

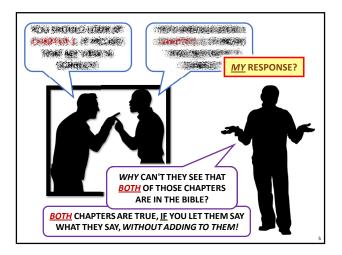
HOW should we look at an issue like this?

- 1. We would *like* to find a Scripture passage that gives us the answer... but there are none.
 - <u>All</u> of the passages either focus on "Israel" (and not "church"), or on "church" (and not "Israel").
 - We should consider the possibility that, if the Bible doesn't have an answer to our question, maybe we're asking the wrong question!

2. What normally happens:

- People combine passages from different contexts, make assumptions, or insert the one concept into passages that mention the other concept.
- The end result is people arguing over who's view is "correct" –
 each claiming that "their" chosen Scripture passage "proves"
 the other viewpoint is wrong.





- Instead of all this arguing, we should ask: What can we learn, if we let each passage speak for itself, without inserting into it things that are not there? *
 - We would definitely learn something, but it might not be the things we *want* to find.
- 4. We need to be willing to let *Scripture* change the way we think on issues, so that our views will begin to match the Bible... and not the other way around. THIS INCLUDES:
 - Letting Scripture change our foundational perspectives and assumptions.
 - Accepting what Scripture passages teach without adding to, or subtracting from them.
 - ☐ Defining concepts the way *the Bible* defines them.
 - * (There are times when we need something outside the immediate context. Example: If the passage refers to a "city," we may need to find out what city is being referred to!)

A BASIC METHOD FOR UNDERSTANDING SCRIPTURE.

This is a basic and valuable starting point for studying the Bible. Start with the passage itself, before taking into consideration what other passages say.

We need to pay attention to:

- 1 The words and their meanings.
- (2) How those words connect.
- 3 The context of the passage.
- 4 What other passages say.



In the early church...

Their "church-Israel" issue involved the nature of salvation – \underline{not} the relationship between the two entities.

Then some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."

And after engaging these men in sharp debate, Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question.

Act 15:1-2 (BSB)

- Today, our "church-Israel" issues are different. To complicate matters, we have changed the definitions of some of the words; so when we do look, we don't recognize what Scripture actually says!
- This is especially true of the word "CHURCH."

(2)

Today, we normally <u>don't</u> use the word "church" the way it is used in the Bible!

- ① The Bible <u>NEVER</u> uses the word "CHURCH" to describe a BUILDING! NEVER.
- · God defines the church as "people."
- The building might be described as a house, a meeting place, a synagogue, etc.; but NEVER as a "church"!
- "Going to a church" if they could even think in those terms – would have meant visiting a group of Christians, wherever they might be located... even if in a field, far away from any building.



(2) The word "church" was <u>NOT</u> a special word or a "technical term" that referred specifically to Christians, or in some way defined people as being "Christian."

Today, the word has meanings that did not exist when the Bible was written. We talk about "the church" as an institution, a denomination, a group of Christians (local or worldwide), the Christians living in a specific time period, etc.

- Some of the slides in this presentation illustrate this.
- Is it WRONG to use the word "church" this way?
 - Within OUR context of life, it might not be wrong to do so.
 - The problem occurs when we superimpose OUR modern concepts into the <u>Bible</u>.

THE KEY ISSUE IS: We need to recognize the <u>difference</u> between the way WE use that word and the way THEY used it!

3 The modern concept of "church" has become associated with many customs and practices that have nothing to do with the New Testament concept of "church."

Though the practices aren't always *wrong*, many of them distract people – keeping them from focusing on what <u>the Bible</u> defines as the reason(s) for coming together as a group.

Many modern "church practices" were totally unheard of at the beginning of Christianity.

Some of them can actually be deceptive.



I'M ON THE LIST.
THAT MEANS I'M
A CHRISTIAN!

There is NO SUCH LIST in Scripture! This is a human invention that occurred much later.

- 4 Even people who talk about the New Testament Greek word for "church" often misinterpret it!
- Typically, we are told something like this:

The Greek word is ἑκκλησία (ekklēsia), and it is a combination of two words: ἐκ (ek), which means "out of," and καλέω (kaleō), which means "called." And so, the church is comprised of people who have been "called out" of the world...

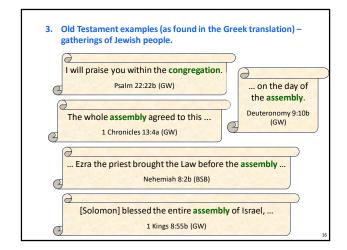
- It is true that Christians are "called out" of the world. But it is NOT because of the word ἐκκλησία (ekklēsia), or "church"!
- Archaeologists, linguists, historical researchers, etc., can all show that this word was used for centuries before the New Testament era, and there is no record of it ever having such a connotation!
 - (If it ever did have such a connotation, it was lost in the early development of the Greek language.)
- Here is what the New Testament word really means:

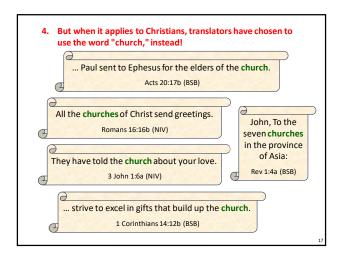


- It was a common word not special, but normal to everyday life. It was
 used by Christians, Jews, the unsaved anybody who wanted to use it.
 It is found in the Old Testament (Greek translation), as well as in the
 New Testament.
- HERE IS THE PROBLEM: Most translators use <u>different</u> words, based on <u>who</u> is assembling or coming together in a group... BUT IT'S THE SAME GREEK WORD IN EACH CASE!
 - They use "ASSEMBLY" (sometimes "CONGREGATION") if it involves unsaved people, Jews, or the Old Testament (Greek translation).
 - They normally use "CHURCH" if it involves Christians.
- There is no *linguistic* reason to separate things this way. <u>The early Christians</u> didn't! <u>We</u> do, simply because we are following customs that were *invented centuries later*.

