

# The Captivity of the Church

## Lesson 1: In the Beginning—the Real Thing

### Introduction

As I was studying the New Testament Church as presented in the Scriptures, I couldn't help but see the difference between the first century *ekklesia*, the Church, and the thing that we call “church” today.<sup>1</sup> It is obvious that there is little relationship between the two except for the cliches, the lingo, the use of words that, in many cases, have their meanings changed. I thought, “where did things go wrong?”. I decided to try to determine the point or the error that caused things to diverge from the true *ekklesia* to a false version of “church”.

After prayer, study, research and much thinking about this, I have reached some conclusions and, I believe, some revelation from the Holy Spirit concerning this. This article will challenge you and confront many of the traditions that we have received from our fore-fathers.

### True and False

To distinguish between what is true and what is false, we have to know what is true first. As I understand it, when banks train their tellers on how to recognize counterfeit bills, they handle real bills for an extended period of time first. Once they are thoroughly familiar with the look and feel of the real thing, it becomes very easy to spot a counterfeit when it is handled because it doesn't have the same look and feel.

The problem with “church” is that we have all been exposed to the false for a long period of time. This makes it very difficult for us to recognize the real thing because the “false” appears to be the “real”. This is the nature of deception—the false is accepted as the real, the lie for the truth.

Suppose for a moment that as you were growing up, you were repeatedly told that a horse was a zebra. Not only are you told that, but everyone around you also calls the horse a zebra. By the time that you are an adult, whenever someone says “zebra” you immediately picture a horse in your mind. You are fully convinced that you know exactly what a “zebra” looks like. One day you go to Africa and on safari you see a number of black and white striped animals and you ask the guide what they are. He tells you that they are zebras and you tell him “no way, I know what a zebra looks like and they don't have stripes.”

You have believed something that is not true and accepted it as true. The thing that is not true has been full accepted as being factual; therefore, any contradiction to this believed lie is obviously not true.

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<sup>1</sup> For further explanation see “Will the Real Church Please Stand Up” available on the website.

This is exactly what has happened to the Church. We have been repeatedly told that the “church thing” that we have is the true and real thing. We have accepted horses as zebras and get very irritated with those who attempt to point out our problem. We can’t see the real thing because we have become fully invested in the false thing.

## The Real Thing

So, first, we need to be able to see the real thing as the Lord intended. To do this, we have to lay aside our traditions about “church” and look at the Scriptures and let the Holy Spirit bring us revelation, open our eyes so that we might see.

The very use of the word “church” is false. It is not a proper designation of what the Lord intended for His Body. Use of church as this designation was introduced by the King James translators when they used the Scottish word “kirk” as the translation for the Greek word “ekklesia”. The Scottish word means “house of the Lord”, or “house of God” and to the translators this meant the basilica, cathedral, on the street corner—a place. The Greek language has a word for “house of God” also, but it is NOT “ekklesia”. In the Greek language, “ekklesia” cannot mean a place but can only mean people.

We use “church” in our English scriptures to identify the building and the assembly of the people of God. However, this is not the meaning of the Greek word “ekklesia”. This Greek word is made up of two words, the preposition “ek”, which means “out or out of” and “klesia”, which means “to be called”. Together, “ekklesia” means “to be called out of”. So, the “ekklesia” are the ones called out by God; in other words, the New Covenant people of God.

Many times Greek words are simply transliterated into English without actual translation. An example is “baptize” which is a transliteration of the Greek word “baptizo”. When words are transliterated they will look and sound similar to the original word. We see this scenario for “ekklesia” in languages other than English. For example: “ekklesia” in Spanish is “iglesia”; “ekklesia” in French is “eglise”. Notice how similar in look and sound the words are. However, in English we have translated “ekklesia” as “church”. It doesn’t look or sound like anything similar. Does it? That’s because “church” doesn’t come from “ekklesia” but, instead, comes from the Scottish word “kirk”.<sup>2</sup>

So, immediately with the translation of the Scriptures into English, we have a wrong name designated for the Ekkesia. We started calling a horse a zebra and have been doing so ever since. We have to strip this error from our thinking or we will never understand the truth.

Now that we know that “ekklesia” is not a place but a people, we need to further determine what the Scriptures mean when this word is used. Jesus used this word only three times, once in Matt. 16:18 and twice in Matt. 18:17.

The first occasion when Jesus used “ekklesia” occurred when He was asking the disciples who did men think that He was and who did they say that He was. In response to His question Peter had answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God”.<sup>3</sup> Jesus told Peter that this was revelation from the

<sup>2</sup> For further discussion of how this happened see “House of the Lord” available on the website.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 16:16

Father, that it did not come from men. Then Jesus made a pun.

#### Matthew 16:18 NASB

(18) "I also say to you that you are Peter [petros], and upon this rock [petras] I will build My church [ekkllesia]; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.

