

A Study Of
The Church Christ Built
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"Upon this rock I will build my church . . ." (Matthew 16:18).

"And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved" (Acts 2:47).

"Even as Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it" (Ephesians 5:25).

"And hath put all thing under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church. Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all" (Ephesians 1:22-23).

Of all churches that exist today, which one did Christ build? He said, "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" (Matthew 16:18). He promised to build HIS church. Did he do it? If he built his church, from whom did all the others come?

Upon the day of Pentecost, following the resurrection of Christ, Peter and the other eleven apostles with him preached the resurrected Christ and the terms for the forgiveness of sins. About 3,000 souls were baptized that day, composing a body of believers unlike anything before them. They continued together, "Praising God, and having favour with all the people, and the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved" (Acts 2:47).

This same process has continued down through the ages unto the present time. When the resurrected Christ is preached, and people believe the word, repent of their sins and are baptized into Christ, they are added to the body of like believers wherever they are. The Lord adds to the church and no one else can do so. Only Christ can take those out of the body who sin and will not repent. That will make the church today exactly like that one to which Christ added baptized believers on Pentecost in Acts 2.

There are some basic facts that every believer in the word of God accepts without question. He does not question that there is a God, that God had an eternal purpose by which He would reconcile sinful man to Himself, and that this was done through the death, burial and resurrection of His Son Jesus Christ. Every believer in God's word accepts the fact that in the fullness of time all this was accomplished and today there exists upon earth a people belonging to God by way of the blood of Christ, and that Christ sits at the right hand of God as supreme ruler over this body of obedient believers. But somehow man has almost constantly disputed what God has revealed about the **nature, purpose and work** of this body of saved people called the "church." Every generation has come up with some new idea to promote or some change to make in the church of the Lord.

A few years ago a few brethren decided that the scholarship of the world, the translators, the brethren through the years, and the great majority of the people of God today do not know what the word "church" (ekklesia) means and have, consequently, unawares created something foreign to the word of God. I have no personal feeling against anyone whose views I review in this article. I am interested only in presenting and preserving the doctrine of Christ as revealed in the New Testament.

The late brother J. D. Hall of Jasper, Texas published a treatise on this subject in the August, 1965 issue of the **Preceptor**. His contention was that we have understood the church to be an institution when in reality its meaning is an **assembly, congregation, crowd, gathering, or community of people**. His article repudiated the idea of an organization in the local congregational sense. Brother James W. Adams reviewed brother Hall's article in the September, October, and November, 1965 issues of the **Preceptor**.

During the lecture week at Florida College, 1966 brother Charles A. Holt diverted from his assigned subject and spoke on this same theory. He ridiculed the meaning of an organization or institution in the word "church" as used in the word of God. It is not my purpose in this article to review his statements in that speech, but I do want to point out something about the **church** (ekklesia) of the Lord that clearly shows that whatever idea one may have about the English "church," the people of God do form an institution and organization in the local sense. And it is so plainly taught that I am amazed that one so well read in the word of God as brother Holt would make such statements as he made in his speech.

Hall's Concept Of "Church"

Of course brother Holt's speech at Florida College in 1966 indicated that he shared the views of brother Hall, but brother Hall's position is in print and easier to review at the present time.

Brother Hall gives five meanings that scholars have assigned to "ekklesia":

1. The Scriptural Assembly (Matthew 16:18);
2. Christians Gathered Together Physically (Acts 11:26);
3. The Children of Israel In The Wilderness (Acts 7:39);
4. A Riotous Mob (Acts 19:32); and
5. A Court Of Law (Acts 19:39).

It is true that these are meanings of the common term "ekklesia." But he indicts the translators of the King James version in these words: "In this case (translating the word "church" - H.E.P.) these fine scholarly men deliberately and knowingly changed the Word of God to fit their own materialistic concept of what the Kingdom of God should be" (page 402). He says when we get away from this deliberate change in the word of God by the use of the word "church": "Lost will be the institutional sense which is inherent in the word 'church' when the passage is dealing with a group of Christians. Lost will be the hierarchical sense of the spiritual brotherhood which gives our sectarian friends so much trouble. And found will be the simple 'individual to Christ' relationship which is so abundantly taught in the New Testament, but which has been so hard to detect in our present so-called 'churches'" (Page 403).

