

The Church

New Life's Ecclesiology

Part II: The New Testament Church and Contemporary Churches Compared ***(Can Today's Organized Religion's Leadership Structures Be Justified by Scripture?)***

- Questions we will address:
 - Are most modern churches operating with a leadership structure and authority that was outlined in the New Testament and expressed in the New Testament church?
 - Are modern churches finding a way for Jesus and His Holy Spirit to lead them?
 - Or are our churches predominantly driven by charismatic pastors, boards modeled after corporate administrations, and human ideas and opinions?
 - How good a job has organized religion done to keep our nation and country moral and righteous?
 - And not embrace our society's increasingly paganized acceptance of immorality, perversion, and abortion.

- We should pray for today's church, and bless her attempts at goodness and the promotion of an historical Christian worldview

- But the church's destiny, and the desire of the Trinity, was that she become a church that is empowered by the Holy Spirit to bring Jesus' salvation message to the lost, to teach and preserve the Word of God, and to incorporate into our culture realities of the Kingdom of God to come

- Churches in the first century featured:
 - Individual, self-governing small groups of believers scattered throughout Europe and Western Asia
 - Leadership by local leaders called elders (*bishops*) who were apostle-appointed (*and God-selected*)
 - Informal networks led by apostles like Paul and his helpers (*Timothy, Titus, Priscilla and Aquilla, Apollos, Phoebe, Epaphras*)
 - Communication maintained between the groups by visits and letters from apostolic leadership
 - Shared resources (*offerings taken up for the more needy assemblies*)
 - Unity: no denominations
 - The absence of a church hierarchy (*priests, archbishops, popes*) or official territorial jurisdictions
 - Size? The largest churches perhaps 50-150
 - There likely were several house churches per city
 - Prophetic guidance given by the Holy Spirit through individuals recognized as prophets

- Acts 13:1
- Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (*who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch*), and Saul.
- The presence and honoring of prophets indicates an attempt to hear from the Holy Spirit through gifted people and to not rely exclusively on human logic, reasoning, and organization
- The recognized church leadership (*Eph. 4*) in the New Testament church was:
 - Apostles (*Paul and 13 others mentioned*)
 - Prophets (*Agabus; Phillip's daughters*)
 - Evangelists (*Phillip, Apollos*)
 - Pastors ??(*Shepherds*)
 - Teachers (*Apollos, Paul, Timothy, others implied*)
 - Preachers?? (*Proclaimers of the good news*): Solomon, the 12, Paul
- Much of the ministry inside and outside of the New Testament church was done by church members, the "laity," not the church leadership (*whose role was to train the believers*)
- Eph. 4:12-13
- ...to equip the saints for works of ministry and to build up the body of Christ...
- The first century church was primarily a group of people in relationship, and secondarily a structured organization with positions and offices
- Where there is love, trust, and law-keeping, there is no need for law or government
- New Testament church leadership is challenged to not build an ecclesiastic hierarchy or establish rigid rules applying to the practice of the Faith, but to create an atmosphere that allows the believer to:
 - Meet and experience Jesus' Holy Spirit
 - To learn to personally hear Jesus' voice on their own (*"My sheep hear my voice"*)
 - To worship Him
 - To be transformed, renewed and healed by Him
- Early local church leaders consisted of elders and deacons
 - Supported by trans-local five-fold ministers (*apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers*)