The word for Peter in Greek is “petros” and means a small rock, a pebble. The word for “rock” is “petras” and means a large rock, a boulder. Jesus used a play on words to make His point—you are a little pebble but upon this boulder (the revelation of “you are the Christ, the Son of the Living God”) He would build His ekklesia.

We see two things in this, (1) the error of those who say that Peter is the basis, the foundation for the ekklesia; and (2) the real basis or foundation of the ekklesia is the revelation of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God.

A little later in Matthew, Jesus is talking about a situation where your brother sins against you. He said to go to him and confront him with the issue and if he won't deal with it then take one or two more with you and confront him again. Then He says:

#### Matthew 18:17 NASB

(17) "If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church [ekkesia]; and if he refuses to listen even to the church [ekkllesia], let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

The ekkesia, in this instance, serves as a type of judicial function, judging and correcting the situation between you and your brother. If the brother doesn't heed the judicial function of the ekklesia, he is to be treated as a heathen, as if he was no longer a part of the people of God.

I think that in these two instances where Jesus spoke of the ekkesia, we have the seed of what the ekklesia is to be. First, its basis is the revelation of who Jesus is. Second, it serves a judicial, governmental function between brethren.

We sometimes forget that “ekkllesia” as a word was used before Jesus used it. Would not Jesus use it with its normal meaning? If He didn't use it that way, then would He not have explained its meaning to us? It is even used in the Scriptures with its common meaning in the book of Acts, chapter 19.

The idol makers were upset with Paul and his companions because they were losing a lot of business when people heard Paul saying that “gods made with hands are no gods at all”. Demetrius, a silversmith that made silver shrines of Artemis, stirred up the other artisans to deal with this issue before they lost all of their business. They grabbed Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's Macedonian companions, and dragged them into the theater, the meeting hall where the group of people were gathering.

#### Acts 19:32 NASB

(32) So then, some were shouting one thing and some another, for the assembly [ekkllesia] was in

confusion and the majority did not know for what reason they had come together.

(Technically, if we were to follow the King James translators, *assembly* here should be “*church*”, which would make it a ridiculous translation based on our current meaning of “church” since it was a gathering of artisans who were idol makers. This alone should tell us that the way we have used this word is incorrect.)

#### Acts 19:38-39 NASB

(38) "So then, if Demetrius and the craftsmen who are with him have a complaint against any man, the courts are in session and proconsuls are *available*; let them bring charges against one another.

(39) "But if you want anything beyond this, it shall be settled in the lawful assembly [ekklesia].

#### Acts 19:40-41 NASB

(40) "For indeed we are in danger of being accused of a riot in connection with today's events, since there is no *real* cause *for it*, and in this connection we will be unable to account for this disorderly gathering."

(41) After saying this he dismissed the assembly [ekklesia].

We can reach some conclusions from the normal usage of *ekklesia*. Many of the people that had been called out were confused because they didn't know the reason that they had been called together. Therefore, they were in danger of become a riot rather than a lawful assembly. So, before that happened they were dismissed as an assembly. This means that a gathering or meeting of a number of people does not, necessarily, constitute an *ekklesia*. There can be an unlawful gathering or a lawful assembly. The lawful assembly are those who have been called out to come together for a reason, a purpose that would deal with governing decisions.

This is how the Thayer Greek Dictionary defines *ekklesia*:

#### **Thayer Definition:**

- 1) a gathering of citizens called out from their homes into some public place, an assembly
  - 1a) an assembly of the people convened at the public place of the council for the purpose of deliberating

This primary definition fits with its usage in Acts 19. The normal meaning of *ekklesia* can be stated as “people called out to convene for a purpose as a public council.”

This is also consistent with the way Jesus used the word *ekklesia* in Matthew. The **basis** of being called out is the revelation of who Jesus is. The **function** or purpose of convening is governmental. The **result** is the administration of the things of the Kingdom of God.

Can it be that we have created something, a church thing, that is far removed from the intention of the Lord? We only have a record of Jesus speaking the word, *ekklesia*, three times, yet we have a record of Him speaking of the Kingdom of God well over a hundred times. In His last days before His

ascension, He spent His time with the disciples speaking of the Kingdom.

### Acts 1:3 NASB

- (3) To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over *a period of forty days* and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God.

Notice what He considered important. He was not going to be with these disciples in this manner any longer; so, He used the time to speak of the Kingdom not the Church. From our perspective, knowing what was coming, He should have been telling them how to establish churches; how to structure and order them; how to conduct proper services; and all of the other aspects of church that we consider so important. However, HE DID NOT DO THAT! He, apparently, didn't speak about “church” at all, but devoted His time to “speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God.”

