

Sept. Acts 20:28
Eph 5:25, 27
1st 16:18
1st 4:12

I. THE CONCEPT OF THE CHURCH

I. The Biblical Concept of the Church

A. The uses of the Hebrew word gahal

1. It refers to a non-religious assembly, Ps. 26:5
2. It refers to an assembly of angels, Ps. 89:5
3. It refers to the assembly of Israel, Numb. 8:9

B. The uses of the Greek word ekklesia (which means to call together, not to call out)

1. It refers to a political assembly, Acts 19:39, 41 ^{st/mo} to the meeting
2. It refers to the assembly of Israelites, Acts 7:38 w people - rec. Galilee. Syn mix
3. It refers to the universal body of Christ, Eph. 1:22-23 not invisible
4. It refers to the visible church in a region, Acts 9:31; 1 Cor. 15:9
5. It refers to churches of my acquaintance, 1 Cor. 10:32
6. It refers to churches in a city, 1 Cor. 1:2
7. It refers to a church in a house, Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19

Some observations: (1) Both the Hebrew and Greek words are used to label a variety of assemblies; (2) the spiritual entity we call the church can refer to an assembly that includes only true believers (the body of Christ) or assemblies that include true and professing believers (visible churches); (3) when referring to visible assemblies, the word church can refer to a small group in a house or a larger, regional group.

II. Other Concepts of the Church

- A. The Roman Catholic concept emphasizes the sacraments and pope.
- B. The Anglican concept emphasizes the sacraments and the monarch.
- C. The Reformed concept includes children of believers.
- D. The Baptist concept emphasizes the subjects and mode of baptism.

VI. MINISTRIES OF THE CHURCH

I. Group Worship

Worship: ps 4:24

*Spirit - important
- from one spirit (dey)
- Person to Person
- truth - no pretence*

- A. Teaching and preaching the Word, Acts 2:42; 1 Cor. 14:23-26; 2 Thess. 2:5
- B. Prayer, 1 Tim. 2:1-8 *1 Cor 11:5 (?)*
- C. Singing, 1 Cor. 14:26 (a solo?); Col. 3:16; 1 Tim. 3:16 *(sing)*
- D. Giving, 1 Cor. 16:2; Acts 11:27-30; 2 Cor. 8-9
- E. Fellowship, Acts 2:42; Eph. 4:12-17

II. Discipline, Matt. 18:15-20; 1 Tim. 5:19-20; 2 Thess. 3:6; 1 Cor. 5

III. Care of and Ministry to Widows, 1 Tim. 5:3-16

*Family - living & dead
Church - widow & orphan - destitute*

IV. Ministry of Financial Support

1 Cor 12-18

- A. Of the poor, 2 Cor. 8:18-22
- B. Of victims of catastrophes, Acts 11:27-30
- C. Of Christian workers, 1 Cor. 9:4-14; Phil. 4:16
- D. Of believers first, then others, Gal. 6:10

Day of Worship

*Not Sabbath
Not a free day
not bec. weekly calendar
4 & 8 day market week*

honor the Word of God by attempting to discover the correct interpretation of individual texts which will be consistent with one another. That should be every Christian's first desire regardless of any so-called consequences in the practical realm.

Actually, the solutions to the problems raised by this discussion are not so difficult as they are delicate. It is only too apparent that the early church did not allow its women to take part audibly in public worship. That included preaching, praying in mixed company, and teaching men in public. It is equally evident that they served in many other ways, but the questions today always revolve around their public ministry in the church. If the practice of the early church is authoritative by way of example for us today, then women should not lead in any way in public worship. This does not mean that a woman may not teach children, for this is definitely her God-given privilege, nor that she may not lead in prayer in women's groups or in teaching other women. However, she should not do even these things if they interfere in any way with her responsibilities toward her own children. She must never usurp the authority God gave to the man to lead in the public life of the church. This is the pattern established in Scripture.

However, we do not live in an ideal world. There are many times on both the home and foreign fields when there are simply no men to do the work. In such instances this writer feels that we need to remember that Paul not only commanded that things be done decently and in order but also that they be done. In such cases, then, one feels that it is better to do the work with qualified women—even though this is not ideal—than to sit back and do nothing simply because there are no men. However, women must be cautioned against continuing in such work after there are trained men available for the job. Any woman who finds herself doing a man's work should so aim her own work that a man can assume it as quickly as possible. The acid test any woman can apply to such situations is simply this: Would I be willing to give over all my work to a trained man if he should appear today? To know the Scriptural pattern is absolutely essential. To aim our labors toward

attaining that ideal is the only practical way to serve in the present-day situation.

