

Denominationalism, Religious Cults and World Religions

Lesson 1

Understanding the New Testament Church

Introduction:

There are well over 2,000 different religious groups in the U.S. today. There are more than 5,000 so-called "prophet movements" in Africa. Add to all these, the religions of Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Confucianism, Shinto and a host of other religions, and there should be no doubt about the fact that the world is drowning in religious confusion

The New Testament reveals there is only one church (Ephesians 4:4-6; 1:22-23). What was that church like? Can we find it today? And if there is ever a time in history when we cannot find that church, would it possible to restore that church in the world? In an effort to understand the origin of religious confusion and in an attempt to be the one church we read about in the New Testament, we are going to begin a study on religious division which will specifically focus on the growth of denominationalism in America and around the world.

However, before we look at religious error we need to understand the truth about the truth about the Lord's church – the church we read about in the New Testament. Once we have established that truth, based on what the Bible teaches, we will be able to indentify error in both the organization and teaching of churches that are not the Lord's one true church. Therefore, let's begin by looking at what the Bible teaches about the church Jesus died to establish.

I. The New Testament church was built according to the pattern.

- A. God has always given man pattern to follow in order to carry out the Lord's commands in the way He wants. In the Old Testament:
 - 1. God gave Noah a pattern for the ark (Gen 6:14-16, 22).
 - 2. God gave Moses a pattern for the tabernacle (Exod 25:9, 40; Heb 8:5).
 - 3. God gave a pattern for the temple (1 Chron 28:11-13).
- B. God has also given a pattern for His church.
 - 1. We are to obey the "form (pattern) of doctrine" (Rom 6:17).
 - 2. Paul taught the same in every church (1 Cor 4:17).
 - 3. We are to "hold the form (pattern) of sound words" (2 Tim 1:13).

- C. This divine blueprint is the New Testament (Jude 3, 2 John 9-11).
- D. "Churches of Christ" referred to collectives of individual Christians who all lived, worshipped and worked in a specific geographical location – the term did not refer to different churches or denominations (Rom 16:16).

II. The New Testament church was also built according to prophecy.

- A. There are numerous Old Testament prophecies concerning the church/kingdom Jesus came to establish.
 - 1. It was to be built in the last days when the Spirit was poured out (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2:1-47).
 - 2. It was to be built in the days of the Roman kings (Dan 2; Acts 2:1-47).
 - 3. It was to be built in the last days in Jerusalem; all nations would flow into it; and the gospel would be preached from Jerusalem (Isa 2:1-4; Micah 4:1-2; Acts 2:1-47).
- B. This means the New Testament church was always a part of God's eternal purpose (Eph 3:8-11).

III. The New Testament church belongs to Jesus Christ.

- A. There are three specific reasons why the church belongs to Jesus
 - 1. Jesus promised: "I will build my church" (Matt 16:13-20).
 - 2. He is also its foundation and chief cornerstone (1 Cor 3:11; Eph 2:19-22).
 - 3. He shed His blood for the church (Acts 20:28).

IV. The New Testament church has a specific organization.

- A. The characteristic marks of the New Testament church are:
 - 1. Jesus Christ is its Head (Eph 1:22-23; Col 1:18; Matt 28:18).
 - 2. The New Testament, Word of God, Gospel of Christ, is its constitution (Mark 16:15; Gal 1:6-9; 2 Tim 3:16-17; Rev 22:18-19).
 - 3. Each congregation is autonomous (Acts 14:23; Phil 1:1; 1 Pet 5:1-2).
 - 4. Elders were appointed to oversee local churches (Acts 14:23).

- a. They were also called bishops or overseers (Acts 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5-7).
- b. They were also called shepherds or pastors (Eph 4:11; 1 Pet 5:1-4).
- c. Elders had to meet specific qualifications (1 Tim 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9).
- 5. Deacons were appointed as servants of the church (Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 3:8-13).
- 6. Evangelists, ministers of the Word, were preachers of the gospel (Acts 21:8; Eph 4:11; 2 Tim 4:1-5).

V. The New Testament church has a specific pattern for worship (John 4:24).

- A. New Testament Christians met specifically on the first day of the week – a day that carried special significance (Acts 2:1 (Lev 23); Matt 28:1; Mark 16:1-2; Luke 24:1-3; John 20:1-2, 19, 26; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 16:1-2; Rev 1:10).
 - 1. The New Testament church partook of the Lord's supper (Matt 26:26-28; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 11:23-34; Acts 2:42).
 - 2. The New Testament church worshiped in prayer (Acts 2:42; 1 Tim 2:1-8).
 - 3. The New Testament church sang praises to God (Eph. 5:18-19; Col. 3:16-17).
 - 4. The New Testament church was edified by the preaching of God's Word (Matt 28:19-20; Acts 20:7; 2 Tim 4:2-4).
 - 5. The New Testament church gave of their means on the first day of the week. (1 Cor 16:1-2; 2 Cor 8 & 9).

