

# The Church

*According to the Bible*

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The Church: According to the Bible  
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# Preface

What once started out as a small paper in November of 1997 has continually evolved over the years into this book in its present form. It took over ten years for the first edition of this book to be written which was released on August 5, 2008. Although the first edition was never advertised, it had a profound impact on many lives, reaching people in many different countries and was even translated into other languages. The second edition was written to consolidate some sections and to match the format of the prequel book titled, “Rationality: From Ignoramus to Rationalist”. This third edition was written to remove some redundancy and improve its overall readability.

This book is intended to remain an open work in that it will hopefully be revised and improved as suggestions are received. If anything is found to be in error, please point it out so that it may be retracted or corrected. *Corrections are not despised, but are welcomed as there is interest only in portraying the truth, whatever it is and wherever it may be found.* Perhaps this book will never be perfect, but hopefully the gist of it will be clear enough that any genuine seeker of the truth could easily supply anything that is lacking. You are encouraged to “Eat the meat and spit out the bones” or to put it in Scriptural terms, “**Test all things, keep the good.**” (1Th. 5:21-22)

At times it has been clear that demonic spiritual forces have tried to hinder this work. I have fought through several physical attacks on my health that have impaired my ability to write for any good length of time. At other times it seems that the Lord himself prevented this work from proceeding until certain things were adequately understood and actually being lived out in people’s lives over a period of time. I can hardly take sole credit for this book and in fact Jesus once rebuked me for thinking that this was “my book”. I make no claims of being a great writer, and actually do not enjoy writing much at all. Indeed, my hands may have written this alone, but I alone did not write this. (See what large letters I type with my own hand.) 😊 My role was actually more like that of a secretary recording the things that God has shown me and many others.

A whole host of witnesses have had a profound impact on my Christian life in urging me to seek the truth regarding the Church – this is all your fault! Special thanks are given to the scores of proponents and critics who have proofread and corrected this work in both form and substance. This book does not represent any denomination or institution of any kind. It is humbly submitted to the Body of Christ for whatever benefit and encouragement it may contain. All praise is given to God who has already brought about tremendous fruit in the lives of many people through this book!

*Alan Bunning*

# Introduction

Unlike some other books, this is probably not an introduction that you will want to skim through and then skip ahead to the next chapter. That is mainly because this introduction will help you decide if you really should be reading this book in the first place. The consequences of reading this book could radically change your life! Some of you will need to read this book at least twice – once to get over the shock and then once to reconsider what it actually says.

Many Christians have been looking for something, but they don't seem to know exactly what it is. They know that they should be experiencing a deeper level of spiritual fellowship and yet something is missing. They go from “church” to “church” looking for a greater spiritual experience, but they have been looking in all the wrong places. Some have stopped going to “church” altogether and yet they never stopped loving Jesus in their hearts. Even non-Christians have visited “churches” looking for meaning in their lives, but have been turned off because they intuitively know that it does not represent God. These people are not really rejecting Christianity, but only Churchianity. They have been presented with an unbiblical “church” system that has been trying to pass itself as the Church.

So what is the true nature of the Church? This book will address many common questions such as: What is the Church? Who is an authority in the Church? Can anyone start their own Church? How is a meeting of the Church supposed to function? And most importantly, *what does the Bible have to say about any of this?* When someone finally discovers what the Bible teaches about the Church, it is often just as shocking as when King Josiah rediscovered the Scripture in his day (2Ki. 22:8-13, 2Chr. 34:14-21). Many Christians have never studied these issues in depth and indeed may find the answers to these questions quite surprising.

## i.1 Overview

This book provides a comprehensive view of the Church according to the Bible. Some books merely tell nice stories of how they think the Church should operate without any Scripture to back them up whatsoever. Others promote baseless ecclesiological theories by choosing a few select verses and then twisting them out of context. Some of them only discuss the Church from a narrow vantage point making it difficult to grasp the big picture of how everything fits together. One book, for example, might highlight the equality of all Christians as a “kingdom of priests” but then leave people wondering how submission to Biblical leadership fits into the picture.<sup>§6.1.2</sup> There are several resources that when taken together cover much of the content addressed here in a piecemeal fashion, but not everyone has the time or patience to read so many books. This book, however, attempts to provide a systematic analysis of all the pertinent Scriptures concerning the Church in one complete volume.

