

# Lesson 1

## THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

A.D. 33 – 100

*“Upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18)*

### I. INTRODUCTION.

#### A. The Study of History is Profitable.

1. Old Testament writers appealed to history (Deut. 1-3; Psa. 78; Isa. 51:1-2).
2. Jesus (Mt. 12:40-42), Paul (1 Cor. 10:1-12), the author of Hebrews (Heb. 4:1-11), James (Jas. 5:17-18), Peter (2 Pet. 2:4-9; 3:3-5), and Jude (Jude 5-7) all appealed to history to make their point.
3. We follow their example and appeal to history to learn important lessons for the Lord’s church today.
4. It has been said: “Those who ignore history are destined to repeat it.” It has also been said: “All we learn from history is that we learn nothing from history.”

#### B. Why This Particular Study Is Profitable.

1. We can examine the New Testament church as the Lord intended it to be from the beginning and have a greater appreciation for it.
2. We can know when the Lord’s church began in order to distinguish it from other religious groups that came before and after.
3. We can be warned of the dangers of introducing error into the Lord’s church that leads to apostasy.

#### C. Understanding Some Terms.

1. “Church” from the Greek word *ekklesia*, means a “called out” people (never a building). These people are called out from sin, to salvation, by God, and in obedience through the gospel (2 Thess. 2:14; see Mt. 16:18; 18:17; Acts 2:47; 5:11; 8:1,3; etc.). In these series of lessons, “c”hurch is used to refer to the Lord’s church in any age and “C”hurch is used to refer to the human religions started by men. “Church History” is used to refer to human “C”hurches (religions related to Christianity) as they come in contact with the Lord’s “c”hurch (people).
2. “Apostasy” is from the Greek *apostasia* and means “to fall away (*apo*) from a fixed spot (*stasia*),” “to leave,” or “to forsake” (see Acts 21:21; 2 Thess. 2:3). When one leaves or forsakes the fixed realm of New Testament teaching he has apostatized.

### II. THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH.

#### A. The New Testament Church Established.

1. The NT church was planned by God (Ephesians 3:10-11).
2. The NT church was promised by the prophets (Isaiah 2; Dan. 2; Joel 2; Acts 2).
3. The NT church was prepared for by John the Baptist (Matthew 3:1ff; 11:10).
4. The NT church was purchased by Jesus Christ (Acts 20:28).
5. The NT church was preached by the Apostles (1 Cor. 1:23; 2:2).

## B. The New Testament Church.

1. Its Founder.
  - a) The NT church was built by Jesus. He is the one and only founder and foundation of the church.
  - b) No other religious body is authorized by God to exist. No human denominations of Christianity existed in the NT like we have today.
  - c) Isa. 28:16; Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:36; 20:28; 1 Corinthians 3:11; Matthew 15:13; Eph. 2:20; 4:4; 5:23-24.
2. Its Head.
  - a) The NT church (body) has Jesus Christ as its one and only head. The NT church is an absolute “monarchy” (one ruler).
  - b) To follow any other head is unscriptural and without spiritual life. No human head existed to rule over the Lord’s church in the NT.
  - c) Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:8-10-16; 5:23; 1 Corinthians 9:21; Galatians 6:1; Colossians 1:18; 2:19.
3. Its Beginning.
  - a) The NT church began on the day of Pentecost, A.D. 33.
  - b) All other religious bodies beginning after this date are not authorized by God to exist. No human denominations (Churches) existed in the NT like they do today.
  - c) Isaiah 2:2; Mark 9:1; Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8; 2:1ff.
4. Its Membership.
  - a) The NT church was made up of saved souls who had heard the gospel, believed in Jesus, confessed Jesus as the Christ, repented of their sins, and had been baptized (immersed in water) for the remission of their sins. They were then “added” by the Lord to his church (Acts 2:47).
  - b) No person every “joined” a “Church” in the NT and all other plans of salvation by man which add to or take from these conditions are in error.
  - c) Baptism was always immersion in water (Acts 8:38; Rom. 6:3-4; Col. 2:12), never sprinkling or pouring. Baptism was always for remission of sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16), never to show one is already saved. Baptism was always for believers (Acts 8:12; 18:8), never infants.
  - d) Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:46-47 Acts 2:38,41,47; 8:36-37; 18:8; 22:16; Romans 6:3-4; 10:9-10,17; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 12:13; Galatians 3:27; 1 Peter 3:21.
5. Its Nature / Mission / Work.
  - a) The NT church was a spiritual body that had a spiritual mission and work that focused on saving souls with the gospel. The NT church also edified those who were saved and were benevolent toward needy saints. Each local church was sufficient to do its own work. Local churches were not bound together in any way to do their work, nor did they rely upon human institutions to do their work.
  - b) No NT church ever engaged in social or recreational activities as a church “work” and no NT church ever utilized a human institution to do its work.
  - c) Acts 4:34-35; 6:1-7; 2 Corinthians 11:8; Ephesians 4:11-16; Philippians 4:14-18; Col. 1:28; 1 Thessalonians 1:5-8; 1 Timothy 5:16.

