Body Life @ JBC Class

Session 3:
Who We Are

(Revised June 2013)
The Christian church began 40 days after Christ’s ascension, when the Holy Spirit descended upon a 120 believers gathered in a house in Jerusalem. During the first three hundred years, Christians were severely persecuted throughout the Roman Empire, yet Christianity continually grew—spreading across Africa, Asia, and Europe. Church leaders, called bishops, were headquartered in prominent cities and began to exercise oversight over large geographic areas. As doctrinal controversies arose, bishops called together church councils which established official statements called creeds. These statements helped to define orthodox Christian doctrine (the Apostles Creed, the Nicene Creed, etc.).

In 313 AD, what seemed like a good thing for the church perhaps was not so good. Constantine, the Roman emperor issued the Edict of Milan, giving Christianity tolerance within the Roman Empire. While this freed Christians from persecution, the development of a state church created many problems for centuries to come. Membership was not voluntary nor based on faith in Christ. The bishop of Rome became very prominent and was later designated as the head of the church and given the title Pope. During the Middle Ages, after the fall of the Roman Empire, many unscriptural teachings and practices crept into the church. Such things as prayer for the dead, the adulation of Mary, the worship of saints and images, the use of purchased indulgences for forgiveness of sins, and the concept of purgatory were made official church dogma. Of primary significance was the acceptance of “Sacred Tradition,” the decisions of church leaders as equal to the teaching of the Bible. Access to the Bible by lay people was denied. Church leadership at times was corrupt, seeking power and wealth. Popes were sometimes generals of armies in wars.

Baptism, while originally performed by immersion, was gradually changed to other modes. In the 1300’s, sprinkling was officially adopted by the Roman Catholic Church as the official method of baptism. Today, many Christian denominations still pour or sprinkle or touch with water to baptize. And many of those churches today baptize infants as well. In 1644, the Church of England officially adopted sprinkling as the means of baptism, by a 25-24 vote in Parliament!

Along the way, individuals and small groups of believers rebelled against some of these wrong beliefs and practices and were persecuted for it.
HISTORY OF BAPTISTS

The Protestant Reformation had its official beginning in 1517 when Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the door of his church in Wittenburg, Germany, protesting corruption in the Roman Catholic Church. As the Reformation progressed, one sub-group was nicknamed the Anabaptists, a name that means rebaptizers. Later that was shortened to Baptist. But why would anyone advocate baptizing someone a second time?

Beliefs that characterized the Baptist movement from the start were:

1. **Believer’s Baptism** – An individual needs to place his/her faith in Christ and become a believer before being baptized. Baptism is an expression of that inward belief and the transformation that results. For that reason, infant baptism was rejected. (Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli did not reject infant baptism.) Immersion was advocated as the biblical method of baptism.
2. The **Bible as the final authority** in the life of the church, not “traditions” of men.
3. Church membership only for those who are regenerate or “saved” or “born again.”
4. The **separation** of civil government from the church. (Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli also did not hold this belief.) Religion is not to be forced on an individual, but is rather a voluntary decision a person makes.

Because of their beliefs, Anabaptists were severely persecuted.

The first Baptist church is said to have been started by John Smyth of England. With his group of congregational separatists (believing in autonomy and separation from the government), he fled to Amsterdam and formed a church there in 1608. In about 1610, part of the group returned to England, where Baptist churches began to multiply. Baptists were persecuted in England until 1689 when the Act of Toleration was passed.

**BAPTISTS IN THE UNITED STATES**

As you may know, the Pilgrims, the group who came to Massachusetts in 1620, were Puritans. They believed that the Church of England had not gone far enough in purifying the influence Rome had in corrupting the church. They wanted freedom to worship according to their ideas and came to the New World for that reason. There in Plymouth they found that freedom. They did not, however, extend religious freedom to others. Anyone with different ideas was punished, sometimes through banishment or even hanging.

Roger Williams came to the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1631 as a pastor. Because he began to advocate separation of church and state, he was banished in 1636, to be sent back to England. Having escaped, he spent the winter with the Indians.
In the spring, he purchased from the Indians what became Providence, Rhode Island. His wife and family joined him there, as did many others. He began a colony with a new view of religious freedom for all, no matter what their religious beliefs, and in 1663 received a charter from King Charles II for that purpose.

