

Servants of Christ, part 9 of BF&M
April 9, 2017

Russ Blowers was a pastor in Indianapolis back in the 80s and 90s. He was active in his local Rotary club. At club meetings each week a different member would give a brief statement about his job. When it was his turn, Russ said: "I'm with a global enterprise. We have branches in every country in the world. We have our representatives in nearly every parliament and board room on earth. We're into motivation and behavior alteration. We run hospitals, feeding stations, crisis pregnancy centers, universities, publishing houses, and nursing homes. We care for our clients from birth to death. We are into life insurance and fire insurance. We perform spiritual heart transplants. Our product is free for the asking. Yet, there's not enough money to buy it."

That is a different way of describing the church. This morning's sermon is about the church. We are reading article 6 of the Baptist Faith and Message.

Article VI. The Church

A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is a local body of baptized believers who are associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel, observing the two ordinances of Christ, committed to His teachings, exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by His Word, and seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth.

This church is an autonomous body, operating through democratic processes under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. In such a congregation, members are equally responsible. Its Scriptural officers are pastors and deacons.

The New Testament speaks also of the church as the body of Christ which includes all of the redeemed of all the ages.

Matt. 16:15-19; Matt. 18:15-20; Acts 2:41-42, 47; Acts 5:11-14; Acts 6:3-6;
Acts 13:1-3; Acts 14:23, 27; Acts 15:1-30; Acts 16:5; Acts 20:28; Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2;
1 Cor. 3:16; 1 Cor. 5:4-5; 1 Cor. 7:17; 1 Cor. 9:13-14; 1 Cor. 12; Ephes. 1:22-23;
Ephes. 2:19-22; Ephes. 3:8-11, 21; Ephes. 5:22-32; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:18; 1 Tim. 3:1-15;
1 Tim. 4:14; 1 Peter 5:1-4; Rev. 2-3; Rev. 21:2-3.

We're going to start with some word study this morning. It is important to learn why we use the word church and what it means in the Bible. The New Testament was written mostly in the Greek language. **The word in the original Greek New Testament that is translated as church is *ekklesia*.**

This word was not a religious word. It was coined in ancient Greece, in the city of Athens. In that city the city government was actually comprised of all the men of the city. There was no small group of councilmen that represented everyone else in the city. Instead, all the men of the city came together to decide what needed to be decided. They would be called to assemble together for the transaction of city business. When they were assembled they were referred to as the ***ekklesia* (ehk-lay-sea-ah) = "the ones called out", or "the called out ones."** Over time the meaning of this word was stretched to mean any group that gathered for a special purpose, or a group that gathered because they had something in common.

This word is used in three ways in the Bible. One way it is used is for a secular group. In Acts 19, a group of Roman citizens have gathered in the local theatre. They are angry at the Christian missionaries and causing a near riot. A city official comes and addresses the crowd, explaining that the missionaries had not done anything wrong. He warns the crowd that they themselves are in danger of breaking the law.

Acts 19:38-41 (NIV) "If, then, Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a grievance against anybody, the courts are open and there are proconsuls (judges). They can press charges. If there is anything further you want to bring up, it must be settled in a legal assembly. As it is, we are in danger of being charged with rioting because of today's events. In that case we would not be able to account for this commotion, since there is no reason for it." After he had said this, he dismissed the assembly. (and verse 32)

This same word, *ekklesia* is used twice in the New Testament for the nation of Israel.

Acts 7:38 (NIV) He (Moses) was in the assembly in the desert. (and Hebrews 2:12)

In the days of the early church, Christians borrowed this term to refer to themselves when they came together. It carried for them the idea that God had called them out of the world to serve Jesus together. One example is at the beginning of Paul's letter to the Christians in the city of Corinth.

1 Corinthians 1:1-2 (NIV) Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes, (writing) to the church (called-out-ones) of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy...

When Christians gathered together, they were the *ekklesia* of Jesus. This word is used 109 times in the New Testament to speak of a church. The church is a group of Christians who have gathered or assembled together for whatever reason.

I shared this so you would understand how the Bible uses the word church. At it's core, a church is simply a group of Christians who gather together in the name of Jesus. They started using this word long before they had buildings, budgets, and other institutional characteristics.

So where did the word church come from? I'll give you the short answer to that question. Another Greek word, *kyriakos*, (*keer-ee-ah-kohs*) = "**belonging to the Lord**" appears twice in the New Testament.

Revelation 1:10 (NIV) On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet,...

1 Corinthians 11:20 (NIV) When you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat,...

The usage of this word was adopted by early Christians and applied to anything belonging to Jesus . Once they started purchasing buildings to meet in they called those "the Lord's house." This term, "the Lord's House" became our word church. It took transitions through several different languages, over a period of 1,500 years, to become the English word "church". The word church was originally used for both the building and the group meeting in it, as both were considered belonging to the Lord Jesus Christ.

On the morning of the Day of Pentecost, 50 days after the resurrection of Jesus, Jesus already had a group of followers. Acts 1:15 says there were about 120 people gathered together that morning. This is after Jesus had returned to heaven, but before the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Later that day, when the Holy Spirit came, He created a disturbance that attracted the attention of people on the street. The Spirit used that to gather a crowd to hear from Peter the good news about Jesus. That led into an intense period of discipleship, much like we do.