6. Its Worship.

- a) The NT church worshiped God in local church assemblies and engaged in...
  - (1) Singing without instruments.
  - (2) Preaching God's word.
  - (3) Praying.
  - (4) Giving cheerfully and proportionally ("upon the first day of the week").
  - (5) Partaking the Lord's supper with unleavened bread and the fruit of the vine ("upon the first day of the week").
- b) New Testament worship was directed toward the right object (God), prompted by the right attitude, and involved the right actions (Jn. 4:24).
- c) No "vain worship" (Mt. 15:9), "ignorant worship" (Acts 17:23), or "will-worship" (Col. 2:23) existed among true NT Christians as it does today in the denominations.
- d) Matthew 26:26-28; Acts 2:42; 20:7; Ephesians 5:19-20; Colossians 3:16; 1 Corinthians 10:16; 11:24-26; 14:15; 16:1-2; 2 Corinthians 9:6-7; 1 Thessalonians 5:17,25; 2 Timothy 2:2.

7. Its Organization.

- a) The NT church was organized into local churches under Jesus Christ as her head (Eph. 1:22-23). Local churches had "elders" (also called "bishops" and "pastors"), deacons, teachers, evangelists, and saints.
- b) No class distinction existed between the "clergy" and "laity" as it does today in many denominations. There were no titles used like "Father," "Reverend," or "Pastor" (for the preacher). Three Greek terms are used to describe the local church leadership: *presbuteros* - "elder" or "presbyter" (Acts 20:17, emphasizing age and wisdom); *episkopos* - "bishop" or "overseer" (Acts 20:28, Phil. 1:1, emphasizing watch and care over others); and *poimen* - "pastor" or "shepherd" (1 Peter 5:2, emphasizing feeding through teaching). Each local church was independent and autonomous. No ecclesiastical or denominational structure existed within local churches or bound these local churches together.
- c) Acts 14:23; 20:17,28; Ephesians 4:11-12; Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:1-13; 2 Timothy 2:2; 4:5; Titus 1:5-9; Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 5:1-4.

8. Its Doctrine / Teaching / Message.

- a) The NT church did not formulate its own doctrine; it simply followed the doctrine set forth by Jesus and his apostles. The NT church practiced and preached the gospel/doctrine of Jesus Christ. This apostolic doctrine was the pattern for the NT church. The doctrine of Christ contained in the NT is authoritative, simple, complete, and unchanging.
- b) No human "creeds" (Latin *credo*, I believe), "manuals," or "disciplines" were followed, only the New Testament.
- c) Acts 2:42; Romans 1:16; 1 Corinthians 2:13; 4:17; 9:21; 15:1-9; Gal. 6:1; Ephesians 2:20; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Jn. 9-11; 2 Timothy 1:13; James 1:22-25.

9. Its Conduct.

- a) The NT church members lived in harmony with each other (Acts 2:42-47).
- b) The NT church members lived in purity with relationship to the world (Ephesians 5:25; James 1:27).
- c) The NT church members lived in complete devotion to God (Mt. 6:33; 22:37).

- d) No impure conduct was allowed in local NT churches (Rom. 16:17-18; 1 Cor. 5; 2 Thess. 3; Tit. 3:10; Rev. 2-3).