WIDOWS

The Old Testament often espouses the cause of the widow and orphan. God is spoken of as the judge of widows,³⁹ and the Mosaic law pronounced a special curse upon those who afflicted widows.⁴⁰ The *leviratus*, that is, the marriage of a widow by her brother-in-law after the death of her husband, helped protect the rights of a widow. However, even that law made provision for releasing the brother-in-law when there were circumstances that would produce hardship on him if he fulfilled his obligation.⁴¹ As a result Levirate marriage was neglected, and widows, left to make their own way, became the objects of charity.⁴² So neglected had they become at the time of Christ that the Jews had established a fund in the temple for the purpose of relief to widows and orphans.⁴³

When some of these widows, who have been receiving support from the temple fund, were converted and joined the Christian community, the support they had been getting was naturally cut off, and the early Christians, who were also Jews, quite naturally assumed the responsibility of caring for them. Thus in the early record there appears a large group of widows supported by the church.⁴⁴ It is a natural, normal development from the Jewish background of the first Christians. It seems likely that the practice of giving relief to widows was begun shortly after Pentecost and continued smoothly for a few months until a murmuring arose because some felt that the distribution was not being done systematically. The murmuring resulted in further organization in the church, but not of organization of the widows, for as yet there certainly was no order of widows assigned any duties in the church but only a class which was recognized as needy.

The story of Dorcas further illustrates that widows as a class were prominent in other Christian communities.⁴⁵ It also indicates that these widows were nothing more than the recipients of relief and were not bound together in any sort of order—the only bond

being their common need. That Dorcas herself was a widow need not be assumed. Luke's probable meaning is that she devoted herself to charitable work and that the widows who came to lament over her body were those who had profited from her work. Dorcas was probably instructed to do such work by her knowledge of the Old Testament and the example of Jesus,⁴⁶ and these would be sufficient motives to account for the naturalness of the account in Acts. The story further emphasizes the fact that there is no record of the widows' ministering in any way to the church in return for the relief given them. There was no order at that time.

The *locus classicus*, however, concerning widows in the New Testament is I Timothy 5:3-16. By the time that Paul wrote this epistle in the mid-sixties, provision was made for a definite order of widows with specific requirements for admission. There are problems, however, in the passage, and they center in two questions: (1) What was the purpose of the enrolling? and (2) What duties, if any, did the widows have in relation to the church?

Some of the confusion and vagueness of the commentaries might be dissipated if the principal subject of the passage were kept in the fore. The subject which Paul is discussing is the relief of widows. Any service to be performed in return, any enrolling, any qualifications are all secondary to this principal theme. Obviously the church had continued to support widows from the early days, but with the passing of time certain abuses had arisen. One of these was that relatives of widows were not assuming their own responsibilities toward their widows but rather were pushing the matter of support onto the church. So Paul twice admonishes relatives to be responsible for those widows in their own families. In the first instance the admonition concerns younger unenrolled widows, while in the second it evidently related to enrolled ones.⁴⁷ The second, then, is not a mere repetition of the first, for "since v.9 the whole thought has been of enrolled widows, who do not include all necessitous widows. Here then it is a question also of enrolled widows: some of them would be well to do and able to support themselves, some necessitous. Of the latter class, some would have relations able to support them, and, in that case, though the widows are

doing Church work, they are supported by their relations: others would have no such relations and are to be supported by the Church."⁴⁸ The first clear principle, then, in regard to widows' relief is that relatives must assume their support whenever possible.

The second principle is that the church must support those who are unable to be supported by relatives. "Widows indeed," *ontōs chērai*, or "real widows" are not, as many commentators seem to suggest, to be defined as the enrolled widows. They are defined in the Scripture as those who are desolate, trusting in God, and continuing in prayers day and night.⁴⁹ Financial and family status, not age, is the primary qualification for a "widow indeed." It cannot be assumed, therefore, that enrolled widows were the only ones who had a claim upon the church for its charity. *Tima* clearly means material support, and the plain injunction to honor "widows indeed" is given before the word about enrolling.⁵⁰ "It cannot be supposed . . . that the Church would refuse help to a widow if she was under sixty, for this restriction would be simply cruel if the question were one of charity; the widows in direst need would generally be the younger ones, who were left with small children."⁵¹ On the other hand, to say that the enrolling was entirely unrelated to material need is to miss the point also, for it is clear that, unless they had relatives who could support them, enrolled widows were in some way the special charge of the church. Therefore, the best we can say is that financial need is related to enrolling for those over sixty but not determinative of enrolling, since the church undoubtedly gave relief also to younger unenrolled widows.