He says further on the word "church" as we now use it: "This 'church' is a materialistic institution. It is something we can see. It has a definite location. People look at the beautiful – or even the shabby – building and say, 'There is the Church of Christ.' Yes. You can even read the sign out front which says in bold lettering, 'Church of Christ.' Can there be any doubt? Certainly not. Everyone understands that this is a religious club with a hierarchy composed of Elders and Deacons who have absolute lordship over the physical properties of this club (or church) as over its 'members'"(page 406).

Finally, he sums up his views on the use of "church" by saying: "Brethren, there are no passages in the New Testament which prove the existence of an institution in the time of the apostles such as we have today, and which we call a 'local church of Christ.' Christians in the first century gathered themselves together at various times and places as commanded by the inspired leaders. But these were ONLY gatherings of Christian people; nothing more. Nowhere do we read of a common treasury such as we have today, and around which revolve almost all so-called 'work of the church' never have we been told of an incident where anyone, either as a church, gathering, or as an individual, ever hired a preacher or anyone else for any purpose whatever. Nowhere, do we read where elders were in charge of anything or anybody. But, we do read where elders are to be ministers, or servants, among God's people. Hear the Lord in Matthew 20:25-28" (Page 406).

This was the new theory on the meaning of "church" in our English Bible from 1965. There is no organized local church in any sense. Only Christians gathering at various times as commanded by the "inspired leaders." I wonder who would call them together today since we do not have "inspired leaders." There are no elders overseeing anything or anyone. There is no common treasury; no preacher or anyone else employed to do anything. And Matthew 20:25-28 is the passage that is used to show that elders are not overseers of anyone or anything.

Like many theories before it, this theory was destined to evolve into something more sinister and divisive when its leaders passed from the active scene, and that is exactly what has happened.

I want to take a moment to expose this false application of Matthew 20:25-28. I have heard it used many times to try to prove that elders are not over anyone. The context of these verses begins back in verse 17: "And Jesus going up to Jerusalem took the twelve disciples apart in the way, and said unto them." He told them about his suffering to take place in Jerusalem. In verse 20 the mother of the Zebedee brothers came to Jesus requesting that he grant one to sit on the right hand and one on the left in his kingdom - superior positions over the other apostles. In verse 24, the verse just before these verses used to disprove that elders oversee anything, we read: "And when the ten heard it, they were moved with indignation against the two brethren." Verses 25-28 involve only the twelve apostles. They do not involve the body of baptized believers. There was to be no ruler "among them." No apostle was over the other apostles. It is a perversion of the passage to apply it to elders, preachers, or anyone else. Jesus was talking to the apostles about their relationship to each other.

The Proper Use Of Words

Words are vehicles by which we convey our ideas, thoughts and objectives to others. These words must be understood by both the speaker and the hearer before true communication is possible. God revealed His mind to us through words, and these words must be understood before we can know the mind of God. We believe in the verbal inspiration of the word of God – the very words were given by the Spirit of God. John 16:13 says that the Spirit would speak what he heard to the apostles. On Pentecost the apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak "as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 1:4). Paul wrote to the Corinthians that God had prepared things for those who love him that had never entered the heart of man, "But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God" (1 Corinthians 2:10). "Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy

Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual" (1 Corinthians 2:13). "How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ" (Ephesians 3:3-4).

God expects us to understand and obey what He speaks to us. That is the only way we can have faith (Romans 10:17). We will be judged by these words spoken by Christ (John 12:48-49; Revelation 20:12). We are forbidden to go beyond what is written (1 Corinthians 4:6; 2 John 1:9), or to preach another gospel (Galatians 1:8-9), or to add to or take from the words of revelation (Revelation 20:18-19).

