

The Original Pattern Of The New Testament Church

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In this article the object is to return to the New Testament, and read the description of the church as drawn for us in that original pattern. No denominational articles of faith or human interpretations will be used. We shall simply read, word for word, what the scriptures say. Our object is also to show that on that original pattern present-day churches of Christ stand. We have no human articles of faith, book of faith and practice, discipline, but propose to reproduce the New Testament pattern for the church. This we are ordered to do in Heb. 8:5. But, now, let us observe a ten-point description of the New Testament church.

1. **It Was Established on the First Pentecost After Christ's Ascension, in Acts 2.** Isa. 2:2-3 prophesies the establishment of "the Lord's house." This could not refer to Israel, since Israel then existed. No other people, nation or institution was ever called "the Lord's house," until in 1 Tim. 3:14-15 Paul referred to "the house of God, which is the church of the living God." Since the church was established after Isaiah's prophecy, and it was called "the house of God," of necessity then the prophecy of Isaiah referred to the church. When that house, or church, would be established, Isaiah gave three points of prophecy to be fulfilled: (1) the time would be "in the last days;" (2) **all nations would flow unto it;** (3) **Jerusalem would be the place.** In Mk. 9:1 Jesus said: "Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power." The body of Christ, or church, of Col. 1:18 is described in vs. 13 as "the kingdom of his dear son." This is the kingdom of God on earth, which Jesus said would come in the lifetime of some then in His presence. But, He said that it would come "with power." Again, in Lk. 24:47-49, Jesus told the apostles that "repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name, beginning at Jerusalem . . . but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high." Here Jesus said that when the power from on high came they (the apostles) would preach "remission of sins in his name" and begin in Jerusalem. Since Jesus had already said that when that **power** came the kingdom would come, we must expect then that this new message of remission of sins in Christ's name would be preached when the kingdom, or church, was established.

Turn to Acts 2 and you find all 5 of these prophesies fulfilled. It was the occasion of the Jewish Pentecost day (vs. 1). The scene was **Jerusalem** (vs. 1-5). The apostles received the power of the Holy Spirit, enabling them to speak in the languages of "every nation under heaven," from which Jews had come to Jerusalem for Pentecost (vs. 4-11). When a throng assembled, Peter explained the miracles as the fulfillment of prophecy, identifying the time as "**the last days**" (vs. 14-17). He then preached a sermon on Jesus of Nazareth as the prophesied Messiah, the world's Savior, and exalted Lord and Christ (vs. 21-36). Convicted, the people asked what they should do (vs. 37). They were told to "Repent and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins . . ." (vs. 38). In vs. 39 he explained that the promise was to Jews and "as many as the Lord our God shall call." Since 2 Thess. 2:14 shows that the Lord calls "through the gospel"; since Acts 10:34-35 shows that under the gospel dispensation He is no respecter of persons; and since Mark 16:15 shows that the gospel is to be preached "to every creature," it is plain that the "as many as the Lord our God shall call" in Acts 2:39 includes all nations. Hence, Jews from every nation on that day were invited, and the gospel invitation even included all people — Jews and Gentiles. Isaiah said that "all nations shall flow unto it."

Verse 41 says: "Then they that gladly received His word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls." Gal. 3:27 and Rom. 6:3 say that they were "baptized into Christ." On that day you find all five items of the prophesies fulfilled: (1) Jerusalem was the place; (2) it was in the last days; (3) the power from on high came upon the apostles; (4) the message of remission of sins in the name of Christ was preached for the first time; (5) all nations were invited and began to "flow unto it." With all of these 5 items of prophecy fulfilled, and thousands accepting the message, Acts 2 has to be the place where the church was established—and from that chapter onward the New Testament speaks of the church, or kingdom, or body of Christ, as an accomplished fact.

Any church beginning after Acts 2 or beginning before Acts 2 is too young or too old (Mt. 15:13). The New Testament church there began.

