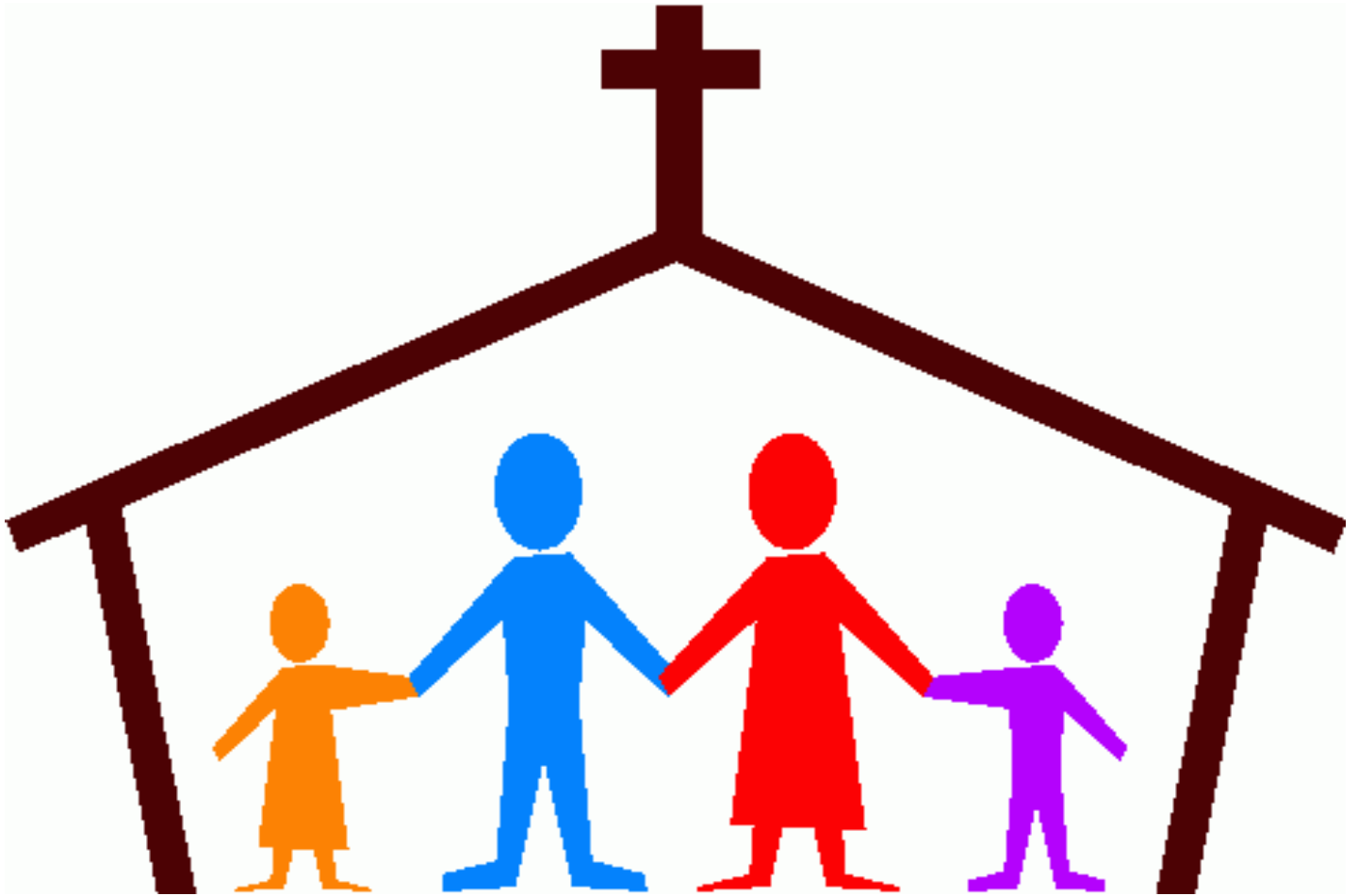


# The Church Of Christ

Lesson 1:

Ekklesia



Discovering God's Word

Bible Study Series

The Church Of Christ  
**Lesson 1: Ekklesia**

Learn how the word "church" is and is not used in the New Testament

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Discovering God's Word Bible Study Series

**Study Number:** DGW56

Written by Eric Krieg

**About the author:** My name is Eric Krieg. I am a disciple of Jesus, a Bible student, a truth seeker, and an evangelist. My interest is in using the Bible as my only guide in my faith. My desire is to help others understand the message of the Bible and pursue true, New Testament Christianity.

