



Sunday: September 7, 2014

Speaker: Pastor Doug

Title: What does it mean to be a Congregationalist? Part 1

Scripture: Matthew 18:20 *for where two or three are gathered in my name, I'm there with them.*

This is a general recounting of the message basics – access to our website will provide you with the video of this and all our messages.

I'm not talking today about our rich history that goes back to the Pilgrims on the Mayflower. What I want to do is give an answer to the question – what does it mean to be a Congregationalist? What makes a congregational church unique or different?

I will use as a guide the generally held congregational beliefs we have written in our bylaws and in our membership materials. Listen well for some important key words.

We are a **FREE** Church. This means that...

***We believe in direct (no one between) and immediate (instant) access to God. We believe that Jesus alone is the head of His Church. God's Spirit can speak directly to each member (YOU) and to a congregation without the benefit of any hierarchies or intermediaries.***

We are free in that we are independent of other churches, the authority of a pope, concept of apostolic succession, bishops or presbytery. We are free not just in terms of our polity but also in civil terms. We are staunchly committed to the separation of church and state. You cannot mingle the two.

In a free church - everything in the church is ours to conceive of and fashion.

Jesus alone is the head of each church. As we gather together honestly seeking truth (Lord's will for us), He will come in our midst to guide our minds and hearts in his intended way.

Our freedom is not freedom from authority or just an independent spirit but it is the freedom to follow Christ. It is the freedom to obey the Lord and care for each other, the freedom of faithful obedience.

Each church is free before God to order its own life as it feels directed to do so by the Holy Spirit. No one way of doing things can be handed to us as a decree or order from above us. We are a "free" church, free to follow Christ alone.

We are the **GATHERED** Church. This means that...

***We believe in the “gathered” church. The church exists based on Matthew 18:20 for where two or three come together in my name, I am there with them. This is a covenantal relationship of Christians bound together freely in the mutual bond of their common love for Christ.***

The common tie that binds us together regardless of our differences is our love for Christ. The theological foundation of congregationalism is bound up in this scripture: *for where two or three are gathered in my name, I’m there with them.* This is how we feel church is accurately defined.

The church is not defined by a denomination or a building but by this simple definition.

The church is gathered around Jesus, the head of each church, with his Spirit in our midst. The church is the people – not the minister or a denomination but the people themselves with Christ in their midst. The power (strength of the church), work of the church and the witness of any church rises or falls with what the people are. We are the “gathered” church – not solo believers.

We are a **COVENANT** Church. This means that...

We are covenant people as opposed to other churches that are creedal or confessional churches. Their test of faith is one’s acceptance of a set definition of Christian faith. To be part of a confessional church you have to agree with their set creed or their set statement of faith.

Congregational people believe that Christ made a covenant with His people. He didn’t say, *believe, these items of theology and you’re in.* He didn’t say *if you do these things and don’t do this other list of things then you’re in.* No he said, follow me, walk with me, live with me, trust me, and learn my way.

Jesus goal was not theological or doctrinal correctness and certainly not doctrinal sameness. Jesus wanted a personal relationship and a personal commitment. Jesus did not ask us to have bishops, hierarchy, canon law, creeds but he asked for simple belief – salvation by faith. *Come follow me and I will make you...*

Remember his words, *this cup is the new covenant....* Covenant is an agreement between God and man as to what their relationship will be. In this covenant, Christ is enough, He is Lord, to him and him alone we owe allegiance and obedience.

When you join this church is the moment when you “own” or give consent to the covenant. We articulate that covenant here at TAECC in the words: *in the search for truth (God’s will for us in our time) and in the spirit of Christ, I enter into covenant with God and this church for the worship of God and the service of mankind.* We are in a covenant together to worship God and serve mankind.

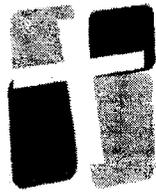
We are the **PEOPLES** church. This means that...

***We believe in "congregational polity". The congregation is a self-governing unit where duties and responsibilities are shared by all the members. As an autonomous church we are free from external control.***

Church lives or dies by the dedication and devotion of its people. The people own the mission. The people have the imagination and inspiration for the church. This is a priesthood of all believers.

Priesthood of all believers means never the priesthood of just the minister alone. Minister is one of the people. The minister first becomes a member of the church he or she will serve as pastor. The minister's ordination is actually tied to the church where he or she serves. The minister is one of the people because we are all the called... it is the people's church, it belongs to them, it is their work and their responsibility. The burden is not to be cast on just a few. This is the people's church.

\* Here we ended part one of the message – next Sunday we will cover Congregational views on God, Jesus, salvation, the Bible and the like. Be sure to avail yourself of part two!



