

# Rediscovering God's Church

Message No:3 and Picture #1

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In the last two sermons, I shared with the God's Vision for the Church. I believe that God is concerned with the restoration of two people group to whom He is related by a covenant, which He has declared He will not break. The first, historically is ISRAEL and the second is the CHURCH.

**First** we looked at God's intention to provide for His Son a perfect companion for all eternity. As such, Church is the object of God's affection-the future bride of His beloved Son. An essential requirement in the process of attaining that great status and title, the Church must have a direct, personal relationship with God.

As redeemed people, the Church must become His own possession (Exodus 19:3-5). This is far above the level of what we could imagine or think for ourselves. Deuteronomy 32:9 says "For the Lord's portion is His people".

**Secondly**, we looked and studied that in order for God to make the Church into the kind of people He intends to become, there must be a process of transformation. When we accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior(as per Rom10:9-10) and are redeemed, we are only beginning the journey towards all we ought to be and that God intends us to be.

Today, I would like to start digging deep into the Word of God. We are going to look at the nature of the Church by looking at the various pictures of the Church in the Paul's letter to Ephesians. The first picture is titled as THE ASSEMBLY.

The Greek word translated "**Church**" in Ephesians 1:22 is ECCLESIA. The noun ecclesia is derived from a verb that means "to call out". The concept is a group of people that is formed by being called out from a larger group of people. It is also a group called out for a special purpose, that applies to the church. So, we are called out of the world through faith in Jesus Christ for a special purpose of God.

In the secular Greek of New Testament times, the word Ecclesia had a very specific meaning. It meant a "governmental assembly." Surprisingly, it is used in that way three times in the 19<sup>th</sup> chapter of Acts, where we read about an uproar that broke out in the city of Ephesus because of Paul's ministry.

Note the use of the word "assembly" in Acts 19:32 "*Some therefore cried one thing and some another, for the assembly(ecclesia) was confused and most of them did not know why they had come together.*" The people were holding an unorganized, unauthorized meeting and the town clerk rebuked them and told them they had no right to hold a meeting there in that way. Then the clerk added:

*" but if you have any other enquiry to make, it shall be determined in the lawful assembly(ecclesia)."*...V39. The word is used again in V41: "*And when he had said these things, he dismissed the assembly(ecclesia).*"

There fore the root meaning of the word we habitually translate as church means "a legal or governmental assembly." This meaning has been obliterated/destroyed in many modern translations, but the **governmental assembly** is the first picture of God's people in the mirror of God's Word.

## **Qualifications to Enter the Assembly.**

Research informs us that in the assembly in Ephesus, many people were excluded: Slaves (who comprised nearly half of the population), Women and all visitors and temporary residents. The assembly was reserved only for free citizens residing in Ephesus. To find out what are the qualifications to be in the assembly of the Lord Jesus Christ, let's look at what Jesus Himself told us in Matthew 16:15-18.

Peter came out boldly and proclaimed to Jesus *"You are the Christ(Messiah), the Son of the living God."* This revelation did not come by Peter's natural reasoning or logic. It came from God the Father through the Holy Spirit. It did not reveal Jesus of Nazareth as the carpenter's son whom he already knew, but it revealed Jesus in His divine, eternal nature as the Son of God.-the Messiah.

Millions today have been given membership to churches when they have not received This basic revelation. Thus, the church can not function in its full authority because its members don't even qualify to enter the assembly!

The language of Jesus in the above passage is very emphatic: *"You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church."* All the emphasis is on the word "My". My church, My assembly. What Jesus was saying, in effect, that there are many Assemblies. Each city and state has its assembly. Nations have their assemblies. But Jesus said "I am now building My Assembly". There is a relationship between build and my. If Jesus does not build it, He will not own it. He owns only what He builds.

The church as an assembly is a group called out for a special purpose of God. There are four elements that constitute the procedure for admission to the assembly of Jesus Christ: **Confrontation, Revelation, Acknowledgement and Confession.** We can never enter the assembly to rule until we have had a life-shaking, personal encounter with Jesus, as Peter had. Likewise, we cannot know the truth about Jesus unless it is revealed to us. Since Jesus made Peter the example, let's use what transpired between the two of them, to illustrate the procedure.

