

# Assemblies of the Church

What does the Lord Expect?

Winter Quarter 2020-2021

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It is tempting to have the attitude that we can't wait until all of this is over and we can get everything back to the way it was in 2019. I think that attitude sells us short.

I am looking to be stronger, wiser, more patient, more loving and to have a deeper trust in God because of all we are experiencing this year.

- What do you think?

**Thinking about all that we have gone through and are still enduring:**

- What lessons have you learned?

- What principles regarding the church or being a child of God have been demonstrated, made clearer or reinforced in your mind?

## **The Purpose of our Study**

Let's frame the purpose of our study.

- \* Learning about the assemblies of the church.
  - \* addressing questions that have been raised
- \* Learning about & practicing the discovery of the Lord's will for us
- \* Reinforcing our relationship of love for the Lord and for each other

### **Some questions that have been asked:**

- Why did we stop meeting in person?
- Why are we still having the Lord's supper for those on Zoom while some are meeting in person?
- Until we can all be at the building why aren't we all staying on Zoom?
  - What we are doing now is much less orderly and we are more divided since people on Zoom and people at the building don't see each other or interact together.
- Why don't we just meet on Zoom until this pandemic is over?

**Are there other questions we should be considering as we study this together?**

## **Lesson 2 - Remember These When Studying Together**

As we go through studying God's word together to learn more about His design and expectations of us regarding our gatherings, there are some important things to keep in mind. These things can help frame our study and reinforce our relationship with the Lord and with each other.

### **Why should we care about what the bible says?**

This may seem obvious, but for many people, the bible is just a good book with wise sayings about life. We regularly encourage one another to study the bible for a better understanding of God's will for His people.

- Why do we do that? What is so special about the bible?
  
- What does the bible have to say about itself?

### **What's love got to do with it?**

- What did Jesus say was at the core of all that God wants of His people? Where is that found?
  
- What other passages in the New Testament speak of the importance that God places on love toward Him and toward each other?

- What does 1 Corinthians 13 teach us about love?

### **What if, after study, two people don't have the same conviction about an issue?**

This can lead to some challenging conflicts. Let's look to the scriptures for guidance with this.

- What passages can you find that provide some principles that can help us understand how to deal with this?

### **A brief discussion of hermeneutics**

There are hundreds of different kinds of religious groups around the world all claiming to be the people of God and guided by the bible. And yet there is an amazing diversity of teaching and practices.

- How can that be?





## Lesson 3 - What is the Assembly?

### First a bit of Review: What is the Church?

We recently had a class about the New Testament church and we talked about it in earlier lessons. Let's do a bit of review.

- How would you explain to someone what Jesus and the New Testament writers meant when they spoke of the church? (include scriptures to illustrate)

### What is an Assembly?

The word "church" in the New Testament is translated from the Greek word "*ekklesia*", which is found 114 times in the ESV translation. 108 times it is translated "church," 4 times as "assembly" and 2 times as "congregation."

This word, along with its definition and origins, is used in discussions and studies to help understand what the church is and how it is supposed to act.

- Let's start with a definition. What does "*ekklesia*" mean?

As we discussed earlier, the context of a word, sentence or verse is a powerful tool to help us understand what is meant by the writer.

I encourage you to look up places where the word "church" is found to get a sense of what the word means.

Let's look at some examples of texts where the word is found.

As we discussed, there is both a sense of being "called out" and of a "gathering together" that can be part of the meaning, depending on the context of its usage.

In each of these cases, look at the surrounding context and describe what is meant by the word "ekklesia." (ESV translation used in these examples. The word translated from "ekklesia" is in bold)

- **Matthew 16:18** *"And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my **church**, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."*
- **Ephesians 1:22** *"And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the **church**, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all."*
- **1 Timothy 3:14-15** *"I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the **church** of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth."*
- **Acts 9:31** *"So the **church** throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied."*
- **Acts 8:3** *"But Saul was ravaging the **church**, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison."*

- **1 Corinthians 1:2** *“To the **church** of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours.”*
- **Revelation 1:10-11** *“I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet saying, ‘Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven **churches**, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.’”*
- **1 Corinthians 11:18-19** *“For, in the first place, when you come together as a **church**, I hear that there are divisions among you. And I believe it in part, for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized.”*
- **1 Corinthians 14:34-35** *“For God is not a God of confusion but of peace. As in all the **churches** of the saints, the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in **church**.”*
- **Acts 7:38** *“This is the one who was in the **congregation** in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai, and with our fathers. He received living oracles to give to us.”*
- **Acts 19:32** *“Now some cried out one thing, some another, for the **assembly** was in confusion, and “most of them did not know why they had come together.”*

- **Hebrews 12:23** *“and to the **assembly** of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect,*
  
- How would you summarize the different meanings of the word “ekklesia” in these passages?

### **What did the church do during its assemblies?**

Let’s look into the New Testament to find instructions or patterns that help us know what was done or expected during the gatherings of the church. What can you find?

Do all gatherings appear to be the same? Explain.

**Are some types of assembly more challenging for some activities?**

## Lesson 4 - Why is In-Person Meeting So Important?

I have hinted at my thinking on the matter by the way I phrased the question for this lesson. This is an important part of our study. Some might come to think that the digital gatherings should become the “new normal” for the gatherings of the church. It certainly can make it easier, from one perspective, but “easier” is certainly not the primary criteria here.

- Should digital assemblies become the normal for how the church should gather (after the pandemic is over)? Why or why not?
- Consider your human family. What if you found out you could only connect with you spouse, children, or parents by video or telephone for months or years? Would that be as good as being with them in person? Why or why not? What would be missing?
- Now think about your church family. What, if anything, is missing if we only experience a video or telephone connection over a long period and never are together in person?
- What New Testament passages can you find that can help us with this discussion?

## **Lesson 5 - What about Special Circumstances?**

### **Might it ever be impossible or unwise to fulfill the ideal of the church?**

This may sound like a crazy way to describe something. Again, let's look to the scriptures for guidance.

Can you find any instances where people of God were unable to fully follow His designs? Were they still His people?

Sometimes there are seemingly opposing principles that we find in the scriptures and we need to use wisdom to decide what to do. For example:

- Does the New Testament indicate that the church is designed to have elders? Where is that found?
- Were there churches in the New Testament that did not have elders? Were they still considered churches of our Lord? Explain with scriptures.
- Are there circumstances when it might be unwise or wrong for a church to appoint elders?
- How does wisdom figure into this consideration?

Now, let's think about this with respect to our assembling together as a church.

- What if one or more types of assembly are not possible or are particularly dangerous?

**What role does faith play in all of this?**