These words which were inspired of God were in a language we call "common" Greek, the language spoken by the common man during the days Christ and the apostles lived upon earth. Because we do not speak that language today as used by the Holy Spirit, we must depend upon translations – the carrying across from one language to another the exact meaning in the original words used, respecting the word for word nature of verbal inspiration. The world's greater scholars have worked at the task of reproducing into English the exact meaning of the original Greek language used by the Holy Spirit in revealing the mind of God. Unfortunately, some of these words were not translated, but invented from the Greek for various reasons. In addition to this, some of the English words have changed meaning since some of the translations were made and, therefore, do not now convey exactly what the original words mean. However, the percentage of these words is so small that one should have little difficulty determining the meaning, either by the context, some other passage with a clear meaning, or by consulting some standard authority on the true sense of the word.

There can be no true communication between people without understanding the meaning of a word and there must be some accepted standard by both parties by which to determine this meaning. I believe standard English dictionaries and Greek lexicons are the only sources to which we can go to determine this matter. This I shall do in this study. In trying to learn what the Greek "ekklesia" and the English "organization" and "institution" mean I shall appeal to these standard authorities and not to some man's arbitrary definition to prove his point.

The Meaning Of Ekklesia

The English word "baptism" has the meaning to most people of a burial, sprinkling or pouring water upon the subject, but the word was created to translate the Greek term "baptizo," which did not have all these meanings. There are three ways I can learn what this word really means, and I do not have to be well versed in the Greek to do so.

1. I can consult a standard Greek authority for the meaning in New Testament times. This word comes from a Greek word which scholars say means to "dip" or "immerse." I can learn what the mind of God is relative to this subject by going to these scholars and determining what the word meant at the time Christ and the apostles used it.
2. But that is not the only way I can determine its meaning, even from the English, if I never consulted a Greek lexicon. I can find other expressions referring to baptism that take away all doubt as to its meaning by inspired writers. "Therefore we are buried with him by baptism . . ." (Romans 6:4). There is no doubt about the English word "buried" – I know

what God meant by "baptism." "Buried with him in baptism . . ." (Colossians 2:12). I know that one is "buried" IN baptism. There is no doubt about what God meant even if the English "baptism" is an invented word for the translators because they wanted to retain the idea of sprinkling. Other English words clearly tell us what God revealed by describing the action.

3. In addition to this, I can learn what "baptism" means in the word of God by the necessary circumstances that surround the action. "And, Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water . . ." (Matthew 3:16). Only a "burial" (which the New Testament says is IN baptism) requires such action. Sprinkling and pouring could be done without it. "And he commanded the chariot to stand still: they went down both into the water, both Philip the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water . . ." (Acts 8:38-39). These circumstances demand a "burial," which the Bible says is done in baptism. You see, I can learn what God's word teaches on the subject of baptism from the English, even if the English word "baptism" is not exactly true to the Greek used by Christ and the apostles.

The word "church" is exactly the same. I can learn what the Spirit meant by the word "ekklesia" from other English expressions even if the English "church" is not properly used by some today. I can show that the word the Holy Spirit used carries the idea of institution and organization in the local congregational sense in the New Testament.

First, I must find the true meaning of the English "organization" and "institution." Webster's Twentieth Century Dictionary says of "organization": "1. The act of organizing; the act or process of arranging and getting into proper working order; as, the organization of an expedition. 2. The state of being organized; that which is organized; an organized body. 3. Organic structure: the disposition or arrangement of the organs for the performance of vital functions. 4. The arrangement of the parts of an aggregate or body for work or action; systematic preparation for action."

The same authority says of "institution": "1. The act of establishing; establishment; that which is appointed, prescribed, or founded by authority, and intended to be permanent. 2. An organized society, established either by law or by the authority of individuals, for promoting any object, public or social; as, a literary institution; a benevolent or charitable institution."

What does the Greek "ekklesia" mean? Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words by W.E. Vine says: "From ek, out of, and klesis, a calling (kaleo, to call), was used among the Greeks of a body of citizens gathered to discuss the affairs of State, Acts 19:39." He goes on to give various ways in which this word is used and passages where it was so used.

The meaning of "ekklesia" (and it was no more a religious word than the word "baptizo" during the time the word of God was being revealed) is "out" and "called." It means "called out" and may apply to any number of persons in various relationships. The word "baptism" means to "dip" or "immerse" and may be applied to anything. But Christ and the apostles gave a spiritual meaning to "baptizo" in the revealing of God's mind to man. Like the word "walk," which means to move on the feet or go forward in some manner, among other meanings, came to have a spiritual meaning when Paul said to "walk in the Spirit." The word "ekklesia" was given a spiritual meaning in

revealing the mind of God to man. When Jesus said, "upon this rock I will build my church," he was talking about a spiritual body of "called out" people.

