

# THE ASSEMBLY MESSENGER

Proclaiming the Timeless Truth of the Church to a New Generation of Believers

Volume 01-47

Dear Reader

We have been into rather heavy material on “assembly truth” for quite some time in the Assembly Messenger. We are exercised to shift gears and seek in this next series to help those who are more at the beginning of their search as to what pleases the Lord regarding their “church” position and walk. Sometimes explaining the basics in a way understood by the uninstructed is hard to do for us who through a lifetime of study and conviction, have searched out so-called *assembly truth* and are generally comfortable with our assembly fellowship. But let’s try! First, we need your help in getting these next issues into the hands of the younger- and less-instructed believers. So, I’ll now step into my imagination-machine. Your what?

## THE IMAGINATION MACHINE

I’m now in my imagination-machine where anything is possible. I imagine myself back many years as a teenager who wants to please the Lord, but doesn’t know quite how. Or I’m a college student exposed to so many religious cultures and professedly-Christian denominations and groups, and I’m confused, although I don’t want to let Dad and Mom know it. Or I’m recently married, or a young father or mother with a new child I’m responsible to bring up in the “discipline and admonition of the Lord” (Eph.6:4), and for the first time I want to get serious as to where the *Lord* desires me to gather for Christian fellowship. Does *He* have any preference as long as the gospel is preached? There are so many questions and so many groups to choose from. Is the social life of the “church” a deciding factor? Since I sing so well (I’m in the imagination machine, don’t forget, where anything is possible), does that large choir and well-respected music director and majestic new organ factor into my decision? How about that well-known pastor who is able to hold his audience on the edge of their seats with eloquent sermons? What does the Bible say? Does it say anything? How do I find out? Think, dear older reader, how many younger people who you know are in this position! Maybe older ones too. Remember, *your* knowledge and comfort in these things is not *theirs*!

## THE AMMUNITION

In my imagination machine I choose to pick the young married person since that was about the time *I* got serious as to the above questions. My father had recently died, so my source of comfortable answers had gone: I was in a very small isolated assembly. I then had to search things out on my own. I remember it wasn’t easy! There were many potholes in the road!

It seems reasonable to me in my imagination machine and in my mid-20's, not knowing all I’ve learned since, to begin with the Bible. But which one? Today there are a multitude of translations and paraphrases, some easier to read and understand, some not. Since the Bible was written in Hebrew (most of the Old Testament) and in Greek (the New Testament), it seems reasonable that my English translation should as accurately as possible represent the Hebrew and Greek. I find this a long search in itself. It seems obvious that *paraphrases* such as the *Taylor Living Bible* cannot be as accurate as a *translation* since the paraphrasers wrote down what they *thought* the original writers meant. What if they were wrong? I find that other translations such as the very popular NIV [*New International Version*] are thought-by-thought translations (instead of word by word) and thus necessitate considerable judgment in translating into English. People well-instructed in the Word tell me the NIV is probably the least accurate of the major translations, although about 95-97% of it is fine. But it’s not a good study Bible. Although the old (from 1611 with changes) KJV [*King James Version*] has a very large and loyal following, I find it has many errors and words that have changed meanings, thousands of which are corrected in the *New Scofield Reference Bible*, KJV version, and in the margins of other Bibles. And much of the English is hard to read and understand by we teens and 20-somethings. Many of us today just simply don’t have the vocabulary of the older brethren: it is not stressed in school today. The NKJV [*New King James Version*] also corrects many of the KJV errors while being written in modern English, but maintains the general flow of the KJV and thus is more acceptable to the KJV loyalists. To cut this short, I find that the Scofield KJV, the NKJV and the NASB [*New American Standard Bible*] are looked upon by many conservative scholars as generally scripturally-accurate translations at about the 97-98% level.

My computer Bible program contains an obscure “New Translation” by John Nelson Darby, done in the mid-1800’s, which *scholars* use as an English study-Bible because of its great accuracy to the Hebrew and Greek. [I step out of my imagination machine and tell you there is no more accurate or better English translation, at the 99+% level, and that it is available in leather binding through Believers Bookshelf, 570-672-2134 USA; 905-563-4929 Canada.] But I find in my study that Greek and Hebrew words have shades of meaning that the *best* of translations often don’t make clear, and that two of many helpful books along these lines are *Strongs Concordance* with Hebrew and Greek Lexicon [often available in the \$25 range] and *Vine’s Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* [my favorite, in the \$20 range]. Finally, I found there are several very accurate Greek-English interlinear New Testaments, some even for specific translations [like the one I have for the NKJV]. Well, now that I have some accurate Bibles, I can in my imagination machine begin a prayerful, painstaking search. What will I find?

