

In search of...

Truth & Right

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Four Assemblies

The Greek word "ekklesia" is translated in various parts of Scripture, depending on the translation, as "church," "congregation," or "assembly." This word, like so many words in our modern English language, has more than one use. For example, a book is something that you read, with words on pages in between covers. However, we also say that we are going to book a flight on an airline, or book a reservation to eat at a restaurant. And, we also have been known to speak of "booking it" to run very quickly so as not to be late for an appointment. So it should come as no surprise that this term is no different.

As it turns out, "ekklesia" has four uses, and I want to spend some time going over each one of the four and making some points about what they mean for us as members of the church, as well as how the church functions as the assembly.

To begin, we must understand that the first use of the word goes back to its simplest literal meaning, as well as its root in Greek culture. While the term seems to have originally referred to a specific legal assembly, over time it came to mean any gathering for the purpose of

city governance, ("But if you seek anything further, it shall be settled in the regular assembly." – Acts 19:39) and from there it went on to describe any general assembly of people. We find in the Scriptures it being used in this way to describe the nation of Israel: "This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai, and with our fathers. He received living oracles to give to us." (Acts 7:38)

Such was the most common (and secular, we can note) usage of the word ekklesia: a generic term to describe any vague gathering of people for any purpose. The second use varies greatly because it refers to a specific group, called out for a specific purpose. It is in this sense that we find the word appearing in Matt. 16:18, "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." In the Bible, the second use of ekklesia is to describe the body of Christ, also known as the church universal, a group who could be summed up as all of those who have been redeemed. Just two places (there are several more, but let me quote these two in the interest of being brief) that use the word in this sense are in the letter

to the Ephesians. "And He put all under His feet and gave Him as head all things to the church," (Eph. 1:22)

"so that He might present the church to Himself in splendor, without or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish." 5:27) Clearly these verses are not about just one group in one city, since Christ has authority over all Christians, and the church universal, not just one congregation, is to be pure and without blemish.

Having said that, let us now address the third use of the term, DOES refer to a local group (congregation) of people. While all the ones who make up such a church are members of the universal body, they set apart by identifying as belonging to local group that meets in a specific One place where we find this instance the beginnings of the various letters written to local congregations. "Paul, called by the will of God to be an of Christ Jesus, and our brother Sosthenes, to the church of God that is Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ called to be saints together with all who in every place call upon the name our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord ours." (1 Cor. 1:1-2)

"And when this letter has read among you, have it also read in church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea." (Col. 4:16) Reading these passages, is no doubt that the church in Colossae and the church in Laodicea were distinct groups. They met in different locations and were made up of people, even though they both taught same doctrine and were both under the same authority. God's Word is easy to understand when it comes to this: each congregation is to be autonomous, that self-governing. A plurality of elders is oversee each flock. They have no jurisdiction over other groups, and no other assembly has any right to direct business.

Perhaps everything we have

looked at so far is nothing new to you. fact, I am sure that most members know very well the difference between the church universal and a local congregation of believers. On top of that, to learn that the term ekklesia originated as a general word to describe any assembly, and not directly connected with the Lord's church at all is most likely not a surprise. But, as the title of this article points out, there is another use for the word. A fourth use that is different that any we have examined up to this point is found in two places in the Scriptures that I know of, 1 Cor. 11:18 & 14:34. Here is the text: "For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. And I believe it in part," (11:18) "the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says." (14:34)

Explaining the difference here might take some time. The easiest way to do so is to answer the question, "Are you in the Wellsburg church of Christ today?" I would answer yes, in the sense that I have (for more than three and a half years now) associated with this local congregation, and thus worship and serve God as a member here. However, the answer is no, in the sense that as I sit here writing this at my desk, I am by myself and in my house. I am most definitely NOT in the Wellsburg church of Christ. Please understand that I am in no way trying to say that our building, or any building for that matter, has some kind of holiness or significance. The church is the people, the members. The reason why I would say no, that I am not in the Wellsburg church of Christ, is that I am not currently assembled together with my brethren for a common purpose.

