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THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH: DISTORTED AND DEFORMED

CHAPTER ONE

THE "C-H-U-R-C-H" TAKES SHAPE

How did the Greek word *Ecclesia*, meaning a called out assembly, congregation or community, come to be translated "*church*", a word that is neither Greek nor English but is of doubtful Latin origin and implies a building and temple worship? What is a word that is neither Greek NOR English doing in a Greek to English translation?

In order to answer these questions, we must look at some historical documents and references. When we study the history of Bible translations, it is easy to see why those in authority, along with the translators, have sought more to *hide* the meaning of some verses than they have done to *reveal* their real meaning to the common people's understanding.

There is absolutely no doubt that this word (among others) remained intact in order for the clergy to redefine it, interpreting it with the strongest institutional and hierarchical connotations. Was this mere ignorance, or a means of creating a ruling class of "*church overseers*?"

In 1604 for example, King James I, who was not only the King of England, but head of the Church of England, commissioned fifty-four Hebrew and Greek scholars to give English-speaking people the official version of the Bible. The king had always been

interested in the Scriptures and was somewhat of a scholar in his own right. He appointed Richard Bancroft, soon to be made the Archbishop of Canterbury, as chairman and "chief overseer" of this committee.

The "*King James pattern of church*" was already well established in the ecclesiastical orders and offices of the Church of England, so it was relatively easy to follow the instructions of the noble King James who held many titles, one being "Defender of the Faith".

So, the stage was set to give the world a true English translation of the Bible. But the world never had a chance to receive a pure translation because everything was stacked in favor of one that would place the emphasis on the institutional Church and its ruling officers. Bancroft, as well as Erasmus, were the architects of the King James Version translation and they were far from being saints. The translators were obligated to fit the translation with the Anglican agenda and beliefs without any conflict between church and state. King James knew "*no bishop, no king*" and he ordered a translation which would make his control over the church and the people less difficult.

When the King James Version of the Bible was created, James actually gave instructions not to change the word *church* in order to reflect its actual meaning. This is not a conspiracy theory. This is documented history! Bancroft subsequently, with the King's approval, devised 15 rules which the translators were ordered to abide by in their development of what became known as "*the Authorized Version*," a cunning ploy that would eventually make all other versions "*unauthorized*." Notice rule number three: "The old Ecclesiastical Words are to be kept; i.e., the word *Church* not to be translated congregation or community, etc." It was clear to the translators what "*ecclesiastical words must be kept*" and you can be sure that they would have no qualms for choosing "*ecclesiastical words*" that would fit the best interest of the powerful Clergy/Church, one of which was this rule not to tamper with these terms (i.e. church). Again, this is an historical fact. Many other words were translated differently as well so as to agree with the Anglican Church.

So again, the King James translators retained, under orders from the King and the Archbishop certain "*ecclesiastical words*, including "*church*." Such words do not give the true meaning of the Greek. "*Church*" does not translate ecclesia. English words such as "congregation" and "assembly" and "community" do. Again we ask, why were these words not translated? Why were the people deprived of the true sense of these words? What would the Church of England, and subsequent "churchmen," have to gain by keeping the people ignorant of the true meanings of these words? We have given you a hint to the answers to these questions already in this article. It is so obvious.

Bibles are not translated by atheists. If they were, maybe they would be more accurate. But Bibles are mostly translated by Christians who profess to adhere to the tenets of Christianity and who ALREADY KNOW WHAT THEY BELIEVE. And as they translate, THEY WILL PUT THEIR BELIEFS INTO THEIR TRANSLATION.

In regards to "c-h-u-r-c-h," here we have an example of translators modifying the text to make it seem to align better with tradition and practice that is already set in place, rather than trying to convey the literal intended meaning.

The word "church" naturally draws the reader's thoughts to a religious structure and a religious form rather than organic spiritual life.

But this is no justification of the use of "church" for ecclesia. Unless of course one has a built-in bias in shifting the meaning of the word from "the people" to "a building". A building would more serve the purpose of a religious group with a built in hierarchy.

