

New Testament Church Organization—A Mark that Matters

Any organization that is larger than the local congregation, but smaller than the church in its universal sense is not in the Bible: denomination, synod, convention, council, diocese, etc. The local church—its nature and character—is a mark that matters!

The character of the local church must be the same character as portrayed in the New Testament. Replication of these characteristics creates a New Testament church in the 21st century.

The local congregation was pervasive. In Acts 14:23, Paul and his cohorts appointed elders in every church. Paul told Titus to appoint elders in every city in Tit.1:5. Paul recognized these churches in the congregational sense; for example, he said, “All the churches of Christ salute you (Rom16:16).” In I Cor. 16:1, he spoke of the congregations of a region, “I gave order to the churches of Galatia.”

The local congregation was all-sufficient. The all-sufficient word of God provided the all-sufficient local congregation to get God’s work done. Paul wrote: “Our sufficiency is from God (I Cor. 3:5).” He added, “. . . So that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (II Tim 3:17).” The local congregation is sufficient for God’s work.

The local congregation was overseen according to the will of God. In I Pet. 5:2, Peter himself recognized that a congregation could only be governed by elders according to the will of God.

The local congregation was autonomous. Since each local church was autonomous or independent, their own elders had the oversight. Peter was specific when he said to fellow-elders: “Tend the flock of God which is among you (I Pet. 5:2).” In Acts 20: 28, Paul told the elders at Ephesus, “Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.” These passages restrict the government of the church to the local congregation and make them independent of outside influence.

The local congregation organized itself according to the New Testament. In Eph. 4:11 Paul names evangelists, pastors (elders), and teachers. In Phil. 1:1, he address the saints (all Christians), overseers (elders) and deacons.

In addition to these New Testament characteristics, there are distinctive features in every true New Testament church. They will all have the New Testament organization of Phil. 1:1. The worship will include singing (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16); praying (Acts 2:41); the Lord’s Supper (I Cor.11:17); teaching and preaching (Acts 20:7); and giving (I Cor. 16:1-2). These congregations will do the work prescribed: preaching (Eph. 3:10; I Tim.3:15); teaching and edifying (Eph.4:12); and benevolence (Acts 2, 6, 11).

These are marks that matter! You will not find any of the following in the Bible: denominations, preachers as pastor, raffles or pie suppers, legislative conventions, and baptisms or the Lord’s Supper held for special events only on some Sundays.

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Any organization that is larger than the local congregation, but smaller than the church in its universal sense is not in the Bible: denomination, synod, convention, council, diocese, etc.

The Local Church Is:

- Pervasive: Acts 14:23; Tit. 1:5; Rom. 16:16; I Cor. 16:1
- All Sufficient: II Cor. 3:5-6; II Tim. 3:15-16
- Overseen by the Will of God: I Pet. 5:2
- Autonomous: I Pet. 5:2; Acts 20:28-29
- Organized According to the Bible: Eph. 4:11; Phil. 1:1

No Denominations, No Preachers As Pastor, No Raffles or Pie Suppers, No Legislative Conventions, No Special Event Baptisms or Lord's Supper

The Local Church Has:

- NT Organization: Phil. 1:1
- NT Worship
 - Singing: Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:19
 - Praying: Acts 2:41
 - Lord's Supper: I Cor. 11:17
 - Teaching & Preaching: Acts 20:7
 - Giving: I Cor. 16:1-2
- NT Work
 - Preaching: Eph. 3:10; I Tim. 3:15
 - Teaching and Edifying: Eph. 4:12
 - Benevolence: Acts 2, 6, 11

A Marks That Matters!

New Testament Church Organization

Questions and Answers

1. List five organizational formats larger than the local congregation but smaller than the church in the universal sense.

2. In how many churches did Paul appoint elders (Acts 14:23)? _____ Where did Paul tell Titus to appoint elders in Tit. 1:5? _____
3. What are congregations of the church called in Rom. 16:16? _____
4. Who makes us sufficient (I Cor. 3:5)? _____ What equips us for "every good work?" _____
To what should we look when organizing the church and congregation for the 21st century? _____
5. What is the organization sufficient to do God's work here on earth? _____
6. What is the rule that applies in overseeing the local church (I Pet. 5:2)? _____
7. What flock of God are elders charged to tend (I Pet. 5:2)? _____
8. What flock of God were the elders at Ephesus charged to keep watch over (Acts 20:28)? _____
9. What protects the local church from outside influence? _____ How? _____
10. In Phil. 1:1, Paul addresses the church. What three different groups of members does he mention? 1. _____
2. _____ 3. _____
11. What kind of music did the early church have (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16)? _____
12. List four components of worship outlined in Acts 2:41. 1. _____ 2. _____
3. _____ 4. _____
13. List three components of the work of the church. Eph. 3:10 _____
Eph 4:12 _____ Acts 2, 6, 11 _____
14. List some modern day features of church organization, worship, and work not found in the Bible. _____
