

**THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH: A
SERMON DELIVERED BEFORE
THE FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH
IN PHILADELPHIA, PA.**

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The Christian Church: A Sermon Delivered Before the First Baptist Church in Philadelphia, PA.
by George Dana Boardunan

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GEORGE DANA BOARDUNAN

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A SERMON

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

IN PHILADELPHIA, PA.

BY

GEORGE DANA BOARDMAN

AT THE CLOSE OF HIS THIRTY YEARS' MINISTRY AMONG THEM

SUNDAY EVENING, MAY 13, 1894

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST

THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

Dearly beloved fellow-members of the First Baptist Church in Philadelphia:

IN closing to-night my thirty years' ministry among you, it may have been expected that I would preach what is generally called a Farewell Sermon. But I cannot bring myself to believe that indulgence in personal reminiscences or allusions, however natural or delightful, makes a fitting close of a pastorate even so long and happy as mine. Let me then rise above all personalities and speak to you of some larger and more abiding theme bearing on the Kingdom of God.

This morning our theme was "A Baptist Church." Allow me to recapitulate; especially in view of our evening theme, which, in a certain sense, may be said to be complementary to the morning. I endeavored to make the following points:

A Baptist
Church.

*First—Definition of a Baptist Church:—*A Baptist Church is a voluntary band of baptized Christians organized for Christ's service.

*Secondly—Purpose of a Baptist Church:—*To serve our Lord Jesus Christ: (1) By obeying his commands (the precepts of his ordinances, acts, examples, character, etc.). (2) By unfolding his truth (preaching, Bible schools, training schools, etc.). (3) By extending his sway (home and foreign, etc.).

Thirdly—Composition of a Baptist Church:—(1) A voluntary membership (not hereditary). (2) A converted membership (not sponsorial). (3) A baptized membership (the baptism being based on personal regeneration,

personal convictions, etc.). (4) A trained membership (in systematic theology, practical ethics, etc.). (5) A consistent membership (consistent with creed, profession, especially with the symbolism of baptism).

Fourthly—Creed of a Baptist Church:—In general harmony with the Catholic Faith of Christendom from the beginning; its difference from creeds of other Christian churches being theological or metaphysical, not ethical or practical; the tendency toward greater simplicity of doctrinal statements being a healthful sign of our times; etc.

Fifthly—Ordinances of a Baptist Church:—(1) *Baptism:* (a) Meaning of the word (burial, and very especially resurrection; Christ by his own resurrection transfigured immersion into also emersion; sadness of the news when a ministerial correspondent of a religious journal can say nothing better of his success than this, "It was my privilege last Lord's Day to bury ——— converts in baptism." Resurrection—not burial—the chief thing in the Christian life); (b) Subjects of baptism (none but Christians; not but that we ought to dedicate our infants to God in his church. I wish we would revert to the example of our Baptist fathers; the very first entry on the fly-leaf of the marriage book of our venerable church is this: "John, son of Jeremiah Sullivan, was this day, April 7, 1769, named and devoted." If more were consecrated in infancy, more would be baptized in youth). (2) *Communion:* (a) Meaning of the ordinance (commemorative, representative, covenantive, communicative, associative, proclamative, anticipative, etc.); (b) Subjects of communion (none but baptized Christians; not that this, as you well know, is my view; I believe that communion, like baptism, is a Christian ordinance rather than an ecclesiastical. It is often said that when a pastor does not agree with the views of his denomination, he ought to leave it; I do not think so; it is his business to lead his flock, not to follow it. Of course, he must be frank and outspoken at the points wherein he differs from his denomination, distinctly stating that they are his views, not his denomination's. Personally, I believe in "open communion;" ecclesiastically, I practice "close communion;" etc.).

Sixthly—Officers of a Baptist Church:—Presbyters, bishops, pastors, teachers, evangelists, deacons, deaconesses, lay-workers, trustees, committees, singers, ushers, etc.; each member of the church, whether pastor or layman, man or woman, patriarch or child, is in God's sight his priest.

Seventhly—Discipline of a Baptist Church:—(1) Not penal, but educational; reformatory; to recover wanderers; save offenders; etc. (2) To separate the incorrigible; etc.

Eighthly—Relation of a Baptist Church.—(1) To the State (absolute separation. We owe to the State our allegiance, support, prayers, etc.; let us vote for none but upright men; I believe (at least till we can have some kind of duly restricted franchise) in woman suffrage, as I said in yonder Association Hall nearly twenty years ago; but we will ask from the State no pecuniary favors or special immunities. With our esteemed friend and fellow-worshiper, Dr. Wayland, I believe in the taxation of church property. Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help, and trust in chariots, because they are many, or in horsemen, because they are very strong, etc.). (2) To the denomination (local independence, wholesome within due limits; gross abuses of the doctrine of independence; letters of transfer, commendation, etc.).