One of the main premises of this book is that if you truly believe the Bible, then many of you will no longer be able to fellowship as you do. This book is geared toward the average Christian who “goes to church” today and challenges them to commit themselves to Jesus with total abandonment. There are some in every generation who want to follow the Lord with all their hearts with no compromise – this book is for you. If you are not such a “radical” Christian, then perhaps this will make you one! Quite surprisingly, after reading this book, many Christians find themselves in total agreement with the basic concepts presented here. Thus, the problem isn’t that they don’t agree with what the Bible says, but only that they are not obeying what it says.<sup>§c.3</sup>

You may initially be skeptical about some of the claims of this book and that is understandable, since many Christians have never studied the Scriptures on this topic and have never heard a single sermon preached about this from the pulpit. But you are asked to consider things like the Bereans and “**examine the Scriptures**” (Acts 17:11) to see for yourselves if the things presented here are true. It is highly recommended that this book be discussed in a small group or a Bible study setting where these claims can be publicly scrutinized and not easily dismissed by one person’s “**private interpretation**” (2Pet. 1:20). Many Bible-believing Christians who once boasted, “We do everything according to the New Testament” have soon been silenced after reading this book. It is understandable that you might not want to get bogged down looking up every Scripture reference the first time through, but please take the time to look up any verses that you have questions about or are unfamiliar with.

Please be willing to discard any preconceived notions, as you will see that the Church described in the Bible is radically different from what is occurring among most Christians today. Christians must first come to understand the true Biblical

**“You can have all of your doctrines right, yet still not have the presence of God.”**

**– Leonard Ravenhill**

nature of the Church before they will ever experience the type of spiritual fellowship that God desires.<sup>§3.1</sup> Yet knowing all about the Church is not nearly as important as knowing Jesus. Do *you* know Jesus? Are you seeking after Him? Trying to obtain the most Scriptural form of Church structure will never be as important as knowing Jesus Christ personally! Even if you joined the most wonderful group of Christians who are filled with the Holy Spirit, that would not make *you* right with God.<sup>§1.3.1</sup>

## ***i.1.1* Purpose**

Why write a book about the Church? This book was written to encourage Christians to correctly begin functioning as the Church under the headship of Jesus Christ. For when this happens, “**the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the Church to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realm**” (Eph. 3:10). Jesus is indeed restoring the Church in cities all around the world today. Many who had once become disillusioned with their “church” have been restored to new life in fellowshipping with other Christians as

commanded by the Scriptures. Millions of Christians have now left the confines of unbiblical institutional “churches” to rediscover Biblical Christianity as God intended. Century after century, various movements of genuine Christians have left the institutional establishment at that time only to rediscover the exact same truths which have been documented here.

The goal of this book is *not* to get people to mimic a certain set of practices from the “New Testament Church”, but simply for them to be a part of the Church that Jesus Christ is leading today. The Church does not need more revival meetings as much as it needs a total *restoration!* Of course, the Church today will have many similarities with the early Church as it is founded on the same Scriptural principles. *And these basic principles will become critical as the Lord prepares the Church for the end times.* These foundational truths will become imperative as the Church is restored to a glorious state of spiritual power amidst growing persecution from the world.

**“Multitudes of Christians within the church are moving toward the point where they may reject the institution that ‘we’ call the church...They are hungry for a personal and vital experience with Jesus Christ.” – Billy Graham**

Christians need to recognize these things and begin to apply them to their lives now or they will be forced to deal with them later – either way Christians will eventually have to face these realities. The normal institutional way of handling things will soon come to an end and it will no longer be business as usual.

### i.1.2 Synopsis

This book attempts to expose the unbiblical nature of the current institutional “church” system by examining seven major principles of the Church: identity, unity, fellowship, meetings, authority, leadership, and practices. Without trying to summarize the entire book, here is a brief synopsis of the book’s major thesis:

	<b>Scriptural Truths</b>	<b>Counterfeit Philosophies</b>
<b>Identity</b>	Anyone who is a true Christian is by definition a member of the Church regardless of any geographical or logistical distinctions. (Gal. 3:28, Eph. 2:19)	An institutional “church” is a religious organization or non-profit corporation that typically conducts meetings or services in a particular building.
<b>Unity</b>	All Christians belong to the same Church founded on the basis of one Body, one Spirit, one Hope, one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, and one God. (1Cor. 12:12, Eph. 4:4-6)	Christians are divided into man-made organizations with made up names that embody their organizational doctrines and membership requirements.