10. Its Name.

- a) The NT church was described by God.
- b) No man-made names were worn and no men were followed. The use of man-made names and following men causes division in the body (1 Corinthians 1:11-15). All names and designations not found in the NT are unscriptural.
- c) The NT church collectively was given names by God such as...
- (1) church of God (1 Corinthians 1:2; Galatians 1:13).
  - (2) churches of Christ (Romans 16:16).
  - (3) church of the first-born (Hebrews 12:23).
  - (4) The church (Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 1:22).
  - (5) The church of the Lord (Acts 20:28).
  - (6) House of God (1 Timothy 3:15).
  - (7) Temple of God (1 Corinthians 3:9,16-17).
- d) The NT church members individually were given names by God such as...
- (1) believer ((Acts 5:14).
  - (2) disciple (Acts 6:1).
  - (3) Christian (Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16).
  - (4) saint (Rom. 1:7).
  - (5) children of God (Rom. 8:16).

11. Its Unity.

- a) The NT church was unified and “one” for a time. They were unified upon the teaching of Jesus Christ. There is “one” body of Christ found in the NT.
- b) No divided denominations existed in the first century as they do today. Unity was accomplished by adhering to God’s word, not by “ecumenical movements” which focus on shared beliefs and ignore the differences in practice.
- c) John 17:20-21; Romans 15:5-6; 1 Corinthians 1:10; Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:4-6.

12. Its Persecution.

- a) The NT church was persecuted for its stand for truth by the...
- (1) Jews (Jn. 15:18-20; Acts 4-8, 12:1-2; 13-14,17-19; 26:9-11; 1 Cor. 4:9,11-13).
  - (2) Greeks (Acts 14:1-4,8,19; 16:12-40; 18:1,12-17; 19:21-28).
  - (3) Romans (Emperor Nero, A.D. 64-68, Acts 18:1-2; and Emperor Domitian, A.D. 89-96, Revelation 6-18). Persecution under the reigns of later Emperors will be discussed in Lesson 2.
- b) The NT church was persecuted because...
- (1) They were viewed as disloyal and unpatriotic (Acts 5:28-29; 6:13-14; 16:20-21; 17:7).
  - (2) They preached a different message (Acts 17:18-20,32)
  - (3) They would not worship idols, false gods, or Roman Emperors (Revelation 20:4).
  - (4) They threatened some business interests (Acts 19:24).
  - (5) They lived a pure life (1 Peter 4:4).
-

- c) The result of this persecution caused the church to spread (Acts 8:1-4) and some Christians were martyred (Stephen, Acts 7; James, 12:1-2; Antipas, Revelation 2:10,13). Some, however, denied the faith.

13. Its Problems.

- a) The NT church faced the problems of neglect (Acts 6:1-6), circumcision (Acts 15:1ff), division (1 Cor. 1-4), Gnosticism (Col. 2:1ff; 1 John), etc.
- b) Problems were addressed immediately with the word of God and no sin, error, or weakness was ignored.

14. Its Growth.

- a) The NT church grew in the first century as Christians went everywhere preaching the word and saving souls (Acts 1:8; 2:41,47; 4:4; 5:14; 6:1,7; 8:6; 9:31,42; 11:21; Colossians 1:23).
- b) The growth of the NT church was due to the Christians' 1) zeal, 2) hope of the afterlife, 3) temporary miraculous powers, 4) purity, and 5) unity and discipline.
- c) No man-made methods philosophies of growth were used.

15. Its Universality.

- a) The NT church grew and spread all over the known world (Matthew 28:18-19; Mark 16:15-16; 1 Corinthians 15:23-26; Colossians 1:23; Revelation 22:17).

16. Its Destiny.

- a) The NT church had "one hope" – the hope of heaven.
- b) No other destination, hope, or goal existed (such as life on earth, three levels of heaven, nirvana, Muslim paradise, etc.).
- c) 1 Corinthians 15:24; Ephesians 4:4; Colossians 1:5.