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**My plea:** It is my hope and prayer that you are searching for the truth that is contained in God's word, the Bible. My desire is to help you understand and obey these truths God has revealed in the pages of His word. It is to that end that I write this material. Please observe all of the Scripture references and evaluate whether the conclusions I have drawn are in harmony with God's word. If they are, I ask that you make honest application of those truths to your life and obey God's instructions.

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# Lesson 1:

## Ekklesia

What is the church of Christ? Perhaps you have considered this question before or have even studied this question with someone else. Certainly, the word “church” has come to be used in many different ways in our society today, having reference to a large number of different things.

But, how is the word used in the Bible? What does the word “church” really mean? Who is part of the church? How do you join the church? When did the church come into existence? Has it even been established? What is the church to be called? Why does the word “church” seem to be used in different ways in the Scriptures? What is the work of local churches of Christ? What are the assemblies of local churches of Christ like? What should the organizational structure of the church of Christ be?

These are the sorts of questions we will be attempting to answer during the course of this 8-lesson study about the church of Christ. It is my hope that this study will help you better understand what the Bible teaches on the subject of the church – and that this study will enable you to help others come to a knowledge of the truth on this subject.

As you engage in this Bible study (as always), please carefully consider the things presented with an open Bible and an open mind. Please carefully evaluate what the Scriptures teach to see what the truth in God’s word is on the subject of the church. Do not allow preconceived ideas to hinder you from seeing what the Bible teaches on the subject. Be open to any and all of the truths contained

within the pages of God’s word. After all, it is God’s word that will judge us in the Last Day (see John 12:48 and Revelation 20:11-15). Also, I encourage you not to take my word for anything! It is my hope only to teach the truth of God’s word. However, I encourage you to search the Scriptures for yourself and see if the conclusions we draw during the course of this study are in harmony with the way of truth or not! Be like the Bereans (in Acts 17:11) and search the Scriptures daily in order to see whether the things you are being taught are truth or not.

In this first lesson, we want to take some time to evaluate the use of the Greek word “ekklesia.” This is the Greek word that is often translated “church” in our English Bibles (Remember that the New Testament was originally written in the Greek language – and has been translated from the Greek into English). As we will see, this Greek word is used frequently in the pages of the New Testament – and it will be the focus of this first study. For instance, when Jesus said, “I will build My church” in Matthew 16:18, the word “ekklesia” is used. This first study aims to help you gain a more accurate understanding of what the word “church” really means so that we can build upon this foundation in future lessons.

### ***Why This Study Is Important***

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Why do you need to know anything about the Greek word “ekklesia”? Maybe you are thinking that a study of a Greek word sounds dry, boring, and irrelevant to your life – and are about to skip over this lesson. Before you decide that this lesson has no relevance to your life, please allow me to briefly explain why it is important for you to consider this study.

### **Not because you have to be well-versed in the Greek language**

God does not require you to know one syllable of the Greek language in order to be saved. Certainly, God does not require or expect you to learn Greek in order to learn what He commands or expects of you during your life. You can live your

life in a way that pleases God without knowing the Greek language. However, a study of this Greek word will *aid* in your understanding on the subject of the church.

## **So you can speak as the oracles of God**

Actually, this study will not be an in-depth study of this Greek word at all. I readily admit to you that I know very little about the Greek language. What we are aiming to do in this study is to observe many passages in which this Greek word is used so that we can gain a greater understanding of the English word “church.”

Sometimes, we can be guilty of using terms in ways that God does not use them – as our society and culture changes the meanings of words. You see, English words evolve in their meanings over time. For instance, the word “conversation” is used in the King James Version of the Bible (originally published in 1611 A.D.) to identify our manner of life (see Ephesians 4:22). However, this English word “conversation” has evolved to refer specifically to our verbal interaction with others. Another example of English words evolving in meaning is the use of the word “gay.” In the mid-1900s, the English word “gay” meant “happy.” However, now (in the early part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century) the word refers to homosexual behavior. So, our English words evolve.

Since this is the case, it is profitable to go back to the original Greek word “ekklesia” and study this term in its original context in order to see what God refers to whenever He uses this word. Many times, mankind has changed the meanings of certain words God has used in the Scriptures. Let me give you two modern-day examples of this.

