

## THE DEFINITION OF THE CHURCH

In the past, and until a few years ago, churches were identified by their name, however, the trend today is to abandon generally accepted names of the church and adopt names for the church that only remotely identify them with anything traditional. An internet search shows hundreds of such name's churches have adopted today. A few names of said churches are: "The House of Worship, Tabernacle of Judah, Break Through Church of Faith, Risen Life Church, Venture Church, Truth Temple, Centrifuge Church, Inspired Life Church, Remah Covenant Worship Center, New Harvest Church, Angels of Life Christian Center, Bethel Life Center, Power of Life Family Worship Center, Walking in The Harvest Church, Refuge Church, New Revelation Family Church, God's Church of Faith, Revelation Church, Risen Life Church, Inspired Life Church, First Love Church, New Deal Church, Churchopolis, Connect, and Elevation Church.

The Greek word for "church" is "*kuriakos*" which means according to *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*: "pertaining to the Lord" or "of the Lord." In the Greek N.T. *kuriakos* appears twice but is never translated "church." It refers to *the Lord's Day* in Revelation 1:10, and in I Corinthians 11:20 it refers to *the Lord's Supper*. In *Nestle's Greek New Testament Interlinear* there is a footnote concerning this word that states: "no English equivalent is available for *kuriakos*." This is a strange conclusion gone to seed. If it is a Greek word from which our New Testament was originally written, it must have been written in the original Greek text. Therefore, since there are no original manuscripts existing today, it is reasonable to say that somewhere along the way, in the many copies of the original, another word was substituted for *kuriakos*. That word used throughout the New Testament that is translated "church" is the word *ekklesia*, meaning "called out." It is used in Acts 19:32, 39, 41 describing a civil body in Ephesus and is translated *assembly*. This is the only place it is translated *assembly*; in every other instance it is translated "church." The church, then, according to this definition is the "called out ones." This being true, we believe that in Matthew 16:18 Jesus did not say "Upon this rock I will build my *ekklesia*, (assemble, a people called out), rather he said "upon this rock I will build my *kuriakos* (church, a people of the Lord). Concerning this we quote the following definition from the *Encyclopedia Britannica*: "In the New Testament *ekklesia* is the only single word used for church. It was a name given to the governmental assembly of the city of Athens, duly convoked by proper officers and possessing all political power including even juridical functions." Why is this important? Because in today's world to most people the word "church" signifies a "place," while the word "assembly" signifies a gathering of people.

Jesus put an end to worship as a *place* in John 4, confirmed by God by the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. To both Jew and Samaritan, the place of worship was crucial. The woman sums up this attitude when she stated: "Our fathers worshipped in this mountain (*Mount Gerizim*) and you say that Jerusalem (*Mount Zion*) is the place where men ought to worship" (ver. 20). Jesus' answer was that the hour was coming when they would worship

in Spirit and truth (ver. 21). The "hour that was coming" was the calamitous event when the Roman war machine under the leadership of Generals Vespasian and his son Titus would decimate both Samaria (Mt. Gerizim) as a place of worship and also Judea (Jerusalem and the temple). With these worship centers in ashes both Samaritans and Jews would have to approach God in a new way. There would be no human clergy to oversee a worship system and no formalized system "do's" and "don'ts," nor any "churchy/synagoguery" way of doing things. The reason was worship must be in spirit and truth. We wonder if the extravagant expensive buildings called "worship centers" or "houses of the Lord" were reduced to ashes today would our approach to God be any different?

For a definition of the church we will lay all the Dictionaries, Lexicons and reference works on the shelf and let the Bible itself define the church. In defining the church, we begin with the most unknown and neglected fact that defines the church: God's "*New Man*." The term "new man" is translated "new self" in Colossians 3:10 and is said to be created by God. Ephesians 4:24 states that the "new man" has been "created in the likeness of righteousness and holiness of truth," and Galatians 6:15 and II Corinthians 5:17 states that he is a "new creation." Romans 6:4 shows baptized Christians are to walk in "newness of life." Based on these scriptures "God's new man" is a subject that should not be neglected nor overlooked. However, most works of theology give it little attention. Dr. Arthur G. Custance, an English Theologian and Scientist, in his book *The Seed of The Woman* makes this interesting observation on Genesis 3:9: "When God cried out 'Adam, where are you?' God was not searching for fallen man (whose whereabouts He surely knew) but for unfallen Adam who had simply disappeared. It was Adam as created, physically immortal and spiritually alive, who had vanished." In another beginning, on the day of Pentecost, God created another man. The words of Paul tell us that "...by abolishing in his flesh the enmity, which is in the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, that in Himself He might *create* of the two (that is Jew and Gentile) one new man" (Eph. 2:15). God's "New Man" has also disappeared from the thinking of any who would write or preach on the subject of the church. In two passages (Ephesians 2:14 and 4:24) Paul uses the word "*create*" in reference to the new man. This means the church has been created to take the place of the failed creation of Adam. What is God's new man's relationship to the world of sin, sickness, evil and depravity? Various answers as to the church's purpose are being given today by the religious leadership and the one summed up in the letter the Apostle Peter penned to encourage first century Christians is either not understood, not taken seriously, or ignored completely. He wrote: "You are being built into a spiritual house to be a *holy priesthood*, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ...you are chosen people, a *royal priesthood*, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (I Pet. 2:5, 9). The Apostle John confirms this in writing to the churches in Asia Minor, by stating; Christ "has made us to be a *kingdom, priests* to his God and Father" (Rev. 1:6). How many church members today realize just who they are supposed to be?

