

An Explanation (Part One)

By

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This is the first of three articles, followed by a response to a certain individual who questioned these articles. In fact, these three articles are in response to a Roman Catholic man who rebuked us for writing about the Bible. This man's rebuke was not an isolated response about teaching from the Bible, nor was what he said limited to Roman Catholics. We will let you decide if what we say is correct, and look forward to any response you may have. In previous articles certain ones objected to us not having the authority to proclaim what the Bible has to say on many topics of faith and morals. It was this that prompted the writing of these three articles.

A few letters were sent to us saying that "A person cannot understand what the Bible says unless the church authorities tells us." They then followed that up by saying "That the church reminds us that 'No prophecy of Scriptures is made by private interpretation,' thusly, without the church explaining what it says you would never understand it."

If what is quoted above from certain individuals were true, then what would be the use in reading the Bible as the churches these individuals belong to urge them to do? It would be a waste of time. But, is the above true? Let us examine what is said in the Bible and find out.

First, let me raise a few questions. Who or what is meant by the word "church" as these certain individuals use it? Is the one teaching these individuals about the Bible the "church?" Is the "church" those individuals holding offices? Just who is the head of the Church? In defining this word we can better understand WHO it is that is teaching us this "truth" or "falsehood." The best method of finding out who or what the word "church" means is to look at what is meant by the word as it is used by the one who used it first—Jesus the Christ.

Looking into Scriptures, we see in Matthew 16:18 the first instance in which the Greek word "ekklesian" is used. According to this Greek word used, we find that its meaning is "a called our assembly" (any Greek to English dictionary or Lexicon will substantiate this definition). Jesus took this Greek term and applied it to a particular group or assembly of people, calling them his "ekklesian," or to put it as used today, "church." Looking further we see Jesus say that "upon this rock I will build my church." Jesus literally said: "Upon this rock I will build my *'called out assembly'*."

As this verse does not define what the word means, we must look elsewhere in Scriptures to get what he meant by using this word, ekklesian. We do that for your benefit. When we read Acts 19:23–41 we see the word is illustrated as to what it means. It would be worthwhile for you to read that passage in full at this time, for I am only going to bring out the three verses in which the Greek word "ekklesia" is used.

Verse 32—“The assembly (ekklesia) was in confusion: some were shouting one thing, some another. Most of the people did not even know why they were there.”

In this verse the Greek term we use as “church” is referring to an assembly of Silversmiths and other men of like occupations (See verse 25). Is this what the word “church” means? Why is it here called an “assembly” instead of “church?” The same word is used!

Verse 39—“If there is anything further you want to bring up, it must be settled in the legal assembly (ekklesia).”

This verse used the Greek term as referring to the Greek Court of Law when it is called to session or assembled together to decide a case. (See verse 38).

Verse 41—“After he (the city clerk, verse 35) had said this, he dismissed the assembly (ekklesia).”

This use of the Greek term refers to the same members as in verse 32. It is always used to refer to an assembly (ekklesian) of particular people called together for a special purpose. We can add much strength to this by looking at another verse in which the Greek term “ekklesian” occurs. I would like to call to your attention at this point that this word “ekklesian” is also translated as “community” or “congregation” in many Bible versions; even the “Latin Vulgate” version as translated by Jerome in the fourth century used the Latin term for an assembly of people. This is rightly so, for that is what the term means.

Acts 7:38—“He was in the congregation (ekklesia) in the desert, with our fathers and with the messenger who spoke to him on Mount Sinai; and he received living words to pass on to us.”

In this last verse is mentioned the spirit of God who was present with the “ekklesian” of the Jews who were called out of the land of Egypt by Moses under orders from God. It refers to the whole “gathering, or assembly, or congregation,” (or church as used today), of the people of God—the Jewish nation.

From what I have just shown you, it is easy to see and to understand that the term which we use as “church” is made much more clear as to what it really means. I have in front of me right now a Greek to English dictionary. I have it opened to the word “church,” and what do I see?

“For Church see ASSEMBLY and CONGREGATION.”

Now let’s look at the word “assembly” in this dictionary:

“EKKLESIAN, from “ek”—out of, and “klesis”—a calling (kaleo—to call). This word is used among the Greeks to refer to any body of citizens gathered or summoned for any definite purpose. In Acts 7:38, it is used of the gathering of the people of Israel. In Acts 19:32 and 41, of a gathering of the silversmiths and others of like occupations. In

Acts 19:39, of the gathering of the Greek Court of Law. It has two applications to the gathering of Christians:

a) To all who confess (acknowledge), as Peter did in Matthew 16:18: “Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.” This is the company of which Jesus said, “I will build my church.” This is further described as “the church which is his body” (Ephesians 1:22).

b) In the singular, referring to a local congregation: e.g., Matthew 18:17. To a company consisting of all professed believers in a given locality when they are together (churched—sembled): E.g., Acts 20:28, 1 Corinthians 1:2, Galatians 1:13, 1 Thessalonians 1:1, 2 Thessalonians 1:1, 1 Timothy 3:5, and in a plurality, referring to separated groups in a larger area. In Romans 16:23, where Gaius was called the host of “the whole church,” simply meant that the “assembly” in Corinth met in his house.”

