

The first Day & the “Assembly”

I. The importance of the assembly

A. Greek word for church is “ekklesia”, which simply means assembly.

1. A church is not a church without assembling
2. Hebrews 10:24-25 - Coming together is important in the New Testament.
3. A lot of what is done in Christian living is in the context of the “assembly”

B. Other Greek terms used to refer to the assembly

1. “sunerchomai” - to come together
2. “sunago” - to gather together
3. “sunathroizo” - to assemble
4. “epi to auto” - the same place
5. (Acts 2:6; 10:27; 16:13; I Cor. 11:17, 18, 20, 33; 14:23, 35; Acts 4:31; 11:26; 14:27; 15:6, 30; 12:12.) - examples of use

NOTE: Although church is the “assembly”, there is a distinction between the church assembled and the church not assembled

II. The nature of the church as an assembly

A. I Corinthians 1:2, 9 - Called Together by God

B. 2 Corinthians 6:16-18 - Conscious of Separation from the World (a distinct entity)

C. I Peter 1:9-10 - The church is a people (community)

D. 2 Thessalonians 2:1-2 - The word “gathering together” is one of the words for meeting together in the present time and is now applied to the 2nd coming. Assembling is in a sense, then, an anticipation of the Lord’s 2nd coming, when there will be a final ultimate assembly before the Lord in Heaven.

III. The Day the church is to assemble

- A. In the Old Testament, the 7th day was pre-eminent, however there are distinct differences between the Sabbath and Sunday.
- B. In the New Testament
 - 1. Acts 2:46; 20:20 - Did the church assemble every day?
 - 2. There was a special day associated with worship called the “Lord’s Day”
 - 3. Terms for this “special day”
 - a. “1st Day of the week” - (Jewish way of looking at it was that this was the first day between the two Sabbaths)
 - b. “The 8th Day” - Had origins in Hellenistic Judaism
 - c. “The day of the sun”, or “Sun-day”
 - d. “The Lord’s Day” - The was the Christian way of referring to it. It is consistent in early Christian writings.
 - 1) Revelation 1:10 - Only place this is used in the New Testament. It was called so because it is connected with the Lord’s Resurrection and Pentecost (Leviticus 23:15-16)
 - 2) Special days are observed in the spirit of that day (eg. Independence day, Thanksgiving, etc.) The “Lord’s Day”, ought to be observed with activities in the spirit of that day.
- C. Significance of the First Day
 - 1. It was the day Jesus resurrected from the tomb (Luke 24:1-6)
 - 2. It was also the day Jesus met with his disciples (Luke 24:13-49)
 - 3. It was the day Jesus ascended (Luke 24:51)
 - 4. It was the first day of the church (Acts 2:1, 41-47)
 - 5. It was the day the spirit was poured out (Acts 2:1, 4, 15-18, 38-39)

IV. Purposes of the Assembly

- A. Glorify God - I Corinthians 10:31; Ephesians 3:21; I Corinthians 14:40
- B. Edify Christians - I Corinthians 14:26 (edify occurs 7 times in I Cor. 14)
- C. Express & Promote Fellowship - Acts 2:42, 46; Hebrews 10:24-25
- D. “Properly” impress outsiders - I Corinthians 14:23-25
- E. Commemorate & Proclaim Salvation - I Corinthians 10:14-17; 11:17-34

V. Criteria for Activities in the Assembly

- A. That which accords with the will of God (If glorify God, then will will seek His will)
- B. That which reflects the character of God - I Corinthians 14:33, 40
- C. That which is spiritual (John 4:24) (not cater to carnal or fleshly, worldly)
- D. That which is for edifying (I Corinthians 14:26)

VI. Activities in the Assembly

- A. Lord’s Supper - Central to the weekly assemblies (I Cor 10:16; 11:20-33; Acts 20:7)
- B. Praying - “House of prayer” was common Jewish term for synagogue, continued to be as important in Christian assemblies (Acts 4:24, 31; I Corinthians 14:15ff; I Timothy 2:8)
- C. Singing - (I Corinthians 14:15, 26; Romans 15:6)
- D. Reading of Scripture - (I Timothy 4:13; I Thessalonians 5:27; Colossians 4:16)
- E. Preaching, Teaching & Exhorting -
 - 1. Acts 11:26; 20:7; I Timothy 4:13
 - 2. 2 Types of speaking in assemblies:
 - a. Informational - Acts 15:30

- b. Personal Testimony (mission reports) - Acts 14:27
- F. Contributing - (I Corinthians 16:1-3; Acts 2:44; Romans 12:13)
- G. Baptizing - (Acts 2:41)
- H. Solving Problems - (Acts 15)
- I. Administering Discipline - (I Corinthians 5:4ff; Matthew 18:17ff)
- J. Choosing and Appointing leaders - (Acts 6:5ff; Acts 13:2ff)
- K. Note: Obviously all of these activities were not all done at every assembly. Also, many of these activities were not limited to the **first** day assembly, but are often times directed to be done at other times.

