

“WHERE DID ALL THE CHURCHES COME FROM?”

David Halbrook

Have you wondered why there are many different kinds of churches and where they all came from?

In Scripture, all churches were the same “kind” of church, having the duty to teach and practice only what God revealed (1 Thess. 2:13). Paul taught the same message “everywhere in every church” (1 Cor. 4:17). The fact that today, the same message is not taught “everywhere in every church” proves that different messages now exist.

Paul knew this would happen and warned of new teachings and practices (read 1 Tim. 4:1-5). These changes ultimately produced new kinds of churches. Some of those churches no longer exist, some of them do.

On Wednesday evenings at 7PM, we are studying “Church History.” This study began in the New Testament, when there was only one kind of church, and we saw what the church was originally taught to believe and practice. From there, we have surveyed the record of religious history, finding the origins and reasons for the existence of many modern churches. You are invited to join us and participate in this study. To see what we are studying this week, go to WWW.QVCOC.COM or contact us.

-- *Editor's Note:* Have you thought about inviting someone to our Wednesday study of religious history? Most likely, we all know someone who wonders about that subject. Use our *Arkansas Weekly* article to invite someone this week. Or, maybe they'd rather study with you privately. Would you “be ready”? (1 Pet. 3:15)

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The Exhorter

Acts 11:23 *Exhorted them all... cleave unto the Lord*

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THE CHURCH, THE ASSEMBLY

David Halbrook

In the New Testament, the words “church” and “assembly” mean exactly the same thing. Matthew 16:18 says *I will build My church*, and *I will build My assembly* teaches the same message. Acts 2:47 says *And the Lord added to the church...*, and that could also say *And the Lord added to the assembly...* Ephesians 1:22, which says *He gave Him to be head over all things to the church*, could read *He gave Him to be head over all things to the assembly*. When you read the word “church,” you should think of an assembly of people.

Primarily, this “assembly” is spiritual, meaning that we are called out of sin, into Christ (Col. 1:13). But, as we have seen, the word “church” is synonymous with one of the functions of the saved—to assemble (1 Cor. 11:18; 14:19, 28). The first Christians earned a reputation by regularly assembling. In the year 112AD, Pliny, a Roman governor, wrote a letter to Trajan, the Roman emperor, asking whether or not he should execute Christians. A portion of his letter said “The whole account they gave of their crime or error (whichever it is to be called) amounted only to this –viz. That they were accustomed on a stated day to meet...” Even Roman rulers knew that Christians assembled! Throughout the New Testament, the first day of the week is the only day identified as being important to all Christians and all churches (Matt. 28:1; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2). Is it important to you?

When reading the book of Acts, before we learn of the assembly on the first day of the week, we read that they were assembling “daily with one accord” (Acts 2:46a). Does God give a local church permission to assemble on a day other than the first day of the week? Yes. If you had been in Jerusalem then, what would you have done? If you had chosen to assemble “only” once a week, think of how much teaching you would have missed! If you did not daily bring your children to learn the apostles’ teaching, what were they doing that was more important? Based on your current habit, how often would you have chosen to be present when the saints assembled?

Later in the book of Acts, it is apparent that the church did not continue assembling every day. Passages like Acts 14:27; 15:30; 21:22 record the church being called together for some specific purpose. This would not be necessary if they were together every day. But this shows that the church sometimes came together for an occasion which was not typical. No doubt, a few people were sick, a few were out of town, and others were prevented from coming due to circumstances out of their control. But when God says the church was together, what part of the church did that exclude? Would it have included you if your family was in town visiting, your children wanted to play a ball game, or your favorite show was in progress? To which of these assemblies are we most committed? Which of these assemblies is most important? Where are you most needed? Where will your children's inward man be renewed?

God, not man, has revealed the practice of assembling ourselves together as the church. He even identifies His people as an assembly. That is who we are because that is an important part of what we do. God also identified His people as a family, kingdom, and body. But, if we do not consistently function together as a family—why do we consider ourselves the family of Christ? If we do not steadfastly function together as a kingdom—why do we consider ourselves the kingdom of Christ? If we do not regularly function together as a body—why do we consider ourselves the body of Christ? And, if we do not persistently function together as a church (an assembly)—why do we consider ourselves the church (assembly) of Christ? Let us act consistent with who we claim to be and to whom we claim to belong, so that we can attend that final assembly in Heaven.

“THOU HAS REVEALED THEM UNTO BABES”

Marc Gibson (www.knollwoodchurch.org/yr1999/k10_babes.html)

In one of the prayers He addressed to His Father, Jesus said, **"I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight "** (Matthew 11:25-26). He then said to those who would hear Him, **"All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and he to whom the Son wills to reveal Him "** (v. 26). In Luke's recording of these words, He adds that Jesus turned privately to His disciples and said, **"Blessed are the eyes which see the things you see" (Luke 10:23).** God has revealed truth unto man. In this present time, the Father has revealed His Son, Jesus Christ, to those who will see and hear. In Christ is revealed all truth for man to know and please God. Jesus said that God gave this revelation unto "babes," and hid it from the "wise and prudent".

When Jesus used these terms, He referred to the world's judgments as to who was wise and who was naive. The "wise and prudent" are those who, due to their worldly wisdom and self-righteousness, rank themselves highly. "Babes" are those who humble themselves before the altar of God's wisdom, leaving behind human assumptions and preconceived notions. Revealed truth is "hidden" from the wise and prudent because they refuse to acknowledge it. Truth is "revealed" to babes because they are of a mind to hear and heed God's word.

Paul, in speaking of the fact that some would deem the message of the cross (the gospel) as foolishness, wrote: **"For it is written: 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.' Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe" (I Corinthians 1:19-21).** Education can be very helpful, but filling the mind with large doses of worldly wisdom (whether religious or secular), can endanger the soul. The more enamored we become with worldly philosophy and wisdom, the more difficult it is for us to perceive spiritual truths. **"But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (2:14).** This is why Paul warned the Colossians to beware of being "plundered" by **"Philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ"**(Colossians 2:8). One commentator noted correctly *"it is paradoxical but true that study can separate a person from the truth as well as bring a person to truth. It is the attitude of the learner that determines the result"* (Robert E. Mounce, NIBC, *Matthew*, p. 107).

Again, Paul wrote, **"For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty... "** (1 Corinthians 1:26). Worldly wisdom is a trap that the devil sets to lure those who will not fully submit their minds to God's revealed will. Christians should not be ashamed of lacking worldly learning and prestige. We are still fully equipped to stand up and contend for the faith and give a defense for the hope that is within us (**Jude 3; 1 Peter 3:15**). You may be a "babe" in worldly wisdom, but you can understand the revealed mind of God.