

“PAY-DAY—SOME DAY”

With Other Sketches From Life and Messages From The Word

by

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CHAPTER TWELVE

THE CHURCH OF YESTERDAY

Are Churches meeting God’s plan and program in this age? In order that we might study this vital and most important question with some degree of intelligence I have chosen to divide it into three chapters, thus: The church of yesterday; The church of today; and The church of tomorrow.

It will also assist us greatly to get the correct picture of the past, present and future church if we see what is:

1. The plan of the church.
2. Conditions as they are.
3. The remedy.

I believe in a New Testament church. Such a church consists of only saved sinners . . . **“and the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved”** (Acts 2:47). We must differentiate between the body of Christ, which is called His church (which is the engagement name of His bride), and the local church. When you are saved you become a member of His body. **“For by one Spirit are we baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free, and have all been made to drink into one Spirit”** (I Corinthians 12:13). **“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”** (Ephesians 4:4-6). Then the apostle goes on to describe how Christ loved the church, and gave Himself for it, that He might present it to Himself **“a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle.”**

In this description of the family of God, Paul, through the Holy Spirit, gives us a beautiful picture: One body—One Spirit—One hope—One Lord—One faith—One baptism. Christ also gives us a beautiful description of His church (His bride) in the sixth chapter of The Song of Solomon, verse ten: **“Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun and terrible as an army with banners?”**

All true believers are members of this body, whether they belong to a local church or not. It is possible to join a local church without being saved, but you are born into His church (baptized into His church through the Holy Spirit).

But there are bodies of Christians banded together into local groups called churches. Acts eight tells of the church at Jerusalem. Acts twelve mentions a local church that prayed Peter out of prison. Then we have the church at Antioch, the seven churches in Asia mentioned in Revelation, and the church where you belong. There are some churches that are better than others and some that are poor examples of what Christ intended them to be. But with all their faults they represent the best institution on earth.

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Now let us look at the plan and program. This is not my plan, nor the plan of some church authority.

IT IS GOD'S PLAN

We read in Isaiah 56:7, "**They shall be joyful in my house of prayer . . . my house shall be called a house of prayer.**" Three times this is repeated in the New Testament.

When we read of the first church in Acts 2 we find seven important matters that we do well to take notice of and see if the churches of today are meeting these conditions (Acts 2:42-47):

1. They continued in the teaching of the Word, in fellowship, breaking of bread and prayer.
2. They carried each other's burdens.
3. They were constantly praising God.
4. They had the respect of the community.
5. People were saved continually.
6. They were of one heart and one soul (4:32).
7. The preachers gave themselves to the ministry of the Word and prayer (Acts 6).

Some may suggest that it would be impractical for the present church to follow rules and practices of the first church, especially to have all things in common and to sell their possessions and goods and to part with them to those in need, etc. I agree that it might be difficult to adhere strictly to the letter, but call your attention to the fact that the first church as described here came into being right after Christ left this earth, and after the disciples had just been told (Acts 1:11) that "**This same Jesus which is taken from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.**" These disciples and those who gathered in the upper room believed that Christ would return to earth at any time and for that reason they had no desire to lay up any wealth or goods for the coming day, because Jesus is soon coming, and they were all glad to divide with those who had less.

I submit to you, my friend, that if we were convinced that Jesus would return tomorrow, or next week, or even next year, we would be only too happy to let the less fortunate brethren share the abundance of what God has given us. And this is what the first church practiced. Would to God the present church had more of this same spirit.

You will also notice that the first church had no social functions or program of entertainment. Their fellowship consisted in building themselves up in the holy faith around the Word of God, never forsaking the assembling of themselves together, nor the prayer meeting.

Looking over the conditions in the average church today, we find that Bible teaching services are not popular and the Lord's Table and prayer meetings attract the smallest crowd. I need not add here that many churches have long since lost the respect of the community because of bazaars, concerts, socials and ticket selling, not to mention rummage sales, etc. That people were saved continually in the first church is what could be expected when they "**were one heart and one soul.**" Strife and friction are given no room where people love God, love each other, love souls and in prayer wait upon God.

Will you take note of the sixth chapter of Acts which will give us the complete picture of the plan as found in the first church? (Acts 6:3-7)

“. . . Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and the ministry of the word.”

Here we find that the preachers gave themselves to the ministry of the Word and to prayer. God has not altered His plan since that time. If in our church order we would let our preachers devote their time to the study of God's Word and to prayer we would again find spiritual giants back of the pulpit, rather than weaklings. The church is to blame for this condition.

Too many churches want a pastor to be an errand boy for the church rather than a messenger of God. It is unreasonable to expect a preacher to be a spiritual power and to give his message with special unction when he has been busy getting ads for some church program instead of receiving new revelations from God's Book, or running himself ragged with some minor committees when he should have been in the secret place of the most High.

Lastly, and possibly the most important of all, the first church was not over-organized. These were two requirements:

- (1) Seven men.
- (2) And these seven men should be men of honest report, should be men of faith and men that were filled with the Holy Ghost .

Anyone who will study church conditions without any preconceived notions or prejudice will come to the conclusion that our churches are over-organized. I know there are exceptions, but they are few. Committees and boards sometimes really "board up" the forward progress of the church. I have been a keen student in church management for years and have held the most prominent positions in a Bible-believing, New Testament church for more than thirty years, and without fear of contradiction I make the claim that the trouble with most churches is that there is too much organization. We are so busy with little petty things that we have very little time left over for important matters for God. Oftentimes board meetings have so little of importance to handle that they become nothing but wrangling meetings.

Placing the leadership of the church in the hands of seven men will settle many church problems.

But what kind of men should be on a church board? They should be “**men of honest report, full of faith and the Holy Ghost.**”

Does your church select that kind? God will bless the church that does. But oftentimes it is just the opposite. Instead of electing those who are filled with God’s power, those that are full of money power are selected. Thank God for the many big men of affairs that God has filled with His power, and they really are men after the heart of God, but they are nevertheless exceptions.

I am sorry indeed that I must say that many churches are ruled by men who have big pocketbooks and can write out big checks rather than by men who are filled with the Holy Spirit and who have faith in God.

The first church was a triumphant church because it put first things first, and if we today really want to go some place with God and be victorious in these days of apostasy we must be willing to pay the price of complete obedience to God’s plan and program. If I had to choose I’d rather have the poorest shoe-cobbler with heaven’s power on my church board, than the richest man in town without spiritual power. A lowly scrub-woman who knows God is a greater asset in a church than a fine society lady who is popular with “the higher-ups.”

I am firm in my opinion that a local church that dares to follow God’s plan and specifications in church rules and order will go forward to a glorious victory for God and have a continuous revival!

~ end of chapter 12 ~

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