

## WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT: NEW TESTAMENT CHURCHES

### I. THE ETYMOLOGY OF THE WORD "EKKLESIA."

#### A. THE WORD "CHURCH" NEVER OCCURRED IN THE GREEK LANGUAGE.

1. Without exception, the word translated "church" in the New Testament is "EKKLESIA."
2. The Greek word is a compound word formed by combining two Greek words:
  - a. The first word is "EK", which means "out of" or "out from within."
  - b. The second word is "KALEIN" which is the infinitive form of the verb "KALEO", and means, "to call".
  - c. Therefore, the word "EKKLESIA" is accurately translated as "assembly," or "the ones called out."
3. The word "EKKLESIA", in New Testament times, was a common term for a meeting of officials who were called to discuss the business or affairs of a free state.
4. This word always described a visible assembly of citizens who were normally called out from among the citizens by the town crier.
5. Therefore an "EKKLESIA" was, and is, a local, visible assembly of citizens called out from among the other citizens to discuss the business of the government entity.

#### B. THE TERM "EKKLESIA" IS NOT A RELIGIOUS TERM.

1. Each Greek city had an "EKKLESIA" or city council.
2. The term "EKKLESIA" was understood, without exception, as an assembly.

3. Acts 19:24-41 states this principle:

"For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, which made silver shrines for Diana, brought no small gain unto the craftsmen:

Whom he called together with the workmen of like occupation, and said, Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth.

Moreover ye see and hear that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands:

So that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth.

And when they heard these sayings, they were full of wrath, and cried out, saying, Great is Diana of the Ephesians.

And the whole city was filled with confusion: and having caught Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia, Paul's companions in travel, they rushed with one accord into the theatre.

And when Paul would have entered in unto the people, the disciples suffered him not.

And certain of the chief of Asia, which were his friends, sent unto him, desiring him that he would not adventure himself into the theatre.

Some therefore cried one thing, and some another: for the ASSEMBLY was confused; and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together.

And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander

beckoned with the hand, and would have made his defence unto the people.

But when they knew that he was a Jew, all with one voice about the space of two hours cried out, Great is Diana of the Ephesians.

And when the townclerk had appeased the people, he said, Ye men of Ephesus, what man is there that knoweth not how that the city of the Ephesians is a worshipper of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Jupiter?

Seeing then that these things cannot be spoken against, ye ought to be quiet, and to do nothing rashly.

For ye have brought hither these men, which are neither robbers of churches, nor yet blasphemers of your goddess.

Wherefore if Demetrius, and the craftsmen which are with him, have a matter against any man, the law is open, and there are deputies: let them implead one another.

But if ye inquire any thing concerning other matters, it shall be determined in a lawful assembly.

For we are in danger to be called in question for this day's uproar, there being no cause whereby we may give an account of this concourse.

And when he had thus spoken, he dismissed the assembly."

4. Clearly, the assembly in the above reference was not what could be called a "church" today.
5. Acts 7:37-38 states:

"This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear.

**This is he, that was in the CHURCH in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us:"**

6. The word "church" in the above Scripture did not identify an invisible and universal assembly. It clearly identified a local and visible assembly of the nation of Israel.
7. There is nothing religious or special about the term "EKKLESIA" until it is identified as belonging to the Lord.
  - a. Jesus said in Matthew 16:18:

**"And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."**

- b. Jesus said that "I will build (dome up, build, or erect) MY local, visible assembly (EKKLESIA)."

C. THE HISTORY OF THE WORD "CHURCH."

1. Since there is so much misunderstanding about the concept of a New Testament church, it will be of great value to examine the etymology of the word "church".
2. Dr. L. D. Foreman, in his book "The Bible in Eight Ages," addressed this subject very ably.

"According to most authorities, the word is derived from the Greek Kuriakon doma, "the Lord's house," and is common to many Teutonic, Slavonic and other languages, under varied forms, e.g., Scottish kirk, German kirche, Swedish kirka, Danish kirke, Russian tserkon, Bulgarian cerkova, Czechoslovak cirkev, and Finnish kirkko. The term was originally applied to the building used for Christian worship and later extended to the assembly (ekklesia) itself. Encyclopedia Britannica." (Foreman, Bible in Eight Ages, Page 367)

3. Dr. Foreman states further:

"Our English word church comes from the Anglo-Saxon, the language brought into England in the fifth and sixth centuries by the German invaders and there developed. The Word church was then circe. The mistake made about this time was to associate the words, Lord's house (the meeting place of the assembly), with the congregation." (Foreman, 1973, p. 367).

