

## ASSEMBLY PRINCIPLES

### INTRODUCTION

The Greek word for church is *ekklesia*, from *ek*, out of, and *klesis*, a calling. It means a gathering or assembly. The church in the New Testament was a company of true believers devoted in love to Christ and to one another. A person becomes a member of God's family of believers (the church) when he receives Christ (John 1:12). The universal church consists of all believers in every place; the local church is a gathering or assembly of believers who meet together in the name of the Lord Jesus.

“Does the New Testament list a certain number of requisites or essentials of a local church?...We would suggest that this is not the case....Instead of that, we believe that the New Testament approach is this. All believers are instructed that, by the grace of God, they are members of the church. Then they are exhorted to gather together in such a way as to give expression to the great truths of the church. Some assemblies of Christians give a very poor representation of the body of Christ. Other groups present a more faithful likeness. None does so perfectly. Thus, ...the language of Scripture is the language of grace; namely, ‘You as believers are the church; now meet in such a manner as to give an accurate expression of this fact to the world.’”

--William MacDonald

“The Christian assembly is a local group of believers who follow as closely as they know how, the principles of gathering spelled out in the New Testament. This is a brief summary of some of these fundamental truths. Those gathered are Christians. Christians have admitted their guilt of sin before God, and have put their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior. They gather in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. New Testament believers gathered to no name other than Christ's. The assembly has Christ as its center. The functions of the assembly include: worship, prayer, ministry, gospel and discipline.

“The assembly follows two ordinances which were commanded by our Lord, were practiced by the early church and were expounded in the epistles. They are the Lord's Supper and baptism. The Lord's Supper is filled with meaningful symbolism whereby on the first day of the week the believer is reminded of the Lord's shed blood and broken body on his behalf. Baptism after one is saved is commanded as an act of obedience by the Lord, and it, too, is filled with meaningful symbolism. In baptism, the believer identifies himself with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection. The New Testament church, or assembly requires no single pastor, but is guided by a body of elders and gifted men, including evangelists, pastors, and teachers. There is no New Testament authority for names that flatter men such as ‘Reverend.’ The government of the assembly is by the elders who are to be the shepherds, the watchmen, the leaders, the laborers, and the models for the local assembly. Finances of the assembly are supplied in a free will manner, from believers only. Funds are dispersed as needs arise....

“The assembly subscribes to the belief that all believers are priests and exercise their priesthood through praise, by presenting their bodies to God, by giving financially and by bringing petitions to God in prayer....

“The prayer meeting plays a key role in the lives of believers who meet with the local church, in that prayer is the fuel which propels the Christian's spiritual power and progress. Believers express the oneness in the body of Christ through fellowship, or sharing, and service to each other through ministering of spiritual gifts. The sign gifts, including speaking in tongues, which were used to verify in the old times that a man was of God, are regarded as not...for this age by the assembly. The believers meeting at the local assembly are separated from the world, and live in view of the Lord's second coming when He shall take them to heaven. The Christian assembly is a shelter and a place of warm fellowship where believers of like faith worship and serve together.” --  
Merrill Oster

“So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.” --Acts 2:41,42

#### Additional Verses

Matt. 18:15-20--two or three gathered together in My name

Matt. 16:18--I will build My church

Phil. 1:1--overseers, deacons, and saints

1 Cor. 12:13--one body

Acts 14:21-23--elders in every church

Acts 20:17-32--elders, overseers, shepherd

Acts 2:41-47--the early church

## PICTURES OF THE CHURCH

In the New Testament the church is pictured as a body (Col. 1:18, Eph. 1:22,23, 3:6), a household (Eph. 2:19, Gal. 6:10), a building (Eph. 2:20-22), and the pillar and support of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15). John Morris, commenting on 1 Timothy 3:14,15, said this: “‘These things write I unto thee, hoping to come into thee shortly: But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth’ (1st Timothy 3:14,15).

