

LESSON V

Last Time

You will remember that in Lesson IV, we studied some of the descriptions applied to the church in the New Testament. At the same time, we discovered that several different descriptions were applied to the individual members of that church. Do you remember that you told me then that these people were just Christians -- nothing more and nothing less?

This Time

In our lesson this time we want to continue drawing a picture of the church described in the New Testament. By reading these scriptures listed at the bottom of our chart, we will be able to complete the picture of this first century church.

ORGANIZATION

Everything which exists has some kind of organization or order. This church described in the New Testament is no exception.

Elders

(Read Titus 1:5,7.) You will note here that Paul is talking about ordaining someone in Verse 5. Who was that? (Elders) But we notice in Verse 7 that when certain qualifications are named, Paul refers to this office as what? (Bishops) So we see that in the church described in the New Testament, elders and bishops referred to the same office, don't we?

(Read Acts 20:17,28.) Paul called whom down to Ephesus? (Vs. 17-Ephesian elders) When he addressed them later, he said they had been made what? (Vs. 28 - overseers) So we see that elders and overseers referred to the same office in the church described in the New Testament, don't we?

(Read I Peter 5:1-3.) In this passage (Vs. 1) elders are again mentioned. In Verse 2 their job is to do what? (Answer: "feed the flock.") From this we can see that elders were also thought of as spiritual shepherds, caring for a flock.

Thus, we can see that the men called "elders" had the duty of overseeing the church. They were sometimes called by other terms, but each term merely described them.

- ❖ They were called "elders" because they were to be older men.
- ❖ They were called "bishops" because they were to "oversee" the church.

- ❖ They were called "shepherds" because it was their job to "pastor" the church like a shepherd pastors his flock.

Elders, then, were the spiritual leaders of each congregation.

Deacons

(Read Acts 6:1-4.) In Verses 2 & 4 we see that the early church had two obligations: That is, "serving tables" and "ministering the word." Both were important, so a set of men were placed over each.

We are not surprised to find someone in this church assigned the physical tasks of the church. Qualifications are given in I Timothy 3:8 for an office called "deacon." The word deacon means "servant," and that is what they were -- official servants of the church.

Members

(Read I Corinthians 12:27.) This shows that all Christians in the church described in the New Testament were "members."

Preachers

You may wonder what kind of preachers they had in this church of the New Testament, and what they called them.

In Romans 10:14 Paul calls those who preach "preachers." (This title describes their work.)

In I Corinthians 3:5 such men were called "ministers." (Again, this describes their work.)

Let's read Ephesians 4:11. You will notice that this church had an office called "pastor" and another one called "evangelist." Now I wonder which one of these referred to the preacher?

Well, let's turn over to II Timothy 4:5 and see what God's Word says Timothy did. It says here that Timothy was to do the "work of an evangelist," doesn't it? Also, he was to make full proof of his "ministry." So this church of the first century spoke of their preachers as "evangelists" with a "ministry." So far as the Bible reveals it, they did not call their preachers "pastor." (Remember, Ephesians 4:11 listed the two as separate offices.) You will recall from our previous study that the "elders" were the shepherds and pastors of the flock.

Also, let us read Matthew 23:9 to find out what Jesus said about calling religious teachers by titles. Here he forbids us to call any man "father" as a term of religious honor. In Verse 8 Jesus said "Rabbi" came under the same prohibition. "Reverend" is a modern title which men have applied to preachers, but it was never used to refer to preachers in the church described in the New Testament.

WORSHIP

Next, we would like to look at the worship of the church described in the New Testament.

- Teach - In Acts 5:42 we discover that the early church taught when they assembled.

- Pray - It is also quite plain that this church (according to I Timothy 2:8) prayed in their worship. (If teaching Catholics, you might want to read I Timothy 2:5 to show that Christ is our only mediator today, excluding even Mary.)

- Give - We find the giving of this church to be different from the tithe (or 10 percent) required under Moses' law. Instead, I Corinthians 16:1,2 shows their giving was done on the first day of the week and "as they were prospered." II Corinthians 9:7 adds two other points; that our giving be "purposed" and "cheerfully" done.

- Sing - (Read I Corinthians 14:15, Colossians 3:16, and Ephesians 5:19.) We know from these verses that the church described in the New Testament sang in its worship to God. All the New Testament references establish this point. It is interesting that not one mention is made of any kind of instrumental music. So, all the New Testament authorizes us to say about this church is that they sang in worship. (Pause here to let them object or disagree. Ask them if they had ever realized that this church didn't have instruments. Likely they will say they don't see that it makes any difference.) Your reply: Review the first chart with its cases of exact obedience as commanded, such as Noah, etc. Show that by this standard only singing is authorized by God. The only way we can be sure we are obeying God is by doing exactly what He has authorized.

EXTRA POINTS IF NEEDED

1. We don't know everything that God had in mind for our worship, but he does tell us a few points in Colossians 3:16. He wants us to teach and admonish each other as we sing. Certainly, we teach by singing in a way that we cannot do with any instrument. Also, scripture reveals the instrument by which we are to "make melody" to be the heart." (Ephesians 5:19)

2. There are a few other facts that make one wonder:
 - a. Instrumental music was used in Jewish worship. The church sprang out of a Jewish background. The early church had instrumental music all around it, yet it used none of it. It is certainly a strange omission. The natural thing would have been to have it, but the New Testament does not command it. (It makes you wonder why.)

- b. It is also odd that it took 600 years before church history reveals instrumental music being used to any extent. Even a corrupted Christianity stayed away from instruments for 600 years. (That is three times as long as our country's entire history!) Why this strange reluctance unless inspiration left some special guard against it? In point of fact, it was 1,000 years before this departure became general.
- c. The Greek Orthodox church of the East still speaks Greek, the language in which the New Testament was written originally. Today after all these years, they still do not use instrumental music in their worship. (The New Schaff Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, IV, pg. 51.)

Commune

1. What day did they meet? (First day)
You remember that the Corinthian church met on the first day of the week (Sunday), didn't they? We read that in I Corinthians 16:1,2. (This reference is already on your chart under "Give.")
2. What did they do? (Had communion.)
Read I Corinthians 11:20 in the King James Version and then some other translation too. The American Standard says "When therefore ye assemble yourselves together, it is not possible to eat the Lord's supper."

This shows that one of the reasons for which they came together each time was to eat the "Lord's Supper." But a reading of this context will show that they had so acted that they had ruined the very purpose of their coming together. So this verse establishes that they came together on their day of worship for the express purpose of keeping the Lord's Supper.

3. We have a concrete example of this at Troas.
When we read Acts 20:7 we find the church at Troas doing exactly the same thing.
4. Conclusion

So we can see that the church described in the New Testament met on each Sunday to commune in the Lord's Supper.

This completes our picture of the church described in the New Testament. Isn't it a beautiful picture? (Pause for their agreement.)

Wouldn't it be wonderful if everybody today just went back to the New Testament picture of this church and did exactly like they did? Certainly nothing could be wrong with going back to the New Testament and "restoring" the pattern which we find here. This is what I personally am trying to do today as a Christian.