

Sunday, October 24, 2010—Grace Life School of Theology—*Church History: A Tale of Two Churches*—Lesson 6 Early Church History: Paul Establishes Local Churches

An Astounding Truth

- Acts 13:1-3—between Acts 13 and 20, a period of 10-12 years according to Ussher’s dating system, Paul established churches in four Roman provinces: Galatia, Macedonia, Achaia, and Asia. (Jordan, 1)
- In Acts 13 there were no churches in these provinces; by Acts 20:1-3 (when he wrote Romans) Paul could speak as if his work there was done and could plan extensive journeys into the far west without (Romans 15:14-24). (Jordan, 1)
- Paul’s work in a region was done when he planted fully functioning local churches (I Thessalonians 1:6-10). These churches were able to carry on the work in the future.
- Paul’s strategy was the multiplication of local churches as the base for doing the work of the ministry.
 - Paul helped establish the church at Antioch (Acts 11:19-30)—the first visible presence of the Body of Christ in Acts. This was a growing fully functioning local church with fully appointed leadership (Acts 13:1-3). From that base, Paul embarked to do the specific work of church planting and local church based training and leadership. (Jordan, 1)
- Paul carried out his core strategy in several basic steps.

Step 1: Evangelize

- Paul evangelized strategic cities to establish a beachhead of believers.
 - Selected specific target areas—mainly strategic cities: Rome (capital of the known world), Corinth (commercial center), Galatia (along major trade routes), Ephesus (religious center), Philippi (Acts 16:12) (Jordan, 1)
- “All the cities and towns in which Paul planted churches were centers of Roman administration, Greek civilization, Jewish influence or some commercial importance.” (Ronald Allen, quoted in Jordan, 2)
- Paul considered an area evangelized when a fully functioning local church was planted in its major city (Romans 15:14-24). (Jordan, 2)
- When Paul chose a target city he looked beyond the city to the surrounding region (Acts 19:10). (Jordan, 2)

Step 2: Edification

- Paul edified new believers in sound doctrine by teaching and establishing them in the principles of grace.

- Paul followed the divine design for the edification of the believer (Acts 14:21-22, Romans 1:11-12, 16:25, I Timothy 1:3-4, Colossians 2:7)
- Paul instructed the saints about what it means to be a member of the body of Christ:
 - Believers are no longer aliens—they belong (Ephesians 2:12, 19).
 - Believers have a new identity (I Corinthians 12:13, 27, II Corinthians 5:17).
 - Believers are a called-out group, no longer part of the old culture but separate and distinct from the society around them (II Corinthians 6:14-16). (Jordan, 2-3)

Step 3: Established Local Churches

- Paul established these new communities of believers into organized local churches (Acts 14:22-23, I Timothy 3, I Thessalonians 5:12, Titus 1:5)
- Self-governing (Acts 14:23, 20:17, 28)
 - Possessed a multiplicity of elders/bishops in every city and church (Titus 1:5)
- Self-supporting (I Timothy 5:17)
- Self-propagating (I Thessalonians 1:6-8, II Timothy 2:2)
- There was no higher governing authority over the churches other than the rightly divided scriptures and their duly appointed eldership. (Jordan, 3)

Step 4: Expand

- These local churches were a base for the expansion and penetration of the gospel into communities and regions beyond (Philippians 1:3-7, 27-30, 4:3, 15, II Corinthians 10:13-15).
- Paul passed the baton to the elders of these local churches to continue the process (Acts 20:17-28), charging them the leaders he had trained to train others in the same manner that he had trained them (II Timothy 2:2).
- He left them with instructions for ordering the local church (Pastoral Epistles) and encouraged the churches to be of one mind in their efforts for the furtherance of the gospel (Philippians 1:27-31). (Jordan, 3-4)

Concluding Thoughts

- In these four steps we have the God ordained and sanctioned method for the universal body of Christ to organize itself at the local level.
- Bishops only had authority in the churches and cities in which they were properly ordained and there was not higher authority than the Bible.
- The local church in the book of Acts is harassed and persecuted by Rome (Acts 24). It is Rome who cuts off James' head (Acts 12) and imprisons Paul (Acts 28).

- The local church according to the Pauline model has ordained elders and deacons (I Timothy 3:1-9); no priests, nuns, monks, archbishops, cardinals or popes.
- The local church in the New Testament never prays to Mary, never practices infant baptism, or teaches baptismal regeneration.
- The Bible believing New Testament church is marked by the following characteristics:
 - They used an Old Testament that did not contain the Apocrypha.
 - The New Testament they constructed was written largely in Asia Minor without one original manuscript originating from Alexandria Africa.
 - Their home base was Antioch of Syria not Rome. From this area comes the Byzantine Textus Receptus of the Protestant Revolution and the King James Bible
 - The genuine Pauline local church was preoccupied with evangelism, edification, and Bible preaching not governmental programs and political movements.
 - No New Testament Christian ever called any church leader “father,” nor is one New Testament church official ever called a “priest”.
 - The Bible believing church was premillennial in its understanding of prophecy knowing that the “kingdom of heaven” is not coming to earth until the King of Heaven returns to this earth to establish his rightful throne at Jerusalem.
 - Pauline local churches observed only one ordinance (the Lord Table, I Corinthians 10-11) and no sacraments. (adopted and sanitized from Ruckman, 19-38)

Work Cited

Jordan, Richard. *Church Planting Boot Camp*. Chicago, IL: Grace School of the Bible.

Ruckman, Peter S. *The History of the New Testament Church, Vol. I*. Pensacola, FL: Bible Baptist Bookstore, 1982.