“The church has been ordained by God to be the primary instrument through which His work on earth is to be accomplished. Here Paul uses three phrases to describe three aspects of the church:

“(1) The house of God: The Christian family, with husband, wife, and children performing their God-given roles, provides a beautiful picture of the relationship of the church (the ‘bride’ of Christ) to the Lord. The household of God consists of a family of believers where love controls and where He is honored. ‘Ye also, as lively stones, built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ’ (1st Peter 2:5).

“(2) The church of the Living God: The *ekklesia*, or ‘called-out ones,’ serve the living God. ‘The blood of Christ (shall)...purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God’ (Hebrews 9:14).

“(3) The pillar and ground of the truth: A pillar of a building is not used for support, but rather for display, by elevating or calling attention to something else. The ground provides the support. The church should function to support and display the whole truth in such a way that all men can see and believe it.

“It should be a family of believers exhibiting brotherly love, individually and corporately serving the living God out of a pure conscience, defending the truth, and displaying it to the lost. May each of us as church members enjoy and support such a church.” --John D. Morris, Ph.D

## PRIESTHOOD OF BELIEVERS

Conspicuously absent from the New Testament church were professional clergymen and a laity of spectators. Instead, all believers were a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:5,9). As priests they were to offer sacrifices of their persons (Rom. 12:1), praises (Heb. 13:15), and possessions (Heb. 13:16). They were to perform ministries of prayer (1 Tim. 2:1,2), sympathy (Rom 12:15), instruction (1 Peter 2:9), and proclaiming the gospel (Rom.15:16).

“All believers are altogether priests, and let it be anathema to assert that there is any other priest than he who is Christian; for it will be asserted without the Word of God, on no authority but the sayings of men, or the antiquity of custom, or the multitude of those that think so.” --Martin Luther

## SPIRITUAL GIFTS

Christ gives to each believer, by the ministry of the Holy Spirit, some gift or gifts to equip him to serve the Lord and edify other believers. The tendency of allowing the ministry to fall into the hands of one man should be resisted; instead, the Holy Spirit should be free to use the various gifts which Christ has given to the church.

“For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. And since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let each exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.” --Rom. 12:4-8

Additional Verses

Rom 12--gifts

1 Cor 12-14--many members, one body

Eph. 4--equipping of the saints for the work

1 Pet. 4:10,11--each one received a gift

Heb. 2:1-4 (1 Cor. 13:8-13; 2 Cor. 12:12)--sign gifts

## LEADERS IN THE CHURCH

Leaders in the New Testament were not a separate class; instead, they were mature believers who led by teaching and example. Leaders were warned in the Scriptures not to “lord it over” those in their care. The example of Scripture points to a plurality of leaders in the local church, not a single pastor.

In Acts 20 we see different terms used to describe the same people. The term elder describes their character--they were spiritually mature men. The term bishop or overseer describes their responsibility--to look over and guard those in their care. And the term shepherd or pastor describes their work--to feed and care for the flock.

Elders in the New Testament were assisted by deacons (deacon means servant), spiritually mature men who helped to take care of physical needs, as well as other tasks.

It is our belief that elders should be the highest authority in the local church--there shouldn't be a federation of churches, a “bishop” over a diocese, or a superintendent over an area. Instead, leadership should be in the hands of local men who are qualified according to 1 Tim. 3 and Tit. 1, not according to a prescribed sequence of preparation.

Additional Verses

1 Tim. 3:1-13, Tit. 1:5-9, Acts 6:3--qualifications

Heb. 11:7,8,17,24-26, 1 Chron. 12:32,33--qualities

Heb. 13:17--obey

1 Thess. 5:12,13--highly regard

Eph. 4:11-13--leaders equip the saints

Acts 5:42--teaching and preaching

Acts 11:26--leaders train the saints

Acts 20:17,28--elder, overseer (bishop), shepherd (pastor)

Phil. 1:1, Acts 15:16, Tit. 1:5--plurality

Tit. 1:5, Acts 14:21-23--leaders appointed

1 Pet. 5:1-4--elders, examples to the flock

1 Tim. 5:19,20--accusation against elder

## FELLOWSHIP

The Greek word for fellowship is *koinonia*, which means communion or sharing in common. Christians share together a common inheritance, a cooperative service, and a reciprocal responsibility. Christians are all members of one body, and are to love one another and build up one another, as well as sharing in the ministry of reconciliation.

