

THE NEW TESTAMENT ORGANIZATIONAL PATTERN PERVERTED

Lesson 2

I. INTRODUCTION.

- A. The Pattern of NT Local Church Organization is Not Always Followed.
- B. Centralized Church Government Is A Perversion of the NT Pattern.
 - 1. All perversions of the NT pattern of local church organization have a common denominator — centralization. “Centralization” is the joining of two or more local churches together in some “organized” fashion to do the Lord’s work. It is the opposite of allowing each local church to do its own work (see Lesson 1).
 - 2. According to human wisdom, it is thought that to put the control of local church affairs into the hands of a few (centralization) is an improvement upon the NT pattern. According to this wisdom, centralization (1) facilitates the enforcement of unity and practice, (2) expedites the mobilization of the membership, (3) makes for more efficient finances, record-keeping, and management, (4) expedites the works of benevolence and evangelism, (5) affords a feeling of security, (6) relieves individuals from the responsibility of making all the decisions, and (7) gives all members a sense of accomplishment by association.
 - 3. Regardless of all the human wisdom and good reasons given for centralization, the fact still remains that it is not God's plan. Centralization is not in the NT pattern!

II. CENTRALIZATION AND DENOMINATIONAL PERVERSIONS.

- A. Catholicism Is An Example of Centralization.
 - 1. Six steps toward the Papacy (centralization):
 - a. A "Presiding Bishop" was exalted over the elders in a local church (2nd cent. A.D.).
 - b. A "City Bishop" was given power outside the local church and a "Metropolitan Bishop" was given power that extended outside city (4th cent. A.D.).
 - c. A "Diocesan Bishop" was given power over a large area of churches.
 - d. Five "Metropolitan Bishops" had risen to the same power and prominence and were called "Patriarchs" (5th cent. A.D.).
 - e. "Universal Bishop" is claimed by John the Faster of Constantinople, but he is forced down by Gregory I of Rome (6th cent. AD.).
 - f. "Pope" is claimed by Boniface III (7th cent. AD.).
 - 2. Catholic Church organization was evolutionary and constantly changing. Much of it was modeled after the government organization of the Roman Empire. Today, the basic pyramid organization of the Catholic Church from bottom to top is this: priest, bishop, archbishop, cardinal, and pope. This is Catholic hierarchy and centralization.

B. Protestantism Is An Example of Centralization.

1. The associations, conferences, synods, assemblies, conventions, etc., of Protestantism are all forms of centralization. Protestants in the 1500s and 1600s simply exchanged one form of centralization (Catholicism) for another (Protestantism).
2. Examples.
 - a) Assemblies of God churches have some level of independence. However, the General Council is made up of all ordained ministers and a delegate from each church, and this council sets the doctrinal standards for all the churches.
 - b) Baptists have independent congregational organization, yet they have "associations" in which Baptist churches work together through church "messengers" (representatives).
 - c) Episcopalians (Anglicans) have a government modeled after that of the Catholic Church. A "parish" is overseen by a "rector" (priest), a "diocese" is overseen by a "bishop", and the whole church is overseen by the head, the "Presiding Bishop", elected by the general convention.
 - d) Jehovah's Witnesses have a headquarters in Brooklyn known as the Watchtower Society where there is a Board of Directors. Each local church has a "company servant", who reports to "zone servants", who in turn report to "regional servants". Everyone is governed by the Watchtower Society.
 - e) Lutherans are governed in the local church by a "church council" consisting of a "pastor" and "lay officers." Several churches make up the "synod" which is governed by "pastors" and "lay representatives". The "general body" is the highest level and it meets several times a year at a national or international level.
 - f) Methodists are governed through a series of annual conferences. The General Conference meets every four years. Local "pastors" report to "bishops", who in turn report to "district superintendents."
 - g) Mormons have a President, two Counselors to the President, a Council of Twelve Apostles, a Council of Seventy, and two priesthoods ("elders" come from the Melchizedek priesthood and "bishops" come from the Aaronic priesthood). Territory is divided up into (from small to large): "blocks", "wards", and "stakes".
 - h) Nazarenes are governed by the General Assembly, District Assemblies, General Superintendents, and District Superintendents.
 - i) Presbyterians have a "presbytery" made up of representatives from local churches. Representatives from several "presbyteries" make up a "synod". The General Assembly is the highest court of the Presbyterian Church.
3. Protestant church organization was reactionary, reforming the abuses of the Catholic Church, but it was still centralized in form and structure.

C. Social Reasons for Such Perversions.

1. Desire to gain control (3 Jn. 9).
2. Desire to evade responsibility.

III. CENTRALIZATION AND BROTHERHOOD PERVERSIONS.

- A. Centralization - brotherhood centralized organization is simply an imitation of other religions (see above), but just with different terms to describe it. What are some of the terms?
- B. Institutionalism — organization other than the local church (Orphan Homes, Colleges, United Christian Missionary Society, etc.).
- C. Centralization — organization larger than the local church (the “sponsoring church” arrangement of the Herald of Truth, Gospel Press, One Nation Under God, etc.).
- D. Discipling Movement — organization larger than the local church (Boston Church Movement and the Focused Few, formerly the Crossroads cult).
- E. Misc. Perversions — organization smaller than the local church (elders as "puppets", trial rule, preacher rule, leadership rule, majority rule, committee rule, bible class treasuries, youth organizations, etc.).
- F. Individualism (Charles Holt) — no local church organization, treasury, or authority at all.
- G. Social Reasons for Such Perversions.
 - 1) Desire to do a "brotherhood work" (Rom. 16:16).
 - 2) Desire to be like the denominations (1 Sam. 8:5).

IV. CENTRALIZATION PERVERSION PROOF-TEXTS.

- A. Proof-Texts Used by Denominations:
 1. Matthew 16:18 is used to advocate for a "Papacy" (Peter as the first pope).
 2. Acts 15 is used to advocate for the "First Ecumenical Council".
 3. It is sometimes argued that James, Peter, and John (Gal. 2:9), Timothy (1:1-4), Titus (1:5), and John (Rev. 1:4; 2:1, 8, 12, etc.) were “head bishops” over the churches where they were members.
- B. Proof-Texts Used by Brethren:
 1. Acts 11:29-30 is used to argue for a "sponsoring church".
 2. 2 Corinthians 8:16-24 is used to argue for a "forwarding eldership".
 3. James 1:27, Galatians 6:10, and 2 Corinthians 9:13 are used to argue for the building and maintaining of human institutions and "societies" (with presidents, treasurers, boards of directors, etc.) apart from the elders in a local church.

V. CONCLUSION.

- A. Change in the NT Pattern of Organization Leads to Change in the Gospel.
- B. God Explains in the NT Who Should Do the Work (the Local Church) and How It Should Be Done (the Local Church). We Must Do the Lord's Work in the Lord's Way!

Lesson Two Discussion

1. All perversions of the NT pattern of organization have what common factor?
2. What are some reasons why people think centralization is a good thing? Do these reasons justify centralization?
3. What common idea is present in each of the six steps toward the Papacy?
4. How is the centralized structure of Protestant denominations the same as, and different from, Catholicism?
5. What social reasons are behind the centralized structure of Catholicism and Protestant denominationalism?
6. Give one example of a centralized organizational structure among brethren that is larger than, small than, and other than the local church.
7. What social reasons are behind the centralization projects among brethren?
8. Show from the context how each NT proof-text has been twisted to justify centralization.
9. Has God given a pattern for local church organization? If so, is it just as important as other patterns in the NT (for example, the plan of salvation and the plan of worship in the local church)? What happens when this pattern is changed?