

THE PERPETUITY OF THE CHURCH

By Forrest Keener

INTRODUCTION

There is a great deal of foolishness and error being exercised today in the teaching of the true biblical doctrine of church perpetuity.

First there is the clear denial of it either by statement or implication. This is promoted in two ways. There are those who claim that the Lord's church has ceased to exist, at least from time to time, and has been reestablished by some person with new revelation, or supernatural insight, such as Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism, or some other person like him. This denial is also presented by the claim or assumption that His church fell into chaos and disarray, and was, of necessity, reformed by men. You hear such terms as "The great reformation". The reformation was not great. It was nothing but the sticking of band aids on Catholicism, and all it does or can possibly produce is reformed Catholicism.

Secondly, there is the approach of Neo-Landmarkism, which seeks to prove the perpetuity of the Lord's church by a pedigree, preserved through human history. While history will surely give witness to the perpetuity of the Lord's church, the pedigree route tends to discredit it rather than to corroborate it. While there are good records, which point in the direction of church lineage, it is likely if not certain that no one today has a, church by church, step by step, pedigree. I have never seen one, even set fourth, at this point in my ministry, though some mistakenly assume that is what they have. Even if such a record could be offered, and if it were accurate, it could not be proved. Thus, this approach to the teaching of perpetuity harms the cause rather than to help it.

For this reason, and several others, I offer this simple two part message, addressing the subject of church perpetuity. I have tried to present it in a fashion that even the youthful Bible student can digest the subject matter and receive edification. May God use it as it pleases Him.

THE PERPETUITY OF THE CHURCH PART # 1

THE BIBLE FACT OF CHURCH PERPETUITY

Number one of two messages preached in Bethel Baptist Church, in November of 1994, and edited by Forrest L. Keener, for publication in the Baptist Watchman.

Open your Bibles to Matthew chapter and to Acts Chapter 1. Let us begin to read in Matthew Chapter 16 and verse 13.

When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. 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.

Then Acts chapter 1 and verse 8, a passage that all of us are quite familiar with: "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you:" (He is talking here to His church). "Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses" (this is not just a command, this is also a prophetic statement) "Ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."

Then notice Acts chapter 8, verse 1: "And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison. Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word."

Then, for my text, read that classic verse again: 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." The rock He is speaking of here is not Peter, by any means, nor his confession, but the object of his confession, Jesus Christ Himself. Peter (petros) is a little stone, such as can be picked up and thrown, or washed about by the currents of time and turmoil. But the word rock (petra) is never to be confused with that. In the English Bible men never throw rocks. You will never find an occasion of anybody throwing a rock, because this word rock or at least the word that is normally translated rock means something like a cliff of rock, something that is not throwable, nor moveable. It is immovable. And Christ refers to Peter as that little stone, that piece of rock that could be rolled, and moved, and thrown, and cast about. But it is upon this rock, (Petra) this great cliff of stone, this mountain of stone that fills the whole earth, that He shall build His church, Himself, of course. "and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

I want you, with those verses in mind, to listen to the title, or the subject for the next couple of Sunday nights. I am going to be speaking to you twice on the subject of "The Perpetuity Of The Church." My purpose tonight, is to speak upon what the perpetuity of the church is, and next week to deal with how it is determined. In other words, How do we identify the Lord's church? How do we go about seeing if this perpetuity has anything to do with us or not? Where are we in this perpetuity, and where does church authority lie? How is the church authority conveyed? We will be dealing with that as we go on.

Now, these verses that I have read tonight are most often used to show the church's commission. That is, going into all the world, and preaching the gospel to every creature. But they show with equal clarity of statement, not just by implication, but with equal clarity of statement, the church's certain perpetuity. In other words that which is going to soon die, could never do what the Lord is saying the church must do, and shall do. It is not possible. I also want to say that an entity which does not fulfill one of these scriptures does not fulfill the other. In other words, He said in Acts chapter 1 and verse 8: "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witness unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." No entity, no group that is not fulfilling what

He says the church shall do in Acts 8:1, is what He is talking about in Matthew 16:18, when He says, upon this rock I will build my church. We need to keep that in mind. My subject is not Church History. I am not dealing with church history, though, necessarily, some church history will come into these messages. My subject is that simple and relatively narrow subject of Church Perpetuity. Now when I say narrow subject, I do not imply that it is a small subject, or that it occupies a small part of the Bible, because actually, it reaches out and touches almost every New Testament doctrine in some way, directly or indirectly. But the subject of Perpetuity within itself is what I am dealing with, and I am going to try to do it in the narrowest possible sense, so as to make it quite understandable, and useable, and thus, I will not incorporate so many things into it, that I will be over burdening you with other issues, and other doctrines. May I further say that I plan to use these messages in some teaching in the Philippines, because there are a lot of men over there that would like to understand this issue better. It will be an underscoring of some things that are already covered in the Bible Institute of Correspondence, in the Ecclesiology section of it. However, I hope this will be a little more pointed and will deal with these things, perhaps a little more instructively and constructively.

I WHAT IS THE DEFINITION OF THE TERM: PERPETUITY OF THE CHURCH

First of all then, what is the definition of this term: Perpetuity of the Church? Some may say, I never use that word perpetuity. Well, you have used the teaching of it in some of its senses. At least you used the meaning of it. You understand it, but you may not understand it when we just simply say: "My subject is the Perpetuity of the Church." What do I mean by the perpetuity of the church? Well, the term simply means that the church will be perpetual, that it will be continually ongoing, and that the gates of hell, that all of the forces of evil, will never prevail against it, and bring it down, or nullify its commission, or bring it to surrender. That is just never going to happen. That perpetuity, according to the scripture, is clearly to last until Jesus comes. Someone might say, well, He said that the gates of hell would not prevail against it, but for how long? And it was to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature, but for how long? How long is this perpetuity to extend itself? There are several things that we could touch upon, but I want to just make it brief and say this: that as we look at the ordinances of the church, we understand that as

long as the church continues, that those ordinances are to continue. This is made very clear in the scripture. So if we could find a place that told us how long those ordinances were to continue, and would continue, that would be a shortcut to finding out how long His church and its commission was to continue, and we have precisely that in the scriptures. 1 Corinthians 11:26: "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come." And I could spend a lot of time underscoring and piling scripture up that would show you that this perpetuity was to continue until the Lord comes back again. But I trust that this will be sufficient, and that you will see clearly that this perpetuity is to continue until the Lord comes again. I want to say something else, and please do not underestimate the importance of it. Some years ago, I heard a man say this: "Yes, the Lord's church has always continued. There have been times when it went underground, like an underground river resurfacing somewhere else out in the future." Garbage! Do not believe that junk. That is just not so. I understand there have been times when the Lord's churches have met in caves, and things of that sort, but that is not what he was talking about. He was indicating that the Lord's church might cease to be what it is in its open sense of preaching the gospel, and carrying the message into all parts of the earth, and that there might not be a really sound church upon the face of the earth, at some given time, but somewhere underground it was flowing along, and it would resurface. No, it would not. I want to say this to you: Humanly speaking, if the Lord's church could ever cease to exist, in a biblical fashion, it could never be revived, or rejuvenated. Humanity can pollute something which is clean, but humanity can never bring a clean thing out of an unclean. So wherever that church ceases to exist as a church, it will never be rejuvenated as a church. It will always go down, it will never come back. It will always deteriorate, it will never revive in the sense of being something that it was not. Once a group abandons basic truth and knowingly decides upon a way, that is the way of error, that group cannot again become, nor can they possibly ever produce, a sound church. Just take a little shortcut here. When you find a sound church, you can be absolutely sure it somehow came from a sound church.

