?*

“WE BELIEVE IN **ONE**, **HOLY**, **CATHOLIC**, AND **APOSTOLIC** CHURCH” (Council of Constantinople c.381 AD)

1. **ONE**—*The Oneness of the Church*

*“The essential oneness of the church…finds its source in the oneness of the Triune God” (Van Gelder, Essence of the Church, 122)*

“There is one body.” (Eph. 4:4)—*why so many* ***denominations****?*

*Organizational or spiritual?*

*Identical or diverse? How diverse?*

**So What?** *How well is Calvary expressing the ONENESS of the church?*

* Spiritual unity with those truly saved (those who belong to Christ “*one Lord, one faith*” Eph. 4:5) as opposed to unity in an organizational structure
* Must be expressed beyond one local congregation. “*Is Christ divided*? (1 Cor. 1:13)
* Unity is not a hope, it is a fact. “*Unity is God’s gift to every church in the gospel; expressing it is every church’s ongoing task.*” (Hammett, 55)
* Unity is a fact and a task, but never at the cost of the gospel—unity must serve the gospel and not be allowed to sacrifice legitimate and sincerely held biblical beliefs. “Inter-faith” unity goals actually undermine God and his church.

2. **HOLY**—*The Holiness of the Church*

“Be holy, because I am holy.” (Lev.11:44; 1 Pet. 1:16) – *why is* ***membership*** *important?*

*Can any church be absolutely holy? –wheat, weeds, and sin. (Matt. 13:24-30) corpus permixtum*

The church is holy because the Head of the church is holy, but the local church is holy only to the degree that the people are holy, being made holy. (1 Cor. 1:2; Heb. 12:22-23; Eph. 5:25-27)

To the church of God in Corinth, to those *sanctified* in Christ Jesus and called to be his *holy* people, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours:

1 Cor. 1:2🡪 ALREADY NOT YET—*special status and expected conduct*

But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made *perfect*, Heb. 12:22-23 🡪 DONE DEAL

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her *to make her holy*, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but *holy* and blameless. Eph. 5:25-27🡪 BEING COMPLETED NOW

**So What?** *How Holy is Calvary Baptist Church?*

* Because the church is called to be holy, only saved, Spirit-indwelt people can be members—therefore, only the saved are able to be baptized and permitted into membership (can’t be holy without the Holy Spirit).
* Every true believer should pursue membership in the local church to clear up identity confusion—are you a holy (called out) person or not?
* Church discipline is necessary because of the command to be a holy church—members, unrepentantly sinning, must be removed.
* *“Holiness is obscured to the degree that unbelievers are present in it, and to the degree that unbelieving conduct is practiced, even by those who are holy in status.” (Hammett, 57)*

3. **CATHOLIC** –*The Catholicity of the Church*

A major distinction between God’s people in the OT and his NT church is in global scope. *How extensive is the church?* The early formers of definitions were operating under the idea of one worldwide faith (Matt. 28:19—All Nations)

“The church, then, is called Catholic because it is spread through the whole world from one end of the earth to the other. It is called Catholic because it brings into religious obedience every sort of men, rulers and ruled, learned and simple, and because it is a universal treatment and cure for every kind of sin.” (Cyril of Jerusalem 350 AD)

“…neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female (Gal. 3:28)… “…purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation (Rev. 5:9)… “…make disciples of all nations.” (Matt. 28:19)

“The church’s catholicity is rooted in and bounded by the gospel’s catholicity. Anytime, anywhere, anyone can be forgiven his or her sins by faith alone in the one and only Saviour, our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Dever, A Catholic Church, 92)

**So what?** How Catholic is Calvary Baptist Church

* The catholic doctrine of the church requires a passion for mission in every believer and every local church—the doctrine is not fully realized until every people group has an opportunity to respond to the gospel.
* There is no one culture, race, or type of people to whom the church belongs or with whom the church exclusively identifies. Calvary B.C. is a geographic part of God’s global/catholic church.

4. APOSTOLIC—The Apostolicity of the Church

From where does the Church derive her **authority**?

Apostolic succession or Scripture? Bishops or Apostles? Current or Ancient?

Succession from Christ’s absolute authority commissioning (Matt. 28:18-20) to the apostles (Matt 10:40; Rom. 1:5; 2 Cor. 13:10), whose authorized writings in turn endure as the authority for the church (Jude 3; Eph. 2:20; 2 Thes. 3:14)

“…all authority has been given to Me… (Matt. 28:20)… He who receives you, receives Me…(Matt. 10:40) …in accordance with the authority which the Lord gave me… (2 Cor. 13:10) …having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone… (Eph. 2:20) …that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.” (Jude 3) NASB

The Reformation divided the church, necessarily but with great risk—no central structure or centralized theological adjudication (Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodoxy enjoy). WHAT ARE THE PROTESTANT GUARDRAILS?

On a church being a true church, Calvin wrote, “Wherever we see the **Word of God** purely preached and heard, and the **sacraments** administered according to Christ’s institution, there, it is not to be doubted, a church of God exists.” (Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, 21:1023 (4.1.9)

**So What?** How Apostolic is Calvary Baptist Church?

* **People of the Book**—the church in heaven has perfect apostolicity; we see through a glass dimly.

A church to be a church must preach the word of God (gospel) faithfully and carefully.

“I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes…for in it a righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith—but the righteous man shall live by faith.” Rom. 1:16

* **Proper administration of the sacraments** (ordinances—Lord’s Supper and Baptism).

“Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are essential elements without which a true church cannot exist.” (Towns and Stetzer, Perimeters of Light, 68)

The practice of both must accurately reflect the gospel they represent and not be a threat to the gospel. (M. Volf)

If the sacrament seeks to convey grace without faith, it repudiates the gospel (certain practices of the Lord’s Supper and Infant baptism).

The sacraments/ordinances, properly practiced, symbolize the gospel, they don’t replace it.

Impropriety in practice that compromises the message of the gospel disqualifies the church as a church; improper administration (not as Jesus administered—symbols of his redemptive passion; he was there, and he was immersed) weakens the church’s health and ministry, but does not disqualify as a church. (Hammett)

The essential marks of an authentic church are ONE, HOLY, CATHOLIC, APOSTOLIC assembly, formed and bounded by the GOSPEL. (The ancient Councils plus Reformation theology)