2. **The Creed was that "Jesus Christ is the Son of God."** John 1:1-14 shows that Jesus was originally with God in heaven. Matt. 1:18-25 shows that He came to earth and became flesh by means of the supernatural, miraculous Holy Spirit conception, and birth of the Virgin Mary. In Mt. 16:16-17 Jesus blessed Peter for making that confession of His divine sonship. In John 8:24 Jesus said: "If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins." It was at least included in the reference in Rom. 10:10 that "with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." In Acts 8:37, when Candace's treasurer had asked for baptism, Philip would not baptize him until he confessed that "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." John (1 Jno. 2:22; 4:3; 2 Jno. 7) taught that those who denied that the Son of God came here in the flesh were antichrists and deceivers. Verily, the creed of the New Testament church was belief in Jesus as God's only begotten Son.

3. **The Law, Discipline, or Rule of Faith and Practice was the Law Given by the Apostles, and Later Written in the New Testament.** Christ promised the apostles that He would send them the Spirit to "guide you into all truth" (Jno. 16:13; 14:26). He did so, as we have seen, on Pentecost of Acts 2, and from then on through the New Testament they spoke in words taught by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 2:12-13). They were "ambassadors for Christ" (2 Cor. 5:20). They gave us "the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3) which could not be changed (Gal. 1:8-9; 1 Tim. 1:3; 2 Jno. 9). When that was written down in the New Testament it then became a part of the whole scriptures given by inspiration of God, by which the man of God is "thoroughly" — thoroughly, completely — "furnished unto all good works." The whole Bible then, as it was written, became the only rule of faith and practice of the New Testament church.

4. **The Terms of Admission into the Church were Divinely Given.** The terms of pardon to an alien sinner were (1) faith in Jesus as the Christ, the son of God (Jno. 8:24; Mk. 16:15); (2) Repentance of sins (Lk. 24:47; 2 Cor. 7:10); (3) confession of that faith in Christ (Acts 8:37; Rom. 10:10); and (4) baptism "into Christ" for the remission of sins (Rom. 5:3; Gal. 3:27; Acts 2:38). This baptism was the "one baptism" of Eph. 4:5 which was a burial (Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:12).

But numerous passages show that the church is the body of Christ, of which He is the head (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18-24). Hence, when people were baptized into Christ, the head, that automatically admitted them into the church, the body of Christ. The terms of pardon for alien sinners, then, were the same as the terms of admission into the church. People then did not

teach, as sects do now, that they entered covenant-relationship with Christ by faith alone — contrary to Jas 2:24 — and then joined the, or a church.

5. Salvation was Within, Not Without, the New Testament Church. All spiritual blessings are in Christ (Eph. 1:3). Since Christ is the head of the body, the church (Eph. 1:22-23) the Lord intends us to see the parallel between the human body and spiritual body, the church. So, as no member of a human body can have a connection with the head except as it is a part of the human body, so can no one have any connection with Christ, the head, except as one is in the body, the church. Again, the church is Christ's kingdom (Col. 1:13-18). No king has any subject who is not a citizen of that specific king's kingdom. But anyone saved is a subject of Christ (Jno. 14:6). So, if a saved man is a subject of Christ, the King, that saved man is of necessity a citizen in Christ's kingdom, the church. The same process that would make that man a subject of Christ would make him a citizen of His kingdom, the church. To say that he could be saved out of the church would be to say that he would be a subject of King Christ and not be a citizen of His Kingdom, the church. So, salvation was and is IN the N.T. church, and not out of it. That does not mean that the church saves, but it does mean that Christ saves only those in the church, His body, His kingdom.

6. Divinely-Authorized Names as Congregations and Individuals. The N.T. church wore only such religious names, as congregations and individuals, as were supplied by the Holy Spirit. As individuals, for example, they were called "Christians" (Acts 11:26). If that had been only a nickname, Paul would have repudiated it, instead of trying to convert Agrippa to it (Acts 26:28-29). As congregations, they were called "churches of Christ" (Rom. 16:16); "church of God" (1 Cor. 1:2); "the church" (Phil. 3:6). This was in the Divine pattern, by which they were ordered to go (Heb. 8:5).