Now move on. As nations have risen and fallen, the church has, of necessity, been there to go to them with the gospel, thus it is that witness unto all nations. Was this command and prophesy just concerning the nations that were upon the earth at that time? I should say not! The fact of the matter is that the basic statement of this implies that this church has to go on, and has to keep doing exactly what He said it would do, until He comes back again, or He has failed, (now, listen to me) both in its design and in His prophecy of it. His church would have failed to do what He said it would do prophetically, and His church would have failed to do what He ordained it to do, as far as commission is concerned. And so, the perpetuity of the church is exactly that, and it is extremely important, both as a doctrine and as to its effect.

II THE PROMISE OF PERPETUITY

Now with that in mind, let us turn for a moment and consider the promise of this perpetuity. Matthew 16:18, once again: "And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church;" (Now, Peter is not the rock. As I said a moment ago, Jesus Christ is the rock. He is the foundation of the church. He is the cornerstone of the church. All of those things are said about it in the Bible, time will not permit enlargement upon them.) He said, "and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." The thing I want you to see from that passage is this: This statement of the perpetuity of the church is not something that originated with Forrest Keener, or some other preacher who was his mentor, or some preacher that was his mentor's mentor, or on down the line. This is a statement that is clearly made by our Lord Jesus Christ. It was promised by Him. Therefore, anyone who would dare deny this is definitely flying into the face of a statement, and promise, made by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. He promised that this very institution would be perpetual. He was not speaking of a particular congregation, and certainly not a universal entity, because there is no such thing as an universal church. There never was, the Bible knows nothing whatsoever about it. Scripture does not say one thing in the world about any such monstrosity. There is no such thing. He is talking about this church, this organism, this organization, all of these things are true about it, that is a congregation of people--now listen--His church is a congregation of people, teaching what the Lord taught, doing what He taught them to do, perpetuating the doctrines that He gave them.

Almost a hundred years ago, there was a great movement in this country that is often now-days identified as neo-evangelicalism, new evangelicalism. Out of this came a great deal of interdenominationalism, and a lot of other erroneous teachings. Among these came the idea, that somehow the carrying of the gospel, and the teaching of biblical doctrine, are two different things. This error is so prominent, and because of the great and proper importance of evangelism, it is difficult to fight. You know, Satan can really dream up some great things, as priorities of the flesh, and none is more effective than this idea that the carrying of the gospel, and the teaching of biblical doctrine, are two different things. And that there is great superiority of the carrying of the gospel of Christ as compared to the teaching of biblical doctrine. "We are not going to get all hung up on doctrine; we are just going to tell men how to be saved." That was the philosophy, and that philosophy has spread, and in some instances, has been whole-heartedly embraced, and in other instances has crept into the thinking of men and has deceived some good men. But the fact of the matter is, that Paul went everywhere preaching Christ, and if you could ever say that anybody, short of the Lord Jesus Christ, was an evangelist, it was the Apostle Paul. Still, he was accused of having filled the world with these doctrines. Anybody who thinks Paul was not a doctrinal preacher does not know split beans from coffee. He was a deep doctrinal preacher. And yet taking all of that doctrine that he taught, he bound it up in this way: We were determined not to know nothing among you, save Christ and Him crucified. The absence of doctrine? Not by the furthest stretch of your imagination. The very essence of doctrine is Christ and Him crucified.

The church at Jerusalem does not exist any longer. It is gone. The church at Antioch does not exist. Some years ago, I heard a man who was a missionary to Syria say, "As far as I am able to tell, as far as I have been able to discover, there not only is not a church in Antioch of any kind, there is not even a Christian in Antioch of Syria." He had been there a lot, and he said, "I have never met a Christian in Antioch of Syria." There are not many Christians living around Jerusalem. Christianity is not very popular in Jerusalem nowadays, if you folks did not know that. It is not very popular at all. But the point is this: The church at Jerusalem produced the church at Antioch. The church at Antioch produced the church at Ephesus and the church at Corinth. Do you follow what I am talking about? It produced churches, and those churches produced churches. So down through the years, even though those churches have lived and died,

they have produced other churches that have produced other churches of like faith and order.

Now, the Lord put this organism together, in my opinion and I believe the Bible will bear me out, much as He did the human body. That is, as it grows old and decrepit, and churches do that, some growing decrepit faster than they grow old, He lets them die. In the process of their living they have reproduced themselves, and those new churches go on. And so, even though that particular congregation sooner or later dies out, the organization, the church, the institution that the Lord founded has continued to be perpetuated down through the years. Like the human body, it dies off, and yet humanity is perpetuated through its offspring and, as with man, those original characteristics prevail. Now men do produce monstrosities. Did you know that? I am not trying to be mean about deformed babies and things of that sort. And sometimes those monstrosities live to be a great burden upon society. But we can be thankful that those monstrosities, though they may live in some sense, do not perpetuate themselves in exactly the same way. Men have departed from truth, and created some ecclesiastical monstrosities, but the Lord took away their candlestick, and though He suffered them to exist in error, He never let them be the vessels of church perpetuity. The Lord's church has held those original doctrines and characteristics down through the years. Now there is a principle here. When churches or groups go into heresy, they will reproduce heretics and heretical groups not churches, and those groups will never come back to reform into true churches. Have you ever heard the story of a Catholic church returning to being a Baptist Church? Of course you have not and you are not going to. Somebody said, "Yes, but I knew about a Lutheran church that reunited with a Catholic." There is no reason why they should not, they never truly came out. They, essentially, always were Catholic. And so are Protestant churches in general, but not true Baptist Churches. There is a distinct difference. I do not have time to get into all of that. There is so much here, that I have to move on, and I know that I am leaving some important things just touched upon. I have just been able to make a mark over them and have had to go on, but I must do that. Christ's institution called the church is local and it is visible. It is just like this body of people right here tonight. It speaks and it hears, according to the Bible. Let me show you what I am talking about. In Matthew 18:16: "But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be

established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican." Now the unavoidable conclusion here is that this church is not a "universal, invisible church." How could you take grievance to an "invisible church?" I do not even know how you would take one to a "universal church," because that is everywhere. But He said take it to the church. Tell it to the church. And if they will not hear the church, now the indication in this statement is this: You tell it to the church, and the church hears what you have to say, and the church replies, the church speaks to the matter. And if they will not hear the church... So this church has to be a church that both hears and speaks. May I say that the Roman Catholics are far more accurate in their definition of a church, that is a universal, visible church, than all of the Protestants are in their definition of a church, that is a universal, invisible church. I do not care if some of those Protestants are calling themselves Baptists; I have no respect for their position. It makes no sense at all: Universal, invisible church, indeed! Folly of the silliest sort possible. But anyhow, this is a church that hears and it speaks.

The Lord gives us descriptions of the church, and He often does so in metaphorical terms. By that I mean, He uses common words to define the meanings of terms and doctrines. We use metaphorical words all of the time. That does not mean that they are not accurate. It does not mean that they are some kind of mystical symbolism at all. That is the furthest thing in the world from what that means. It means that He takes a word that we are very familiar with, He takes a word that these little children sitting before me tonight can understand. If I say to Janenna, or David, or Kari: show me your body, point to your body, those children will know how to take their finger and say, this is my body. They know what a body is. They will not be very old before they know what a vine is. By the time they are teenagers they will know what a bride is. They know what a building is, even now. Little children understand those things. The Lord used a body, He used a bride, He used a vine, He used a building to describe His church. But I ask you, how universal are those things? Have you ever seen a universal vine? Have you ever seen a universal building? Have you ever seen a universal bride? How about an invisible bride? Would you gentlemen like to marry an invisible woman? I would rather be able to see her, wouldn't you? Would you like to have an invisible house to live in? Hey, that would be like being blind, would it not? To have an invisible bride, or an invisible

house, I mean really, that would be like being blind. I am simply saying that the Lord did not leave us dangling, with reason or right to define the church in those abstract terms, but he told us what it was like.