	Scriptural Truths	Counterfeit Philosophies
Fellowship	Committed relationships are formed among the community of Christians who fellowship with one another on a daily basis by sharing their spiritual gifts as a priesthood of believers. (1Cor. 12:4-7, 1Pet. 2:9)	Christians maintain acquaintances with each other based on their religious preferences and have little to no contact with each other outside of the regularly scheduled weekly meetings.
Meetings	Every Christian actively participates in an open format, meeting together at any time or place as the Holy Spirit leads. (Matt. 18:20, 1Cor. 14:26-33)	Services are only conducted once or twice a week at a fixed location where the laity passively observe pre-planned performances as spectators.
Authority	Every Christian is able to be led by the Holy Spirit and submits directly to Jesus Christ who governs all the affairs of the Church. (John 10:3-4, 1Jn. 2:27)	Man-made decisions are handed down by boards, committees, or individuals who hold invalid positions of authority over other members.
Leadership	Christians voluntarily submit to one another and recognize servant leadership on the basis of spiritual authority. (Matt 20:25-28, Eph. 5:21)	The laity obey a hierarchical command structure of professional clergy that preside over them from elected or appointed offices.
Practices	The practices of the Church are derived from the Life of the Church through the continual direction of the Holy Spirit. (Gal. 5:25, Col. 2:8)	Business practices and traditions of men have created an institutional environment governed by unbiblical codes, schedules, and rules.

### i.1.3 Organization

This book utilizes a reference guide format where information is logically classified into chapters, sections, and subsections. The first digit of the numbering system designates the chapter, the second digit designates a major topic of that chapter, the third digit designates a subtopic of that topic, and so on. Each major chapter is subdivided into the following four subsections:

1. *Scriptural Truths*. This section discusses aspects of the Church from a purely Scriptural viewpoint. If someone wants a positive picture of how the Church is supposed to operate, they could just read this section of each chapter. The goal is to present indisputable facts that can easily be verified by anyone who cares to study the Scriptures. It is important that all the Scriptures on each subject be taken into account within their Biblical contexts.<sup>§c.2</sup>
2. *Counterfeit Philosophies*. This section discusses in detail how institutional “churches” today are disobeying the Scriptures and analyzes some of the unbiblical man-made philosophies that have been crafted in their place. This section may seem to be somewhat harsh at times, but its intent is only to tell the truth in love. While this book condemns the false institutional religious

system created by men, it recognizes that genuine love and ministry still occurs among many Christians attending institutional “churches”.

3. *Practical Applications*. This section addresses how Christians can practically apply the truth to their lives and begin to fellowship in the Church as God intended. Some books may cover a topic well enough but then the reader is overwhelmed and left wondering, “Where do I go from here?” This is where a marvelous spiritual journey can begin if you are up to it! Of course, any particular application would be unique for each individual, so this section is offered to provide some possible advice, direction, and examples to consider.
4. *Challenge Questions*. This section provides several questions to challenge your thinking and see if your experience lines up with the Scripture. Someone may breeze through a chapter thinking they are already doing everything right, and then they come to these questions which jolt them back into reality.

The material in this book progresses in a chronological “scope and sequence” fashion with each chapter building upon the concepts learned in the previous chapters. Thus, it is recommended that you first read through this book at least once before you begin jumping around between sections. If you start jumping around to interesting sounding sections without having read it straight through, you may miss many important points and think this book claims many things that it does not. For example, if you just skipped ahead to a latter section and saw the word “Church”, you might think it is referring to that white building on the corner that you attend every Sunday at 10:30 AM, but this is not what the Church is, nor what Scripture says the Church is.<sup>§1.2.1</sup> So while this reference guide format makes it easy to peak ahead, it is suggested that you refrain from jumping around between sections until you have become familiarized with everything the first time through.

## i.2 Preconceived Notions

This book often evokes strong reactions before people have even read it. Many people today are content with their religion and simply don’t want to be bothered with the truth. Those who think they are already doing everything right, often get mad at the slightest suggestion that they are not. Some are in denial and think that none of this could apply to their “church”, and yet they don’t even know why. This book will definitely not be well received by the religious Pharisees of our day<sup>§7.2.4.4</sup> You are merely asked to prayerfully consider the Scriptures presented here with an open mind before the Lord. The truths mentioned here have brought much joy to many, but just seem to anger others. It may upset your way of life, but please don’t get upset! There is certainly much here that could offend the average religious “church goer”, but it sincerely is not the intent to insult anyone. Jesus certainly offended many but that is often a side effect of the truth (John 14:6). Some who read this introduction may begin to jump to all sorts of faulty conclusions: “This is just some house church movement.” “They probably don’t submit to authority.” “They are claiming to be the one true

Church.” If you would just take the time to read this book you would see that all of these assertions are false. None of those things are advocated and in fact all of them are refuted by this book. Certainly, there have been some extremist groups who have fallen into errors along these lines, but such groups are equally denounced by this book as well. Please don’t let others’ misapplications of Scripture keep you from embarking on a marvelous spiritual journey leading to a more intimate relationship with Jesus.

