

Jesus' Jew/Gentile Church

Introduction

It doesn't take much study to realize how closely Jesus was directing the activities of the members of the churches in His evangelism and the building of His churches in the narratives in Acts. However, it will require the intense use of our imagination to visualize how our king rules on earth from heaven. Each individual has been endowed with imagination. We can hear the word of God; however, unless we visualize the scene in the narrative we cannot achieve understanding in a way to have faith in what we hear.

First, we study to clearly understand the individual narrative. Next we form a picture in our mind about what we read. This requires thinking and perhaps some deep meditation. We must then see how there is some hope of satisfaction for one or more of our innate needs in what we visualize. Unless we see how what we read will in some way satisfy our innate needs we will not commit ourselves in faith. We may believe but we will not have faith. Faith gives substance to what we hope for (Heb. 11:1). After we have faith our lives are connected to what we hear from God's word. We are in the story. We have entered through the door of faith. The opening of the door requires principled study of God's word.

Please review "How to Read a Narrative," Part I, Lesson Three. Jesus is the protagonist in Luke's story and His mission is His and Christians' Father's will. Where ever we find the will of God being done on earth, as it is in heaven, we will find the kingdom of God. Jesus taught the kingdom of God to the apostles and showed them the eternal life qualities of the citizens (I John 1:1-4). Still it was necessary to have the full cooperation of the Holy Spirit to maintain His authority over God's kingdom on earth. Jesus has two roles.

It was necessary for Jesus to be in heaven at the right of God in order to serve the members of His church as **high priest** (Heb. 4:14-16; I John 2:1, 2). See Part IV, Lesson Five. The following will give us insight about Jesus as **Lord** over the church in the beginning years:

It was He who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.
Eph. 4:11-13

We can understand how elders could be ordained in each church soon after they were established. Of course, they would have been upstanding

citizens of the community and successful parents. Please read I Cor. 12:4-11, 27-31. God gave them wisdom and knowledge by the Holy Spirit.

Lesson

The church at Antioch:

All the foregoing gifts did not give the members their character and personality. The members of the church in Antioch were people who prayed and fasted in order to discern the mission of our Lord. They did not try to second guess the Lord. They did not need to attend theological seminars to develop their spirituality. Each and every member of the church must develop spiritual character regardless of their function.

This is not to say secular education for learning how to read the Bible is not valuable. A school may advertise themselves as a Christian educational system; however, they are secular. Unless Jesus is the Lord of a "called out group of people," they are secular. God's church is the only **spiritual organization** on earth today. An organization that refuses to accept the divine government for the body of Christ is an organization based on the "wisdom of men;" consequently, it is not spiritual. See the Corinthian problem in I Corinthians chapters 1-4.

When Jesus is Lord and elders have been ordained we have a spiritual "called out" people. In the first years of Jesus' evangelism and church building, it was necessary to have the Holy Spirit on the scene. Today we have the Spirit's words in the Bible (I Cor. 2:12, 13). Still, if each Christian is not of such character that the Holy Spirit will fellowship us, we will not be able understand His words well enough to live by faith in these words (I Cor. 2:14). The Holy Spirit will not be present with a Christian if guilt is on their consciences. This is why God gave us Jesus Christ's Priesthood. Jesus, the High Priest, offers His own blood as the "atoning sacrifice." Guilt on the conscience of a mature human being can be removed only by the blood of Jesus (Heb. 9:14; 10:1-4).

The church at Antioch was prepared to preach the kingdom of God to both Jews and Gentiles. Jesus, via the Holy Spirit, said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Acts 13:2. According to Luke's Acts the Apostle Paul was about to take the lead role as the apostle for the Gentiles (Acts 9:15, 16; Rom. 11:13). Please review Part III, Lesson Four; Part IV, Lesson Seven.

