

The Church 3

Organization

Matt 16:18

1

18 "I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.

This will be our third lesson on...

2

"What Defines a Church of Christ"

In our first lesson we established that as there is but one God, one Christ, there is also but one Church, Eph 4. The Church that Jesus built was **HIS** church. The fact that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, Deity, is the foundation...

1 Cor 3:11

3

11 For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. He is the Savior and the Head of His Church, which is His bride...

Eph 5:23

4

23 For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body.

It was purchased with His blood...

Acts 20:28

5

28 "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

The church is the body of Christ...

Eph 1:22

6

22 And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church,

And remember as we have already seen, the scriptures are absolutely plain...

7

There is only one Church or body of Christ !!

We discussed the fact that since the Church belongs to Jesus Christ and is made of those that are saved, Acts 2:47, the New Testament is our only reliable guide to the Church's organization and the revelation of God's plan for bringing man to salvation through the blood of Christ. No man-made churches are described or authorized in the Bible, period. Isn't that what is seen in...

Ps 127:1

8

1 Unless the Lord builds the house, They labor in vain who build it; Unless the Lord guards the city, The watchman keeps awake in vain.

We started with the fact that there is only one Church that will be found acceptable to God and found righteous and in our last lesson we began a discussion of the identifying characteristics of that Church. We saw that God commands that His Church be loving and benevolent. We looked at the discussion of widows and orphans to establish the principles that God has put into place to govern how His Church deals with these issues. We saw that each local congregation is given the responsibility for those saint, faithful Christians, that are among them that may need help. We noted that nowhere, absolutely nowhere does God give the local congregation the authority to send money from the local contribution to a separate organization or institution, to facilitate the taking care of orphans or widows or flood victims, or any other need that may be. The conclusion being that if

there is a group that has decided that the proper way for it to fulfill its responsibility to those of its number and of the Church is by sending funds from its local treasury to a separate entity or institution to do that work, then that group does NOT meet the description that is seen in the New Testament Church.

This is our responsibility, to rightly divide God's Word, thereby showing ourselves to be...

9

Workmen that are not Ashamed

This brings us to our next discussion in hHow to identify a New Testament Church of Christ as opposed to anything else.

The New Testament often refers to

10

"The Church"

in a universal or collective sense. This concept encompasses the entire family of God throughout the world. Christ instructed His disciples to...

Mark 16:15-16

11

15 And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. **16** He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned.

Acts 2:47

12

47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.

The process being that when believes the good news of Jesus Christ and illustrates that faith in their obedience in baptism they are saved, and when saved, the Lord adds them to His Church. This is the Church in the universal or collective sense that all the saved are added to.

The scriptures also frequently refer to "The Church" in a local sense...

Rev 1:4

13

4 John to the seven churches that are in Asia:

Here the Lord addresses His remarks to 7 distinct and separate congregations of His people, Churches, that are in Asia. This is the Church in the local sense.

Now, here are the points that we are going to look at in this lesson. What is the organization that the scriptures describe for the Church, either...

14

A) Universal or Collective

B) Local (***Individual groups of the collective that are in the same location***)

The scriptures authorize no organization for the universal church, except Jesus, who is the

15

1) Absolute Ruler...

Eph 1:18-23

18 I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, **19** and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might **20** which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, **21** far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. **22** And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, **23** which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

16

2) With Absolute authority

Matt 28:18

18 And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.

There is no other organization of authority presented in the scriptures for the organization of the Church collective. Christ rules and gives the Church His instructions through His Word.

On the other hand the scriptures do give an outline for the organization of the Church in a local sense. As we saw in Revelation 1:4, the Lord recognizes that there are local groups of the saved of His Church that have gathered themselves together to worship God in the manner proscribed in the New Testament. It is that organization that delineates between many of the so-called religions of the world and the true Church of Christ as described in scripture. Now the only way to construct a picture of the true, original organization that God approves of is, to look into those scriptures.

The church was established in Jerusalem on the day Pentecost, about 33 A.D. as seen in Acts 2. After **Acts 2:47**, where we saw the Lord adding the saved to His Church, there is no reference in the New Testament to anyone who is saved apart from being in the Lord's Church. The Lord automatically adds the saved to the Church. Acceptance and placement into the Church, the body of Christ, occurs when someone responds in faithful obedience to the Gospel and is baptized. Baptism is that step in the process that God has established that brings man into contact with the blood of Christ.

Eph 1:7

17

7 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, And it is only the blood of Christ that can pay the debt for sin.

1 John 1:7

18

7 but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.

Baptism puts man into contact with the blood of Christ and that blood washes away man's sin, thereby saving him. Baptism saves...

1 Peter 3:2

19

21 Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

So then, in the first century Church, those that were saved and added to it became members of it and were simply called "Christians."

1 Peter 4:16

20

16 but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name.

Peter describes the individual that has been saved as a Christian. These sometimes have different descriptions indicating different relationships either with Christ or with the world or even sometimes both. In...

