

# The New Testament Church

## 9 Teachings and Practices that Identified the New Testament Church

Acts 2:42

42 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine (teaching) and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.

In Acts 2, the church that Jesus Christ promised to build (Matthew 16:18) was finally established. Christ put plenty of sweat and tears into the planning and building of this glorious institution, as anyone would if it meant having to spill your own blood to accomplish the task (Acts 20:28). Paul even says that the planning process started before the earth was even created (Ephesians 3:8-10). Wow! It comes as no surprise then that Jesus would organize the church and provide a pattern for perpetual generations of the church to follow in His absence. In fact, Jesus started revealing the pattern for church teaching and practice to the apostles no later than Matthew 18:15-20. He then delegated the apostles and prophets to set the church in order after its arrival in His absence (John 16:13).



The pattern Jesus revealed is readable and understandable, otherwise we wouldn't say it was revealed; we would say it was concealed. That pattern is found in scripture (2 Timothy 3:16-17), and it is the purpose of this work to concisely reveal the introductory pattern for teaching and practice as carried out in the church of the New Testament.

## 1. Assembly

The church in the New Testament assembled together on a regular basis so as to worship God and edify one another (Acts 4:23-31; 5:12; 20:7; Hebrews 10:24-25). There might have been multiple churches (congregations) in a single city as reflected in 1 Corinthians 16:3-16, but the members of each, individual congregation would assemble together on a regular basis. The regularity of that assembly will be addressed in later points. When they assembled, they would come together in an undivided assembly of men, women, and children alike (1 Corinthians 11:17-20; 14:23)

It was not until the 1780's that the practice of dividing the assembly by the use of Sunday School (i.e.- Bible classes) came into existence. Dividing the assembly into different groups for any reason is never found in the scriptures.

## 2. Teaching *(content and methods)*

The church in the New Testament engaged in regular study and teaching of God's word. While this was the practice of individual Christian's lives, teaching was expected to take place when the church came together in one place to worship. The Bible directs this teaching accordingly:



- Men perform the public teaching of the church (1 Corinthians 14:34-37)
- Speaking is done one man at a time (1 Corinthians 14:31)
- Teaching is from the Bible and does not go beyond what the Bible teaches (Acts 17:2-3; 17:10-11; 20:27; 1 Timothy 1:3; 4:6-7; 4:15-16; Titus 1:10-14; Galatians 1:6-9)
- Teaching is to be edifying as much as possible (1 Cor. 14:26)

### 3. Lord's Supper (Communion)

The church in the New Testament observed weekly communion during their assemblies. This weekly communion meal was conducted according to Jesus' instruction to His apostles which was given the night he was betrayed (see Matthew 26; Mark 14; Luke 22). From reading Jesus' and Paul's instruction on this practice, we come to the following inevitable conclusions about how the church in the New Testament observed this ceremony.

- Observed exactly as the Lord gave instruction (1 Corinthians 11:2,24-25)
- On the first day of the Week (Acts 20:7)
- Every first day of the week (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:26; 1 Corinthians 16:2; Hebrews 10:25)
- One Cup (Matthew 26:27; Mark 14:23; Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 10:16; 11:25,27,28)
- One Loaf (1 Corinthians 10:16-17; 11:23)
- Remembering the Lord's death and what it accomplished (1 Corinthians 11:27-29)



One cup and one loaf in the Lord's Supper was the regular practice of all churches for centuries, as this is the New Testament teaching and practice. It was not until 1891 at the Scovill Avenue Methodist Church of Cleveland, Ohio that individual cups were introduced to the communion service.

#### 4. Prayer

The church in the New Testament would pray in their assemblies (Acts 1:14; 4:23-31; 12:5; 1 Cor. 14:13-14; 1 Timothy 2:8; 1 Thessalonians 5:17). Prayer played an important function in praising God and asking for His blessings.

