
“Come, Let Us Reason Together” About the Bible
What Is the Church of the New Testament?
Bible Study Series

And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.”—(Matthew 16:18)

LESSON FIVE, Part 1 — How Is the Church Organized?
What is the Organizational Structure of the Church Established by Jesus?

Estimated Reading Time: 12-13 minutes

When the church of the New Testament is mentioned, one of the most important questions you can ask is: How did God intend for it to be organized? Was it just left to human opinion, tradition or culture? Or did God provide a pattern?

The truth is, God has always been a God of order and design, and He expects His people to follow the pattern He gives. That same principle applies to the church Jesus built.

Read the following for further explanation:

God Has Always Expected His People to Follow His Pattern

Begin by looking back at some familiar examples from the Old Testament. These will help you see how serious God is about following His instructions exactly.

Noah and the Ark

“Make yourself an ark of gopherwood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and outside with pitch. And this is how you shall make it: The length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits...”

(Genesis 6:14–15)

In Genesis 6, God gave Noah specific instructions for building the ark that would save him and his family from the flood. God told Noah what kind of wood to use (gopherwood), how to seal the ark (with pitch), the exact dimensions (length, width, and height), the placement of the door and window, and that it should have three levels. Noah didn’t alter or add to God’s instructions. God gave Noah precise instructions. He didn’t tell him to “just build a boat any way you want.” Noah followed God’s pattern exactly.

Noah was saved because he followed God’s pattern exactly. This shows us how important it is to respect and obey the pattern God gives — whether for an ark or for the church.

“Thus, Noah did according to all that God commanded him, so he did.”

(Genesis 6:22)

Because Noah obeyed God's pattern, he and his family were saved.

Moses and the Tabernacle

When God instructed Moses to build the tabernacle, He didn't leave it up to human creativity or judgment. God gave Moses a detailed blueprint — including the materials to use, the dimensions of every part, the layout of the furnishings, and even the colors of the curtains and garments of the priests.

“And see to it that you make them according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain.”

(Exodus 25:40)

This wasn't a rough sketch or a general guideline — it was a precise design given by God Himself. Moses was shown the pattern while on Mount Sinai and was commanded to follow it exactly. His responsibility was not to modify it, modernize it, or simplify it — just OBEY it.

And when Moses followed God's instructions, the result was a place where God's presence would dwell among His people. This shows us that God blesses obedience to His pattern, not human innovations.

Just as God gave Moses a pattern for the tabernacle, He has given the pattern for the church — and He expects it to be followed with the same reverence and faithfulness.

David, Solomon, and the Temple

As Israel moved from the wilderness tabernacle to a permanent place of worship, God once again gave a specific pattern — this time it was for the temple in Jerusalem. Though David had the desire to build it, God told him that his son Solomon would carry out the task (2 Samuel 7:12–13). However, David still played a vital role in preparing the plans.

David made it clear that the plans for the temple would not be his own ideas. They came directly from God:

“All this,” said David, ***“the Lord made me understand in writing, by His hand upon me, all the works of these plans.”*** (1 Chronicles 28:19)

He emphasized that every part of the design — the structure, the chambers, the materials, the gold and silver articles, the divisions of the priests and Levites, the furnishings — was revealed by God.

David then gave these plans to Solomon, along with clear instructions:

“And you, my son Solomon, acknowledge the God of your father, and serve Him with a loyal heart and with a willing mind... Consider now, for the Lord has chosen you to build a house for the sanctuary; be strong, and do it.” (1 Chronicles 28:9–10)

God expected Solomon to build the temple according to the exact pattern David had received — just as Moses had done with the tabernacle, and just as Noah had done with the ark.

Solomon obeyed, and when the temple was completed, God filled it with His glory (2 Chronicles 7:1–3). The blessings followed their obedience.

What This Teaches Us

These three great moments — Noah’s ark, Moses’ tabernacle, and Solomon’s temple — all teach the same lesson:

When God gives a pattern, He expects it to be followed — exactly.

It wasn’t up to Noah, Moses, David, or Solomon to innovate or revise. Their job was to trust God’s wisdom and carry out His plan. Today, when one considers the organization of the church, the approach should be with the same respect and seriousness. God has provided a pattern for the church — not to be restrictive, but to bless mankind when His will is followed.

Christ is the Head of the Church

Now, turning to the New Testament, Jesus is seen as the head of the church — not a man, a board, or an earthly headquarters, synod, association, etc.

“And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.” (Colossians 1:18)

As the Head, Christ holds all authority, and He has revealed His will for how His church is to function through His apostles and their inspired writings. One doesn’t have the right to change it.