### III. APOSTASY IN THE FIRST CENTURY.

#### A. Philosophies.

1. Judaism came from the Jews. This philosophy bound the Old Testament (circumcision in particular) upon Christians as a condition of salvation and was answered by Paul and others (Acts 15:1ff; Gal. 1:6-9; 5:1-4).
2. Gnosticism came from the Greeks. This philosophy claimed special knowledge and ascetic practices necessary for salvation and was answered by Paul (Colossians 2:16-23) and John (1 John 4:2-3; 2 John 7).
3. False teaching came from various teachers in general (1 Timothy 6:20-21; 2 Peter 2:1ff; Jude 3-4)

#### B. Individuals.

1. Hymenaeus and Alexander (1 Timothy 1:20).
2. Hymenaeus and Philetus (2 Timothy 2:17-18).
3. See also 2 Cor. 11:2-3,13-15; Phil. 3:18-19; Col. 2:8; and 2 Pet. 3:16-19.

#### C. Local Churches.

1. Corinth – denial of the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15).
2. Ephesus – lack of love (Revelation 2:4-5).
3. Pergamum and Thyatira – false teaching (Revelation 2:12-29)
4. Laodicea – lukewarm (Revelation 3:16-17).

D. Personal Conduct.

1. Hypocrisy (Acts 5:1-11).
2. Sexual immorality (1 Corinthians 5:1-13).
3. Preeminence (3 John 9-10).

**IV. APOSTASY NOW AND IN THE FUTURE.**

- A. Apostasy in Leadership (Acts 20:28-30).
- B. Apostasy in Attitude (2 Thessalonians 2:3-11).
- C. Apostasy in Teaching (1 Timothy 4:1-3; 2 Peter 2:1-2; 1 Jn. 4:1-6).
- D. Apostasy in Living (2 Timothy 3:1-5; 4:2-4).

**V. LESSONS LEARNED.**

- A. The NT church is Recorded For A Pattern.
  1. We must obey the pattern (Rom. 6:17).
  2. We must hold fast the pattern (2 Tim. 1:13).
  3. We must not alter the pattern (Gal. 1:6-9; 1 Tim. 6:3-4; 2 Jn. 9; Rev. 22:18-19).
- B. The NT church is Distinct.
  1. The NT church is distinct and different from all other religions today.
  2. If I cannot see the distinct nature of the Lord's church, then: a) I have not taken the time to properly examine the Lord's church; or b) I have reached improper conclusions about the Lord's church (or the Church I am in) due to my own failures or prejudices.
- C. The NT church Demonstrates God's Wisdom.
  1. The NT church is a reflection of God's wisdom (Eph. 3:10-11).
  2. All other religions are a reflection of man's wisdom and will be removed (Mt. 15:13).
- D. The NT church Is In Real Danger of Apostasy.
  1. Apostasy is real and often comes gradually.
  2. Apostasy is close, within one generation.
  3. Apostasy that has come in the past can come again today.
  4. The man-made doctrine of "once-saved-always-saved" is false.
- E. The NT church Can Exist and Does Today.
  1. Consider two important principles:
    - a) The seed principle. A seed, no matter how old and when it was grown, will produce after its kind when planted (Gen. 1:11-12). The seed of the kingdom can be planted today on good soil, 2,000 years after it was grown and produce true, New Testament Christians (Luke 8:15; 1 Peter 2:22-23)
    - b) The pattern principle. A pattern, no matter how old and when it is written, can be used to make a product at any time (Ex. 25:9,40; 26:30; Acts 7:44; Heb. 8:2,5). The pattern of the NT can be followed today, 2,000 years after it was written and produce the same product, the New Testament church (1 Cor. 4:17; 7:17; 16:1; 11:2; 2 Thess. 2:15; 2 Tim. 1:13; 1 Pet. 4:11).
  2. All the identifying marks and characteristics of the Lord's church can exist today with the right attitude and the right action of God's people.

## **VI. CONCLUSION.**

- A. Let Strive to Be Christians Only and Members of the Lord's church.
- B. Let Us Work to Avoid Apostasy Which is Rooted in a Lack of Respect for Divine Authority.
- C. The Faithful Remnant of the Lord's Church Today.
  - 1. The Lord has always had a remnant of people who remain faithful to him during any period of history (1 Kings 19:18; Dan. 2:44; 1 Cor. 15:23-26; Heb. 12:28; Rev. 3:4; 2 Tim. 3:10,14).
  - 2. Will you be a part of that faithful remnant?