Of course, many questions may be raised as you read through this book: “Why doesn’t my pastor teach that?” “What about some other passages?” “How can that be applied today?” If you come away from a section with unanswered questions, please be patient! Every issue and its related branches of thought cannot always be answered in a single section. If you just dismiss something out of hand saying, “Well, if that is the only argument...” then you probably will miss the point entirely. For if you would just read on, you usually will find that any questions or dangling loose ends are directly answered in another section. Critics who merely skim over parts of this book can often be easily answered by simply quoting the parts that they did not read.

If you read this book with a negative attitude trying to find something to fault, you will probably find it! Please don’t make the mistake of rejecting the truth because of theological nitpicking or wrangling over semantics, but try to extend the benefit of the doubt and understand the gist of the concepts until the full picture comes into view. If you get hung up over minor details, these can easily be corrected and then you will still have missed the point. This book is not particularly geared toward “hand holding” so as to anticipate every imaginable argument that anyone could ever come up with, but is intended to give any genuine seeker of the truth ample fuel to further his pursuit. If you don’t think this book has sufficiently proven a particular point, please take the time to investigate it further. There is no hurry, for the truth of the Scriptures will not be changing any time soon!

### **i.3 Biblical Orthodoxy**

This book stands on the truth of Scripture regarding the Church. Perhaps you may not *like* these truths, but which of these things is unscriptural? This book doesn’t contain any “secret knowledge” for the Scriptures presented here are easily verified by anyone who aspires to follow the truth. Those who find the Scripture confusing will perhaps find this book no less confusing! 😊 If this book seems controversial, it is only because the institutional “churches” haven’t been experiencing Biblical Christianity for such a very long time – but the Scripture has certainly not changed! Sometimes it will be necessary to consult the authority of the original Greek texts in order to fully understand what the Scriptures are really saying.<sup>5A.5</sup> The Scriptures about the Church are not offered as proof so that they can be forced in a legalistic way upon disobedient Christians, but to confirm what the Holy Spirit has been expressing for centuries. The goal here is not to try to prove what the Church is to those who do not have the Holy Spirit, but to confirm these things for those who do. This is not merely a history lesson about



what God did in the past, *this is also what the Holy Spirit is doing today*. These truths are being lived out by millions of Christians all over the world on a daily basis!<sup>§B.2</sup>

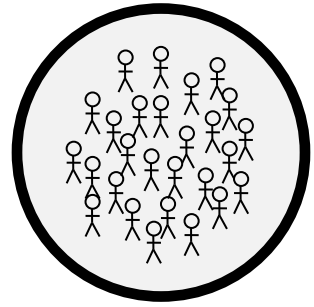
Lest you think some new cultic belief is being advocated here, this book adheres to an orthodox statement of faith in accordance with the Scriptures (and assumes the reader does as well):

1. The Bible, in the original autographs, is divinely inspired, infallible, inerrant, and authoritative in all matters of faith and conduct.
2. There is one God, eternally existent in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
3. The deity and humanity of Jesus Christ is accepted in His virgin birth, in His sinless life, in His miracles, in His vicarious and atoning death through His shed blood, in His bodily resurrection, in His ascension to the right hand of the Father, in His present rule as Head of the Church and in His personal return in power and glory.
4. The Holy Spirit is absolutely essential for the salvation of the lost and regeneration of sinful men.
5. Believers are enabled to live a godly life by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, to witness and work for the Lord Jesus Christ.
6. There is a resurrection of both the saved and the lost – they that are saved unto the resurrection of life, and they that are lost unto the resurrection of damnation.
7. There is unity of all true believers in our Lord Jesus Christ, without regard for racial, gender, or class differences.