"Church" was employed by the King James translators to protect their own interests and to keep its readers from a proper understanding of the will of God. They were happy to let the people live in ignorance and superstition, so long as the church was able to keep its position of privilege. This word has created many false ideas, causing much confusion and division among religious people, even among those who are striving conscientiously to serve the great God of Heaven.

The word "*church*" is not of God. It is the product of man's own theological imagination and abject bias. It is in a class with "Purgatory," "Easter," "Christmas," "Transubstantiation," "Eucharist," etc. For that matter, the same can be said of "Bishop" and "Deacon."

Remember that the "Church" at that time, and indeed, right down to today, had been fashioned into a powerful force that dictated "truth" to the people, and wielded the ecclesiastical sword as a political weapon for its own advantage. In addition, the "Church" imposed itself as the "*mediator between God and man*," making obedience to IT an absolute necessity, without which there could be no salvation. The "Church" claimed to have given the Bible to the people, and that it was the rightful guardian of it. When I speak of the "*Church*" I am referring not only to the Roman Catholic Church, but also the Greek Orthodox Church, all the Protestant Churches, and especially the Church of England.

As a result we have many Bible translations today that truly are tainted by men using covert schemes to gain their own ends; where men who supposed themselves to be authorities over the Lord's Assembly tried to destroy the revelation that all God's children are priests unto God through one High Priest, Jesus Christ. The scheme sought to place self-appointed leaders in mediation between men and God, usurping the authority of Christ. These men sought to alter the Bible text just enough to make it appear supportive of their hierarchical rule and false authority.

These facts are recorded in history and anyone can do the research themselves and find it to be true.

Enter Constantine

From its earliest usage, the word “church” has been understood in pagan traditions. It was the pagans who had constructed their obelisks; their buildings; their shrines and their pagan mosques in which they met to offer their sacrifices unto their idols. There were pagans using the word “church” long before Christians ever began using it. Church is a pagan concept and not a Christian one.

In fact, Justin Martyr, writing in the 2nd century, makes it plain that the concept of “church” and “church buildings” were nonexistent in his day and that the saints were not accustomed to meeting at any particular time or in any place!

When he was asked where he assembled, Justin Martyr answered:

"Where each one chooses and can; do you suppose that we all are accustomed to meet together in one place? Quite otherwise, for the God of the Christians is not confined by place, but being invisible, He fills the heaven and the earth, and the faithful everywhere adore Him and sing His praise."

Not only that, most of the pomp of religious ceremony that so many believe to be essential in *church services* is derived entirely from pagan concepts that influenced and corrupted the early Church. This again is an undisputable historical fact! It is clearly evidenced in early Christian writings. Here is just another example of the many early writings:

"The pagans had been accustomed to numerous and splendid ceremonies from their infancy, and they saw the new religion (i.e. Christianity) destitute of temples, altars, victims, priests, and all the pomp which the pagans supposed was the essence of religion; for the unenlightened persons are prone to estimate religion by what meets the eyes. To silence this accusation, the Christian leaders thought they must introduce some of the rites and ceremonies which would strike the senses of the people;

"Before the second century was half gone, before the last of the apostles had been dead forty years, this apostate, this working of the 'Mystery of Iniquity,' had so largely spread over the East and the West, that it is literally true that a large part of the Christian observances and institutions, even in this century, had the aspect of the pagan mysteries" (Mosheim in Ecclesiastical History).

Even Constantine (280-337), the Roman Emperor and his mother, Empress Helena, built many pagan temples but after his conversion in 313, he continued his custom of building, but this time it was “Christian” temples. Many pagan buildings were later converted to so-called churches. This was really the official beginning of recognizing buildings as churches but it was not until after the reign of Constantine that Christianity was publicly recognized and sanctioned by the state.

By this time however, a clear class of "*church officials*" had evolved and it was Constantine that gave legacies (money) to church leaders and began to erect cathedral type buildings. He built 7 in Rome (at least) , and others in Italian cities, in Africa, Syria, and Asia. Also at this time, the church leaders thought that it was a good idea to herd the laity under one roof. This was desirable so that they could be guarded against "heretical" teachings of those that weren't approved by the clergy.