Additional Verses

2 Cor. 1:4--comfort

Eccles. 4:9,10--two better than one

1 Jn. 1:3-7--fellowship with us

Pro. 13:20--walk with wise

Col. 3:16--psalms, hymns

1 Cor. 14:26--psalm, teaching

1 Cor. 8:1--love edifies

Eph. 4:11-16--every joint

1 Thess. 2:8--shared lives

Jn. 13:34,35--love one another

1 Thess. 5:11,14--build up one another

Heb. 3:12,13; 10:24,25--encourage one another

1 Cor. 16:20--greet one another

Gal. 5:13--serve one another

Gal. 6:2--bear one another's burdens

Rom. 12:5--members one of another

Rom 12:10--be devoted to one another; give preference

Rom. 15:7--accept one another  
Rom. 15:14--admonish one another  
Eph. 4:2--forbearance to one another  
Eph. 4:32--kind to one another  
Eph. 6:18--pray for one another

## BAPTISM

A baby never has to walk to have life, but humanly speaking, he would never experience all that life could have for him. So it is for a Christian. When he is born again, he starts a new life. He begins to walk as he starts to obey the word. The first big step is what the Bible calls baptism. Baptism is not a condition of eternal salvation, but through it a person starts to experience the reality of obeying and walking with God.

In the New Testament people were baptized shortly after becoming true believers. Baptism is commanded (Acts 10:47,48, Matthew 28:19,20). A person can be baptized anywhere where there is enough water (Acts 8:36-39, John 3:23). Baptism is a symbol. When a believer goes under the water, it symbolizes that his old life is dead and buried with Christ. When he comes up out of the water, it symbolizes that he has been raised up to a new life (Colossians 2:12).

“Following the Lord in baptism means doing what He did (Matthew 3:16,17). Following the Lord in baptism means telling the world you’re under new management (1st Corinthians 6:19,20). Following the Lord in baptism means following Jesus and forsaking the way you used to live before you were saved (2nd Corinthians 5:17). It is a way of telling everyone, ‘I’m a new person, a new creation in Christ. Old things have passed away; all things in my life have become new. I’m off to a brand new start.’ Baptism is going public for God. It is saying to the world, ‘I have decided to follow Jesus, no turning back, no turning back.’”

--Woodrow Kroll, General Director, Back to the Bible

“The principal meaning of believer’s baptism is most fully developed in Romans 6:1-10. We might summarize the teaching of that passage as follows: (1) When Jesus died, He went, as it were, under the waves and billows of God’s wrath (Psalm 42:7). (2) He did this as our Representative. (3) Because Christ really died in our place, we can say that when He died, we died. (4) By dying, He settled the whole question of sin once and for all. (5) Therefore, we too have died to the whole question of sin. Sin no longer has any claim on us. (6) God sees every believer as having been crucified with Christ. All that he was as a sinner in the flesh has been nailed to the cross. (7) In baptism, the believer gives a dramatic illustration of what has already taken place. In going under the water, he is saying in effect, ‘Because of my sins, I deserved to die. But when Jesus died, I died too. My old man, or old self, was crucified with Him. When Jesus was buried, I too was buried, and I now acknowledge that my old self should be put away from God’s sight forever as a matter of daily practice.’ (8) Then just as Jesus arose from the dead, so the believer arises out of the waters of baptism. In so doing, he signifies his determination to walk in newness of life. No longer will he live to please self, but rather he will turn over his life to the Savior so that He can live His life in the believer.

