

Upon this Rock I will Build My _____

Part 1: What is Church?

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Full Text (for reading on your own)

Co-Missioned Believers!

We are believers with a mission. We are co-missioned as Kris Vallotton says. That means it's God's mission and it's our mission and we get to work together and labor together with Him in His mission!

We operate in Christ's authority. Have you ever had responsibility without authority? That stinks - it will make you want to quit! Responsibility without authority is no fun at all. Conversely authority without responsibility is a shame. To have authority and not take responsibility is a shame.

We are commissioned believers who operate in Christ's authority. All authority in Heaven and on earth has been given to Jesus and that's the basis from which He told us "Go, therefore!" He never told you to go as part of the Great Commission until He told you that He had all the authority - because He sent you with His authority!

When we pray in Jesus' Name, we are praying in the authority of Christ. I do not tell devils to leave people on my own authority, but instead in Jesus' Name (in Word or simply in positioning of my heart)! His authority is complete over all the powers of darkness so when I am in Him nothing shall by any means hurt me!

Remember the sons of Sceva in Acts? These Jewish exorcists tried to use Jesus' Name to cast out demons but the demons said they knew Jesus and Paul - but they didn't know them! Paul was operating in Christ's authority - that's why he could cast demons out. And the demons definitely knew about Paul because they knew about Jesus and Paul was operating under Jesus' authority.

Submit yourself to God, resist the devil, and he will flee from you. You have to submit to God in order to resist the devil and once you resist the devil, submitted to God, he flees from you. The same thing will happen as you are submitted to God - you will resist the devil that is in other people and he will flee from them and they will get set free!

We are protected from harm! Megan and I were recently protected twice from some very dangerous driving situations! Psalm 91 says we will not dash our foot against a stone! Remember that!

Testimony about Fasting (from Natalie)

I hope you, Megan, and the whole of Agathos church are doing really well! It's been quite a few years since I've had the chance to come to a service at Agathos, but I occasionally listen to the sermons online and was encouraged by Kelly Bayzie to have a listen to your sermons about your corporate fast. I was inspired to join in the corporate fast with all of you and felt I should send my testimony to you as the fast came to a close ... Thank you for doing this series and I hope and pray this can encourage others if you decide to share this with anyone.

My husband and I were living in New Zealand the last 3 years and moved back to the US and out to New Jersey in August. Since moving back I have been praying for and searching for a job. I have come very very close to receiving an offer 5 times now, but each time it has fallen through. The 5th time was in the beginning of January. The job seemed *perfect* and seemed right in line with things God had put on my heart in earlier months. I had the final interview, thought it went really well, but then heard nothing back. No update, no feedback, and no reply to my emails.

I was at a complete loss, was disappointed in myself, felt abandoned by God, and felt very sad. I became depressed and without realizing it or meaning to, gave up. I had no idea what went wrong, what to try and fix, or how to move forward, and worst of all, I didn't feel like I was hearing anything from God anymore. I didn't know what else to pray and wasn't sure where God was in all this. When I heard you say in that first sermon that God told you, "I heard your fast", I knew I needed to give it a try.

I had fasted just a meal at a time in the past and wasn't sure what this fast should look like. Michelle's testimony and your comment about fasting according to what you have faith for, were very encouraging and took some pressure off. After praying on it, I felt peace about and felt it would stretch me to for 6 days scale back my breakfast to a plain piece of toast, not eat lunch, but eat dinner. I am grateful for the way you spoke about fasting, because I felt and still feel excited to continue growing in this area of worship rather than condemnation for not fasting a particular way.

I went in to the fast asking God for 3 things: 1) clarity on the type of job he wants me to take, in case I was applying to ones that weren't in his will for me, 2) a job and 3) to feel closer to Him again. I am so grateful that He heard my fast and for the gifts He poured out on me, even gifts I did know I should be asking for but needed. I still don't have complete clarity on the type of job and haven't had an offer for a job yet, but I definitely feel closer to Him and have a determination again to apply for jobs and interviewing. Additionally and unexpectedly, He also helped me see areas I had struggled with in past interviews and needed to grow in.

