

**The Church You Can Read about in the Bible
For what purposes should the church assemble?**

Intro: Can the church you can read about in the Bible exist today? I believe that it can; and it is our goal to carefully search out the features and characteristics of that church. In an earlier lesson on the purpose of the church, we noticed that one of the church's purposes is to bring God's people together for spiritual activities that God has commanded. Let's think together about the church's assemblies and what God had in mind for them. "What does God want the church to assemble to do?"

The word "church" itself is translated from the Greek term "ekklesia" meaning "assembly." It was used of the formal gatherings of citizens to carry out the business of their city. Consider for example this exhortation from the city clerk in Ephesus: *But if you want anything beyond this, it shall be settled in the lawful assembly. (Acts 19:39)*

So in a similar way wherever the gospel spread and a congregation was formed, a weekly assembly of the church was also established. We can see the pattern in the NT description of the various congregations. The Lord's people convened in a local assembly with purposes designated by the Lord.

The importance of the church's assembly is seen in the commands to the Hebrew Christians:

"and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near." (Hebrews 10:24–25)

We can infer from this text that the church of the Hebrews assembled regularly; and that it was God's will that those who made it up should not forsake these assemblies.

But what did the church assemble to do? (Again it is important to remember how God communicates His will. (He tells, shows, and infers).

The NT church regularly assembled to worship God together.

The stated purpose of the weekly gathering was to break bread in memory of Jesus.

Paul implies in his rebuke of the Corinthians that the intended purpose of their gathering should have been *"to eat the Lord's Supper."*

"Therefore when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper, for in your eating each one takes his own supper first; and one is hungry and another is drunk." (1 Cor. 11:20–21)

We can see in Acts that the church at Troas likewise gathered weekly to observe the Lord's Supper. Luke in describing Paul's travels shows how he made his plans to meet with them and speak to them:

“And on the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul began talking to them, intending to depart the next day, and he prolonged his message until midnight.” (Acts 20:7, NASB)

The conditions surrounding Paul’s meeting with the church “to break bread” (Ac. 20:7) strongly points to a worship activity and not merely to a social occasion in which he spoke to them.

Note that Paul was hurrying to get to Jerusalem by Pentecost (Ac. 20:16); yet was willing to delay his journey for seven days (Ac. 20:6).

The expression “break bread” is used not only of social meals, but is a common term for the observance of the Lord’s Supper (Cf. 1 Cor. 10:16)

We can see that the church in connection with the breaking of bread worshipped God in prayer and song.

NT disciples also prayed together “in every place” (1 Tim. 2:8).

Such a practice would have seemed entirely natural to the Jewish Christians and Gentile God-fearers, since they already customarily met on the Sabbath day in the synagogue to pray and read the Scripture with exhortations.

Paul urged those prayers to be made “on behalf of all men” (1 Tim. 2:1).

First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, (1 Timothy 2:1)

And to be led by men who “lifted up holy hands” (1 Tim. 2:8).
Therefore I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension. (1 Timothy 2:8)

The exercise of spiritual gifts resulted in prayers that were offered in thanksgiving to God (1 Cor. 14:16)....

Otherwise if you bless in the spirit only, how will the one who fills the place of the ungifted say the “Amen” at your giving of thanks, since he does not know what you are saying? (1 Cor. 14:16)

....which Paul urged to be prayed “with the spirit and with the mind also” (1 Cor. 14:15).

What is the outcome then? I shall pray with the spirit and I shall pray with the mind also; I shall sing with the spirit and I shall sing with the mind also. (1 Cor. 14:15)

NT disciples also worshipped God and edified one another through singing together in their assemblies.

The assemblies of the church provided occasion to apply Paul’s command to “teach and admonish one another” (Col. 3:16; Cf. Eph. 5:19-20).

Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns

and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. (Colossians 3:16)

The exercise of spiritual gifts apparently resulted in the revelation of psalms to sing together (1 Cor. 14:26)

What is the outcome then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. (1 Corinthians 14:26)

which Paul urged to be sung “with the spirit and with the mind also” (1 Cor. 14:15).

