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Theme: The Church of God.

Proposition: The church is of God.

Scripture: I. Corinthians 1:1-3.

Text: I Corinthians 1:2.... "To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours;" (RSV)

Date written: June 19, 1958.

Dates and Places Preached:

June 22, 1958, 11 a. m., First Methodist, Skowhegan,  
Maine.  
Sept 15, 1963 - Montross, Colo.

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Introduction:

1. As a sort of preface or prologue in the order of the service for receiving members by profession of faith into the membership of The Methodist Church, the minister reads this statement: "The church is of God and will be preserved to the end of time, for the promotion of his worship and the due administration of his ordinances, the maintenance of Christian fellowship and discipline, the edification of believers, and the conversion of the world."

Do you believe this?

2. Attention here is focused on the first part of the statement, the words "the church is of God." Is it really? Or is it just another human organization, useful but not especially different nor especially good. <sup>Is it "as best by God's favor?"</sup> Naturally, <sup>most of us who belong to</sup> we of the church believe, or most of us do, that the church really is God's special institution, truly "of <sup>God</sup> Him." Toward a better understanding of this claim <sup>we turn</sup> our attention today.

3. We speak, of course, not of just The Methodist Church, but of all churches that strive to meet the standards of our opening quotation. We speak not of a denomination, but of "the church."

I. Scripture references to the church point it out as being of God.

1. Matthew 16:13-20 gives the most-quoted and most-argued-about quotation in the Bible of those which refer to the church. <sup>passages</sup> The words we choose here to institute our thinking are chosen to indicate clearly the Protestant interpretation. These words read, "Simon Peter replied, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.' And Jesus answered him.... 'and on this rock I will build my church.'" The faith that Jesus is "the Christ, the son of the living God," that <sup>Jesus</sup> He is the divine-human personality come to save man from himself, <sup>which</sup> is the foundation of the church. <sup>we believe that</sup> This, we believe, is the clear meaning of these words, and the intent of Jesus in speaking them. No man, Peter, Pope nor Minister, is necessary to the christian faith, no matter how helpful he may be. Here in this quotation Christ Himself is given as the one who instituted and founded the church, <sup>which is composed of those who believe He is the Christ.</sup> composed of those who believe He is the Christ.

2

I Corinthians 1:1-3



3  
OF THE CHURCH

2. Acts 8 tells us "a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the region of Judaea and Samaria." <sup>YOU MIGHT GUESS THAT THIS BEING SCATTERED WAS THE END</sup> ~~this very scattering made the church greater and larger.~~ <sup>for we</sup> read, "Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. Phillip went down to a city of Samaria, and proclaimed to them the Christ. And the multitude with one accord gave heed to what was said by Phillip." (RSV). Obviously, these early preachers believed God was with them and the church was of God. History seems to ~~vindicate~~ <sup>prove</sup> ~~their~~ <sup>their</sup> belief.

3. One final reference to Scripture ~~to~~ <sup>points</sup> out again the obvious fact that the New Testament is a testimony to the belief that the Church ~~is~~ <sup>the</sup> body of ~~Christ~~ <sup>Christ</sup> believers in Christ -- is of God. Here we quote Paul, ~~the very man who before being renamed~~ <sup>THIS</sup> ~~upon~~ <sup>named</sup> becoming a Christian was ~~the~~ <sup>he</sup> Saul, ~~who~~ <sup>he</sup> is recorded in Acts as the one who persecuted, scattered and arrested the Christians. ~~acted~~ <sup>acted</sup> upon the authority of the Jewish leaders as he did so. After conversion, ~~he~~ <sup>his name was changed to Paul</sup> became one of the most tireless and effective missionaries and christian influences of all time. ~~this~~ <sup>his letters to churches he should make a study of the N.T.</sup>

On Scripture is the selection we chose for today's reading and from which we took our text. I Corinthians <sup>1:1-3</sup> begins with words which ~~well~~ <sup>will</sup> summarize the attitude of Paul and the whole New Testament toward the church. We read, "Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and our brother Sosthenes, to the church of ~~Christ Jesus~~ <sup>Christ Jesus</sup> God which is at Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,"...

