

The Doctrine of the Church

By Dr. Robert A. Morey

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I. Secular Greek meaning of the word *evkkhlsi,a*:

The citizens of a Greek city/state could be called out of their homes to assemble as a body to vote, conduct business, hear announcements, declare war, etc. The implications are as follows:

1. To be an official “citizen” of a city/state gave you certain rights, responsibilities, and privileges (Acts 21:37-39; 22:25-29).
2. In the NT, members of the church are called “citizens” (Eph. 2:19; Phil. 3:20). This gives them certain rights, responsibilities, and privileges.

II. Religious meaning of the word *evkkhlsi,a* in the OT:

When believers, saints, and godly Jews gathered as an assembly or congregation for public worship, the preaching of the Word, singing, giving of offerings, giving of testimonies, praise, etc.: Deut. 4:10; 9:10; 18:16; 31:12, 30; 1 Kings 8:22;

1 Chron. 28:2, 8; 29:10, 20; Ezra 10:7-8; Neh. 13:1;

Psa. 22:22; 26:12; 35:18; 40:9; 68:26; 89:5; 107:32;

149:1; Pro. 5:14; Lam. 1:10; Joel 2:16; Micah 2:5.

III. Biblical Theological development:

A. The “church,” i.e. assembly of believers in worship, prayer, and praise, was set up at the Beginning in the Garden of Eden by the pre-incarnate Messiah. He met with Adam and Eve on regularly scheduled times so He could teach them who He is, who they are, where they came from, why they were created, what they are to do in the Garden, what they are forbidden to do, how to worship Him, what offerings to bring when they gather to worship Him, etc. (Gen. 2:15-25; 3:8f)

B. Messiah was the first pastor in Eden church; Adam and Eve were the first congregation; the Devil caused the first church split; he has been causing them ever since; Adam and Eve were thrown out of the church; they were redeemed by the shedding of blood; the Messiah met them in worship outside of the Garden; they taught their children how to worship God.

C. After the apostasy of Cain and Lamech (Gen. 4:16, 19, 23-24), Seth set up a church separate from the world and they met as believers to worship and to hear preaching (Gen. 4:26). Matthew Henry comments:

God gave them to see the reviving of religion in their family: *Then began men to call upon the name of the Lord*, v. 26. It is small comfort to a good man to see his children’s children, if he do not, withal, see peace upon Israel, and those that come of him walking in the truth. Doubtless God’s name was called upon before, but now,

1. The worshippers of God began to stir up themselves to do more in religion than they had done; perhaps not more than had been done at first, but more than had been done of late, since the defection of Cain. Now men began to worship God, not only in their closets and families, but in public and solemn assemblies. Or now there was so great a reformation in religion that it was, as it were, a new beginning of it...when men saw in Cain and Lamech the sad effects of sin by the workings of natural conscience,—when they saw God’s judgments upon sin and sinners,—*then* they were so much the more lively and resolute in religion. The worse others are the better we should be, and the more zealous.
2. The worshippers of God began to distinguish themselves. The margin reads it, *Then began men to be called by the name of the Lord*, or to call themselves by it. Now that Cain and those that had deserted religion had built a city, and begun to declare for impiety and irreligion, and called themselves the *sons of men*, those that adhered to God began to declare for him and his worship, and called themselves the *sons of God*. Now began the distinction between professors and profane, which has been kept up ever since, and will be while the world stands.^[a]

VI. From the Garden of Eden to today, believers have always gathered to worship God and hear the Word of the Lord. Melchizedek is an example of church leaders long before Moses (Gen. 14:18f). He was a “priest of the most high God” to whom Abraham gave tithes.

The “Israel” within Israel, the holy “Remnant” within the nation, was the church of God. The issue of whether the church is the nation of Israel is a false issue. The “church” existed before the nation of Israel came into existence, within the nation, and was still in existence when the nation was destroyed. We must not confuse the church with the nation. They are two separate entities.

VII. Revealed religion has thus always been the norm and not the exception. It has surfaced under all eight covenants and existed in every dispensation. The people of God were never dependent on Natural Theology for truth or Natural Law for morals. Truth and morals always came by Special Revelation, not by human reason, experience, feelings, and faith.