VI. The New Testament church had a three-fold work to do.

- A. Jesus built and organized His church to do three things;
 - 1. To preach the gospel to the whole world (Matt 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:46-47; 2 Tim 2:2; Col 1:23).
 - 2. To edify the saved (Matt 28:20; Acts 20:7; Eph 4:11-15; Rom 1:15; Heb 5:12-14; 2 Pet 3:18).

3. To help the needy saints (limited benevolence) as opportunity presented itself (Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-37; 6:1-6; 11:27-30; 2 Cor 8 & 9; 1 Tim 5:3-16).
 - a. As individual Christians our benevolence is unlimited. We can help everyone according to our ability to do so (Gal 6:10; Jas 1:27).

VII. The New Testament church was united.

- A. There were no denominations because the apostles would not tolerate division.
 1. Jesus prayed for unity (John 17:20-21).
 2. Division was strongly condemned (1 Cor 1:10-13).
 3. False teachers were marked (Rom. 16:17-18; Titus 3:10-11; 2 John 9-11).
 4. Members were characterized by their love one for another (Acts 2:44-45; 4:34-37; John 13:34-35; 1 John 3:11; 16-18; 23).

VIII. The New Testament church maintained the same divine standard of morality.

- A. The Lord's church takes an uncompromising stand on morality.
 1. Works of the flesh were condemned (Gal 5:19-21).
 2. Those who walked disorderly were withdrawn from (1 Cor 5; 6:9-11; 2 Thess 3:6).

IX. The New Testament church had a common hope.

- A. The common hope was heaven.
 1. Their citizenship was in Heaven (Phil 3:20-21).
 2. They awaited the coming of the Lord (1 Thess 5:1-11).
 3. They were "strangers and pilgrims" on this earth (1 Pet 2:11).
 4. They awaited the "crown of life" at the Last Day (2 Tim 4:6-8).
 5. They looked for "new heavens and a new earth" (1 Pet 1:3-5; 2 Pet 3:13).

X. The New Testament Church had a specific plan of salvation.

- A. This pattern is seen throughout the New Testament
 - 1. One had to hear the gospel (Mark 16:15; Heb 11:6; John 6:44-45; Rom 10:17).
 - 2. One had to believe the gospel (1 Cor 15:1-4; Rom 1:16; John 8:24; Mark 16:15-16).
 - 3. One had to repent of his sins (Luke 24:47; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 17:30-31).
 - 4. One had to confess his faith that "Jesus Christ is the Son of God" (Matt 10:32-33; 16:16; Acts 8:37; Rom 10:9-10; 1 Tim 6:12).
 - 5. One had to be baptized (Mark 16:16; 1 Cor 12:13).
 - a. This was a burial in water (Rom 6:4-5; Col 2:12; Acts 8:36-38).
 - b. It was "for the remission of sins" (Matt 26:28; Acts 2:38).
 - c. It was by the authority of, or "in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" (Matt 28:19).
 - d. It was to put one into Christ where all spiritual blessings are (Gal 3:26-27; Eph 1:3).
 - e. It "saves" us (1 Pet 3:21; Acts 22:16; Rev 1:5; Mark 16:16).
 - f. It was only for accountable persons (1 John 3:4; Rom 3:23; Acts 8:12).
- B. Members of the New Testament church continue to have Jesus Christ as our Advocate, High Priest, and Mediator (1 John 2:1-2; Heb 4:15; 1 Tim 2:5).
 - 1. We are to confess our sins (1 John 1:6-10).
 - 2. We are to "repent and pray" (Acts 8:22).
 - 3. We are to remain faithful unto death (Rev 2:10)

Conclusion:

I. There was only one church in the beginning – the church Jesus came to establish.

- A. This church is unlike any other church or religious organization because:
 - 1. All the saved were members of it.
 - 2. It was built according to the pattern.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. What is meant by the term "churches" in the New Testament? Is this referring to different denominations, as some contend? Explain your answer.

2. What is the blueprint for the Lord's church?

3. When did the Lord's church begin? List some of the prophecies that help us pinpoint when the church began.

4. Where did the Lord's church begin? List some prophecies that help pinpoint the place where the church began.

5. Who is the Head of the New Testament church? What does this imply, and how is this different from religious denominations?

6. What is the three-fold work of the New Testament church? What about the church being active in politics, or an instrument to help bring about social change? Can the church be involved in this work, and if so, how?

7. What did the New Testament church teach and practice regarding a plan of salvation? List all the steps and supporting scriptures.