In 1638, he espoused Baptist beliefs and was baptized by immersion. Ten others were then baptized as well. The first Baptist church in America was then formed in Providence, a church that exists to this day. Jews, Quakers, Catholics, and others found freedom to live in his colony. In other colonies, Baptists were hunted, whipped, imprisoned, and fined. In Virginia, parents who refused to have their infants baptized were heavily fined. Nevertheless, by 1740, there were 47 Baptist churches in the colonies. Eventually it was the Baptists in Virginia who influenced the Bill of Rights for freedom of the individual, especially in the area of religious beliefs, taking up the principles of Roger Williams in doing so.

**BAPTIST DISTINCTIVES**

1. The Bible is the __________________________ in the life of the church.
2. **Believer's Baptism** – Each individual needs to place his/her faith in Christ and become a believer before being baptized. Baptism is an expression of that _______ _________ and the transformation that results. For that reason, infants are not baptized. Immersion is advocated as the biblical method of baptism.
3. **Church membership** for the ________________ _________, that is, those who have been born again by placing their faith and trust in Christ.
4. **The separation of government from the church**. Religion is not to be forced on an individual, but is rather a __________________ decision a person makes.
5. The independence and __________________________ of each local church.

6. Each believer has ________________ to God through Jesus Christ (the **priesthood of the believer**, I Peter 2:5,9. All are on an ________ plane, each is to be ________________, and each has a right to ________________. Some of the results of this doctrine are:
   a. Each person can go to the Bible and ________________ it personally.
   b. Each person needs to have an individual and ________________ faith in God. The relationship comes from the inside out. It is not an outward religion of religious acts.
   c. The Christian life is not lived by rules and regulations, but a **personal** ________________ with a living God through His Spirit.
   d. Every human being is to be ________________ and ministered to.
   e. The ________________ need to have a right to decide on church decisions, choosing a pastor, etc., hence congregational church government.
A Brief History of the CBA

Founded in 1947 as the Conservative Baptist Association of America, (CBA) has historically been known as a movement of evangelical Baptists with a zealous commitment for evangelism, the Bible, and missionary expansion through church planting both at home and abroad. CBA came into being just four years after the founding of CBInternational (CBI- formerly known as CBFMS Conservative Baptist Foreign Mission Society; the mission sending agency of CB churches) and three years prior to Mission to the Americas which is now known as Missions Door (MTTA formerly CBHMS Conservative Baptist Home Mission Society, the urban, ethnic, and campus ministry founded in 1950).

Rather than become "another denomination" CBA chose to equip churches and facilitate missions through the above cooperating organizations and regional networks of churches. We have partnered with other evangelical ministries such as Youth for Christ, the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, CRU (formerly Campus Crusade for Christ) and others with a commitment to fulfilling the Great Commission at home and around the world.

From the 1950's through the early 1970's CBA was a church-planting dynamo with hundreds of new churches planted across America. The focus of CBA in the 80's continued church planting and added a significant emphasis on training congregations in evangelism, discipleship and member care.

We have impacted the military, hospitals, and other social agencies with a significant chaplaincy program that continues to grow while changing the lives of those who find Christ through a bold proclamation of God's word.

CBA exists today as a network of more than 1200 churches and ministries, vitally connected to national and regional leadership, committed to fulfilling the Great Commandment and the Great Commission by living Christ Before America.

While each individual CBA church is autonomous, we choose to function interdependently because we believe we can do more together than we can alone in building Christ's kingdom here on earth.

Today we are a network of unique churches in cities, suburbs, small towns and rural settings, all across America. But we are all committed to knowing God and winning His lost ones in every way we can. Through our national and regional offices we offer assistance in church planting, revitalization, church assessment and ministry mapping, leadership multiplication, a focus on next generation ministries, and a strategy to assist churches in building stronger spiritual foundations.
JACKSON BAPTIST CHURCH

Spiritual Foundations

On August 11, 1971, 34 people met in the basement of a home on Oregon Avenue in Jackson, NJ. Their goal was to establish a church built on the foundation of the Bible and to make disciples for Jesus Christ. The little group had their first communion together the following month.