“Thus we might say that baptism is a ceremony signifying the end of the former way of life. It is a public act of obedience to the will of the Lord (Matt. 28:19,20), picturing the believer’s death with Christ. It has no saving merit, but is for those who are already saved.” --William MacDonald

Additional Verses

Matt. 28:19—command

Acts 8:12--believe, baptized

Acts 10:47,48--receive, baptized

Romans 6:1-10--meaning

Col. 2:12--picture of salvation

Rom. 1:16, 1 Cor. 1:17--doesn’t save us

Acts 8:36-40--water

Acts 16:30-34--immediately

Acts 9:1-19--Paul

## THE LORD'S SUPPER

“Jesus Christ Himself requested this commemoration of His death, burial, and resurrection as a continuing responsibility of true believers in Him until He, according to His promise, returns for His own. For this reason participation in the meeting is limited to those true and genuine believers in Himself who love Him, and who are not practicing moral wrongs, nor holding teachings contrary to the Scriptures (Luke 22:19,20; Acts 2:42, 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26, 5:11 and 2 John 10,11).

“The order of the meeting is in accordance with the New Testament practice, ‘...When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation...’ (1 Corinthians 14:16). This constitutes a meeting that is open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit where believing men successively take part in an orderly manner. This may include requesting a hymn, or leading in prayerful thanksgiving and praise to God, to lead our hearts and minds intelligently in remembrance of Jesus Christ’s Person and work and in particular, His work at Calvary. It may also include the reading of an appropriate Scripture portion, with, perhaps, a comment. Following the partaking of the bread and cup, there may also be some word of ministry from the men to instruct or encourage those present relative to their Christian life and walk with the Lord.

“In the Church meetings, leadership is the responsibility of the men. The women, according to the Scriptures, are to remain silent with regard to the leadership on these occasions. They nonetheless assuredly worship the Lord while in silent meditation and/or prayer and praise from the heart, as well as when agreeing in spirit with the men taking part. Accordingly, a head covering is worn to demonstrate the woman’s recognition and honor of God’s order of headship, thus veiling her natural ‘glory’ (1 Corinthians 11:7) that men and angels may bear witness to God’s order of responsibility (1 Corinthians 11:3-16).” --Jim Haesemeyer

Additional Verses

Lk. 22:14-20--Jesus

1 Cor. 11:23-30--instructions

1 Cor. 10:16,17--one bread

Acts 2:42,46, 20:7--example of once a week

## WOMEN'S ROLE

Scripture declares that “...there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal.3:28); women are fellow-heirs of the grace of life (1 Pet. 3:7). Although women are of equal worth and value in the sight of God as men, the Bible does portray different roles for men and women. As believers we should follow the instructions found in His Word.

“The role of women in the assembly is one of silence in the church. The New Testament exhorts the woman not to teach or rule over man in the church. But she is given the privilege of showing in symbol the church’s subjection to the Lord by praying with her head covered....

“Her sphere of service includes homemaking, kindness and good works, private instruction--particularly to the younger women, and her personal testimony....” --Merrill Oster

“1 Corinthians 11:2-16: This passage is rather long so it will not be quoted in full. First of all, Paul gives the various ranks of authority: woman, man, Christ, and God. This is simply a question of order and rank and does not imply inferiority of person or ability. Christ is Deity even as the Father (Col. 2:9). The woman is as human as the man.

“The Corinthian women who accepted Christ felt so emancipated that they were even casting off social propriety. The wearing of a veil or a head covering in public was considered a mark of modesty in that culture. To act in a bold, rebellious way, casting off social restraint and custom, is to dishonor your husband (v. 5) . The veil here is not her hair: it could be left off without cutting her hair (v 6). Wearing the veil was the outward symbol of a submissive spirit.

“Paul pleads for modesty and for the women to accept their role. He stresses that to defy this is to go against the custom of all the churches (v 16).

“The troublesome area is that in 1 Timothy 2 and in 1 Corinthians 14 silence is enjoined upon the women during the church meeting. Here in verse 5 he seems to allow speaking if a woman is veiled. Does Paul completely reverse

himself in chapter 14? But accepting the inspiration of Scripture or even the keen logic of Paul will hardly allow this view.

“One solution is to say that 1 Corinthians 11:1-16 applies to situations outside of the church, such as a women’s meeting. But the veil was worn in the presence of men, not women. And the rest of the chapter deals with the breaking of bread, a church meeting.