(1) The word “baptism.” Today, it is common for folks to speak of the English word “baptism” when they speak of the actions of having water sprinkled or poured over another’s head. However, God does not use the word “baptism” in this way. Instead, a study of the Greek word for “baptism” and its use in the Scriptures reveals that God is *always* talking about an immersion or overwhelming. So, as it should be applied today, baptism (by God’s standards) can only be accomplished by the

immersion in water. Acts 8:38-39 is one example which demonstrates this to be true.

(2) The word “Christian.” Today, it is common for folks to use the English word “Christian” whenever they speak about folks who profess to follow Jesus Christ. The word is used then to refer to anyone of any denomination – as long as they profess allegiance to Jesus Christ (regardless of what doctrine they believe and follow). However, a study of how this word is used in the Bible would help us to understand that Christians are disciples of Jesus Christ (Acts 11:26). Then, as we would study what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, we would discover that it does not just refer to someone who professes allegiance to Christ; but, someone who is entirely dedicated to learning from Him and obeying Him (see Matthew 7:21-23 and Luke 9:23-26). Furthermore, a study of being a Christian would conclude that only those who have obeyed God’s plan of salvation are truly Christians. God’s plan of salvation is to hear His word (Romans 10:17), believe (John 8:24), repent (Acts 17:30), confess Christ (Romans 10:9-10), and be baptized (Acts 2:38). Then, the one who has become a Christian is expected to remain faithful to God throughout his/her earthly life (Revelation 2:10).

In the same way, it is common for folks to use the word “church” in ways that do not quite match up with how the Bible uses the word. While this may seem “innocent” and “harmless,” it actually results in great spiritual harm! We will consider some of the ways in which the word “church” is misapplied momentarily.

For now, please make it your desire to speak as the oracles of God. 1 Peter 4:11 says, “If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God...” I hope that your desire is to speak as the Bible speaks. We should always desire to use words and phrases in the ways God intends them to be used rather than forcing a word or phrase to mean something God has never intended! Therefore, if this is your desire, please realize that the word “church” has often been misused in our society – and take a moment to clear away any ideas you may have had, opening your mind to allow the Bible to show you how the word is to be used and determine to apply it in the proper way!

## **So we can set the proper foundation for our study**

A thing can only be as good as its foundation. Jesus demonstrated this to be true in Matthew 7:24-27: “Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.”

This house which was built upon the sand could have been the most ornate, beautiful, and well-constructed house imaginable. However, because of its poor foundation, it did not endure! The same is true concerning our understandings of Biblical words and concepts. We may believe we have a firm understanding of particular concepts and doctrines; but, if they do not have the proper foundations, they will not endure – no matter how beautiful we may be able to articulate our ideas about them.

You must be careful to gain a proper understanding of the use of this word in the Scriptures in order to properly grasp the other teachings about the church you can read about in the Bible! If you do not have a proper understanding about how the word is used in Scripture, the other teachings you need to learn concerning the church may not make any sense to you! Therefore, laying the proper foundation is necessary – and this lesson attempts to accomplish that goal.

## **So you can overcome misconceptions of the church**

Since the word “church” is commonly misapplied in today’s society, it is possible that you have a misconception of the church that needs to be corrected. Again, many of these misconceptions get to the very foundation we will be addressing during the course of this lesson. Therefore, no matter what your view of the “church” is, I simply ask that you be open and honest with yourself and with the

Scriptures as we begin this study – and acknowledge the *possibility* that you could have a misconception about the church! Then, if such a misconception does exist, I hope that this lesson will help you to begin destroying the weak foundation you have been building on and establish the firm foundation that is based entirely upon God’s word!

## ***Common Misconceptions About The Church***

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Before we consider how the Bible does use the word “ekklesia” (church), let me take a few moments to identify some things the Bible does *not* refer to when it uses this word. Take some time to consider the following common misconceptions about what the church is. Again, be honest with yourself and allow any false ideas that are present in your mind about the church to be destroyed so that you can build the right foundation! You can search the Scriptures repeatedly and never once find the church referenced in any of the following ways!

### **An earthly organization**

Those who lived during Jesus’ lifetime were looking for Christ to set up an earthly kingdom. Many folks today have not made an improvement in their concept of this kingdom (church). Often, folks still see the church only through a physical lens – often making it into nothing more than an earthly organization.