4. At this time in history, the official religious institution of England was known as the Church of England.

Clearly, King James (that great Bible scholar!) believed there was no difference between the word, "church" and the Biblical word "EKKLESIA"; he, therefore, ordered his translators to translate "EKKLESIA" as "church." It must be noted that this improper translation was made, not to clarify the meaning; rather, to force the words of the Bible to fit a tradition of the Church of England.

5. Therefore, instead of a term all could easily understand ("assembly," which is neither mystical nor invisible), the mystical word "church" was used. Quote from the article, AIf I Were the Devil@ see page 203-204 of book AFree.@
6. This "small" change has led to much misinterpretation of Scripture today.

D. A GOOD DEFINITION OF THE LORD=S EKKLESIA.

1. It is extremely important to arrive at a Scriptural definition of this concept, therefore the following is offered:

"A local, visible assembly of saved, scripturally baptized believers, called out and covenanted together for the purpose of giving glory to the Lord through obedience to His Word."

2. This definition automatically rules out the concept of an invisible, universal "church" made up of all believers.
3. All, who have been saved by the grace of God, are members of the "family" of God.
4. To be a member of the "Lord's assembly," however, requires more than the new birth; rather, it requires commitment, presence and participation in the "assembly."

## II. THE KIND OF "CHURCH" THAT JESUS BUILT.

### A. THIS IS THE ONLY SCRIPTURAL PATTERN.

1. If the above definition is correct, then it must match, exactly, the assembly that Jesus built.
2. Jesus Himself established His assembly during His personal ministry on earth.
3. Since Jesus started His "assembly" during His personal ministry, a close examination of Scripture is required.
  - a. John 1:35-42 states: (This was at the Jordan River.)

**"Again the next day after John stood, and two of his disciples:**

**And looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God!**

**And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus.**

**Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye? They said unto him, Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted, Master,) where dwellest thou?**

**He saith unto them, Come and see. They came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with him that day: for it was about the tenth hour.**

One of the two which heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother.

He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messiah, which is, being interpreted, the Christ.

And he brought him to Jesus. And when Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone."

- b. The scene changes from the Jordan River to the Sea of Galilee where Matthew states in Matthew 4:18-20. (*The Sea of Galilee is about 100 miles north of where John was baptizing.*)

"And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers.

And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.

And they straightway left their nets, and followed him."

- c. These men were already saved and had been baptized by John the Baptist.
- d. The job of John the Baptist was to prepare a people for the Lord as stated in John 1:23 which states:

"He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias."

- e. Acts 1:21-22 strongly suggests that baptism by John the Baptist was required for one to be an apostle.

"Wherefore of these men which have  
 companied with us all the time that the  
 Lord Jesus went in and out among us,

Beginning from the BAPTISM OF JOHN unto  
 that same day that he was taken up from  
 us, must one be ordained to be a witness  
 with us of his resurrection."

4. In light of these facts, it must be concluded that when these men answered the call of Jesus, they constituted "a local, visible assembly of saved, scripturally baptized, called out and covenanted together for the purpose of giving glory to God through obedience to His Word."
5. It must also be noted here that Judas Iscariot, though he assembled together with the other eleven, was not a member of the Lord's church because he was not saved.
  - a. Jesus stated in John 17:12: *(Having your name on a church roll does not make you a member.)*

"While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled."

6. It was to this "church" that Jesus gave the two ordinances, His authority and principle of "church" discipline.
  - a. Matthew 28:18-20 states:

"And Jesus came and spake unto them,  
 saying, ALL POWER is given unto me in  
 heaven and in earth,

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations,  
 baptizing them in the name of the  
 Father, and of the son, and of the Holy  
 Ghost:

Teaching them to observe all things  
 whatsoever I have commanded you: and,

lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen."

- b. Jesus further stated in Matthew 18:15-17:

"Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.

But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.

And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the CHURCH: but if he neglect to hear the CHURCH, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican."