“Alford gives a better answer: “The women overstepped the bounds of their sex, in coming forward to pray and to prophesy in the assembled church with uncovered heads. Both of these the apostle disapproved-as well their coming forward to pray and to prophesy, as their removing the veil; here however he blames the latter practice only and reserves the former till ch. 14:34” (Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament*, Vol. II, p. 564, Chicago: Moody Press, 1958).

“Paul follows this practice of dealing with one abuse at a time in other places as well. One can see this illustrated in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10 when he deals with the eating of meat offered to idols. This is the best solution to an apparent contradiction.” --Donald Norbie

#### Additional Verses

Gal.3:28--neither male nor female

1 Pet. 3:7--fellow-heir, honor

1 Cor. 11:2-16--woman subject

1 Cor. 14:34,35--silent; not ask questions

1 Tim. 2:11-15--instructions

1 Cor. 11:5-10--head uncovered

Tit. 2:4,5--teaching younger women

1 Pet. 3:1-4--gentle and quiet spirit

## FINANCES

The church should receive its finances from those who are within. Christian giving is an act of worship. All that a Christian has belongs to God; believers are to act as stewards, using all he has to bring glory to God. Paul wrote in 1 Cor. 16:2, “Now concerning the collection for the saints....On the first day of every week let each one of you put aside and save, as he may prosper....” Funds of the church should be used for widows in the assembly, for the poor saints, and for those who devote their time to the work of the Lord.

#### Additional Verses

Prov. 3:9,10--honor Lord

2 Cor. 9:6-15--cheerful giver

1 Cor. 16:2--1st day of week

Gal. 6:6--one taught share

1 Tim. 5:17,18--support leaders

1 Tim. 5:9,10--widows

1 Jn. 3:17,18, Acts 6:1-6--those in need

Luke 6:38, Phil. 4:19--promises

1 Tim. 6:9-11--warning

Acts 20:35--more blessed

## CHURCH DISCIPLINE

“A church’s testimony is not harmed by people of all sorts attending gospel services or other meetings where the Bible is preached or taught. But as soon as people are allowed to partake of the communion and are recognized as is fellowship with the believers as fellow-Christians, it becomes the duty of the leadership of the church to discipline any who lead lives that are immoral or careless, or any who spread false doctrine. Many churches have no discipline at all today for fear of losing members. Also a person may be under discipline in one area or group and then be accepted in another as if nothing were wrong. The whole purpose of discipline is to restore the erring ones to fellowship. Tact and grace are imperative in this, but if the church is to be holy, as God commands, warnings must be made to the unruly (1 Thessalonians 5:14). The disorderly are to be avoided (2 Thessalonians 3:11,14,15) along

with those who sow discord (Romans 16:17), and heretics are to be flatly rejected (Titus 3:10). A heretic in the New Testament is one who causes division by embracing false views on important doctrinal matters. The final form of discipline is excommunication (1 Corinthians 5:11,13). This should be done gravely, and should extend to the immoral, greedy, idolatrous, railing, drunken, and extortioners. All discipline should be fair, and church matters should be kept within the confines of the congregation. If some of the totally disqualified persons now claiming fellowship in certain otherwise sound congregations were disciplined, perhaps we would see more of God's blessing in the gospel testimony."