He promised us that this entity would go on, or be perpetual. I am not going to quote the scripture for lack of time, but He said to David that there would not fail him a man to sit upon his throne until Shiloh come. And in the same sense, the Lord has promised that there would not fail to be this, His church, to keep carrying the gospel and spreading the word of God, until Jesus comes again. He promised it, and it is going to be there.

III WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE CHURCH'S PERPETUITY

Thirdly, what is the purpose of the church's perpetuity? I have already quoted that purpose to you from Acts 1:8. Many other scriptures could be given, dozens of them. But I am going to keep it simple so let us go back to that one: "...and ye shall be witnesses unto me..." That is what the church is for. I get a couple of dozen calls every week, practically. I suppose some weeks I must get fifty. Some weeks I suppose I drop down to five or six. But sometimes I get five, or six, or seven, or ten a day. People are calling, and they are wanting money from the church: "Do you have funds to help with utilities?" they ask. Is your church giving away commodities today? Could you help me with a bus ticket? I received a call Thanksgiving Day; a man wanted me to give him some money to go to Norman to visit with his daughter who he claims is in the hospital. He did not have gasoline money. Would you believe that was probably the twentieth time that man has called me about going to Norman to visit his daughter who is in the hospital. She has been in the hospital longer than anybody of whom I have ever known. It is amazing! Now, my point is this: Those people in their mind think that is what the church exists for. It is amazing how many people think the church is to feed preachers. While I agree that the laborer is worthy of his hire, and if a preacher is producing and earning his keep working for a church, that church is shamefully derelict if they do not take care of him. And I praise God for the way this church takes care of me and my wife, and Brother Lester. Praise God for that. That is proper. That is good. But I want to tell you something, simply because a man is a preacher, does not mean that churches ought to be taking care of him. Brother Bynum was telling about a man who came to his church some years ago, and came down front and sat down. He

said he knew what he wanted, and that when started to dismiss the service, this man got up and said, "I need to speak to the church a minute." And Brother Bynum said, "No, I will talk to you back in my office." He said, "But I need to speak to the people before they leave." And Brother Bynum said, "No, I will talk to you back in my office." And he said this man was pastor of a black church up here around Bethany, Oklahoma, and he was traveling all across the country, out through the plains, and just soliciting money, wanting churches to help him. He asked Brother Bynum, if he would give him a hundred dollars out of the offering that morning, you know, since the folks were already gone, just hit on the preacher! And he said, "No." And he said, "Would you give me fifty then?" And he said, "No, I would not give you fifty. I will not give you anything." He said, "Would you just give me fifteen?" He said, "No, I will not give you anything." He said this man had come in just shortly before the services were over, and that when he started calling around, he learned that this man had made two or three other churches the same morning, right there in Lubbock, Texas before he came there. If you were to ask that man: Are you a crook, are you a confidence man? He would say: No, I am a preacher, and churches are supposed to take care of preachers." Garbage! I mean just because a man acclaims himself a preacher does not mean a church owes him anything. That is true here and that is true in the Philippines. That is true everywhere. I want you to know, tonight, that is not what the church is for. The church is not to feed people, or to keep people supplied with food, though we certainly are to be charitable. We are to be tender toward the poor. The Bible teaches us that is a Christian principle, as individual, Christian people. Listen, you ought not come to the church and say, I have a neighbor who has had a catastrophe in his life, and needs some groceries. You should not! If you have a neighbor who needs some groceries, and you feel that it is a Christian responsibility to help out with that neighbor's groceries, go buy him some groceries. Take them to him when his neighbors will not likely see, and do not come to church and tell everybody you did it. Just go do it, and keep your mouth shut about it. That is the way to do those things. It is amazing though, how many people think that feeding the poor is what the church is for. The Lord said, and ye shall be witnesses unto me. Let no church assume that it has a right to exist, or even that it is really a church, unless it is witnessing of the Lord Jesus Christ. It has no reason to exist outside of this purpose, and when it departs from this purpose, the candlestick is removed, and I do not care if the building is bulging at the seams with people stacked inside, it is no longer the Lord's church. Preaching the word of God,

carrying the message is the business of the church. Let no group that is not involved in world-wide missions and the preaching of the gospel at home, ever assume that they are a church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Ye shall be witness unto me, is not just a command. It is a command, but it is also a prophetic declaration that identifies His church.

IV THE HISTORICAL FACT OF THE PERPETUITY OF THE CHURCH

Fourthly, and finally: Let me mention the historical fact of the perpetuity of the church. Now secular history, by that I mean human history, will tell us a little and that must be qualified. But all church history, except that which is here in the New Testament, is human history. I do not care what it is, if it is not written in this Book, that I am holding here in my hand, it is human history. There is nothing necessarily wrong with human history. I love human history. I have always been a history student who loved history. When I was going to school, even in grade school, I always made straight A's in history. It was not because I was so smart, or because I had a goal, but I loved history. I would read every history lesson two or three times, because I loved reading it. I liked it. I thought it was a wonderful adventure in study. Most people thought it was boring. I did not think it was boring at all. I love history. But the point is this: No matter how much I may love to read history, I need to be objective about it. And the only history that is fully accurate is that which is contained within this holy book, the Bible. I practically memorized my Oklahoma history book when I was in grade school. I think maybe in the fifth or sixth grade, we took Oklahoma history. But, you know, I have found since that a lot of the things that my Oklahoma history book taught, just simply were not so. A lot of things about the Indians just simply were not true. They sounded good, and they were charitable, but they were not so.

You would be amazed at the things today that are like that. This Turner report on the history of American Indians, that has recently been broadcast on television, telling about the history and culture of the American Indian, is for the most part, pure garbage. It is not true. It simply is not accurate or anywhere close to it. It may be nice, it may be romantic, but it is not true. A lot of those things I know, because I know Indians. I have lived among Indians. I know about them, and I love them, but a lot of those things simply are not so. The point is this: Human history is that way. Secular history is always biased by the

prospective of the writer, or in the case of "History on TV," by what they think the viewers want to see and hear, or the view that the writer prefers.

Therefore, man's accuracy--now listen--will, at best, be somewhat affected by his interpretation of the facts, and at worst, what he wants people to believe about them.

While I was in the Philippines, the next to the last time, we went up into an area down near Malita, in Southern Mindanao. We had been to the mountains, and Bro. We had met a man there and I could tell he was part Caucasian, but this man spoke no English. He seemed to be very, very adept at business things, very ingenious industrially, which is not common among the Filipinos. They are hard working people, but this man was a manager. You could tell he was a manager. You could also easily tell that he had some Caucasian blood. Brother Velmar Paler explained to me that he probably is from "one of the American soldiers who fled." At first I could not understand what he was talking about, and he said they ran away when the Japanese overran the Philippine Islands, before the Americans came back in and really took things over, he said, many of the Americans could either just be killed, or they could run. And he said, they could not defend and had nothing to defend, so they ran. There was nothing else to do. There was not a fight going on, it was all done. Either they surrender or they crawl off into the bushes. He said many of them got away, they fled, and they came way up into these mountains, where the Japanese seldom came. He said they married or took up with Filipino women and they had children. He said this man is probably a child of one of those, or a grandson of one of those. He explained that, and it made sense. Now, I was just thinking about that, and how different the history would be, if we were to read after an American historian, who wrote as honestly and objectively as he knew how, about the events, that took place in the Philippines during the Second World War, and then we read the as history written by a Filipino, who also wrote as honestly and objectively as he knew how, about the same events, and then if we read after a Japanese historian, who wrote as honestly and objectively as he knew how, about the those same events, we would have three different histories, I promise you. I am not saying which would be the most accurate. But I am saying that if all of those men wrote as accurately as they knew how, we would have three different histories, because they necessarily saw those things from three different perspectives, and all with limited knowledge and understanding. And not only that, but all of those people write with limited