Consider some characteristics of an earthly organization – as churches today often have been made to resemble these. (1) Hierarchical systems that have CEOs, boards of directors, managers, employees, etc. In these systems, those in the greatest positions of authority make changes to the rules and regulations. In business, this is good and proper. However, regarding the church, there must not be central governing bodies, counsels, or human heads of any kind (like the Pope), etc. who make “policies” regarding the doctrines of the church! The Bible is the church’s only guide and Christ is the church’s only Head! (2) Business-oriented goals. Businesses

*should* think about customers and finances. However, churches cannot be driven by financial ramifications or be engaged in “people pleasing.” Both will lead to a perversion of God’s plan! Instead, the church must be concerned about spiritual things (i.e. souls)! (3) Fundraising. Businesses and secular organizations seek to increase their “bottom line.” They will try to do as much as they can to accomplish this. The church that is viewed as an earthly organization will also likely be engaged in fundraising activities that are unauthorized by the Scriptures (i.e. bake sales, rummage sales, etc.).

### **A social club**

Many have misguided views about the subject of fellowship. To many, fellowship is primarily concerned with physical things. Certainly, fellowship between Christians is important! However, the fellowship discussed in the Scriptures is a spiritual fellowship (see 1 John 1:7). Then, due to this spiritual fellowship, it will prompt Christians to be close on a physical level as well. Even still, it is not the role of the church to provide for and organize such social gatherings/events – as there is *no authority* in the Bible for such as the work of the church!

Consider some characteristics of the church that views itself as a social club. (1) It will often have assemblies that “water down” God’s word (since the primary focus often becomes physical socialization rather than spiritual instruction and edification). (2) It will often be involved in putting on plays, field trips, singles’ nights, movie nights, and other entertaining activities. (3) It will often build, maintain, and utilize gymnasiums or similar facilities. (4) It will often build, maintain, and utilize “fellowship halls” (i.e. kitchens). Other similar characteristics often manifest themselves in the church that views itself as a social club.

### **A political machine**

Some churches have stopped speaking God’s word and have exchanged it for the “social gospel” (read Galatians 1:6-10 to see that God authorizes no changes to His gospel). They begin focusing on social issues or become political activists. Now, please understand that individuals have the

opportunity to be involved in politics and social issues; but, this is not the God-given role of the church (except as it may influence individuals and societies through the teaching of God’s word).

Consider some characteristics of churches that view themselves as political machines. (1) They often stop preaching God’s word. (2) They will often present (so-called) “sermons” that are filled with “culturally-relevant” matters. (3) They will often present (so-called) “sermons” concerned with being “politically correct” (i.e. no longer speaking out against homosexuality, abortion, divorce for any cause, women preachers/elders/deacons, etc.).

### **A building where religious people meet together**

Some folks act and talk as if the church is nothing more than a building where religious people come together. However, when Saul was persecuting the church (in Acts 8:1-3), what was he doing? Was he destroying a physical structure by using hammers, saws, and such things? Or, was he harming the people who belonged to Jesus Christ? The answer is obvious from the text. Yet, many people today talk of “going to church” as if the church is a physical structure!

Consider some characteristics of a church that becomes nothing but a meeting place. (1) Members of that “church” will probably view their responsibilities lightly (if they recognize any responsibility at all). This is only reasonable. After all, if you are someone who “attends church” it carries far less responsibility than being part of the church! (2) Members who have this view of the church will be less likely to become involved in one another’s lives. They will only view one another as attending the same church (gathering at the same building) every once in a while. They will not be devoted to helping one another live in the way God wants His people to be living. (3) It often develops the “see you next week” mentality. This mentality is demonstrated when people gather together “at church,” leave “church” (the building), and have minimal contact or interaction with one another until the next “meeting.”

## Christ

Some churches have reversed their role with Christ's role. These churches see themselves as being the head of the body, rather than giving Christ that exalted position. Colossians 1:18 sets these roles straight: "And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence." Christ is the Head of the body (which is the church). Yet, *churches* often begin to be seen as the giver and interpreter of the law. The Pope, bishops, priests, counsels, central governing bodies, "church creeds," etc. are all proof of this.

Furthermore, the church can be viewed as the savior, rather than Christ! Some believe that as long as they are on some church's "membership role" that they will go to Heaven. However, as we will observe, the church is the saved (i.e. it is composed of those who are saved). If an individual is not living properly in the eyes of God, he/she will not be saved (no matter what church's membership role he/she is on)!