--from *Basic Bible Doctrines* by R.E. Harlow

#### Additional Verses

2 Thess. 3:6-15--keep aloof

1 Cor. 5 (2 Cor. 2)--not to associate

Tit. 2:11,12--deny ungodliness

Heb. 12:6--whom the Lord loves He disciplines

1 Jn. 5:16,17--sin leading to death

Matt. 18:15-20--reprove in private

Gal. 6:1--restore in gentleness

2 Cor. 13:1--testimony of two or three witnesses

1 Tim. 5:19--accusation against elder

## PURPOSE

"Paul's skill as a missionary is nowhere more marked than in his success as a church planter. As an effective evangelist hundreds came to know Christ through his preaching. He also excelled as a teacher and trainer of people. As a faithful parent trains his children so Paul brought to maturity his spiritual children. His crowning activity, however, was that he formed churches from the believers who had been evangelized and taught. The planting of churches was the third and final step in the strategy of Pauline mission (Acts 14:21-23)...Paul looked at the local church as a dynamic organism. Its life was that of Christ Himself. Its unity was maintained through His presence. Its direction and purpose were from Him. Paul expected to plant these organisms wherever he went with the gospel. He nurtured them with a view to growth both qualitatively and quantitatively. He established them so they could thrive and grow in the cultural setting of the community. He encouraged them to reproduce themselves in the surrounding communities and, by extension, in distant places. Living organisms grow and reproduce if they are healthy. Paul viewed the churches in this way....He saw the church as an organism designed by God to function in accomplishing God's purposes. That function was in general to glorify God....In glorifying God the church, as Paul saw it, was to function in three directions. The first function was in relation to God, upward. The churches were gatherings of believers for worship....The second great function of the church as Paul viewed it was inward, toward its own members. They were to be built up in the faith, brought to maturity. They were to grow up. The risen Lord gave spiritual gifts such as teaching to people in the church to provide for its growth (Eph. 4:8-13)...Within this inward function there was room for admonition and discipline....Another side of the inner functioning of the church is that of fellowship or *'koinonia.'* The local church functions so that its members share a common life. This is true in the spiritual life as well as in the social life. It even includes financial sharing. Fellowship is that which binds the Christians together.

"The third great functioning of the church was outward toward the unbelieving world around them. Christ is building His church (Matt. 16:18). At the heart of what God is doing in this age is the fact that 'He is taking out from among the Gentiles a people for His name' (Acts 15:14). Paul taught that evangelism must be central in the function of the church. The church was not only the goal of evangelistic activity, it was the base for evangelism in the New Testament. To the Thessalonian church Paul said, 'For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place' (1 Thess. 1:8)...God designed it so that believers would be saved, then taught to grow to maturity, and finally gathered into a local church. From the strength of the local church fellowship they were to reach out, to evangelize, teach, and plant other local churches which would then repeat the process....When healthy churches function in this way, the result is the most efficient and satisfactory

means of world evangelism. It is the key to world evangelism.” --from “Paul the Church Planter”  
by Kenneth Fleming

## PLYMOUTH BRETHREN

### Early Brethren

Around 1830, a few Christians from various Protestant churches became concerned about the way the church was divided into so many denominations. They felt that denominationalism was not consistent with Jesus’ prayer that “they may all be one...that the world may believe that Thou didst send Me.”

As these Christians began to meet together, certain truths from the Scriptures became apparent, including the church truths we have previously examined. They began to meet together in the Name of the Lord Jesus alone, seeking to follow the simple pattern seen in the New Testament. The group in Dublin became known as the forerunner of the movement. The movement spread throughout Europe and over to America, and eventually to many other lands. They refused to take any name that would distinguish them as a separate entity from the rest of the body of Christ, although others came to call them “Plymouth Brethren” from their active testimony in Plymouth, England. Early leaders included men such as J.N. Darby, Anthony Norris Groves, and George Muller.

In addition to the church truths mentioned earlier, these brethren also helped to systematize a dispensational view of Scripture.

### Dispensationalism

What is a dispensation? *Dispensation* comes from the Greek word *oikonomia* meaning to manage, regulate, administer, and plan. The central idea in the word dispensation is that of managing or administering the affairs of a household. The various forms of the word dispensation are used in the New Testament twenty times.

Dispensationalism views the world as a household run by God. Just as a parent would govern his household in different ways, according to varying necessity, yet ever for one good end, so God has at different times dealt with men in different ways, according to the necessity of the case, but throughout for one great, grand end. A dispensation then is a particular way of God’s administering His rule over the world as He progressively works out His purpose for world history.

Essential characteristics of dispensationalism:

1. A dispensationalist keeps Israel and the Church distinct.
2. A dispensationalist consistently interprets the Bible literally.
3. A dispensationalist believes that God’s purpose is to manifest His glory.

Although God has employed several dispensations, there is only one way of salvation. Salvation has always been by the grace of God through faith in the Word of God, and God has based salvation on the work of Jesus Christ.

