

bread” (Acts 20:7). This “breaking of bread” was the simple memorial service which Jesus established to remember his death. In First Corinthians 11:20 Paul calls this “the Lord’s Supper” and there shows that it’s observance was an important reason for their assembly on the first day of the week.

It would be a mistake to imagine, however, that New Testament assemblies were important because of the observance of the Lord’s Supper. A second fundamental reason for their assemblies, often on days in addition to Sunday (see Acts 2:46), was to encourage one another. The writer of the letter of Hebrews commands Christians that they should not be—**“forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as we see the Day**

approaching” (10:25). The way they encouraged one another in these assemblies involved four activities:

1. **Singing.** In the New Testament this was always vocal music alone (Colossians 3:16, I Corinthians 14:26, Acts 16:25 & Ephesians 5:19).
2. **Praying.** (I Thes. 5:17 , I Cor. 14:15).
3. **Teaching.** (I Corinthians 14:26, Acts 20:7). In the assembly this teaching was done by men (I Corinthians 14:34 & I Timothy 2:11,12).
4. **Collection.** On the first day of the week a collection was taken from among the saints, **“for the saints”** (I Corinthians 16:1,2). This voluntary collection was how the early church raised funds.

By Kyle Pope

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Services

Sunday: 9:30 a.m.
10:20 a.m.
6:00 p.m.
Wednesday: 7:00 p.m.

Elders:

Ken Ford
Charles Kelley
Pat Ledbetter

Deacons:

Dean Bowers
Eddie Cook
Bill Davis
Pat Goguen
Neil Ledbetter
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Portrait of the New Testament Church

When the word “church” is used in this day and time most people call to mind a building where religious activities are conducted. In the New Testament the word is used much differently. First, it is never used to refer to a physical building. Instead a “church” is an assembly of people. In the original Greek, in which the New Testament was written, the word which described this (which we translate “church”) was the word *ecclesia* (ἐκκλησία), meaning “a called out body; a congregation, assembly or gathering.”

On one occasion the New Testament uses *ecclesia* in reference to a non-religious assembly or mob (Acts 19:32,41).

Most often, when the New Testament refers to the “Church” it is referring to a group of God’s people “called out” by the gospel or message of Jesus Christ (II Thessalonians 2:13-15). Thus we find reference to **“churches of Christ”** (Romans 16:16) or the **“church of God”** (I Corinthians 1:2) and even the **“church of the First-born”** (Hebrews 12:23). These all describe for us

those people who by their faith and obedience to Jesus belong to God in Christ.

The Saints

Who were these people who made up Christ's church? We can find the answer to this within the pages of Scripture. Many New Testament books were originally authoritative letters sent from apostles of Christ to various churches in the first century. From the opening words of these letters we can learn a great deal about who these people were. For example, First Thessalonians was written by the Apostle Paul—**“To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ”** (1:1). Thus the letter was to the “called out body” in the city of Thessalonica. Similar to this, the book of Colossians was addressed—**“To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are in Colosse”** (1:2).

Much like the word “church” the word “saints” has a different meaning in Scripture than in modern usage. In the Scriptures a saint was not one who has been recognized by some religious body and then given this title. Instead, all Christians are saints. The word “saint”

is translated from the Greek word *hagios* (ἅγιος) meaning someone or something which is “set apart unto God; consecrated or holy.” Paul addressed the letter of First Corinthians—**“To the church of God which is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord”** (1:2). This shows us that the “church” in the New Testament was that group of people who were “sanctified” by Christ, thus “saints” who had been “set apart” and saved by His blood. Sometimes in the religious world it is suggested that a person can be saved without being a member of the church. This Scripture shows us that the “church” is those who are the “saved.”

The Universal & Local Church

In Paul's introduction to the church in Corinth, he referred to the “church” in two distinct senses. First, he speaks of **“the church of God which is in Corinth”** (a specific location) then to **“all who in every place call on the name of Jesus”** (many locations). This teaches us that there are two ways in which the church may be viewed: The

Local Church (I Thessalonians 1:1 & I Corinthians 1:2) and the *Universal Church* (Matthew 16:18 & Hebrews 12:22,23).

By considering these distinctions we can understand a great deal about how the New Testament church functioned. Of the universal church, the only organization that the Bible describes is the fact that **“Christ is the head of the church”** (Ephesians 5:23). The universal church determined practice, teaching, and conduct first by the **“apostle's doctrine (or teaching)”** (Acts 2:42) and then by those things which they, through the direction of the Holy Spirit wrote (see I Corinthians 13:37; II Thessalonians 3:14 & I Timothy 3:15).

The local church was to have a very specific structure. Paul's letter to the Philippians is addressed—**“To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons”** (1:1). This teaches us that these independent local churches were made up of “saints” (that is all Christians), “bishops” (men appointed from the congregation according to specific qualifi-

cations outlined in I Timothy 3:1-7 & Titus 1:5-9) and “deacons” (also men appointed from the congregation according to qualifications recorded in I Timothy 3:8-13). This is the only structure the Bible authorizes for local church organization.

In the religious world of today much of the division that exists comes from the misapplication of the universal and local sense in which the church must be viewed. Many groups seek to develop some kind of structure to regulate the universal church. Others expand the authority of a local eldership to exercise control over a number of congregations. In the New Testament there is no superstructure larger than the local church yet smaller than the universal church.

The Assembly

The New Testament church was characterized by its simplicity. Rather than complex formal rituals and lofty elitist dissertations, New Testament church assemblies were simple, spiritual times of encouragement, edification, learning, meditation and praise. The Bible tells us these early saints assembled on the first day of the week “to break