Acts 26:10

21

10 And this is just what I did in Jerusalem; not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons, As priests, a chosen race, a Holy nation, and a people of God's possession in...

1 Peter 2:9

22

9 But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION,

So we see the Church in the New Testament as having members that have various descriptions and the scriptures are filled with instructions for them telling them how to act in those various roles and how to best serve God.

Now note...

Eph 4:11-13

23

11 And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, **12** for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; **13** until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God,

Though all members are equal in God's eyes, they are to fill different roles in the Church. It is by God's design that women are not permitted to assume positions of Church leadership...

1 Cor 14:34

24

34 The women are to keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but are to subject themselves, just as the Law also says.

This is not God's commentary on the ability of women, it is not a discussion on their intellect, wisdom, understanding, or any such thing. It is a faithful obedience to God's Word.

In Eph 4 we saw that various and sundry roles were established for the purpose of equipping the saints, the saved, for the work of service. The fact that women are not to take a leadership role in that equipping in no way excuses them from serving God in their role.

From among the members are chosen teachers, preachers, deacons, and elders. These are all different roles that are filled by those with different abilities and desires.

1 Cor 12:27-29

25

27 Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it. **28** And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues. **29** All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not workers of miracles, are they?

Who are the teachers? All Christians are expected to be able to teach the lost...

1 Peter 3:14-15

26

14 But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. AND DO NOT FEAR THEIR INTIMIDATION, AND DO NOT BE TROUBLED, **15** but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence;

All Christians are told to "teach and admonish" one another...

Col 3:16

27

16 Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

And then are those who accept the responsibility to teach in a more formal manner, these have a greater burden...

James 3:1

28

1 Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment.

Then there are those who take on the job of publicly proclaiming the Word of God, preachers. Men who choose the ministry as an occupation...

1 Cor 9:14

29

14 So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel.

These are called preachers in **Rom. 10:14**, ministers in **Col. 1:23**, and evangelists in **Acts 21:8**. They have no duty to God that is any different from any other Christian, just a greater responsibility to work full time for the Gospel, but the same accountability for what they teach. The Apostle Paul instructed the young evangelist Timothy to "Preach the Word" in **II Tim. 4:2, 5**.

As we discussed, in the Church universal there is but one leader and that is Christ, but in the local congregation, the Lord has set up Elders to lead the local Churches by His authority only and not of their own.

Now, the term Deacon comes from a Greek word meaning "servant." We find the first Deacons, servants, being chosen because of a specific need in **Acts 6** when the Grecian widows were not being properly attended to. A point to be made here; Deacons are seen as servants to the Elders, or in this context the Apostles, they are not ever presented as having any authority other than that which is delegated by the Elders. As seen in Acts 6 and 1 Tim 3, God has given qualifications for men who would serve as Deacons, those who serve under the authority of the Elders. That is a discussion for a later time, suffice it to say that in New Testament times the local congregation in the first century had "bishops and deacons."

Phil 1:1

30

1 Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons:

By God's design "Elders" are to rule in the local church as seen in **I Tim. 5:17**. They are also referred to as "bishops" **I Tim. 3:1**, "overseers" **Acts 20:28**, and "shepherds" or "pastors" **I Pet. 5:2, 4; Eph. 4:11**.

Each church should be governed and supervised by a plurality of such men, not by one. There were "ElderS" over the church in Ephesus **Acts 20:17**, and "BishopS" over the church in Philippi, **Phil. 1:1**. Paul instructed Titus to "appoint elderS in every city" **Titus 1:5, Acts 14:23**. As a ruler in the church, an elder is only authorized to maintain those rules already set down by God, **Acts 20:30, Gal. 1:9**. He is to lead by his example, **I Pet. 5:3**. All Christians who have associated themselves with that local congregation have been commanded to submit to the leadership and authority of the Elders of that congregation, **I Pet. 5:5, Heb. 13:7, 17**. Note that nowhere do we Elders of one congregation having any authority over a different congregation only over the "Saints that are among them."

Again, the Lord has established qualifications for these men in I Tim. 3:1-7 and in Titus 1:6-9. The Elders only have authority such as has been given to them by the Lord. Christ is the head of the Church and all authority is His and from Him.

We cannot expect to be rewarded by God unless we live "according to the rules" (**II Tim. 2:5**) we find in God's Word. We can conclude that God will not be pleased unless we play by His rules. We don't want to be that plant that God roots up and throws into the eternal fire.

A New Testament Church is defined by its organization that follows the authority of Christ given by God. Christ adds to His Church those that are saved, the members. From those members all teach, some choose to teach formally, some choose to preach, some are chosen to formally serve as Deacons, and some are chosen to serve as Elders. Any other organization is unscriptural and will be rooted up.

The burden rests on each of us to make the determination of whether or not the Church we are looking at fits the standard of God's Word in its organization, teaching, benevolence, and every other characteristic of a Church of God's People.