

Jesus, the Way Out of Religious Confusion

SIXTH LESSON - By Sewell Hall

When God gave His law by Moses to Israel, He made no provision for the division of His people into sects and parties. But by the time Jesus came into the world, sects and parties were well entrenched. There were the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Essenes, and doubtless others. It was assumed that all who were serious about religion would be associated with one of these.

To which of these parties did Jesus belong? All must agree that He belonged to none of them. He maintained His independent, nonsectarian relationship with God to the very end. For this reason, they all opposed Him.

Jesus did not provide for His followers to be divided into sects and parties. Rather He desired that they might be united. After praying for His apostles, He added:

"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us..." (John 17:20-21)

Through the years, however, divisions have developed and these have been perpetuated by the writing of creeds and the formation of denominational organizations. The result is that now among professed followers of Jesus there are many bodies (denominations), many lords (religious authorities), many faiths (creeds), and many baptisms.

There is much difference between the present situation and the unity described in the New Testament.

"There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all." (Ephesians 4:4-6)

"And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence." (Colossians 1:18)

Many today regret the division among believers and wish it did not exist. They desire the uniting of all the great denominations and are working diligently to that end. But they assume that until this is accomplished, there is nothing an individual can do but join one of the existing divisions and maintain a kind of tolerant spirit. Nothing in the teaching or practice of Jesus supports this approach to unity.

Jesus did not undertake to convene an ecumenical conference designed to effect a merger of Pharisees, Sadducees and Essenes into one super sect. Neither did He pray

that His disciples might be united into one super denomination. He prayed rather that individual believers might be united in Himself and in the Father. His teaching was designed to turn individuals from the doctrines and traditions of men to the simple Word of God. Through His teaching and example, He surely can be for us **THE WAY OUT OF RELIGIOUS CONFUSION.**

The Lord's Church

Jesus promised to build His own church. He said:

"...Upon this rock I will build my church." (Matthew 16:18)

He promised to build only one church and it was to be His. The rock on which it was to be built was not Peter, but the truth that Peter confessed.

"For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ." (1 Corinthians 3:11)

The word *church* means "*called out.*" By preaching the gospel on the day of Pentecost, Peter and the other apostles "called out" those who were willing to believe in Jesus.

"Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and to the rest of the apostles, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?' Then Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'" (Acts 2:37-38)

"Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them." (Acts 2:41)

This was the beginning of the church. It was composed of all who were saved by Jesus Christ, and it continued to grow as others were saved.

"...And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved." (Acts 2:47)

Groups of these saved people met in various cities and each group was a church. Though united in Christ, they were independent of any human association or federation. Christ directed them through His inspired apostles, teaching them how they were to worship and work together.

Avoiding Division By Following Jesus

If we obey the same instructions that Peter gave on Pentecost, repenting of our sins and being baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, we too will be saved. When we are saved, the Lord will add us to His church as He added them. They joined no other religious organization; neither should we. In Christ, we are united with all others who are in Him.

As members of the Lord's church, we must then study carefully the New Testament description of that church. This is found in the book of Acts and in the letters which follow it. Since the apostles were guided by the Holy Spirit, we may be sure that the churches under their instruction were exactly what Jesus wanted them to be. If we duplicate these early churches, the Lord will be pleased with us.

Duplicating a New Testament church may not be as difficult as one might think. It may be possible to find an independent group of Christians following the New Testament pattern already assembling in one's community. If not, just two or three who are of common purpose can meet and worship together acceptably. No great church building is necessary (Many churches in Bible times met in homes -- **Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:19**). No humanly ordained priesthood is required since all Christians are priests (**1 Peter 2:5**). No charter from any earthly headquarters is needed since the only affiliation is with the body of Christ.

Jesus said:

"For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them." (**Matthew 18:20**)

May we assist you to become simply a Christian?

Questions

Using your own Bible, find the characteristics of the Lord's church as revealed in the following passages:

Membership:

1. I(**Acts 2:38**) Peter told believers to _____ and be _____ for the remission of their sins.
2. (**Acts 2:41**) Those who received the Word were _____ and were added to the disciples.
3. (**Acts 2:47**) The Lord added to the church daily those who were being _____.

Doctrine:

4. (**Acts 2:42**) They continued in the _____ doctrine (teaching).

Worship:

5. (**Acts 2:42**) In addition to the teaching, they also continued in breaking of _____ and _____.

6. (2 Corinthians 9:7) Every person should _____ as he purposes in his heart.

7. (Ephesians 5:19) Christians are to _____ and make melody in their hearts.

Day of Worship:

8. (Acts 20:7) On the _____ day of the week, disciples came together to break bread and Paul spoke to them.

Organization:

9. (Colossians 1:18) Christ is head of His body which is the _____.

10. (Acts 14:23) When local churches which Paul established had time to mature, Paul returned to them and appointed _____ in every church.

11. (Philippians 1:1) The church in Philippi had saints with _____ and _____. Note: Elders and bishops are the same (See Acts 20, verses 17 and 28).

Work:

12. (1 Timothy 3:15) The church is the pillar and ground (foundation) of the _____.

13. (Acts 11:29) The church in Antioch sent _____ to the brethren in Judea who were facing famine.

Designations

Individually:

14. (Acts 11:26) Disciples were called _____.

15. (1 Peter 4:16) If any man suffers as a _____ he should not be ashamed.

Collectively:

16. (1 Thessalonians 2:14) Groups of Christians assembling in various cities were called churches of _____.

17. (Romans 16:16) They were also called churches of _____.

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