There Is Only One Church

While the Bible refers to many local congregations, it is always clear that there is only one universal church — the body of Christ — composed of all the saved.

“There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling...”
(Ephesians 4:4)

“And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.”
(Ephesians 1:22–23)

The church is called “His body,” and there is only one body. So while Christians met in different locations (like Corinth, Ephesus, Philippi, etc.), they were all part of the same church, united in doctrine, worship, and allegiance to Christ.

“The churches of Christ greet you.” (*Romans 16:16*)

Here Paul refers to local congregations using the plural “churches,” but notice they all belong to Christ. These were not different denominations with different beliefs and practices. They were simply local gatherings of the one church Jesus established — each autonomous, yet all united in Christ.

Today, when of the churches of Christ are referenced, the text is going back to these same kinds of local congregations whose followers of Jesus were meeting in different places, striving to follow the same New Testament pattern — teaching the same gospel, worshiping the same Lord, and belonging to the same body.

Each Local Congregation Is Independent

The New Testament shows clearly that every local church was autonomous — that is, self-governing under the headship of Christ. There was no earthly headquarters, governing council, or denominational authority over them. Each congregation operated independently while remaining united in faith and doctrine.

Look at this pattern in the letters written by the apostle Paul. He wrote to specific churches in specific locations — such as:

- Galatia – a group of congregations (Galatians 1:2),
- Philippi (Philippians 1:1),
- Ephesus (Ephesians 1:1),
- Colossae (Colossians 1:2).

Each of these letters contains different admonitions, praise, and instructions tailored to the needs of that particular congregation. Though these churches faced different challenges, they were all part of the one church, united in Christ, and referred to collectively as “the churches of Christ”.

(Romans 16:16)

Likewise, in the book of Revelation, the risen Lord Jesus appeared to the apostle John in a heavenly vision and instructed him to write messages to seven churches in Asia: (Revelation chapters 2–3)

1. Ephesus
2. Smyrna
3. Pergamos
4. Thyatira
5. Sardis
6. Philadelphia
7. Laodicea

These were all independent, local congregations — each praised or corrected according to its own spiritual condition. They were not branches of a global denomination, nor were they overseen by a central religious authority. Jesus didn't instruct John to write to the Roman Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox Church, or any Protestant denominations such as Lutherans, Methodists, or Baptists — because these organizations didn't exist in the first century and are not part of the pattern revealed in Scripture.

Instead, Jesus addressed His churches — local bodies of believers who belonged to Him and were expected to follow His Word.

This consistent biblical example shows that the church of the New Testament consists of many local congregations, each with its own leadership and responsibilities, yet all part of the one body of Christ — the church He purchased with His own blood.

(Part 2 continues in the next lesson.)

Lesson FIVE, Part 1 – Questions to Confirm Understanding

“How Is the Church Organized?” – Part 1

Estimated Time to answer questions; 3 – 5 minutes; with Scripture Lookup: 22 – 25 minutes

Read and answer the following set of questions about this lesson, and circle your answer: “True | False” or “Yes | No”. Look up the scriptures provided to confirm your answers. Then compare your answers with the Answer Key provided after these questions.

1. God gave Noah specific instructions about how to build the ark, including its dimensions, materials, and structure.
True | False
2. Noah was allowed to modify God's design for the ark to suit his preferences.
True | False
3. (Genesis 6:22) “Thus Noah did; according to all that God commanded him, so he did.”
Does this verse show that Noah followed God's pattern exactly?
Yes | No
4. God allowed Moses to use his own creativity in building the tabernacle.
True | False
5. (Exodus 25:40) “And see to it that you make them according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain.”
Does this verse show that God gave Moses a detailed design for the tabernacle?
Yes | No
6. David claimed that the plans for the temple were his own ideas and inventions.
True | False
7. (1 Chronicles 28:19) “All this,” said David, “the Lord made me understand in writing, by His hand upon me, all the works of these plans.”

Did David say the temple plans were given by the Lord?

Yes | No

8. God filled Solomon's temple with His glory after it was built according to His pattern.

True | False

9. When God gives a pattern, He expects people to follow it exactly.

True | False

10. (Colossians 1:18) "And He is the head of the body, the church..."

Does this verse teach that Christ is the head of the church?

Yes | No

11. There are many churches in the New Testament that all teach different doctrines.

True | False

12. (Ephesians 4:4) "There is one body and one Spirit..."

Does this verse teach that there is only one church, or body?