knowledge and understanding of the facts. The Filipinos at the best they could do, would not know all that was going on in the plans, and the structure of the American military operation. And the Americans at the very best they could do, would not know all that was going on among the Japanese, and that would be true all the way around. So this history would be fragmented, and biased. I saw this wonderfully illustrated some years ago when I was up in Ontario, Canada, in a meeting. Brother Curtis Pugh gave me a book, and I have referred to this before, but it is the best illustration of my experience there that I know of. I believe it was a book entitled, "The History Of The Baptist Churches Of The St. Lawrence Valley." Most of you folks know what the St. Lawrence Valley is, but if you go up into that part of the country, the St. Lawrence Valley is a huge valley that runs off from just above the U.S. Coast, the part that is know as that, over into the Atlantic Ocean. And during the Revolutionary War, when you look at that on the map it looks like the river ought to be running in land but actually it does not, it goes toward the ocean like rivers do. You can kind of figure that out all by yourself. But In this book it spoke of the men, who at the time the Revolutionary War took place were Loyalist. Do you know what a Loyalist was? A Loyalist was a person who believed that it was unbiblical or unscriptural, or in some cases politically incorrect, to rebel against the king. Some of them believed that God had appointed all kings, and governors, and people like that, and that the person who rebelled against them, rebelled against God. I wonder where they ever got an idea like that? Well, right or wrong, you can easily see why those people felt that they should not fight with the revolutionaries. On the other hand, there were those Americans who said, well, this is an extraordinary situation and we are going to stay, and we are going to fight for our homes, and our rights. And if we must fight the king, we are going to fight the king, because the king is usurping a position that only God should hold. Now, I would vote with the revolutionaries. I would have stayed and fought with them, and yet I can see why the men, who left there and went into the lower areas of Canada, and the St. Lawrence Valley, and started churches there, felt what they felt. I do not agree with them, but I can understand why they felt that. And so as they wrote the history of these churches, it was from such a different perspective, that I had to sort of transport myself to that philosophy, to have any sympathy for the sufferings of those Christians. But then I noticed something that surprised me a little. The churches in New York and throughout that part of the country, Pennsylvania, and other neighboring areas actually--listen now--sponsored those churches who went there, holding that they had a

right to that religious and political conviction. They sponsored those churches. The point that I am trying to make is that, as you look at that human history, you will find that these things were seen from different perspectives. And men whom we might consider to be heroes would have been considered, by them, to be traitors, with the same measure of sincerity that we would consider them to be heroes. The point is this: Even though there are men who would disagree, and men who will look at the Baptist churches,--and I do not say the Baptist Church, because there is no such thing--Baptist churches, as being the enemies of Christ, and there are those who do, have nevertheless, historically recorded our existence. Do you follow what I am talking about? In other words, you can look in all ages, and you can find the existence of churches just like this church here tonight. Now, I do not mean they sat on oak pews, or that they dressed exactly like we dress, or that they had a P.A. System in their auditorium, I do not mean that. I mean that, in doctrine and in practice, the essence was the same as it is today. You can find historical evidences, both from our friends and our enemies, coming right down through the ages, saying there was a church like that, there was a church like that, there was a church like that. Century, after century, after century, the history of them is very, very clear. For instance, you could read J. M. Carroll's book "The Trail Of Blood," and of course, he advocates Baptist history as being the history of the true church. Indeed, these were the Lord's churches! Millions of copies that little booklet have been distributed, and I think it is a wonderful booklet, and I agree with what it says. Now, if a Roman Catholic were to pick that booklet up and read it, and you would then say to him, "Is there any accuracy in that book?" He would say, "Well, yes. Sure those churches have existed. The difference is that the true Christians are the ones Carroll was calling heretics." The Roman Catholics, for instance, would say, "We are the church." Carroll shows how the Catholics went off into heresy and thus became Catholics. But the point is this: That as you read his statement, his history, you will find there, churches that believe what we believe. They have not always been called Baptists, but they have for a lot longer than most of you would think. You can even go back to the thirteenth century, and find the term Baptist used, even without the prefix anti. In Catholic history you can find that. Now, they were our enemies and yet they testified of us. For instance, they have said such things as this: 'We know of no sect, or no group of heretics, which more than the Baptists, has held this tenaciously to their damnable doctrines, and though grievously tormented and persecuted, they have held those doctrines, even to the death.' Oh, those

wicked heretics, those lowly, no good Baptists! These writers had no use for us. They hated us with a vengeance. They burned us at the stake. They killed us. They drowned us. They did everything you could imagine. They hated us, and yet the hatred and the history of their efforts to purge the earth of our miserable existence prove, testify, state, yes they record that we were there. Churches just like this church were there. Yes, you will find this the histories recorded, both by our enemies-and our friends.

The Bible promises, and history will bear out, that there is a chain of churches stretching from that first church that Jesus built to this very group we are part of tonight. It might well be questioned, whether we can irrevocably prove it by human history, and the doubter may ask "Is it true? Is it real? Is there really a chain link from Bethel Baptist Church back to the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ that was assembled in the upper room on the day of Pentecost, which church our Lord established during His earthly sojourn? There certainly is! Absolutely! There is a chain link. Brother Keener, can you draw an unquestionable circle around each of those links? No, I cannot. In all honesty, I doubt that anybody else can, though there are some good and honest men who think they have accurate pedigrees of their churches. And I think they know, that even though they feel it is true, they cannot prove it to be so. They have what they feel is a good honest history, and they may have a pedigree, but I simply refuse to pursue the proof of one in that sense. I will explain next week, why I will not pursue that. But I am simply saying now, though it remaineth for us to prove by the scriptures, whether what we hold doctrinally and practically is right or wrong, it is not necessary for us ever to prove the perpetuity of people like this, because the histories written, both by our enemies and our friends will state over, and over, and over again, that there have always been Baptist churches just like this. If someone were to say, "The Keener family tree was split during the Revolutionary War, and some of those people fought with the English." I would have to say, you know something, you are probably right. My daughter and son-in-law did some research and they found a man, and they called him Martin, the Tory. Now, do you know what a Tory was? He is one of those people who fought with the English. But not all of them did. You might come on down in time and say, "They were even split during the Civil War?" I expect so, because they came from Pennsylvania down into North Carolina, then over into Tennessee and Alabama. I expect that everywhere they came from, they left some behind. That is usually the case.

And if there were some left Pennsylvania, and apparently there were, then there were some who came on down to North Carolina and Alabama, and there were. They probably fought on different sides, and they would probably write a different history. But I want to tell you something, the fact that I am here testifies to the perpetuity of that family. Yes, even their conflicting histories will so testify. It does not mean that we could go back and prove every link. The fact of the matter is, I cannot trace my line all the way back. We have one forefather, who we have a hard time with. We do not know for sure, the name my great, great, great grandfather, we know he was one of two brothers, we do not know for sure which one. You say, is that all you lack? Well, that seems to be all we lack, but how important is it? If I can find out who he is will I be rich? Will I be smart. Will it really do something for me if I can just prove that. It will not do a thing for me materially, nor do I need it to prove I am a Keener. But I would like to know more of where I came from. It is interesting, and that is about all there is to it.