Since there was now a well defined distinction made between the clergy and laity, special clothing, special titles, and official duties evolved that could only be performed by these elitists. This group now decided who could speak, who could teach, and be added to their special group. These "*church leaders*" now gathered together to decide issues and plans. They regularly discussed personal matters of the laity that in other contexts would be considered gossip. And all this was accomplished for the good of the laity. These were the "self-appointed watchers" that insisted on submission. These leaders thought that they had the power to act in authority above the Word of God. They sought to, and did impose their self-righteous, man-made doctrines on the people and called all failures to obey these man-made rules sin.

Can the reader describe one aspect mentioned above that is NOT present within denominations existing today?

Organized Christianity was now on the move and made equal before the law with the few remaining pagan religions still recognized by the Roman government. Some church historians accord these events as one of the most decisive in world history. Whether Constantine was himself "converted" in the sense of New Testament usage of the word matters little. What does matter, and very much, is that the "*c-h-u-r-c-h*"; the institution of the church, was legalized for the first time; all of this done with no Biblical justification whatsoever! The full majesty and power of the stately Roman government conferred its recognition and blessing upon this new formed institutional church.

In 325, Catholicism became the exclusive and domineering religion of the realm and in rapid succession, urged on by the clergy. Constantine issued decrees conferring unprecedented advantages upon the church. Tax exemption was granted; members of the clergy were excused from military service; the estates of those dying without direct heirs was given to the church, and the church was empowered to receive gifts and legacies of any kind.

Every pagan cult and communion of any kind, except Catholic, was outlawed and their assets confiscated and given to the Catholic Church. And the measures taken against dissident Christians were even worse. Christians who opposed what was happening were forbidden to assemble on pain of death or exile, and all their assets were confiscated and given to the Church. Of course, the clergy said that these measures were necessary for the defense of the gospel and silencing heresy.

THIS was the beginning of institutional Christianity and the downfall of what "*church*" and "*worship*" truly means.

As the centuries went by, this idea of not only the word (church), but also the concept of an institutional church kept growing more and more by the Catholic church and was retained by the Church of England and both used it as a device to hold people in subjection to the whims of a few powerful men who controlled the institutional church at that time.

Enter Tyndale and others

The keeping of the word "*church*" in the vocabulary of the religious leaders is important to the institutional church concept even today, and is defended by the modern day clergy for the same reasons that it has been for centuries but never has the word "church" been demonstrated or justified from a biblical stand point to represent the Greek word ecclesia.

But even at that time, though the Bible was still a closed book for the English, God was in the process of preparing a man to change this.

During the 15th and 16th centuries, some Godly men knew of the evil that had been already perpetuated. In the 16th century, men of God like **William Tyndale**, Greek scholar and translator of the first printed English Bible, knew that the word "ecclesia" did NOT translate as "church." In his translation of the Scriptures, instead of using the word "church," Tyndale used the word "*congregation*" to place emphasis upon the congregation of God or the community of God's people who assemble **ONLY** under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. He wanted to rid the Bible of the ecclesiastical words set in by a powerful clergy system and move the unscriptural focus from a building to the people.

He knew that the word "church" was totally misleading and that inherent in that word resided all the apparent justification for an institutional Church with all its trappings. Although he was at one time brought before the local bishop on charges of heresy, but released with a warning, William Tyndale would not be silent about the Word of God.

Tyndale's emphasis was deliberate and true. It is obvious to see how this offended the religious leaders of his day, just as it does the religious leaders of our day; because Tyndale's emphasis on people being the Ecclesia of God distracted readers from seeing organized religion, hierarchical leadership and the buildings dedicated for religious service as pertaining to and even defining the Church.

These men were fighting for the right of the people to have a translation that would give them clear meanings to all the words; that they be expressed in simple English words that would make the meanings clear to the people. Tyndale, and other men like him, were fighting against that which they saw as a perversion of the gospel of Jesus Christ. They contended that each individual had the right to assemble where they wish and a responsibility to search the Scriptures on their own, and not to rely upon the Clergy. The "*Church*" objected, and therein lay the conflict.

