

The Model Church

Introduction. The church of the first century is our model or pattern for today. Just as the construction foreman follows a blueprint in building, so we must follow the first century church in the twenty-first century.

Jesus Christ, just as Noah who built the ark (Genesis 6:13-21) and Moses who erected the tabernacle (Exodus 25:1-27:21), built the church according to God's eternal purpose and plan (Ephesians 3:10-11; Hebrews 8:1-5).

Therefore, let this church pattern itself after the church of the New Testament, so the Lord will identify it as His and it will be worthy of imitation by other churches. So we will study the characteristics of the model church of the first century.

I. The Church Of The First Century Was

- A. Studious — its members were learners or disciples of Christ.
 - 1. Jesus invites all to come learn of Him (John 6:44-45).
 - 2. You have to continue in His word to be His disciple (John 8:31-32).
 - 3. The disciples continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine (Acts 2:42; 5:42).
- B. Rich in faith — its members grew in faith as they learned of Christ's way.
 - 1. One cannot please God without faith (Hebrews 11:6).
 - 2. Faith comes by hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17).
 - 3. The rich in faith are to be heirs of God (James 2:5).
- C. A defensive institution — its members contended for the faith.
 - 1. Jude wrote for all to contend for the faith (Jude 3).
 - 2. Paul was set for the defense of the gospel (Philippians 1:17).
 - 3. Stephen gave his life in defense of the gospel (Acts 6:8-7:60).

II. The Church Of The First Century Had

- A. A converted membership — a changed people.
 - 1. We are converted in order to enter the kingdom (Matthew 18:1-3).
 - 2. We are converted in order to have our sins blotted out (Acts 3:19).
 - 3. We are "new creatures" in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17; Colossians 3:1-14).
Saul of Tarsus an example
- B. A scriptural leadership — each church was to be scripturally organized.
 - 1. Each church had elders (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5; Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1-3).
 - a) Elders (Acts 15:2; 1 Peter 5:1).
 - b) Bishops or overseers (Acts 20:28; 1 Timothy 3:1-2).
 - c) Pastors (Ephesians 4:11).
 - 2. Each church had deacons to serve the physical needs of the congregation (Acts 6:1-6; Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:8-10).
- C. Unity and fellowship — keep the unity of the Spirit by walking in the light.
 - 1. Members were to be of one mind (John 17:20-21; 1 Corinthians 1:10-13).
 - 2. Members walked in the light to have fellowship (1 John 1:3-7; 2 John 9-11).

III. The Church Of The First Century Did

- A. It worshiped spiritually and scripturally.
 - 1. The only object of their worship was God (Matthew 4:10; Revelation 19:10).

2. The elements of worship were “in spirit and in truth” (John 4:23-24).
3. The acts of worship were:
 - a) Devotion to Christ’s doctrine (John 17:17; Ephesians 3:8-9; 2 John 9).
 - b) Fellowship in giving (1 Corinthians 16:1-2; 2 Corinthians 11:7-9).
 - c) Partaking of the Lord’s Supper (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:20-34).
 - d) Praying without ceasing (Acts 4:31; 1 Thessalonians 5:17; James 5:16).
 - e) Praising God by singing (Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 2:12; 13:15).
- B. It worked to fulfill its mission.
 1. The church preached the gospel (2 Corinthians 3:1-3; 1 Thessalonians 1:8; 1 Timothy 3:15).
 2. The church edified itself in love (Acts 20:32; 1 Corinthians 14:26; Ephesians 4:16).
 3. The church relieved needy saints (Acts 2:44; 4:32-35; 6:1-6; 11:27-30; Romans 15:25-31; 1 Corinthians 16:1-3; 2 Corinthians 8-9; 1 Timothy 5:16).
 - a) We need to briefly discuss what the church’s work isn’t:
 - (1) It isn’t social — the gospel of Christ is not a “social gospel.” The increasing tendency to have “fellowship banquets,” a social hour with refreshments after the service, a church fellowship hall or cafeteria to entertain visitors and accommodate social functions to attract greater attendance is purely sectarian.
 - (2) It isn’t recreational — church basketball teams, church-sponsored skating parties, facilities for recreational games, etc., are a perversion of the resources of the church.
 - (3) It isn’t educational — the church does not teach secular subjects such as science, mathematics, history, literature, etc.
 - (4) It isn’t directional — whatever the Bible teaches should be taught whenever and wherever it is needed by any Christian and by the church. But parent education, psychology, sociology, and other related subjects that are not taught in the Bible are not the task of the church.
 - (5) It isn’t vocational — the church has no business in business. God gave the pattern for raising funds (1 Corinthians 16:1-2). It should be respected. Merchandising, manufacturing, farming, or any other economic endeavor is outside the function of the Lord’s church.
 - (6) It isn’t political — God ordained civil government to address and resolve issues and they should be left there (Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-17). The church is not an arena for political posturing.
 - b) The following elements describe almost all Protestant groups in existence today and how they see fit to operate in the realm of saving souls.

Conclusion. A beautiful and simple pattern exists for the New Testament church, but man to be content with it. God’s pattern demands respect, and when it is respected, the church, in all its glory, shines forth as the institution God intended it to be.

I am deeply indebted to Glenn L. Shaver for the use of his material.