

The House of the Lord

This is a familiar term and at some point probably all of us have used it. The problem is that the way we use it is not in keeping with the scriptures.

Usually, we call the “church building” the house of the Lord and it seems logical for us to do so. However, man's reasoning is not the same as understanding the purposes of God. The Lord has made it clear that He doesn't dwell in houses made by our hands.

Acts 7:48-50 NASB

(48) "However, the Most High does not dwell in *houses* made by *human* hands; as the prophet says:

(49) 'HEAVEN IS MY THRONE, AND EARTH IS THE FOOTSTOOL OF MY FEET; WHAT KIND OF HOUSE WILL YOU BUILD FOR ME?' says the Lord, 'OR WHAT PLACE IS THERE FOR MY REPOSE?

(50) 'WAS IT NOT MY HAND WHICH MADE ALL THESE THINGS?'

By using this phrase incorrectly, it obscures the purpose of God and causes our understanding to deviate from the clear meaning of scripture. Why has this happened to us? It seems to me that our traditions are at fault. It begins with the King James translators.

Let's take a look at the word “church” because in our English scriptures it is used to identify the assembly of the people of God. However, the word that our English scriptures translate as “church” is 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 of the world 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” with 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”. How did this happen?

How “Ekklesia” Became “Church”

First, a little historical background. England, under the reign of Henry VIII (Henry Tudor), split from the Holy Roman Empire and the Roman Catholic Church and formed the Anglican Church, the Church of England. This was done mainly for political reasons, not religious differences.

Henry had married his brother's wife, Catherine of Aragon; however, she had been unable to provide him with a male heir, which he felt was necessary to maintain the House of Tudor and lead the armies into battle. To resolve this, Henry took Anne Boleyn as a mistress and got her pregnant. But, an illegitimate son would not be able to succeed him on the throne of England. Henry needed to divorce Catherine and marry Anne. However, the Pope denied Henry's request for an annulment of his marriage to Catherine.

To get what he wanted, Henry removed England from the Holy Roman Empire. He created the Anglican Church and installed Archbishop Cranmer who granted Henry his divorce. However, the expected child was not a son but a daughter who later ascended to the throne of England as Elizabeth I.

The only surviving child of Henry and Catherine was Mary, the wife of Philip II of France. In 1547 she sat upon the Scottish throne as Mary, Queen of Scots. During this time, John Knox had established Presbyterianism in Scotland, which was stirring the Scots into a growing revolution away from the Roman papal system.

Young Queen Elizabeth was fighting to maintain her kingdom against the growing power of Mary, who was supported by France. Elizabeth had Mary arrested and brought to the Tower of London and executed, creating a vacancy on the Scottish throne.

The son of Mary and Philip succeeded to the Scottish throne and was crowned James VI of Scotland. When Elizabeth died in England, she left no heir to the throne. James VI of Scotland survived all of the intrigues and was crowned James I of England. His strong roots and much of his support came from Scotland and from the Presbyterians.

King James had to make a decision concerning Roman Catholicism. He could continue the reforms that were taking place or permit the resurgence of Catholicism in the British Isles.

There was, at this point, much debate as to which way the king would go. Would he permit the resumption of Roman Catholicism in the British Isles, which had never been fully renounced? It had simply been dropped because it was not politically expedient. Or, would he bring forward the reforms that had been going on? When an attempt was made to assassinate him, he decided to continue with the reforms.

A complete religious break (not just a political one) with Rome required an official English bible translated from the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures. Prior to this time, the Scriptures used in England were the Douai version, which was French, or the Latin Vulgate by Jerome.

In 1603, King James convened the “Hampton Court Conference” (Hampton Court was one of his residences). He commissioned them to translate the Scriptures from their original tongues into the English language. The translation was completed in 1611 and is known as the King James version of the Bible.

When the King James translators came to the word “ekklesia” they used a Scottish word (“kirk”) as the translation. That is how “ekklesia” came to be translated as “church”. The corresponding Greek word for “kirk” is “kuriakos”, which means “house of God”.

The meaning of “house of God” during the 1600's was culturally clear. For centuries they had built monasteries, cathedrals, and meeting places. Their natural frame of reference for “house of God” was the building.

The word, "ekklesia," means "the called out ones"--people called out of darkness into the kingdom of the Son of God; people called out of darkness established upon the truth that He is the Christ.

But the word, "church," has never properly reflected that meaning. It has always meant a meeting hall—a place, not a people. Because of this, we have never had, in the English Bible, a proper rendition of what the Lord Jesus Christ said in Matthew 16:18. So, remember, every time you read the word, "church," it is the word, "ekklesia"--the called out people.

A Spiritual House

The house of the Lord has always been in the heart of God. Just not in the way that we think. We tend to mix our desires and understanding with the purposes of God. The Lord has not hidden what He intends to do. Even from the earliest days He has spoken to us plainly. Look at the prophetic words of Samuel.

1 Samuel 2:35 NASB

(35) 'But I will raise up for Myself a faithful priest who will do according to what is in My heart and in My soul; and I will build him an enduring house, and he will walk before My anointed always.

God has raised up Jesus, our High Priest, who has done all that was in the heart of the Father. God says that He will build Him an enduring house. This is where we get into trouble. God has to build the house and He builds it for Jesus and He doesn't build it out of bricks and mortar like we do.

God speaks prophetically to David and adds more details to His intention.

2 Samuel 7:12-13 NASB

(12) "When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom.

(13) "He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.