Those who held political sway over the masses through the "church" insisted that these men be silenced, and that their works be burned. An all-out attack was launched to discredit those "**heretics**" and to intensify the message of so-called "*orthodoxy*." The "Church" determined what the truth was for everyone, and the clergy set out to defend it with all vengeance. Religious leaders who did not pledge allegiance to the State religion, The Church of England, were more than looked upon with a great deal of suspicion. They were deprived of certain rights. If he was a clergyman, he was often relegated to an obscure outpost where his work could not influence many people.

William Tyndale became famous for his translation of the Bible from Greek to English. Throughout his translation, Tyndale gave "congregation" as the meaning of ecclesia, and the word "church" **never appears in his translation**. One church leader named John Bell told Tyndale that it would be better for the people to be without God's truth, as long as they had the churches law. This was Tyndale's famous response:

"If God spare my life, ere many years I will cause a boy that driveth the plough should know more of the Scripture than thou dost."

In the England of Henry VIII, it was illegal to translate the Bible into English. The church authorities believed that it would be dangerous for people to read the Bible themselves. How would they know how to interpret it without the "*Church*" to tell them what it meant? (Sound familiar?) One English bishop complained that placing the Bible in the hands of the people would cause "*the pearl of the gospel to be scattered on the ground and trodden in the mud by swine.*" But the real problem was that the "*Church*" was not teaching the Truth of the Scriptures to their people. They were happy to let the people live in ignorance and tradition, so long as the church was able to keep its position of privilege.

There is no doubt that Tyndale's assessment of the problem was undeniably factual in that the Scriptures were being hidden from the eyes of the people. Many of the people could not find the answer or explanation, or even understand the "churches" subtle rules, policies and teachings. Those in "*leadership positions*" in the church covered up their abominations and sham by hiding the Scriptures from the people's eyes and darkening the right sense of the Scriptures by their confusing and deceptive arguments. This went well beyond mere verbal deceit to tampering with the actual Scripture texts themselves, as we have seen.

The average person had no way of proving or disproving their suspicions. If they did speak up their lives would be endangered by the very institution that claimed to speak for the God of love. The terror that plagued the hearts and minds at the very mention of the word "*heretic*" kept them silent, for the end of everyone who was given the title was the same - burning at the stake.

One English couple were actually arrested for teaching their children the Lord's Prayer and the 10 commandments in English. They were found guilty and burned to death.

These things infuriated Tyndale, causing him to press on in earnest. Tyndale realized what he needed to do.

After his translations started showing up in England, the King, (Henry VIII) along with *the church*, declared Tyndale a heretic and a criminal and orders were issued for his arrest. The King sent many spies throughout Europe searching for Tyndale. They were ordered to arrest him and take him to England. Tyndale lived a life of constant difficulty and danger.

It is believed also at this time that Tyndale probably hid for several years in Hamburg, Germany. Even his friends did not know where he was. During his time of hiding, he also wrote other books, one of which was "The Practice of the Prelates," a book dealing with the corruption and abuses of the Church. This, along with other books, were secretly printed and smuggled to England where they were a great help to Christians there.

Even while he was engaged in this great work, Tyndale was never safe. He knew he was a wanted man and he constantly moved from place to place. Because he was so secretive, we don't know much about his life at this particular time. He was probably living in a very poor run down area of whatever city he was living in at the time; or in barns out in the country. Of course, he couldn't afford to attract attention. Tyndale lived on very little food and had almost no possessions, except for the books and papers he needed for his translations.

Although Tyndale was very careful about who he trusted, he was finally "tricked" by a man whom he thought was his friend, but turned out to be one of the King's (Henry VIII) spies. One day, Tyndale accepted an invitation to this "*friends*" home for dinner. When he arrived, there were other men waiting who grabbed Tyndale and tied him with ropes.

He was taken to a huge medieval fortress in Antwerp, and cast into a filthy and rat infested dungeon. He was beaten and mistreated and was held there for a year and a half.

The crimes he was charged with, among other things, was for teaching that people should be able to read the Truth of the Scriptures and to read it in their own language.