4. There is no doubt about it, <sup>according to</sup> ~~in~~ the New Testament the church is God's. Has it ~~so~~ <sup>continued</sup>? <sup>to be in the N.T.</sup> ~~Let's~~ take a brief look at the pages of history to support our contention that it ~~is~~ <sup>is</sup> ~~truly~~ <sup>truly</sup> the church of God, ~~because~~ <sup>because</sup>

II. The church's history indicates that it ~~is~~ <sup>has been</sup> of God.  
~~For many centuries after Jesus -~~

1. We would ~~not~~ <sup>most</sup> ~~deny~~ <sup>admit</sup> that there are many regrettable incidents in the history of the church.

I Corinthians 1:1-3

This does not mean that the church has always been perfect

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a. In the very earliest days <sup>of the church</sup> ~~of the denial of their faith by many (under the threat of persecution, a thing which has happened among many of the church's members thro' the centuries, is regrettable.~~

b. ~~The tendency to gain wealth and temporal authority at the expense of serving people further illustrates the way the church can get off its mission. Positions of prominence by churches of wealth in very poor communities, the receiving of tax money for support of a favored church, the denial of voting and educational rights to those not of the particular church in power (Geneva under Calvin or today's Spain), are instances of the church showing very ungodly tendencies.~~

c. The persecution in the name of Christ of those who ~~cannot~~ <sup>could</sup> believe as the church dictated is another bad page in the church's history book; <sup>we look name</sup> Savanorela, John Huss, <sup>and other Christian martyrs who were killed by the church.</sup>

d. Yielding to popular superstitions, like the Puritans did when in Salem they killed "witches," demonstrated weaknesses the church has been known to have.

e. As often charged, <sup>hypocrites are harbored</sup> ~~the harboring of hypocrits within the church we admit; but say we do not do it purposely.~~ This too is a weakness.

2. We <sup>MUST ADMIT</sup> ~~would assert~~ that these often-terrible, and certainly regrettable, <sup>weaknesses</sup> ~~events~~ were by imperfect people, <sup>like you and me</sup> as we all are. We would point out that ~~only~~ the church, of all wide-spread human institutions, <sup>most</sup> ~~constantly~~ examines its own motives and seeks to purify itself with God's help, <sup>the church</sup> admitting and repenting of its wrongs, <sup>going</sup> trying to right them, and seeking to avoid future wrongs.

3. We <sup>claim</sup> ~~would go further and say~~ that, in spite of its failures, over the centuries the church has shown that it is of God.

a. Augustine of Carthage, <sup>went</sup> ~~converted to Christianity~~ in the Rome to which he went to enjoy the pleasures of the capital city, was converted by overhearing <sup>HE</sup> ~~of~~ a devoted christian reading his devotions. Augustine was a good thinker, and became a great theologian. He wrote a massive work, many volumes, called "the city of God. It is Christianity's ancient,

I Corinthians 1:1-3

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11-11-11



reasonable and most-used concept of the church, written in about the 4th century a.d.. ~~In it the~~ "City of God" is depicted as being composed of ~~some~~ <sup>people</sup> these who are or <sup>who</sup> have been in the church, but ~~not~~ all of ~~these~~ <sup>church members</sup> are in the city of God, nor in the true church. The city of God is composed of all <sup>people</sup> who have a sincere faith in <sup>Christ</sup> and humble acceptance ~~of Christ as Saviour~~, and who seek to live as Christ would have. Such folks are part of the visible city of God, the church, <sup>in the visible</sup>, earthly church there <sup>are</sup> many hypocrits and wrongdoers. However, the sincere and true christians in the visible church <sup>and those who have gone thro death's gate and now are in heaven</sup> compose the true city of God, <sup>Augustine</sup> declares, and this city of God is the true church. Thus <sup>Augustine</sup> laid the reasonable theological definition of the church as <sup>the</sup> universal body ~~of~~ all christians, wherever they are, and whenever they lived. The Roman Catholic church claims Augustine's true city of God to be that church, and claims Augustine as one of its own. He was in Rome and of the church there, but the Roman church with its theory of an infallible pope did not exist as such at that time, ~~and the Roman Catholic claim is simply not true historically or reasonably.~~ <sup>Augustine's definition or description of the church as the universal and timeless body of Christians identifies him and the church as the messenger of God.</sup>

b. <sup>So another</sup> ~~One other~~ historical illustration ~~that the church is of God will suffice for our time and purpose here, and we propose a bit different source for our illustration, turning~~ <sup>now</sup> to American history. We think of Marcus Whitman and his wife Narcissa, who were commissioned about 1836 by the Presbyterian church as missionaries to the Indians of the Oregon territory. They went overland to the west, and Narcissa and the other woman-missionary of the party, <sup>o</sup>Mrs. Spalding, are said to be the first white women to have crossed the <sup>continent</sup>, <sup>on the</sup> overland route. Befriending the <sup>Indians</sup>, telling them of Christ, attempting to learn their language and to reduce it to writing and in it to produce the Bible, were routine parts of their work at the

