

## BASIC BIBLE PRINCIPLES

# THE ECCLESIA

*Ekklesia* is a Greek word which occurs over one hundred times in the New Testament. It is usually translated 'church' or 'churches'. The word comes from two words: *ek* ('out of') and *kaleō* ('called'). The two words occur separately in the following quotation:

"Out of Egypt have I called My son" (Mt. 2:15).

The ecclesia is a group of people who have been 'called out'. Usually the word is used of the believers in Christ who have been called out from the world to be a people for their God, but it is also used of Israel in the wilderness (Acts 7:38) and of the "assembly" of Diana worshippers in Ephesus who gathered at the theatre (19:32,39,41).

### Particular ecclesias and the ecclesia in general

To avoid confusion with the way the world uses the word 'church', Christadelphians usually use the word '*ecclesia*'. In this leaflet '*ecclesia*' is used instead of 'church' in quotations from the New Testament AV.

*Ecclesia* can refer to groups of believers in specific locations:

"the *ecclesia* which was at Jerusalem" (Acts 8:1);

"the *ecclesia* that is in their house" (Rom. 16:5);

"the *ecclesia* of the Laodiceans" (Col. 4:16);

"the *ecclesia* of the Thessalonians" (1 Thess. 1:1).

*Ecclesia* can also refer to the believers as a whole:

"upon this rock I will build my *ecclesia*" (Mt. 16:18);

"I persecuted the *ecclesia* of God" (1 Cor. 15:9);

"concerning Christ and the *ecclesia*" (Eph. 5:32).

### The ecclesia and the promises

In Hebrews 2:12 the writer quotes from Psalm 22:22. The Greek word *ekklēsia* is used to translate the Hebrew word *qahal* ('congregation'). So *qahal* is an Old Testament word for *ecclesia*. The first occurrence of *qahal* is in Genesis 28, where it is translated 'multitude': "And God Almighty bless thee, and make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, that thou mayest be a *multitude* of people" (v. 3). Thus the ecclesia has its roots in the promises made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Later on in Genesis 28, Jacob set up a stone as a pillar and called it "God's house" (v. 22). Paul alludes to this in writing to Timothy, when he likens the ecclesia to a house and a pillar: ". . . the house of God, which is the ecclesia of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15).

### The ecclesia and Christ

The ecclesia is likened to a body with Christ as the head: "And he is the head of the body, the *ecclesia*" (Col. 1:18); "Now ye [the *ecclesia*] are the body of Christ, and members in particular" (1 Cor. 12:27). Just as a body has many different parts, each with its own function, so the ecclesia is made up of many brethren and sisters, each with their own role: "If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were

hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased Him” (vv. 17,18). As parts of this body, brethren and sisters should avoid schisms (divisions), and “care one for another” (v. 25).

In Ephesians 5 the ecclesia is likened to a bride with Christ as the bridegroom. The husband is the head of the wife, just as Christ is the head of the ecclesia (v. 23). Wives should be subject to their husbands just as the ecclesia is subject to Christ (v. 24). Christ loves the ecclesia as a husband should love his wife; such is his love that he gave himself for the ecclesia (v. 25). The bride is to be cleansed by “the washing of water by the word” (v. 26), and so the Word of God should play a central part in the life of an ecclesia.

### **Ecclesial life**

A central aspect of ecclesial life is remembering the sacrifice of Christ by breaking bread and drinking wine, usually “upon the first day of the week” (Acts 20:7). The meeting on the first day of the week is also an appropriate time when collections can be taken (1 Cor. 16:2). When we meet together we should also exhort one another: “not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching” (Heb. 10:25).

Another Old Testament word which matches with *ekklēsia* is the Hebrew word *miqra*. This word is made up of the Hebrew words for ‘out’ and ‘called’, as found in “and called My son out of Egypt” (Hos. 11:1). *Strong’s Concordance* defines it as meaning, ‘something called out’. It is translated ‘convocation’ (Ex. 12:16), ‘assemblies’ (Isa. 1:13) and ‘reading’ (Neh. 8:8). In Nehemiah 8:8 the Hebrew is better translated ‘in convocation’ or ‘in assembly’. This assembly in Nehemiah 8 provides us with an example of the kind of things an ecclesia should do when it meets together:

- gather together as one (v. 1)
- read the Word of God (v. 3)
- worship God (v. 6)
- expound the Word (v. 7)
- teach (v. 9)
- have joy in understanding the Word (v. 12).

### **Other points**

When a member of the ecclesia persists in wrong behaviour then he or she should be withdrawn from: “Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us” (2 Thess. 3:6).

The letters to the seven ecclesias in Revelation provide us with much instruction and warning for ecclesial life. The ecclesias varied in their spiritual health. For example, the Ephesians were commended for their works, labour, patience, refusal to bear evil, and their hatred of things which Christ hated, although they had left their “first love” (Rev. 2:2-6). But the Laodiceans were rebuked for being materially rich but spiritually “wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked” (3:17).

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