Thus records this Greek to English Dictionary. The true meaning of the word “church” is not found in the Greek word “ekklesian.” It comes from two distinct Greek words which I will bring forth in the next article (Part Two). I will show you how the word “church” came to be substituted for the word “ekklesia” by *ecclesiastical power*. Together with this article it should show you the fallacy of the way many use it today. (Note: By “*ecclesiastical power*” is meant the ruling body of both the Protestant and Roman Catholic Churches.)

Many of you will now think: “If the church is the members of a local area gathered together for a particular purpose, WHO is the church spoken of, telling us what appears in the first paragraph of this article?” “What authority is there by someone who misquotes and misapplies what the Scriptures say?” “how come that I, as a member, have no say in what is said?” “Am I not considered a person who can understand what I read?”

These thoughtful questions are very important to this short discussion. The church was never an individual or a clergy, as the Scriptures make clear. No one man can claim to be the church or its sole representative. Scripture also makes this clear. The “power” of the “church” is the people, not a clergy or an individual. Let’s let Jesus show us this. It is very simple to see.

‘If you bother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ If he refuses to listen to them, then tell it to the ‘ekklesian’ (church); and if he refuses to listen to the ‘ekklesian’ (church), treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector” (Matthew 18:15–17).

Notice that Jesus does not say that the one sinning is to go confess to anyone other than the one he sins against. The one he sins against is the one to show your fault. (Quite different from what is done, isn’t it!). If this sinner listens and corrects his fault, his sin is then forgiven by the offended one and they are again brothers in the faith. In verse 17 comes the point in which Jesus says to tell the church—the whole gathering of Christians—to decide and confront the one sinning. Jesus says that the whole “assembly” is to confront the unrepentant sinner, not some individual who is looked upon as “the

authority” or “in charge.” In fact, a clergy has nothing to do with the confrontation of the sinner. It is the “assembly” that has the power of excommunication, and not a clergy, a bishop, or even a pope. This is the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ! In Luke 6:46–49, Jesus has this to say about his teachings:

“Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not what I say? I will show you what he is like who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice. He is like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete.”

These words that Jesus spoke are very easy to understand. You do not need anyone to explain them to you. They mean just what they say. There are no hidden meanings in what I have just shown to you. Jesus speaks very plainly in Scriptures and it is only men who have made it seem otherwise. Jesus speaks again (John 14:23–24):

“If anyone loves me, he will obey my teachings. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.”

As you have just read, those who hear Christ’s words and do not put them into practice, who that they do not love Him. When a person hears these words Christ spoke, he is liable for what they say. Christ will not judge those who do not obey him; it is what he has already said that will be the judge. Read this in John 12:48:

“There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day.”

That is the teaching of our Lord Jesus the Christ! Jesus is very plain about the results of not listening and obeying what he teaches. What Jesus taught about what we call the “church” is also very clear to those who hear his words and put them into practice. Jesus said that the “ekklesia” were those who confessed that He “is the Christ, the Son of the living God,” and upon that truth—that solid rock foundation, “the gates of hades shall not prevail.”

The “ekklesia” (church) was built upon the foundation that the Apostles laid and that foundation was based upon the belief that “Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.” The Apostle Paul also makes that very plain (1 Corinthians 3:11):

“For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.”

Now, back to the question again. WHO is meant by the word “church?” The assembly of members, or a clergy system? Jesus tells us that it is the members! The one speaking in the statement under discussion is referring to leaders of some sects and groups among the members. Who are you going to listen to? Christ or man? None of what is said by me is of my own imagination; it is what is said in the Scriptures.

I would like to point out at this time that there is no Law or Dogma in the church that prohibits any individual from the private reading and understanding of what is in the Scriptures, or in obeying Christ’s teachings as he comes to knowledge of them. In fact, Scriptures approve of the individual reader understanding what he reads. Matthew 24:15 says, “**Let the reader understand.**” The Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 1:13 says, “**For we did not write you anything you cannot read or understand.**” There are many more places in the Scriptures where the individual is encouraged to read and heed the word of God.

Now to the phrase that was mentioned in the beginning of this article: “No prophecy of Scripture is made by private interpretation, thusly, without the church explaining what it says, you would never understand it.”

How do we take this statement? Very simple, we ignore it! What is quoted from the Bible verse that contains a part of that statement has nothing to do with not being able to read and understand it. The only thing the above quote does say is that we can be assured that no man just made up what is said. Of course, to say that with the confidence I have, you would have to know what the rest of the passage it comes from has to say. I am not going to go into it because this article was not to deal with that part. But, I would like to make some comments regardless.

When I see someone use God’s inspired word and misuse it as is done in the above quote, I realize that he could be ignorant of what he is quoting. This ignorance may be intentional or not. It could be that he has never read the passage from which the quote is taken. In that case he would only be parroting what another has told him and be deceived. What is so terrible about this is that he would be guilty of perpetuating falsehood, and using God’s word to do it. On the other hand, if he knew what the rest of the passage said, he could rightly be branded as a false teacher. It would be an intentional deception, and if we were still bound by the Old Testament Laws given by Moses, he would be stoned to death for speaking and teaching what God didn’t say.

Here is something else that I bring up for you to think about. What kind of motive is behind the making of a statement like the one in question? What is there in Scriptures that they are trying to hide from you? Don’t you think that if a group says that they hold the “Bible” as the infallible word of God and support their teachings by it, that they would want you to read and understand what it means?

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