***Ekklēsia* (Church)**

*Ekklēsia* has a wide range of meanings, but none of them refer to a physical building. The word *ekklēsia* refers to an assembly of people, any assembly of people for any reason. It does not have to be a religious gathering, although it was adopted by early Christians to refer to the gathering of Christians.

Let us first explore the uses of *ekklēsia* that refer to any assembly of people for any reason:

Acts 19:32 – “Meanwhile, some cried one thing, and some another, for the assembly (*ekklēsia*) was in confusion, and most of them did not know the reason that they had come together.” The gathering of people in Acts 19:32 was a mob coming together with no particular ethnic or religious affiliation; in fact, the text says, “most of them did not know the reason they had come together.”

Acts 7:38 – “This is he who was with the assembly (*ekklēsia*) in the desert with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our fathers, who received living words to give us.” The term is used of the Jewish group, including some Gentiles (Exod. 12:38), who were led out of Egypt by Moses.

Matthew 18:17 – “And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the congregation (*ekklēsia*), and if he also refuses to hear the congregation, let him be to you as the Gentile and the tax collector.” The term “congregation” most likely refers to a congregation of Jews and also, in the near future, the principle being taught in the verse would apply to a gathering of Christians as well, i.e., the church.

So the term *ekklēsia* does not solely apply to the Christian Church.

Yet, the most common use of *ekklēsia* is referring to Christians, but as a gathering of people, not as a “church” building.

The term *ekklēsia* in the New Testament most often refers to a local gathering of Christians:

* 3 John 1:10 – “And not just being content with that, he himself does not receive the brothers and sisters, and he stops those who intend to receive them and throws them out of the church (*ekklēsia*).”
* 1 Corinthians 1:2 – “To the Church (*ekklēsia*) of God that is in Corinth, to those who have been made holy in Christ Jesus.”
* Galatians 1:2 – “And all the brothers and sisters who are with me, to the churches (*ekklēsia*) of Galatia:”
* Acts 8:1 – “And on that day there arose a great persecution against the church (*ekklēsia*) that was in Jerusalem.”

The term *ekklēsia* can also refer to the Church body at large, or every Christian in the world:

* Colossians 1:18 – Christ is “the head of the body, the church (*ekklēsia*),” which refers to the entire world congregation of Christians (cf. also: Acts 5:11).
* 1 Corinthians 11:16 – “But if any man seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor do the churches (*ekklēsia*) of God.”
* 1 Corinthians 12:27-28 – “Now you all are the body of Christ, and individually parts of it. And God has set some in the church (*ekklēsia*), first apostles, secondly prophets, thirdly teachers, then miracles….”
* Philippians 3:6 – “in regard to zeal, persecuting the church (*ekklēsia*).”

In modern English, the term “Church” often refers to a Christian building of worship, however, this is not how the word *ekklēsia* is used in Scripture. The correct understanding of “Church” or *ekklēsia* is vital to realizing the emphasis of the New Covenant. Whereas under the Old Covenant, the Tabernacle and Temple building held great significance and importance (Exod. 25:8; 1 Kings 6:11-13), under the New Covenant, the importance is placed on Christians themselves as the dwelling place of God (1 Cor. 3:16-17; 6:19-20). There is no “place” one can go on earth today to feel or see the presence of God more intimately; rather, God can be encountered anywhere through the presence of the holy spirit.

This truth should realign the priorities of Christians. If a particular local church is spending significantly more time and money investing in a building or institution rather than the people of the church themselves, they are misunderstanding the priorities of the New Covenant. The true Church is a people, who have been saved by grace. Thus, the resources, time and energy of a “church” should go toward building up a people, not a building or institution.