

# PRESENT TRUTH

A Teaching Letter of Lifestream Teaching Ministries

*For this reason I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things, though you know and are established in the present truth. (2 Peter 1:12 NKJV)*

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## WHAT IS CHURCH?

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When the King James translators came to the Greek word "ekklesia" they used a Scottish word (kirk) as the translation instead of properly translating "ekklesia". "Kirk" means a building, literally "the house of God". That is how "ekklesia" came to be translated as "church". The corresponding Greek word for "kirk" is "kuriakos", which means "house of God". So, by the King James translators using the meaning of "kuriakos" instead of the meaning of "ekklesia" we have an immediate mis-understanding of the meaning of what we call church.

The meaning of house of God during the 1600's was culturally clear because they had built monasteries, cathedrals, and meeting places for centuries. Their natural frame of reference for the "house of God" was the building.

The word, "ekklesia," means "the called out ones"--people called out of darkness into the kingdom of the Son of God; people called out of darkness established upon the truth that He is the Christ. But the word, "church," the way that we use it has never properly reflected that meaning. It has always meant a meeting hall—a place, not a people. Because of this, we have never had, in the English Bible, a proper rendition of what the Lord Jesus Christ said in Matthew 16:18. So, remember, every time you read the word, "church," it is the word, "ekklesia"--called out people.

Therefore we have a split in meaning produced by the King James translators. Instead of the ekklesia (the people), they introduced "the house of God" (a place). Now we have to deal with the building as the house of God instead of the people as living stones built together as the temple of the Lord.

### Meaning of Church

Although the Most High does not dwell in houses made by human hands, [Acts 7:46-50] we have adopted the "house of God" meaning for church and made the building to mean church. We have made this religious meaning to be more important than the scriptural meaning of church. In order

to remove from its meaning all of the tradition which has been attached to the word, we need to establish its original meaning from the Scriptures.

As wzx said earlier the Greek word translated as church is ekklesia and has a definite and specific meaning—an assembly formed by calling people out of a larger group. We forget that "ekklesia" as a word was used in society before Jesus used it in His teachings. Would not Jesus use it with its normal meaning? If He didn't use it that way, then would He not have explained its meaning to us?

The Greek word is used three times in Acts chapter 19 (verses 32, 39, 41) with its secular meaning and is translated as "assembly". This assembly was called in the City of Ephesus to deal with the effects of Paul's ministry there. We can learn several things from the usage of ekklesia in these instances of its secular usage.

1. they went to gather in the theater; this establishes the fact that ekklesia is not a place but a people.
2. not all people in Ephesus were allowed to attend, only those that met the requirements of citizenship and were freemen.

The same is true of the ekklesia of Jesus Christ.

This is how the Thayer Greek Dictionary defines ekklesia:

Thayer Definition:

- 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 the council for the purpose of deliberating

This primary definition fits with its secular usage in Acts 19. The normal meaning of ekklesia can be stated as "people called out to convene for a purpose as a public council."

This is also consistent with the way Jesus used the word ekklesia in Matthew 16. The basis of being called out is the revelation of who Jesus is. The function or purpose of convening is governmental. The result is the administration of the things of the Kingdom of God.

## The Question

Now comes the problem question. How many believers does it take to constitute an ekklesia? Is there a critical mass necessary or is there some other requirement that is required before a gathering of believers becomes an ekklesia?

Most of the current thinking on this, especially by the house church groups, is that two or three constitute an ekklesia. This is based on this verse in Matthew:

[Matthew 18:20 NASB](#)

(20) "For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst."

However, this verse does not say that where two or three are gathered, there is the ekklesia. It simply says that when two or three have been led together into His name (literal meaning of the

Greek), He is there too.

Regardless of the House Church interpretation of the “two or three” verse, we know that two or three do not make an ekklesia because of another verse that Jesus spoke.

Matthew 18:15-17 NASB

(15) "If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother.

(16) "But if he does not listen *to you*, take one or two more with you, so that BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED.

(17) "If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

In these verses there is your brother, yourself and one or two more with you making a total of three or four at least. This meets the criteria for “two or three” gathered together. Certainly Jesus is in the midst of this gathering in order to bring reconciliation. However, if reconciliation doesn't happen, then you are to take it to the ekklesia. If your “two or three” gathering were an “ekklesia” then you would not have to take the problem to the “ekklesia”; therefore, the “two or three” gathering is NOT an ekklesia; therefore it must be something different.

The only place in the Scriptures where there seems to be some documentation of becoming an ekklesia is in the book of Acts. When Paul and Barnabas were sent out from Antioch they traveled through a number of towns preaching Jesus. The believers that resulted from this are called “disciples”. On their return trip some time later, they retraced their path back through these towns and met with the disciples that had continued in the Lord. As Paul and Barnabas made these second visits, they were appointing elders. As they did this the terminology now moved from groups of disciples to ekklesia. It would appear then that the transition from groups of believers to ekklesia occurs as elders are appointed. This suggests to me that the governmental aspects of ekklesia cannot be accomplished without functioning elders.

Another interesting set of Scriptures regarding the ekklesia occurs in the book of Revelation.

Revelation 2:1-5 NASB

(1) "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this:

(2) 'I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them *to be* false;

(3) and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary.

(4) 'But I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love.

(5) 'Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place-- unless you repent.

We are told at the end of chapter one of Revelation that the Lord is moving among seven golden lampstands. These lampstands are identified as seven “ekklesias”, with Ephesus being one of the seven. The Lord threatens (this is not an empty threat) to remove their lampstand if they do not repent. That means that they would cease to be an “ekklesia”.

Now, how do we understand this? The Ephesian Ekklesia is removed from its place. Does this mean that there are no believers at all in Ephesus? Or does it mean that the believers that are left in Ephesus will not longer be an ekklesia? It would seem to me to be the latter. If so, then this surely shows that you can have groups of believers without these groups of believers being an “ekklesia”.

It would certainly seem that there is something about “ekklesia” that we have not understood. It would also certainly seem that our concept of “church” is completely skewed from the “ekklesia” of the Lord.

[This Present Truth Teaching Letter is excerpted from my new book  
[“Will the Real Church Please Stand Up?”](#)  
Available in both electronic and print format  
Click on title to go to the Lifestream Teaching Ministries book web page.]

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