By October they were joined by Pastor Ken Kirby, a church planter with the Conservative Baptist Association, who shared their vision. Under his leadership, and with the Holy Spirit’s guidance, they worked hard to visit people and share the gospel. People began to respond. The church ministered to a diverse and unusual congregation as several families (as well as a group of young men from a nearby fraternity house) came to the Lord.

Spiritual foundation stones were laid through the decisions of this early group of believers. A missions outreach was established and the church began to support its first missionary families in February 1972.

God was working in the little church. The first baptism took place on May 21, 1972. By September of that year, the church incorporated. A fellowship fund was established to help to “share one another’s burdens”. Pastor Kirby recognized that leading people to Christ was a first spiritual step. However, it was important to make each believer a “disciple” – one who continued to learn at the feet of Jesus. The philosophy of “People becoming Christ Disciples” – an ongoing, lifelong learning experience, began to take root.

Today, JBC continues that legacy as we seek to win the lost, build up individuals within the church and equip them to become disciples able to make disciples and carry on the mission of God in their communities.

Physical Foundation

While the church was growing spiritually and adding new people, it became evident that the home on Oregon Avenue was too small. The church began meeting at the Johnson School on Larsen Road. Then, in 1974, property was purchased on Bennetts Mills Road. Plans were adopted in May of the following year, and the church family began their hands-on labor – building a church.
The original building was dedicated on May 2, 1976 – it was the second day on the job for new pastor Carl Vereen. Under Pastor Vereen, and later Rev. Jack Benzenhafer, Jackson Baptist Church continued to grow. With the arrival of our current senior pastor, Ken Underhill, growth continues. Pastor Don Sodano was called on August 1, 2005 to help with the growing ministry needs. Growth continued to rapidly increase and in January 2006 Jared Nicastro JBC’s first ever fulltime Youth Pastor was called by the church to minister to the youth.

The building that had once seemed so large to the original congregation has now become our new education and nursery wing and “friendship hall.” In April 2006 we completed phase one of our building campaign, known as Building for Eternity adding our new sanctuary and other space to minister to the people that God is continually bringing in. The structure now complete is the fulfillment of several years of sacrificial giving on the part of the current congregation. Phase 2 of the project, the Family Life Center, consisting primarily of a new gymnasium, state of the art church kitchen, and additional classroom space will hopefully commence soon.

**Our Church Government and Structure of Leadership**

There are three basic forms of church government:

1. **Episcopal** – This is a “top-down” structure. Decisions for the church come from structures outside and above the local church. Compared to the government systems of countries, this would be comparable to having a king. Pastors are selected and assigned by the leaders at the top. Property is owned by the denomination. Roman Catholic, Methodist, Anglican and Orthodox churches would be examples today.

2. **Presbyterian** – Leadership comes from elders within the congregation, as representatives of the church. Compared to civil government, this would correspond to the republican form of government. Presbyteries, synods, and general assemblies are over each church, but made up of representatives from the churches.

3. **Congregational** – The membership of each congregation makes decisions together, often through voting. Each local church is an autonomous unit. In comparison with civil government, this would correspond to a true democracy, for example, with town meetings. Property is owned by the congregation. Churches select their own pastors and elders.

4. Jackson Baptist Church has a _________________ form of church government. Major decisions are made by the congregation. The pastoral staff must be recommended for service by the Elders and voted on by the congregation. Elders and committee members are approved by the congregation.
The budget, purchase or sale of property, and changes in the constitution or by-laws require a congregational vote. The church property is owned by the congregation.

Much responsibility has been delegated to the Elders who are directly responsible for the oversight of the church. Elders may serve two three-year terms, and then must leave the board for at least a year before they can return. Congregational meetings need not be held as often under this arrangement. The pastoral staff are considered as Elders and are voting members of the elder board. Many Baptist churches have only one elder, the senior pastor, and a board called deacons. At JBC, all elders, including the senior pastor and pastoral staff are equal in the decision making process, although the senior pastor is, of course, highly respected and listened to.

Our fiscal year is January 1 to December 31, so the annual congregational meeting to approve the general budget and officers is held in October. The mission’s budget is voted on at the January quarterly business meeting.

