

July 12,2020

## What The New Testament Church Did Not Have

We frequently discuss the various characteristics of the church about which we read in the New Testament, the one Jesus built (Matt. 16:18), and purchased with His Own shed blood (Acts 20:28). We have, on different occasions, shown that the church is the body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23), and that it includes all the “*saved*” (Acts 2:47; Eph. 5:23).

But sometimes it is well to approach a subject from a negative viewpoint. Such is our purpose in this article. Below are a few items which **the New Testament church did not have.**

**1. It did not have a denominational name** (I Cor. 1:12-15; Col. 3:17; Acts 4:11-12). Inasmuch as salvation is in “*none other name,*” and since the church is the bride of Christ (2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:22-33), it wore no divisive, denominational name.

**2. It did not have a denominational organization.** The only church organization known was that of the local church (congregation) — it consisted of saints, bishops (or elders), and deacons (Phil. 1:1; Acts 14:23; Tit. 1:5). They had no complex, ecclesiastical arrangements. The organization was local and simple.

**4. It did not have a corrupted worship.** The worship was “*in spirit and in truth*” (John 4:24), consisting of singing “*spiritual songs*” (without being accompanied by mechanical instruments of music), praying, breaking of bread (i.e. the Lord’s supper), teaching the word of God, and laying by in store upon the first day of the week (Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:19; Acts 2:42; I Cor. 16:1-2).

**5. It did not have denominational requirements for membership.** Those who became members of the church in the first century were those who simply obeyed the gospel. Through hearing the word preached, they became believers in God and in Christ, repented of their sins, confessed their faith, and were baptized into Christ “*for the remission of sins*” (Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38-41; Acts 8:35-39). Upon their obedience to the gospel of Christ, the Lord “*added*” them to the church (Acts 2:47).

**6. It did not have a corrupted work.** Its work consisted of sounding “*out the word of the Lord*” (I Thess. 1:8; I Tim. 3:15), edifying the saints (Eph. 4:11-16; Matt. 28:20), and engaging in works of benevolence among indigent saints (Acts 4:32-35; 6:1-7; 11:27-30)). Each congregation was an independent functional unit, and did its own work under the oversight of its own overseers (Phil. 1:1-2; Acts 14:23; Acts 20:28; I Pet. 5:2). Sponsoring church arrangements, whereby many churches pooled all or a part of their funds under one eldership for it to do a brotherhood work was unknown in the days of the apostles. Activities of a social, political, or recreational nature were not considered a part of “church work.” The “great preachers” of the first century did not try to influence local churches to pawn their work off on human institutions and pay them to do

the work God imposed on the church.

**Conclusion:** What the Lord's church **did not** have in the first century it **must not** have in the 21st century. Otherwise it becomes an apostate body, not the **Lord's** church! Inasmuch as the ways and thoughts of God are as much above our ways and thoughts as the "*heavens are above the earth*" (Isa. 55:8-9), then it behooves us to be satisfied with what He, through His word, has authorized. **God** knows what is best, and what is best for us He has revealed in the Scriptures. Hence, in our efforts to worship and serve God, let us not introduce or follow those things that be **of man!** —B. Witherington

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