Now, that last part might not seem like too big of a blessing, but it was truly a game changer for me. God led me to some resources to improve in those areas and helped me realize how important they

would be for any future job I would take in my field. I truly believe that without growing those skills, I would have had a harder time on-boarding and would have had some real struggles with confidence. I feel even more certain He wanted me to grow in those areas before starting a job here, because upon finishing the last of an online course this past Thursday, I have had 5 companies reach out to me. I now have two upcoming phone interviews and two scheduled on-site interviews for this coming Monday and Tuesday.

I am floored by how this fast has changed my life and am so grateful to have had a chance to do a corporate fast with all of you. Thank you for doing that series Peter.

Many blessings to you and all of Agathos - *Natalie*

Financial Testimony

Sam had done a modified fast for the entire month of January. Sam has been on a very long construction job - it started with fixing the stairs in an old house and has turned into nearly an entire remodel. It has been good - it's work to do! In February at some point, Sam went to work and the gentleman who owns the house hands him an envelope full of cash - not for payment for the job - just a blessing for Sam. When Sam looked in the envelope, he found an the equivalent of an entire month's pay for him!

Do you see what happened? Sam gave how long to the Lord in the fast? A month! So he got his normal pay during January, but do you see what else God gave him? An extra-month's pay!

A few weeks ago I gave a testimony of when Megan and I had asked God for an 83% financial increase in 12 months and God beat our request with an 84% increase in 12 months. When I shared that testimony recently, I forgot to share an important part of it ...

I shared last time how we prayed in faith for that specific increase (83%). What I forgot to share is that when we came up with that number (our faith goal for a new income level) the first number in our calculation for our necessary budget was a GIVING GOAL!

When we tried to figure what our budget needed to be to be able to own a house comfortably, the first number we put on the page was our goal for giving - and it wasn't 10% ... it was more!

Remember that the word "tithe" literally means 10%. Brad also taught us that tithing is not of the Law - Abel tithed and Abraham tithed to Melchizedek - all before the Law! Kris Vallotton likes to mess with those who say the tithe is of the old covenant by asking them "so you give more than 10% right - since the New Covenant is founded on better promises!?" Kris says that it's funny ... those who say the tithe is Old Covenant tend to give less than 10%.

2 Corinthians 9 says that God gives the sower seed for sowing AND bread for food. Here's a supernatural strategy: If God increases your seed for sowing, what always comes with it? Bread for food! This is the scriptural basis for leading your financial planning with giving goals! If God increases your seed for sowing, inherently He is going to be increasing your bread for food!

What is "bread for food?" You would like to own a home. You would like to have a bigger home that hosts your children and grandchildren better. You would like to take more vacations with your family. 2 Peter 1 tells us that God has given us ALL things that pertain to life and godliness. All of those things would qualify.

If you want to have increased bread for those sorts of things, here's a strategy ... stop trying to increase your bread and start trying to increase your seed!

The first number on our projected budget 6 or so years ago was not what the house would cost per month! It was a giving goal - what we WANTED to give! A giving goal - and it was more than 10%! Bill Johnson's granddad (who was also a pastor) taught him "tithing is your rent check on earth." Faith is in the offerings. There is faith in tithing but many opportunities for greater faith in the offerings.

God exceeded our income goal with an 84% increase! Now - about 6 years later - I realized that in 2017 we were able to give more than 2x as much as our giving goal from 6 years ago! Praise God!

I was thinking about that and the Lord spoke to me and said "what do you want your new giving goal to be?" I gave Him a number and it's ambitious.

At the beginning of the year I received a major-to-me prophetic word about finances and the Lord spoke to me one night during the fast and said "your offerings are going to be the key to unlocking that breakthrough in finances." We already are giving offerings but the Lord spoke to me about needing to step into a greater place of faith in our offerings.