His pursuit of a fair and honest translation not only put him at odds with the Clergy, but his translation brought down the wrath of the Clergy and it cost him his life and for that they labeled him a "heretic" and finally succeeded in having him burned at the stake. All this, because he dared to challenge the meanings of certain ecclesiastical words; all because he translated the Scriptures from Greek and Hebrew into terms that more closely identified with their original meanings!

Tyndale refused to say that he was wrong. He defended his answers by quoting from the Bible, which he had given his life to study and translate. In October 1536, he was declared guilty and was sentenced to death.

On the day of his death, he was taken to the place of execution. First he was chained to a wooden stake. Then he was surrounded up to his waist with straw and wood sprinkled with gunpowder. Church officials were sitting in their seats of honor to watch. Many hundreds of townspeople had also come.

The order was given and the hangman first strangled Tyndale, and when he was dead started the fire that burned his body.

But Tyndale was not silent in his death. Just before his death he prayed in a loud voice, "*Lord, open the King of England's eyes!*" Just as our Savior Jesus did, Tyndale prayed for his enemies at the moment of his death. The Lord answered the prayer of William Tyndale, raising up other men, who took up the task where Tyndale had left off.

After the martyrdom of Tyndale, the work of giving the English speaking people a Bible in their own language fell upon the shoulders of Miles Coverdale. With the encouragement and support of Thomas Cromwell and Thomas Cranmer, and publishers Richard Grafton and Edward Whitchurch, Coverdale published a translation that leaned heavily upon the Tyndale Bible. The new work was called "The Great Bible," which was published in 1539. Again, in every case, ecclesia was translated "congregation," and the word "*church*" never appears in his translation!

But today the KJV still thrives. The KJV has had greater circulation among English speaking people than any other version before or since. The style is one of its greatest appeals. Written in the stately Elizabethan language, it is perhaps the easiest of all translations to commit to memory. It came to be regarded as the one and only true translation, even venerated as sacred. To speak critically of "*the blessed KJV*" is close to the sin against the Holy Ghost in the view of some. Some churches revere it as the only reliable translation.

As some might know, many of our other translations that are around today get its cue from the KJV; versions such as the ASV, NASV, RV, NIV, NKJV, Scofield; just to name a few.

Considering the above, could you see why almost all of our translations today have kept the word "church?" When the influence, popularity, and hold of the KJV is considered and when one looks at the religious world with all the churches, who would dare publish a Bible and leave out the word church? Who would buy a translation if the word church was not in it?

"*Church*" is a dear and beloved word and *Church people* are not going to give it up, nor their beloved Church. How dare anyone publish a Bible without Church in it? For sure it

will be a publication failure. No good, faithful member of any church would have a Bible in his home that did not have the word "church" in it. It would border on blasphemy to leave church out of the Bible, desecrating that holy institution, the church!

I would venture to say that many people have never seen a translation that does not use the word "church." It is little known to Christendom that multitudes possess a "bogus" translation that has been foisted upon the "*church*" by the translators; a "camel" that has been swallowed by many scholars and students alike.

However, several scholarly translations have been made in more recent times. Translators attempted to accomplish many of the same things that Tyndale, Coverdale, and others did. But these translations never sell well because there is no "church" in it!

Robert Young, who gave us "*The Analytical Concordance to the Bible*," published a work which he called, "A Literal Translation of the Holy Bible." He uses "assembly" as the translation of "ecclesia," and the word "church" is not found in it. It is published by Baker Book House. He dared to give us a translation of the word "ecclesia" rather than substituting the word "church." He destroys "the myth of the church" - there is no such thing in the NT Scriptures!

Another bible scholar, relied upon by our brethren in recent years, J.B. Rotherham, put out a literal translation which he called "The Emphasized Bible." He too, never used the word "church." Many others can be cited as well.

Again, such translations are not popular with church-dependent people, because they "*belong to a church*" which is the center of their religious life.

It is significant that this attempt by Tyndale, Coverdale, and many others to rid the Bible of such ecclesiastical words as "church" brought down the wrath of the powerful Clergy upon them. The same has been true in every generation, even to this day. Whenever honest people explore the possibilities that what they are being taught by their religious leaders may contain untruths, they run the risk of inciting their wrath. Many religious men are fearful that they may lose control of the people, their livelihood, and/or their reputation. The most hated people are those who challenge our religious system.