- Deacons in the early church: men (*and later women*) chosen to serve tables
 - But anointed as well: Stephen and Phillip
- Acts 6:1-3
- In those days when the disciples were increasing in number, the Grecian Jews among them began to grumble against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So, the Twelve summoned all the disciples and said, "It is unacceptable for us to neglect the word of God in order to wait on tables. Therefore, brothers, select from among you seven men confirmed to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will appoint this responsibility to them."
- Elders:
- Acts 22:23
- And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord.
- Was church leadership effective in the first century?
- Acts 17:6
- "These that have turned the world upside down are come here also!"
- Romans 15:19; 24
- So, from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ...I hope to see you on my way to Spain.
- The modern church does not look like the first century church
- How did we get to where we are today?
- First some history:
- The church was under persecution off and on from the time of Emperor Nero (60 AD) until Emperor Constantine
 - In 313 AD Emperor Constantine issued the Edict of Milan, granting to Christians and others "the right of open and free observance of their worship."
 - In 380 AD under Emperor Theodosius, Christianity became the official religion of Rome
- Missions rapidly spread the gospel to Britain, Ireland, Western Germany, the Balkans, and the Middle East
- The bishop of Rome (*the Pope*) ruled Western Europe while a Patriarch in Constantinople (*modern day Istanbul*) ruled the East

- The pagan temples, literature, libraries and culture were destroyed after Constantine's conversion
- A Roman Catholic hierarchy with a powerful pope and his cronies developed
 - There was minimal training of priest, little oversight of individual parishes
 - Holy Communion was offered four times a year; confession rarely
 - A system for collecting tithes was established
 - Religious dissent was brutally suppressed
 - Anti-Semitism was widespread
 - The "fruit" of combining religious and secular power
 - A cult of the saints and relics developed
- With uneducated, disorganized local priests and parishes, not surprisingly, heresy and pagan influences invaded medieval church practices
- Boniface in the 700's AD described most priests as "spending their lives in debauchery, adultery, and every kind of filth."
- A 742 AD German council passed a decree condemning pagan rites performed in churches including:
 - The sacrifice of animals
 - Sacrifices to the dead
 - Pagan incantations
 - Divination
- Middle Ages: 500 AD – 1500 AD
 - Small feudal kingdoms covered Europe
 - Eventually the stronger feudal lords became kings and emperors
- Charlemagne (740 AD +)
 - Conquered most of western Europe
 - And was crowned as the first "Holy Roman Emperor" by Pope Leo III
- Charlemagne enlisted a British monk, Alcuin of York (740 AD to 804 AD) to tutor his children and begin an education system for royalty and the populace
- Alcuin's of "hope" for medieval Christians
 - That all Christians learn the Lord's Prayer first, and then the Ten Commandments
- There were several particularly infamous popes
 - With numerous wives and mistresses
 - Known for their gambling and drinking
 - They killed and tortured their rivals
 - They accumulated millions of dollars in wealth

- The office of pope was reformed in 1050 AD by Gregory VII
 - The powerful popes thereafter selected and crowned most Holy Roman Emperors
 - The pope and the Grand Inquisitor were more powerful than kings in the later Middle Ages
- Summary: the church throughout the Middle Ages featured:
 - The development of powerful, rigid hierarchies
 - Shared power with secular authorities
 - Increasing corruption and immorality
 - Little or no training for local church leaders (*priests*)
 - Man-run bureaucracies governed the church...not the Holy Spirit
- Until the Reformation, the people of God had little access to the Bible
 - Before the printing press Bibles were rare and hard to produce
 - Very few translations were available in native European tongues (*only Greek and Latin*)
 - Most of the laity was illiterate
 - The Bible was deliberately kept from the people by the “church”
- Decree of the Council of Toulouse (*1229 AD*):
 - "We prohibit also that the laity should be permitted to have the books of the Old or New Testament; and we most strictly forbid their having any translation of these books."
- As late as 1536 AD William Tyndale was burned at the stake for translating the Bible into English by Catholic authorities in Belgium (*he was betrayed by the British*)
- The Protestant Reformation
 - A movement to place the Word of God in the hands of the people of God
 - Began as opposition the Roman Catholic institutional excesses (*indulgences, corrupt clergy, greed, laity exclusion*)
 - We will yet look at the revivals and church movements since the Reformation to come
- The “Second” Reformation
 - A movement to place the work of God in the hands of the people of God
 - “Parachurch” organizations
 - Focus on the Family, Intersity, Gideons, YWAM, Prison Fellowship, Wycliffe, Samaritan’s Purse, Billy Graham Evangelistic Association
 - Very effective in their missions; a blessing
 - But Holy Spirit-led individual, local churches faithful to their mission are closest to the New Testament church model

