

The Church in Four Stages

Eph. 3:21

Introduction:

- A. The popular concepts of “the church” are vague and varied.
 - 1. Anything from building to ecclesiastical hierarchy.
 - 2. A denomination or all denominations.
 - 3. A definite group or a vague abstract (cf. Church, state, home)
- B. The proper concept of “the church” can only be learned from the Bible.
 - 1. Bible is a sufficient guide in religion (2 Tim. 3:16, 17; 1 Pet. 4:11; 2 Pet. 1:3).
 - 2. Bible not to be tampered with (Gal. 1:8, 9; 2 John 9).
- C. We want to look at the church in four stages.

Discussion:

I. The Planning Stage.

- A. Planned to bring all together in one before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4-10).
- B. Brought all together in one body -- the church (Eph. 2:16; 1:22, 23)
- C. Church is according God’s eternal purpose (Eph. 3:9-11).

II. The Preparatory Stage.

- A. Old Testament types, providence and prophecy (cf. Isa. 2:2-3; Dan. 2:44).
- B. The personal ministry of Christ.
 - 1. He and John preached that the kingdom was at hand (Mt. 3:1-3; 4:17).
 - 2. He promised to build the church (Matt. 16:18, 19).
 - 3. He paid the price for the church (Acts 20:28; Eph. 5:25).

III. The Perfected Stage.

- A. Established on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2).
 - 1. Before this day spoken of in future, after it spoken in present.
 - 2. After that day people were added to the church (Acts 2:47).
- B. Spoken of in three senses: Universal (Eph. 1:22, 23), Local (1 Cor. 1:2) and assembly (1 Cor. 11:18).
- C. Had same doctrine (Apostles Doctrine -- Acts 2:42) and practice everywhere.
 - 1. Same thing taught everywhere (1 Cor. 4:17; 7:17).
 - 2. Same organization local organization everywhere (Acts 14:23; Tit. 1:5).
- D. Warned against a major departure or falling away (Acts 20:28-31; 2 Thess. 2:3-12; 1 Tim. 4:1-3).

IV. The Perverted Stage.

- A. The rise of Catholicism (606 AD).
- B. The development of denominationalism.
 - 1. Martin Luther (Germany) and the Lutheran church (1517).
 - 2. Henry VIII and Church of England (American Episcopalian) (1534).
 - 3. John Calvin (in Geneva) and John Knox (in Scotland) and the Presbyterian Church (1560)
 - 4. John Smyth (Holland) and the Baptist church (1607).
 - 5. John and Charles Wesley (England) and the Methodist Church (1729).
 - 6. William Booth (London) and the Salvation Army (1878).
 - 7. Joe Smith (New York) and the Mormons (1830).
 - 8. Holiness groups from Methodists from 1890 on.

Conclusion:

- A. We must go back of the perverted stage to the perfected stage of the New Testament
- B. If we preach the same gospel that the apostles preached, it will produce the same church.