What does all of this mean? It means (among other things) that it is quite obvious that for centuries there have been many scholars and students of the Bible that have been concerned about the use of "*church*" as a translation of ecclesia. Many church leaders and teachers today would have us believe that challenging the word "church" is foolish and that it should not be done. They contend that this kind of criticism is of recent origin, calling it a "*New Age*" movement and that only a "*handful of heretics*" are raising questions about it.

Anyone can see that this is not true. Our study shows that conscientious Bible students have objected to these theological, ecclesiastical words, such as "church" for

centuries, and we will continue to do so as long as there are those who insist on conjuring up distorted meanings of ecclesia.

Remember that many in the clergy today derive their prestige and livelihood from a clergy system with its corporate headquarters in a building. A change back to the faith that was once given to the saints rings fear to the order of our institutional church system.

Our translators presumed to know more than the great Author and corrupted the word of God. How can those who profess to be Christians modify what God, by the Holy Spirit has given! The body of Christ is a purchased possession bought and paid for with His blood. He and He alone is the Head and holds full ownership. By changing the frame and form of His body by adding our own rules, and regulations and interpretations, we pollute the pure Scriptural example. We say that we are qualified to further define God's Word; that God didn't finish His Word because man's clarification is necessary.

Can one imagine a more perfidious and deceptive act of man? It truly is repugnant to those who reverently regard the original as the very word of God, and want it to speak to them as He was pleased to give it.

Those who would push aside the Holy Spirit, the teacher and guide to all truth (John 16:13-14) have been a thorn in the side of the Body of Christ from the beginning. They always want to add or clarify or change something. Just like the Pharisees who came before them, they seek to elevate themselves by enslaving others; by taking away the liberty which is ours in Christ. (Galatians 3)

During the so-called Reformation Period, very little changed. The concept of "*church*," along with its structure and format, kept pressing on, even to greater distortion. The people continued to look to teachers for truth and "correct doctrine" and death to the dissenters followed its path.

The focus on the building and a strong one man leadership had not changed since the time of Constantine. "The Reformers" simply went from priest to preacher and never healed the clergy/laity gap that still exists today. Great teachers emerged and we worshipped their eloquence.

Crowds jammed to hear these silver tongued orators. And what did we do? We built **bigger buildings** in celebration of our idols. Christianity became defined by men of skill and oratory, not men defined by servant-hood and humility and other fruits of the Spirit.

Though they elevated the Word of God to some degree in the Reformation, they continued many of the lofty customs and traditions they had grown up within the confines of the Roman Church. They adopted from Rome (which was adopted from the pagans) the use of large elaborate buildings with steeples on top. These buildings

contained altars and platforms which raised their appointed leaders above the congregation. It divided the congregation from the so-called leadership. Leaders were set above the congregation and were called ministers and pastors.

Though no such practice took place in Scripture, the traditions of pews, platforms, stained glass, and clergy continue to this day. Even during the Reformation, so accepted did these traditions of men become that even the building now became known as the "Church."

People began to believe that the building was the "*House of God*" and called it so. No thought was given to Scripture on this matter or it would have been clearly seen that each of God's people is His house. (Hebrews 3:6; 1 Corinthians 3:16) They would have known that God does not dwell in temples made with hands. (Acts 7:48ff)

As the Reformation grew, it continued to practice many of the customs of the Roman Church, the greatest of which was the placing of mortal men above the Word of God. They began to make rules and regulations not found in the Scriptures. They justified these additions by saying that these things were not forbidden in the Word and would help to define it. Do you think God needs our help?

Like the Roman Church before them, they sought to legislate everything. Since the leaders now placed themselves *above the people*, they now decided who could or could not teach; who people should marry; right down to eating, drinking, and dress. Gossip and slander continued behind people's backs and became common place amongst the leaders, and all of this being justified by "*watching over the flock.*"

This whole desperate effort to justify from Scripture the man-devised and instituted local corporate church institution is as absurd as it is totally contrary to God's word. And what is really even sadder is that many refuse to see this false teaching and folly for what it really is!

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