This is why not a single “theologian” or “philosopher” ever appeared in the history of God’s people before or after the nation of Israel was established. God sent His people *prophets* and then *apostles* who proclaimed the Word of the Lord.

IV. New Testament Concept

A. The New Covenant church is the final form of the church that began in the Garden of Eden. It is composed only of *believers*.

B. Where does Heb. 11 begin its “Hall of Believers”? Believers of all ages were one in heart and experience.(Rom. 3:29-30). Thus there is only one tree (Rom. 11:17-21).

C. All the members of this church “know the Lord,” their sins have been forgiven, and they are all priests of the most High God. Primary passages: Jer. 31: 31-34; 32:38-41; Lk. 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25; 2 Cor. 3:6; Heb. 8:8-13; 9:15; 13:20.

D. Matt. 16:18 is the first usage of the word in the NT. Jesus rejected the apostate church of His day and had to reestablish the church.

E. Whose Church is it? The pastor’s, the people’s, the

denomination? The inter-testamental Jewish literature promised, “To the Messiah belongs a people.”

1. mou th.n evkklhsi,an Matt. 16:18 "My church"
2. tou/ Cristou/, Rom. 16:16 "of Christ"
3. tou/ qeou: Acts 20:28 "of God"

F. The Messiah is the Head of His church: Eph. 5:23; Col.

1:18

V. Organization of the Church.

A. In the first days after Pentecost the disciples had no thought of separating themselves from the religious life of Israel, and would not realize the need of any distinct organization of their own.

B. The temple-worship was still adhered to (Acts 2:46; 3:1), though it was supplemented by apostolic teaching, by prayer and fellowship, and by the breaking of bread (Acts 2:42, 46).

C. The early assemblies were called synagogues (James 2:2).

D. Church offices were the product of gradual growth suggested by emerging needs (Acts 6:1-7).

E. The universal church: (see Eph 1:22; 3:10; 5:22-27; Col 1:24; Heb 12:23).

G. The local church: In Acts 11:26, it is said that Paul and Barnabas were "gathered together with the church," where the church at Antioch is meant. In Acts 14:23, Paul and Barnabas are said to have "appointed elders in every church," that is, churches which they had planted. In Rev 2 and 3 the seven churches of Asia Minor are addressed. In Acts 16:5 we are told that the churches "were strengthened in the faith." On the local sense see, further, Acts 8:1; 15:4; 16:5; 20:17; Rom 16:4; 1 Cor 12; 6:4; 11:16; Gal 1:2,22, and many other places.

H. There were two clearly distinct offices of a local and permanent kind in the New Testament churches. Paul (Phil 1:1) addresses "all the saints in Christ Jesus that are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons."

I. Elder: The most common designation of the first of these officers is "elder" (Grk: *presbuteros*). It was already the leading office in the synagogue. In one passage (Eph 4:11) he is called "pastor" (Grk: *poimen*). In Acts 20:17-28, it becomes clear that the office of elder, bishop, and pastor was one; for there the apostle charges the elders of the church at Ephesus to feed (pastor) the church in which the Holy Spirit has made them bishops (compare Titus 1:5,7; 1 Pet 5:1,2).

The function of the elders was, in general, spiritual, but involved an oversight of all the affairs of the church (1 Tim 3:2; 5:17).

H. Deacon: The second office of the local church. The office of deacon originated with the appointment of the Seven in Acts 6. If we compare the qualifications there given by the apostles with those given by Paul in 1 Tim 3:8-13, it seems quite probable that the necessity which arose at Jerusalem, and which led to the appointment of the Seven was really the occasion for originating the office of deacon in the churches. The work assigned the Seven was secular, that is to say, the "service of tables." They were to relieve the apostles of that part of the work. A similar relation to the work of the elders seems to have been borne by that of the deacons.

^[a]Henry, Matthew: *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible : Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*.
Peabody : Hendrickson, 1996, c1991, S. Ge 4:25