There are certainly some problems concerning the church that exalts itself to the role of Christ. (1) It dictates and changes the law rather than simply upholding the law that God has revealed. (2) It becomes a human organization that submits to men and women rather than a spiritual kingdom that is subject only to Jesus Christ. (3) It may teach salvation through a church rather than salvation through Jesus Christ!

## A group of denominations

The church is often believed to be a collection of all the (so-called) "Christians" from all of the various churches. So, the church is often believed to consist of "Christians" from the Catholic Church, "Christians" from the Baptist Church, "Christians" from the Methodist Church, "Christians" from the Lutheran Church, "Christians" from the Pentecostal Church, "Christians" from the Nazarene Church, etc., etc., etc.

Therefore, what has been created is known as "unity in diversity" (or, ecumenism). That is, folks believe that we can all believe and follow the Scriptures differently – but all still be acceptable to

God and be part of the one church of Christ. However, this is ***not*** the true unity that is described and commanded within the pages of the Bible. Consider the unity God demands, as described in 1 Corinthians 1:10: "Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment."

Furthermore, this concept of the church entirely misses the teachings of the church in the Scriptures! The church (according to the Scriptures) is composed of individuals who have been obedient to the gospel's plan of salvation (hear, believe, repent, confess Christ, and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins). However, the overwhelming majority of churches today teach different plans of salvation. Many teach the "Sinner's Prayer," faith only, sprinkling/pouring as acceptable methods of baptism, infant baptism, etc. Therefore, those who are involved in these denominations and follow these false plans of salvation simply cannot be part of Christ's one true church – because they have not done what God commands for salvation! In addition, there is a pattern for local churches to follow (a blueprint that is revealed in the pages of the New Testament) – and there are very few churches that actually follow this pattern!

## Summary

Certainly, there are many false ideas about the church. I am sure that these represent only a few of the false ideas that exist. I am also certain that additional points could be made about each of the things we've just discussed. However, my intention has simply been to draw some contrasts between these false ideas and the truth about the church that is taught in God's word (as we will now begin to discuss).

## ***How The Word Is Used***

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Now that we have discussed the importance of using the term "church" accurately and identified some common misconceptions about what the

“church” is, let’s devote the rest of this lesson to allowing God’s word to instruct us concerning the proper applications of this word.

## Some definitions

Before we consider the passages themselves, consider how a few Greek scholars define the Greek word “ekklesia.”

(1) *Thayer’s Greek Definitions*: “(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 council for the purpose of deliberating; 1b) the assembly of the Israelites; 1c) any gathering or throng of men assembled by chance, tumultuously; 1d) in the Christian sense.” [Thayer, Joseph Henry. *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Published in 1886. Using: E-Sword. Version 10.2.1. Rick Myers. Copyright 2000-2013.]

(2) *Robertson’s Word Pictures* says that the word “ekklesia” originally meant assembly (Acts 19:39), but, also came to refer to an “unassembled assembly” (Acts 8:3) (see comments on Matthew 16:18). [Robertson, A.T. *Word Pictures in the New Testament*. Published in 1930-1933. Using: E-Sword. Version 10.2.1. Rick Myers. Copyright 2000-2013.]

(3) *Strong’s Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries*: “...a calling out, that is, (concretely) a popular meeting, especially a religious congregation...assembly, church.” [*Strong’s Bible Dictionary*. Published in 1890. Using: E-Sword. Version 10.2.1. Rick Myers. Copyright 2000-2013.]

(4) *Mounce’s Expository Dictionary* says that “ekklesia” refers to the “called-out ones” of God.” Then, Mounce makes reference to the fact that the word had a secular use referring to a gathering, a Jewish use referring to the assembly of God’s people in the Old Testament, and then a Christian use referring to disciples of Jesus Christ. [Mounce, W. (2006). *Mounce’s complete expository dictionary of Old & New Testament words*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan.]

Each one of these definitions are useful to us in developing a better understanding of the word “church” (the Greek word “ekklesia”). However,

again I assert that you do not need to be a Greek scholar or use Greek word study tools in order to understand the Bible. So, let’s allow the Bible to be its own best commentary – and see how it uses the word “ekklesia.”

