

Part 1

## The Meetings of the Assembly

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If you have read many of the articles on this site, you know that I frequently refer to the *ekklēsia*, the assembly of people whom God has called out of the darkness of this world into His marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9). Naturally, readers frequently want to know what the meetings of the *ekklēsia* were like and how they can conduct meetings of the *ekklēsia* today. This article is the first in a series in which I will answer these questions.

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When you think of church, what comes to mind? Big buildings? Stained glass? Robed ministers? Liturgy? Choirs? Even if you picture the little, rural, Baptist church, you will still likely see it as having a pulpit facing rows of pews, a pastor who preaches sermons, deacons and ushers who pass around plates for a collection, and a congregation that—aside from singing and saying "amen"—is almost entirely silent and passive during the "service." What this arrangement does is teach everyone—men and women alike—to be submissive to the pastor, who finds himself in the role of lording it over the congregation (Mark 10:42). This results in pastors who fall into the temptations of pride and tyranny, passive men who do not have the opportunity to teach, preach, exhort, oversee, etc., women submitting to a man other than their own husband (or, if unmarried, father, brother, uncle), and children seeing, and often growing up to resent and reject, the poor role models their parents have displayed. Sitting silently in a submissive position in a pew in front of and below one man who speaks week-after-week is not a way for us to grow into strong, well-rounded Christians who are equipped to boldly take the Gospel to the world.

Paul G. Johnson wrote in his 1968 book, *Buried Alive*,

To perpetuate the clerical role of answer man, the layman when inside the church building must act as if he has only half a brain, while outside, in the world, he is expected to be an ambassador for Christ, a lay transmitter of faith. Outside, he is to be informed and vocal; inside, he must appear ignorant and mute as a sheep. Christians have within them many questions—questions that are at once elementary and profound, questions that would ripple the water were they raised. However, because a Christian is

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supposed to have "answers," life's important questions are not discussed outside the church building; and, because the pastor is the educated, spiritual authority, they are not discussed inside either.

While this is the status quo in the institutional church system, God's design for the *ekklēsia* is entirely different. If you examine your Bible, you will find that anyone who fellowshiped with Peter and Paul and James and John would have considered as alien what we moderns believe to be inseparable from church services. The trappings of a typical church would have seemed to them to more closely resemble pagan temple rites than the meetings of the *ekklēsia* with which they were familiar.

If we are going to assemble as our first century brethren did, if we are going to revive meetings of the *ekklēsia*, we need to know what those meetings were like. In this series of articles, I'd like to show you from the Bible how to hold meetings of the *ekklēsia*.

### **What Were the Assemblies Called?**

Before continuing, I want to recommend that you read, "*Ekklēsia* or Church, Does It Matter?" (<http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/ekklesia.htm>). It contains information that is foundational to what I will say here. In this section, I want to point out that the New Testament writers referred to both the assembly as a whole and the local meetings as the *ekklēsia*. Some English Bibles incorrectly translate *ekklēsia* as "church." A few do better by rendering it as "assembly" or "congregation." *Ekklēsia* literally means "those called out from." In the Bible, it refers to people called out from darkness and bondage and gathered before God. A good, workable translation is, "the called out assembly."

The writers of the Bible never called the assembly "church." "Church" would be an English translation of the Greek word, *kuriakos*. We never see the Bible use the word *kuriakos* to mean the assembly. The assembly and its meetings were called *ekklēsia*.

### **Where Did the *Ekklēsia* Meet?**

The only places the Bible mentions for the meetings of the *ekklēsia* are private houses (see, for example, Acts 8:3; Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:19; Colossians 4:15). Evangelistic campaigns were not specifically for the brethren but were for the public and were held in public places such as the temple, synagogues, schools, and outdoors.

But the saints held their meetings of the *ekklēsia* in their houses. The Bible doesn't tell us what size these meetings were, but Jesus says, "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the middle of them" (Matthew 18:20). In other words, once you have two believers, at least one of which is a man to do the speaking, the size requirement has been met. An *ekklēsia* may have consisted of a large number of people, or may simply have been the family that lived in the house. Don't worry if you cannot find a great many people interested in forming an *ekklēsia*. If you have two or three believers, one of which is a man, you can have an *ekklēsia*.

### **When Did the *Ekklēsia* Meet?**

The Bible gives no specific frequency, day of the week, or time for meetings. You can meet daily, weekly, or whatever you like (see "What Is the Christian Sabbath?") (<http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/christiansabbath.html>). There is also no requirement for everyone to always attend (see "Hebrews 10:25: What Are We Not To Forsake?") (<http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/hebrews1025.htm>). You can, for example, meet with your family daily at 7:00 pm, and other brethren can attend on the days that they can make it. As we will see, compared to most church services, meetings of the *ekklēsia* were relatively informal (but not without some rules).

In the installments that will follow, I will discuss the Lord's Supper, the role and function of the elders and servants (and whether there is a difference between elders, pastors, and bishops), who can speak, the order of the meetings, why the early church met and why we meet today, and whether the meeting is a worship service.