He spoke to me about leading our income with our offerings, not our income leading our offerings. That's faith. I'm working on that! The Lord is speaking to me that the order of magnitude of my offerings needs to go up because He wants the order of magnitude of my income to go up.

When you give, you are given seed for sowing and bread for food and God will multiply your seed for sowing and increase your harvest of righteousness *"Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness ..."*

Sam and Kelly have the same mindset. They are aggressive in giving. They don't set earnings goals - they set giving goals - and they watch God increase their earnings ... b/c as the song says ... "you can't beat God giving, no matter how you try!"

There are opportunities for you financially! Lead with giving goals - that's faith! Lead with giving goals! You all know and know this, but to be clear: "*Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account.*" (Phil. 4:17) That's my heart, but I want to equip you.

There is a mindset about this that's the faith mindset. I believe God is wanting to release financial blessing to YOU in greater measure, but I'm saying that if you don't partner with God in faith about your finances you will limit what God is wanting to do in your life. He's already willing but He's saying "will you partner with Me in faith?" You say "yes, I have faith for finances." Then give! It doesn't have to be to Agathos (the Bible does speak about tithing) but you get the idea ... I seek that fruit may abound to your account.

If you have faith you will give. James said he would show his faith by his works. There is nothing more practical in terms of faith for finances than giving! Jesus said that if we can't be faithful with unrighteous mammon how could we be trusted with true riches. When you are learning to live by faith as a believer, learning to have faith with finances is a Biblical pre-requisite course to consistently seeing true miracles!

Hopefully that's encouraging! I don't know if you'd like to have a month's salary or an 84% increase in your income? We just think too small! "I can't give 20%!" Well if He doubles your income you would still have 80% more than you currently do! That's called winning!

New Sermon Series

Fill in the blank ... "upon this rock I will build my _____." This is going to be a "fill in the blank sermon series." What did Jesus say He would build upon this rock? His church! (Mt. 16:18) So our goal for this sermon series is to answer the question "what is church?"

Perhaps this sermon series could at first glance seem like an esoteric exercise in nebulous thinking whereby I will opine in front of the church about some nice ideas, but that is not my goal here. To me church-life is near the center of all of our lives on earth. We gather with people from church multiple times a week, we go to church services ... in short we orient our lives with church somewhere near the middle of our lives here on this earth. I believe that priority is right - "church" is used 113 times in the New Testament - so it is a major concept in the New Covenant.

While church is rightly towards the center of our life here on earth, I wonder if we could define "church?" I think many of us would struggle to do so. What is church? Is it possible that the Word of God offers something more clear and compelling than perhaps we've put words to before?

Proverbs 23:7 says that as a man thinks in his heart so is he. Is it possible that as a church thinks in its heart so is it? We have an awesome church - check out the testimonies that were summarized in the letter sent with your giving statement from last year! Wow!

So we have an awesome body of believers and there are already many many testimonies coming out of our church! But there is always a tension in the Kingdom - you are contented but you are also hungry. Proverbs 24:21 says not to associate with those given to change! We can change things, but one given to change is operating in rebellion. Their cause may be good, but their heart is bad. I say that to say, as I address “what is church” this is not meant as a contrarian message. It is not from that heart. It’s just saying “what does the Word of God say about church?”

Working on Defining “Church”

Looking in an English dictionary, you will see that definitions say “WORD BEING DEFINED is ANOTHER NOUN” For instance “a BRIDGE is a STRUCTURE carrying a road, path, railroad, or canal across a river, ravine, road, railroad, or other obstacle.” If you pointed to a bridge and said “look at that structure” it would still work grammatically. It would not be as accurate as calling it a bridge but it would still work. Every definition for a noun will tend to start with some variation of “WORD BEING DEFINED is ANOTHER NOUN”

In trying to answer the question “what is church” we are going to by nature need to form a definition that start like this: “CHURCH is a _____.” So what’s the noun that fills in the blank about church?

