

Lesson 6

THE LORD'S CHURCH TODAY

A.D. 1900 - Present

"Wherefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not vain in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 15:58)

I. INTRODUCTION.

A. The Study of History is Profitable.

1. OT 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 will see how Christians that came out of the Restoration Movement had to face many issues that came up within the Lord's church. One main issue (local church organization) had been around since the early centuries.
2. We will study how Christians must face various religious and moral challenges in our world today.

C. Apostasy Is Cyclical.

1. A major apostasy that faced the early church was inter-congregational organization leading to the formation of the Catholic Church.
2. The same desire inter-congregational organization led to Protestant denominations during the Reformation period.
3. The same desire inter-congregational organization led to the formation of the Christian Church / Disciples of Christ during the Restoration period.
4. The same desire inter-congregational organization led to the formation of institutional Churches of Christ in the 20th Century and today.
 - a) In edification: colleges.
 - b) In evangelism: sponsoring church cooperatives.
 - c) In benevolence: homes for the needy (orphan, aged, unwed mothers, etc.).

II. THE LORD'S CHURCH AND ISSUES WITHIN.

A. The Issues of the Early 1900's.

1. The no Bible class issue. This issue came up c. 1900-1925 (H.C. Harper, N.L. Clark, G.A. Trott). Advocates of this position labeled the Bible class as another organization like the denominational Sunday school.

2. The no located preacher issue.
 3. The one cup issue.
 4. The no Bible literature issue.
 5. The no Bible college issue.
 6. The premillennial issue.
 7. The war issue.
- B. The Issues of the 1940's and 1950's.
1. The college issue. Some brethren operated such schools as David Lipscomb, Abilene Christian College, Free-Hardeman, and Harding College. In the late 1940's, local churches were urged to support these colleges by men such as Robert Alexander, G.C. Brewer, N.B. Hardeman, A.C. Pullias, and Guy N. Woods.
 2. The orphan home issue. Some brethren operated orphan homes such as Tennessee Orphan Home (1909), Potter Home (1915), Tipton Home (1922), Boles Home (1926), Southern Christian Home (1926), and the Sunny Glen Home (1936). Local churches were urged to support these homes.
 3. The sponsoring church issue. Some brethren wanted to do evangelistic and benevolent work overseas after WW II and used a sponsoring-church plan to do it (preacher, radio, T.V., Herald of Truth). This plan was advocated by G.C. Brewer and opposed by Yater Tant. The plan would be that several local churches donate funds to one local church to do the work of all the sponsoring churches. These brethren rejected the American Christian Missionary Society plan of the late 1800's, but substituted their own similar plan.
- C. The Issues of the 1960's and 1970's.
1. The social-gospel issue. Some brethren began to involve the Lord's church in social and recreational activities in the name of evangelism, edification, and benevolence. Camps, gyms, ball teams, fellow-ship halls, etc., were built and maintained by some brethren.
 2. The tongue-speaking issue.
 3. The neo-Calvinism issue.
 4. The discipline issue.
- D. The Issues of the 1980's and 1990's.
1. The individual / no local church / no elders issue.
 2. The marriage issue.
 3. The fellowship issue.
 4. The deity of Jesus issue.
- E. The Issues of the 21st Century.
1. The days of creation issue.
 2. The compromise issue (among institutional brethren).
 - a) Instrumental music in worship and baptism not necessary.
 - b) Lord's supper observed on a day other than Sunday.
 - c) "Christians" in all denominations.
 - d) Easter and Christmas observed as religious holidays.
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III. THE LORD'S CHURCH AND CHALLENGES WITHOUT.

A. The Distortion of Truth.

1. Charismatic Movements.

- a) Pentecostal Churches are formed in Topeka, Kansas and Los Angeles, California in the early 1900's to promote "spiritual gifts" and the alleged work of the Holy Spirit in tongues speaking and modern-day miracles. The Assemblies of God Church is formed in 1914. The charismatic movement reaches the Catholic Church in 1967 and some Churches of Christ in the early 1970's.
- b) Consider 1 Cor. 13:8-12.

2. Emotionalism.

- a) Modern denominations have put a premium on emotions and have neglected the study and practice of God's word.
- b) Consider Phil. 4:4-9.

