

A Survey of the First Century Churches

The purpose, structure and activities
A Biblical and a historical perspective

Introduction

As we begin this study, I am reminded of two things that Barry Kercheville said to us during his meeting last year. First of all, he told us to read the scriptures as if it were the “first time we read them”. With an openness and curiosity that drives us to uncover the meaning and the spirit of each word and every phrase from a fresh perspective, one not colored by what we have heard or thought before. Many of the activities and works of the Church we will be studying and discussing will be things that we have done over and over for many years. Many of these things will be the things that are most notable about us as members of the Lord’s Church to an outsider. They are the things that people will first associate with the Church when they visit. They may be the things that first pique the interest or curiosity of the visitors.

The other thing Barry said was, that the biggest mistake Bible class teachers make, is they “talk too much”. With that in mind as I have prepared these lessons I have endeavored to create a format that will make it easy to generate some exchange of thought. A section will be dedicated to discussing personal observation and experience, a section to delve into the Biblical examples and direction for what we are and what we do and a section to read and discuss some of the historical writers and what they have to say about these matters.

Our lessons will include a look at the first century churches activities and examples in the following areas:

- I. The Lords Supper-Fellowship with Christ, How, when, who etc
- II. Worshipping God through music
- III. The collection-our act of grace, how, when, why
- IV. Evangelism-How, who, where, when
- V. Leadership-Church organization
- VI. Discipline
- VII. One another relationships
- VIII. Persecutions
- IX. Spiritual Challenges-false teachers, etc
- X. The first century methods of knowing God’s will-their views of study etc
- XI. The role of women in the first century churches

So, to serve as further introduction to this lesson, please answer the following questions:

1. What value is there in studying the activities of the first century churches? What would be the motivation?
2. As we examine the scriptures of the New Testament, how do we determine what was the churches purpose, how they were structured and what were their activities?
3. Is there any reason that the Church should have changed from what we read about in the New Testament? Do traditional, cultural or political changes in society necessitate a change in the Church? Why or why not?
4. The influence of Satan and human invention started to alter the work and worship of the churches within the first century. What are some of the passages that showed that the Apostles saw this and foretold of its coming? Share some passages in the New Testament that show the seeds of this kind of activity.
5. What is the meaning of the word Apostasy? Why did it happen?
6. There are many religious organizations today claiming to practice first century Christianity. If they are not, what has typically happened that has drawn them away?
7. Is the Bible a historical document? If so, is it reliable? Why or why not?
8. Is there any value in studying the secular history of the 1st century churches?