

WE HAVE BEEN LOOKING AT ISSUES RELATED TO ISRAEL AND THE CHURCH.

Last week, we were looking at what the word "church" meant at the time the New Testament was written.



THE <u>EARLY CHURCH</u> DID NOT USE THE WORD "CHURCH" THE WAY WE NORMALLY DO.

- FOR US: The word has become a "technical term," and can refer to an institution, a denomination, a group of Christians at a specific location or living in a specific time period, etc.
- ✓ FOR THEM: It meant any group of people assembling together –
 Jew or gentile, saved or unsaved. It was a common word, and
 was used of Israel in the Greek translation of the Old Testament.

THIS FACT HAS GREAT SIGNIFICANCE IN MANY WAYS.

- We need to realize that the "modern" definition is so ingrained in people's minds, that it is probably impossible to change it.
 - Modern definitions may be necessary in some instances. We
 often need to communicate concepts that the early Christians
 couldn't even think about! Consider our use of the phrase "the
 early church" or a reference to a "church denomination." etc.
 - ☼ There are some modern-day definitions that would be good for us to oppose − such as equating the word "church" with a building.
 - ☼ In other cases, we might be able to replace the word "church" with "Christian."
 - Context is important! If we recognize the different ways the word is used, we can distinguish between the way we typically use that word, and the way the New Testament typically uses it.

Since the word "church" did <u>not</u> have a special "technical" significance when it was originally used ...

- 2. Inserting a "technical" significance into the New Testament may result in wrong conclusions.
 - It doesn't always do so. Since we often use the word "church" as synonymous with "Christians," what Scripture says about <u>Christians</u> will be true about Christians who have <u>assembled</u> together for worship ("church").
 - Sometimes it does. We can illustrate this with an argument that some make when talking about end-times issues.

Interesting trivia: The word "church(s)" is found about 110 times in the New Testament (if you include the few times it is translated as "assembly" or "congregation"). It is found about 100 times in the Greek translation of the Old Testament. (This is about 1/3 as often, since the O.T. is much larger than the N.T.)

EXAMPLE OF A WRONG CONCLUSION

 reached by giving a significance to the word "church" that does <u>not</u> exist in the New Testament.

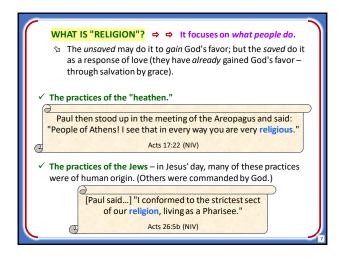
- What some argue: The absence of the word "church" in Revelation chapters 4-21 means that the "church" isn't present at that time.
- What it actually means: The absence of the word "church" doesn't prove anything about the presence or absence of Christians in this time period. All it means is that there is no mention of people meeting together. There are no statements indicating that Christians are <u>not</u> present.

Disclaimer: We are looking at end-time <u>issues</u>, not attempting to prove or disprove specific <u>interpretations of how things may occur</u>. If this prophecy viewpoint is correct, it will find its support in other Scripture passages. (In the future, we may observe things that seem to "disagree" with <u>other</u> viewpoints.

3. Many modern-day uses of the word "church" have unintended negative consequences.

Especially with all the rituals and practices that have been added, and are often deemed "necessary"; also when equating the word "church" with a building.

- It's a lot easier for "fakes" to feel at home. It is easy to be a fake, when "church" is defined as a building or a set of rituals – or something you occasionally "go to."
- It often blurs the distinction between "following Jesus" and "religion." With all the rituals and trappings, the "membership drives" (often with incentives or rewards), the committees and meetings and activities and programs, it is often difficult to see any difference. (Most unsaved people don't see any difference.)
 - Many "churches" act no different than a "club" or some type of "religious organization" – especially when the characteristics mentioned in the New Testament are absent.



✓ The practices of the saved – an expression of love for God and people ... a response – the result of being saved.
 "Christianity" is NOT a "religion"; but your response to being saved is. James illustrates this with two examples of a saved person's "religion":

 Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless.

 Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

 James 1:26-27 (NIV)

 ❖ Moral purity is an expression of love for God.
 ❖ Helping the weak (people who can't pay you back, such as destitute widows and orphans) is an expression of love for people.

Since our "identity" is NOT defined by the word "church,"
we should focus on concepts that do define it.

Many of these concepts also apply to the saved Jews of the Old Testament (or sometimes to the Jewish nation).

This should not be too surprising, since we have much in common with all the saved in all ages.

The difference:

They (those who were saved) trusted God to take care of the sin issue. We know how he did it, and we also trust him.

Under the Old Covenant, when the focus was on the nation, some of these terms might apply in a different way.

In the end, these things will NOT apply to the unsaved.

Some terms that identify us (instead of the word "church"). →

* (If Scripture uses these terms to identify us, shouldn't we?) *

God called Israel "holy." For the most part, these Scripture passages were directed toward the nation of Israel. God set them apart from all the other nations for a special purpose.

For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His prized possession out of all peoples on the face of the earth.

Deuteronomy 7:6 (BSB)

With this privilege came obligation: The people had an obligation to pursue holiness (even though many didn't do it). *

The Lord said to Moses, "Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: 'Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy.' "

Leviticus 19:1-2 (NIV); also in Leviticus 11:44-45; 20:7.

* (Many churches are just like this. There are fakes present, who don't pursue holiness.)

Under the New Covenant, God has made <u>us</u> holy.

By his will we have been made holy through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

Hebrews 10:10 (NET)

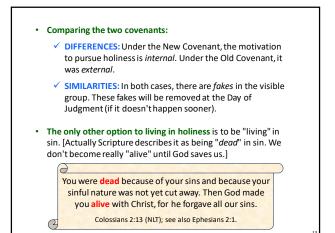
He has saved us and called us to a holy life ...
2 Timothy 1:9a (NIV)

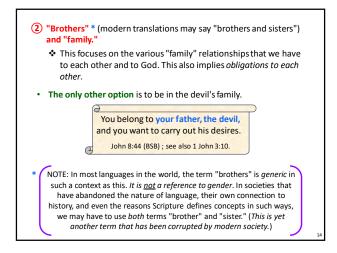
To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people, ...
1 Corinthians 1:2b (NIV)

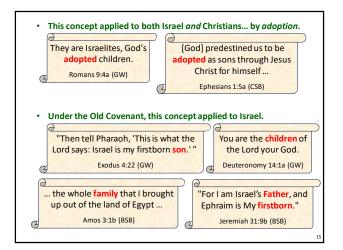
Like Israel, we have an obligation to pursue holiness.

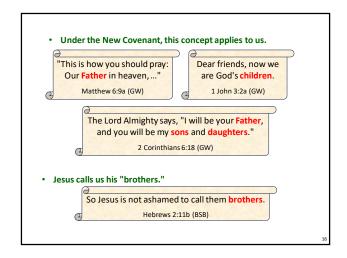
But because the God who called you is holy you must be holy in every aspect of your life. Scripture says, "Be holy, because I am holy."

1 Peter 1:15-16 (GW); he quotes the Leviticus passage.









This family relationship places serious obligations on us.
We are <u>not</u> to treat these obligations as "optional"!

This is the way God's children are distinguished from the devil's children. Everyone who doesn't do what is right or love other believers isn't God's child.

1 John 3:10 (GW)

Doing what is right is an expression of love for God.

Love one another deeply as brothers and sisters.

Romans 12:10a (CSB)

Whenever we have the opportunity, we have to do what is good for everyone, especially for the family of believers.

Galatians 6:10 (GW)