The second question, as stated in the opening paragraph of this section, concerns what ministry widows may have had. It is clear and agreed by all that they did have a ministry of prayer and supplication for the church,⁵² but it is not agreed as to what additional ministry they may or may not have had. Scott, for instance, is sure that the enrolling was indicative of "certain duties the Church required" of them because they "could be counted on to devote themselves wholly to the work."⁵³ However, there are two objections to saying that the enrolled widows were those who were engaged in some sort of work. The first is well stated thus:

. . . it is difficult to suppose that St. Paul, or any other practically minded administrator, would contemplate a presbyteral order of widows, the members of which would enter on their duties at the age of 60, an age relatively more advanced in the East and in the first century than in the West and in our own time.⁵⁴

The second objection is that if the ministry may be presumed to be related to the going from house to house, then obviously the younger unenrolled widows were also engaged in it and were abusing their privilege—thus calling forth the restriction.⁵⁵ Ewald makes a suggestion as to what the ministry might have been. He thinks that widows went from house to house collecting money for the needs of the church.⁵⁶ More clearly, however, verse 10 shows that widows (and it applies to younger unenrolled widows too) may have been responsible for the rearing of orphan children. This may have been part of their ministry to the Christian community in addition to that of prayer; but whatever it was or was not, it is clear that any actual ministry was not limited to enrolled widows.

To sum up: (1) relief by the church was not limited to enrolled widows, though it was assumed in the cases of all enrolled widows except those who may have had relatives to support them; (2) the ministry of prayer was expected of all "widows indeed" regardless of age, and any other ministries which may be suggested by the text were not limited to enrolled widows. What, then, was the purpose of the catalogue of widows over sixty who met certain requirements? That it meant financial support by the church in every needy case is clear. That it meant a special ministry by those enrolled which was not performed by those unenrolled is not supported by the passage. Official support was part of the enrolling; official duties were not. The catalogue was instituted to correct and systematize financial matters, and no doubt it paved the way for the development of orders of ministry among women, but at this point in history matters are still undefined. "There are more detailed regulations for the qualifications of a widow than there were for bishop or deacon, as if the order were not yet fully established."⁵⁷

In the attempt to unravel the threads of thought concerning the order of widows, one must not neglect to notice three other facts in this section which bear on the status of women. (1) It is evident that widows were accorded a place of honor in the early church, and they were the first group of women to be honored in any way as a group. (2) Younger women are advised to marry, and no preference was given to celibacy. (3) The work of women is still primarily connected with the home. "I will therefore that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house, give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully."⁵⁸

DEACONESSES

In reality the position of deaconesses in the New Testament is not so clearly or easily defined as that of women in public worship or even that of widows. Harnack seems to understand Pliny's mention of the two *ministrae* in his letter to Trajan to be the first reference to deaconesses as any sort of recognized group in the church.⁵⁹ Lightfoot, on the other hand, is emphatic in declaring that deaconesses did comprise an order in New Testament times. He says: "The Apostolic Church had its organized ministries of women—its order of deaconesses and its order of widows. Women had their definite place in the ecclesiastical system of those primitive times."⁶⁰ In another place he declares: "As I read my New Testament, the female diaconate is as definite an institution in the Apostolic Church as the male diaconate. Phoebe is as much a deacon as Stephen or Philip is a deacon."⁶¹ Obviously, with such divergence of viewpoint additional investigation is in order. Unfortunately, the evidence is scanty, for there are only two verses in the entire New Testament which shed any light on this subject.⁶²

We have already seen how women served (*diakoneō*) Christ. The seven chosen by the church in Jerusalem served tables (*diakonein trapexais*).⁶³ Others who served and either to whom or to whose service *diakonos* or *diakonia* is applied include Paul,⁶⁴ Stephanas,⁶⁵ Archippus,⁶⁶ Timothy,⁶⁷ Apollos,⁶⁸ and Epaphras.⁶⁹ *Diakonos* is used with such wide meaning that it includes the work

Pentecost
 Holy Spirit
 Baptism - church

scriptures (1 Cor. 3:11; 1 Peter 2:5-9). However, this is a disjuncture between the two rocks contrary to their meaning in the text itself. A modification of this view sees the confession of Christ (Matt. 16:16).

Truth combines elements of both ideas; that is, the rock is the key to the kingdom (v. 19; Isa. 22:22) in proclaiming the message to Jews and Gentiles.

Jesus is the Founder of His church in that He chose the Twelve, gave basic teaching concerning relationships in the church, His life to become the Cornerstone, and then sent the Holy Spirit at Pentecost to activate the church.

ORGANIZATION OF THE CHURCH TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

At the beginning of the church as a functioning body by the Holy Spirit on that day. Before His ascension the Lord Jesus and the disciples would be baptized with the Holy Spirit soon after Pentecost. Though the word "baptism" does not appear in the account of Pentecost in chapter 2, it is quite clear from 11:15-16 that the baptism of the Holy Spirit first time on that day. Since, according to Paul (1 Cor. 12:13), baptism places people in the body of Christ, and since the church is the body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23), the church, the body, began with the baptism of individuals were baptized at Pentecost.