- Modern church leadership described in broad strokes:
 - A corporate, administration-driven model
 - The pastor is an employee and an administrator
 - Pastors are hired to teach, administer, pastor (*counsel*) and evangelize
 - Pastors are hired and fired by church boards and/or denomination leadership
- Denominational governments
 - Have a form of apostolic government but, not the *life* of it
 - Pastors are not well supported by their denominations
 - Pastors go to secular sources for counsel (*doctors, lawyers, psychiatrists*)
- Many denominations have become an embarrassment to local, conservative congregations
 - The Anglican, the United Methodist, the Reformed Church of America, Presbyterian
 - With their rejection of historical Christian norms
 - And embrace of Biblical "higher criticism" and gay ordination and marriage
- Denominations tend to cover up local church problems (*witness the financial and sexual indiscretion scandals*)
 - They move pastors from church to church
 - Methodist pastors are "itinerant" – appointments are for a year at a time
- Independent congregations
 - Lack supervision over doctrine and practice
 - Have no accountability
 - Are at high risk for financial and sexual impropriety
 - Have not infrequently become cults
- The list of "offices" or ministry positions in the New Testament church
- I Cor 12: 27-28
- Now you are the body of Christ, and each of you is a member of it. And in the church God has appointed *first* apostles, *second* prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, and those with gifts of healing, helping, administration, and various tongues.
- Eph. 4:11
- And it was He who gave some to be *apostles*, some to be *prophets*, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers...
- Most denominational and independent churches have an authority structure different from that taught in the Bible and practiced in the first century. The contemporary order:
 - Pastor-teacher-preacher-administrator
 - Board (*bishops [elders] or deacons*) (*which may have more authority than the pastor*)
 - *Or denomination oversight (apostle-equivalents) in consultation*

- Note: there are no apostles in most modern churches
 - There is no “office” of prophet (*nor really ever was*)
 - *Prophets spoke to leadership from outside—independent from the government or church*
- There are few evangelists
- There are no healers or deliverers (*Catholic and Charismatic exceptions*)
- Where are pastors, teachers and administrators on Paul's Ephesians 4 order?
 - They are listed after apostles and prophets
 - The point: the church needs divine, Holy Spirit leadership and guidance from leadership members who are gifted in hearing from God: apostles and prophets
 - Modern churches have a very anti-supernatural leadership structure
 - Recall: “in Antioch there were prophets and teachers”
- In a typical Western Protestant church, the pastor as teacher and/or administrator is hired to run the church
 - Board decisions are made by a “vote”
 - Sometimes a congregational vote
- Question: how often do we find “voting” done in the Bible?
 - Decisions in the Bible were made by:
 - God (*Israel gets a king*)
 - Kings’ decrees
 - Consensus (*Acts 13, first mission trip; Acts 15 circumcision decision*)
 - Casting lots
- In the modern church:
 - Apostolic input from denominational leadership is ignored, unavailable, used to cover up leadership sin, or encourage cultural hipness
 - Prophetic input of the rhema is either rejected as even possible, or shunned
 - This leadership style is human, corporate, legislative, opinion-driven—not Holy Spirit-led
- In the New Testament church
 - The authority was with apostles, prophets, teachers, pastors, elders, deacons
 - The pastor was likely the “chief” elder
 - He co-ruled with the elders and consulted the apostles and prophets
 - He was not hired and fired by the congregation or board
 - The pastor was appointed by an apostle, under the direction of the Holy Spirit
 - And if placed in authority by the Holy Spirit, the pastor could not easily be removed by human authority

- Psalm 105:14-15
- He let no man oppress them;
- He rebuked kings on their behalf:
- “Do not touch My anointed ones!
- Do no harm to My prophets!”