The truths of this book are also supported by Church history and early Christians' writings,<sup>§A</sup> but this book makes its case solely on the authority of the Scriptures alone. The inset quotations from famous Christians sprinkled throughout are not given as proof of anything and many of them operated under an institutional framework without ever seeing the Church in its fullness. So you are not asked to believe what a famous Christian leader says or what you read in a best-selling Christian book – you are asked to believe what the Bible says! Peter, James, and John were some pretty famous Christians too, *so we will rely on their writings instead!* The Bible must always take precedence over what any organization or denomination says. (Or did you think Jesus was a Nazarene, John was a Baptist, and Paul was Apostolic?) ☺ Christians simply need to learn to obey the Scriptures because they are *true!* We do not follow the opinions of men; we follow Jesus! If you won't believe the Scripture, then there probably isn't anything else that would convince you anyway. There are many more Scriptures that could have been cited to support the points of this book, but were purposely limited to save space. The goal here was not to list every Scripture possible, but only to give enough references to clearly establish the basis for the truth. Accordingly, all non-scriptural references to historical, scientific, or statistical information have been given limited importance, so if you question the validity of any claim, please look it up yourself for these things can readily be verified.<sup>§B.1</sup>

## i.4 **Warning**

Before proceeding any further, a warning is probably in order. The content of this book highlights Scriptures that are being violated on a daily basis by a large number of Christians, especially by those who are leaders. This is largely done out of ignorance by people who otherwise have good intentions, because most of them have not thought about this topic very much and have never studied the Scriptures concerning the Church. But after reading this book, this would no longer be the case for *you!* You may be faced with some harsh truths that you have never encountered before that radically challenge your current way of life. The Scriptures cited in this book are not offered as mere suggestions or good advice, but as *commands* for Christians to obey. These truths tend to be highly charged and once the “cat is let out of the bag” there is usually a forceful discharge in one direction or another. It is tempting to say, “Don’t read this book if you are happy with the way things are”, but that is hardly a valid option for a Christian who loves the truth. In other words, you shouldn’t read this book unless you are willing to let the Lord radically change your life, but then again if you really are a Christian, then shouldn’t you be willing to let the Lord radically change your life? *Are you willing to submit to the truth contained in the Scriptures?* Now that you have been warned, you may proceed at your own risk.



# Chapter 1: Church Identity

## 1.1 Scriptural Truths

Before discussing any detailed aspects about the Church, it is important to first be clear about exactly what the Church is. Is the Church a white building on the corner with a steeple? Is the Church a meeting that is convened each week on Sunday mornings? Is the Church any non-profit religious organization? Let us begin by examining what Scripture says about the Church. It is imperative that Christians properly identify themselves with the Church that Jesus Christ has founded. Several of the topics introduced here will only be touched on briefly, so please be patient as they will be discussed in greater detail in later chapters.

### 1.1.1 What is the Church?

The Church is referred to by many different names in Scripture: **“the Church”** (Eph. 1:22, 5:23), **“Body of Christ”** (Eph. 4:12), **“Church of God”** (1Cor. 1:2, 10:32, 2Cor. 1:1), **“the Body”** (Col. 1:18), **“God’s house”** (Heb. 3:6), **“the Way”** (Acts 9:2, 19:23, 24:14), **“household of faith”** (Gal. 6:10), **“Church of the living God”** (1Tim. 3:15), and **“temple of God”** (2Cor. 6:16). There is not one official name used for the Church throughout Scripture,<sup>§2.2.1.4</sup> so the term “Church” will simply be used here for consistency purposes. The English word “Church” was probably coined from the Greek word “ΚΥΡΙΑΚΟΣ” #2960 meaning “belonging to the Lord”, but that is not the word that is translated as “Church” in the Scriptures. The word “Church” is translated from the Greek word “ΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑ” #1577 which literally means “called out ones”. The word “ΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑ” was not necessarily a religious term but was used for political gatherings and other non-religious assemblies where people were “called out” to assemble as a deliberating body. Those who were “called out” from the general population, similar to those elected to a congress, would be considered the “called out ones”. In the context of Christianity, these are the people who have been “called out” from the world by Jesus Christ to be His

disciples. **“You do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world.”** (John 15:19) The Church is “called out” of the world to be a separate assembly.<sup>§4.1.2</sup> **“Therefore come out from the midst of them and be separate.”** (2Cor. 6:17) The very concept of *sanctification* means “to be set apart” or separated from the world and dedicated to God (2Th. 2:13-14). **“But you are an elite class, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s possession...”** (1Pet. 2:9)