#### 5. Singing

The church in the New Testament would sing in their assemblies (1 Corinthians 14:15; Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16). This was done without the aid of instruments. There is no scripture in the New Testament authorizing instrument use in worship; it is neither explicit or implicit in scripture (*see Appendix*). History verifies that instruments were not introduced to church worship until 670 A.D.



## 6. Collection

The church is an organization. And though it is not like human organizations, it does consist of humans. Naturally, the members of the church will fall into need occasionally. Beyond this, the gospel must be taken to all the world (Matthew 28:18). For the purpose of fulfilling the physical needs of members and the call to spread the gospel, the church in the New Testament took up a weekly collection from the members (1 Corinthians 16:1-2; 2 Corinthians 9:6-7). The collecting of money implies the existence of a treasury where the money would reside until needed for use. How this collection was performed and exactly how the collected monies were used is described by the following list:

- Duty of every member (1 Corinthians 16:2)
- Every first day of the Week (1 Corinthians 16:2, ESV, NASB, NIV)
- For Christians (1 Corinthians 16:1; 2 Corinthians 8:24; 9:1)
- For Needy Christians (2 Corinthians 9:12)
- For supporting Preachers (1 Corinthians 9:1-11; Philippians 4:15)
- For supporting Elders of the church (1 Timothy 5:17-18)
- For supporting Widows in need (1 Timothy 5:1-16)
- For supporting the work of the church (*implied by the support of preachers and elders*)

## 7. Leadership

The church in the New Testament had structure and government. Naturally, if there was no government in the church, there would be anarchy and chaos. To prevent chaos and to ensure the church was spiritually and physically cared for, God gave instructions for the existence of leadership in the church.

- A church is not mature until it has established biblically qualified men to the office of leadership called Elder (*aka: bishop, presbyter, pastor, shepherd, overseer*). See Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5
- Elders must meet certain qualifications (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:6-9)
- There is always more than one elder (Acts 11:30; 14:23; 15:2-6; 16:4; 20:7; 21:18; 1 Timothy 5:17; Titus 1:5).

While biblically qualified eldership is the ultimate mark of a church with mature leadership, there are other offices of leadership found in the New Testament church such as evangelists and teachers (Ephesians 4:11). Evangelists and teachers are essential in developing and supporting church elders.

On the other hand, the scriptures do not leave any hint that the early church had priests, archbishops, or even local churches governed by a single man such as is prevalent in the one-man-pastor-



system. It was not until 606 A.D. that the Catholic Church officially appointed their first pope, Boniface III.

The scriptures do not leave any hint that any man, group of men, or church council presided over or governed multiple churches. Each local church was self-governing and autonomous when reading the Bible.

## 8. Evangelism

The church in the New Testament was evangelistic, meaning that the members of the local church engaged in spreading the gospel. This was the commission of Jesus Christ in Matthew 28:18-20, and this is exactly what the early church did (Acts 5:14,42; 8:4-6,25).



## 9. Fellowship

The church in the New Testament had regular fellowship; in other words, the members of the church shared time together outside the worship of the church. They were a part of each other's lives (Acts 1:14; 2:1; 2:42; 2:44; 4:32-35; 12:12; 16:14-15; 16:33-34; 21:8-10; 1 Thessalonians 2:8). This relationship fosters an atmosphere of love and caring for each other as family members and equally valuable members of the body of Christ.

# Appendix

How the Scriptures Teach	
Explicitly	Implicitly
Required	Required
Prohibited	Prohibited
Permitted	Permitted
Silence	

How the Scriptures Teach
1. Command
2. Example
3. Necessary Conclusion

## 2 Timothy 3:16-17

16 *All Scripture* is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,  
17 that the man of God may be *complete*, thoroughly equipped for *every good work*.

## Colossians 3:17

17 And *whatever* you do in *word* or *deed*, do *all* in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.



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Other Resources

*[tncgchurchofchrist.org](http://tncgchurchofchrist.org)*  
*[fiveminutebiblestudy.com](http://fiveminutebiblestudy.com)*