7. The "church" which Jesus started had all of these things, given by Jesus Himself while He was still on the earth. His "church" was clearly started BEFORE the Day of Pentecost.
8. Thus, it must be concluded that Jesus built His "church" during His personal ministry, and the above definition conforms to the character and nature of that "church".
9. As a footnote, it must be noted that the events, which happened on the Day of Pentecost, constituted the once-and-for-all-time empowering of the Lord's "churches." Jesus had given His "church" His authority before He ascended back to heaven, yet He empowered them on Pentecost.

B. THE TEACHINGS OF THE LORD-S "CHURCHES."

1. I Timothy 3:15 outlines the teachings of a "church" of Jesus Christ:

"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."

2. The only thing that remains is to discover the source of truth.
  - a. Jesus stated in His prayer in John 17:17:  
**"Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth."**
  - b. Paul wrote to Timothy the words in II Timothy 2:15:  
**"Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."**
  - c. Paul further stated in II Timothy 3:16.  
**"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:"**
3. Therefore, a true "church" of Jesus Christ must adhere strictly to the only source of truth, the Bible.
4. There is no room for compromise on this point. Believers are not authorized to make any "improvements" in the Word of God. Thus, the work of the believer, especially in a New Testament church, is simply: (1) learn the truth, (2) live the truth and (3) teach the truth to others.
5. This fact rules out the unscriptural notion that all saved people are part of the Lord's "church."
  - a. Some teach that salvation is a free gift without any works whatsoever, yet others teach some other contingency or "good work" to obtain or keep eternal life.
  - b. Some teach that a saved person can never lose his/her salvation, yet others teach that God will revoke eternal life for certain undesirable behavior.

- c. Some teach there is a literal place of eternal torment for the unbeliever, yet some teach that such a concept is only figurative and not to be taken literally.
  - d. Some teach and practice immersion as the only mode of Scriptural baptism, yet others practice sprinkling and pouring.
6. Clearly, teachings so opposite cannot all be true.
  7. Therefore, it must be concluded, "churches" that do not teach the truth cannot be scriptural "churches."
  8. Clearly, there are some, if not many, people who have been saved, in the membership of unscriptural "churches."
  9. In light of these truths, it must be concluded that the teachings and practice of a "church" determine whether or not it is a Scriptural "church" of Jesus Christ.

C. THE WORK OF THE LORD-S "CHURCHES."

1. Many today seek to use their "church" as a vehicle for social change.
  - a. Feeding the poor.

(1) Jesus stated in John 12:1-8:

**"Then Jesus six days before the passover came to Bethany where Lazarus was which had been dead, whom he raised from the dead.**

**There they made him a supper; and Martha served: but Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him.**

**Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment.**

Then saith one of his disciples,  
 Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, which  
 should betray him,

Why was not this ointment sold for  
 three hundred pence, and given to  
 the poor?

This he said, not that he cared for  
 the poor; but because he was a  
 thief, and had the bag, and bare  
 what wast was put therein.

Then said Jesus, Let her alone:  
 against the day of my burying hath  
 she kept this.

For the poor always ye have with  
 you; but me ye have not always."

- b. Political action.
- c. Fighting abortion.

(1) Jesus stated in Mark 12:12-17:

"And they sought to lay hold on  
 him, but feared the people: for  
 they knew that he had spoken the  
 parable against them: and they left  
 him, and went their way.

And they send unto him certain of  
 the Pharisees and of the Herodians,  
 to catch him in his words.

And when they were come, they say  
 unto him, Master, we know that thou  
 art true, and carest for no man:  
 for thou regardest not the person  
 of men, but teachest the way of God  
 in truth: Is it lawful to give  
 tribute to Caesar, or not?

Shall we give, or shall we not  
 give? But he, knowing their  
 hypocrisy, said unto them, Why

tempt ye me? bring me a penny, that I may see it.

And they brought it. And he saith unto them, Whose is this superscription? And they said unto him, Caesar's.

And Jesus answering said unto them, Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. And they marvelled at him."

(2) Paul stated in Romans 13:1-7:

"Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God; the powers that be are ordained of God.

Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.

For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same:

For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.

Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake.

2. While these three goals may be desirable by believers, Satan has used these worthy goals to distract true "churches" of Jesus Christ from their God-given task.