## A general assembly

In Acts chapter 19, Paul was preaching in the city of Ephesus. During this time, a man named Demetrius (a silversmith by trade, who made silver replicas of the temple of Diana and made great profit through this work) stirred up the people of Ephesus against Paul. He was telling the people that the temple of Diana would be despised and her magnificence would be destroyed through the teaching of the apostle. In response to the things being said by Demetrius (who was primarily motivated by greed), the Ephesians became full of wrath and “the whole city was filled with confusion, and rushed into the theater with one accord” (v. 29).

In this context, notice verses 32, 39, and 41. Acts 19:32 says, “Some therefore cried one thing and some another, for the assembly was confused, and most of them did not know why they had come together.” Acts 19:39 says, “But if you have any other inquiry to make, it shall be determined in the lawful assembly.” And, Acts 19:41 says, “And when he had said these things, he dismissed the assembly.”

Notice the word which is translated “assembly” in each one of these passages. This is the Greek word “ekklesia.” Certainly, in this context, the word is not being used in a Christian sense in any way. Instead, it refers to a general assembly (a riot) of people in the city of Ephesus. So, we can conclude that the word can be used to denote a general assembly of those who were not Christians.

## The congregation of Israel

In Acts chapter 7, Stephen is preaching before a Jewish audience – giving a brief lesson in Jewish history and how Jewish people had routinely rejected God’s ways. As he does so, consider the reference he makes in Acts 7:38: “This is he who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the Angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with



our fathers, the one who received the living oracles to give to us.”

The word translated “congregation” in the NKJV is the Greek word “ekklesia.” Here, it is clearly used in reference to the Israelite nation (the Jewish people) when they were in the wilderness, after being brought out of Egyptian slavery. Certainly, the context in which this word is used helps us to conclude that the word “ekklesia” is being used with reference to the collection of the Israelites.

## **The people of God**

Though the Greek word can be used in the ways we have just observed (a general assembly and the assembly of the Jewish people), the word is most commonly used in the New Testament with reference to the people of God during the Christian/Gospel Age. The word is used frequently in the book of Acts and in the epistles which were written, but is only used twice in the gospels (in the book of Matthew). When the word is used in this sense, it is used with reference to the congregation of God/Christ. It does *not* refer to any building; but, to a group of people (Christians).

In 1 Corinthians 14, as Paul is dealing with the use of spiritual gifts, he instructs that these gifts be sought so that the church would be edified (or, spiritually built up in the faith). Notice 1 Corinthians 14:12: “Even so you, since you are zealous for spiritual gifts, let it be for the edification of the church that you seek to excel.” Clearly, these spiritual gifts were not for the purpose of building up a physical building – but in building up the people of God in the most holy faith!

Also notice how Paul uses the word in Galatians 1:13: “For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it.” Paul (then called Saul) had persecuted God’s church and had tried to destroy it! Notice that it was not just any assembly or group of people Paul had intended to bring harm upon; but, that it was God’s church (His group of people) he wanted to destroy. I would also encourage you to read the Biblical record of this persecution in Acts 8:1-3 and Acts 9:1-2 – and consider that Paul was not attempting to destroy

physical buildings; but, that he was interested in destroying the Christians who composed God’s church!

Furthermore, as the definition offered by Mounce suggested, the word “ekklesia” is derived from two Greek words which mean “to call” and “out of.” Certainly, the Scriptures would help us to understand that the church of God is composed of God’s “called out ones.” 1 Peter 2:9-10 says that Christians have been called out of darkness and into God’s marvelous light! Therefore, God’s church are people who have been separated from the sinful ways of darkness and are dedicated to accomplishing God’s holy and righteous purposes!

## **An assembly of God’s people**

Specifically, the Greek word “ekklesia” can be used in the Scriptures to refer to God’s people when they are assembled together. For instance, as Paul was giving instructions to the Corinthian church concerning their assemblies, consider what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35: “Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church.”

Certainly, Paul was not saying that Christian women were *always* forbidden to speak. Rather, Paul was giving particular instructions whenever the whole church assembled together. For instance, notice 1 Corinthians 14:23 and 26 to see this context: “Therefore if the whole church comes together in one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those who are uninformed or unbelievers, will they not say that you are out of your mind?... How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.”

Therefore, it was in these assemblies the women were commanded to keep silent. They were not always forbidden to speak. Nor were they forbidden to speak in a particular building. But, in the “churches” (assemblies) that are identified in 1 Corinthians 14:23 and 26 – when the whole

congregation would be assembled together. Note that we will talk more about the role of women in the assemblies of the church later in this series of lessons. For now, just appreciate the fact that the word can be used to denote the assemblies of God's people.

