

The New Testament Church Government 1

The Church of the New Testament was an extraordinary work of the Holy Spirit. But then every thing the Spirit does is extra ordinary. It grew and spread at an exponential rate. We can excuse the lack of work in our own time and place by saying that the kind of things that were done were special to start the spread of the Gospel throughout the world. But in our heart I believe we know that the lack is the dilution of believer's love for God, faith and expectation, and obedience to the Word. If we find the New Testament church established by the work of the Holy Spirit was structured in a certain way, do we have the option of changing it? In what ways? Is the form He established a part of the substance?

Certainly we can not change fundamental beliefs in the person and work of Christ. We have creeds that sum up the basics of our faith. In these creeds government is not mentioned. We must understand by that we are studying something that is not central to our faith and should not be a divisive issue. Yet, if the Holy Spirit led the Apostles to establish a form of government can we assume that there is a reason for that form? Should we endeavor to stay with that pattern that the Spirit revealed to the Apostles as much as is possible in our culture and situation? If it is irrelevant then we should change the topic for next week and continue with a short history lesson. If it is significant and was revealed to help us avoid error then we should carefully search the Scriptures to find what we can about it.

In exploring the Church of Jesus Christ after Pentecost we must try to take off the glasses of experience through which we are use to seeing so that we can examine it without bias. So as we start, set aside preconceived ideas and prepare to look at something quite different from most of the Church government today.

This week I would like to do a background as to why it is important to do things God's way with an illustration from Acts 1. Just before the Church began, we have what I believe is one last example of man's way. Not everyone agrees with this opinion but it is held and defended by many. In the beginning of the next chapter the church will be birthed as the Holy Spirit is poured out. Now the 120 are waiting the seven days between the ascension and Pentecost. Vs4 They don't know how long they are to wait but that is what Jesus had told them to do. Up through verse 14 they are doing what Jesus told them to do. In verse 20 Peter quotes several verses from the Psalms about Judas. We don't know if Jesus shared them with him or if he was inspired to recall them from songs sung in worship. Verse 21 and 22 show Peter's preconceived qualifying conditions. 1. He must have been with them from the beginning of Jesus ministry. 2. He must be a witness of the resurrection. Where did he get those qualifications?

Remember the Holy Spirit is not yet poured out. They found two men that met the conditions. Verse 24 They ask God to pick one of these guys. Do we sometimes give God our options when He may have another? Is it possible to see a truth in Scripture and then try to fulfill it ourselves? Verse 26 Lots were cast to determine God's choice. Prov 16:33 Remember lots were cast by the sailors to determine the storm was caused by Jonah. These sailors were not believers. Two stones are placed in a jar, each with the name of one of the men. The jar is shaken and the first stone out is the one God chose.

What had Jesus told them the Spirit was coming to do? "Lead them into all truth", so what is Peter trying to do? Do you think he meant well? We never hear of Matthias again but we do hear of the Apostle God selected. Paul declared that he was an Apostle (18 times), born at the wrong time – like a miscarriage. 1Cor 15:7-9, Gal 1:1, 1Cor 4:9 On the foundation of New Jerusalem are the names of the twelve Apostles, a very select group. Rev 21:14 Do you think it includes Matthias or Paul? We are built on the foundation of the teaching of the apostles Gal 2:20. Any doubt now?

So what can we learn from this? Man would like to be the head of structure and organization, make decisions, reason out the best course of action. What is the fruit that remains of all that? Who is the head of the church? Eph 5:23 1Cor 12:27 Christ is the head and we are members of the body. We are suppose to take are orders and instructions from Christ just as He took his from the Father.

One of the greatest discoveries of the Reformation was the priesthood of believers. 1Pt 2:5,9 This concept is important for to understand for our upcoming studies. During the Old Testament era we had priests that represented us to God, and prophets who were the voice of God to us. God had promised through the prophets that the day would come when He would personally live with us. Christ atonement made that possible and the promised Holy Spirit was sent. Now as we read the Word and pray the Spirit speaks to our hearts and teaches us directly. Our High Priest is Jesus. He is the only mediator between us and God. 1Tim 2:5 We each can stand before God because of what Christ has done for us. We need no man to represent us except for the One who bears the marks that paid for our sins.

Hopefully we are ending this lesson understanding 2 points. Man's way often differs from God's way. Each believer has access to God without any mediator but Jesus Christ. In much of the Church today we have a corporate structure. The members elect the board. The Pastor is the CEO. This is nowhere to be found in Scripture. Where did this all begin and why? What was the original structure and how did it function? That is what we will examine in the next few weeks. Be prepared for some surprises.