

Know Your Bible

BY GENE TOPE

LESSON

CORRESPONDENCE COURSE

I. THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

There is but one true church! This is the church we read of in the Bible. It is the church that was purchased by the blood of Christ (Acts 20:28) and started by the apostles. One must be in this church to be saved. It is these facts we wish to demonstrate to the student in this lesson.

It is our intention in this study to consider the church as it was originally. That means that we must go back beyond all modern day denominationalism, back beyond the formation of the Roman Catholic Church, back to the days of the apostles 2,000 years ago! We believe that from such a study one can see what the church should be like today.

PENTECOST—THE CHURCH'S BIRTHDAY (ACTS 2)

Acts 2 tells us how the church actually came into existence. You will recall from our last lesson that Peter and the eleven, having been baptized with the Holy Spirit, were enabled to tell a great audience what they must do to obtain salvation. When the people were moved to ask, "What shall we do?" Peter told them to repent and be baptized (v. 38). The record says, "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized; and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls" (v. 41). Acts 2 closes with this explanation: "And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved."

FROM ACTS 2 WE LEARN THE FOLLOWING IMPORTANT THINGS:

1. All those who obeyed Peter's preaching were saved from their sins.
2. All the saved were added to the church. There were no saved people in Jerusalem outside the church. The New Testament teaches that being saved and being added to the church occur at the same time.
3. God does the adding. This is not man's work. We do not read of anyone "joining the church" in New Testament times.
4. Acts 2 marks the beginning of the church Jesus promised to build.

Q U E S T I O N S

FILL IN THE BLANKS

1. The _____ was purchased by the blood of Christ.
2. Acts chapter _____ tells us of the birthday of the church.
3. The _____ enabled the apostles to preach the Gospel.
4. The _____ added to the _____ daily such as should be _____.

TRUE OR FALSE CIRCLE CORRECT ANSWER

- T F 1. A study of the original church shows what the church should be like today.
- T F 2. About 3,000 people were baptized on Pentecost.
- T F 3. The Lord did not add all of the saved to the church.
- T F 4. The saved all continued steadfastly together.

II. THE WORSHIP OF THE EARLY CHURCH

It is both interesting and profitable to notice how the church of Christ worshipped. A study of the Jerusalem church is especially helpful in discussing this topic. Acts 2:42 tells us: “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine, and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.” Four activities are mentioned here that we will consider in order. To continue in the apostles’ doctrine would mean that the early disciples both heard and obeyed the teachings of the apostles. As inspired men, their teachings were equal to the inspiration of Old Testament writings (see 2 Pet. 3:2). Hence the disciples listened reverently and eagerly to these Spirit-led men.

The word *fellowship* means “joint participation” or “a sharing together,” and of course this plays a vital role in Christianity. We are to have fellowship with God and fellow Christians. One special phase of fellowship is the giving of our money to the service of God. From the very beginning, the disciples were noted for such generosity (see Acts 4:32, 34, 35). Christ is the Christian’s example here inasmuch as he became poor for our sakes that we might become rich through his sacrifice (2 Cor. 8:9). The New Testament teaches that Christians are to give according to their prosperity every first day of the week (1 Cor. 16:1, 2).



The breaking of bread refers to the Lord’s supper and not to the eating of a common meal (1 Cor. 10:16). This very important part of worship was instituted

on the night of our Lord's betrayal. Every faithful Christian is to partake both of the bread and the cup which recall the Lord's body and blood. Some ask, "How often should we partake?" Early disciples broke the bread every first day of the week, every Sunday (Acts 20:7). As this is undoubtedly the inspired record and as it received the approval of the Apostle Paul, it would behoove all those wanting to follow the divine pattern to do likewise each Lord's day.



Prayer has always been a most blessed privilege of worship. The Jerusalem disciples continued steadfastly in such supplications to God. Prayer can properly be counted as an act of worship because in it we praise God and show our dependence on him (Matt. 6:9-13). God answers the prayers of only those wanting to do his will (1 Pet. 3:12).

Singing, though not mentioned specifically in Acts 2:42, must be included in the worship of early Christians. In Colossians 3:16 we read, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." It is significant that though David in Old Testament times used various musical instruments, New Testament Christians always sang their praises unaccompanied by such. The command and example in each place in the New Testament is to "sing."



QUESTIONS

FILL IN THE BLANKS

1. Acts 2:42 mentions _____ activities of worship the Jerusalem church engaged in.
2. As inspired men the apostles' _____ were equal to the inspiration of Old Testament writings.
3. The New Testament teaches that Christians are to give _____ to their _____, every _____ day of the week.
4. "And upon the _____ of the week, when the disciples came together _____, Paul preached unto them. . . ."
5. In _____ Testament times various musical instruments were used in worship.