These “called out ones” of Jesus Christ are referred to by many different names in Scripture: **“disciples”** (Acts 6:1-2, 18:23, 20:7), **“Christians”** (Acts 11:26), **“believers”** (Acts 5:14, 1Tim. 4:12), **“saints”** (Rom. 1:7, 2Cor. 1:1, Eph. 1:1, Phil. 1:1), **“brothers”** (Acts 6:3, 11:29, 15:3), **“members of the Body”** (1Cor. 12:24, Eph. 5:30, Col. 3:15), **“the elect”** (Matt. 24:31, 2Tim. 2:10, 1Pet. 1:2), **“children of God”** (John 1:12, 1Jn. 3:10), and **“followers of the Way”** (Acts 22:4). Again, there is not one official name used for Christians throughout Scripture, so the term “Christian” will simply be used here for consistency purposes. A Christian is the same thing as a disciple of Jesus, since

**“the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch”** (Acts 11:26). In Scripture, the terms “Christians”, “disciples”, “believers”, “saints”, and “brothers” are all interchangeable *synonyms* for the word “Church”, designating all the people who are the “called out ones”. Someone could talk about the believers of Lafayette, the saints of Lafayette, the Christians of Lafayette, or the Church of Lafayette, and these are still all the same thing! Paul’s letters in the Bible, for example, are addressed to the **“brothers”** (Col. 1:2), **“saints”** (Rom. 1:7, 2Cor. 1:1, Eph. 1:1, Phil. 1:1), and **“Church”** (1Cor. 1:2, 1Th. 1:1) in an interchangeable manner. All these terms for the Church are synonymous with God’s *people* – not buildings, meetings, and organizations that are falsely called “churches” today. The Church doesn’t just exist once a week for an hour on Sunday mornings, the Church is all of the Christians all of the time. There are not disciples, believers, or saints *in* a “church” – the disciples, believers, and saints *are* the Church. The Church does not contain people; *it is the people!* **“Now you are the Body of Christ and individual members of it.”** (1Cor. 12:27; cf. Rom 12:5, 1Cor. 12:12)

**There are not Christians in a “church”, the Christians are the Church!**

### 1.1.1.1 Church Membership

If a person wishes to be a member of the Church, then they must become one of these “called out ones”. People become “called out ones” when they are **“born again”** of the Spirit (John 3:3-8). **“God is Spirit”** (John 4:24) and anyone who wants to have fellowship with Him must be **“born of the Spirit”** (John 3:6,8). A person has either been “called out” of the world by being **“born again”** (John 3:3,7), **“saved”** (Eph. 2:8), **“redeemed”** (Tit. 2:14), **“justified”** (Gal. 2:16), etc. or else they do not belong to the Church.<sup>§1.3.1</sup> **“But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Him.”** (Rom. 8:9) There are many resources, including the prequel to this book, which discuss how to become a true Christian. Once you become a true Christian, you are automatically and by definition a part of the Church. **“If Christ is in you”** (Rom. 8:10), then you are already a member of the Church. There are absolutely no other membership requirements to belong to the Church. The

membership committee of the Church consists of exactly one person – Jesus Christ! **“For we are members of His Body.”** (Eph. 5:30)

Membership in the Church should never be confused with membership in an *institutional “church”*.<sup>§1.2.2</sup> (The term “church” is designated with quotation marks and a lowercase “c” so that it will not be confused with the Church). An institutional “church” is an organization, denomination, non-profit corporation, association, sect, or other such religious institution that was created by men. Membership in an institutional “church” does not have any bearing on whether or not someone is a spiritual member of the Church. A Christian does not become a member of the Church when they are baptized into a man-made denomination,<sup>§2.2.1.3</sup> but only when they are baptized into Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:27). You do not become a Christian by joining a “church” organization, when you become a Christian you *are* a member of the Church. **“You are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with the saints and God’s household.”** (Eph. 2:19) From now on, when the term “Christian” is used in this book (without the quotation marks), it does not refer to those who merely attend an institutional “church” or claim to be a Christian, but only those who are genuine believers and true followers of Jesus Christ. You cannot get to Heaven by joining any man-made organization, even if that organization claims to be “the one true church”.<sup>§1.2.1.2</sup> Simply being a member of an organization, no matter how wonderful you think it is, will not give you spiritual birth.

