

SEED & BREAD

FOR THE SOWER ISA.55:10 FOR THE EATER
BRIEF BIBLICAL MESSAGES FROM

THE WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRY

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EKKLESIA TRUTH

In the spring of 1934 a group of about fifty-five ministers gathered in an open conference at the North Shore Church in Chicago. They were there at the invitation of Pastor John C. O'Hair for the purpose of considering Biblical matters that were then in fervent dispute among the fundamentalist churches in that area. One of these subjects was baptism, which had become a matter of heated controversy due to the fact that Pastor O'Hair had for a number of years been presenting a radical view of this topic on his daily radio programs. I was there through his personal invitation and was one of the speakers.

From the discussions of the first day it became quite clear that the one subject that was going to dominate the conference throughout was the question, "When did the church begin?" And by the second day it also became apparent that there was not a man there, including myself, who had any workable definition as to what the church was or is in Scripture. So, there we were, thrashing about, making statements pro and con, trying to decide when something began when none of us knew what the thing was. The problem arose again and again, but it always remained an unanswered question.

As would be expected, there were many laudatory statements made concerning "the church," but none of these eulogistic declarations told us what it was. Over and over it was said that "the church is the body of Christ," and none could object to this, but it was of no help in solving the problem that was under discussion. It simply imposed a second difficult question: "What is the body of Christ?" There were numerous remarks about "the visible and the invisible church," prompting one brother to affirm: "All churches in the New Testament were quite visible." But the "visible and invisible" formula did not answer the question, "What is the church?" or "When did the church begin?"

The conference ended after four days with nothing being settled. No advances were

made, but many rejoiced in the opportunity for open, unhindered discussion. A second conference in the fall of that year ended in multiple disagreements. Pastor O'Hair felt we were "going too far too fast," and it seemed that most participants wanted to drop from the discussions everything that was controversial. However, I had gone into the conference in order to learn, seeking for help in uncovering the truth. If I could not learn in fellowship with others, then I would learn alone. The quest for truth became the supreme purpose in my life, and now after forty-six years it is still the goal of all my endeavors.

In a report which *Time* magazine gave of the first assembly of The World Council of Churches, one sentence reads as follows: "The greatest church meeting since the Reformation could not even agree on a definition of the word "church" (*Time*, Sept. 13, 1948). This was true then and it is still true today.

The main reason for this inability to agree can be found in the fact that the word "church" has no definition. This can be verified by consulting an unabridged dictionary. There you will find what are supposed to be definitions, but no basic meaning out of which all other usages are derived. You will also find that the word "church" is a fickle, ephemeral, erratic word upon which no approximate meaning can be fixed. So it becomes a case of use it as you please, for any purpose you may desire, make it say what you want it to say, and make it to be what you want it to be.

In recent years while listening to certain religious programs on television I have heard a song, usually sung as a solo, in which the singer vociferously demands, "Let the church be the church." This ultimatum often results in some hearty *Amen's* from the audience. But I am inclined to question whether any of these soloists or those who so heartily approve their words can tell us what "the church" is or what it must do in order to be what it is supposed to be.

In the subject under consideration most of the difficulties arise from the character of the word "church." This is not a sound word since no approximate meaning can be fixed upon it. It is a weasel word that will wiggle out of any trap that is set for it. It is a Humpty-Dumpty word that means just what the user wants it to mean, neither more nor less. It is a chameleon which changes its color to suit its environment. It is a harlot among words, having no permanent relationships to anyone idea. And if any think my words to be too strong, let them note that in California we find The Satanic Church and the First Homosexual Church.

In my own experience as a teacher the word "church" has often turned out to be a wet blanket that will snuff out any flame of truth that God has kindled in regard to the truth concerning His ekklesia. Translators have literally forced this word into the New Testament, not because it represented or translated the Greek word *ekklesia*, but

because they wanted to get their religious organizations into the Bible. What other conclusion can we come to when we find that they failed to so translate *ekklesia* in Acts 19:32, 39 and 41 when it worked contrary to their position? Martin Luther fought vigorously against the use of the word "church" (*kirk*, in German) but lost the battle.

