

CHAPTER I

A WORD STUDY

"Church" is an interesting word in that Jesus apparently never uttered its New Testament Greek equivalent; a word that is not used anywhere in the record of his utterances in the Greek gospels. It occurs only twice in the entire Greek New Testament and that to refer to things unrelated to what we normally think of as "church." Now, you are thinking that this is a ridiculous statement, seeing that your New Testament is literally peppered with this word? Let me explain.

The English word derives, according to The Oxford English Dictionary, from a Greek word, *kuriakos*, that means "house of the Lord." This does not necessarily imply "belonging to the Lord Jesus." Rather, it applies to any lord, whether a landlord, a master, a lord of slaves or any other lord. It is this word, from which "church" is derived, that occurs only twice in the Greek New Testament. In I Corinthians. 11:20, it is used to identify the "Lord's Supper" as belonging to the Lord. In Rev. 1:10, it is used to refer to the "Lord's Day" as belonging to the Lord. There is no record that Jesus ever used this word, *kuriakos*, and it is not found in the Gospels.

Of course, I am aware that "church" occurs many times in the English New Testament. We find it more than one hundred times, primarily in the Acts and the Epistles, and always as translated from the Greek word that, transliterated, becomes in English *ecclesia*. This word in turn derives from a Greek verb that means "to summon forth," or "to call out from." It apparently has no etymological relation to *church*. *Ekklesia* is not a uniquely Christian word. In the Greek world it had numerous applications, often indicating an assembly of citizens, such as a town meeting.

Even in the New Testament it is not uniquely Christian. When Paul was at Ephesus (Acts 9:23-41), Demetrius, the silversmith, vigorously opposed him and gathered together silversmiths and other craftsmen and started a riot that enveloped the whole city, for "the city was filled with confusion." Then a great mass of pagan citizens, crying out "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" laid hold of Paul's companions, Gaius and Aristarchus, and dragged them into the theater. Some cried out one thing, some another, for the "*ekklesia*" was in confusion. Then the town clerk took charge of the assembly, rebuked the mob and urged them to bring such charges as they might have before the courts, which were open. "But," he said, "if you seek anything further, it shall be settled in the regular *ekklesia*." Then, after a few more words, "he dismissed the *ekklesia*."

Here we have the word used to specify a rioting mob of pagan citizens of the city of Ephesus, and also to apply to a legal assemblage of citizens. Luke in Acts also used the same word in relating the speech of Stephen that resulted in his martyrdom. Speaking of the great congregation of the children of Israel that gathered with Moses at Sinai, Stephen said, "This is he who was in the *ekklesia* in the wilderness . . ." (Acts 7:38). In the first case, we have a rioting mob called out from the city of Ephesus by Demetrius, the silversmith. In the second case, we have the Israelites whom God had called out from Egypt, and assembled with Moses at Sinai. Finally, Luke also used *ekklesia* to refer to the assembly of disciples, in many references such as Acts 5:11, where he related, "And great fear came upon the whole *ekklesia* and upon all who heard of these things."

In the Septuagint, it is used in place of the Hebrew, *qahal*, for the assembly of the Israelites, especially when gathered for religious purposes. Thus, below, we will find it used in this way in Acts 7:38 (by Stephen, based on his reading of the Septuagint) to define such an assemblage, and in Hebrews 2:12.

PAUL: THE STRANGER

Jesus used *ekklesia* only twice in the gospels. After eliciting Peter's confession of himself as the Christ, the Son of the living God, he said:

Blessed are you, Simon Bar Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter (*petros* – stone, little rock) and upon this rock (*petra* – crag, cliff, large rock) I will build my *ekklesia* (Matthew 16:17,18).

Later, giving instructions to the disciples as to how to respond to a brother who had sinned against them, he said:

If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the *ekklesia*; and if he refuses to listen even to the *ekklesia*, let him be to you as a gentile and a tax collector (Matthew 18:15-17).