Some might be wondering at this point what exactly is the assembly, or to put it differently, when is the church assembled and when is it not? The key to answering this question, as

well as any subsequent questions (such as when women can speak, etc.), is purpose. When we have purposed to ALL come together for one reason, THAT is the assembly, the fourth use of ekklesia. For us here, at the times we have set aside for Bible study, we are NOT all together, are we? Yes, we are all technically within the building, but make no mistake: we are NOT ALL together for one purpose. We separate into various classes, each with its own teacher(s) and lesson plans, each studying decently and in order. Even if we all happen to be going over the same Bible verses and principles, we are not assembled, no more than a high school full of students is assembled while they are in their different English classes, History classes, and Math classes.

I know that many try to teach that this distinction does not exist, and therefore they hold no Bible classes in the church building. Their argument is that it is still the assembly, and thus must be the church's common activity of worship, so therefore women must keep silent, and so on. But taking such a position, really, is arguing that a person/group of people can worship accidentally. It argues that even though I have come, NOT to worship but to study in an open discussion format, and NOT to assemble with the whole church but just one class, deliberately keeping others separate, I am in reality worshipping God; doing so without my knowledge or consent.

Ask yourself: can someone worship on accident? The answer is obvious. When we assemble as the church, we worship the Lord. Our purpose in coming together makes all the difference. Assemble with the saints, in spirit and in truth!

Jarred Currence

*Happy Moments,
Praise God.*

*Difficult Moments,
Seek God.*

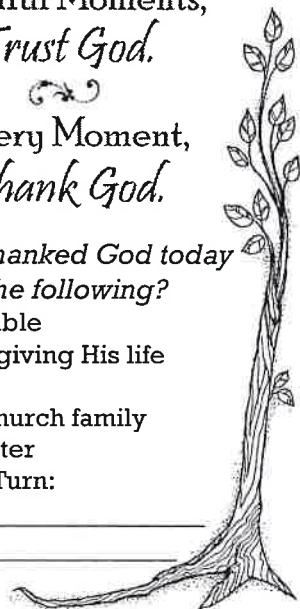
*Quiet Moments,
Worship God.*

*Painful Moments,
Trust God.*

*Every Moment,
Thank God.*

*Have you thanked God today
for any of the following?*

- The Bible
- Jesus giving His life for us
- Our church family
- Laughter
- Your Turn:



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Bible Trivia!

DIRECTIONS: After searching through your Bible, circle which answer is correct.

1. What prophet measured the wall of the temple district?

- a) Isaiah
- b) Elijah
- c) Nahum
- d) Ezekiel

2. What does Satan masquerade as in the present world?

- a) A false teacher
- b) A serpent
- c) An angel of light
- d) Neighbors

3. Who recognized Peter's voice after he was miraculously delivered from prison?

- a) Felicia
- b) Rhoda
- c) Cora
- d) Silvia

4. Where did the faithful mother of Rufus live?

- a) Rome
- b) Asntioch
- c) Bithynia
- d) Ephesus

5. How many times is Eve, the first woman, mentioned?

- a) Twelve
- b) Only four
- c) Seven
- d) Only twice

6. Who had a vision of one angel running to meet another?

- a) Zechariah
- b) Habakkuk
- c) Obadiah
- d) Haggai

7. According to Matthew, who ordered the guard at Jesus' tomb?

- a) The captain of the guard
- b) Herod
- c) Caiaphas
- d) Pilate

8. What animals devoured the foreigners who had moved into Israel?

- a) Rats
- b) Bears
- c) Lions
- d) Leopards

9. What coppersmith had, according to Paul, done him great harm?

- a) Maximus
- b) Alexander
- c) Lucian
- d) Jason

10. Which psalm says, "We are his people and the sheep of his pasture"?

- a) The 142nd psalm
- b) The 23rd psalm
- c) The 50th psalm
- d) The 100th psalm

LAST MONTH'S ANSWERS & VERSES:

- 1) C, Reference: Acts 24:26
- 2) A, Reference: Isaiah 53:6
- 3) D, Reference: 2 Kings 3:4
- 4) B, Reference: Luke 24:30
- 5) A, Reference: 1 Kings 3:5-15

- 6) B, Reference: Acts 5:17-29; 12:1-17
- 7) C, Reference: Revelation 7:1
- 8) D, Reference: Judges 6:25
- 9) B, Reference: James and 1 Peter
- 10) C, Reference: Daniel 5:5