

CHURCH: UNDERSTANDING EKKLESIA, OIKOS AND KYRIAKON

An overview study from the New Testament by John Ridgway

Introduction: I am a churchman through and through.
Ruth and I are church through and through
Ranjini, Raja, Ruth and I are church family through and through
We do not go to church but we are church

CHURCH = PEOPLE

In the 4 gospels the word church is mentioned twice by Jesus.

In Matt 16:13-20 He explained that his concern was the church. Our concern is to be for the keys of the kingdom.

In Matt 18:15-20 Jesus expressed that if 2-3 people were together then He was also there and the characteristic of this fellowship was prayer and relational harmony which if disturbed meant involving others also. The essence was vertical and horizontal relationships not structure of any kind.

However Jesus' concern was overwhelmingly for the Kingdom which is mentioned more than 100 times in the gospels. Matthew 6:33 indicates that it is our primary concern: His kingdom – a changed perspective and His righteousness – a changed life.

The kingdom is eternal and we are part of that kingdom for eternity. The church is time bound between the first and second comings of Christ and is the outposts of the kingdom on this earth in our history. The Kingdom involves heaven and earth. The church is the expression of the Kingdom on this earth and Jesus is building His church.

Let us now examine these 3 key Greek words:

EKKLESIA

Ek = out of, klesia = call. Therefore the “called out” ones. This is often explained as meaning that we have to get people to leave their “mess” (the “worldly mess”) where they are currently living and join the church meaning the local building and the community connected with that building. This usually involves breaking off all relationships with their old set of friends and now starting anew with another set of people who have a whole different set of activities and agendas something like joining a social club.

The actual usage of the word in the New Testament times was that of a political term referring to the group of people who would come out into the streets to hear the messenger from Rome who had just blown his trumpet and “called people out” to hear the latest edicts from the Roman emperor. Something like the internet today. Afterwards people went back into their homes and continued their daily business. The primary focus was a group of people.

The scriptures do focus on a calling out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9) and a calling into the fellowship of His Son (1 Cor 1:9) and turning to God from idols (1 Thes 1:9). But the scriptures are also clear that we are called to retain the place in life that God has assigned us (1 Cor 7:17) and to remain in the situation that we were in when God called us (1 Cor 7:20).

We are to remain in the context of our **first birth** including our place in life but our **second birth** is a calling out of darkness and the dominion of Satan into the wonderful Kingdom of God.

But traditionally people will insist on both a spiritual conversion and also a social conversion that immediately impacts the **mobility** of the gospel. The first birth is the key to impacting our family, relatives, work colleagues, neighbors and old friends. The second birth is the basis for the **purity** of the gospel. But if I violate the natural networks related to my first birth then they can never see and experience the purity of the gospel since I have now left them and joined another whole social group of people.

When we think of church we are simply thinking of **people** in relationship to Christ and each other and also our lost and unconvinced friends. We could equally use words like group, gang, friends, believers, disciples, or whatever makes sense in your context. In the Hindu and Muslim contexts, “followers of Jesus” is very acceptable.

The word Pharisees = separatist and in their context it was understood as the righteous Jew keeping separate from Gentiles, Samaritans and “sinners” and such a concept had its roots in the Old Testament where the nation of Israel in general was to keep **separate** from the rest of the nations around them. That is why the Pharisees had such a tough time seeing Jesus eating and socializing with tax collectors and “sinners” (Luke 15:1-2) and was considered a friend of such people (Luke 7:34).

But Jesus was introducing the good news of the kingdom and everyone wanted to get in on this (Matt 11:12) since it meant acceptance rather than rejection. The kingdom ushered in the new covenant which would bring hope for all. So rather than a “come” mentality it is now for us to “go” to the nations and live amongst them and introduce them to Jesus. There is a separation from sin but not from the sinner. There is no longer a **participation** in the sinful ways of the past (1 Cor 10:14-20) but there is an **association** with the sinners of the past and the present (1 Cor 5:9-13).

In Romans 16 we have 5 usages of the word “ekklesia”

1. Verse 1 – Church in Cenchrea – People in a specific location, in this case a small village just outside of Corinth.
2. Verse 4 – Churches of the Gentiles – People associated with a particular background (Muslim believers).
3. Verses 3-5 – Church in Priscilla and Aquila’s home (some translations put “meets in their home” but the word “meet” is absent in the Greek. I understand that the argument of some translators is that the word “church” implies a meeting). As I understand it the word “church” here is speaking primarily to the people in their home and their relationships with one another.
4. Church in households
 - Verse 10 – Household of Aristobulus
 - Verse 11 – Household of Narcissus
 - Verse 13-15 – Parts of households (3)

5. Church in a region or the entire church in the world

Verse 16 – Churches of Christ – Expressions of the kingdom all across the Mediterranean world.

Verse 23 – Whole church here – All the believers in Corinth at that time who were enjoying Gaius' generous hospitality.

