

The Church Assembly

What should Christians do when it assembles? Should the church assemble at all? Is there really any need for us to be together. After all, many say, “*we can worship God wherever we are.*” While this is true, worship is only one of the reasons we assemble.



Try to imagine in your mind the what the church assembly should be like from your reading of the New Testament. Try to imagine you have never seen a 21st century building or been in even one assembly. What would you see?

Let's look at some of the things the New Testament says the people did when they gathered together.

1. **Singing** — Many Christians would site singing as their favorite part of assembly and people often change churches to find the best music, but how much was music a part of the church in the Bible?

Ephesians 5:19 says that Christians are to sing and make melody in their hearts to the Lord, but nothing says that this is in the just in the confines of the assembly. Jack Cottrell writes, “there is no clear NT reference to a Christian assembly engaged in congregational singing, either by command or example.” This does not mean that we should not do so, for we are not prohibited from singing praises together and OT worship seemed to include assembled collective songs of praise. (Hebrews 13:15, Acts 16:25, and 1 Cor. 14:15 indicate singing, but not in the assembly.)

What if anything does this tell us about singing in the assembly?



Acts 2:42

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

2. **Prayer** — Certainly prayers were offered in the assemblies. **Acts 2:42** specifically mentions prayer taking place in the infant church as it assembled. After being arrested in Acts 4:23-31 Peter and John assemble the church for prayer. The church in Acts 12:5,12 comes together for prayer. And in 1 Cor. 14:15-17, we have implied that one person may “lead” in congregational prayer.

3. **The Lord’s Supper** — This is the “breaking of bread” in Acts 2:42. The Lord’s Supper honours and glorifies God for His work of salvation through Jesus Christ. Acts 20:7 seems to indicate that it was a main reason for Christians to assemble on Sunday.



When we remember Christ at the Lord’s Supper, we remember the covenant that we have with Him. In essence when we eat and drink, we renew our covenant with God, saying that we continue to rely upon the Lord and that we are committed to live worthy of the gospel (Philippians 1:27).

The Lord’s Supper is not a solitary experience only between the Christian and God, but it is a corporate activity of the assembled church. We recognize our join participation in Christ and our anticipation of His return in the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor. 11:26).

4. **Fellowship**— Perhaps the primary reason the church assembled was for fellowship because it is the one spiritual activity that cannot be done alone.

Mike Root writes, “*From the beginning ‘all those who had believed were together’ (Acts 2:44). The ‘whole church’ came together in Corinth to share and edify one another (1 Cor. 14:23-26). They were together daily, from house to house, in the temple, in the market, and even in chains. They were not punching a clock or checking a list. They were together because one day they would all be taken up together to be with Jesus (1 Thess. 4:17).*”

Everett Ferguson adds, “*The encouragements to meet together in one place show the recognition by early Christians of the social dimension of their faith an the need to frequently be together. Being together does not have to be in any certain place. This is borne out by the fact that “not until the age of Constantine do we find specially constructed church buildings.” Christians met wherever they were able to be together.*”

Offerings — We might assume that giving is incorporated into fellowship as the word fellowship means sharing together. It is clear that the early church was involved in giving financially (Acts 4:32-5:11; 2 Cor. 8:1-9:15). 1 Cor. 16:1-3 leads us to believe that giving was a weekly activity of the church.

Bible Study — As we see in Acts 2:42, the early church was involved in the apostles' doctrine. The word doctrine simply means “teaching.” The teaching of the apostles is the teaching of the New Testament. We know the church assembled to learn from the Word (1 Timothy 3:16-17).

Acts 20:32

“And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.”

Paul instructs young Timothy “*Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of scripture*” (1 Tim. 4:13). Also see Col. 4:16-17 and 1 Thess. 5:27.

The Day of Assembly

The New Testament Church met on Sunday which was known as the Lord's Day. While they also met daily together, Sunday was a special day in the life of the church. In Acts 20:7, the church met on the first day of the week to break bread and in 1 Cor. 16:1-2, the church collected their offerings on Sunday.

Early Christian writers also attest to the first day of the week being the day of public assembly. See “To the Magnesians,” 9; *Apostolic Fathers*, 95; *The Epistle of Barnabas*, 15; and *Apology*, 67, p. 186. All these ancient writers say the church was meeting on the first day of the week.

Finally, the first day is the day that Jesus arose from the grave. It is only proper for us to recognize and honour Jesus on the day of his great victory.

About Unbelievers in the Assembly

The assembly is designed **for Christians**. Evangelism in the NT took place apart from the assembly (Acts 17:1-4; 17-19; 18:4). In the NT the **only** purpose for the assembly was for worship, edification, and fellowship. However, we know unbelievers sometimes joined the assembly (1 Cor. 14:20-25). While we welcome unbelievers, the assembly should not be our primary method of evangelism and we should not accommodate their needs above or equal to Christians and their need for corporate worship and fellowship.