Now, the point is this: The Catholics called us heretics, but they testified of our existence. We must, and we gladly, therefore, compare ourselves, that is in what we teach, and what we believe, and what we practice, as well as we know how, to what the church of the Lord Jesus Christ taught, and believed, and practiced in years gone by. And I understand that our cultures have changed, our dress, our furniture, and our modes of travel. I do not think the Apostle Paul ever flew in a 747. I do not know how he managed to do what he did without flying on a 747. I doubt that he ever had a blow hair-dryer. I do not have one either, but some preachers really have to have one. Listen folks, I am simply saying that our church is what the church of the Lord Jesus Christ was. The church has been perpetuated down through the years. I am glad to be a Baptist.

We came from the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, which ground work was laid by John the Baptist, as he began to baptize people in the river Jordan. We are a church of The Lord Jesus Christ. You say, "Can you trace this church back step by step?" No, I would not walk around this building to start an effort to do so. "Do you know that this church can be traced back by human history?" No, I do not know that. If I had the records of heaven, I would have a perfect pedigree, But is pedigree really the issue? Now, listen, it is important that we came from that church. If we did not we are not a church. But how do you ascertain that?

Can you do it by tracing backwards? Will going backwards actually prove us to be a church, even if continuity could be established? If, for instance, we could go back from now to the river Jordan, would that, in itself, prove that we are the Lord's church? I will show you, next week how that, within itself, would not prove anything and why that is not the direction that we must go. But tonight, I want us to just be thankful in our hearts that the Lord has given us a church, and He has given us the Bible, in which He promised church perpetuity. Let us be thankful He has taught us to believe this book, and to trust and to follow what it teaches. Let us stand with our heads bowed in prayer.

THE PERPETUITY OF THE CHURCH PART # 2

THE PROPER MEANS OF PROVING CHURCH PERPETUITY

Number two of two messages, preached in Bethel Baptist Church, in November of 1994, and edited by Forrest L. Keener, for publication in the Baptist Watchman.

In part one of this series, I dealt with the biblical fact of the perpetuity of the Lord's church. In this part I am dealing with how a church's authenticity and authority is established. Now, I do not mean by that, how is it brought about. That is done by divine providence, and it is assured by our Lord's promise. But how do we prove it? How do we give evidence of it? That is what I am dealing with in this message.

In the book of Acts, chapter 13 and verse one, the Bible says: "Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus. And when they were at Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews: and they had also John to their minister."

Then go to the 14th chapter. We are just seeing how they were sent out to preach in these verses. In the 14th chapter, and verses 27 and 28: "And when

they were come," (this is when they had returned from this journey, they came back to Antioch) "And when they were come and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles. And there they abode long time with the disciples."

And then notice Acts chapter 15, and verses 40 and 41. They are getting ready to go out on their second missionary journey. "And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God. And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches." I just want you to notice that, "He went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches."

In Matthew chapter 16, and verse 18, our Lord said: "And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock" (not upon Peter, the Petros, the little stone, but upon this rock, Petra -this cliff of stone, that is what the Greek words mean." "I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." We have the biblical statement of the perpetuity of the Church. And in the previous message, I sought to prove scripturally the absolute perpetuity of the Church. That is to say, that there is no chance, no possibility, if the purpose, and if the prophecy of our Lord Jesus Christ is accurate, there is no possibility that His church would not be perpetual until He comes again to this earth.

In this message, I want to deal with How Perpetuity Carries With It Church Authority. That is to say, that the church which Jesus built during His lifetime upon this earth is perpetuated. And within that perpetuated, New Testament Church, lies the authority to preach the gospel, and to baptize, and to perpetuate the church by doing so. This is the means by which He will perpetuate the New Testament Church. Now, how are we able to establish a church's position within that perpetuity? How can we know? There are signs, all over this city, of organizations that refer to themselves as churches, and many of them simply are not churches. Today, you hear people talking about the church, the body of Christ, and what they are talking about does not exist. It never did. That "Universal Church" of which they speak is not a biblical entity at all. It is the dream, it is the delusion, it is the opinion of men. What is the Lord's church? And how can we identify a church as being an entity, that is, within that perpetual line of churches, which the Lord Jesus Christ promised. How may we be sure it is a church that came down from Him to us? The question I am posing is this, Do we prove this by a biblical principle,--listen--do we prove it by a

biblical principle, and evidence it by human history? Or do we prove it by human history? How do we do this? How do we go about it? The scriptures in the book of Acts, that I have read to you this evening, are very, very relevant to this subject. I know there are other scriptures I could have read. I cannot read all of the scriptures in the Bible that would deal with the issue, but I want to just point out something to you. In Acts 13:1-5, where I read, we see Paul and Barnabas being sent out from Antioch by the church at Antioch. The Lord spoke unto the church at Antioch and said unto them: "Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them." The church separated them. The church sent them away. On this we cannot help but agree.

Secondly, in Acts 14:27 and 28, it becomes very evident that they went under the authority of the church at Antioch, because they came back to the church at Antioch and reported to the church that sent them out, that which they had done.

Thirdly, it is obvious that the result of this effort was churches being established. This is obvious when you look at the second missionary journey in Acts 15:40 and 41. If you read the account of the journey that followed, you will see where they went. And Acts 15:40 and 41 says that they went through these regions establishing the churches. And so what they had built on their first journey, what they had established on their first journey is referred to in the scripture as Churches. I dislike, very much, the practice of anybody, today, trying to refer to the Lord's local assembly as something besides a church. For some rebellious reason they want to take away that word or give it a different meaning. I hear them, all the time, talking about something else, as if it were a compulsion. A lot of people, today, are wanting to call the assembly a fellowship. You know what I am talking about! A fellowship! The word church just suggests something they are uncomfortable with. I know some Christian people who made a pact, many, many years ago, that they would eat lunch with each other one Sunday out of every month. They have continued that, I imagine, for twenty years. These three families have at least gotten together once a month and have eaten lunch with each other, and have maintained their friendship. That is a fellowship, but it is not a church. There is a very definite difference. We need to remember that when we talk about the Lord's Church, we are talking about an assembly, but we must be talking about the kind of assembly He was talking about in our text.

Now, I have the final authority on church perpetuity. I have a book on church perpetuity, and church history, that is absolutely, 100 percent accurate. There is not a single mistake in it. Not a mistake was ever made in it. There is nothing in it that is questionable. Everything in this book on church perpetuity is absolutely, 100 percent accurate. The reason that it is one hundred percent accurate is because it was written by the Holy Ghost. It is the book of Acts, right here in this Bible. You will all agree with me that it is totally accurate. The question that we should ask then is this: Is it sufficient? The answer is YES. Now, that does not mean that we cannot have any other kind of records. I think they are good. I think they are handy. I think they are fine. I think they are dandy, but are they necessary? Or is the book of Acts sufficient upon this subject of church perpetuity? My answer to you is that the book of Acts is, in deed, sufficient. What does the Bible teach us in this matter, and on what is it silent? Let me show you what I am talking about. There are a lot of things that I personally, might suggest to you as members of this church that I would say would be very good for you to practice as far as Christian conduct is concerned. There are financial principles that I would love to teach some young people today. Some of them seem to learn it, but a lot of them do not. There are some good principles on rearing children. There are all kinds of good principles of that sort that I think are very wise. As your pastor, I have every right to stand in this pulpit and preach to you, with authority, what this Book says. But I do not have that same degree of right to stand and preach to you, as something that is binding upon you, those things which are my opinions. There is a difference. In other words, that which the Bible is silent on, I certainly must not impose upon you as being a necessity of life. That is true in every area of doctrine, and it is certainly true in the doctrine of church perpetuity. Does the book of Acts tell us of the written records of church perpetuity? Do we have the progressive genealogies of those churches that are mentioned here as churches? Do we have that pattern as an example? Do we have that biblical evidence? If so, then we certainly are bound to follow that pattern. Seriously, if it is there, we had better follow it. We need to do it like the Bible tells us. But we must not demand of anyone what scripture does not demand. Within this format, there are four things that I want to touch upon tonight:

I. BIBLICAL HISTORY OF PERPETUITY

First of all, consider the Biblical History Of Perpetuity. The Lord gave us a

promise. He said, "...upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." He gave us the church ordinances. And in the case of one of those church ordinances, that is, the Lord's Table, He said, do this in remembrance of me till I come. The demand for continuation of proper baptism is contained within the great commission. That is not something that is to be done outside of the church. It is a church ordinance. The very statement that they are to do it till He comes back implies that the church is to continue. It is to be perpetuated until that time. We have a biblical history of that perpetuity. When Paul consented to the stoning of Stephen, he had a goal in his mind. That goal was to destroy the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. He later said of himself, "I am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God." That was his business. That is what he was doing. His goal was to destroy it. Listen, if you will, to Acts chapter 8, and verse 1: "And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles." I want you to think about that for a moment. They were all scattered abroad throughout all Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. Now, the Lord has said, I am going to build my church, this is what my church is supposed to be, and this is what my church is supposed to do. But Paul wants to destroy it. Listen to Acts chapter 1, and begin to read with verse 1. This is very important. I have said, this book is the book on church perpetuity. Let us see if this book has anything to do with church perpetuity. Acts 1:1: "The former treatise have I made, (this is Luke writing, talking about the book of Luke, I have written another treatise) O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach," The Lord Jesus Christ built His church while He was upon this earth. The idea, the common, silly notion that the church started on the day of Pentecost is absolutely unsubstantiated by scripture. He built His church while He was upon the earth, and He is still building His church. It is an ongoing thing. I am talking about as an institution, not as a universal something. But he says He did this: "Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen:" Now, what were these commandments that He had given unto His apostles? He said, I have written this treatise and told what the Lord began both to do and teach, until the day in which He was taken up, and before He went up, He gave commandments unto His apostles. What he is talking about here, is unquestionably: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the

name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:" That is what they were to do. And He goes on, dealing with this: "To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God: And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. 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 Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."

Now, those verses, those eight verses, hold Luke's introduction to the book of Acts. He said, that is what this book is going to be about. This commission was given. And this is what the acts of the apostles were, as they went about carrying out what the Lord had both begun to do and to teach. I mentioned, a moment ago, this persecution that took place, at the stoning of Stephen. The Bible tells us in Acts 8:1 that these people were scattered abroad. They were run out of Jerusalem. But did this hurt the church? Did this destroy the church? Did this negate what the Lord had said, when He said: "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it"? No. What it did was to scatter the seed to the wind, as the promise of God had been. And these people went everywhere preaching the gospel. And among other places, they went to Antioch. And what was begun at Antioch is, no doubt, a church. There is no question about it. In other words, this did not hurt the church, it actually perpetuated it, it spread it, as an institution, resulting in many churches. And from Antioch, it went on. Of course, it went from Jerusalem down to Samaria. Then it went into Syria, which is where Antioch was. From thence to Cilicia, Pamphylia, Pisidia, Phrygia, Galatia, Asia, Macedonia, Greece, Achaia, finally into all of Europe. I was in India in 1991, and it is commonly reported over there that the apostle Thomas came to India and preached. Thomas is a very, very common name, and one of the reasons that Thomas is such a common name in India is, according to them, because the Apostle Thomas came to India and preached the gospel of Christ. There is reasonable evidence that this is, indeed, true. All through the earth, this

message went, and this entity that the Lord referred to as "My church" was perpetuated and spread.

Relevant to this, we have divine promise that it would continue till He came. Now, we should fully expect this today. Somebody says, "Do you really believe that there is a church upon the earth today that teaches what was taught in New Testament times?" If I did not, I would have to renounce my Christian faith. Why? Because My Christ said, "Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." If the gates of hell have prevailed against it, and that message is lost, he is a false prophet. And we have nothing at all to rejoice about. I believe, beyond any shadow of a doubt, that upon the earth today, His church still exists, teaching what He taught, and practicing, in essence, what they practiced. I know we do not walk as they did before, we drive cars, but still that is not the point. We are practicing, in essence, as far as church polity, and preaching the doctrines that He taught. And beloved, it is being done today in Baptist churches just like this church, and if I did not believe that I would get out of this church and find what it is being taught in, and if you do not believe that, you ought to do the same thing. You ought to get out of this church and go where ever you believe that same truth is being taught. Now these churches are not, and they never have been, without flaw. Today, we have some people who apparently think that they are as good as God and getting better every day, and that there is nothing wrong in their church, and never has been, and if anything has ever been wrong in a church, then it is not a church. But you know, the Lord's church had a man preaching in it, ordained by Jesus Himself, and baptizing, who was not even a Christian. Did you know that? Yes, the Lord knew about it. He knew about it! You say, well the church at Jerusalem did not have anything like that. You just think they did not. They had all kinds of problems. How about the church at Antioch, was there nothing wrong? Oh, No? Paul said, when Peter came to Antioch, I withstood him to the face because he was to be blamed, because there was a division there, and Peter was participating in that, but He surely was not alone. Do you follow what I am talking about? Problems! Paul wrote in all of his church epistles, almost without exception, dealing with problems, things that were wrong. He wrote to the churches of Galatia, upbraiding them because they were weak in the doctrines of grace, and implying that they were trying to add works to faith for salvation. He said, are you so foolish, having begun in the spirit, are ye now made perfect in the flesh? They were trying to mix grace and

works. I realize that when that goes too far, that church ceases to become a church. I understand that, but I am simply saying to you, tonight, do not get the idea that if you can find anything wrong with a congregation, that you can immediately write it off as not being a church. This is all to say there are churches tonight that are teaching and doing, essentially, what the Lord did, not perfectly, but essentially.

II. WHAT IS THE BIBLE PATTERN OF PERPETUATING AND ESTABLISHING AUTHORITY?

Secondly, What is the Bible pattern of perpetuating and establishing authority? We have no record, nor hint, that the apostles went about bestowing authority. Do you understand what I am talking about? You just do not find a place where Paul goes, for instance, as Elijah let his mantle fall upon Elisha, and passed on this portion of the power that God had given him, so as to speak. Now I know that was under the sovereign direction of God, but you do not find Paul doing that with Timothy. Apparently Paul loved and thought very highly of Timothy, but he did not say, 'Timothy, you are the young man that I want to choose to carry on my work and my labor after I am gone.' He gave him principles of conduct, but not authority. Paul did not need to do that. Paul did not need to find somebody to perpetuate his work, because that authority was in the church. And so it was with every one of the apostles. So they did not go about bestowing authority, and passing it on. Now listen, listen carefully to what I am going to say, it is both logical and evident that each New Testament Church, growing out of a New Testament Church, carried with it this divine authority. It is passed on by virtue of what the church is. The perpetuity of the church carries with it that Authority. We do not see any evidence that the church at Antioch wrote back to Jerusalem and said, now, we need authority from the church at Jerusalem to organize. Listen, we do that today, and there is not anything wrong with it, especially in a day and time when there is so much attack against the sound church, and so many groups coming in and calling themselves churches, that are not churches. I think the idea of writing down the history of organization and things of that sort are very good. I have nothing against it. We practice it religiously. As you know, the churches we have started, and we have started several now, every one of those churches that we have started, has been started with a written permission from this church. We publish our articles of faith, and demand a commitment from that mission or

