

Chapter Eleven

The Church Defined

What constitutes a “church”? What constitutes “The church”? What does the word “church” mean and where did it come from? These are good questions. They deserve answers.

People are usually surprised when I tell them that “church” is not a Bible word. It is not taken from the pages of Holy Scripture. A rapid-fire response to this statement usually involves getting peppered with many New Testament passages where the word church appears. I am immediately told, “The King James version uses the word “church” 112 times!” What people do not realize is that the word “church” is a word borrowed and used by Bible translators. It is not in the Hebrew or the Greek manuscripts. In the Tanach, erroneously titled the “Old Testament”, the Hebrew word that describes the people of Israel is “kehillah”. The word means “assembly” or “congregation”. In the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Tanach, circa 250 BCE, the translators used the Greek word “ekklesia”, which also means “assembly” or “congregation”, to translate the Hebrew

word “kehillah”. The Greek term “ecc” means “out” and “kaleo” means “call”. So, it refers to a group of people who are “called out”. So far, so good. The translators show consistency and accuracy.

Fast forward to the translations of the Apostolic Writings (New Testament) and see what happens. When the translators come across the Greek word “ekklesia”, instead of being consistent and using the words “assembly” or “congregation”, they insert a new word, “church”. Why? I believe it is due to a deeply held bias based on the errors of Replacement Theology that demand they make a distinction between Israel and what they believe is a new body of the people of God. They simply cannot bear the concept of continuity and, therefore, fully embrace the concept of contrast.

So where does the word “church” come from? There is some debate about the origins, but many scholars suggest that its meaning is something that “pertains to, or belongs to the Lord.” Even this definition has some bias as it technically can be defined as “pertains to or belongs to a lord”, not necessarily The Lord. Do you see how bias works?

So, setting aside the confusion and bias involved in translating, let's see how the Roman Catholic church defines this concept further. What does the word “Catholic” mean and where does that come from? The etymology of the word, according to

Merriam-Webster, spans Middle English as “catholik”; Middle French as “catholique”; Late Latin as “catholicus”; and to Greek as “katholikos”. Its first known use was not until the 14th century as an adjective meaning “universal” or “general”.

So, the Roman Catholic hierarchy assumed the title of “universal” claiming supreme authority on all things.

The actual reality that made the early believers “universal” was their work in sharing the message of the gospel to the whole world. That message was designed for the redemption of the world. What makes any congregation or assembly of believers today truly universal is their faithful adherence to the beliefs and practices of the earliest believers. As will be shown, the beliefs and practices of the Roman Catholic church have deviated significantly from those standards. The later creation of its hierarchy, complete with a sacrificing priesthood, did not fully develop until about five centuries later. In fact, much of what is recognizable today as the practices and traditions of the Roman Catholic church, were developed and added over a span of hundreds of years. This begs the question regarding not only “adding to the Word of God” but also whatever happened to “the faith once for all delivered unto the saints”? There are so many traditions added by the Roman Catholic church that are in direct conflict with the Bible, that more questions arise than can be addressed in this work alone.

When we consider what the foundation of this “assembly” or “congregation” of believers should be, let us consider the following:

- 1 Corinthians 3:11, “For no one can lay any other foundation than that which has been laid, which is Yeshua the Messiah.”
- Ephesians 2:20, “being built on the foundation of the emissaries and prophets, Messiah Yeshua himself being the chief cornerstone.”
- Ephesians 1:22,23, “He put all things in subjection under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things for the assembly, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.”

Our sure foundation is built on Yeshua, the Messiah, as the Head and built on the Apostles and Prophets. As believers, we are His body. All other later traditions that have been added that are in conflict with this authority have no place in the life of any believer. When we see all the pagan practices introduced during the reign of Constantine, 325 CE, we recognize the level of corruption and error.