It is interesting to note that if we did not have Matthew's Gospel, we would have no record whatsoever of any direct reference of Jesus to the *ekklesia*, for neither Mark, nor Luke, nor John use this word in relating his utterances. At the very least, this tells us that the apostles and other earliest disciples, who heard Jesus and later recorded his utterances, had very little recollection of any special significance that this word might have in the doctrine of their Lord. **I believe it means that *the church*, as we know it, had absolutely no place in the message of Jesus.**

Why is church used to translate *ekklesia* into English, when it derives from a completely different Greek word? *Ekklesia* was carried over into Latin and all the romance languages, but not into English, German, or any Teutonic or Slavonic language (see Oxford Dictionary of the English Language). We have no sure answer to this question, so I can only suggest one. Consider that you are native to the British Isles at an early time when Christian missionaries were first preaching the Gospel in Britain, or when the first church buildings were being erected. You might ask, concerning a new building under construction, whose is that? And an appropriate answer would be, perhaps, "It is the Lord's house." Or, in a single word, "that is a *church*," for the word from which *church* is derived, *kuriakos*, means "belonging to the Lord." It may have applied generally to the house of "the lord of the manor." Then it is an easy step to apply church also to the assembly of persons who met in, and maintained the building, then to the larger institution consisting of the union of local congregations. Thus it may have been that the use of *church* evolved through history with no reference to scriptural usage or precedents. I have suggested the setting as Britain, for I am suggesting the origin of an English word; however, it may have been some other location where the word resembled the English *church*, such as in Germany where the corresponding word would have been *kirche*. Carried over into English, it would naturally have become the corresponding *church*. So while I do not know the answer to this question and can only suggest possibilities, I do believe it is very significant, for it seems symbolic of a transition from the Truth to the sham gospels that the modern church proclaims in the name of Jesus, both in the English speaking world and throughout Christendom.

There may be a another reason for the switch from *ekklesia* to *church*. *Ekklesia* generally applies to an assembly or congregation of people who are "called out" or summoned to come together. When applied to a gathering of the disciples of the Lord, this is properly interpreted to indicate a summoning of people to come out of the world and to congregate in his name, apart from the people of the world. This was most appropriate in the early years of Christianity, when people were intensely aware of their uniqueness in having been called out of the world and set apart for the service of the Lord. But their organization became worldly, particularly after Constantine, the Roman Emperor, converted to Christianity, legalized and protected the gatherings of the Christians and appropriated their movement to use on behalf of governing the empire. Centuries passed during which the Christians, oftentimes forcibly "converted," lost their sense of being called out from the world, and related more to the building in which they met to worship, to the

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local congregation, or to the multi-national institution ruling over them, than to a gathering of "called out individuals." Thereafter, it was natural for them to refer proudly to their great buildings as "belonging to the Lord," and to refer to themselves, to their local gatherings, and their institution, in another sense as also belonging to the Lord, even though the Lord did not possess them! In my mind, at least, this word switch according to which church comes to describe the buildings, gatherings, and local, national, and institutional religious organizations in English speaking Christendom, as also the mystical "body of Christ," in contrast to *ekklesia*, the general, or nonspecific, word used by Jesus and his disciples is symbolic of the tragic march of heresy through the centuries. The "church experience" is therefore one that genuine disciples are well advised to avoid as being fraught with frustration, compromise, and all spiritual conflicts. I do not mean that individuals are condemned by belonging to a church, only that it is an association that will bring much tribulation to a true follower of Jesus.

Again, suppose *church*, as derived from *kuriakos* (lord's house), and *ekklesia* (called out assembly) are each valid descriptions of separate but related entities. In this case, I suppose that *church* is properly applied exactly as we apply it: to the behemoth that we call "the church," But *ekklesia* may well apply to that worldwide assembly of individual children of the Father who are genuine disciples whose faith rests on the love of the Father and the hatred of life, and who listen to the Good Shepherd. Many, perhaps most of them, are members of the churches and they will not be sorted out until the Judgment Day, when the Lord will gather and sort them at the Great Assize. That final assemblage may be one thing that Jesus had in mind when he made his reference to the *ekklesia* in saying, "On this rock I will build my *ekklesia*." Then, in the early years, when the apostles were assembling small groups, little flocks, of disciples in the various cities of the Roman Empire, and when they were predominately genuine disciples, they would have been representative of the final gathering into the *ekklesia*. As genuine representatives of that great and final assembly, these groups would have been properly called "the *ekklesia*" in whatever city they gathered, exactly as we read in the New Testament. Later, that is, today, when the multitudes who congregate in the Lord's name throughout the world no longer listen to his voice and so are not his true sheep – except for those few scattered through them who do listen – it is no longer appropriate to refer to them as *the ekklesia*, seeing that few of them will join that entity in the Great Assize and neither do they exhibit a separatist conscience as they must if called out from the world. Thus, in English and Germanic speaking nations at least, they have another name, *kuriakos*, or church.

So, just what is in the word? Apparently not much, at least from the perspectives of Jesus and the early disciples. Based on its New Testament usage, the state assemblies and the House of Representatives in Washington are all churches! Likewise are the mosques and the synagogues.