Why did they pick the word that we translate as "church"? Because: 1) It was a common term. Why should they pick something totally different? 2 It was often found in the Old Testament (Greek translation, which was the Bible $\underline{\textit{they}}$ used). Most New Testament passages refer to Christians. That is because the New Testament is about Christianity! Even so, the reason we know when the word "church" refers to Christians is because of the context or qualifying terms. I have written to the church about this, but CONTEXT Diotrephes ... will not accept our instruction. 3 John 1:9 (BSB) QUALIFYING From Paul... To God's church in the city of Corinth TERM and to all God's holy people everywhere in Greece. ("GOD'S") 2 Corinthians 1:1 (GW)

How the word was used: 1. Used to describe gatherings of unsaved people. Meanwhile the assembly was in turmoil. "[The matter] must be settled in a legal assembly." After he had said this, he dismissed the assembly. Acts 19:32a, 39b, 41 (BSB) 2. Used to describe gatherings of Jewish people. (N.T. examples.) [Moses] was in the assembly in the wilderness ... (In both of these verses, Acts 7:38a (BSB) a the KIV translation "I will praise you within the congregation." uses the word Hebrews 2:12b (GW) "church"!) Œ





So what's the significance of all this? ① If we want to know the relationship between Israel and the "church," we are probably asking the wrong question. • There are differences between us and the nation Israel... but the word "church" ("assembly") is not the reason, since that word applied to both! • (There might be a question to ask... but we would have to reword it.) WHEN PEOPLE ASK: "ACCORDING TO THE BIBLE, WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ISRAEL AND THE CHURCH?" • If we use our definition of "church": We will end up with the wrong answer (since our definition is foreign to the Bible). • If we use the Bible's definition of "church": Asking the question will make no sense (since the word "church" - or "assembly" - applies equally to both Jews and Christians).

- ② There is practical value in knowing how <u>Scripture</u> uses the word "church" (or "assembly").
 - It helps us to better understand the <u>Bible</u>. In some issues, an
 incorrect view about "church" might not lead us into serious
 error. But when dealing with issues such as "church vs. Israel,"
 it shows us that even the *question* is incorrect or misguided.
 - It shows us <u>our</u> obligations toward other Christians. It points to <u>our need</u> to "assemble" (or "come together") with other Christians, in order to fully function as a Christian.* There are many commands we <u>cannot</u> fulfill without doing so.
 - It discourages fakeness. It can't stop it 100%; but knowing that "church" just refers to "coming together as a group" makes it harder to associate it with "being saved."
 - * (For people who live in a country where there *aren't* any nearby Christians, the situation will be different. They are not *trying* to disobey these commands and avoid other Christians.)

(3) When we realize that the word "church" (or "assembly") does NOT define us as being "followers of Jesus," we can look for terms that DO define us!

WE GO TO

WE ASSEMBLE TOGETHER EVERY WEEK!

THAT PROVES WE ARE CHRISTIANS!

WRONG!!

- Such "defining terms" DO exist. The same terms also occur in the Old Testament; so they do not necessarily distinguish us (in the New Testament era) from Israel (at least those who were saved).*
 - * (It is not our purpose here to deal with the similarities and differences that may exist between the two.)

Here are two of those "defining" terms used in <u>Scripture</u> to describe saved people:

- 1 "Holy ones" (also translated as "holy people" or "God's people).*
 - This focuses on the relationship of God's people to God... as well as the type of life they want to live.
- 2 "Brothers" (modern translations may say "brothers and sisters.")**
 - This focuses on "family" the relationship that saved people have to each other. This also implies obligations to each other.
- * Many translations use the word "saints." This can be quite misleading, since many people associate the word "saint" with concepts that have <u>no</u> basis in Scripture. The emphasis is on <u>us</u> being holy. This attitude will influence all that we do.
- ** In most languages in the world, the term "brothers" is *generic* in such a context as this. It is <u>not</u> a reference to gender. In societies that have abandoned the nature of language, their own connection to history, and even the reasons Scripture defines concepts in such ways, we may have to use both terms "brother" and "sister." (*This is yet another term that has been corrupted by modern society.*)

Whether or not we go to meetings does <u>not</u> define us... but these types of terms <u>do</u>:

1 "Holy ones" 2 "Brothers" (or "brothers and sisters.")

I AM PURSUING HOLINESS, BECAUSE THAT IS MY CALLING!

CORRECT!!

CHRISTIANS AS FAMILY,
BECAUSE THAT IS WHAT
THEY ARE!

- Fakes may feel threatened by these terms, because the terms imply obligations toward God and toward other people.
 BUT THIS IS HOW <u>SCRIPTURE</u> DEFINES US!
 - ✓ Fakes tend to treat such terms as empty symbolism or merely figurative (meaningless) expressions, and just focus on "going to meetings" or "doing church."

>> Today's MISSION << GROW!

➡ Learning to understand <u>Scripture</u> the way it presents itself is a lifetime endeavor. God's grace makes it possible for us to grow in knowledge... but we must be willing to grow!

But **grow** in the **grace and knowledge** of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.

2 Peter 3:18 (NIV)

(2)

Learning to understand who we are. Since "church" does not define us, we can focus on the significance of concepts that do define us – like "holy" and "brother/sister."

Credits

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