Meet our staff and Learn About our Ministries

Senior Pastor: Ken Underhill

Ken and his wife Barbra began their ministry at JBC in May of 1995.

Ken was born and raised in Saugus, Massachusetts just north of Boston. He graduated with his BA in Biblical and theological studies from Gordon College and he received his Masters of Divinity from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. Before coming to JBC, he pastored in Maine and New Hampshire and together he and Barbara served as missionaries with CBInternational for one year in Slovenia. Barbara grew up in Maine. She too received her BA in Biblical and theological studies from Gordon College and her Masters in Language Education from Rutgers. She currently serves as an adjunct professor at Cairn University formerly Philadelphia Biblical University where she directs the TESOL training program (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages).

Pastor of Connections and Pastoral Ministry: Don Sodano

Don grew up in Jersey City, NJ and moved to Jackson when he was a teenager. But he didn’t come to know the Lord until he was 29. That was when his wife, Lisa-Jean, began attending JBC and eventually led him to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. In 2002 Don felt the Lord calling him into full-time Christian ministry. In answer to that call he went to Columbia International University in Columbia, SC where he earned his BA in Bible and Pastoral Ministry. Don began his ministry at JBC in August of 2005. Don and his wife Lisa Jean have four children, their daughters Brieanne (25) and Lauren (21), and his sons C. J. (19) and Alex (15).
Pastor of Families and Christian Education: Jared Nicastro

Jared is from Middletown, NJ and a graduate of Philadelphia Biblical University, currently Cairn University where he earned his B.S. in Bible and major in youth ministry. He served for 3 years as Assistant Youth Pastor at New Hope Community Church in New Hope, PA. Jared was called as Jackson Baptist’s first full-time youth pastor in January 2006. Jared and his wife Erin who also graduated (June 2007) from Philadelphia Biblical University (now Cairn University) have two sons Nicholas and Christopher. Together they minister to the families and youth of JBC. Pastor Jared is now the Pastor of Families and Christian Education at Jackson Baptist.

CHURCH OFFICERS (effective January 1, 2014): see handout

Explanation of Missions @ JBC- (see Missions Budget & Faithful Giving Promise)

Small Groups (Growth Groups): see handout

NOTES (rest of page intentionally left blank):
Summary of some church policies and procedures

**Marriage**- must* be regular attenders of JBC. The pastors do not marry unbelievers or believers to non-believers. (A fully documented marriage policy is available upon request)

**Baptism**- must* be a regular attender of JBC who has demonstrated a genuine commitment to Jesus Christ. Baptism is by immersion for believers only.

**Parent/Child (Baby) Dedication**- At least one parent must be a regular attender of JBC and must demonstrate a genuine commitment to Jesus Christ. (A fully documented marriage policy is available upon request)

**Fund Raising**- We as a church do not employ or advocate any type of fundraising. We have always conducted our ministry and ministries by our firm belief that “God’s work, done God’s way will never lack God’s provision”.

**Advertisement**- We do not allow any advertisement or promotion of products, businesses, or business ventures of any nature through or by any means of the church, including the church directory, bulletin boards, or website. Jackson Baptist does have its own Facebook page and a Community Bulletin Board where posts of this nature are acceptable upon approval.

**Fellowship Fund**- Once a month on communion Sunday a special offering is taken to help members and regular attenders who may fall into financial hardship.

**Memorials**- We do not put up plaques or markers in memory of people. We do not publicly recognize individuals for giving special gifts.

**Child Protection**- Everyone involved in ministry to children (Nursery-High School) must read the child protection policy, fill out the application, be interviewed, screened, and provide references.

**Envelopes**- Members are encouraged to use envelopes for giving to the work of the ministry. The envelopes allow a person to allocate his/her giving to the general fund, missions or the mortgage reduction fund, or the food pantry simply by marking the amount on the front of the envelope. If you use checks you need only write one, the breakdown is done by the financial secretary. Using envelopes also makes it easier for the church to provide the giver with the proper documentation for tax purposes. We also encourage everyone to give online through our online giving system.

* exceptions have been made in regard to attendance for various case by case circumstances