VII. Testimony of the Early church (first three centuries) concerning the first day:

A. *Ignatius* - “*If therefore those who lived according to the old practices came to a new hope, no longer observing the Sabbath but living according to the Lord’s day, in which also our life arose through him and his death (which some deny), through which mystery we received faith, and on account of which we suffer in order that we may be found disciples of Jesus Christ our only teacher, how shall we be able to live apart from him for whom even the prophets were looking as their teacher since they were his disciples in the spirit?*” (*Magnesians* 9)

B. *Epistle of Barnabas* - “*Moreover God says to the Jews, ‘Your new moons and Sabbaths I cannot endure.’ You see how he says, ‘The present Sabbaths are not acceptable to me, but the Sabbath which I have made in which, when I have rested from all things, I will make the beginning of the eighth day which is the beginning of another world.’ Wherefore, we [Christians] keep the eighth day for joy, on which Jesus arose from the dead and when he appeared ascended into heaven (15:8ff)*

C. *Justin* - “*And on the day called Sunday there is a gathering together in the same place of all who live in a city or a rural district. We all make our assembly in common on the day of the Sun, since it is the first day, on which God changed the darkness and matter and made the world, and Jesus Christ our Savior arose from the dead on the same day. For they crucified him on the day before Saturn’s day, and on the day after he appeared to his apostles...*” (*Apology I*, 67:1-3, 7)

- “*Is there no other thing for which you blame us, my friends, is there than this? That we do not live according to the Law, nor are we circumcized in the flesh as your forefathers, nor do we observe the Sabbath as you do. (Dialogue with Trypho 10:1.)*

D. *Tertullian* - “*Let him who contends that the Sabbath is still to be observed as a balm of salvation, and circumcision on the eighth day because of the threat of death, teach us that in*

earliest times righteous men kept the Sabbath or practices circumcision, and so were made friends of God. It follows, accordingly, that, inasmuch as the abolition of carnal circumcision and of the old law is demonstrated as having been consummated in its own times, so also the observance of the Sabbath is demonstrated to have been temporary. (An answer to the Jews 2:10; 4:1)

- “To us Sabbaths are foreign” (On Idolatry 14:6)

E. There are more references, but this is sufficient to show that Christians met on the first day of the week and not the Sabbath. There is not ONE SINGLE REFERENCE to Christians ever meeting on the Sabbath.

IV. Principles showing the importance of the assembly

- A. Matthew 6:33 - Seeking first the kingdom of God
- B. Ephesians 5:16 - Redeeming the time
- C. Titus 2:14; 3:1 - Zealous of Good works
- D. Psalm 42:1,2,4; 84:1,2,10 - Lovers of Worship

V. Other considerations

- A. Revelation 7:9-10 - Assembling for worship is an activity carried on in Heaven
- B. There are clear passages that show we are to assemble for the purpose of worship on the first day (Acts 20:7; I Corinthians 16:1-2)
- C. Acts 2:42-47 - The first century church went beyond the minimum, meeting regularly for the following purposes:
 - 1. doctrine
 - 2. fellowship
 - 3. breaking of bread
 - 4. prayer
- D. The example of the early church is clear and unambiguous concerning assembling on the first day of the week. Many writings survive from the first centuries to confirm this.
- E. John 17:20ff - The oneness of His followers is what Jesus wanted
- F. I Peter 2:4-5, 9-11 - We are not “individuals”, but a “people”

- G. I Corinthians 3:16-17; Ephesians 2:19-22 - We (plural) are God's temple
- H. I Corinthians 12:12ff - Church is body of Christ & each member needs each other
 - I. Acts 20:28 - Jesus "purchased" the "assembly" (ekklesia) with his own blood
 - J. Much of worship in the Bible is in the context of an assembly
- K. From the above verses, it is clear to see that assembling is necessary**