

Church or *ecclesia*?

Often in Christadelphian writings the author uses the word 'church' to describe the group of believers. Sometimes the writer is making a direct quotation from the Bible, and, as far as I can find out, all the English versions of the Bible, from Wycliffe (1382) to the most modern versions, translate the Greek word *ekklēsia* by "church", except in Acts 19:32,39,41, where it is translated "assembly". Wycliffe even translates *ekklēsia* in verses 32 and 39 as "church", whilst in verse 41 he has "the people". In Acts 19:37 a Greek word meaning 'temple robbers' is translated by the AV as "robbers of churches", and this is the one place we should not use 'ecclesia'.

The Greek word *ἐκκλησία* (*ekklēsia*) literally means 'those called out'. Liddell and Scott's lexicon tells us that in classical Greek it meant 'an assembly of citizens summoned by the crier'. However, the medieval Latin writers borrowed the word *ekklēsia* to mean a church. In Latin documents, 'ecclesia' is taken to mean "the body of the church [building] as distinct from the chancel" (*Oxford English Dictionary*). It was quite normal for the wealthy in Britain to include in their will a donation to the 'ecclesia', which in reality meant that they would sponsor a part of the church building so that future worshippers would see their name engraved in stone, or in the stained glass of a window.

So why 'church'? The actual word 'church' does not appear in the Greek of the New Testament. It comes from the Old English *ċirċe*, which in turn comes from the Old Frisian and the Old Saxon *kirika*, and similar words in other old European languages. Also, the Scottish 'kirk' comes from the same roots. 'Church' can be further traced back to the Greek word *κυριακός* (*kuriakos*), which means 'belonging to a lord or master'. The nearest to this word in Scripture is to be found in the phrase *κυριακή ημέρα* in Revelation 1:10, translated "Lord's day", and in 1 Corinthians 11:20, where we have *κυριακὸν δεῖπνον*, which is translated "Lord's supper".

From all this we can see that there is no Scriptural justification for brethren and sisters to refer to the believers as the 'church', when the latter word means something quite different. We are the 'called out ones', the *ecclesia*.

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