While David interpreted this word to mean his son, Solomon, the descendant that God describes is Jesus. He is the only one whose throne and kingdom is established forever.

Chronicles records a few more details of this word to David and makes it clear that it is Jesus of whom the prophet speaks.

1 Chronicles 17:11-14 NASB

(11) "When your days are fulfilled that you must go *to be* with your fathers, that I will set up one of your descendants after you, who will be of your sons; and I will establish his kingdom.

(12) "He shall build for Me a house, and I will establish his throne forever.

(13) "I will be his father and he shall be My son; and I will not take My lovingkindness away from him, as I took it from him who was before you.

(14) "But I will settle him in My house and in My kingdom forever, and his throne shall be established forever."

David mixed his own desires concerning the house of the Lord with the word that he had received and passed these to Solomon with the exhortation to build the Lord a house. This was a mis-application of the word to David and resulted in something less than the perfect will of God.

The bottom line is that it is God's intention to build His house. Anything that we try to do in terms of building for the Lord is vanity.

Psalms 127:1 NASB

(1) Unless the LORD builds the house, They labor in vain who build it; Unless the LORD guards the city, The watchman keeps awake in vain.

God is building a spiritual house for His Son. Only He can build it. For us to refer to a physical building as the house of the Lord is to insult the purpose and plan of the Father.

Construction Materials

It was not by mistake that under the Old Covenant God dwelt in tents. He did not want to confuse us about His purpose for His Temple that He would construct

under the New Covenant.

God has His own design and layout for His Temple and we are the building materials. His dwelling place is in the hearts of Men and, as living stones, He is building us together as a spiritual house.

1 Peter 2:4-5 NASB

(4) And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God,

(5) you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Notice the verb tense, “are being built”. This is an ongoing process, which is not completed yet (in time, it is complete in Eternity). Today, the house of God is under construction. Paul also speaks of this in Ephesians.

Ephesians 2:19-22 NASB

(19) So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household,

(20) having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner *stone*,

(21) in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord,

(22) in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

Paul also identifies the problem that we have today. He describes the foundation of the house of God. Christ Jesus is the cornerstone of the foundation and the apostles and prophets complete it. [Note: “apostles and prophets” is referring to the New Testament apostles and prophets for two reasons: (1) “apostles” are mentioned first, and, (2) the Old Covenant is always referred to as the “law and prophets”. In Ephesians 4 the ascended Christ gave gifts to us that included apostles and prophets to continue to equip His people for His work in the earth.]

The Western Church, especially the American version, has neglected to recognize apostles and prophets and their current function in the Lord. Without apostles and prophets, how can the foundation be complete? How can a building be built with an incomplete foundation? In our ignorance of His plan and purpose to build His house are we actually hindering the Holy Spirit from doing His job?

The Lord did use the methodology of building Solomon’s temple as a spiritual lesson for the way He is building His spiritual house.

1 Kings 6:7 NASB

(7) The house, while it was being built, was built of stone prepared at the quarry, and there was neither hammer nor axe nor any iron tool heard in the house while it was being built.

If we consider the quarry as the world and us as living stones being quarried from it then the spiritual application becomes very thought provoking. The ascended Christ has given us Evangelists to dig up the stones and Pastors and Teachers to clean them up and begin shaping them. Then Apostles and Prophets help build them together as they are laid in the proper place in the building of God. At least to me, this appears to be the Lord's intention.

However, what appears to be happening is something different. The Evangelists are digging up the stones and throwing them onto the bank of the quarry. Then Pastors come along and start piling up the stones and washing the dirt off of them. They become very protective of "their" stones and become concerned that another Pastor will come by and take some of "his" stones. So, they build a shed (church) over the stones to help protect them. Then, the stones are piled up in the shed a few times a week and the Pastor sprays them with the water hose to wash them. Sometimes, a Teacher might polish them a little bit but all in all very little change occurs to the stones.

A pile of stones isn't worth a whole lot. The stones have to be built together in order to accomplish the purpose of the One who owns the stones. The Pastors and Teachers should be cleaning, shaping, and polishing the stones in preparation for them to be built together. As the verse above says, the stones were prepared before they were built together. A properly prepared stone fits into place without fuss or bother. It has been shaped for its proper place and function.

It is the Apostles and Prophets that bring order and structure to the building. They are part of the foundation upon which the stones are placed. Paul considered himself as a "wise master builder". In other words, he had the architect's viewpoint of the building.

1 Corinthians 3:9-11 NASB

(9) For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building.

(10) According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it.

(11) For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

The Apostles and Prophets are the ones who see the "big picture". They have received the heart of the Father and have adjusted their perspective to His viewpoint. Paul saw his work (his function as an apostle) as laying the foundation of Jesus. Once done, others would build on it. The work of the apostles and prophets is to build people together so that they are placed and function according to the purpose and calling of God for them.

Those we are called to work are the ones who are building the house of the Lord as a dwelling place for Him. The worker must be careful about the building materials that he is using. God has established His own building specifications.

1 Corinthians 3:12-15 NASB

(12) Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw,

(13) each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is *to be* revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work.

(14) If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward.

(15) If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

Our work only has value if we are using the proper building materials. Improper materials will not stand the test.

For centuries now we have built bigger and more elaborate sheds to protect the stones; but the spiritual house has not been built. It is time that we return to the original specifications, the original design blueprints, which specific the materials to be used and where and how everything is placed. It is time for the people of God to recognize those called as true Apostles and Prophets, who have received the Father's heart. We need to receive their ministry and yield to the process of being built together.