that group, which is to be chartered under the Articles of Faith of this church, to carry on in that faith and practice. And we even transfer the by-laws on to them, for them to have the opportunity to embrace those by-laws, and the constitution if they wish to do so. I think that is good. But we do not find that done between Jerusalem and Antioch. There is no evidence of it. I believe the principles were carried on, but these people went everywhere preaching the gospel, and that is what they were there for, and the Lord's church was perpetuated just that way. Now, the authority was carried with the church, and is indicated in those perpetuated churches. I think it is very wise today, if we do things decently and in order. And the sufficient order that may have been called for at one time may not be sufficient for all the problems that have arisen today. You say, now wait a minute. You mean they changed the way they did that? Well, they modified some things in the New Testament. Look through the book of Acts, and you will find that there were times when a problem arose that had not been noted before, and for the sake of solving that problem, they instituted some kind of a statement. For instance, the letters that Paul read after he had gone to Jerusalem, in Acts chapter 15, when he went back and read to the churches on his second missionary journey, were not read the first time. They were to deal with a problem that had arisen after his first trip. Likewise, there are many things that we do today, and do properly, to deal with problems that have more lately arisen. But if a group fails in one or two of those things, does that mean that it is not a church? If we fail, for instance, to write down a record, are we no longer a church. Let us just say, that tonight, Bethel Baptist Church were to go somewhere, or any other true church in the world, were to go somewhere and establish a New Testament Church. And they put down the records of that meeting, but before the person who was carrying the records got home, the ship sank, or the plane crashed, and the records were destroyed, in both places. There are no written records! And these people say, 'We need to do something. We probably need to recreate these records.' But before those records are recreated, before those records have been reestablished, all of the people who were present in the chartered church are dead, but they have won others, and those they won and baptized are there functioning as a church. And they are carrying out just what was done before. But they do not have the original, written records. Is it, therefore, not a church? Well, the Bible does not indicate anything of that sort, and I think it is probably, to some extent, for that very reason, that the Lord did not give us the genealogies, or the written lineages of these churches in the book of Acts. Of

course, I doubt that they had stepped down that many steps, but there is no doubt in my mind, that by the time Paul died that there were churches which had started other churches, and that even some mentioned in book of Acts were, at least, second and third generation churches. I think almost anybody would agree with that. In other words, the church at Antioch started churches as Paul went out preaching. There is no doubt in my mind, that those churches were started out of the church at Antioch. But were any churches started out of the church at Corinth, or Ephesus, or Colosse? Were any churches started out of the churches of Galatia? I do not have any doubt that these were. But we do not have the lineage. We do not have a pedigree of those churches. Now, the church that organized Bethel Baptist Church, for instance, was Bible Baptist Church in Duncan, Oklahoma, and that was done in December of 1957. How many of you folk were members here, in December of 1957? None of you? Well I was not either. I came in 1958. When I came here there were two documents of church records. We have boxes of them now, I mean hundreds of pounds of them. For instance, we can go back to 1963, and I can show you, essentially, every check ever written since then, either a check or a photostatic copy of it. If the bank does not send it back to us, we say "Get us our check. We want our check." From 1963, there are boxes of them, and they are all identified. You can go up to the storage rooms and go through them. They are all there, all of the minutes of our business meetings. At least we have set out to keep them. You say, are you sure none of them were ever lost? Are you sure no church secretary ever failed to get it written down? I wish I could say, yes, but I am not. But essentially, those things have been kept, they have been tended to down through the years. And I am glad for that. That is the way they ought to be. The point is this, that church (Bible Baptist Church of Duncan Oklahoma) embraced the same Articles of Faith that we embrace, The New Hampshire Confession of Faith. They organized this church. They sponsored this church until that organization, and we have the commission to carry on what they were carrying on. Does that mean that there is no preacher that has ever been in that church that had a doctrinal error? Does that mean there has never been a preacher in that church, or this church that has practiced anything that was wrong? There has never been a church alive of which that could be said. That is not what perpetuity and authority mean at all. But this means that there is a line of perpetuity, and with that perpetuity goes the authority. In other words, as a church sponsors and establishes a church, with that new church goes that authority of the sponsoring church, that the Lord gave, to go into all the world

and preach the gospel to every creature, and to baptize those people. What I have just described is what is called Landmarkism, and I believe it is right and biblical.

III. NEO-LANDMARKISM'S MEANS OF ESTABLISHING AUTHENTICITY

Thirdly, I want to touch upon Neo-Landmarkism's means of establishing authenticity. I count myself a Landmark Baptist, and I do not make any apology to anybody for that. What is a Landmark Baptist? A Landmark Baptist is a Baptist who believes that the authority to baptize and to organize churches lies within the church, that nobody has the right to organize a church but a church. They believe that this authority and authenticity came down to us through the Lord's churches and no other way. They believe in the perpetuity of the church. But there is a group which has arisen quite lately, and I refer to them as Neo-Landmarkers. By that I mean new, a new breed of Landmarkers. They are kind of like the Pharaoh that rose up that knew not Joseph, I fear. And they have some very strange ways of establishing church perpetuity. Baptist writers have long studied church history, and thankfully they have written down evidences of the perpetuity of Baptist Churches. In other words, they can go back and say, we will show you here, in the 1800s, in the 1900s, back in the 1700, in the 1600s, in the 1500s, and the 1400s, in the 200s, and everything in between, we will show you churches which were preaching and teaching precisely what we are preaching and teaching today, which stood for the things we stand for today. Sinless people? No, just born again children of God, seeking to preach and to teach the truth of God's word. I have read a lot of these histories, but so far as I am concerned, and as far as I can tell, I have never read one of them--now listen to what I am saying, do not hear me say something that I am not saying-- I have not read one of them which has ever offered, a church by church account of a local church's lineage. I hope you heard what I said, and not something I did not say. Some years ago, a man made the statement to a member of our church, that he had made a study of our church to see if we were a valid Landmark Baptist Church with a good lineage. And he reported to this man that, indeed, we were, and that it was only thirteen steps back to Jordan. Now, he was implying, not that he was able to see that this church came out of a certain group, or probably came out of a certain group. No, no, he was implying that he had a church by church, blow by blow lineage (pedigree) of it. Later on, he got mad at me, changed his mind, and decided that was not true, and that this was

not even a church. But at that time, he was defending it, and he said only thirteen steps. Now, listen: If we took 2,000 years, not quite 2,000 years, and went back 13 steps, it would mean, that every one of these churches had to average, to put the whole 2,000 years in there, 154 years per generation. Not only the church that established the new church had to continue for 154 years, but on average it would have to be 154 years before the next church in the lineage was established. I want to tell you something folks, not too many Churches of years gone by, have even lasted 154 years. They die from all kinds of sicknesses. I do not say that is out of the will of God. I believe that He builds His church something like the human body, so that with those illnesses it dies. But before it dies, it reproduces itself, in other churches of like faith and order, and thus, His church is perpetuated. But beloved, I want to tell you something. We do not normally have those records. We just do not have them. In most cases, we would not be looking at dozens of generations but hundreds. How many of you in the auditorium know the first name of your grandfather's, grandfather? Two people. I happen to know mine, but do you know something? In asking questions of my uncles and aunts, I found that none of them knew. Not a one of them knew. My son-in-law and my younger brother had to go back and do some very extensive checking of court and library records. My daughter and son-in-law went all the way to Gadsden, Alabama and checked in three different counties there, getting these records together. Does that mean that there is something wrong, or that there would be something wrong or something suspect, if I could not offer you a pedigree? The fact of the matter is I can go back to my grandfather's, grandfather, but the name of my great grandfather's, grandfather, I do not know for an absolute certainty, he was one of two brothers, but I do not know for sure which one. You see it gets difficult to tell, by ancient and second hand records. Does that mean that I am illegitimate? Does that mean that I am not a Keener? Certainly not!

