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THE COUNCIL AT JERUSALEM: A MODEL FOR CONTEMPORARY BAPTIST CHURCH COUNCIL

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ABSTRACT

Based on the Baptist's understanding of democracy, it is the focus of this research work to model local Baptist Church Council after the Council at Jerusalem as recorded in Acts of the Apostles Chapter 15.

Chapter One of the essay deals with the general introductory aspect which includes; thesis statement, motivation and purpose of the study, research methodology and definition of key terms.

In Chapter Two, effort is focused on the historical background of the Council at Jerusalem including the authorship of the Book of Acts, Date, and place of writing, purpose of the book, Analysis of the passage (Acts 15) and the interpretation of the text.

Moreover, Chapter Three of the work centers on the Local Baptist Church Council; composition and leadership, how decisions are made, brief analysis of the questionnaire administered and possible strengths and weaknesses of the democratic system of church government practiced in Baptist denomination.

Moreso, Chapter Four revolves round the significance of the decision made at the Council of Jerusalem to the church at Jerusalem, diaspora churches, local Baptist Church and the mission activities at large.

Futhermore, Chapter Five gives the conclusion based on the entire research work and possible recommendation.

CONCLUSION

This research work has been able to examine the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15, their decision-making process and the local Baptist church council and her decision-making process. It is observed that, the problem of the Antiochene Ecclesia was brought to the Jerusalem Church for deliberation. The matter was thoroughly discussed by both the apostles and laymen. All the members were in support of the motion. The motion according to James who was the leader (Pastor) of the Jerusalem Church was not to put unnecessary laws or burden on the Gentile Christians.

In some denominations, such a doctrinal problem is referred to a council or committee or the head of that denomination for an acceptable declaration. As a part of democratic process, the matter was discussed thoroughly by both parties and were pleased with the decision taken at the meeting in Jerusalem. When the matter was brought to the apostles, it was noted that they did not decide it themselves or asked the leaders of the community to decide on it. It was the Spirit of God that led them. It is also observed that the apostles laid aside selfish interests and personal prejudices in order for the will of the Holy Spirit to prevail and for peace to reign in the entire Christendom.

In view of this, the Council employed democratic principles, which enhanced effective decision that they made. In the same vein, a local Baptist Church Council is similar in principle to the Council at Jerusalem but differs in practice. The decision reached in Acts 15 was unanimously agreed upon because the council members gave priority to the leadership of the Holy Spirit. However, a local Baptist Church Council has given priority to majority rule by casting of votes. From the research analysis, it is evident that majority of church council members cast their votes based on personal interests and prejudices. This in essence makes them to be different in practice from the council at Jerusalem.

RECOMMENDATION

It is evident from the analysis of the questionnaires administered that most of those who are members of a local Baptist Church Council make decisions based on their personal understanding of issues which is motivated by their personal interests and biases. Hence, in most cases they do not give room for the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

At this juncture, the researcher recommends among others the followings to members of the local Baptist Church Council:

Firstly, they should all give priority to the leadership of the Holy Spirit in their decision making process, irrespective of their personal interests and prejudices on such matters.

Secondly, it is obvious that those who made up the Council at Jerusalem were Christians and not just office holders. Therefore, local

Baptist Churches should make sure that members of the church council are those who have accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and personal Savior. This will also enhance efficient decision-making process.

In addition, it is expedient for members of a local Baptist Church Council to always lay aside personal interest when decisions are to be made. This was true of the original apostles of Christ at the Jerusalem Council. They laid aside their Jewish interest for Gentiles to be free.

Besides, church council members should know that they are accountable to God first and foremost, and to the church in all the decisions they make. Therefore, they should see the council meetings as an extension of their worship to God. In view of this, they should do all things to the glory of God.

In the light of the above, if a local Baptist church wants to experience effective and efficient decision making process then the council at Jerusalem should be her model in all respects.