These things occurred on the Day of Pentecost. The disciples were baptized with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4). Three thousand were baptized with the Holy Spirit. The visible church began that day (vv. 42-47).

At Pentecost, baptizing those who believe into the body, the Spirit also empowers individual Christians (1 Cor. 6:19), local churches (3:16), and the church (Eph. 2:22). The Spirit also empowers, leads, commissions gifts to the church (Acts 1:8; 9:31; 1 Cor. 12:3). In a very real sense, the Holy Spirit is the energizing life and power of the church.

Before considering the biblical teaching concerning organization, order, and ordinances for local churches, a basic question should be raised. Does the New Testament give principles for these areas to be followed generally, but to be adapted to various cultures and times; or does it also expect the pattern practiced in New Testament times to be followed today in all cultures? For example, does the New Testament teach principles of church government which can be adapted in a variety of ways, or does it also prescribe the particular pattern which must be followed? Many would say that flexibility in this area is permitted. The church must have leaders, but it makes little difference whether they are called elders or deacons or whether a group has both. One might even call them stewards and still follow the New Testament principle of leadership.

Or take another example. The New Testament teaches the principle of believers gathering together. But in New Testament times they gathered in homes. Are we today allowed the flexibility of building church buildings, or should we follow the pattern of meeting in homes? Most would allow for flexibility in this case.

Or another example: The principle in water baptism (whatever mode is used) is to show leaving the old life and entering into the new. Is there any way that principle can be followed without using the pattern of actual baptism? Almost all would say no. But why not erect a little closet on the church platform, have the candidate enter it in old clothes, change his clothes inside the closet, and then emerge in new clothes? Would that not illustrate the same truth as baptism does? And is it not a scriptural illustration? (Col. 3:9-12) In church government we allow some flexibility between principle and pattern. In using church buildings we permit complete flexibility between principle and pattern. In water baptism we insist on no flexibility between principle and pattern. Whatever be a person's or group's theoretical views on this question, I doubt that anyone is totally consistent in practice.

Arguments for flexibility are mostly historical and analogical. Historically, it is pointed out that since the early church was influenced by its culture and adopted its forms from that culture, we can do the same

today. To be sure, elders came from the synagogue organization (though Gentile communities also had them). That the idea of deacons was taken over from the synagogue is much less clear. Baptism was practiced as one of the requirements for proselytes to Judaism and in the mystery religions. The Lord's Supper was new to the church, though it grew out of the Passover feast. Instruction in the Jewish synagogue and instruction in the Christian church were similar. Excommunication was practiced by both groups. Unquestionably many practices which the church used had their antecedents in Judaism. This is to be expected. But the question still remains: when the church took over these practices, did they become divinely sanctioned (to be followed today) or simply divinely exemplified (not necessarily to be followed today in every detail)? The historical argument really does not settle the matter.

Analogies are often drawn to support flexibility between principles and patterns. For example, the Gospel is an inviolable principle, but there are many patterns to follow in presenting it. Salvation is an absolute; but conversion experiences vary. Therefore, it is argued, though the church is an absolute, its forms and functions are variable. But because it is not exegetical the argument is weak.

Those who feel that church practices should conform closely to the principles and patterns of the New Testament point out that the Scriptures claim to be sufficient for every good work, including the work of the local church (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Specifically, Paul wrote 1 Timothy with all its details about church life and government so that Timothy might know how to conduct himself in the house of God and how to instruct others in those same specifics (3:15). And in the same epistle, cultural conditioning of truth is specifically ruled out (2:11-14). Furthermore, Paul expected the churches to follow the "traditions" which included both principles and practices (1 Cor. 11).

Can this matter be settled? Probably not conclusively (and no one is entirely consistent). But to conclude, much flexibility seems to ignore the detailed patterns that are revealed in the New Testament. It is one thing to acknowledge a difference of interpretation about some detail, but it is quite another to say it is unimportant. My own feeling is that we should attempt to follow as many details as possible of the patterns for church life as they are revealed in the New Testament. Otherwise, there is no satisfactory answer to the question of why the patterns are there. And since they are there, I want to use them today.

What constitutes a church? Whenever two or three are gathered together in my name, I will be there, and will bless them. Then every Christian organization is necessary, better while others are not.

The New Testament church. However, it is not the only church. On the basis of the New Testament church. It is an assertion that every Christian who is baptized and who is a member of the church must be made. (2) A church must be made. (3) A church always exists. (4) A church exists for the purpose of a number of things: (a) to glorify God, (b) to evangelize, (c) to worship, (d) to minister to a people. A church may have features that are not open its doors.

Though the definition of a church is not clear, there is latitude in interpretation (e.g., of baptism for church membership). The specific details of organization is not clear, but meetings, frequent ministry.

Just because the details of organization are not clear, churches. But that is the very first (though it is not the last) they had to choose.