The aim of this lesson will be to understand what was happening in these new churches where the members had a Jew/Gentile background. We will review the letters Paul wrote to the churches. He wrote to the churches in the

Galatia area and two letters to the church at Thessalonica and four letters to the church at Corinth. We have only two of the Corinthian letters recorded in the New Testament; however, we know the main reason for his writing two other letters. Paul wrote a great letter to the saints in Rome while in Corinth at the end of his third missionary journey.

The aim of this letter to the saints in Rome was to help all the churches understand how Jesus' church identified as spiritual Israel (chapters 9-11). This would set the stage for a loving fellowship that included all people on earth (12:9—13; 15:5-9). These Christians offered their bodies as living sacrifices as they functioned in the role of their choice in Christ's body (6:17, 18; 12:4-8). The saints in Rome were full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another (15:14). They were competent to serve as an extension of Jesus' world evangelism team (1:8). Their goal for existing included more than a Sunday morning worship service.

From our study of these letters we can visualize a composite picture of what was happening in the churches. They were functioning as the body of Christ. Since this is what a church is, according to the Bible definition, we need to visualize the church in the way we view the function of our bodies. People who do not have this vision will have a vision of the church that has conformed to the world definition of what is a church. The world vision of church is the vision Satan wants us to have in our minds.

Christians need a vision in our minds of the church that has been transformed by the word of God (Romans 12:1, 2). Transformed in this scripture has been translated from the Greek word "*metamorphoo*." This word transliterated into English explains how a worm becomes a beautiful butterfly. Now let us attempt to create the "wisdom of God" vision of the church, in part, by a brief review of the letters Paul wrote while he was evangelizing in Acts.

The following are a few lines from Paul's letter to the **Galatians** soon after the churches had been planted (1:6). This letter emphasized the freedom of each member of the church for the purpose of the rehabilitation of their inner-person. They had been rescued from "the present evil age" by the gospel Paul taught (1:4). The only gospel that will rescue people from the world realm is the gospel Paul received from the Lord by the Holy Spirit and taught as the foundation of the Lord's church (1:8-12; I Cor. 3:8-10).

These Christians were rescued from their old self that had been crucified with Jesus in their new birth (2:20; 3:26-29; 5:24-26). Their new identity was sons of God and heirs of the promises made for them as seeds of Abraham through Christ (3:17, 18; 4:4-7). This gave them freedom from sin, death and the Law of Moses (3:23-25; 4:31; 5:1).

With their new freedom in Christ they could begin reinventing their lives in harmony with the Holy Spirit (3:3-5; 5:16-18). The goal of this "reinventing of the self" program was to have "Christ formed in you." 4:19; 5:22-25; 6:15. They measured themselves by Jesus Christ, in whom resides the law of life (6:2-5). These members were developing so they could have life and help each other have the life of a son of God while living in Christ - free from this present evil age (6:1, 2, 10). This is a Bible description of a church member in the Lord's church. This is spiritual growth because it is what is happening to the spirit, or inner man, in each of us that came from God (Heb. 12:9).

From Paul's letter to the very young **church in Thessalonica** we can add to our vision of "what is a church of God in Christ?" The members were imitators of the Christians who proclaimed the gospel to them as well as the Lord. Paul wrote:

In spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with joy given by the Holy Spirit. And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia - your faith in God has become known everywhere.
I Thess. 1:6-8

Evangelism, suffering and joy are characteristics of the church Jesus built in Thessalonica (2:13 -15). When they turned to God from idols they lived holy lives (1:9; 4:1-7). They loved the other members of the church (4:9, 10). They had the respect of their community because they lead a quiet life, minded their own business and worked with their own hands (4:11, 12). They were self-controlled, faithful, loving sons of the day (5:8).

When Paul arrived in Corinth the Lord spoke to him in a vision:

Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city. So Paul stayed for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God.
Acts 18:9-11

Paul wrote what we call I Corinthians from Ephesus on his third missionary journey (16:8). He had written a letter before warning them not to fellowship sexually immoral people in the church (5:9). Paul wrote another letter we do not have before he wrote what we call II Corinthians (II Cor. 2:3). The purpose of the third letter was to express his love for the church in order to persuade them to obey his instructions as an apostle (2:3-11). The last letter (II Corinthians) was written to expose the "false apostles" who were attempting to discredit the apostleship of Paul.