Perhaps the most common Scriptural term describing the church is "*the body of Christ*." I Cor 12:27: "Now you are *Christ's*

body, and individually members of it;" Eph. 1:22, 23: "He (God) put all things in subjection under his feet, and gave him as head over all things to *the church, which is his body*, the fullness of him who fills all in all." Eph. 4:12: gifts were given "for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry in the building up of *the body of Christ*." Eph. 5:29, 30: "...Christ also loves the church because we are members of *his body*." Col 1:24: "...I do my share on behalf of *his body* which is *the church*." In order to understand the significance of the church being the body of Christ we must begin with the ascension of Christ. Acts 1:1, 2 states: "The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus *began to do and teach*, until he was taken up to heaven." What Jesus began to do and teach on earth he continues to do and teach through his body, the church. Hebrews 8:1: "We have a high priest, who has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens a *minister* in the sanctuary and the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man." His earthly ministry simply prepared him for his greater ministry from Heaven, which he continues through his earthly body, the church. The word *reconciliation* (Rom. 5:10, 6:12, 11:15; II Cor. 5:18ff) II Corinthians 5:18-20 is the determinative passage showing the relationship between Christ and his earthly body. (A relationship seldom, if ever, recognized by today's elite church culture).

We quote this passage from II Corinthians 5:18-20: "God reconciled to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ be reconciled to God." This is a very emphatic and momentous statement concerning the purpose of the church. Note: "as though *God were making an appeal through us*" and we "*beg you on behalf of Christ*." Instead of Christ being here physically the church is to continue the work he began during his earthly ministry. In the book of Acts this work took place in the open-air meetings, in homes, on the highway, in the desert, in jails and prisons, by the riverside, in the marketplace and the synagogue. There is no record of unbelievers being converted in worship services. "Worship services" as we know them today were unknown to the early church. They met in homes and rented facilities. The pattern seems to be that the unbeliever is converted then brought to worship services not brought to worship services and then converted. The purpose of the church was not to provide "excitements" other than the excitement of the Good News. The church gathered on the first day of the week to hear the word of God, for corporate prayer, and for the breaking of bread (Acts 2:42; 20:7). Significantly none of the evangelistic preaching in Acts occurs within the context of the church gathered for worship. To be sure, the early church was involved in aggressive evangelism, but it kept the gathering on Sunday for the edification of the faithful and for God's covenant people to praise the covenant God. These conclusions are borne out in I Corinthians 14:23, 24 where Paul shows it was unusual for an unbeliever or outsider to enter the place of worship. He states: "If therefore the whole church should assemble together and all speaks in tongues, and ungifted men or unbelievers enter, will they not say you are mad? But if all prophesy and an unbeliever or ungifted man enters, he is convicted by all; he is called into account by all." It would have been very unusual for an unbeliever to attend a Christian worship service in Paul's day.

However, today most of the church's evangelism takes place by unbelievers being brought into the worship of the church. The result: the worship has been turned into an evangelistic service with most of the sermons and teaching being directed toward converting the unbeliever and most contemporary as well as traditional services are centered on the "needs" of "seekers" and non-believers. This, many times, neglects those already in the fold. This accounts for the immaturity of so many Christian people today.

A Definition of the church as "*House of God*" is much used today, but specifically mentioned only one time to describe the church is found in I Timothy 3:15; to Timothy Paul wrote: "I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the *house of God*, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth." *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* defines the word house as "*oikos*' strictly an inhabited house, differing from '*domos*' the building." The usual interpretation of John 14:1-3 affirms that these verses refer to heaven as the Father's house, Jesus is there now preparing a place for us which will consist of "many mansions" and He will someday come again and take us home to heaven. This passage is by and large one of the most popular text of the Bible for funeral sermons. It has been the basis of both song and sermon to give comfort in the times of bereavement. As for songs how can we explain gospel singers who sing "I've Got a Mansion Just Over the Hilltop" then follow it with "Lord Build Me A Cabin In the Corner Of Glory Land?" Nowhere in Scripture is it stated that heaven is the Father's house, yet the Father's house is clearly identified. In the Old Testament the temple is referred to as "the house of God" and Jesus refers to the temple as being "My Father's house" however no physical place is referred to as "the house of God" in the New Testament. Hebrews 3:6: "Christ was faithful over His (God's) house, whose house we are." Hebrews 10:21: "...and we have a great priest over the house of God." Jesus is the high priest of the church. Ephesians 2:19, 22: "you are of God's house...you are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit." The Father's house is the church. In His house are many "dwelling places" (KJV "mansions"). In verse 23 where Jesus says of those who love Him and keep His word, He and the Father will "come to him and make our abode with him." The word "abode" in this passage is the same as "mansion" or "dwelling place" in verse 2. At one time the Father had only one dwelling place on earth, His Son, now He has "many dwelling places," His church. Revelation 21:3: "And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold the tabernacle (dwelling place) of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them.'"

"I go to prepare a place for you" (ver. 2). The place He prepared is not a place for us to live after we die, but a place for us to live now. Hebrews 9:12: "and not through ("taking" RSV) the blood of goats and calves, but through ("taking" RSV) His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all having obtained eternal redemption." We now have a place prepared for us in the holy place (heaven itself Heb. 9:24) so now we can "have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us" (Heb. 10). He has prepared a place for us in the very presence of God. We are now "sitting with Christ in the heavenlies" (Eph. 2:7). We have now access to all spiritual blessings (Eph. 1:3) in Christ.

.....Definition: continued next month