Are we guilty of mis-placed priorities? Have we twisted the Scriptures to give a place of importance to something that is out of proportion to the Lord's intention? The Catholics have done this with Mary. There is a proper place in Scriptures for Mary and for her place in the plan of God; however, her place and purpose have been blown out of proportion by the Catholics to the point that Mary is an idol, detracting from the place and function of Jesus. It seems possible to me that we have done the same thing with “church”. We need to adjust our priorities—we are to seek first the kingdom of God.

## Criteria for Ekklesia

In the secular usage of “ekklesia” that we discussed above, there were certain criteria required to participate in a lawful assembly (ekklesia). This assembly was called in the City of Ephesus to deal with the effects of Paul's ministry there. We can learn several things from the usage of *ekklesia* in this instance.

- 1) they went to gather in the theater; this establishes the fact that *ekklesia* is not a place but people.
- 2) not all people in Ephesus were allowed to attend, only those that met the requirements of citizenship and were freemen.

The same is true of the *ekklesia* of Jesus Christ.

If we are to participate in the *ekklesia* of Jesus Christ then we, too, must meet the proper criteria. There are four requirements and we can find them in Matthew 16:15-18 in Peter's response to Jesus question about who He is.

### Matthew 16:15-18 NASB

- (15) He \*said to them, **"But who do you say that I am?"**
- (16) Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."
- (17) And Jesus said to him, **"Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal *this* to you, but My Father who is in heaven.**
- (18) **"I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.**

First, there was a confrontation with Jesus over the issue of who He is. This is the first step—the issue of Jesus. Second, the Father revealed that Jesus is the Son of the Living God (this revelation does not come through people). Third, Peter acknowledged Jesus as the Son of God. And, fourth, Peter confessed Jesus as the Son of God before others.

To qualify for participation in the *ekklesia* of Jesus, we must have a personal confrontation with Jesus for the revelation, acknowledgment, and confession of Him as the Son of the Living God.

Now comes the problem question. How many believers does it take to constitute an *ekklesia*? Is there a critical mass necessary or is there some other requirement that is required before a gathering of believers becomes an *ekklesia*?

Most of the current thinking on this, especially by the house church groups, is that two or three constitute an *ekklesia*. This is based on this verse in Matthew:

#### Matthew 18:20 NASB

(20) "For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst."

However, this verse does not say that where two or three are gathered, there is the *ekklesia*. It simply says that when two or three have been led together into His name (literal meaning of the Greek), He is there too.

Regardless of the House Church interpretation of the “two or three” verse, we know that two or three do not make an *ekklesia* because of another verse that Jesus spoke.

#### Matthew 18:15-17 NASB

(15) "If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother.

(16) "But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that **BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED**.

(17) "If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church (*ekklesia*); and if he refuses to listen even to the church (*ekklesia*), let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

In these verses there is your brother, yourself and one or two more with you. This meets the criteria for “two or three” gathered together. Certainly Jesus is in the midst of this gathering in order to bring reconciliation. However, if reconciliation doesn't happen, then you are to take it to the *ekklesia*. If your “two or three” gathering were an “*ekklesia*” then you would not have to take the problem to the “*ekklesia*”; therefore, the “two or three” gathering is NOT an *ekklesia*.

The only place in the Scriptures where there seems to be some documentation of becoming an *ekklesia* is in the book of Acts. When Paul and Barnabas were sent out from Antioch they traveled through a number of towns preaching Jesus. The believers that resulted from this are called “disciples”. On their return trip some time later, they retraced their path back through these towns and met with the disciples that had continued in the Lord. As Paul and Barnabas made these second visits, they were appointing

elders. The terminology now moved from groups of disciples to ekklesia. It would appear then that the transition from groups of believers to ekklesia occurs as elders are appointed. This suggests to me that the governmental aspects of ekklesia cannot be accomplished without functioning elders.

Another interesting set of Scriptures regarding the ekklesia occurs in the book of Revelation.

#### Revelation 2:1-5 NASB

- (1) "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this:
- (2) 'I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them *to be false*;
- (3) and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary.
- (4) 'But I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love.
- (5) 'Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place--unless you repent.

We are told at the end of chapter one of Revelation that the Lord is moving among seven golden lampstands. These lampstands are identified as seven “ekklesias”, with Ephesus being one of the seven. The Lord threatens (this is not an empty threat) to remove their lampstand if they do not repent. That means that they would cease to be an “ekklesia”.

Now, how do we understand this? The Ephesian Ekklesia is removed from its place. Does this mean that there are no believers at all in Ephesus? Or does it mean that the believers that are left in Ephesus will not longer be an ekklesia? It would seem to me to be the latter. If so, then this surely shows that you can have groups of believers without them being an “ekklesia”.

It would certainly seem that there is something about “ekklesia” that we have not understood. It would also certainly seem that our concept of “church” is completely skewed from the “ekklesia” of the Lord.