Yes | No

13. Paul referred to different denominations when he said, "The churches of Christ greet you."
(Romans 16:16)

True | False

14. Every local congregation in the New Testament had to answer to a central religious headquarters.

True | False

15. Jesus instructed John to write letters to seven independent churches in Asia. (Revelation 2–3)

Yes | No

Lesson Five, Part 1 – Answer Key

Estimated Time to Read the Answers: 5 - 7 minutes; With Reflection and Contemplation: 22 - 25 minutes

1. God gave Noah specific instructions about how to build the ark, including its dimensions, materials, and structure.

Correct Answer: True

Explanation: Genesis 6:14–16 records God's detailed instructions for building the ark. Noah was told what kind of wood to use, its size, shape, and the number of decks. This demonstrates God's concern for following His exact pattern.

2. Noah was allowed to modify God's design for the ark to suit his preferences.

Correct Answer: False

Explanation: Noah was not given permission to make any changes. Genesis 6:22 says Noah did "according to all that God commanded him." Deviating from the pattern would have been disobedience.

3. (Genesis 6:22) “Thus Noah did; according to all that God commanded him, so he did.”
Does this verse show that Noah followed God’s pattern exactly?

Correct Answer: Yes

“Thus Noah did; according to all that God commanded him, so he did.” (Genesis 6:22, NKJV)

Explanation: This verse confirms Noah obeyed God’s instructions completely, without additions or subtractions.

4. God allowed Moses to use his own creativity in building the tabernacle.

Correct Answer: False

Explanation: God gave Moses a detailed pattern on Mount Sinai and instructed him to build it accordingly. He was not allowed to invent or alter anything (Exodus 25:40).

5. (Exodus 25:40) “And see to it that you make them according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain.”

Does this verse show that God gave Moses a detailed design for the tabernacle?

Correct Answer: Yes

“And see to it that you make them according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain.” (Exodus 25:40, NKJV)

Explanation: The word “pattern” shows a precise blueprint given by God, not a general idea or suggestion.

6. David claimed that the plans for the temple were his own ideas and inventions.

Correct Answer: False

Explanation: David said the plans were revealed to him by God, not from his own thinking (1 Chronicles 28:19).

7. (1 Chronicles 28:19) “All this,” said David, “the Lord made me understand in writing, by His hand upon me, all the works of these plans.”

Did David say the temple plans were given by the Lord?

Correct Answer: Yes

“All this,” said David, “the Lord made me understand in writing, by His hand upon me, all the works of these plans.” (1 Chronicles 28:19, NKJV)

Explanation: David directly attributes the plans for the temple to divine revelation, not personal initiative.

8. God filled Solomon’s temple with His glory after it was built according to His pattern.

Correct Answer: True

Explanation: 2 Chronicles 7:1–3 records that after Solomon completed the temple as God commanded, His glory filled it. Obedience brought God’s approval.

9. When God gives a pattern, He expects people to follow it exactly.

Correct Answer: True

Explanation: This is the consistent lesson from the examples of Noah, Moses, and Solomon. Each man was required to follow God’s instructions without deviation, and blessings followed obedience.

10. (Colossians 1:18) “And He is the head of the body, the church...”

Does this verse teach that Christ is the head of the church?

Correct Answer: Yes

“And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.” (Colossians 1:18, NKJV)

Explanation: The verse clearly identifies Jesus as the authoritative head of the church — not any man or organization.

11. There are many churches in the New Testament that all teach different doctrines.

Correct Answer: False

Explanation: The New Testament teaches that there is one body (Ephesians 4:4) and one gospel. Though there were many congregations, they were united in doctrine and purpose.

12. (Ephesians 4:4) “There is one body and one Spirit...”

Does this verse teach that there is only one church, or body?

Correct Answer: Yes

“There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling.” (Ephesians 4:4, NKJV)

Explanation: The “one body” is the church (Ephesians 1:22–23). This shows the unity and singular nature of Christ’s church.

13. Paul referred to different denominations when he said, “The churches of Christ greet you.” (Romans 16:16)

Correct Answer: False

Explanation: Paul was referring to multiple local congregations of the same church — all belonging to Christ. These were not denominational bodies with different doctrines or practices.

14. Every local congregation in the New Testament had to answer to a central religious headquarters.

Correct Answer: False

Explanation: Each congregation was autonomous, governed locally under Christ. There was no human headquarters, council, or synod. This is evident in letters written to individual congregations (e.g., Philippi, Corinth, Ephesus).

15. Jesus instructed John to write letters to seven independent churches in Asia. (Revelation 2–3)

Correct Answer: Yes

Explanation: Revelation chapters 2–3 show Jesus directly addressing seven distinct local congregations, each with its own spiritual condition. This supports the autonomy of each local church.