### **An unassembled assembly**

Not only can the word "ekklesia" have reference to the people of God whenever they are assembled together in one place (as we saw in the previous point); but, it can have reference to the collection of God's people even when they are not assembled together. A.T. Robertson brought this to our attention whenever we considered his comments on Matthew 16:18.

Notice Acts 8:1-3 regarding Saul's persecution of the church to see this point: "Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison."

When this great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem, how was it that Saul persecuted the church? Verse 3 said that Saul made havoc of the church by entering every house and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison. So, Saul persecuted the church by persecuting the individual members of the church. Notice that the congregation does not appear to have been assembled together when Saul was said to have persecuted the church. Still, they were collectively referred to as the church. That said, no one individual can properly be referenced as a church. Instead, each individual Christian is simply a member of the church, the body of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 12:27)!

### **Used in a singular sense**

One of only two uses of the term "ekklesia" in the four gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) is found in Matthew 16:18 – in the form of a promise

made by Jesus Christ. He said, "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it."

This is a particularly significant passage regarding the church – as Jesus Christ promises that He would build His church. We will notice some more of the implications from this passage in our next lesson. For now, observe the fact that Jesus Christ only promised to establish one church. Notice that the word "church" is singular, not plural. That is, Jesus Christ would only establish one congregation of people. He would only be Head of "one body," the church (see Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 4:4).

Though we will give greater attention to the "universal church" in a future lesson, recognize that Jesus is clearly making reference to a single group who would be His people. This is what I refer to whenever I use the term "universal church." This is the totality of the saved who belong to Jesus Christ. Again, in reference to this "universal church," the Bible refers to the "church" in a singular sense.

### **Used in a local sense**

Finally, not only can this word be used in a broad sense, referring to all of God's people collectively (the "universal church"); but, it can also be used in a local sense. When it is used in a "local" sense, it refers to a church in a local geographic area. Acts 11:22 references the "church in Jerusalem." 1 Corinthians 1:2 references the "church of God which is at Corinth." 1 Thessalonians 1:1 references the "church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." And, there are many other similar references to local churches in the Scriptures.

Therefore, when the word is used in this local sense, it is sometimes used in a plural sense. For instance, the word is used in reference to multiple churches in a local region. 1 Corinthians 16:19 references the "churches of Asia." Galatians 1:2 addresses the book of Galatians to the "churches of Galatia." Furthermore, Romans 16:16 references "churches of Christ" in a general sense without limitations of a specific region. Then, Romans 16:4 makes reference to the "churches of the Gentiles."

Now, please understand that these passages do not discuss different denominations or indicate a hierarchical structure (like a Catholic diocese). Rather, these passages simply refer to different congregations of Christians in local geographic areas. More attention will be given to a study of the local church in future lessons in this series.

## ***Conclusion***

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After observing some of the ways in which this Greek word is used in the New Testament, you should be aware of one fact: You must look to the context of the passage in order to determine how the word is being used! You must allow the Bible to be its own best commentary!

Now that we have established this introductory information to the Bible subject of the church, it is my hope that we have established a firm foundation upon which we can build over the next seven lessons. Again, I encourage you to reflect upon the things we have studied and destroy any unbiblical ideas you may have about the church so that you can build your knowledge of the church only according to the teachings of God's word!

## ***Study Questions***

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What is the church of Christ?

What is the word "ekklesia"?

### **1. Why This Study Is Important**

Do you have to be well-versed in the Greek language in order to be saved or to please God?

How will a study of this Greek word help you speak as the oracles of God?

How will a study of this Greek word help set the proper foundation for our study?

How will a study of this Greek word help you overcome misconceptions of the church?

### **2. Common Misconceptions About The Church**

Briefly discuss each of the following misconceptions about the church:

1. An earthly organization –
  
2. A social club –
  
3. A political machine –
  
4. A building where religious people meet together –
  
5. Christ –
  
6. A group of denominations –

### **3. How The Word Is Used**

Provide some definitions for the Greek word “ekklesia.”

Discuss how the word is used in the following ways:

1. A general assembly –
  
2. The congregation of Israel –
  
3. The people of God –
  
4. An assembly of God’s people –
  
5. An unassembled assembly –
  
6. Used in a singular sense –
  
7. Used in a local sense -