### 1.1.1.2 Church Formation

The Church exists wherever there are “called out ones”. Wherever there are “called out ones” is where the Church is. Christians do not need to join a “church” *because Christians already are the Church!* This is not simply a matter of semantics, because what most people falsely refer to as a “church” today is not the Church at all, but is merely an institutional “church”. Thus, when someone today speaks of “starting another church”, they can only be referring to starting an institutional “church”,<sup>§1.2.2.1</sup> because the Church is already here. Jesus started the Church 2000 years ago! *The Church can never be started again, it can only spread.* **“The kingdom of God is like a man who scatters seed on the earth. He sleeps at night and rises at day and the seed sprouts and grows and he does not know how.”** (Mark 4:26-27; cf. Matt. 13:31-32, Mark 4:30-32) Notice that there is never any discussion about starting institutional “churches” in Scripture because the Church is not an organization that can be started by men. The Church is already here!

**“We Christians are the Church and whatever we do is what the Church is doing.”**

**– A. W. Tozer**

If Christians exist in a location, then the Church already exists in that location. If Christians spread to a new area, then the Church is in that new area. If there are any Christians living in your area, then the Church is already in your area. Scripture records people becoming Christians in many different locations, and then without any discussion of its origins, the Church is simply mentioned as

being there. For example, some people became believers in Jerusalem (Acts 2:41) and suddenly the Church appears in Jerusalem (Acts 5:11, 8:1); some people become believers in Antioch (Acts 11:19-20) and suddenly the Church appears in Antioch (Acts 11:26); some people become believers in Ephesus (Acts 18:19, 19:1) and suddenly the Church appears in Ephesus (Acts 20:17). There was no building, headquarters, or sign out front announcing that the Church was there, yet the Church was there! So how does someone extend the Church to a new location? Simple, begin preaching the gospel in that location! As soon as people become Christians there, the Church will have been formed there.

## 1.1.2 Scope of the Church

There is only one Church because Jesus only has **“one Body”** (Rom. 12:5, 1Cor. 10:17, 12:20, Eph. 3:6, 4:4, Col. 3:15). **“For as there is one body which has many members and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is the Body of Christ.”** (1Cor. 12:12) The existence of only one Church is not a matter of wishful thinking – it is a Scriptural fact.<sup>§2.1.1</sup> There are not different “churches” to choose from, there is only one Church! But how can this be? The Body of Christ is not represented by any physical structure created by men; it is a *spiritual kingdom* – the kingdom of God. Jesus said, **“My kingdom is not of this world.”** (John 18:36) The Church is clearly “in the world”, but the Church is not **“of this world”** (John 17:13-18). The Church is like a four-dimensional object existing in a three-dimensional world. Men often try to construct an institutional shell around the Spirit to contain it, but then after the Spirit moves on they are left with nothing but an institutional shell of dead works.<sup>§7.1.1.1</sup> That is because the Church is a *supernatural* entity that merely expresses itself in the natural world.

### 1.1.2.1 Transcending Geography

The Church is not limited by any geographical boundaries. Although there is only one Church, it does not mean that all Christians must live in one place. Christians may be found all over the world, yet they still remain one in the Spirit. Scripture makes references to the Church throughout the entire geographical spectrum:

- Houses (Acts 2:46, 8:3, 20:20, Rom. 16:5, 1Cor. 16:19, Col. 4:15, Phm. 1:2, 2Jn. 1:10)
- Cities (Acts 8:1, 9:32, 11:22, 13:1, Rom. 1:7, 16:1, 1Cor. 1:2, 2Cor. 1:1, Eph. 1:1, Phil. 1:1, Col. 4:16, 1Th. 1:1, Rev. 2:1,8,12,18, 3:1,7,14)
- Nations (Acts 15:41, 2Cor. 8:1)
- Regions (Acts 9:31, 11:29, 1Cor. 16:1,19, Gal. 1:2, Rev. 1:4)
- Worldwide (Rom. 16:16, 1Cor. 7:17, 10:32, 11:16, 12:28, 14:12,33, 2Cor. 11:28, Eph. 1:22, 3:10,21, 5:32, Col. 1:18,24)

Likewise, if mankind ever succeeded in colonizing another planet there could eventually be references back to the “Church on Earth”. Among all the types of references used, *the city was the most common geographical association of the*

