

## How does the Biblical church meet?

There are all sorts of churches that go by the name of 'Christian' and they all have very different meeting formats. Which one is correct? Well I am not interested in evaluating modern church meetings but simply seek to explain what Christ ordained through his apostles.

Regarding non-essentials there is room for variation, especially according to local culture; these would include: the time of gathering, the arrangement of contributions or the length of the meeting. But regarding what the apostles taught as essential we must simply obey.

**Gathering:** The day of gathering is Sunday, the Lord's Day. This is confirmed by Acts 20:7 and the early church practice.

**Purpose:** The central purpose of meeting together is to celebrate the Lord's Supper; the teaching in Acts 20:7 and 1 Cor 11:17-34 confirms this. The early church had a preparatory communal meal before this, as the background to 1 Cor 11 confirms, but this meal is not the Supper; the meal is a means to enhance fellowship by sharing food together and to help poorer members. In the Supper the church remembers and gives thanks for the death of the Lord Jesus and affirms his victory and coming again. This will be a time of reverent worship and prayer.

**Edification:** After this the meeting is centred upon edifying one another (1 Cor 14:26; 1 Thess 5:11) through the sharing of gifts that God has given all (1 Cor 12; Eph 4:7). However, teaching is considered vital in this process of edification and encouragement (Acts 15:35, 18:11; Col 3:16; 2 Tim 4:2). It may well be that a church has a special meeting to develop teaching one night in the week, just as Paul met with churches to edify them on days other than Sunday in his travels (Acts 20:31). This teaching will involve dialogue, as one Greek word for 'preaching' reveals (Acts 20:7; 'preach' AV, 'spoke' NKJV is *dialegomai* meaning, 'discuss, converse, argue'). The elders of the church will want to emulate Paul and also apply teaching, especially to young converts, in their homes (Acts 20:20).

**Sharing:** members will also edify each other by singing hymns (Eph 5:19; Col 3:16), reading scripture (1 Tim 4:13; 2 Pt 3:2), praying (Acts 2:42; 1 Thess 5:17) and admonishing, exhorting or stirring one another up (Acts 14:22; 1 Thess 5:12; Heb 10:24-25).

The focus of all that is done is Christ, and this is why breaking bread is central to the gathered church. All edification is centred upon revealing Christ and applying his truth to encourage others; thus anything that distracts from Christ is to be shunned.

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