## MY FINDINGS AS TO THE CHURCH

I find that some translations use the term *assembly* to translate the Greek word *ecclesia* (or *ekklesia*), and others use *church*. Whichever, the Greek word means “called out ones.” What do I find as to this word *church* or *assembly* in the New Testament, and as to Christians gathering together? We will number my findings for easier future discussion and reference.

1. In Matthew 16:18, the Church is seen as something future and built on a Rock. Is that rock Peter?
2. Matthew 18:20 speaks of two or three gathered unto Christ’s name, and Him in the midst. That certainly seems significant. Is it?
3. In Luke 22:19-20, the Lord passed bread and wine and told the disciples to “do this.” This seems to be expanded on in 1 Corinthians 11 and associated with some serious admonitions. Please explain!
4. In Acts 2, strange things happened, disciples are seen gathered together in a new way, and the Lord added to the Church daily. Is this when the Lord began building His Church?
5. What is ordaining elders in every church in Acts 14:23? Is that leadership? How does that tie in with Acts 20:28; 1 Thessalonians 5:12 and 1 Timothy 3:2-12? Are the elders the clergy?
6. In Acts 19, there are several uses of the word *assembly* that don’t seem to be religious in nature. What does that mean?
7. In Acts 20:7 the disciples broke bread on the first day of the week. Is that significant?
8. Romans 12:3-10 speaks of gifts, functions and members? Does that refer to the Church? How does this tie in with 1 Corinthians 12:4-28 and Ephesians 4:11-16?
9. Romans 16:17-18 speaks of division-makers and actions regarding them. I found too a number of similar verses such as 1 Corinthians 5, 1 Thessalonians 5:14 and 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14-15. Do these verses have to do with maintaining order in the Lord’s Church?
10. Romans 16:25-26 speaks of something as a mystery. Is that the Church? What does it mean? How does it connect with Ephesians 3:3-10 and Colossians 1:25-27?
11. Why in 1 Corinthians 1:1-2 are all in every place brought into a letter written to one church? In this regard, why is the church sometimes a few Christians in one locality, as at Corinth, and sometimes much larger in scope as in Matthew 16:18?
12. Do verses 10-13 of that first chapter of 1 Corinthians speak of internal strife in the church at Corinth?
13. In 1 Corinthians 3:16-17, how does the Temple of God fit into this?
14. In chapter 10 the cup of wine and the bread seem to have spiritual meanings. What are they?
15. In chapter 12 how can a church be a body? How are we baptized into one body?
16. Chapter 14 seems to speak of orderly functioning of an assembly. How does speaking in tongues and women speaking or not speaking get involved in this order? Does it have anything to do with God’s order of headship in chapter 11?
17. From 1 Corinthians 16:1-2, does “giving” have anything to do with assembly fellowship?
18. In 2 Corinthians 3:1, what are letters of commendation?
19. Ephesians 1:22-23 says the Church is the Lord’s body. How?
20. Chapter 2:14-16 says that Jews and Gentiles are in one body. Does that connect with the above?
21. Verses 19-22 say the house of God is being built. How does that connect to the Church?
22. The fourth chapter of Ephesians is confusing — so many concepts. Can you explain them?

23. In chapter 5:23-32 the Church is likened to a husband and wife. Why?
24. Colossians 1:18 says that Christ is the Head of the Church. What does that mean?
25. What is holding the Head in Colossians 2:19?
26. 1 Timothy 2:11-12 speaks about woman's silence or quietness, and women teaching. Explain?
27. 1 Timothy 3:15 speaks of proper behavior and then calls the Church the house of God. How are these related and what do the terms indicate?
28. Why the discouragement seen in 2 Timothy 1?
29. 2 Timothy 2:19-22 seems to be Paul's instructions to Timothy as to how and with whom he should fellowship. What is the significance of these verses?
30. Hebrews 10:25 seems to indicate that Christians assembling together is important to God.
31. Hebrews 13:13 says to gather unto Christ outside the camp. What does that mean?
32. It seems from 1 Peter 2:5-9 that Christians should worship and serve? Is that everyone or only those ordained to be the clergy like the Old Testament priests?
33. 1 Peter 4:10-11 seems to indicate that those who have a gift should use it. Who are those people?
34. Revelation 2-3 seem to be rather strange letters to seven churches. What do they mean?
35. Why does the Church seem to disappear in Revelation? Is it found there after chapter 3?

