

The Church In Paul's Writings (5)

Introduction:

1. The apostle Paul uses a variety of images to reflect the nature of the church.
2. In his writings he describes it as "the body of Christ," "the bride of Christ," "God's building (temple)" and "the true people of God."
3. When considering the worship of the church individual activities include singing, communicating the word, praying, observing the Lord's Supper and baptism. Other activities of worship include adoration, thanksgiving, communicating compassion, etc.
4. In this lesson we will give consideration to Paul's writings especially as they relate to the organization (or government) of the church. It will help us in our understanding to notice exactly what is said and contrast it with the organizational structures associated with other religious organizations.

Discussion:

- I. Christ is the head of the church at large (the church universal).
 - A. Already in our studies we have seen that Paul uses the concept of church in the sense of all believers and in the sense of a group of believers in a particular locality.
 - B. When considering the church in the universal sense there is only one office and it is occupied by Christ.
 1. Eph. 1:20-23 states that by the power of God Christ has been seated at God's right hand.
 - a. His position is above all rule and authority and power and dominion and every name that is named. Cf. "I will build My church and the gates of Hades will not overpower it" (Matt. 16:18). "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (Matt. 28:19).
 - b. God, the Father, has put all things in subjection under His feet.
 - c. God, the Father, gave Him as head over all things to the church.
 - d. The fullness dwells in Him.
 2. Col. 1:13-18 reiterates the same idea.
 - a. God, the Father, rescued us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son.
 - 1) Whereas, the kingdom of darkness controlled us before we are transferred to the kingdom of God's Son.
 - 2) Note that it is a kingdom that we are transferred to. It is not a democracy. It is a dictatorship. It is a benevolent dictatorship. We often think of a dictatorship as when a ruler controls others for his/her own benefit and so takes advantage of those ruled. Christ is a benevolent dictator. He rules self-sacrificially for the benefit of those ruled.
 - 3) This approach does not allow for the citizens to rule, to vote, nor to decide the rules of the kingdom by majority or minority. Every citizen submits to the authority of the King. Every citizen has the same rights. The result is peace paid for by the sacrifice of the King who forgives sins by means of

- His own blood (Eph. 2:13-18; Col. 1:14, 20).
- b. The King occupies the only place of preeminence (Col. 1:15-20).
 3. Citizens in this kingdom must understand clearly the nature of this submission.
 - a. They have made Christ Lord of their lives. In baptism they have given themselves completely and totally to His control.
 - b. And yet we must constantly be reminded (2 Pet. 1:10ff; Jude; Gal. 1:6-10). Our self-centeredness and our fleshly desires tempt us to exalt ourselves and our will over the will of others.
 - c. Submission to Christ is first and then submission to one another is the prevailing message (Eph. 5:21).
 - 1) This has implications in family life (Eph. 5:22ff).
 - 2) And in the church (1 Pet. 5:1-11).
 - d. In all these areas it is not about us getting our way, but about our humbling ourselves under the mighty hand of God (James 4:5-10).

II. In the local church there are a variety of functionaries identified by Paul, but there is no hierarchy as in the religious organizations of the world.

- A. Lists of functionaries are found in 1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11; Rom. 12:6-8.
 1. Even though Paul sees the office of apostle as having some authority it is a delegated authority (cf. Matt. 16:19) involving servitude (1 Cor. 3:5ff), not personal advantage.
 2. This was not an authority limited to a local congregation.
- B. There are other functionaries (e.g. prophets, teachers, evangelists). There is no personal authority of a hierarchal nature associated with these functions.
- C. Phil. 1:1 is the only church epistle in which Paul mentions definite officials.
 1. Elders.
 2. Deacons.
 3. Elders (presbyters); pastors (shepherds); bishops (overseers) do have authority, but it is a delegated authority and not hierarchal. It is an authority of service, not lording over. Cf. the husband in the family.
 - a. 1 Tim. 5:17 says they must rule well. Not a democracy, but not lording over for personal benefit either (cf. 1 Pet. 5:3).
 - b. 1 Thess. 5:12 probably refers to elders although no title is given. It identifies those who have charge over you in the Lord.
 - 1) They diligently labor; have charge over you; give instruction.
 - 2) Your response is to appreciate them and esteem them very highly because of their work.
 - c. It is a leadership of service, not dominance, not self serving.
 - d. All the terms are used to refer to different aspects of the same function (cf. Acts 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5, 7).
 - e. Special qualities are required for eligibility (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9).
 - f. Deacons are special servants (1 Tim. 3:8-10, 13). Wives (1 Tim. 3:11).
- D. What is not mentioned: a single elder ruling over a congregation; head elders; an eldership ruling over more than one congregation; any functionaries ruling over the church universal except Christ and his apostles (who bound what was bound

in heaven); women serving as elders; the matter of women serving as deacons is debatable (cf. Rom. 16:1; 1 Tim. 3:11). There is no feminine form of deacon (deaconess) that occurs in the N.T.

- E. In the world we see all kinds of organizations ruled over in hierarchal fashion, religious and secular. We see families and churches ruled over this way. We see some people accepting this. Some opposing it but attempting to gain control to domineer over others, in effect, seeking to do the same thing that they perceive is being done to them. Our country is founded as a democracy where the power is spread out. There are votes cast. Branches of government are divided to balance the power. Religious organizations attempt the same.
- F. But the Kingdom of God, the church, is a dictatorship, a benevolent dictatorship, in which the King is servant to all and lays down His life for His citizens (Eph. 5:25). His headship in the church involves doing this very thing. Faith in Him (trust) is the appropriate response in light of His being on our side and not for Himself. What He has done creates humility in us. Submission to the King is therefore natural.
- G. In a world dominated by the pursuit of power the King gave up power. Accepted the humiliation of the cross and because of that delivered us from sin and we submit to Him in loving response. It's revolutionary!!!!

Conclusion:

1. Paul knew about domineering authority. Before the Damascus road experience he had letters from the authorities to exercise that kind of power.
2. He had witnessed that kind of power and cast his vote with those who used that kind of power to stone Stephen.
3. But he was transformed by seeing the resurrected Lord. The Lord could have killed him. He could have "made him pay" for his sin, but He did not! Instead He asked, "Why are you persecuting Me?" Wash away your sins calling on the name of the Lord.
4. Saul was humbled before such power and began proclaiming Jesus, He is the Son of God.
5. Will you humble yourself before Him?