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Hold Fast...Sound Words

"If a word means anything, it means something" a wise friend once said. Think about it. Serious writers select words carefully, perhaps painstakingly, so they convey just the right thought. God was a serious writer when He wrote the Scriptures; each word was exactly the right one for the meaning He wanted to express. Notice that God did NOT write:

"And great fear came upon all the chapel, and upon as many as heard these things" (Act. 5:11) "For first of all, when ye come together in the chapel, I hear that..." (1 Cor. 11:18) "To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the chapel the manifold wisdom of God" (Eph. 3:10)

Listen carefully to many in your assembly and you may hear things like:

"The correspondent of the chapel...", "The chapel sent flowers to the funeral", "The chapel is having a fellowship dinner next Sunday", "Our chapel is having special gospel meetings next spring", "The elders in our chapel...", "Our chapel had fellowship with..." etc..

Really?? It would be very interesting indeed to watch, for instance, a building use its phone to call the local florist to have them send flowers to the mortuary or, to cook a meal, set up the tables, and put the tablecloth and silverware in place. You can envision all sorts of strange, humorous, and fascinating performances by this exceptional structure of wood and cement. These remarkable operations would surely attract the

newspapers who would hail this as very advanced technology!

Ridiculous you say. Absolutely. But isn't that what we're often really saying in our everyday conversation?

True, it may not be too important in many instances, but in others it is indeed important. For instance:

"And I say also unto thee, That thou art

Peter, an upon this rock I will build my chapel; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." (Matt. 16:18)

"Husbands, love your wives, even as

Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it." (Eph 5:25)

Christ did not shed His precious blood and suffer the holy wrath of God on sin for the benefit of some building of wood, cement, roofing, and paint. No; that's appalling and perhaps blasphemous. We reject that idea with all the energy in our being.

The word church is, of course, the translation of "ekklesia," a gathering of called-out ones, an assembly of people — specifically, in the New Testament, believers in the Lord Jesus Christ called out of the world and assembled together by the Holy Spirit. We often — and correctly — refer to such a gathering as an assembly or congregation. In spite of our care to honor the Lord by not calling the building a church and by saying that the assembly meets in a chapel (or hall), we often get careless and refer to the gathered people of God as a chapel; clearly, a chapel is a material structure not an assembled group of people, and most certainly not a very special and blessed people redeemed by the precious blood of the incarnate Son of God.

Then there's that phrase that we often hear, "Time to go to church," or "After church we went to...." Really? Does the local body of redeemed saints have a starting or ending time on any specific day? Notice also, we would think it strange if one were to say, "Time to go to family," etc.

Happily, we don't hear the word

"assembly" being used to refer to the chapel, such as, "we need to put a new roof on the assembly", or is that going to be the next step?

Surely we're not protesting about slips of the tongue that most of us fall into at one time or another. But if our thinking is muddled or too indiscriminate — or perhaps we are ignorant of the implication — we need to rethink the matter more carefully.

Nor are we speaking of the legal or incorporated name of a state-recognized body (nor the people of that organization) for the purposes of holding property, handling funds, etc.. Obviously, the assembly and the legal organization involve the same people, but we quickly realize that the legal name ("...Chapel") has quite a different meaning and is not a suitable reference to God's precious people gathered together by the Holy Spirit.

Why all the fuss? At least three things are involved:

- 1) Accuracy. Scripture is consistent; we do well to speak and write in harmony with God's mind. He is a serious writer. Honor of His Word is vital to sound growth.
- 2) The value of the great salvation Christ has procured. He didn't suffer for sin at the hands of a holy, eternal God on the shameful cross on Calvary for mere material

consumables such as a chapel. Christ's horrible agony and death was for eternal souls, made in the likeness of God Himself. In humble moments we often wonder with amazement why "Christ died for us" — an incredible statement if it didn't appear on the pages of God's holy, inerrant Word. To infer, whether thoughtlessly or ignorantly, that His marvelous redemption covered a meeting place is certainly an affront to the Sovereign of all the universe.

3) It conveys to the untaught mind a terrible error, a totally wrong idea. The chapel is not a source of preaching the Gospel, providing comfort to the troubled heart, or refuge for the seeking soul. It is not a living body which represents the resurrected Savior to the world. It is not in itself a holy thing. It is indeed a tool for these and other purposes, but only a tool. Useful? Certainly. To be respected for its purpose? Absolutely — and we should be thankful for such a provision by God to help in carrying out His work.

Let our expressions thoughtfully follow

God's perspective, especially in areas so precious to Him and His beloved Son. This may require that we think carefully as we speak and write.

"And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence." (Col. 1:18)

"Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee." (Heb. 2:12)