I Corinthians 1:1-3



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mission they founded on the banks of the Walla-Walla. Sadness came when their little 2-year-old girl, their only child, during a service of worship for the Indians wandered off and drowned in the river. At that time both Great Britain and the United States were under pressures to annex the area. Marcus Whitman became concerned over the tactics of the British Hudson Bay Company to assure British control, for he saw in the persons and work of the Roman Catholic priests who were with the company a very serious threat to religious freedom, to his own work, and to political freedom. Firmly convinced that it was ~~not only best politically but necessary~~ <sup>and</sup> religiously for Oregon to become part of the United States, ~~and part of British-owned Canada~~, he made more than one trip on horseback across the continent to Washington, even in the dead of winter, to convince congressmen to bring his adapted area into the Union. ~~We know that~~ ~~he~~ was successful in this. He, his wife Narcissa, and ~~all~~ <sup>whites</sup> at the settlement were massacred by the Indians not many years after this. There is some indication, tho no proof, that the Indians were incited to these murders by those who were thwarted in their efforts to get the territory for Britain. We could cite case after case from history of missionaries who gave their lives in ~~their efforts to make their faith applicable to all areas of life themselves and among those they sought to reach.~~ We can ~~assert~~ safely that no other organization than the church, ~~there~~ no other religion than christianity, has so rich, numerous and effective incidents, ~~the~~ other faiths do have fine missionaries.

c. ~~Truly~~ <sup>does</sup> History indicates that the Church is of God.

III. Present-day experience indicates that the church still is of God.

1. This is a day of ~~constant~~ <sup>when</sup> fear ~~of~~ <sup>that an</sup> atomic detonation ~~that~~ might wipe out people. This is an age of ~~great~~ tensions ~~from uncertainty of~~ <sup>many</sup> sorts. This is a time of growing urbanization, with the bulk of the people living in the impersonal environment of ~~the~~ great cities.

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11-11-11

2. This is also a day in which church membership and attendance, both numerically and on a percentage-of-population basis, are higher than ever before. The church interest indicates that people are searching for something to answer their questions, sooth their fears and give them certainties by which to live. To these people, to you, the church speaks of a God who is none other than the universal, unimaginable, intelligent and good creator of the universe, <sup>one who</sup> is interested in each individual. <sup>who</sup> The church says <sup>that</sup> this God wants to be approached directly, by you, in your own words, <sup>about</sup> with the things that concern you, <sup>we</sup> call this approach prayer. ~~Because God is so unimaginably great the church is happy to point out that the human figure in all history was actually God-in-flesh, not thus limiting himself; but demonstrated the best toward~~ <sup>ON EARTH</sup> ~~which people can strive in this life.~~ <sup>WHO</sup> Further, the church says this God-man <sup>ACCEPTED</sup> took punishment and a brutal death, but rose from that death into a life immortal, <sup>THAT HE</sup> to be <sup>TEACH</sup> taught or symbolised that <sup>THAT</sup> ~~one~~ does not have to be punished for <sup>THESE</sup> sins and yet can have eternal life. The church says <sup>THAT</sup> God forgives when <sup>YOU</sup> truly repents of sin and turns <sup>TO</sup> to new life patterned on Christ's life and teachings. ~~that this Christ~~ the person who dies after receiving this new life will have by the gift of God eternal life in God's presence, in heaven. The church points to patterns of eternal ~~right, God-given patterns,~~ <sup>BY WHICH PEOPLE</sup> where men may live. The church provides a fellowship, instruction, worship and activities within which <sup>SO THAT</sup> the seeker of ~~work~~ God may go further and further in <sup>HIS</sup> understanding and application of his faith, <sup>YOU CAN</sup> finding the certainties, comfort and guidance <sup>you</sup> needs.

