

# “Church Just Ain’t What It Used To Be”

*by Bryan Gibson*

That’s the very comment someone made to me a few months ago. She couldn’t believe some of the things being done in the assemblies of the church she was attending. She is right, you know—what we find in many churches ain’t what it used to be. I don’t know exactly how far back she was going for her comparison, but I would urge that we go all the way back to the New Testament—to the “beginning” (1 John 2:24). What is done in the assemblies of many churches today hardly resembles what was done by the churches we read about in the New Testament, and that ought to bother us. These churches were taught the commandments of the Lord (1 Corinthians 14:37), so what they did in obedience to the Lord is what we ought to do today. Are we interested in doing it His way, or our own way? That’s what it really boils down to.

Various passages throughout the New Testament speak of a local church coming together for worship—1 Corinthians 11:17-20; 14:23, 26; Hebrews 10:25—just to name a few. We know that they met regularly on the first day of the week (1 Corinthians 16:1-2; Acts 20:7), and sometimes on other days (Acts 2:46; 19:9). But exactly what did they do when they came together?

Let’s understand this point first—there was a distinction made between what was done “in church” and “at home” (1 Corinthians 11:34; 14:35). So let no one argue that “anything goes” as long as it is done “to the glory of God.”

Let’s look first at some things they did on a regular basis, in their worship to God. 1) They engaged in the teaching and study of God’s word (Acts 2:42; 11:26; 15:30-35, 20:7; Colossians 4:16). 2) They sang psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (1 Corinthians 14:15; Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 2:11-12). 3) They prayed together (Acts 2:42; 1 Corinthians 14:14-17). 4) They gave money to aid in the Lord’s work (1 Corinthians 16:1-2). 5) They ate the Lord’s supper (Acts 2:42; Acts 20:7). Please observe in your study of these passages that two of these activities were limited to the first day of the week—giving, and eating the Lord’s supper.

But there were some other things they did on a less regular basis, as the need called for it. 1) Brethren were informed of needs (Acts 11:27-30). 2) Reports of preaching work were given to the congregation (Acts 14:27; 15:4). 3) Elders were appointed (Acts 14:23). 4) Brethren were commended for their good service (3 John 1:5-6; 2 Thessalonians 1:4); 5) Discipline was administered to unruly members (1 Corinthians 5:1-4). Look over this list again. Perhaps we’ve missed some activities in our study, but you can easily see the spiritual nature of all these activities.

Here’s the problem. Many churches today have become more concerned with entertaining than edifying, more concerned with feeding bellies than feeding souls. Are people’s “needs” really different than they were in New Testament times? Someone has got to take a stand; someone has got to point people back to the Bible, to the very words of Jesus Christ himself. Maybe that someone is YOU!