

The Universal Church

Introduction:

- A. Those who espouse a “new hermeneutic” deny there is a New Testament pattern to which the church is to conform.

For the individual believer, Christ's perfect example remains the benchmark for his or her life.

For the corporate body of Christ, there is no historical prototype of the church for duplication.

The kingdom of God is yet to come in its ultimate form (Rubel Shelly and Randall J. Harris, **The Second Incarnation**. 6).

- B. Every major apostasy began with a corruption of the organization of the church. - Catholic Church, Christian Church, institutional Church of Christ

- C. There is a New Testament pattern for the organization of the church. - Hebrews 8:1-5

- D. What is the organization of the universal church?

I. What is the universal church?

- A. It is the entity Jesus promised to build. - Matthew 16:18

- B. It is composed of all those people saved by Christ. - Ephesians 5:23; Acts 2:47

- C. Christ has only one such church. - Ephesians 4:4

II. What is “organization”?

- A. definition: “organize”: “to set up an administrative and functional structure for” (**Webster's Third New World Dictionary** [unabridged]. 1590)

- B. three characteristics:

- 1. pooled resources - 1 Corinthians 16:1-2

- 2. oversight - 1 Peter 5:1-2

- 3. work common to all - 1 Timothy 5:16

- C. not: arrangement, method, work - e.g., Bible classes vs. Sunday School

III. The universal church has no earthly organization.

- A. The church is composed of individuals, not congregations. (Every metaphor used in the New Testament that describes the composition of the church applies to individuals.)

- 1. kingdom: citizens - Matthew 16:18-19; Ephesians 2:19

- 2. fold: sheep - John 10:16

- 3. vine: branches - John 15:5-6

- 4. body: members - 1 Corinthians 12:27

- 5. temple: stones - Ephesians 2:21; 1 Peter 2:5

- 6. family: children - Ephesians 3:14-15; Galatians 3:26

- B. Individual members of this universal body function under a spiritual Head. - Colossians 1:18; 3:17

- C. Christians universally have fellowship by each following Christ through submission to the words of His apostles. - 1 John 1:3,7

Conclusion:

- A. Jimmy Lovell, founder of World Bible School, called for “universal action for the universal church.” This is the basis of both Roman Catholicism and the American Christian Missionary Society.

- B. The universal church is a spiritual relationship.

- 1. Its only Head is Christ.

- 2. Its only tie is spiritual fellowship of individual Christians in Christ by submission to the word of His apostles.

- 3. It has no earthly organization.

- C. We must maintain this pattern. - Hebrews 8:5