

THE BENCHMARK FOR A NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

3rd Session (End-Time series)

From the book of acts as well as other passages in the New Testament, we gain insight into the norms/pattern/model as well as criterion and authoritative standards for a New Testament Church. These are as follows:

(1) First and foremost, a Church is to be consisted of people formed into local congregations and united by the Holy Spirit, diligently seeking faithful personal relationship with God and Jesus Christ (Acts 13:2; 16:5; 20:7; Rom 16:3-4; 10Cor16:19; 2-Cor11:28 and Heb 11:6).

(2) Through its powerful witness of the Church, sinners will be saved, born again, baptized in water and added to the Church; they will partake of the Lord's Supper and wait for Christ's return (Acts 2:41-42; 4:33; 5:11; 11:24 and 1-Cor 11:26).

(3) The baptism in the Holy Spirit is to be preached and communicated to new believers and the Holy Spirit's power and presence manifested.

(4) The Holy Spirit's gifts are to be in operation (Rom 12:6-8; 1-Cor12:4-11; Eph 4:11-12), including wonders, miraculous signs and healing (Acts 2:18; 4:30; 5:12; 6:8; 14:10; 28:8)

(5) God gives a fivefold leadership to the Church in order to equip the saints for the work of ministry (Ephesians 4:11-12).

(6) Believers should be able to drive out demons (Acts 5:16; 8:7; 16:18; 19:12; Mark 16:17).

(7) There should be absolute loyalty to the Gospel. i.e., the original teaching of Christ and the apostles. The people should devote themselves to studying and obeying the Word of God (Acts 6:4; 18:11; Rom 15:18; Col 3:16 and 2-Tim 2:15).

(8) On the first day of the week (Acts 20:7 & 1-Cor 16:2), the local congregation should meet together for worship and mutual edification through the written Word of God and the manifestations of the Spirit (1-Cor 12:7-11; 14:26; 1-Tim 5:17).

(9) The Church should stand in humility, awe and fear before the presence of a Holy God. The people should be vitally concerned for the purity of the Church, disciplining sinning members and teachers not loyal to the biblical faith (Acts 20:28; 1-Cor 5:1-13; Mt 18:15)

(10) Those who have persevered in godly character and the righteous standards set forth by the apostles should be ordained as elders to oversee local churches and maintain their spiritual life (Mt 18:15; 1-Cor 5:1-5; 1-Tim 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9).

(11) Likewise, the Church should have deacons responsible for the temporal and material affairs of the Church.(1-Tim 3:8).

(12) There should be observable love and fellowship in the Spirit among the members (Acts 2:42 and 44-46; John 13:34), not only within the local congregation but also between other Bible-believing congregations (Acts 15:1-31; 2-Cor 8:1-8).

(13) Every Church should be a praying and fasting Church(Acts 1:14; 6:4; 12:5; 13:2; Rom 12:12; Col 4:2 and Eph 6:18).

(14) Believers should separate themselves from the prevailing worldview and the spirit of their surrounding culture (Acts 2:40; Rom 12:2; 2-Cor 6:17; Gal 1:4; John 2:15-16).

(15) There may be suffering and afflictions because of the world and its ways (Acts 4:1-3; 5:40; 9:16 and 14:22).

(16) The Church should actively help send missionaries to other lands(Acts 2:39; 13:2-4).

No local church has the right to call itself Church after New Testament norms unless these 16 characteristics are in operation among its people.

Seven Important Characteristics of a True Church(Acts 2:42-47).

Apostles Teaching (V42a): The early believers were disciplined and nourished in the Word taught by the apostles, some of which later became our NT Scriptures. They were a Word centered Church.

Fellowship (V42b): The disciples not only developed a vertical relationship to God, but also nourished horizontally a warm, honest, open, healing, redeeming fellowship based on common life together in Christ. They pursued the fellowship of Christ and the Holy Spirit between and amongst believers.

Breaking of Bread (V42,46): This common expression in Acts and the early Church seems to have a threefold dimension: the initial beginning of a common meal, the moment of sharing in an agape meal, and the Lord's Supper itself.

Prayer (V42d): In the early Church, prayer was clearly a high priority and an integral part of their life together. In Acts, where there is much prayer, there is much activity of the Holy Spirit; and where there is much activity of the Holy Spirit, there is much prayer.

Miraculous Signs and Wonders (V43): Miracles were an important aspect of the presence of power of the Holy Spirit among believers and occurred most often in their mission to unbelievers (compare 3:1-10; 4:30; 5:12-16; 6:8; 8:6).

Sharing Community (VV44-47a): The early Church in Jerusalem experienced community like few people have in the earth (compare 4:32-37).

Making Disciples (V47b): The righteous influence and witness of these believers effectively permeated (spread throughout) the city as the natural overflow of their life together and outflow of Jesus' ministry through them by the Holy Spirit. Consequently new converts were being added to the Church daily.

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