### **OUT OF MY IMAGINATION MACHINE: A SERIOUS QUESTION FOR THE OLDER BRETHERN**

Dear older reader, do you realize how much study and prayerful effort it would take a young person — or any person not brought up in assembly truth — to reach the point of just *asking* the above 35 questions, much less putting these questions together to make a logical, scriptural doctrine that becomes the basis for a life-long commitment to something not popular today and not naturally pleasing to our old corrupt nature (the flesh) which we inherited from Adam. Then consider that perhaps 80% of true Christians get virtually *no* teaching on these questions, and that those who do, get the teaching so filtered through denominational “churches” and ministers who have a vested interest in keeping people from finding out anything that might make them leave, that the vast majority have only the *vaguest* idea of God's Church and how it should function. So help us as we seek in briefest form to outline the precious truths of the Assembly by seeking out those less instructed, by making copies of these studies available and by patiently answering the questions the younger ones may have.

### **THE 35 QUESTIONS ANSWERED: TO OUR YOUNGER BROTHERS AND SISTERS**

Dear younger believer, we won't necessarily take up the questions in the order found in Scripture, for God doesn't give any doctrine in an orderly presentation in a single chapter or book. He expects us to “search the Scriptures” (Acts 17:11) and put those scriptures together like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle to find out His mind, with the safeguard that no one doctrine or verse can contradict what other scriptures say. The Lord is looking for those Christians who are serious about His things and thus are willing to put in the time and effort to find out the whole truth. As to Bible translations, most of the material is from the NKJV: the J.N.Darby translation (JND) is used when there is a question of accuracy.

We will use some written material in these answers that was used in a recent review of *church truth* by brother Craig Stephens and myself in our local assembly at Dearborn Heights Michigan. Other material is new or revised. For those more mature in these things or who are anxious to get into the details and controversies of church- or assembly-walk, we are still offering a free subscription to the Assembly Messenger, including back copies. The address is 22240 Morley Ave., Dearborn MI 48124-2127.

### **WHAT IS THE CHURCH?**

The word *church* is so well known that almost everyone has a definition with which he or she is comfortable. When we see a building with a steeple and/or a cross on it, we say, “There's a *church*.” We speak of the Lutheran or Baptist *church*, and because of its size and influence, to many, the *church* is the Roman Catholic church. My dictionary confirms these meanings. It says, “A building for public and especially Christian worship” and “a body or organization of religious believers as ... a *denomination*.” It also defines the church as “a public divine worship, as going to *church* every Sunday.” But there is a big problem with these definitions! *Not one of them fits the biblical definition of the Church!* The Church

of the Bible *never* refers to a building. It *never* speaks of a *denomination* (a group of religious people gathered on some subset of doctrines or practices not common to all Christians). And one *never* “goes to church” on Sunday.

So it seems thus far we have done a good job of defining what the Church of the Bible is *not*. What then *is* the Church? First and foremost, the Church is *redeemed people*. Every born again, truly saved person *today* (in this present dispensation of grace, from the day of Pentecost 1970 years ago, to the future rapture of the Church to heaven) automatically belongs to this Church: they are a part of it. “And the Lord added to the Church [or, *together*] daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47). The “togetherness” was “to the Church” as seen in Acts 5:11 and throughout its early history as given in Acts. So, on Sunday, when we meet together, *part of the Church* goes to some building or convenient location to break bread, worship and pray together, and study the Scriptures. The building is simply a practical convenience: it is *not* a “church” or a “church-building.”