The focus of these different expressions of the word “ekklesia” is always on people and no mention of meetings or programs comes up.

That is why in all the epistles the focus is always on relationships and the “one anothers” (Hebrews 3:13).

OIKOS

The word “oikos” means “household” referring to all the relationships associated with a family including relatives and those who worked in that household (the soldiers and servants associated with Cornelius' household) and others who in some way were a relational part of that household. Cornelius had invited his close friends also to hear Peter (Acts 10:24). It is considered as the church as we see in 1 Tim 3:15. In the verb form it is usually translated as “built up” (Col 2:7).

Examples of this expression of the church is seen in the book of Acts:

Cornelius – Acts 11:14 you and your whole household. Acts 10:7 mentions 2 of his servants and one of his soldiers and verse 24 mentions his relatives and close friends.

Lydia and her whole household – Acts 16:14,15

The jailer and his whole household – Acts 16:31

Crispus and his entire household – Acts 18:8

Also Nympha and the church in her house – Col 4:15

And also Priscilla and Aquila and the church in their house (NASB) – Rom 16:5

Note the leadership of the early church came out of this framework. Deacons were those who led and managed their households well (1 Tim 3:12) and overseers (bishops) = elders were those who had a concern for other households as well. The word elder is of Hebrew origin and the Greek word overseer (bishop) was of Greek origin. See Titus 1:5,7.

KYRIAKON

An amazing Japanese pioneer and thinker Kanzo Uchimura (1861-1930) started a whole movement in Japan with his total focus of two “J”s: Jesus and Japanese. He said the gospel must be purely Japanese (versus foreign) and purely Jesus (without Western structures). He makes the following statements:

“The origin of the word “church” in English and “kirche” in German is different from “ekklesia”. Both originally come from the Greek word “kyraikon” which literally means “house of God”. It is a purely religious word that had the meaning of “temple” or “chapel” unlike “ekklesia”, which originally meant “the meeting of ordinary people”.

I understand that when the King James Bible (the authorized bible, AV) was done in 1611 there was considerable argument over how this word “ekklesia” would be translated, based on the Tyndale’s translation done in 1525. By 1611 King James was head of the Anglican church and the understood meaning of the word church was that of a building. And so the meaning of a Greek word was chosen for the English translation that is not even in the Greek New Testament. That explains why pastors and others have to keep explaining to people that church is not the building but rather the people of God. But in reality everyone uses the word church to mean the building down the street.

The dilemma all started when in 323 AD the emperor Constantine authorized the “church” to be the state church controlled by the state and the official religion of the Roman Empire. He began a massive building spree right across the Roman Empire naming all the buildings after “apostles” e.g., the church of St. Paul (Minneapolis – St. Paul, where Latin is the language of the building), the church of St. Peter, etc. He declared himself the 13th apostle and erected statues of the 12 apostles in a massive building in Constantinople and included a much larger statue of himself in the building. He banned all house meetings and unofficial gatherings of any kind.

Jim Petersen’s book *Church Without Walls* you will see good insights on how things deteriorated during the early centuries of the early church. Rodney Stark’s book, *The Rise of Christianity* details the extraordinary growth of the early church in the first 3 centuries and the disasters of Constantine’s actions after that. He details this more in his book, *To the Glory of God*.

The book that theologians refer to most regarding the Body of Christ (the church) is Ephesians. This is coupled with Colossians which teaches on the Head (Christ).

But when in fact you read the book of Ephesians there is no mention of meetings, Sunday worship, collection of funds, worship songs, one mention of “pastor” (being the only time it is mentioned in the NT, whereas “shepherd” is mentioned many times, referring to a functional role rather than a positional role). There is one reference to baptism but it is in the context of “one Lord, one faith, one baptism” referring to our spiritual baptism and in fact a strong indication that this is the only baptism required.

In essence, Ephesians is indicating:

- Chapter 1 Christ is the Head, verses 22-23
- Chapter 2 We are His household, living holy temple, living stones, fellow citizens (Jews and Gentiles) where God dwells
- Chapter 3 The Gentiles and the lost and the unconvinced and the wary all are part of His church
- Chapter 4 Unity and diversity are essential for the church to function with gifted people enabling both qualitative and quantitative growth to take place
- Chapter 4:17-5:20 Living and discipling amongst the lost:
No longer live as the Gentiles do (4:17)
Life of God (4:18)
Former way of life (4:22)
New self created to be like God (4:24)
Live a life of love (5:1)
Live as children of light (5:8)
Be careful then how you live (5:15)
- Chapter 5:21-6:9 Your new lifestyle is now lived out in the context of your family and your workplace, the two primary places of influence and where people observe your lifestyle and relationships most carefully.
- Chapter 6:10-23 We are in a deadly spiritually battle where the scriptures and prayer, faith and a changed life are essential as we rely totally on Christ (in contrast to our emphasis ministry plans and strategy). And we all need a Tychicus.