- (1) There is a direct confrontation: Peter met Jesus face-to-face. There was no body between them, no mediator, no middleman.
- (2) There is revelation granted: The revelation was granted by God the Father through the Holy Spirit. Without that revelation, Peter could not have known who Jesus truly is.
- (3) There is an acknowledgement of the revelation: Peter acknowledged the revelation when he responded to Christ's question.
- (4) There is confession of the revelation: Peter confessed, out loud "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

## **Our Earthly Authority.**

In Psalm110:1 we read: The LORD said to my Lord "Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool." In Mark 12:35-37, Jesus applied the above reference to Himself. In this verse the "LORD" is God the Father and "My Lord" is Jesus Christ. The New testament clearly reveals that Jesus is *right now* seated at God's right hand.{see Romans 8:34; Ephesians 1:20; Colossians 3:1; Hebrews 1:3; 1-Peter3:22}. Jesus Christ is on His throne right now and here is how His authority is to be executed on earth: *"The LORD shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion. Rule in the midst of Your enemies."* Psalm110:2

Here we see all three Persons of the Godhead are represented in the first two verses of Psalm 110. In the 1<sup>st</sup> verse, we read that God the Father says to Jesus the Son, “Sit on My right hand.” Then, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> verse, we see that God the Holy Spirit stretches forth the scepter(rod) of Christ’s authority from Zion—the assembly of His holy people, and says “Rule in the midst of Your enemies!” In Scripture, the title that is regularly used for the assembly/church of God’s people, when they meet in divine order is Zion.

We can check out what the Scripture says about our relationship to Zion as believers in Hebrews 12:22-24. Notice that this is not a future event. The writer did not say “you are soon going to come.” He said that you have already come!. Not physically, of course but spiritually. We are already part of the total governmental assembly of God. Although part of it is in the heaven and part of it is on earth. The Head of this assembly/church, under God the Father, is Jesus Christ. **We as the church/assembly and God’s people are the representatives of God’s authority in the Earth.**

Jesus rules “out of Zion” which is the picture of God’s people meeting in divine gathering(assembly), divine order and divine authority. Therefore the essential feature of the true church is the governmental authority in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Most Christians accept the fact that Jesus is going to rule someday. But it is vital to know that He is ruling right now. When the church/assembly fully grasp this fact it will drastically change the way we live. Through our prayers, intercessions and fasting, through our proclamation of the Gospel and our committed lifestyle, we are being utilized by Christ to “rule in the midst of His enemies” Remember the departing words of Jesus in Matt 28:18. He said “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” Under His authority and power, the church/assembly has to operate and do the things that He asked in the great commission as well as in the last few verses of last chapters in gospel of Mark & Luke.

After giving a strong exhortation/caution/warning about right relationships in the church, Jesus said *“Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning any thing that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.”* (Matthew 18:18-20)

In this passage notice, that the initiative is not with heaven but with earth. When we agree on earth, heaven does the work. Our agreeing and binding and loosing are made effective as we gather in a unified divine order. God has placed the responsibility on us the church/assembly.

Another very important point about the church is that it functions only when we recognize each others gifting. Apostle Peter in his epistle (1-Peter 4:10-11), tells us that each one of us has received a gift and we should minister it to one another. The Greek word for this special gift is charisma. We must be sensitive to- and minister to one another through- *our charisma*. Whether our gifts are speaking, singing, serving, teaching, giving or any thing else. Remember Spiritual authority can operate only by voluntary recognition. It can not be imposed-it must be submitted to.

Let us challenge ourselves to a more serious commitment to this church. Attend church consistently and punctually, serve in some capacity and appreciate the fact that we are a part of an important institution. Give the church/assembly, our very best in attitude and service. As I said above, the essential feature of the church/assembly is governmental authority of Jesus Christ. We will not be fit to govern the world until we have learned to govern ourselves. What a challenging image we see in the mirror, and what a position we must rise to! May God empower us to meet the challenge.