- I Tim. 5:19-20
- Do not entertain an accusation against an elder, except on the testimony of two or three witnesses. But those who persist in sin should be rebuked in front of everyone, so that the others will stand in fear of sin

- If church government is most likely to succeed when consistent with the guidelines and example set in the Bible and practiced in the New Testament church...
 - Then can administrative-base, human appointed and led church leadership structures be justified?
 - Do we not need apostles and prophets to help us hear the Holy Spirit's guidance?

- Eph. 4: 10-13
- And it was He who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for works of ministry and to build up the body of Christ, until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God, as we mature to the full measure of the stature of Christ.

- Do we see this yet?

- Most all Christians would agree that pastors and teachers are still needed in the church
 - Conservative churches agree that evangelists are still needed

- But the function provide by the apostles and prophets still exists
 - Church planting supervision (*local and international missions*)
 - Pastoral and elder advising, counseling, rebuking
 - The speaking forth of the in-the-moment rhema of God to prophetically help make church decisions

- These functions are being carried out today, however imperfectly, and often without divine input, by church hierarches in major denominations
 - By cardinals, bishops, archbishops, patriarchs, presidents

- Few use the titles “apostle” or “prophet,” (*Pentecostal exceptions*)
 - Perhaps out of humility
 - Or due to unnecessarily excessive awe of Peter, Paul, John and the others
 - Or in fear of the abuse of authority
 - But also, more likely, because many church leaders do not really hear from God in their decisions

- It is much safer to try to recognize apostolic and prophetic input today in the church than to omit it
- Healthy, mature, prayed-for, God-centered, God-listening to, Holy Spirit-led leadership can better spot and manage satanic attempts to sabotage the church as well as potential excesses and abuse of authority than human theories and opinions can
- The questions asked at the beginning of this talk:
 - Are most modern churches operating with a leadership structure and authority that was outlined in the New Testament and expressed in the New Testament church?
 - Do they find a way for Jesus and His Holy Spirit to lead their churches?
 - Or are our churches predominantly driven by a corporate administrative model and by human opinions?
- If we perceive problems in church leadership (*at New Life and elsewhere*), let us:
 - Not judge
 - Not divide the church further
 - Rather, pray for the church locally and worldwide
 - And resolve to do better ourselves at New Life
- John 4:21; 24
- "Believe Me, woman," Jesus replied, "a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem...God is Spirit, and His worshipers must worship Him in spirit and in truth."

ADDENDUM

- Did the need for the prophetic word cease with the canon, the completed *logos*?
 - The "perfect" in I Cor. 13:8-10
- I Cor. 13:8-10
- Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away.
- The argument: that prophecies and tongues have ceased
 - Did knowledge cease?
 - Has prophecy ceased?
- The "perfect" is not the canon and the Bible

- The Bible is cool, adequate, divinely-inspired, but not “perfect”
 - But there are two main manuscript lines translated into English
 - There are innumerable Greek and Hebrew revisions and corrections in the translations
 - *(More in the Greek NT than the Hebrew OT)*
 - Modern English translations are “literal (*word-for-word*),” “dynamic equivalent (*thought-for-thought*),” paraphrase
- II Tim. 3:16
- All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable (*Gr: ophelimos*) for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:
- Óphelimos: profitable, useful, beneficial
- The “perfect” in I Corinthians 13 is perfect love, which if expressed, does not need the help of all the gifts of the spirit explained in Chapters 12 and 14 (*or the “help” of the Law*)
- “Perfect love casts out fear...” I John 4:18
- “Love is the fulfillment of the law.” Rom. 13:10
- At the Second Coming of Jesus, we will experience the “perfect,” by joining:
 - Christ the perfect Head with the church, His perfected body
 - And Christ the Bridegroom with the church, His spotless bride
 - Eph. 4:15-16
- We will in all things grow up into Christ Himself, who is the head. From Him the whole body, fitted and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love through the work of each individual part.