

WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

(Titoki Church – 26/4/87 – EKB – Revised 02/2002)

1. The Greek word translated **church** in the New Testament is **ekklesia**. This word means an **assembly of called out people**. (Refer to Bible Dictionaries, Greek Lexicons, Bible Commentaries). The Word had a very definite, clear meaning in Jesus' day, and in the time the New Testament was written. **The word ekklesia was in common use in secular Greek, and it meant the constituted assembly of free citizens in a city state whose responsibility was to govern the affairs of the city.**

This is the use of **ekklesia** in *Ac 19:32,39,41*, where it is translated **assembly** in the NKJV. That is, the assembly of free citizens in Ephesus, called out to govern the city.

In *Ac 7:38*, **ekklesia** describes the assembly, or congregation, of the tribes of Israel in the wilderness, which had been called out of slavery in Egypt, by God, through Moses.

When Jesus said, "**I will build My Church,**" in *Mat 16:18*, He was saying, "**I will build My assembly, of those I have called out of the Kingdom of darkness,**" (see *Col 1:13, Heb 12:23*), **and they will prevail against the gates of hell, Mat 16:18.** *Mat 16:18* is the **Universal Church**, also *Heb 12:23, Mat 18:17* is the local church in a locality.

The **assembly nature of the church** is revealed in many passages of the Word, eg *Heb 10:25, Heb 12:23, 1Cor 11:17-22, 1Cor 14:4,12,19,23,28,34,35, Ac 20:7, 20,28, 1Cor 5:4,5, Ac 14:27, Ac 15:4,22, Ac 11:26*. Make a note of all the reasons given, **for gathering into assembly.**

The church is the Body of Christ. Christ is the Head. *Eph 1:23, Col 1:18, Eph 5:23, Col 1:24*. Believers are the members of Christ's Body, the Church, and are set by God in the Body, just as He pleases. The Body is one and has many members, *1Cor 12:12,18*.

This picture of the church as a **body**, stresses the **close knit nature of the church, and the mutual interdependence of every member**. There is no room for individualism. As in the natural, if a member of one's body is cut off from the body, it dies, and the body loses a member. *Eph 4:16, 1Cor 12:25*. For continued life each member must be joined to the Body and to the Head.

The Church is pictured as a Body, a Temple, 1Cor 3:16,17, Eph 2:21, a Household. Eph 2:19, and an army, Eph 6:10-17.

2. **God's Word teaches clearly, that each local church or assembly, is to be under the leadership and authority of a presbytery of elders,** (for details see Pastors' Notes, No 6), *Ac 20:28*. These elders are appointed by the Holy Spirit, recognised by the church, and confirmed in their calling by the travelling apostles, *Ac 14:21-23* or other like ministries. In each group of elders, God raises up one of them to be the leading elder as James was in the Jerusalem Church, *Ac 15:13, Ac 12:17, Ac 21:18, Gal 1:19, 2:9,12. Tit 1:5-9*, eg Titus was an apostolic delegate, from Paul to Crete. Read *1Pet 5:1-5, Heb 13:7,17,24, 1Thes 5:12,13, 1Tim 5:17-20. 1Tim 3:1-7, Ac 20:17-28*. Also the deacons are appointed, who are responsible for the temporal affairs of the corporate assembly and its

members. *1Tim 3:8-13*, eg finance, venue of assembly, material needs of the poor, disabled, sick, widows. *Ac 6:1-7*.

3. **The local presbytery of elders are responsible for the spiritual oversight of the church: ministry** of the Word, wise counsel, discipline of the saints, *1Thes 5:12, Heb 13:17, 1Tim 3:4,5*, protection of the flock of God, *Ac 20:28, Jn 10:11-15, Tit 1:9, 1Pet 5:2*, providing for the spiritual well-being of each believer committed by God into their care, so that the whole local Body of Christ grows to maturity, and effective witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, in the local community.

The elders are the local shepherds of the flock, *1Pet 5:3*. They minister healing to the sick, *Jam 5:14-16*. They visit the needy. They have authority in Christ, but like the Chief Shepherd they walk among the saints as those who serve, *Lk 22:27, 1Pet 5:3*. Also read *Ezk 34*.