Here’s what the New Oxford American Dictionary says about church (look for the nouns!):

- a ***building*** used for public Christian worship: *they came to church with me.*
- (Church) a particular Christian ***organization***, typically one with its own clergy, buildings, and distinctive doctrines: *the Church of England.*
- (the Church) the ***hierarchy*** of clergy of a Christian organization, especially the Roman Catholic Church or the Church of England.
- ***institutionalized religion*** as a political or social force: *the separation of church and state.*

So, the New Oxford American Dictionary says that church is one of the following:

- | | |
|-----------------|-------------------------------|
| A. Building | C. Hierarchy |
| B. Organization | D. Institutionalized Religion |

Usually I'm blown away by how well dictionaries define words (it's tough work making good definitions). But, let's see how this definition holds up by inserting these "defining nouns" in place of church in 5 separate passages of scripture. Remember that a BRIDGE is a STRUCTURE and therefore if you walked up to a BRIDGE and said "that's a STRUCTURE" it would still work. So let's see how "building, organization, hierarchy, and institutionalized religion" work in these 5 scriptures.

Acts 2:47 "praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the **church** daily those who were being saved."

- People are being saved and they are being added to something.
- *"And the Lord added to the (**building**) daily those who were being saved."* Are the people being saved being added to the building? Did God turn them into stones? "I loved knowing Jimmy, but he got saved and now he's mortared into the north face of the church!"
- *"And the Lord added to the (**organization**) daily those who were being saved."* Perhaps that is close to working.
- *"And the Lord added to the (**hierarchy**) daily those who were being saved."* Nope!
- *"And the Lord added to the (**institutionalized religion**) daily those who were being saved."* Hmm.
- Remember, any "defining noun" should work in every one of these scriptures!

Acts 5:11 "So great fear came upon all the **church** and upon all who heard these things." FEAR (an emotion)

- *"So great fear came upon all the (**building**) ..."* Laughable.
- *"So great fear came upon all the (**organization**) ..."*
- *"So great fear came upon all the (**hierarchy**) ..."*
- *"So great fear came upon all the (**institutionalized religion**) ..."*
- None of these sound very plausible as a "defining noun" for church. Perhaps "organization" is still hanging in there a bit.

Acts 8:1 "Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the **church** which was at Jerusalem; and **they** were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles."

- “At that time a great persecution arose against the **(building)** which was at Jerusalem; and **they** were all scattered ...” I’ve never met a building that was a “they.” Nor did I know that buildings were able to be moved back then without a semi-truck!
- “At that time a great persecution arose against the **(organization)** which was at Jerusalem; and **they** were all scattered ...” Again, that may sort of work in a way.
- “At that time a great persecution arose against the **(hierarchy)** which was at Jerusalem; and **they** were all scattered ...” The apostles (not that they were a hierarchy) actually stayed in Jerusalem!
- “At that time a great persecution arose against the **(institutionalized religion)** which was at Jerusalem; and **they** were all scattered ...” Institutionalized religion was not scattered.
- So watch parallel structure here ... the persecution arose against the CHURCH, which is then called THEY. The church is not an IT, but a THEY.

Acts 14:27-28 “Now when they had come and gathered the **church** together, they reported all that God had done with them, and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. So they stayed there a long time with the **disciples.**”

- “Now when they had come and gathered the **(building)** together...”
- “Now when they had come and gathered the **(organization)** together...” Maybe it was one of those organizational retreats where you cast vision ...
- “Now when they had come and gathered the **(hierarchy)** together...” Maybe ...
- “Now when they had come and gathered the **(institutionalized religion)** together...” Don’t think so!
- But here we have parallel structure again. They gathered the church together (v. 27) and verse 28 says they stayed there a long time with the disciples! So church is a THEY and DISCIPLES.
- A bridge is a structure ... but what are you calling a church?

Acts 18:22 “And when he had landed at Caesarea, and gone up and greeted the **church**, he went down to Antioch.”

