
Practice

Since the church was purchased with the blood of Christ (Acts 20:28), it must have a mission so holy and divine that no other organization could fulfill its work. Some have prostituted the Lord's church by turning it into a glorified YMCA or some sort of social club. The New Testament church has three great works:

1. Preaching The Gospel To The Lost.

This is the greatest and most urgent need of our day. When Jesus gave the great commission, He said, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:15-16). The gospel was preached to the known world in less than forty years. When Paul wrote to the church at Colosse, he spoke of the gospel "which was preached to every creature under heaven" (Col. 1:23). This mammoth task was accomplished without the use of radio, television or national organizations. It was done by Christians teaching their neighbors (2 Tim. 2:2).

Early Christians did not employ gimmicks such as "Karate For Christ" or "Gymnastics for God" to lure people into their assembly. The message of the cross was the only drawing power they ever used (Rom. 1:16; 1 Cor. 1:18).

2. Preaching The Gospel To The Saved.

The early church assembled together every Lord's day to partake of the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7), sing (Eph. 5:19), pray (Acts 2:42), give of their financial means (1 Cor. 16:1-2), and hear preaching from God's word (Acts 20:7). These elements of worship served to edify (build up) the saved (Heb. 10:24-25).

Jesus set elders and evangelists in the church "for the equipping of the saints for

the work of the ministry, (and) for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:12).

3. Care Of Needy Saints. Benevolence to Christians in need was another obligation of the church. The Christians in Macedonia and Achaia sent a contribution to the saints in Jerusalem (Rom. 15:25-33). In order for widows to be taken into the regular care of the congregation, they had to meet certain requirements (1 Tim. 5:3-16). The general care for world's hungry is not a work assigned to the church, nor is the church to be involved in political pursuits.

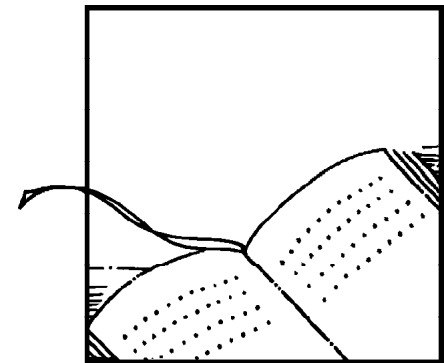
The Seed Of The Kingdom

When Jesus gave the parable of the sower, He explained that the seed of the Kingdom was the word of God (Luke 8:11). When we plant that seed in a man's heart, the only thing it will produce is a *Christian*, a member of the body of Christ. When believers were baptized in the New Testament, God washed away all their sins and added them to the church belonging to Christ (Acts 2:38, 47; 22:16). Jesus promised to build His church (Matt. 16:18), and it is the only one He has promised to save (Eph. 5:23; 4:4; 1:22-23). Churches and organizations devised by men will be uprooted (Matt. 15:13). Are you a member of the His church? □

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"Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it"
(Matthew 16:18)

What Is The New Testament Church?



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What Is The New Testament Church?

Are you a member of the New Testament church? Nearly two thousand years ago Jesus Christ promised to build His church (Matt. 16:18). The church of Christ was established on the first Pentecost after His death, burial and resurrection (Acts 2).

If the apostles of Christ were on earth today, what church would they be members of? There are over 3000 different religious bodies in the United States. The Mormon church alone has created over 100 different sects. There are more than 100 groups that go by the name *Baptist* (including American Baptists, Southern Baptists, Missionary Baptists, Freewill Baptists, General Baptists, and Primitive Baptists).

How can one determine which religious group to be identified with? Since it would be impossible to examine every denomination here, we will confine ourselves to the New Testament and compare it with some practices of today. Let us look at three main areas: Name, Organization and Practice.

Name

Does it make any difference by what name you are called? In the Old Testament, God changed Jacob's name to *Israel* (Gen. 32:28). The "el" in his name was a constant reminder of *Elohim* (God). Every time the word *Israel* was uttered, God was glorified.

In the first century the followers of Christ were divinely "called Christians first at

Antioch" (Acts 11:26). The word *Christian* means "an adherent of Christ." Every time this name is used, Christ is glorified.

There are several terms used to designate the individual followers of Christ. Among them we find: "disciples" (Acts 11:26), "brethren" (Gal. 6:1), and "saints" (Rom. 1:7). These terms show the relationship of the saved to the Lord or to other Christians.

When individual congregations are spoken of in the New Testament, they are referred to as: "the church of God" (1 Cor. 1:2), "the church of Christ" (Rom. 16:16), "the house of God" (1 Tim. 3:16) and "the church of the Firstborn" (Heb. 12:23). These terms give glory to God, not man.

When a man calls himself a "Baptist," he is either giving honor to a mortal man (John) or to a Bible doctrine (baptism). Wearing the name "Lutheran" or "Wesleyan" gives undue honor to men like Martin Luther and John Wesley. Followers of Christ must be identified with Him, "for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

Organization

It comes as a shock to many people when they learn the New Testament church did not have any organization larger than, smaller than or other than the local congregation. Many denominations understand this concept and have striven to maintain the inde-

pendence of each local congregation. Other groups, ignoring the Bible pattern, have developed massive national organizations.

One Baptist manual makes this interesting observation: "Because churches are the only Christian organizations provided for in the New Testament, it may be said that they are the only ones really essential to the accomplishment of the purposes of Christ. Experience, however, has demonstrated that churches in fellowship with one another are able to fulfill the work of the gospel more effectively than churches alone" (*Hiscox Standard Baptist Manual*, p. 120). Hiscox believed the New Testament church was completely autonomous (independent), but that man could improve upon God's original design by developing Associations, State Conventions and National Conferences.

In the divine pattern, every local congregation consisted of elders, deacons, preachers and members (Phil. 1:1). Elders are older men who oversee the work of the local church. The only authority they have is in the congregation where they rule (Acts 20:28, 1 Pet. 5:1-4). The qualifications for elders can be found in 1 Tim. 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. These qualifications are not to be taken lightly.

Deacons can be found in many religious groups, and this is to be commended. The qualifications for deacons are listed in 1 Tim. 3:8-13. Since deacons must "be the husbands of one wife" (1 Tim. 3:12), women can never fill this office.

Preachers in the New Testament were not called *Reverend*. Jesus prohibited His followers from heaping titles of praise upon themselves (Matt. 23:5-10). The clergy/laity system, which originated in Catholicism and practiced in most churches, is in direct opposition to the plan of Jesus.

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