3. ~~If such an organization is not of God, none is. Truly it is God's church, even today. For this reason, and not chiefly, because it is popular and respectable, to do so, people are turning to the church.~~

IV. God leaves to church members the determination of whether or not the church will continue to be of God -- and it will.

1. It is a prime article of Methodist teaching and belief that God forces no one to be good, ~~to do~~

I Corinthians 1:1-3

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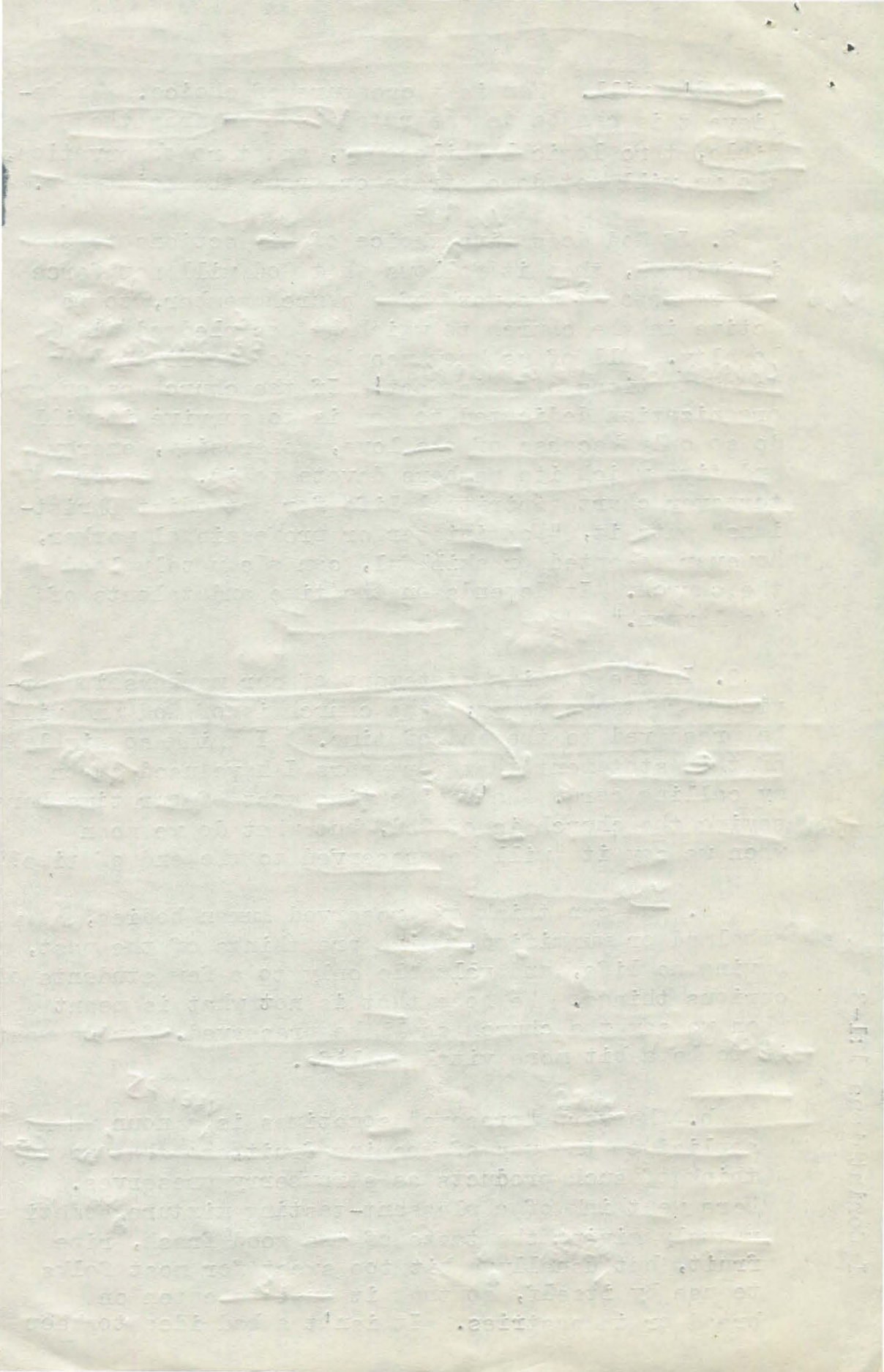
do God's will. Man is a creature of choice. We believe this can be demonstrated ~~as true~~ from the Bible, thro logical philosophy, and thro observation, tho we will not demonstrate or argue the point now.