The English word "organization" means "the act of organizing; the act or process of arranging and getting into proper working order," and "the state of being organized; that which is organized; an organized body." Is this what Jesus meant when he said he would "build" his church? In Ephesians 1 :22-23 and Colossians 1:18 the inspired writer said the "ekklesia" was the body. "The church, which is his body . . ." The word "body" tells us what the church is in these passages.

As in the case of the Greek "baptizo," which is translated by some form of "baptism," the Greek "ekklesia" is translated by the English "church." In both cases the English may not truly and accurately translate the Original sense, but we can find other English words that tell us the true meaning of the original term. One of these is the English word "body." Paul tells us something about "ekklesia" that shows it to be an organization. "For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office; so we being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another" (Romans 12:4-5). 1 Corinthians 12:27-28 and Ephesians 4:11-12 give various parts that God placed in the body for its function. This is the process of arranging and getting into working order - an organization.

"For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ" (1 Corinthians 12:12). As our physical body is one with many members, so is the body of Christ, which is the church. "For the body is not one member, but many" (1 Corinthians 12:14). Paul goes on to explain the various functions of the foot, hand, ear and eye, and then concludes, "But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body" (1 Corinthians 12:18-20). Webster says "organization" is "the state of being organized; that which is organized; an organized body." That is exactly what Paul says of the body of Christ, which is the "ekklesia." Of course, he is talking about the use of spiritual gifts, but still the parts are formed into the whole for function. "That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one of another" (1 Corinthians 12:25). The members of the body are not to be divided, but to be as one. This is organization. The idea of organization is in the word "body" and the church is called the body of Christ.

Webster says the word "institution" means "establishing; establishment; that which is appointed, prescribed, or founded by authority, and intended to be permanent." Is that not what Christ did when he built his church? Even though the Greek "ekklesia" does not carry the inherent idea of organization or institution, the word of God teaches that this "called out" body of Christ was instituted and organized, thus an institution and organization.

Different Uses Of The Word "Church"

Like most of the words we use, the word "church" is used in different senses. The context usually tells us the sense in which it is used. Sometimes the word is used to refer to the "called out" in the universal sense. It means those who have been called "out of darkness into his marvelous light: which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God . . ." (1 Peter 2:10). "Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his

dear Son" (Colossians 1:13). Obviously, in these passages the "called out" is used in the universal sense of the word. The same is true in Matthew 16:18 when Jesus said, "Upon this rock I will build my church."

But the word is also used of "called out" people in a given locality, excluding some "called out" in other areas. Several letters were written by Paul to churches in given localities and he put them in contrast to churches in other places. "Unto the church of God which is at Corinth. . ." (1 Corinthians 1:2), he wrote: "Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye" (1 Corinthians 16:1). In these passages the word "church" is used in a local sense, meaning the "called out" of a certain area. In Revelation 2 and 3 the apostle John wrote to seven different "churches" in Asia and named the cities where they were located. The charges and commendations differed with each church. There is no way to understand these churches in any sense other than local congregations of the "called out."

But again the word "church" is used to mean the actual coming together of the members for some function. In 1 Corinthians Paul made several statements that clearly show the sense to mean "assembly." "For first of all, when ye come together in the church . . ." (1 Corinthians 11:18). "Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding (1 Corinthians 14:19). "If therefore the whole church come together into one place . . ." (1 Corinthians 14:23). "Let your women keep silence in the churches . . ." (1 Corinthians 14:34). The context shows that the word is used in the sense of actually assembling for some function. This is the English meaning of "organization."

The Church Is An Organization

The word of God teaches that the universal church has no functional organization – arrangement of parts for function or action. It has no scriptural systematic arrangement whereby it can function as a body. But these "called out" people of God have some scriptural organization by which they function to do the Lord's will in each given locality. This is what we mean by a local congregation or church.

Just as in the case of learning the true meaning of the word "baptism" in the New Testament by other terms that cannot be denied, I shall show that the word "church" in the local sense is an organization and institution divinely arranged and prepared for function.

