

**The Great Doctrines of the Bible  
The Doctrine of the Church**

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## **THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH.**

**There is great danger of losing sight of the Church in the endeavor to emphasize the idea of the Kingdom of Heaven or Christendom. We are prone to think it a small thing to speak of the Church; the Kingdom and Christendom seem so large in comparison. We are tempted to distinguish and contrast Churchism, as it is sometimes called, and Christianity, to the disparagement of the former. It is well to remember that Jesus Christ positively identifies Himself with the Church (Acts 9) and not with Christendom; He gave up His life that He might found the Church (Eph. 5:25). The Apostle Paul sacrificed himself in his endeavors to build up the Church, not Christendom. He speaks of his greatest sin as consisting in persecuting the Church of God (1 Cor. 15:9). The supreme business of God in this age is the gathering of the Church. Some day it will be complete (Eph. 4:12), and then the age will have served its purpose.**

### **I. DEFINITIONS; DISTINCTIONS.**

- 1. OLD TESTAMENT USE OF THE WORD.**

**Lev. 4:13--"And if the whole congregation of Israel sin through ignorance, and the thing be hid from the eyes of the assembly . . . ."**  
**The Hebrew word for *assembly* means to *call* or *assemble*, and is used not only for the act of calling itself, but also for the assembly of the called ones. In this sense Israel is called a "church," an assembly, because called out from among the other nations to be a holy people (Acts 7:38, "the church in the wilderness"). There is always a religious aspect associated with this particular call.**

## **2. THE NEW TESTAMENT USE OF THE WORD.**

**It is from the New Testament primarily, if not really exclusively, that the real meaning and idea of the Church is derived. The Christian Church is a New Testament institution, beginning with Pentecost, and ending, probably, with the rapture. Two words are of special importance in this connection:**

### **a) Ecclesia, from Two Greek Words Meaning "To Call Out From."**

**This word is used in all about 111 times in the New Testament. It is used in a secular sense in Acts 19:39--"It shall be determined in a lawful assembly"; of Israel in the wilderness (Acts 7:38), and of the assembly of believers in Christ (Matt. 16:18; 18:17; 1 Cor. 1:2; Eph. 5:25-27). In keeping with this idea the saints are said to be the "called-out" ones (Rom. 8:30; 1 Cor. 1:2; cf. 2 Cor. 6:17).**

### **b) "Kuriakon"--That Which Belongs to the Lord.**

**So we have "the supper of the Lord" (1 Cor. 11:20); the "day of the Lord" (Rev. 1:10). See also Luke 22:25 and Rom. 14:8, 9, as illustrating that over which the Lord has dominion and authority.**

**To sum up then: The Church is composed of the body of believers who have been called out from the world, and who are under the dominion and authority of Jesus Christ.**

### **c) The Growth of the Church Idea in the New Testament.**

**At first there was but one Church at Jerusalem. The meetings may have been held in different houses, yet there was but one Church with one roster: so we read of the total membership consisting at one time of 120 (Acts 1:15), again of 3,000 (2:41), and still again of 5,000 (4:4), to which there were daily additions (2:47). The apostles were at the head of the Church (2:41-47). See Acts, cc. 1 and 2, for a fuller account of the first Church.**

**The second stage in the growth of the Church was its spread throughout Judea and Samaria, as recorded in Acts 8.**

**Antioch, in Syria, then became the head of the Gentile Church (Acts 13:1), as Jerusalem was the head of the Jewish Church (Acts 15); Paul representing the Church at Antioch, and Peter and James at Jerusalem. The assembly at Antioch was called "the church" just as truly as was the assembly at Jerusalem (11:22; 13:1).**

**Because of the missionary activities of the apostles, especially Paul, churches sprang up in different cities, especially in Asia Minor, e.g., Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, and Philippi.**

**In view of all this the term "church" came to be used of the Church *universal*, that is, the complete body of Christ as existing in every place (1 Cor. 15:9; Gal. 1:2, 13; Matt. 16:18); of *local* churches in any one place (Col. 4:16; Phil. 4:15; 1 Cor. 1:2, etc.); of *single meetings*, even where two or three met together (Matt. 18:19; Col. 4:15; Phil. 1:2; Rom. 16:5).**

**It is evident, then, from what has here been said, that by the term "church" is included all that is meant from the Church Universal to the meeting of the church in the house. Wherever God's people meet in the name of Christ to worship, there you have the Church.**