7. A New Life in Christ was Essential. In Rom. 6:4 it was shown that they were "buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." Christ was to live in the members (Gal. 2:20). They were to be distinctive in everything — doctrines and life (Cor. 6:14-7:1). They were not to be conformed to the world, but were to be transformed (Rom. 12:2). The N.T. church was not to ape the world (Gal. 1:10). Thus, to accept the doctrine and not live the life was worse than useless.

8. The Divinely - Authorized Assembly Worship on the First Day of the Week. In Matt. 26:26-29 Christ instituted the Lord's Supper. In 1 Cor. 11:23-27 Paul

ordered the church to observe it "till he come." The time is given in Acts 20:7: "upon the first day of the week." The week being the cycle of time mentioned there, the necessary inference then is that they came together to break bread upon the first day of the week as often as that day came. Under the old covenant, abolished at the cross (Col. 2:14), the "remember the Sabbath day" of Ex. 20:8 meant as often as that day came, though the law did not there say "every" sabbath. The language of Acts 20:7 is parallel. The same text authorizes preaching or teaching of God's word. In 1 Cor. 14:15 Paul authorized prayer and singing, and in 1 Cor. 16:1-2 the weekly "laying by him in store," or contributing our money to the church treasury. Such was the first-day-of-the-week worship of the church.

9. The Church's Two-Fold Work was Evangelism and Benevolence. Since Jesus' mission was to "seek and to save that which was lost," that is the church's mission. In doing so, it was obligated to "teach all nations" (Mt. 28:19-20); to be "the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:14-15); to "sound out the word of the Lord" (1 Thess. 1:8). The record shows that all work was done either through individual enterprise (Acts 8:4) or group, congregational effort, without any organization within or without the congregations. In supporting the weak (Rom. 15:1) and relieving distress (Acts 11:30) it was the same plan followed. Under this system within about 35 years from its establishment Paul could say of the gospel that "it is in all the world and bringeth forth fruit" (Col. 1:6).

10. The Church was Divinely Organized. Each church, as an independent unit, was governed by a plurality of elders (Acts 14:23). They were also called bishops, overseers, pastors, shepherds, the presbytery (Acts 20:17, 28; Phil. 1:1; 1 Pet. 5:1-3; Eph. 4:11; 1 Tim. 4:16). The elders of 1 Pet. 5 were called shepherds, and the pastors of Eph. 4:11 were the same, for that is the definition of the word "pastor." These men were assisted by deacons (Phil. 1:1). This was the Divine plan for the government and organization of the N.T. congregations, with no officer higher than and over these.

We have given you here the scriptures saying how Christ, through the Holy Spirit-directed apostles, gave the pattern for the New Testament church. Churches of Christ today reproduce that pattern. We do not alter it in any point where the Lord has legislated. In such matters as have not been ordered by the Lord, we are at liberty to be "progressive." But where He has spoken we dare not change the pattern. We propose to "speak as the oracles of God speak" (Heb. 8:5); to "make all things according to the pattern" (Heb.

8:5). Therefore, we wear no religious name and have nothing in our church procedure except what the Lord has authorized, in those items where He has spoken.

In view of the foregoing, how could churches of Christ today be any part of a denomination? How could we be other than the New Testament church? On the pattern of that church we stand. We teach and make it our aim to reproduce that pattern in every detail. Our critics cannot point to one item which we have as a rule of faith and practice which we cannot read in the new Testament. Then, why not forsake divisive sectarianism, as Rom. 16:17 directs, obey the gospel, and be a member of the church recorded in the New Testament? It was bought, made possible, by the blood of Christ (Acts 20:28). All others are man-made, and will be destroyed (Mt. 15:13).

FIRST DAY - - -

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are some of the references to the first day of the week, and everyone who desires freedom from the old law of Moses can readily see the importance of it. The Lord's covenant was a new and better covenant than that of Moses; the Lord's church was a new and better church than that old church in the wilderness; likewise, the Lord's day is a new and better day than the old Jewish Sabbath which was nailed to the cross of Christ.

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