

What is the Ecclesia?

Intro Q&A

Brief Word Study On Church Vs. Ecclesia

Q: From where do we get the word "church"?

A: To answer this we must go to an etymological dictionary (i.e., a dictionary that traces words back to their origins) ... such as the Oxford English Dictionary (which includes etymological entries at the beginning of each definition), or we can use a dedicated etymological dictionary like A: Concise Etymological Dictionary Of The English Language, by Walter W. Skeat. These books can be found in a public library, and are actually interesting and fun. There is, also, an online etymological dictionary:

<http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?search=church&searchmode=none>.

The word "church" hails back to the Scottish "kirk," which came from the Old English "chirche" (pronounced keer-chey), which in turn came from the Greek "kuriakon" or "kuriakos." Anyone can quickly research this. It is beyond dispute.

Q: Since all these forms of "church" seems to come from the Greek word "kuriakos," can you define it?

A: "Kuriakos" is a form of the Greek "kurios." "Kurios" means "lord" or "master." Therefore, "kuriakos" means, literally, "pertaining to the lord," or "the lord's." It means anything pertaining to or belonging to any lord or any master ... a common term of the day. Other forms of the word found in the New Testament are: kuria: a female of authority; kuriotase: lordship; authority; kuros: confirmation, ratification; and the verb ekurieuo: to exercise authority over.

Q: Is the Greek word "kuriakos" in the Bible?

A: Yes, but it is never translated "church" in any English translation. For example, "kuriakos" appears in 1 Cor. 11:20 KJV as "the Lord's" - referring to a meal. Also, in Rev. 1:10 KJV as "the Lord's" - referring to a day. These two are the only occurrences of "kuriakos" in the New Testament. In both instances the KJV translators chose not to translate it "church" ... for obvious reasons. If they had, I Cor. 11:20 would have read, "the church supper," and Rev. 1:10 would have read, "the church day." One must wonder, however, how the churches get around this inconsistent use of the word.

Q: My English Bible has the word "church" many places in the New Testament. What is the Greek word they used for "church"?

A: The King James Version translators replaced the Greek "ecclesia" (which appears many times in the New Testament) with "church." Thus, the word "church" appears many times in the King James Version.

Q: Is "church" an acceptable translation of the Greek "ecclesia"?

A: No. "Church" comes from "kuriakos," not "ecclesia."

Q: What is the correct definition of "ecclesia"?

A: "Ecclesia" is correctly translated as "the called-out ones" ... literally "the called-out."

Q: Why did the KJV translators elect to use "church" instead of "ecclesia" or "the called-out"?

A: The King James Translation was printed in 1611, long after the institution of "church" was known and popularized in the Roman and Celtic world. The form of the modern "church" was adopted after 300 AD by Roman Emperor Constantine the Great who declared it the state-sanctioned form of worship for Christians. By doing this he took control of religion by incorporating it into the state. By declaring it a state religion, Constantine was able to reorganize it, control it, and use it for his own political purposes. In essence, Constantine invented the "church" as we know it. Although "church" became the accepted word and form for organized religion, the actual word in the Bible remained "ecclesia" for a long time afterwards. Before Constantine, Christians had no centralized organization, no official buildings, no priests, no professional preachers. The body of Christ was living within "ecclesias" - groups of believers here and there.

The use of the term "church" in the English Bibles to replace "ecclesia" came from the Pagan Celts and Europeans. But the church form of organization and worship was distinctly Roman, and still is. Many Christians continued long after Constantine to call their assemblies "ecclesias" rather than "church." Some continue even to this day. In Tyndale's groundbreaking translation of the New Testament, in the 1500's, he chose to translate "ecclesia" as "congregation" rather than "church" - undoubtedly an effort to distance himself from the Roman influence inside the Church of England. For the crime of translating the New Testament into English, Tyndale was eventually burned at the stake by the Church of England.

The Church of England eventually allowed the Bible to be printed in English, but only if it was translated by state-sanctioned translators. The Roman-leaning King James authorized his new translation in 1611 (done by hand-picked, church hirelings) which continued the tradition of state-controlled religion, and the word "church" had supplanted the actual word "ecclesia." Since that time the west has increasingly accepted the word "church" to replace "ecclesia" ... even to the extent of going back and retrofitting

"church" into many older texts (both religious and secular) where "ekklesia" had previously been transliterated into English as "ecclesia."

Q: Is it important for a Christian to know the difference between "church" and "ecclesia"?

A: Yes! As you can see, the two words do not mean the same thing, nor do they come from similar origins. "Ecclesia" is a Bible concept. "Church" is a state concept that evolved out of the Roman world of Constantine. If the words God used in the sacred text of the Holy Bible are important, then we must respect them and translate them as accurately as possible. The implications are huge. If a "church" claims to teach truth, shouldn't its teachers and scholars understand the basic definitions of the most common Bible words? If these teachers have not researched even the most basic milk of the word, and if they don't understand that words from the Bible are preferred over words from the Roman State, then how many other errors might they be wrong about?

The King James Version, is not THE BIBLE. Rather it is A VERSION of the Bible. Look at the title page of the book. It tells you it is a VERSION. Versions ... even ones that are done with sincerity ... are capable of error. The King James Version was a state-created and state-authorized book. Christians are foolish if they trust a Roman emperor or a British monarch to handle the word of God fairly and without bias.

(This research is easily accomplished by anyone with a little curiosity, access to an English Bible, a Greek interlinear, a Greek Analytical Lexicon, the Englishman's Greek Concordance, and an etymological dictionary of the English language.

I can't over emphasize the importance of word studies. Learn the skill of researching word origins and comparing Greek Bible words with English words, and you'll not only be happy for it, you'll increase your confidence in the Word 10 fold.