The assembly provided occasion for instruction in God’s word.

Again this would have been the same course that the Jewish Christians would have done in their synagogue where the Scriptures were read weekly and a "word of exhortation" was given by one of the men present.

Paul’s meeting with the church at Troas provided the occasion to preach to them (Ac. 20:7).

And on the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul began talking to them, intending to depart the next day, and he prolonged his message until midnight. (Acts 20:7)

The exercise of spiritual gifts in the assembly resulted in prophetic discourses to be given to the church (1 Cor. 14:3, 23ff).

But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation. (1 Corinthians 14:3)

The assembly also provided an appropriate time for Christians to give financially to do work to which all had a common obligation.

Paul’s order to the Corinthians suggests that both the churches of Galatia and Corinth were accustomed to meeting “on the first day of every week” (1 Cor. 16:1-2).

Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also. On the first day of every week let each one of you put aside and save, as he may prosper, that no collections be made when I come. (1 Corinthians 16:1-2)

The weekly meeting of the church provided the occasion for each disciples to “set aside and save” (NASV) something for the needy saints in Jerusalem.

Sometimes the church was called together for special purposes besides worship.

To hear reports concerning the work of those sent out or supported by the church

When Paul and Barnabas returned from their first preaching journey, the church assembled to hear a report of the things they had accomplished.

And when they had arrived and gathered the church together, they began to report all things that God had done with them and how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. (Acts 14:27)

To solve congregational problems

And the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. (Acts 6:2)

In Acts 15 we can see that the apostles and elders in Jerusalem came together to discuss the problems caused by Jewish Christians who had gone down to Antioch, affirming that Gentiles had to be circumcized. Note that "the multitude" was listening (Ac. 15:12) and were indicated as giving them consent to the final decision of the apostles and elders (Ac. 15:22).

To discipline unruly members

Paul urged the Corinthian church to discipline an immoral man "when you are assembled together."

In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. (1 Corinthians 5:4-5)

Two final observations

It is interesting to notice that all of the assemblies of the church mentioned in the NT attach to the mission of the church.

Whatever the church may have done incidentally to or in addition to their assemblies, it is clear that the assembly itself was an occasion to carry out the spiritual mission of the church.

Paul strongly rebuked the church at Corinth for altering the spiritual purposes of the assembly by making the Lord's Supper a private dinner (1 Cor. 11:17-34).

The Scriptures stress the importance of attendance to both commanded assemblies and expedient ones provided by the church's shepherds to assist the believer in his spiritual growth.

The command to "break bread" each first day obligates all who profess to be Christians to assemble together.

Assembling to "break bread" fulfills a direct precept of Jesus himself, "This do in remembrance of me" (1 Cor. 11:24-25).

The Hebrew writer may have this background in mind in exhorting the Hebrews not to forsake the assembling of the believers together. For he considers failing to assemble as "sinning willingly" (Heb. 10:26ff).

Other assemblies may be planned with the understanding that they are provided for the edification of members in keeping with their ability to participate (Cf. Ac. 2:46).

The church is not a cult that imposes spiritual disciplines on its members. Neither are church leader's "lords" who may command disciples where Christ has not commanded.

However, it is the work of shepherds to "watch for souls" and "feed the flock" (Ac. 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2). To that end they may

provide additional occasions to instruct the flock beyond the first day meeting (like, for example, our gospel meetings or Bible classes) or occasions to carry out the other purposes of the church (such as congregational meetings to discuss the church's work, to hear reports from supported evangelists, or to carry out church discipline).

God encourages each disciple to pursue spiritual growth (2 Pet. 1:3-11; 3:17-18). Thus, disciples, motivated by a desire to grow will respond to the provision of their shepherds and take advantage of the opportunities provided to learn and to encourage others in their spiritual life (Heb.13:17).

Conclusion: The assemblies of the church are an important part of its mission. In fact, it is clear that every part of the church's mission in some way or another relates to the act of coming together as a church. Those who "honor God's voice" will seek to be obedient to God's commands and cooperative to every effort to assist them in their spiritual lives.