

## EKKLESIA

By Bob Young

Can we once and for all put to rest a misconception, a misunderstanding? Probably not! Nevertheless, here goes!

You have heard it. I have heard it. The church is wherever a Christian is. You can “do church” by yourself when hunting season rolls around. I will not be “at church” Sunday because I want to do something else – but be assured that I will “do church.”

Two things—the first perhaps easier to grasp than the second.

First, church is a collective noun, like family or club, or assembly—which is the meaning of the Greek word *ekklesia*. An assembly of one person is not an assembly. A club of one person is not much of a club. Simple grammar—one person cannot be *ekklesia* (assembly, church) alone. You cannot “do church” by yourself.

Second, the idea that *ekklesia* means “the called out” is incomplete. The idea continues to find support even though serious Bible textual and language scholars do not affirm it. *Ekklesia* is usually translated as “church,” but the World English Bible consistently translates it as “assembly.” Many English translations use “assembly” in Acts 19 where the word *ekklesia* is used three times to refer to the group of people assembled in the marketplace (Acts 19:32, 39, 41).

A few centuries before Christ, Plato used the word *ekklesia* to refer to the assembling of a jury from the residents of Athens. The jury members did not stop being residents of Athens. They were assembled as *ekklesia* because they were residents of Athens. Plato’s reference also illustrates “assembly for a specific purpose.” In Greek cities, the town hall was formed when people left their homes (were called forth) to assemble.

What should we conclude?

What makes a group an *ekklesia*—an assembly or church—is not the calling forth but the assembling.

In the first century, *ekklesia* did not carry the meaning of “called out.” People have wrongly jumped to that conclusion because that is a literal translation of the prefix (*ek*) and the root word (*kaleo*, I call). That kind of literal dissection is not how you discover the meaning of a word, and even less how you discover the meaning of a word at a certain time in history.

The church is church (assembly) because it assembles. The word *ekklesia* literally means an assembly, a meeting or gathering. That is the New Testament meaning of the word.

That *ekklesia* means “assembly” rather than “called out” does not mean that Christians are not called to be separate from the world, a truth that is easily proved by various New Testament passages, without reference to the Greek word *ekklesia*. In the New Testament, *ekklesia* does not mean “called out” and to so translate would be misleading (to translate “called out” every time the word *ekklesia* appears in the New Testament).

The assembled church functions as the spiritual body of Christ, making Christ visible in the world.

A final truth to consider. The assembled church is not called to be constantly in assembly. The church in its gathering is empowered in its going. WOW!