
Customs of the church
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Activities in the church tend to be in 1 of three categories: scripturally mandated, by scriptural example or a custom. It is good to be clear on the differences as some customs mistaken for a scriptural requirement can inhibit a congregation's need to adapt to new situations.

KEY WORDS:

Custom
example
Scriptural

GLOSSARY:

Scripturally mandated: Specific instructions of the New Testament.

Scriptural example: Something in the New Testament which was reported to us as what they were doing in the early church, but for which we do not have a specific command.

Custom: Anything the church does regularly which is not a specific instruction or a New Testament example.

REPORT:

Activities in the church tend to be in 1 of three categories: scripturally mandated, by scriptural example or a custom.

This is not to suggest that it is inappropriate to have customs. Some customs are very valuable in achieving the

work of the church. A customary meeting time is very helpful in having everyone show up together. A custom is merely an activity which is repeated regularly. Ongoing operations of any group generate a number of customs.

The problem with some customs is that over time, they take on the appearance of being scripturally mandated. When a discretionary change is suggested to some customs, some members become upset.

Some customs mistaken for a scriptural requirement can inhibit a congregation's need to adapt to new situations.

SCRIPTURAL COMMANDS:

Scripturally mandated is the clearest of these. Examples are:

1. To love one another
2. Belief in God and Jesus
3. Baptism for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38)
4. The Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-19)
5. Communion
6. The offices of Shepherds and Deacons
7. Delegation of administration to deacons (Acts 6)
7. A plurality of Shepherds
8. Shepherds being in charge
7. A widow's list (I Tim. 5:9)
6. Not to add to or take away from what the Revelation letter says (Rev. 22:18-19)

7. Acapella music (Eph. 5:19, Acts 16:25)
9. Withdrawing from certain members (I Cor. 5:9-12)
10. Give on the first day of each week to support the needy (I Cor. 16:2)
11. Confess your sins one to another (James 5:16)
12. Make certain judgments: (I Cor. 5:9-12)
13. Avoid dissensions contrary to the scripture (Rom. 16:17)
14. Women keep silent in church (Rom 14:34-35)
15. Obey your leaders (Heb. 13:17)
16. Women covering head while praying (I Cor. 11:5, 15)
17. Men not covering head while praying (I Cor. 11:7)
18. Not to eat a meal during worship service (I Cor 11: 22)
19. Not to observe days, months, seasons, or years (Gal. 4:10-11, Col. 2:16)
20. Speak in tongues in church only if there is an interpreter (I Cor. 14:27-28)
21. Abstain from food polluted by idols, sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals, and from blood (Acts 15:29)
22. Circumcision not required (by being left out of the discussion, Acts 15:5, 29)

SCRIPTURAL EXAMPLES:

Some examples of scriptural examples would be:

1. Extending the not adding to or taking away from Revelation to all the Bible, (Stated in Rev. 22:18-19 with respect to Revelation, and by example to the whole Bible)
2. Meeting on the first day of the week, (I Cor. 16:2, Pentecost was on first day of

- the week)
3. Meeting on the first day of each week. (I Cor. 16:2)
4. Fellowship meal other than at worship service (Acts 2:42, 46)
5. Renting a building (Acts 19:9) Disciples met daily in the school of Tyrannus for 2 years.

Again, anything the church does regularly which is not on the previous two lists (plus some this paper has not identified) is a custom.

CUSTOMS OF THE CHURCH:

The following is a list of customs of the Churches of Christ. This does not imply they are right or wrong in any way, just thea they are not mandatory to do.

WORSHIP SERVICE:

1. Times of worship
2. Services on Sunday
3. Always 5 acts of worship on Sunday
4. Sunday School: First started in Gloucester in 1780
4. Bible hour/ Children’s church
5. Wednesday Bible study
6. Order of worship (2 songs, prayer, 1 song, Lord’s Supper, Offering, Sermon, etc.)
7. Second communion on Sunday night
8. A prayer as the last thing in a service
9. No clapping or raising hands
10. Always bowing head for prayers
11. Baptism laying backwards
12. Having an invitation song.
13. 1 hour long services

FINANCES

1. Giving on the first day of each week to Supporting local operations: The reference of giving on the first day of each week (I Cor. 16:2) was specifically for supporting mission work. As the first small home churches had no buildings to replace the Temple, there were likely few local expenses.
2. Pledging for budgets
3. Offering after the Lord's Supper
4. Passing a tray down the aisles instead of a central collection
5. Maintaining cash reserves: Certainly, reasonable up to a point. An excessive buildup of reserves should be used to support the Great Commission.

ORGANIZATION:

1. Lead Shepherd: Shepherds being the lead Shepherd by a set rotation
2. Policy and Operation Manuals
3. Committee Structures
4. Business Meetings
5. Printed Order of Worship
6. Lights, AC, speaker system
7. Database systems

FACILITY

1. An Owned Building: We have no record of the early church actually owning any property. However, we do have a record of them meeting in the Temple (Acts 2:46, until they got thrown out) and met daily in the school of Tryannus for 2 years (Acts 19:9-10). That might would be considered a scriptural example of needing a building and could be an example of the practicality of owning it.
2. Pews: Pews were not introduced until the 13th century and that was

apparently because the members were weak from the plague. Prior to that time the primarily teacher sat and the audience stood.

3. Immoveable Pews: Bolting the pews to the floor causes a facility to have a single function limiting evangelistic options. Apparently became common in the 16th century.
4. Stage: Beneficial to speak to larger audiences
5. Pulpit: Apparently early teacher sat and the audience stood.
6. Lord's Supper Table: Organized convenience for larger congregations

MUSIC

1. Song books
2. Power Point
3. Musical notes
4. Four-part harmony (Apparently introduced by Martin Luther during the Protestant Reformation)
5. Song leader
6. Song leader waving arm

PREACHING

1. Stationary preacher
2. Specialized ministers, i.e. Youth, Involvement, Education
3. Invitation
4. Three-point sermon
5. Length of sermon

LORD'S SUPPER

1. One cup, Multi-cup: At the Last Supper, Jesus and the apostles were gathered for a meal. Likely all in attendance had a cup to drink with their meal. Likely all cups were filled from the same wine

skin, pot, or jar. When Jesus said drink ye all of it, it is unclear whether He passed his one cup around, or he had blessed all the wine and they drank from their individual cups. If you choose to follow a one cup or multi-cup practice, it is your custom. It is unlikely that at the large crowds in Jerusalem in the early days they passed a single cup around.

2. Metal trays, mini-cups
3. Servers lining the front of the building

4. Short speech made at Lord's Supper

This attempt to list the scripturally mandated, scriptural examples, and customs of the churches of Christ is to assist local congregations in recognizing what can be changes to improve the ability to achieve their individual part of the Great Commission. We certainly don't want our faithfulness to an old church custom interfere with the task we are here for.