

The church of the New Testament

by Hendrik Joubert

What picture does the word *church* conjure up in your mind? Do you see a beautiful architectural structure? Since it is considered the *house* of God, it is supposed to be impressive? I cannot tell you with confidence what picture it painted in the minds of the Greek speaking people of New Testament times, but the simplicity of the term is remarkable. A look at the word in that language causes drastic changes the image in the mind and promotes a deeper understanding and appreciation for the *ekklesia* revealed in the New Testament.

The word *ekklesia* is formed from the two terms “*ek*” and “*klesis*,” the first meaning “*out of*” and the latter “*a calling*.” It refers to a group of people who were called together, or who gathers for a specific purpose. The *calling out* may be formal, or it may be spontaneous – linked with a purpose. The crowd which gathered rather spontaneously in defense of *Artemis of the Ephesians* (**Acts 19:28**) is referred to as an *ekklesia*. Now notice how the term paints a different picture in your mind as we consider some of the Scriptures dealing with the *church*.

In **Matthew 16:18** the Lord promises to *build* His church upon the fact that He is ***the Christ, the Son of the living God. (Matthew 16:16)*** He is ***the STONE WHICH WAS REJECTED by you, THE BUILDERS, but WHICH BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER stone. Acts 4:11. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians 3:11.***

The term *build* is obviously not literal. Consider it against the background of the meaning of *ekklesia*. The Lord is promising to *call out* a body of people that will identify with Him, wear His ***Name***, and become part of Him. (**Acts 4:12**). The *building* will start some time in the future – I will build my *ekklesia*. The very next statement suggests that it would start after His resurrection; ***the gates of Hades*** (death) would not prevent Him from doing so. It also confirms that those who are part of it ***will not be hurt by the second death. (Revelation 2:11)***. It is in **Acts 2** we find this body coming into existence as the Lord adds daily to the 3000 who obeyed the call through Peter. (**Acts 2:41, 47**)

Already some familiar passages come to mind, but stay with me for a while before you search through the Scriptures with excitement. Notice the clarity of the statement Paul makes in **2 Thessalonians 2:14: *It was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.*** It is not certain what you will think of next, but notice **Romans 1:16-17: *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “BUT THE RIGHTEOUS man SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.”***

Pause for a moment as you consider the simplicity of the terms we are dealing with here. The Lord Jesus died on the cross to be the *perfect sacrifice* for sin. This sacrifice becomes the foundation of the gracious call by which sinners may be pardoned. This *good news* is to be proclaimed to all nations and ***He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned. Mark 16:16.*** Those who answer the *call*, as illustrated in ***Acts 2:38-41***, are added to the body of Christ, the church. ***Ephesians 1:22-23, Colossians 1:18.*** Thus the *ekklesia* was bought with the blood of God. ***Acts 20:28.***

Let me suggest a few more passages to work on the picture in the mind. ***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. 1 Peter 2:4-5.*** Notice the direct connection with *The Living Stone*, but also the way that the *ekklesia* is connected with the concept of the temple and the priesthood. Each pardoned sinner added to the *body of Christ* becomes a *living stone* in this beautiful, *living* structure. Each priest becomes ***a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. Romans 12:1.*** The responsibility of each *living stone* is further emphasized: ***...but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior;¹⁶ because it is written, "YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY." 1 Peter 1:15-16.*** These are called out of the world, a life of sin. ***...COME OUT FROM THEIR MIDST AND BE SEPARATE... 1 Corinthians 6:17***

Many other questions are answered in the same spontaneous way in which the church of Christ comes into existence, and keeps on growing as the Lord adds daily those who are being saved. ***(Acts 2:47)*** Church is an important concept as it refers directly to the body of saved. No man should insult God by tampering with the call and starting his or her own church in the name of grace. ***(Jude 3-4)*** You become part of the call you answer, either the call which comes from heaven, or the call which comes from men. Which will it be for you?