- “gone up and greeted the **(building)** ...” Did Paul go greet a building?
- “gone up and greeted the **(organization)** ...” Did Paul greet the organization? Did he go to city hall and greet the articles of incorporation?

- “gone up and greeted the (*hierarchy*) ...”
- “gone up and greeted the (*institutionalized religion*) ...”

So I am fine with calling a bridge a “structure” but I am not fine with calling a church one of the following options because it seems that when you try to insert one of these words into the scriptures that say “church” the scriptures tend to stop reading correctly.

- | | |
|-----------------|-------------------------------|
| A. Building | C. Hierarchy |
| B. Organization | D. Institutionalized Religion |

I should note that some will consider “organization” just a group of people, but Oxford seems to be saying something much more formal than that “*a particular Christian **organization**, typically one with its own clergy, buildings, and distinctive doctrines.*” I am analyzing their definition by their own words.

What is the Word for Church in the Bible?

Let’s look at the Bible to try to figure out what “church” means. As you may know some words we read in our Bibles are transliterations of Hebrew or Greek words found in the original text. For instance, the word from which we derive baptism is *baptizo* - it means to submerge something. So when you get baptized into Christ you are submerged under water. You have the Holy Spirit in you when you get born again, but when you are baptized in the Holy Spirit He comes UPON you - He covers you! So baptism is actually a word in the Greek that we transliterated into English.

So, the question is “is church a word in the Greek?” The answer is no. Church appears 113 times in the King James Version of the Bible. 112 times “church” is the translation that is rendered for the same Greek word “*Ekklesia*.”

You may wonder what the one time “church” is in the Bible but is not from the word “ekkklesia.” That’s Acts 19:37 “*For ye have brought hither these men, which are neither robbers of churches, nor yet blasphemers of your goddess.*” The Greek that is producing the word “church” here is actually a single word for “robbers of churches” or “temple robber.”

The point is, every time you’ve ever seen the word church in your Bible it has been the exact same Greek word ... there is no second Greek word. There is only one Greek word that has been translated church and that word is Ekklesia.

So, newsflash, “church” does not exist in the Bible.

Only Ekklesia does. So, let’s look at Ekklesia.

Strong's says that an Ekklesia is literally a "calling out." More concretely he refers to Ekklesia as a "popular meeting, especially a religious congregation (Jewish synagogue, or Christian community of members on earth or saints in heaven or both) - assembly, church."

112 out of the 115 times that Ekklesia is used in the New Testament it is translated "church." Yet, an ekklesia is actually an assembly. The word "church" isn't there. I understand the word "church" to have arisen about the 4th century AD. According to Dean Briggs (from Ekklesia Rising, p.237) "*The Greek word 'kyriajon' is the generally accepted etymology of the later English word 'church.' This includes an extended variant, 'Kuriake Oikia' (the Lord's House), which came into use sometime in the 4th century A.D.*"

Now, let's look at three uses of ekklesia in Acts 19 that are actually translated as "assembly." Notice the bold word "assembly" in verses 32, 39, and 41 below:

*Some therefore cried one thing and some another, for the **assembly** was confused, and most of them did not know why they had come together. And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander motioned with his hand, and wanted to make his defense to the people. But when they found out that he was a Jew, all with one voice cried out for about two hours, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!"*

*And when the city clerk had quieted the crowd, he said: "Men of Ephesus, what man is there who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is temple guardian of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Zeus? Therefore, since these things cannot be denied, you ought to be quiet and do nothing rashly. For you have brought these men here who are neither robbers of temples nor blasphemers of your goddess. Therefore, if Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a case against anyone, the courts are open and there are proconsuls. Let them bring charges against one another. But if you have any other inquiry to make, it shall be determined in the lawful **assembly**. For we are in danger of being called in question for today's uproar, there being no reason which we may give to account for this disorderly gathering." And when he had said these things, he dismissed the **assembly**.*

The context here is that the Ephesians have formed something of a mob to do Paul in because he made it clear that idols made with human hands are not gods at all! In this section, there are 3 separate times "assembly" appears - and every time the Greek word under the hood is EKKLESIA!

