

Corporations and the Church

By Dr. David DeWitt

Corporations are an arrangement people make among themselves, to act as one, for their own protection (like the Tower of Babel). But the New Testament church of Christ and the apostles was never a corporation. The New Testament church is a brotherhood of believers who act through their association together either individually or collectively, not a corporation acting as one through its members.

Ten Elements of a Corporation	Corporations and the NT Church
1. A corporation is “a body formed and authorized by law to act as a single person although constituted by one or more persons” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary).	1. The NT church was not formed or authorized by law, therefore, it was not an entity that allowed people to act as one person.
2. Pragmatically, corporations are mainly for protection of physical assets.	2. The NT church had no physical assets that it needed to protect.
3. A corporation “somehow possesses an identity, a life, independent of its members.”	3. The NT church had no identity or life independent of believers.
4. A corporation “has its own interests, values, or criteria of choice, which are not those of its members.”	4. There was no such thing as interests, values, or choices for the NT church apart from those of individual believers.
5. Dealing with a corporation is “in the first instance a spiritual task, which can only be understood theologically.”	5. There was no NT church to deal with theologically or any other way apart from individual believers.
6. “Ultimately, the corporation is about the relationship among human beings.”	6. Ultimately, the NT church is about the believer’s relationship with God.
7. “Corporate reform is a critical part of any program for social improvement.”	7. The NT church was never involved in social improvement.
8. “The corporation is not ‘more’ than the individuals that make it up; it is, however, distinct, and its existence is dependent solely upon the continuing commitment of the members.”	8. The NT church is nothing other than the individuals that make it up; therefore, it does not exist as, or depend upon, members being continually committed to it.
9. “Each corporate participant must recognize the right (in fact the obligation) of <i>all</i> other members to judge him.”	9. The NT church members are individual believers who judge one another according to the Word of God.
10. “Corporate grace is bestowed upon all who err in good faith ... a preparedness to forgive – to show mercy, and to receive it.” (Dr. Michael Black in a December 2011 article entitled “The Crisis of the Corporation.”)	10. There is no such thing as “corporate grace... mercy, or forgiveness” in the NT church. These are individual actions toward those who repent of sin against God, not some corporation.

So as we can see, the church of Christ and the apostles was not a corporation, and that’s because it was not a work of man but a work of God, where individual believers in Jesus Christ were indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Corporations are a creation of men, not God. On the other hand, if we considered the institutional churches, whether Catholic, national, denominational, or local, they would all meet the ten above criteria for a corporation.