

# The Local Church 1 - Part 1

by William MacDonald

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*William MacDonald emphasizes the significance of the local church as an assembly of believers and its role in the Christian faith.*

**Duration:** 9:18

**Scripture:** Ephesians 4:1

**Topics:** "Church Government", "Ecclesiology"

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## Description

This sermon delves into the significance of the New Testament Assembly, emphasizing its importance to God and Jesus Christ. It addresses misconceptions about the church and highlights the need for active participation and understanding of its definition. The message explores the concept of the church as an assembly of believers, both locally and universally, and reveals the mystery of the church age as a unique society with a heavenly calling and destiny.

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## Transcript

The subject of our studies together will be the New Testament Assembly, a subject that I believe is very important to the heart of God, certainly very important to the Lord Jesus Christ. He loved the church and gave himself for it. It should be important to us as well.

People today have the attitude that the church perhaps does not fulfill their needs. I went there, but it didn't do anything for me. I say such people are foolish.

That misses the whole concept of the church. You get out of the church what you put into it. And we'll be saying a lot more about that in the classes to come.

I'd like to read with you Ephesians chapter 4, 1 through 6. I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to have a walk worthy of the calling with which you were called. With all lowliness and gentleness, with long-suffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in you all.

First of all, let's think about definition. Definition of the church. Definitions are very important in the study of the word of God.

There was a man years ago named Bengal. David told me his first name was Johan. Johan Bengal.

And he made a list of 20 words, 20 New Testament words. And he said, if you knew, if you could define those 20 words, you were well on your way to becoming a good theologian. I have searched for those words for years and have never been able to find them.

The result is obvious. Now, I could tell you that the word church, as it's translated in the New Testament, comes from a Greek word ekklesia, but that wouldn't help you a bit. I don't think you'd be any other wiser if I told you that, so I won't tell it.

I won't say it. You can live a very normal life without knowing that. But let me say this, that the word that is translated church really means assembly.

It really means a gathering of people. It's used in different ways. It's a neutral word.

It doesn't necessarily mean a church as we think of it today. When we think of church, we think of a building with steeple perhaps and maybe stained glass windows and a pulpit and the like. But the word really is a gathering of people.

That's really what it means. And that's why some of us like the word assembly better than church. I say it's a neutral word.

It's used of Israel wandering through the wilderness, the church in the wilderness. It wasn't the church as we think of it, but it was the assembly in the wilderness, the crowd in the wilderness. It's also used of a heathen mob in Ephesus in Acts chapter 19, a heathen mob.

You say, well, where did it get the religious connotation? Well, you have to check the context in order to find that. For instance, if it's a Christian church, it would say like the church of God or the church in Christ. In 1 Thessalonians chapter 1 verse 1, it speaks of the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ.

There the word means the assembly, an assembly of people in Thessalonica who acknowledge God as Father and Jesus Christ as Lord. Now, we don't want to make a man an offender for a word. But, for instance, if somebody should say to you, are you going to church? I suppose technically the right answer would be, no, I'm in the church.

I'm going to a meeting of the church. Because if you are saved, you are already in the church, but you go to meetings of the church. It's a gathering of Christian people.

There are two forms of the church, the assembly in the New Testament. There's what we think of as the universal church, and there's the local church as well. The universal church is made up of all believers from Pentecost to the rapture, and really a large segment of the church is already in heaven.

People who have died in faith and have gone to heaven enjoying the glories of the Lord Jesus at the present time. All believers from the day of Pentecost to the rapture. We believe the day of Pentecost was the birthday of the church.

That's when the Holy Spirit was given as the permanent indweller of the church and of all true believers. This universal assembly is called a mystery in the New Testament. Mystery.

Once again, definitions are very important. Mystery in the New Testament doesn't mean what it means in language today. When we think of a mystery, we think of a story usually with a murder in it, and it's woven

in such a way you really don't know who the murderer was until you get to the end and it wasn't who you thought it was.

That's a mystery today. It's not that at all in the New Testament. A mystery in the New Testament is a truth never hitherto known.

A truth that you could never come to by your own intellect unaided, but a truth that has now been made manifest to the church by the apostles and prophets. The church is a mystery. Paul speaks of it oftentimes in that way, a mystery.

In other words, God had a secret from all eternity that after his dealings with Israel down through the Old Testament and into the Gospels as well, and the rejection of Christ at Calvary, that God would establish a new society known as the assembly, a society with a heavenly calling and a heavenly destiny. There was never anything like it in the history of the world and never will be again. So we live in that church age today where Israel has been set aside nationally.

The church is now the people of God, and then when the church is taken out at the rapture, God will resume his dealings with the nation of Israel. The church is a mystery. Therefore, it did not exist in the Old Testament.

Don't look in the Old Testament for any mention of the assembly. It isn't there. Don't look in Matthew, Mark, or Luke for any mention of the assembly.

It's not found in those Gospels. That will shock some of you, I know, and I think I'll probably get sparks from that. But it's not there.

It's not in Matthew, Mark, or Luke. It is in John. It is in John.

Very clearly taught in John, the truth of the assembly, that is. We might look in Ephesians 3, verses 3 through 5, to show that the church is a mystery that did not exist in the Old Testament. Paul is speaking about his ministry.

He says, verse 3, "...how that by revelation he made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in a few words, by which when you read you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ, which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to his holy apostles and prophets." Well, that says it very clearly, doesn't it? That the truth of the church was not made known to the sons of men in other ages, but it has now been revealed by his Spirit to his holy apostles and prophets.

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