How is it possible that the King James Version of the Bible translates these three instances of the word "ekklesia" as "assembly" yet in the other 112 instances of the word "ekklesia" they render it as "church?" Church wasn't in the Bible. Church wasn't even a word for 300 years or so later!

In the 3 instances where “ekklesia” is used in a secular context, the KJV translates it “assembly” each time. Yet, in the 112 instances it is always translated “church.” How could this be? Ed Siloso describes in his book *Ekklesia* (p.43) how William Tyndale (the first to translate the Bible to English) rendered ekklesia as “assembly.” While the other initial English translations followed Tyndale in translating ekklesia as “assembly” King James commissioned a translation team of 47 Anglican scholars whom he constrained with certain directives that included forbidding them to translate “the Greek word *ekklesia* as *assembly* because it went counter to the Anglican Church’s episcopal form of government.”

Ed Siloso also continues (p.44) to highlight that Constantine made Christianity the religion of the Roman empire. In short, I understand that Constantine kicked the pagans out of pagan temples, turned them into church buildings, and placed in them a professional clergy.

Is it possible that our definition of church has been driven by a politically motivated, purposeful mistranslation of the actual Greek word - which is Ekklesia?

Inserting “assembly”

If you start reading the New Testament, replacing the word “church” with the word “assembly” you will find the replacement works every time. Church is an “assembly” and we are going to further define that moving forward.

Romans 16:3-5 *“Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. Likewise greet the (**assembly**) that is in their house.*

*Philemon 1-3 “Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our beloved friend and fellow laborer, to the beloved Apphia, Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the (**assembly**) in your house: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

*1 Cor. 1:2 To the (**assembly**) of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours:*

*1 Cor. 16:1 Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the (**assemblies**) of Galatia, so you must do also:*

*1 Cor. 16:19 The (**assemblies**) of Asia greet you. Aquila and Priscilla greet you heartily in the Lord, with the (**assembly**) that is in their house.*

*Col 4:15 Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea, and Nymphas and the (**assembly**) that is in his house.*

1 Cor. 14:23 *Therefore if the whole (**assembly**) comes together in one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those who are uninformed or unbelievers, will they not say that you are out of your mind?*

What we see in scripture is assemblies at different “levels”:

- At the house level
- the assemblies of a region / city (as in multiple assemblies in one city)
- the assembly (singular) of Corinth (as in the ekklesia of that city overall)
- the assemblies in Asia (a whole broad region)
- the assembly of God overall (the global church)

Where two or three are gathered ...

In Matthew 18:15-20 Jesus said *“Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that ‘by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.’ And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector. “Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. “Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. **For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.**”*

Ed Silvano states (p. 25-26 of Ekklesia) “According to Sir William Ramsay, when a group of Roman citizens as small as two or three gathered anywhere in the world, it constituted the *conventus* as a local expression of Rome ... their coming together as fellow citizen automatically brought the power and presence of Rome into their midst. This was indeed the Roman ekklesia in a microcosm.”

The word “synagogue” is used 67 times in the New Testament yet Jesus did not use the word “synagogue” to describe the church. Why?

Rome had ekklesias. Greeks had ekklesias. Israel had been under a Greek occupation for more than 150 years. They knew all about ekklesia. Jesus did not say “upon this rock I will build my synagogue.” He could have - after all synagogue is used 67 times in the New Testament! Instead Jesus said “upon this rock I will build my ekklesia” - a Greek or Roman entity best translated (in one word) as “assembly.” Church isn’t in the bible, but ekklesia is. Jesus was the first to call it an ekklesia. The question is “why didn’t Jesus use ‘synagogue’ and what’s that mean to us?” That’s what we’re going to discover - or at least investigate - in this series.