TRUE OR FALSE**CIRCLE CORRECT ANSWER**

- T F 1. The word fellowship means “joint participation.”
- T F 2. The New Testament does not teach Christians how they ought to give.
- T F 3. The term “breaking of bread” never refers to the Lord’s supper.
- T F 4. The New Testament teaches that the Lord’s supper may be partaken of any day during the week.
- T F 5. The command and example in each place in the New Testament is to “sing.”

UNDERLINE THE CORRECT ANSWER

1. In New Testament times, Christians gave and partook of the Lord’s supper on (1) the Sabbath (Saturday), (2) the first day of the week (Sunday).
2. God’s people used instruments of music in worship in the (1) Old Testament era, (2) New Testament era.
3. 1 Corinthians 16:1, 2 teach Christians to (1) tithe, (2) give as they have been prospered.

III. NEW TESTAMENT UNITY

As the Jerusalem church is a model to be followed in worship, so it is also in its display of unity: “And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul” (Acts 4:32). Such harmony was not a mere accident, but rather an answer to Christ’s prayer that all his disciples might “be one” (John 17:21-23).

It was never Christ’s intention that there should be many churches. Indeed, the New Testament recognizes only ONE. “I will build my church,” Jesus said. Years later, as the church spread all over the world, Paul could write the Ephesians and exhort them to “keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” because there is only “one Lord, one faith, one baptism” (Eph. 4:3-6). In the same vein, Paul told the Corinthians that there is “but one body” (1 Cor. 12:12, 13, 20).

Possibly the closest we can come to finding denominationalism in the Bible is 1 Corinthians 1:10-13 where religious division is scathingly rebuked. To the parties within the Corinthian church, Paul asks: “Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?” As the answer to all these questions is clearly negative, it must follow that: (1) Christ’s disciples ought not to be divided. (2) Christ’s disciples ought not to wear men’s names. (3) Christ’s disciples ought not to follow men (even great ones like Paul or Peter). If people would keep these things in mind, there could be no divisions, no denominations!

The amazing unity of the early church came about because “they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine.” Whereas the creeds and doctrines of human councils always produce strife and division, God’s word provides a basis of true fellowship: “But, if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another and the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

TRUE OR FALSE CIRCLE CORRECT ANSWER

- T F 1. Christ prayed that His disciples would all be one.
 T F 2. Paul said there was “but one body.”
 T F 3. According to Ephesians 4:5, those in the one body would have many faiths.
 T F 4. Paul approved the divisions in the church at Corinth.
 T F 5. The creeds and doctrines of men produce religious unity.

FILL IN THE BLANKS

1. “And the _____ of them that believed were of one _____ and of _____ soul.”
2. Jesus said, “I will build _____ church.”
3. “Is _____ divided? Was Paul _____ for you? Or were ye baptized in the name of _____?”
4. The amazing unity of the early church came about because they “_____ steadfastly in the _____.”
5. _____ word provides a basis for _____ fellowship.

IV. CHURCH ORGANIZATION

Simply stated, the New Testament government was congregational in form. Each congregation was independent of all others in rule, yet closely tied together by fellowship. This may be learned by observing that church officers were appointed in every congregation: “and when they had ordained them elders in every church” (Acts 14:23). “Ordain elders in every city” (Tit. 1:5). The New Testament elder is also called a “bishop.” The qualifications for this office are set forth in Titus 1:5-9. Their work is discussed in 1 Peter 5:1-4 where Peter talks of three distinct responsibilities: (1) Feeding the flock of God; (2) Taking the oversight; (3) Being an example.

The modern denominational practice is to place one Bishop over many churches, but in the New Testament order it is many bishops (elders) over one church (Acts 14:23; Tit. 1:5; Phil. 1:1). Since the New Testament does not speak of higher officers, such as “archbishop,” “cardinal,” or “Pope,” we must conclude that the elders were the only rulers, and the extent of their rule was only over a local group: “the flock of God which is among you” (1 Pet. 5:2).



QUESTIONS

TRUE OR FALSE CIRCLE CORRECT ANSWER

- T F 1. Elders were ordained in every church.
- T F 2. Elders in New Testament times were also called “bishops.”
- T F 3. The New Testament order was one bishop over many churches.
- T F 4. The New Testament government was congregational in form.
- T F 5. The extent of the elders’ rule was only over a local group.

V. THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

When we speak of the mission of the church, we mean its purpose for existing and the work it is to do. The Bible tells us that Christ died to purchase the church (Acts 20:28); therefore, it must have a most valuable purpose in existing. It does! The work of the church is spiritual, designed both to save the soul of man and to glorify God. In 1 Timothy 3:15 we are told that the church is the “pillar and ground of truth.” As such, the church must teach the word of God in two directions: both without and within. Lost and dying sinners must have the gospel preached to them. Christians must be further taught and edified. The church is God’s *exclusive* organization in accomplishing this task (1 Tim. 3:15; Eph. 4:15, 16).