The point is this: The pedigree thing has become a big issue with a lot of people. And this new group tends to confuse perpetuity with pedigree, and they make havoc of the doctrine of the perpetuity of the church, because they tend to base it upon human records and not the promise of the Lord. That activity will not do, beloved. That will not do. I showed Brother Teal a moment ago, part of a document I have, in my briefcase upstairs. I do not know to what extent I will use it, but it shows the claim, and the devastation, of one of these pedigree claims. I received this from a friend, who has one of the best church history

libraries in the nation. He has thousands of volumes of books, and probably hundreds on church history. He checked this book that was quoted from, and he said, "It is not on the page that they said it was." And he checked further, and he could not find it anywhere. And so he wrote to the man who published the booklet. This was in 1979, December 21, I believe. I have a copy of the letter. The man who had published the book wrote back, and he said, 'Yes, you are right I have done some research and I have found that those entries did not appear on the pages that this historian of 1920 had said they did. Perhaps it is because the book has been redone, and it is on a different page.' But he said, 'in some instances, I was not able to find them at all.' And he went on to indicate that it is not necessary to have it, that is to say we do not have to look to human history to prove the perpetuity of the church. He is exactly right. Why? Because we have the promise of the Lord. We have some of these people today, who are always trying to prove the Bible by human evidence. They make me sick. They are always trying to find some kind of geological, or astrological, or astronomical, or mythological, or whatever, supernatural evidence, that one day the sun stood still, and Joshua had a long day. I would not walk to the front door to get a bona fide statement from the greatest geologist in all the world, or astronomer, or anything else. I would not do that. Do you know why? Because I have the statement in my Bible and that is the way it was. I do not need what those fellows said. I believe it. It is true. And the fact of the matter is that in most instances that sort of human claim is bogus, and we ought not to enter into it. Now all such records, as I am talking about here, are at the very best, second hand human history. Though they may be true, they are not only unproven, but they are unprovable. Such records are not demanded. Do not misunderstand me. If I had a record that went back and said Bethel Baptist Church came out of Bible Baptist Church in Duncan, Oklahoma, which came out of this church, which came out of this church, which came out of this church. That would be nice. And I might very well publish it and say, look at this: It appears that this is the lineage from Christ down to our church. I might very well do that. There would not be anything wrong with it, at all. That is not my point. The issue in question is this: Is it required, and if I had it, could I be sure that it was accurate? Number 1: It is not required by the scripture. Number 2: If I had it, I could not be sure it was accurate, because I was not alive. If I pick up a document that says a church was organized on a certain date, am I sure they dated it properly? I was not there. Have you ever dated a letter the wrong day? Have you ever dated a check the wrong day? I do not mean that would make

anything wrong with it. It would not. I am simply saying that these ideas of human records go way beyond proper reason. A full history would be nice, but I want to tell you something, to claim it as being absolutely valid, and knowable, and therefore, as being the basis of our perpetuity, is a wicked thing. Because we are testifying to something we cannot conceivably know to be absolutely true. As long as it is given as what it is, a likely record, wonderful. But to give it as an evidence, and to testify of the validity of it is wrong.

IV. WHAT IS THE PROPER BIBLICAL MEANS OF ESTABLISHING PERPETUITY

Fourthly, what is the proper biblical means of establishing perpetuity?

Number 1: Knowing by faith that the Church Jesus built, and promised to perpetuate, is here today. He said it would be and that settles it. The gates of hell shall not prevail against it. That is the way it is. Someone said, He said it, I believe it, that settles it. You do not have to believe it. If He said it, that settles it. If you do not believe it, that is your problem, not His. And that does not unsettle anything. Your unbelief does not change a thing in the world, except it just messes you up. Let us accept by faith that what He said was going to happen, has happened.

Number 2: Knowing that only He could build it. Can you imagine a Catholic Church setting out to build a Baptist Church? Can you? They would not if they could, and they could not if they would. They would not have the least idea how to go about it. They would not understand what to teach. Can you imagine a Pentecostal Church building a Baptist Church? They could not do it in a million years. They are stumbling around, coughing their heads off about the doctrine of eternal security, which is wonderfully true but theologically it is child's play. Certainly, it is a true doctrine. But if they knew up from down, or sideways about their Bible, they would see falling from grace as being so utterly impossible it would be embarrassing to even discuss it, as they do. Certainly, it ought to be taught in a proper sense. I am simply saying, that if we find a church which is teaching what the Lord's church taught, and doing what the Lord's church did, it is utterly ridiculous to imagine that it came from anyone but the Lord. A natural man could not build it, not in a million years.

Number 3: Searching the scripture to see what His church began, both to do and to teach, and continues to do and to teach. That is how you are going to know what His church is.

If you could go back and just take a lineage, and go down the line, and say here is the lineage: this church came out of this church, which came out of this church, you will actually prove nothing. Brother John Hinson told me that he saw, on a wall in a Greek Orthodox Church in Athens, Greece, a plaque which gave the lineage of that church, all the way back to the Lord Jesus Christ. And he asked the man, "Can you prove this?" And he said, "I certainly can." Now, that church is many, many years old. And do you know something? Because it is a Greek Orthodox Catholic Church, they very well might be able to prove its lineage. Does that prove its doctrinal soundness? Its forefathers went out from the truth, and into heresy, and they continued in heresy, and they multiplied in heresy. Where they came from is no longer the real issue. What they went into is the issue. They went into heresy. But I will tell you this, if we will search the scripture and see what the Lord began to do and to teach, we will find that it was not what they are doing and teaching, so they are not His church. It is what we are doing and teaching that identifies us. Do you not follow what I am talking about? When you find a church that teaches and practices what the Lord did, then confess in your heart, and glorify God. 'His promise is true. He built His church and the gates of Hell have not prevailed against it.'

And then, beloved, let us go out and establish New churches, teaching them to both teach and to do what He began both to teach and to do. Bethel Baptist Church has started several churches, and if we were to start a church today, if I were leading the church to start one, and they said: "Now we would like to be organized out of Bethel Baptist Church, but we do not agree with this, or this, or this doctrine you teach." If they said, 'here is an Article of Faith that we do not agree with.' I would say, 'well, there is not even a chance, that we would even consider organizing you.'" Now, they might say, 'as a group, we have talked about the idea of how to do certain things, and we disagree with part of the way you all carry out your business meetings.' I might say, well you think about it, and do that like you feel led of the Lord, the Bible does not tell us exactly how to carry on a business meeting.' And as long as it is within the parameters the Bible allows, that is not a great problem with us. But we would not consider organizing this group into a church unless they stated clear

agreement with our Articles of Faith, and were dedicated, and committed to walking by those things. Beloved, if we start churches which do not believe what we believe, we will be implementing exactly what spawned Catholicism, and Pentecostalism and Protestantism of every kind. We must build churches that believe what this church believes. We must stand on that. If need be, we must be willing to die for that, because men have gone on before us, who have burned at the stake, and who have suffered all kinds of losses, to stand for the things that we stand for today. Before the name Baptist was very well known, we were referred to as AnaBaptist, and we were hated. That hate focused upon us for one basic practice. That practice was this: We would not accept the baptism of other denominations. Where groups believed something different from what we believed, we would not confess that their immersion was baptism. True Baptists still will not, either in membership or at the communion table. Beloved, we need to stand on that. We need to take a stand for that, because if we do, we will be used of the Lord in the activity of perpetuating His church. And if we do not, we will become the enemies of this activity. May the Lord keep us in his grace and sound doctrine. God bless you, as you seek to pursue Bible truth.