

The Church, Her Bulwarks and Her Palaces #3

by Danny Brown

11. The early Church or congregations had but one system of government: “And he gave some apostles, and some prophets; and some evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.” (Eph 4:11, 12) “Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons;” (Phil 1:1) “And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church . . . Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.” (Acts 20:17, 28)

The apostles and prophets had no successors. The Bishops, Pastors, Elders or Overseers, had no jurisdiction outside of the congregation to which they belonged. Peter informs us that they were required to “feed the flock of God which is among you.” (1 Pet 5:1, 2) The deacons were servants of the church under the oversight of the elders. (Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 3:8-13). The evangelists were the public proclaimers of the word of life. (2 Tim 4:5) An institution having any other system of Church organization or government is not apostolic. The Scriptures do not know of any organization larger or smaller than the local congregation. The Bible knows nothing of conventions, synods, or assemblies of delegates from various congregations. The church we read about in the Bible has no earthly headquarters. Its only head is Christ and He is in heaven.

12. The church of Christ observes the Lord’s Supper as a sacred and holy memorial. “For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.” (1 Cor 11:23-25) Disciples gather around the Lord’s table and partake of the unleavened bread and fruit of the vine in memory of Him who said, “This do in remembrance of me.” It is a memorial which preaches both the death and the second coming of Christ. “For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord’s death till he come.” (1 Cor 11:26) From a retrospective view, it is a weekly reminder of the Lord’s death on the cross. From a prospective view, it is a promise that He is coming again.

The disciples in the first century partook of it regularly on the first day of the week. “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.” (Acts 2:42) This passage indicates that it was not an occasional custom with the Jerusalem church but that they partook of it regularly and frequently. The church at Troas came together on the first day of the week for the purpose of breaking bread: “And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, intending to depart on the morrow.” (Acts 20:7) Their taking it on the first day of the week is an approved example of what we should do. If it had been wrong, Paul would have condemned it.

Thus every time there is a first day of the week here is an example of what Christians are to do. Does this mean that they took the Supper the first day of every week? God said, “the Sabbath, to keep it holy.” (Ex 20:8) The Israelites were obligated

to keep the Sabbath. Every week had a Sabbath day therefore they were obligated to keep it every week. If we follow the approved example of the church at Troas, how often should Christians meet to break bread? Answer: Just as often as there is a first day of the week. An institution, however pure in teaching, which fails in this particular, is not following an apostolic approved example.

13. *The first century Christians were to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace:* Jesus Prayed for unity, "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me." ((John 17:20-21) Paul plead for unity, "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." (1 Cor 1:10) The Holy Spirit planned for unity, "Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are 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." (Eph 4:3-6) Lift up your eyes and survey the religious field. Every religious order in Christendom has a system or doctrine peculiar to itself. Whatever is taught and held sacred by one is immediately denied by another. I hope I shall not be misunderstood. I am trying to show God-fearing, God-honoring, God-loving people that there is a foundation on which we can unite without sacrificing truth or conscience.

But says an objector to this unity: "We can not all see it the same way." If not why did Jesus pray for it, Paul plead for it and the Holy Spirit plan for it. Why did Jesus establish but one Church and why did the apostles consecrate their lives to this work? In what way is this unity to be produced? Not by formulating a new creed, for they have long since proven themselves to be insufficient. Not by justifying divisions, for this would be sinful. Not by a new revelation, for this one we have is universally acknowledged to be sufficient, as a rule of faith and practice. Not by agreeing to disagree, for this would imply that we are unwilling to concede the wisdom of that for which our redeemer prayed, and for which His apostles labored. Not by forsaking the right of private investigation, for this would be disobedience to the command of Jesus, "Search the Scriptures." (John 5:39) Not by bending the Word of God to our professions, for this would encourage the introduction of new Creeds and sects. Not by expecting the Holy Spirit to guide us independently of the Word of God, for this would deny the authority and sufficiency of the Scriptures.

What then must be done? Simply abandon sectarianism and go back to the original ground. As Jeremiah said in the long ago, "See, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein." (Jer. 6:16)

There was but one foundation in the first century Church. "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." (Matt 16:16; 1 Cor 3:11) there was but one Church, the church, the church of God, the church of Christ. (Rom 16:16; 1 Cor 1:2) The Church had but one head, Jesus the Christ. (Col 1:18) There was but one beginning place, Jerusalem. (Acts 1:8) There was but one law of admission into the Church, the gospel of Christ. (Rom 1:16) There was but one Spirit, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth. (John 14:17) There was a divinely given name by which the followers of Christ were known - Christian. (Acts 11:26) There was but one hope, the hope of eternal life (Rom 8:24;

Titus 1:1, 2) There was but one Lord, the King of kings, and the Lord of lords. (Eph 4:5) There was but one faith, the system of faith revealed from heaven, one time revealed for all time, the gospel, the New Testament. (Jude 3) There was but one baptism, the baptism authorized by Christ for the remission of sins. (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16) There was recognized but one God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Eph 4:6)

This unity probably cannot and probably will not be accomplished on a grand scale. It can only be accomplished by individual action. Each individual substituting faith for speculation, opinions of men for truth, love for variance and devotion for formalism. We can find and walk in the "old paths." We can live for Christ and the proclamation of the pure gospel. Nothing short of "one body," "one Spirit," "one hope," "one Lord," "one faith," "one baptism," "one God and Father," and "one name" with "one head" will unite us on the old foundation.