The Dispensations:

- (1) Innocency--Genesis 1:28-3:6; (2) Conscience--Genesis 4:1--8:14; (3) Civil Government--Genesis 8:15--11:9; (4) Promise--Genesis 11:10--Exodus 18:27; (5) Mosaic Law--Exodus 19:1--Acts 1:26;
- (6) Grace--Acts 2:1--Revelation 19:21; (7) Millennium--Revelation 20

Early brethren believed that we are now in the dispensation of Grace, which would end with the rapture of the church. They also believed in the imminent return of Christ for the church; that is, it could occur at any moment during the church age. The rapture would be followed by a seven year period known as the tribulation, then Christ would return to the earth to begin His millennial reign. During this thousand year period God would literally fulfill His promises to Israel. After this time, some will again rebel against God, and finally those who have rejected Christ will be cast into the lake of fire, and the eternal state will begin.

### Brethren Today

Today, brethren meet weekly for the Lord’s Supper, at which believers may freely express worship and praise without stated leadership. They usually call their meetings “assemblies,” to avoid using the word “church” with its diverse meanings of denomination and building. Assemblies are now found throughout the world.

“Plymouth Brethren is a widely used but generally unofficial designation for a loose grouping of churches with early nineteenth-century roots in the British Isles. Within these churches, the common terminology is simply Brethren, or assemblies, or Brethren assemblies. The name Plymouth will be heard infrequently in casual conversation, but never appears in advertising, on signs, or in church bulletins. Outsiders combined the two words when the 1,000-member congregation in Plymouth, England, attracted notice with its active evangelism....

“The early Brethren envisioned a basis for Christian unity--not in the ecumenical merging of denominations, but rather in forsaking denominational structures and names in order to meet simply as Christians, welcoming all who belong to Christ....

“The autonomy of the local congregation is another feature of the movement, coupled with the doctrinal understanding that a church is not a building, but rather the gathering of people who meet there....

“The weekly hour-long ‘remembrance meeting’ is probably the surest way to identify a Brethren assembly. The centrality of the Communion service is characteristic: In accord with the meaning of ‘priesthood of all believers,’ the service is unstructured, with all men of the assembly free to take oral part....Brethren have consistently refused to restrict the administration of baptism or the Lord’s Supper to ordained ministers, thus effectively eliminating a clergy/laity distinction and the traditional concept of ordination. They moved quickly to the understanding that the Word of God could be ministered by any brother with spiritual gifts....

“The Brethren are committed to all the fundamentals of orthodox Christianity, including the verbal inspiration of Scripture. They strongly emphasize gospel preaching and the necessity for personal conversion. Except for the weekly breaking of bread and the absence of collections at other meetings, their services are much like those of evangelical Baptist and Bible churches.

“Among U.S. evangelicals, Brethren have had an influence out of proportion to their numbers. Their premillennial theology helped shape evangelicalism, especially in the proliferation of independent churches and mission boards. Many have responded to the Brethren emphasis on plurality of leadership and participatory worship in the local church.

“...Christian Missions in Many Lands, Inc., publishes a missionary magazine and an address list of missionaries who serve overseas. In keeping with Brethren concepts of ministers’ and missionaries’ direct responsibility to the Lord, workers are not assigned to specific tasks or locations, nor is responsibility assumed for their financial support. There are no mission boards in the conventional sense.” --from *The Handbook of Denominations*

## MAJOR DOCTRINAL BELIEFS

ONE GOD, existing eternally in three Persons: the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit.

JESUS CHRIST, the eternal Son of God, His full deity and humanity, virgin birth, sinless life, substitutionary death, bodily resurrection, ascension, and imminent personal return.

THE HOLY SPIRIT, who convicts and regenerates sinners, indwells all believers, and empowers them to live a holy life.

THE BIBLE, the fully inspired Word of God, inerrant in the original writings, of absolute authority in all matters.

MAN, a sinner by nature and practice, eternally lost apart from Christ’s saving work, and redeemed only by His precious blood.

SALVATION, by God’s grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, entirely apart from human merit.

THE CHURCH, in its universal form all true believers in Jesus Christ, in its visible, local form a body of believers organized for teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, prayers, and evangelism.