Ninthly—Appliances of a Baptist Church.—Public worship (adoration; thanksgiving; confession; aspiration; offerings; intercession; exposition; application; etc.); daily character the best liturgy; devotional services; Bible schools; mission schools; missionary societies, home and foreign; charitable societies; young people's associations; sociables; visitations; parish schools; guilds; lectures; athletics; etc.; in brief, "edification," that is, Society-building; Christ's church not an iron groove, but a living tree; division of labor; community of purpose; etc.; the church's true hold on society lies not in creed, but in life; one small live church is worth more than a thousand large dead churches; etc.

Such is a rough outline of a Baptist Church:—(a) A band; (b) A voluntary band. (c) An independent band. (d) A Christian band. (e) A baptized band. (f) An organized band. (g) An executive band; etc.

And now my last official summons to you is to continued personal church activity. Most heartily do I thank those of you who, during these thirty years, have co-operated with me in public worship, evening as well as morning; our Friday evening devotional services; our Bible schools; our missionary societies; our charities; etc. Co-operate with my successor in every department of church life—liturgical, charitable, educational, missionary, reformatory, financial, etc. You will best honor me by being loyal to my successor; if any of you leave us because I am no longer pastor, you will prove by that with-

drawal that my ministry here has been in vain. Believe not only in our noble Baptist Denomination; believe especially in our own glorious First Baptist Church. Our dear old church is not going down because this or that person leaves it. Stand by our blessed old flag loyally, reverently, gratefully, bravely, trustfully. So shall we be worthy of our own glorious history of these nearly two hundred years. So shall we help toward realizing that larger, nobler, ideal Church of which I now proceed to speak. I think you will admit, dearly beloved, that this theme has been one of the characteristics of my long ministry among you.

As our morning topic was local, we took a local text—a clause in *Revelation 3: 7*: “*The Church in Philadelphia.*” As our evening topic is catholic, we take a catholic text—*Ephesians 1: 22, 23*: “*The head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.*”

Our theme then is this—“THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH.”

In speaking of this theme, I wish to confine myself in the main to two of the many meanings which this word “church” has; presenting it, first, as a divine organism, and, secondly, as a human organization; or, to use more familiar but less accurate phraseology, “the church invisible,” and “the church visible.”

I.—The Church
as a Divine
Organism.

And, first, the Church as a Divine Organism. Observe: I do not now, at this stage of my presentation, mean by this word “church” any local organization, or the aggregate of organized churches, or the general mass of professing Christians. But I do mean by this word “church” the one organic, universal, spiritual Church of the living God—that ideal Church

of his which he has bought with the blood of his own adorable Son. In other words, I mean by the Church the Kingdom of God as administered by his Son in the hearts of men.

Glance then for a moment at some of the differences between a church in the sense of a human organization and the Church in the sense of a Divine Organism. An organized church is a voluntary association, dependent on conditions of place and time and form; it may be, and often is, rent by dissensions; it may suffer extinction; it acts on itself legislatively, receiving or dismissing or disciplining or excluding its members according to its own will; the relation between its components is constructed and temporal; in brief, it is a human organization.

But the Church Organic is a Divine Society, independent of conditions of place and time and form. It was never "constituted" in human time and space; it was born of a past eternity, chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, having immortality for its birthright and creation for its heirloom. Its members are not inserted into it by baptism or by letters of transfer from other churches; they are corporate, essential, living parts of it. Being that spiritual body of which Christ is the spiritual head, there is between them, as between him and them, community of sentiment—thought, experience, judgment, purpose, movement—in a single word, life. And this ideal Church, surveyed as a whole, in and by itself, has never had any outward, formal organization. True, it has its creed; but this creed is not written in any stone tables of theological symbols; this creed is written with the Spirit of the living God in tables that are hearts of flesh. It

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has its condition of membership; but this condition is neither baptism nor vote of those already members; this condition is faith in the Divine Father, as revealed in the Divine Son, through demonstration of the Divine Spirit. It has its member roll; but this member roll no mortal eye has seen; this member roll is in the Lamb's scroll of life. It has its sessions; but these sessions are not held in any structures of wood or brick or stone; these sessions are held in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus. It has its pastor; but this pastor no earthly presbytery has ordained; this pastor is the minister of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man. It has its music; but this music is not the audible melody of solo or chorus; this music is the silent rhythm of human works and divine grace. It has its baptism; but this baptism is not in any earthly water; this baptism is in the Holy Spirit. It has its communion; but this communion is not in any earthly bread and wine; this communion is in the living bread and the living water that came down from heaven. It has its polity; but this polity is not the polity of written constitution and by-laws; this polity is the polity of holy living and godliness. It has its liturgy; but this liturgy is not the liturgy of rubric; this liturgy is the liturgy of daily character. Take all these things away—take away creed, member roll, sanctuary, minister, music, baptistery, communion table, liturgy, discipline. What have you taken away? You have taken away only what is formal and incidental and transient; the Church of the living God, in all the essentials of her nature, still survives.

M. H. U.