4. **In each local church God raises up people to whom He imparts gifts of ministry**, *Eph 4:11, Ac 13:1*. In the local church these are prophets, teachers and pastors. The apostles and evangelists minister beyond the sphere of just the local assembly. They are mobile. The teacher-pastor is one gift, *Eph 4:11*, and functions within the local church.

The ministries are essential, to produce the results God desires in the lives of the saints. These results are mentioned in *Eph 4:12-16*. The believers are not able to come to maturity, without these **ministry gifts** in operation.

If we look back to references given above, in paragraph 5, no 1, we will note **various reasons given for the assembling of the saints** in a church corporate. To **exhort** one another, *Heb 10:25*, to eat the **Lord's supper**, *1Cor 11:20*, to exercise **the gifts** of the Spirit and **edify** the church, *1Cor 14:4,12*, to **teach** the Word of God, *1Cor 14:19, 1Tim 5:17, 2Tim 2:2, 1Tim 3:2*, to exercise **discipline**, *1Cor 5:4,5*, for **prophetic** ministry, *1Cor 14:24*, **to worship God** in the congregation of the saints, and to **pray, intercede**, and call on God. *1Tim 2:1,2, Ac 4:23-31*.

The assembling of the saints is essential, for the ministries God gives to His Body, to function. See also *1Cor 12:7-11, Rom 12:3-8*. God's gifts are necessary to edify the Body.

5. **The Word says, that the Church is the House of God.** *1Tim 3:15(KJV)*. One thing about God's House is God's **divine order**. He is the Head of His Household and He stipulates His **order**. There is no room for individualism in God's House, of people doing what is right in their own eyes, *Jud 21:25, 1Cor 14:40*. God's Word says, "let all things be done decently and in order," God's order. The whole of *1Cor 14* is the issue of God's order in the church. In fact most of *1Corinthians* is about God's order for the church. The Corinthians were disorderly. The church is part of God's Kingdom, and the Christ is enthroned in this Kingdom, "to order it, and establish it, with judgment and justice, forever." *Is 9:7*.

See *Tit 1:5(KJV)*, for God's order.

We are not free to do what we like in God's House, the Church. *1Tim 3:15*. It is the House of the living God.

God's order for His House is given in His Word. The Word of God does not change, *Is 40:8*. God does not change, *Mal 3:6*. God's order for His House does not change.

The Spirit of God does not lead us contrary to the Word of God. He is the Spirit of truth, and He guides into all truth. *Jn 16:13*. His Word is truth, *Jn 17:17*.

The inner witness of the Spirit in our hearts is in some measure subjective, and must always be in submission to the objective truth of God's Word. "All scripture is given by the inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." *2Tim 3:16*.

6. **The original, of the Tabernacle Moses built in the wilderness, *Ex 25-40*, is in heaven.** *Heb 8:5, Ex 25:40*. God's order in the Tabernacle, and in the life of corporate Israel, *Num 1-5*, was **order in detail**, and no-one might disregard or change that order.
7. **Fellowship, Koinonia in the Greek, means to hold something together in common.** That is to meet and share the life of Christ, and to care, encourage, and uphold one another with that life. **Fellowship** has been strongly emphasised by the Lord in the Church, since 1974, world-wide, and cell groups have been formed everywhere as a result.

However, **fellowship** is not all that is implied by **church**. Fellowship is mutual sharing of the life of Christ and it is very important. We need regular fellowship with other believers. But the Church of Jesus Christ, according to the Word of God, requires:

The assembling of local believers,

The operation of God appointed presbytery of elders to shepherd the flock,

The ministry of deacons,

The exercise of authority,

The ministry of those gifted to minister, given by Christ as gifts to His Body, *Eph 4:11-13*.

The functioning of the gifts, given to each believer, to edify the Body, *Rom 12:5-8*.

The manifestation of the gifts of the Spirit, *1Cor 12:7-11*.

The fulfilment of all, and every reason, God gives in His Word for the assembling of the saints, in worship, in prayer, in intercession, and in ministry.