**TAECC**

Thomas A. Edison  
Congregational Church

Sunday: September 14, 2014

Speaker: Pastor Doug

Title: What does it mean to be a Congregationalist? PART 2

Scripture: Matthew 18:20 *for where two or three are gathered in my name, I'm there with them.*

This past Sunday we discussed these key points about Congregationalism. We asked you to write down some key words.

- We are a **Free** church.
- We are a **Gathered** church.
- We are a **Covenant** church.
- We are a **People's** church.

We are not the only church. This means that...

***We believe in the "universal" church.*** *All believers are one under God, regardless of their denominational background.*

Congregationalist feel a oneness with all Christians. We cooperate with all Christians and people of all faiths. We accept all Christians wherever those Christians allow us to do so. We accept the ordination of other denominations as valid among us. We welcome all who love Jesus to our communion services. (open communion)

Our way is founded on the ecumenical principles from Jesus prayer in John 17 *that they will be one.*

I love the historic policy of this church. *All persons who love the Lord Jesus Christ are welcome to share our worship service, to partake of our communion and to seek membership in our fellowship.*

Yes we are a church where the word "all" means everyone. We honor Christ, as the head of all the church, by having a "big tent."

***We believe in God.*** *God's unity (oneness) is expressed in the Trinitarian view of God, the Father, God, the Son, and God, the Holy Spirit.*

The concept of the Trinity is what is foundational for our communion (interaction) with God.

It is to speak of God not only as Father who is the creator & sustainer of all but also to know God as Jesus Christ the Son of God who dwelt among us, who gave himself for us showing us what love is and finally to know the Holy Spirit who is God with us still today.

***We believe in being Christ centered.*** We focus on the life and teachings of Jesus. In following the teachings and will of Christ, we believe we are to live as if character and conduct matter.

When you hear us speak of the Congregational Way, that “way” is way of Jesus. The way of Jesus is essentially our “way.” (red letter Christians)

Theology is summed up in “knowing Christ.” God came into the life of the world and mankind through Jesus Christ. In Christ, God was present *reconciling the world to himself*. We hold this high view of Christ! Jesus is Lord! And we understand our faith through Jesus.

Congregationalists accept and focus on the teachings, the ethics and the example of Jesus but also above that we see that “in Christ” God was present *reconciling the world to himself*. Jesus is the Son of God but also He is the Savior of the World. Which leads to our next quote.

***We believe in a free and simple way to salvation.*** Salvation is the gift of God’s grace accepted by faith resulting in the forgiveness of sins, strength for life’s journey and the assurance of a destiny worth living for. It is to know oneself as a child of God with the opportunity to be the kind of person God desires us to be.

***We believe in the open (open to all) Bible.*** As we read, study and meditate upon the Bible the spiritual guidance it contains will direct the faith and practice of individuals and the church. Congregationalist are people of the Word. We are a people with a high view of Scripture. Why have canon laws and creeds when we have the Bible? The principles of the Bible will keep us true; check our freedom; bring us back to our mission.

Preaching is important in our churches. We are people gathered around the Word, around the pulpit, around the Bible, we are people of the Word.

The Bible is “open” to us because we are a people open to new revelations and not simply bound to the patterns, formulas or understandings of the past.

Congregationalism has a respect for science, history and archaeology. We seek to understand the scholarship of the Bible by bringing to it historical fact as well as the insights of science and archaeology.

Pastor John Robinson told the Mayflower pilgrims (our forefathers in the faith) before they sailed: *The Lord hath yet more truth and light to break forth from His Holy Word.*” Yes, God speaks in new ways to every generation. That is way we in our generation have covenanted together to be in the search for truth.

***We believe in being a church of thinking and seeking minds.*** We value the principle of freedom of conscience. We have no one statement of faith or cannon law that is binding on all. For one to have sincere convictions they must be given the opportunity for intellectual freedom and personal experience.

Who is to say what the truth of the Bible is? The Bible has meaning only as each man interprets it. There are many interpretations and you can only give yours. As I've said before, go home and look in the mirror – you'll be looking at the only person who fully agrees with you.

We value convictions over creeds. Every Congregationalist is given full liberty of conscience in interpreting the gospel.

Why are we committed to being “opened minded” as a church?

I think taking the time to study Romans 14 would be helpful.

*(5) Each person must have their own convictions. (22) keep the belief you have to yourself – its between you and God (19) so let's strive for the things that bring peace and the things that build each other up.*

We believe that the tent of our church is big enough to include the differences.

We are a free church, a gathered church, a covenant church, a church is for, of, and by the people, a church that is part of the universal church of all believers, a church build on relating to God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, a church that is Christ centered, a church where salvation is simple and free, a church gathered round the Bible that is open to all, and a church of convictions that are the product of thinking minds.

We are built on this truth: *where two or three are gathered in my name, I'm there with them.*