THE FIRST CENTURY CHURCH vs. CHURCHES OF LATER ORIGIN
Sermon by Donald Townsley

INTRODUCTION
1. The church which Jesus built was unique in the first century; it was different from the various Jewish sects and pagan religions -- Rom. 3:21.
2. The things which made it unique in the first century also make it unique TODAY.
3. The church of the New Testament is different from the sectarian denominations, the cults, and the pagan religions today.

I. THE FIRST CENTURY CHURCH BEGAN ACCORDING TO PROPHESY
1. Isaiah prophesied of its beginning in Isaiah 2: 2 -4.
   (1) It was to begin in the last days.
   (2) In Jerusalem.
   (3) It did begin according to prophesy -- Acts 2: 16 - 17; Acts 2:47.
2. Jesus said the Kingdom would come with power before some who heard Him speak died -- Mk. 9:1.
   (1) It did.
   (2) Mk. 9:1; Acts 1:8; Acts 2:1

II. THE FIRST CENTURY CHURCH FOLLOWED APOSTOLIC DOCTRINE
1. Luke recorded that "they continued steadfastly in the apostle's doctrine" -- Acts 2:42
   (1) Doctrine of Christ -- 2 John 9
   (2) Doctrine of God -- Tit. 2: 10
2. The first century church recognized that Jesus had selected the Apostles through whom to reveal His will to mankind -- Matt. 16:19; 18:18
3. He gave them the Holy Spirit to guide them "into all truth"--John 16:13.
4. The Holy Spirit taught them "all things" and brought all things to their remembrance that Jesus said unto them -- John 14: 26.
5. The early church recognized the special role of the Apostles in revealing the will of God, and it abided in the apostle's doctrine -- Acts 2:42; 2 John 9 - 11
6. This made them unique in the first century:
   (1) They various Jewish sects confined themselves to the study of the Old Testament and their traditions -- Matt. 15:9; 16: 6, 12
   (2) They rejected the revelation which was given to the Apostles by the Holy Spirit -- Acts 13: 44 - 46; Eph. 3:3 - 5
   (3) The various heathen religions rejected the Apostle's doctrine -- Acts 17: 32 - 33
7. Today the Lord's church is unique in that it abides in Apostolic doctrine.
   (1) The Catholic church recognized the authority of the Ex Cathedra statements of the Pope, the decisions of various Catholic councils and the Apocrypha books.
   (2) Most Protestant churches appoint synods and councils which have legislative authority over them:
1. They decide whether or not homosexuals should be allowed to serve as preachers -- I Cor. 6:9 - 10
2. They decide whether or not a woman can preach -- I Tim. 2:8, 11 - 12, 14
3. They don’t go to the word of God to settle issues and problems.
4. The apostle’s doctrine is not their standard of authority.

(3) Religious groups which do not have synods or councils, feel at liberty to introduce all kinds of innovations in the worship and work of the church -- they have introduced Choirs, special singing groups, instruments of music, church supported institutions, and all kinds of recreational activities.


III. THE DAY OF WORSHIP WAS UNIQUE TO THE EARLY CHURCH

1. The early church assembled on the first day of every week:
   (1) To eat the Lord’s Supper -- Acts 20:7; 2:42
   (2) To give -- I Cor. 16:1 - 2.
   (3) To teach and pray -- Acts 2:42; 20:7.
   (4) To Sing -- Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:19.
2. This day of worship was known as the "LORD’S DAY" -- Rev. 1:10
3. This day distinguished the first century church from Judaism which "remembered the Sabbath"-- Ex. 20:8; Col. 2:14 - 17
4. The pagans had no distinctive day of worship.
5. The first day of the week worship was distinctive to the early church.
6. The first day of the week is still one of the DISTINCTIVE MARKS of the New Testament church.

IV. THE WORSHIP OF THE EARLY CHURCH WAS UNIQUE; THE EARLY CHURCH’S WORSHIP CONSISTED OF THE FOLLOWING ITEMS:

1. Apostolic preaching -- Acts 20:7; Acts 2:42; II Tim. 4:2; I Tim. 1:3; I Cor. 2:2; 1:18; I Cor. 5:1 - 5; Rom. 1:16
2. The Lord’s Supper -- Acts 20:7; I Cor. 11:20; Acts 2:42
3. Prayer -- Acts 2:42; I Tim. 2:8
4. Congregational singing -- Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:19
5. Contribution -- I Cor. 16:1 - 2
6. This worship is DISTINCTIVE.
7. The Jewish people worshipped God with an altar where animal sacrifices were offered to God.
   (1) They studied the Law of Moses.
   (2) They had a separate priesthood.
   (3) Their worship differed from that of the New Testament church.
9. DENOMINATIONS:
   (1) Forsake Apostolic Doctrine to hear a preacher tell some heartwarming stories and preach from creeds.
(2) They have rejected the weekly observance of the Lord's Supper for yearly, quarterly, or monthly observance.

(3) They have rejected congregational singing for singing by choirs and special groups -- Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:19

(4) They have supplemented singing with instrumental music -- I Cor. 4:6

(5) They have replaced free-will offering with tithes -- I Cor. 16:2; II Cor. 8:12

10. The church which worships in keeping with the Divine pattern is distinctive and unique.
   (1) This worship does not attract the worldly who expect to be entertained.
   (2) This worship only attracts the spiritually-minded -- Rom. 6:6

CONCLUSION
1. As men have departed from Apostolic doctrine in various areas, those who confine themselves to the Bible become distinctive in those areas.

2. The church of the New Testament is distinctive in the Plan of Salvation:
   (1) People in Apostolic days were saved by:
       1. Hearing -- Rom. 10:17
       2. Believing -- Mk. 16:16
       3. Repenting -- Acts 2:38
       4. Confessing Christ as the Son of God -- Acts 8:37
   (2) When they obeyed the gospel they were added to the church -- Acts 2:47

3. Don't you want to be a member of the New Testament church?

4. It had its beginning on the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Jesus Christ -- Acts 2

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