It has already been shown that the New Testament compares the church to a body with various members that function in different realms, yet they compose only one body. I am now talking about the "ekklesia" - "called out" in the local sense. There is a scriptural local organization of the church that is divinely arranged with different members, not having the same work (Romans 12:4-5), to do what is taught in the New Testament. It is amazing to me that men can read over these passages and completely miss this.

When Paul and Barnabas returned from the first preaching journey "And when they had ordained them elders in every church . . ." (Acts 14:23). Paul ordained "elders" in every church. Did he do right? Is this not an organization by the very circumstances of the case? As "baptism" is shown to be a "burial" by the Spirit using a word that clearly defines the action, so the "church"

is shown to be an organized unit in a locality by giving the circumstances and conditions which make it an organization. The "elders" had an obligation to the "church" in Ephesus to be "overseers" as made by the Holy Spirit (Acts 20:28).

Paul wrote to Titus: "For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee" (Titus 1:5). Paul ordained "elders" in every church and told Titus to ordain "elders" in every city (locality). Every church was to have elders appointed if these passages have any meaning and application at all. This in the very nature of the circumstances makes the local church "called out" - an organization.

Peter wrote: "The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder . . . Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof . . ." (1 Peter 5:1-2). Peter limited the oversight of the elders to the "flock which is among you." I doubt that even the most radical person would deny that the flock of God is the same as the church in Acts 20:28. We have the New Testament teaching that there are to be elders in every church, in every city, and limited to the "flock which is among you." This prescribes organization in the local church and forbids any extension of this organization beyond the local church.

Paul wrote a letter and said: "Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the Bishops and deacons" (Philippians 1:1). It may be said, "This does not say the church, but saints." If "saints" do not compose the "called out," who are they? "Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours" (1 Corinthians 1:2).

In Corinth the saints were the church of God. So were they at Philippi. But in Philippi we have "saints," "bishops," and "deacons." This, by the very nature of the language, makes it an organization by our English definition.

This local organization is a "called out" people even when not assembled. Paul was on his way to Jerusalem, recorded in Acts 20, "And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church. And when they were come to him, he said unto them . . ." (Acts 20:17). The church was located in Ephesus, a locality. The elders were from Ephesus, and were overseers of that "called out" people of God. These "elders"- not the church – came to Miletus to meet and talk with Paul. Paul talked to the elders, not the church, on this occasion. There was a "flock" (church "called out") in Ephesus and there were "elders" who were made "overseers" of this local church, and the "elders" of this locality were called to Miletus from Ephesus by Paul. If this does not show that the church had an organization in the local sense other than the actual assembly, I do not understand what the words could possibly mean.

Its Function Shows Organization

The "called out" of the Lord has a work to do. Some of this is to be done by the church as the local organization. I am not talking about an individual obligation; I am speaking of the local church. One of the duties of a local church is to support the preaching of the gospel. This one is enough to prove the point. Paul said: "Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel

should live of the gospel" (1 Corinthians 9:14). While preaching at Corinth Paul said: "I robbed other churches, taking wages of them, to do you service" (2 Corinthians 11:8). Denominationalism was unknown at this time, thus "other churches" meant other local churches. He took "wages" from other "churches" to do "service" at Corinth. These churches (not individuals) did as Paul said the Lord ordained to be done in 1 Corinthians 9:14.

Again, "Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving but ye only. For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity" (Philippians 4:15-16). This was a local organization - "saints with bishops and deacons" sending support to Paul in Thessalonica, and they did it once and again. In the first case several "churches" sent "wages" to Paul as he preached in Corinth, "to do you service" - this is the "church" of God which is at Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:2) - and in the second only one "church" sent to his needs in Thessalonica. This is a work of local organizations called "churches." Each of these churches had "elders" if Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5 and Philippians 1:1 were followed.

The Lord's church is spiritual in its nature, organization and work. God through Christ brought into being this divine institution and assigned the work for the body to do. Only in the local sense does this "called out" (ekklesia) function as it does the work of the Lord. The church has different members, but they are compacted together into one body and each member does its work to accomplish the work of the whole body.

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