

God's Plan for Saving Man

LESSON SEVEN - THE IDENTITY OF THE CHURCH

The church that you read about in the New Testament is a part of the "eternal purpose" of God (**Eph. 3:10-11**). It was built by Jesus Christ (**Mat. 16:18**), and we must be a part of it to be saved(**Eph. 5:23**). The word "church" comes from a Greek word that literally means "the called out"(**1 Pet. 2:9-10; Col. 1:12-13**). It is evident that one cannot be saved out of the church. **We need to make sure that what we are in is indeed the church that Jesus built(Eph. 1:22-23; 4:4-5**). How can we distinguish it from all the denominations of the world which claim to be the Lord's church?

If we are looking for a man or an automobile, we want all the **identifying marks**(age, color, size, make, model, etc.). If we are looking for the church we read about in the Bible, we need to know its identification marks. **The church as God planned it and as Christ built it is described in the New Testament.** We want to study **THE IDENTITY OF THE CHURCH.**

I. THE WORD "CHURCH" IS USED TO REFER TO THE SAVED IN TWO SENSES:

- A. THE UNIVERSAL(**Mat. 16:18; Eph. 1:22-23; Acts 20:28**).
- B. THE LOCAL(**1 Cor. 1:1-2; Gal. 1:1-2; Rom. 16:16**).

II. IDENTIFYING THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH:

- A. WHO IS THE **HEAD** OF THE CHURCH?(**Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18**). Who has all authority?(**Mat. 28:18**). What about the Pope? The head of the church of England is the King or Queen of England. The Mormons have their president, other's have their councils, conferences, and conventions which legislate and enforce laws. This makes the church its own head. The church has **NO** authority and makes no laws. When it does, it has rejected Christ's authority. The Lord's church looks to **Jesus** for guidance, **he is its ONLY head.**
- B. WHO IS THE **FOUNDATION**(**1 Cor. 3:11; Mat. 16:13-20**). What about the Catholic claim that Peter was the foundation? Around whom was the Mormon faith built? What is the guiding principle of the Jehovah's Witnesses?
- C. **WHO STARTED** THE CHURCH?(**Mat. 16:18; 15:13; Psalms 127:1**). Who started the Mormon Church? Joseph Smith. Who started the Methodist? John Wesley. Lutheran? Martin Luther. Mrs. Mary Baker Glover Patterson Eddy started the Church of Christ Scientists. These and many other denominations are eliminated because they have and claim the wrong founder.
- D. **WHERE AND WHEN** DID THE CHURCH BEGIN?(**Acts 2**). Here we find that those who were baptized were added to the church (**Acts 2:47 kjv**). We find also that they were gathered in **Jerusalem(Acts 2:1-5**). We can know that any church that started at a later date(**33 A.D.**)or in another place is not the church of the Lord. For example, the Lutheran Church began October 31, 1517, in Germany. The Methodist began in 1729 in England. From the Bible we know when and where the church began.
- E. WHAT WAS IT **CALLED**?(**Heb. 12:22-23; 12:28; Gal. 1:13; Rom. 16:16**).
- F. WHO ARE THE MEMBERS AND WHAT ARE THEY CALLED?
 - 1. All the saved are members(**Eph. 5:23-27; 1 Cor. 12:13**).
 - 2. Called "Christians"(**Acts 11:26; 1 Pet. 4:15-16**).
- G. WHEN REFERRING TO THE CHURCH IN THE UNIVERSAL SENSE, THE WORD "CHURCH" IS ALWAYS **SINGULAR. THERE IS NO ORGANIZATION FOR THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH.**

III. WHAT DOES GOD SAY ABOUT THE LOCAL CHURCH?

- A. AS WE SEE THE LOCAL CHURCH IN THE NEW TESTAMENT, IT IS A GROUP OF CHRISTIANS IN A PARTICULAR PLACE WHO HAVE **AGREED** TO WORK TOGETHER AS A UNIT UNDER A COMMON OVERSIGHT. IN THE LOCAL CHURCH, OR CONGREGATION, THERE IS **POOLING OF RESOURCES, ABILITIES, AND ACTION.**
- B. THE **ORGANIZATION** OF THE LOCAL CHURCH:
 - 1. All organization of the Lord's church is on a local basis. Each local church is **independent** and autonomous insofar as related to men and other churches.
 - 2. Each church is to have its own officers(**Phil. 1:1; Acts 14:23; 20:28**).
 - 3. The qualifications of bishops(also called elders, pastors, etc.)are found in **1 Tim. 3:1-14 and Titus 1:5-9.**

C. THE **WORK** OF THE CHURCH:

1. **God provided the local church as the only unit of organized and supervised action or work.**
2. Individual Christians working together do not necessarily constitute the church working(**1 Tim. 5:16**).
3. However, the church does nothing except through individuals who are members of it.
4. When the local church causes work to be done, there must first be agreement to work together, oversight, pooling of resources and action.
5. The work of the local church as given by God consists of:
 - a. Providing for public **worship** by specifying the time, providing the place, and making certain all that is needed is cared for(**Heb. 10:25**).
 - b. **Teaching the lost**(**1 Tim. 3:15; 1 Thes. 1:8; Acts 11:26**)
 - c. **Teaching the saints**(**Eph. 4:11-16**).
 - d. **Relieving needy saints**(**1 Cor. 16:1-2**).
6. **God did not provide oversight for the universal church** so it could work as a unit. He did not provide for the bishops of one church to oversee the work of other congregations. He provided a local treasury, but he did not provide for a treasury for the universal church; therefore, there would be no way to finance a "brotherhood" work. When many churches start sending their money to the elders of one church or to delegates representing many churches to do a brotherhood work, the pattern for the church as set forth in the New Testament has been violated. **There is no authorization for the centralization of the church.**

D. THE **PUBLIC WORSHIP** OF THE CHURCH.

1. Individuals may worship either in private or in the public assembly of the congregation, but God did not provide for the public worship of the universal church.
2. The local church must provide for the time, place, and essentials for the following acts of worship:
 - a. Singing(**Eph. 5:19**).
 - b. Preaching and teaching(**Acts 2:42; 5:42; 11:26**).
 - c. Praying(**Acts 2:42; 1 Tim. 2:1-2**).
 - d. Giving as we have been prospered on the first day of the week(**1 Cor. 16:1-2**).
 - e. The Lord's supper on the first day of the week(**1 Cor. 11:23-30**).
3. If we change the pattern of worship found in the New Testament, we destroy its identity just the same as if we were to change its organization or works or name or any other of its God-given characteristics. If we change the worship it will not be acceptable to God(**Mat. 15:8-9**). **God is not pleased when that which he has specified is changed.** The reason it is so hard to find the Lord's church today is that men have never ceased to add to his word.

CONCLUSION:

- A. THE LORD HAS SET FORTH A **PATTERN** IN THE NEW TESTAMENT AS TO WHAT HIS CHURCH IS TO BE LIKE.
- B. MOSES WAS GIVEN THIS WARNING CONCERNING THE TABERNACLE (**Heb. 8:1-5**).
- C. WE HAVE THE SAME INSTRUCTION FROM JOHN(**2 John 9**).