2. If God does give <sup>YOU THE</sup> choice of <sup>YOUR</sup> his actions to the individual, then it follows that God will not force a person to ~~do~~ <sup>BE</sup> the work of a church member, ~~or~~ to be active in the church to which ~~he~~ <sup>YOU</sup> has pledged his loyalty. All of us know people who ~~are~~ <sup>BE</sup> living demonstrations of this fact! ~~the church as an organization dedicated to God is to survive it will do so only because of the love, generosity, energy and time which its members devote to it. As our turnover chart "Spiritual Life for Methodist Christians" puts it, "No minister or professional worker, however talented or skillful, can adequately lead the church. It depends on the time and talents of its laymen."~~ <sup>CHURCHES DON'T TAKE NO PART</sup> <sup>THEY BELONG TO THE</sup>

3. In the ~~opening~~ <sup>FACT</sup> statement of our membership service were these words, "the church is of God and will be preserved to the end of time." I think so highly of ~~the~~ <sup>THE</sup> statement that for years I have used ~~them~~ <sup>THEM</sup> on my calling card. We ~~are~~ <sup>HAVE</sup> spending most of our time here saying the church ~~is~~ <sup>IS</sup> of God, but what do we mean when we say it "will be preserved to the end of time?" <sup>TOOK</sup>

a. ~~one~~ <sup>YOU</sup> can think of preserved human bodies, ~~which~~ <sup>THEY</sup> have been embalmed or mummified, ~~which~~ <sup>THEY</sup> are things of the past, having no life, and valuable only to a few students of curious things. We hope that is ~~not~~ <sup>NOT</sup> what is meant when we say the church shall be preserved, ~~for~~ <sup>FOR</sup> we want ~~the~~ <sup>THE</sup> church to be a bit more vital to life.

b. The ~~verb~~ <sup>WORD</sup> "preseve" sometimes is <sup>USED AS</sup> a noun, when applied to the way of keeping fruit, so that we can think of such products as strawberry preserves. Here we think of a pleasant-tasting mixture, ~~sometimes~~ <sup>WHICH</sup> vaguely giving the taste of the good fresh, ripe fruit, but usually <sup>IS</sup> a bit too sweet for most folks to use by itself, so that it must be eaten on bread or in pastries. It isn't a bad idea to keep





the church <sup>as</sup> in a place and group which leaves a pleasant taste, but we hope it tastes more like the real <sup>THINGS</sup> substance of life than most fruit preserves. We hope, <sup>THE CHURCH</sup> too, that it is not so sweet that people quickly get enough, or rather, too much, of it. We trust it is an institution which does not have to mix with other things to be acceptable to most tastes, yet which does usually mix with other things and makes them more tasty, like <sup>FRUIT</sup> the preserves improve the bread on which you spread it.

c. The church will be preserved not as a static, unchanging, always-the-same organization, but as an organization always with the same goals.

Remember: The church is of God and will be preserved to the end of time for the promotion of his worship and the due administration of his ordinances, the maintenance of Christian fellowship and discipline, the edification of believers, and the conversion of the world.

~~It exists~~ For these things the church exists. It is not a dinner or supper club, the meals are means of fellowship. It is not a social organization, the good use of <sup>FREE</sup> time is surely a function of the church in which it should help people.

<sup>THE CHURCH</sup> It is not a profit-making institution, the wise use of its means enable it to do its task more thoroughly. <sup>THE CHURCH</sup> It is the place of God, religious first and last in all of its activities and phases, with <sup>PEOPLE</sup> these other things only being the frosting upon the cake which is God's will and word for our lives, so to speak.

d. If we keep this truth in mind, that the church exists and must be kept by us for the high purposes mentioned in our order of reception of members, it will be preserved <sup>IN OUR</sup> to the end of time by us and for us and for <sup>PEOPLE WHO</sup> members to follow us.

#### Conclusion:

1. The Bible shows the church to be an instrument and institution of God.
2. History and the present day demonstrate this to be still true, that the church indeed is of God.

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3. God leaves it to the members of His Church to use the church and to keep it, to "preserve it to the end of time."

4. With they hymn writer we can and must conclude:

THE CHURCH'S ONE FOUNDATION

*of Paul  
of church  
as to*

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