It was facts and experiences such as these that drove me to a study of the Greek word *ekklesia*. And one of the first conclusions I came to was that the marvelous phenomenon that is called *ekklesia* in the New Testament has no relationship or connection with the great religious monstrosity that parades under the name of "the church" today. I have done a vast amount of work in seeking to find for myself and to explain to others that miraculous entity that was known as the *ekklesia* of God in the Acts period. My findings, along with those of many others, have convinced me that the *ekklesia* of the first century was totally different in every respect from that which is called "the church" in both the Roman and Protestant camps today. Certainly in the Roman church and in the Protestant churches we see something that men have built, and it borders on blasphemy to say that this is what the Lord meant when He promised to build of Himself His *ekklesia* (Matt. 16: 18).

Men without number have sought to reproduce the divine *ekklesia* that existed in the days of Peter and Paul. By making extravagant claims they have often succeeded in gathering together a few or many followers in some form of organization with themselves as the head, giving themselves some Biblical title such as apostle, elder, or bishop; then when the organization has prospered numerically and financially they pragmatically insist that the results demonstrate that the true church has now been restored among men, even the one the Lord promised to build. Such counterfeits can be passed off to many, who eagerly seize upon the opportunity of belonging to "the true church." Such men are capable in deceiving themselves and deceiving others. They are masters of deception and self-deception. We can expect their number to greatly increase in the concluding days of this dispensation (2 Tim. 3:13).

All who - claim relationship to God owe it to Him to make an objective attempt to understand the full and exact meaning of the Greek word *ekklesia*. However, all studies seem to begin with the preconception that this word has to mean something that will relate it to that which is called "the church" today. This is a fallacy that must be purged from our minds if we would give the Lord a clean slate to write upon.

It is a serious error to take an important word such as *ekklesia* and fasten upon it some inane meaning which reduces it to absurdity. Most students know quite well that this was the name given to the legislative assemblies in the Greek city-states. This is true, but when they deduce from this that these assemblies were so-called because their members were "called out of their homes" to transact official business, they stultify the meaning of this word. Having discovered that the word is formed from *ek* (out) and *kaleo* (called), they take the prefix *ek* and make it to mean severed from.

This is not the truth. This prefix means the same as if one should say that his arm is out of his torso. Then having found that one meaning of *kaleo* is "to call, invite, or bid," they ignore the fact that in at least 96 out of the 146 times this word is found in the New Testament, it cannot have any such meaning. So, combining these two errors they say that since Christians have been called out of the world, we are the church.

Continuing in their error they cite as proof that Israel was an ekklesia (Acts 7:38) since she had been called out of Egypt. And while it was entirely true that Israel was an ekklesia, it was not because she had been called out of Egypt. As a nation Israel was destined to be an ekklesia because she had been given a mediatorial position that was out of God. See Gen. 12:3; Deu. 7:6; 14:2; 26:28,19.

There is probably no one word in common use in the English language that will express the exact meaning of the Greek word *ekklesia*. When a translator comes upon a situation such as this, there is no value in using a word which in no way expresses its meaning. An untranslatable word should be brought into our own language; that is, it should be transposed, and a meaning based upon its usage should be attached to it. And since the word ecclesiastical has long had a place in English, we should have no trouble making a place for *ekklesia*. This word means "out-positioned," and is used to describe individuals, companies, or nations which have a position out of another. Its highest use is when used of one who has a position out of God.

In the realm of things that are certain, we know that it is the purpose of the Lord Jesus Christ to build an ekklesia that will be in fixed relationship to Him when He governs the world. He has announced His purpose to build it, and when all is ready He will present it to Himself a glorious ekklesia, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it shall be holy and without blemish (Eph. 5:27). This is a certainty, but it is also a certainty that there is nothing on earth today that claims to be "the church" which can qualify for this glorious position.

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