The information we glean from these letters might best be captioned, "What the Lord's church is not." Still Paul addressed them as "the church of God

in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy." I Cor. 1:2; II Cor. 1:1. This tells us a church of Christ may need to grow out of some of their sinful relationships (I Cor. 3:1-4). The Lord's church members are not disciples of the people who taught them the gospel (I Cor. 1:11-13). Jesus does not need the wisdom of men to develop His church (I Cor. 1:25).

Paul developed a line from Jeremiah 9:24 as a technical term in both the letters we have recorded. "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord." I Cor. 1:31; 3:21; 4:7; II Cor. 5:12; 11:12, 18, 30; 12:5, 6, 9.

The Lord's church is being built on a much higher level of wisdom than mankind can contribute (I Cor. 2:4, 5, 6-9; 3:10, 11). There are no clergy, holy men or "the preacher" people in the Lord's church. The "pulpit preacher," has become the "monarchal bishop" in many "sign board" churches of Christ throughout the world today. This myth of "the preacher" rather than "a preacher" has its roots in the Corinthian divisional problem.

The Lord's church is not a habitat for immoral people (I Cor. 5:4-6). A member does not bring charges against another member before the ungodly judges in human courts (I Cor. 6:1). The church does not give its allegiance to the old covenant (II Cor. 3:13, 14). Quarreling, jealousy, outburst of anger, factions, slander, gossip arrogance and disorder are unacceptable behavior in the Lord's body (II Cor. 12:21).

Although the foregoing was happening in the church at Corinth, it was not acceptable to Jesus. Paul closed his last letter with this warning:

This will be my third visit to you. "Every matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses." I already gave you a warning when I was with you the second time. I now repeat it while absent: On my return I will not spare those who sinned earlier or any of the others, since you are demanding proof that Christ is speaking through me. He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful among you.

II Cor. 13:1-3

The Lord's church does assemble on the first day of the week to remember the suffering of our Lord on the cross for our sins (I Cor. 11:17-26; Acts 20:7). It assembles for other reasons also; however, the church functions as the body of Christ 24/7 (I Cor. 12:27; 14:23). The church grows spiritually while serving our Lord.

Questions for Discussion

A. Introduction.

1. How does mankind's endowment of imagination assist Christians in building our faith file?

2. We read in the scriptures how Stephen saw Jesus at the right hand of God. We know Jesus told the apostles to preach the gospel and He would be with them. How do we visualize these facts in action?
3. How can we know where the kingdom of God exists in this world?
4. Jesus said He could serve God's purposes better by going away. How has Jesus served Christians both in heaven and on earth?
5. Why was it possible to ordain some members of the church as elders in the newly built churches?

B. Lesson.

1. What did the spiritual gifts not change in a Christian?
2. How do we know a group of people is a secular group, even though they may advertise themselves as a Christian organization?
3. What does it say about a person if the Holy Spirit would not join him or her in fellowship?
4. What happened in Israel before Jesus was ready for the Apostle Paul to become active as the apostle who would lead in the Gentile evangelism?
5. Name the letters Paul wrote while he was actively evangelizing in the Acts narrative before he arrived in Rome.
6. What may have been Paul's main purpose for writing the Roman letter?
7. List main differences in those churches who have had their minds transformed by their study of the word of God and those who of churches in terms of the world culture.
8. What did Paul's letter to the Galatians emphasize?
9. What would help Christians do in regard their "self?"
10. In what way did the church in Thessalonica become a model for all churches of God in Christ?
11. How did the Lord encourage Paul to evangelize Corinth?
12. What was unique about Satan's use of some Jews in his attack on the Corinthian church?
13. How do the Corinthian letters show us that spiritual growth is the order of the day for churches?
14. What was the technical word Paul developed for his use throughout the Corinthian letters?