3. Social Gospel.

- a) Denominations in the 1920's reach out to the outcast of society with social justice and an emphasis on the natural goodness of mankind. "Salvation" from social evils (poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, etc.) is preached. The Liberation Theology within some Catholic Churches of the 1960's and 1970's was a continuation of the Social Gospel for the poor. Mother Teresa (1910 – 1997) was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1979 for her work among the poor of India.
- b) Consider Rom. 1:16; Jas. 1:21.

4. Ordination of Women.

- a) Denominations beginning with the Anglican Church (Church of England) are found ordaining women to the priesthood and leadership roles starting in the 1940's. The Methodist and Presbyterian Churches will also ordain women.
- b) Consider 1 Tim. 2:12.

5. Ecumenism and Evangelicalism.

- a) Modern denominations by the 1950's, using a gospel – doctrine distinction, attempt to unify under ecumenism (going back to the World Missionary Conference of 1910). Billy Graham, a Southern Baptist, rose to international prominence as he preached his "crusades" around the world. The World Council of Churches is another example of ecumenism. It was formed in 1948 with 147 churches. In 1993, it had 322 participating churches of all denominations working together on matters of mission, social justice, and worship.
- b) Consider Jn. 17:20-21; 1 Cor. 1:10-11; Eph. 4:4-6.

6. Moral Majority.

- a) Many denominations by the 1970's have been a part of politically conservative causes. Jerry Falwell (1933 – 2007) and the "Christian Right" were prominent figures of the Moral Majority.
- b) Consider 1 Tim. 3:15.

7. Homosexuality.

- a) Denominations began to ordain homosexuals to the priesthood in the late 20th century and early 21st century (United Church of Canada, Lutheran Churches, Presbyterian Churches, and Episcopalian Churches).
- b) Consider Rom. 1:26-27; 1 Cor. 6:9; 1 Tim. 1:10.

B. The Decline of Truth.

1. Modernism.

- a) Immanuel Kant, David Hume, and Friedrich Hegel set forth the theory that God cannot communicate with man; therefore, the Bible is a product of man. One reaction to Modernism was Fundamentalism which defended the fundamentals of the faith. The *Fundamentals* was a series of tracts written between 1910 and 1915 to attack Modernism. J.G. Machen (1881 – 1937) was one well-known Fundamentalist.
- b) Consider 1 Cor. 2:13; 2 Tim, 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:20-21.

2. Situation of Ethics.

- a) Joseph Fletcher set forth the theory that morality and ethics change depending upon the situation and that “love” is the only guiding principle for determining morality.
- b) Consider Jer. 10:23; Jn. 14:15; 1 Cor. 13:5-6.

3. Post-Modernism.

- a) We live in a post-modern world of relativity and ambiguity where it is claimed that truth cannot be known.
- b) Consider Jn. 8:32; 14:6; 17:17.

4. Indifference and Worldliness.

- a) Many are leaving denominations and the Lord's church for worldly living.
- b) Consider Rev. 3:16-17.

C. The Rapid Spread of Religions.

1. We live in a world where religions of the East and West come together easily. America is no longer a “Christian nation”, but a mixture of many religions.
2. Consider Jn. 14:6; Acts 4:12.

IV. LESSONS LEARNED.

A. Apostasy is an Ever-Present Danger and Cyclical.

B. Apostasy May Not Be Present When Brethren Claim It Is.

1. Daniel Sommer and others in the early 1900's claimed that those who used a located preacher were “apostate” (see his Address and Declaration, 1899).
2. Those brethren today who advocate no class, no multiple cups, no located preacher, no war, or no cause for divorce will sometimes brand other brethren as “apostate” and “unscriptural” and preach that no fellowship is to be extended to brethren who will not agree with them (see the article in *The Light*, August 2010).
3. It is just as wrong to bind where God has not bound as it is to loose where God has not loosed (Mt. 16:19).

C. Overreactions to Apostasy Can Lead to Factionalism.

D. The Lord's Church is Threatened With...

1. Denominationalism.
2. Worldliness.

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 (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 action of God's people.

V. CONCLUSION.

A. Let Us Continue to Stand For Truth (Eph. 6:19; Jude 3).

B. Let Us Be the Faithful Remnant of the Lord's Church.

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?