3. No matter how great the social problem, that is never the priority of the local "church."
4. God understands the social ills of this world are rooted in the sinful hearts of men.
5. Therefore, the only way to positively change the condition of the world is for the hearts of men to be changed!
6. The only thing that can change the hearts of men is the proclamation of the Gospel accompanied by the convicting power of the Holy Spirit.
7. Therefore, this is the job of New Testament "churches."

a. Acts 1:8 states:

**"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."**

b. Simply stated, the work of a New Testament "church" is not hard to determine for Jesus gave the orders in Matthew 28:18-20:

**"And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.**

**Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:**

**Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen."**

8. No other institution, board or organization has the authority and power to accomplish this great work.

9. May God grant His "churches" the faith and courage to keep their focus on their number one priority!

D. THE ORDINANCES OF NEW TESTAMENT "CHURCHES."

1. There are only two ordinances which the Lord gave to His "churches."

- a. The ordinance of Baptism as seen in Matthew 28:19:

**"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:"**

- b. The Lord's Supper. I Corinthians 11:23-26:

**"For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread:**

**And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me.**

**After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.**

**For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come."**

2. Both of these ordinances are pictorial and memorial ordinances only, and thus have nothing to do with receiving or keeping salvation.

E. THE GOVERNMENT OF THE "CHURCHES" OF JESUS CHRIST.

1. Every "church" of Jesus Christ is independent and sovereign unto Jesus Christ.

- a. Paul wrote to the "church" at Ephesus on this subject when he wrote in Ephesians 5:22-27, 32:

**"Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord.**

**For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body.**

**Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing.**

**Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;**

**That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word,**

**That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.**

**This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church."**

2. Each New Testament "church" stands or falls independent of any "denominational" affiliation.
3. A true New Testament "church" will not be held accountable for the teachings or practices of any other "church."
4. No "church" of Jesus Christ is to have any control, or authority over another "church."
5. In the "religious" world there are three basic forms of church government:
  - a. Episcopal: Rule by a hierarchy of bishops.
  - b. Presbyterian: Rule by a board of elders.

- c. Congregational: a democracy where each member has an equal vote.
6. Yet, the God-assigned government of New Testament "churches" is not a true democracy, rather it is to be a Theocracy!
- a. Acts 1:21-26 gives the account of a poor attempt at the practice of a Theocracy:
 

**"Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us,**

**Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection.**

**And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias.**

**And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen,**

**That he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place.**

**And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles."**
  - b. A "church" of Jesus Christ has no right to seek the will of a majority of the members, rather she must seek the will of God if she is to be pleasing to God.
7. While the duty of New Testament "churches" is to conform their actions to the Word of God, there are some questions regarding "ways and means" which are not specifically addressed in the Bible. The members, therefore, should pray and then wait for God to reveal His will in all such matters. Some of these are:
- a. Calling a pastor.

- b. Deciding where to send a Missionary.
  - c. Buildings, property and finances.
8. It is wonderfully refreshing to know God always has the perfect solution to any problem that one of His "churches" may face; further, He desires to lead His "churches" to the perfect solution if they will only ask and wait upon Him.

F. THE REWARD OF THE LORD'S CHURCHES.

1. For those Scriptural "churches" which remain true and faithful to the Lord, and those members of those "churches" who remain true and faithful, there will be a special reward in heaven.
2. The highest reward for believers will be the selection, by Jesus Christ to be a part of His "Bride."
3. Two Scripture references will be used to demonstrate the reality of this special honor:
  - a. Ephesians 5:26-27 states:
 

**"That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word,**

**That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish."**
  - b. Revelation 19:6-9 states: (Note: Some are guests!)
 

**"And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.**

**Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.**

And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.

And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God."

4. Clearly, not all "churches" have been totally faithful to the Lord and His Word.
5. Just as clearly, not all members of Scriptural "churches" have been totally faithful to the Lord and His Word.
6. Therefore, selection of those who will receive this great reward must be reserved to Jesus Himself.
7. This is not salvation, but a special place of honor throughout eternity.
8. The greatest motivator for faithful service to the Lord, in spirit and in truth, is out of deep appreciation for what Jesus did on the cross of Calvary.