If someone becomes a Christian today we, the church, are responsible for that person in Christ. That may not seem like a daunting task, helping one new Christian to grow up in Christ. But imagine for a moment if next Sunday, Easter Sunday, this room is packed with guests and 20 of them become Christians next Sunday. We would have to start some new classes to disciple them. We'd have to move some money around in the budget for all the materials we'd need. We would need some of you to take them under wing.

Well that's what happened on the Day of Pentecost. The apostles of Jesus suddenly had 3000 new believers to disciple. They had a lot of work suddenly thrust upon them.

Acts 2:38 (NIV) Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 2:41 (NIV) Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

The *ekklesia* grew tremendously that day. What made them a group? What was the common element that defined them as an *ekklesia*? **The common element was that they had each been baptized into the name of Jesus.** They had received Jesus as Savior and Lord.

And look at how the author of Acts characterizes the life of that first church...

Acts 2:42 (NIV) And they devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer.

I want to focus on that second part this morning, "They devoted themselves... to the fellowship." This means they devoted themselves to each other, to this new group. This new group was made up of those who had been baptized into the name of Jesus.

What does it mean that they devoted themselves to the fellowship? **The Greek word here translated as “fellowship” is “koinonia.” (koinonia = "joint participation, sharing something in common").** Essentially, “koinonia” means “joint participation” or “sharing something in common.”

The English word "fellowship" originally had the same meaning. But the meaning of the word fellowship has morphed over the years. Today it is commonly used to speak of socials, dinners, or simple conversation with each other. Many churches have a room called a "fellowship hall" where such activities take place.

I want to take you back this morning to the original meaning of that word fellowship as used in the Bible. Fellowship, as the Bible uses it, is not enjoying food together, or other socializing, even in the church. There is a place for such activities, but “they devoted themselves to the fellowship” did not mean such activities. But, verse 42 does not mean that they devoted themselves to potluck meals or game nights.

Instead, it means that they devoted themselves to the group. I believe the best translation of the word *koinonia* is “partnership”. **“They devoted themselves... to the partnership.”** That word best describes their new devotion. As followers of Jesus Christ, they were partners with each other in service to Jesus.

In service to Jesus they gave themselves to His priority command for His *ekklesia*. The priority commandment of Jesus to His church is not worship, not prayer, not evangelism. The priority commandment of Jesus to His followers is to love one another.

John 13:34-35 (NIV) "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

This first church made that commandment a priority. They loved one another.

Acts 2:44-45 (NIV) All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.

Their love for one another was the practical, visual living out of them being the *ekklesia* of Jesus. People would connect them with Jesus by how they took care of each other. That was what showed them to be a Christian *ekklesia*, a Christian church. It was not a building with stained glass windows, pews, a pulpit, and a steeple. It was not a structure of pastor and deacons, a minister of music and youth. The defining characteristic of Jesus' followers is to be our care of one another.

The following verses describe what Jesus had in mind. These are a sample of the many similar commands to us in the New Testament.

Romans 12:10 (NIV) Be devoted to one another in brotherly love.

Romans 12:16 (NIV) Live in harmony with one another.

Galatians 5:13 (NIV) ... serve one another in love.

Ephesians 4:32 (NIV) Be kind and compassionate to one another...

Colossians 3:13 (NIV) Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another.

In short, as one preacher put it, "The church is where one-anothering happens."

This is the main feature of the life of the church. Don't lessen your devotion to Bible Study, to prayer, to worship, to the Lord's Supper. But increase your devotion to the partnership of the *ekklesia* of Jesus. Study and practice the commands in the verses at the end of this sermon.

To those who claim the church is full of hypocrites. Such people have not experienced the church at its best. At its best the church is a place where one-anothering takes place. If you have always wanted to be part of such a group, then this is where you can make a real difference for God.

Again, the church, the *ekklesia*, is made up of those who have received Jesus as Savior and Lord and been baptized into His name. We urge you to do so this morning. Join Jesus. Join what Jesus is doing in His church and in the world.

Be Devoted to the Fellowship:

Jn 13:34; Jn. 15:12, 17; Ro. 12:10, 16; Ro. 13:8; Ro. 14:13, 15; Ro. 15:7, 14; 1 Cor. 1:10; 1 Cor. 11:33; 1 Cor. 12:25; 1 Cor. 13:1; 1 Cor. 14:1; 1 Cor. 16:14; Gal. 5:6, 13; Gal. 15, 22, 26; Eph. 1:15; Eph. 4:2, 15, 32; Eph. 5:1, 19, 21; Ph. 1:9; Ph. 2:2; Col. 3:9, 13-14; 1 Th. 1:3; 1 Th. 3:6, 12; 1 Th. 4:9, 18; 1 Th. 5:11, 13, 15; 2 Th. 1:3; 1 Tim. 1:5; 1 Tim. 2:15; 1 Tim. 4:12; 1 Tim. 6:11; 2 Tim. 1:7, 13; 2 Tim. 2:22; 2 Tim. 3:10; Tit. 2:2; Phil. 1:5; Heb. 3:13; Hebrews 10:24-25; Heb. 13:1; James 2:8; James 4:11; James 5:16; 1 Pet. 1:22; 1 Pet. 2:17; 1 Pet. 3:8; 1 Pet. 4:8-9; 1 Pet. 5:5; 2 Pet. 1:7; 1 John 2:10; 1 John 3:10-11; 1 John 3:14, 16, 23; 1 John 4:7, 11-12; 2 John 1:5-6;