#### **QUESTION 1: THE CHURCH INTRODUCED (MT.16:18)**

We’ve already told you that the English words *church* or *assembly* are used to translate the Greek word *ecclesia*. Greek writers could use the word *ecclesia* in other ways, as was asked in Question 6, but it always means “called-out ones.” Here in Matthew 16:18 we are told of the *Lord’s ecclesia, His Church*. This is the first promise of the Church. Peter was one of the Lord’s disciples who traveled with Him. Upon Peter’s answer to the Lord’s question, giving the revelation that He was “the Christ the Son of the Living God,” the Lord gave the great prophecy concerning the future Church. He said, taking up Peter’s statement, “And I also say to you that you are Peter [Gk: *petros*, a little stone, a piece of the rock] and on this Rock [Gk: *petra*, a large solid stone or rock] I will build My Church, and the gates of hades shall not prevail against it” (v.18). The Lord used a play on Greek words to contrast Himself to Peter. The Church was not to be built on an ordinary man, even a Peter, on an easily moved little stone, but on the *immovable solid Rock*, on Christ Himself, on the One Peter had stated was the Christ! He is the Rock (1 Cor.10:4; 1 Pet.2:4,6-8). It is *His Church*: “I will build *My Church*.” Yet Peter was to have the same qualities as the Rock Himself, having the life of Christ (eternal life — Jn.3:16; 1 Jn.5:11,20 ) and partaking of the divine nature (2 Pet.1:4). He became a “living stone” (1 Pet.2:5) in that Church! You and I also are “living stones” in it!

“*I will build My Church*.” When the Lord spoke the Church was still in the future. It hadn’t begun at that time, for the Church needed a glorified Man in heaven as its Head (Col.1:18) and a divine Person, the Holy Spirit, on earth to form “one body” and indwell it (1 Cor.3:16-17; 12:13). This is very important when we realize that probably 80% or more of professed Christianity are so-called *covenant theologians* who believe that Israel’s Old Testament covenants apply equally to us today because the Church is (they think) just a spiritual extension of Old Testament Israel with still a long earthly future, including the future judgments of the “tribulation” (Mt.24:4-28). *But the Church is a new entity with a heavenly future, and is in contrast to Israel under Judaism and the law of Moses*. Note: Since the word *church* means a building or a denomination in most peoples’ minds, we often prefer to translate *ekklesia* as *Assembly*. The JND translation always uses *assembly*.

Before the cross, there was great religious distance — a wall — between Jew and Gentile. But now, Jew and Gentile are *called out* of national and racial boundaries to form one body, “one new man,” so the wall dividing them is broken down (Eph.2:11-18).

#### **QUESTION 4: THE CHURCH BEGINS (ACTS 2:1-41)**

In Acts 1, after His resurrection, the Lord told His disciples to remain in Jerusalem until they were baptized with the Holy Spirit (1:5). He then ascended back to heaven and about 120 of the Lord’s followers entered an upper room to continuously pray (1:13-15). You can imagine the anticipation of something unique but unknown about to happen!

“When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. *The Holy Spirit had come!* Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues [languages] *as the Spirit gave them utterance*” (Acts 2:1-4).

Thus began the Church or Assembly. The ascended Christ was its heavenly Head; the Holy Spirit had come to earth on that day to *indwell* the believers as promised in John 14:16-17. A tongue like fire came on each one. By the power of the Holy Spirit they were “baptized [entered, immersed] into one body” (1 Cor.12:13). Think of it! From that time on, every real born-again believer has a divine Person, the Holy Spirit, living within him or her (1 Cor.3:16) and they *automatically* are part of something that never existed before! We will explain the “one body” later.

The outward proof, the testimony to the world, of this new thing was that these unschooled mostly-young disciples (many probably in their early 20's) began to speak in the languages of the many people who had come to Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost (2:5-11), even though they only knew Hebrew. What did they say? It was not *gibberish* (as with the Charismatic Movement today), but the gospel preached — “*the wonderful works of God*” (v.11) as the *Holy Spirit* gave them utterance (v.4). As those disciples fanned out throughout Jerusalem, speaking in various languages and dialects, all heard the gospel. Peter gave a short message (vv.14-40), perhaps several times over in different languages (we aren't told), but we *are* told the result of that day's preaching. “That day about 3000 souls were added to them” (v.41).

We will continue, the Lord willing, with further questions answered in the next issue.

RPD