As a third work of the church, we must mention that Christians helped one another in times of need. We have already seen how the Jerusalem Christians shared with their needy brethren (Acts chapters 2 and 4). We are further told that Christians in far-off places sent relief to needy brethren elsewhere (Acts 11:27-30). In 1 Corinthians 16:1, 2 divine instructions are given showing how these funds were to be raised.

Some would like to make the mission of the church purely “social.” These believe that the church exists as a center to provide companionship, entertainment, and fun. Others see the church as a kind of “glorified” Red Cross, designed to meet the material needs of the world. All such efforts are doomed to failure. They fade into insignificance when we compare them to the true and glorious mission of the church. Paul said, “For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 14:17).

THE CHURCH’S MISSION
1. Preach to the lost • 2. Teach Christians • 3. Help Poor Saints



QUESTIONS

FILL IN THE BLANKS

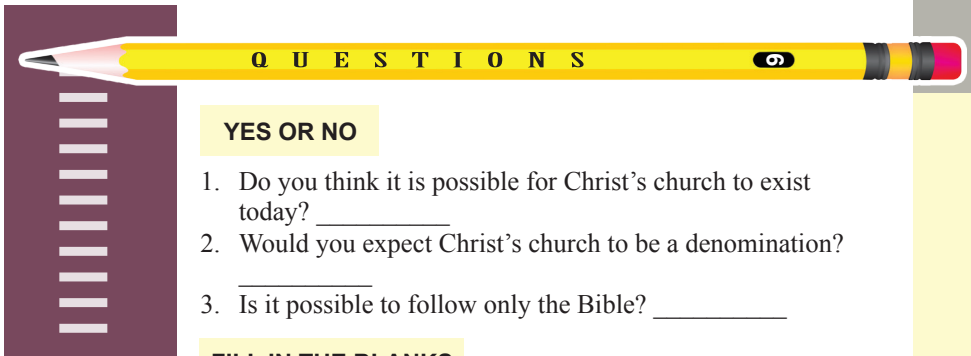
- 1. The church is the _____ and the _____ of the truth.
- 2. Lost and dying _____ must have the _____ preached to them by the _____.

3. Some would like to make the mission of the church purely _____.
4. Christians helped one another during times of _____.
5. "For the kingdom of God is not _____ and _____."

VI. DOES CHRIST'S CHURCH EXIST TODAY?

We have studied the church as it is revealed in Scripture and as it existed 2,000 years ago. Does that church exist today? We do not mean some denomination that is somewhat like it, but the exact church of Christ? We are glad to say: "YES." Notice first of all that the Bible tells us Christ's church was to continue throughout all ages (Eph. 3:21). Secondly, we have a description of the church of Christ in the Bible. All those today desiring to pattern themselves after it may do so. In fact, this is just the way you can identify the true church today: Study the Bible, noting all the characteristics of the church. You will want to consider its NAME, DOCTRINE, ORGANIZATION, UNITY, MISSION, WORSHIP. Then, seek out the church that fits the Bible pattern. Don't be satisfied with anything less. There are probably New Testament Christians meeting in your area, and you should want to be worshiping and working with them. We will be glad to assist you in locating the church of Christ nearest you.

If you are interested in becoming simply a Christian, we want to assist you. Won't you write us today, letting us know your desire?



QUESTIONS

YES OR NO

1. Do you think it is possible for Christ's church to exist today? _____
2. Would you expect Christ's church to be a denomination? _____
3. Is it possible to follow only the Bible? _____

FILL IN THE BLANKS

1. If we follow the description of the church found in the New Testament, what church will we be today? _____

SEND US:

Names of your friends who desire to enroll in this Bible course. Let them share with you the joys of understanding God's word. Write names below.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

The **OLDEST** church in the world!

• The New Testament Church

• Established by Christ

• Controlled by his will

“Upon this rock I will build my church” (Matt. 16:18). Jesus promised to build a church—it was to be his church. In Mark 9:1 Christ said this kingdom (church) would come with power. After his resurrection Jesus told his apostles to wait in Jerusalem for the power (Acts 1:4-8). The power came on the first Pentecost following the resurrection of Christ and the church was established on that day, according to the second chapter of Acts. Jesus is both the founder and the foundation of the church one reads about in the New Testament. “Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 3:11). Any church established by any person other than Christ, in any place other than Jerusalem, at any time other than the first Pentecost after the Lord’s resurrection, is not the New Testament church. The church of Christ is over 1900 years old!

WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED FROM THIS LESSON

- There is only one true church.
- God adds baptized believers to that church.
- The church of Christ exists today.
- By following only the Bible *you* can be a part of Christ’s church.

Student’s Name _____
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