*Church* largely because fellowship with “one another” required physical proximity that is inherently geographical in nature. Scripturally speaking, there is only one Church in any given city. (Notice that the plural word “Churches” is only used in reference to broader regions that contained *more than one city*.) But this does not mean the Church is somehow limited to a city. Some have taken this concept of a “city church” too far and claim that a city is the only valid entity of the Church. But this is clearly not the case as Scripture uses *many other types* of geographical references regarding the Church as noted above. In particular, Scripture refers to the “**Church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria**” (Acts 9:31) which uses the singular word “Church” to refer to a geographical area that is *larger than a city*. Likewise, Scripture refers to the “**Church that meets at their house**” (Rom. 16:5, 1Cor. 16:19, Col. 4:15, Phm. 1:2) which uses the word “Church” to refer to a geographical area that is *smaller than a city*. There were many such houses in a city (Acts 2:46, 8:3, 20:20), yet these were all still referenced as being one Church (Acts 8:1, 11:22, 13:1, Rom. 16:1, 1Cor. 1:2, 2Cor. 1:1, Col. 4:16, 1Th. 1:1).

Regardless of how Christians may be labeled, grouped, or referenced, all Christians are part of this same, one Church. Christians were often addressed by their geographical location, but they were also referenced by non-geographical traits such as ethnicity (Acts 15:23, Rom. 16:4, Jas. 1:1, 1Pet. 1:1). However you can categorize people is how you can categorize the Church, since the Church is just made up of people. To offer an analogy, a swimming pool is one body of water, yet someone may refer to the deep end, the shallow end, the swimming lanes, or the bottom – but it is still only one body of water. It doesn’t matter what someone may *call* any particular part of the pool, the water there will still be indistinguishable from any of the other water. Similarly, the ability to make

**“The Church, during the apostolic age, did not consist of isolated, independent congregations, but was one body, of which the separate churches were constituent members, each subject to all the rest, or to an authority which extended over all.”**

**– Charles Hodge**

demographical *distinctions* about members of the one Church did not mean that there were actually such organizational *divisions* among the Christians.<sup>§2.2.1.1</sup> For example, it is not as though there were a separate denomination known as “**the Churches of the Gentiles**” (Rom. 16:4) with this name on a sign in front of its headquarters simply because someone wanted to make reference to the Christians who were Gentiles. Likewise, references to “**the Church at Jerusalem**” (Acts 11:22) or “**the Church that meets at their house**” (Rom. 16:5) were not references to different *institutions*, but references to different *areas* where members of the Church met. “**The Church at Ephesus**” (Rev. 2:1) was not a title of a “church”; it was merely one location where Christians lived. Again, to refer to “the Church” of some location is no different than referring to the “**brothers**” (Acts 16:2, Col. 1:2, 4:15, 1Th. 4:10) or “**saints**” (Acts 9:32, Rom. 1:7, Eph. 1:1) of that location.<sup>§2.2.1.1</sup>

There are many examples of this principle in Scripture. For example, Priscilla and Aquila could be referenced belonging to the “**Church that meets at their house**” (Rom. 16:5), the “**Church of Ephesus**” (Acts 18:19, Rev. 2:1), and the “**Churches**

**of Asia**” (1Cor. 16:19). Meanwhile, Philemon could be referenced belonging to the **“Church that meets at your home”** (Phm. 1:2), the **“Brothers at Colossae”** (Col. 1:2), the **“Church of Phrygia”** (Acts 18:23), and the **“Churches of the Gentiles”** (Rom. 16:4). Now how many different “churches” do you suppose they belonged to? One! They were all part of the one and same Church that spanned many geographical designations. It was not as if the Christians in Ephesus were part of a different organization than the Christians of Colossae. The Christians living in Colossae, Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, etc. were all part of the same Church. If Philemon moved from Colossae to Ephesus, he would simply start meeting with the Christians located in Ephesus – there would be nothing new to “join” since he was already a Christian and therefore already a member of the Church. This would be somewhat analogous to having an account at a bank with branches located in many areas – an account is still valid at any of the branches because they are all part of the same bank. Notice that there is no mention of the terms “universal church” or “local church” in Scripture because these concepts were not made up until centuries later – there is just one Church.<sup>\$1.2.1.1</sup> Likewise today, there is *still* only one Church, no matter how you slice it!

### 1.1.2.2 Transcending Meetings

The Church is also not limited to any particular meeting. Although there is only one Church, it does not mean that all Christians must attend the same gathering. Christians may meet in a variety of ways, times, and places for various purposes, yet they still remain one in the Spirit. The Church is much more than just a meeting, but of course the members of the Church do meet.<sup>\$4.1.1</sup> The concept of the “called out ones” assembling together is built right in to the meaning of the Greek word “ΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑ”. The Church is not a meeting, the Church is the “called out ones” who meet together by their very nature. The Church obviously does not cease to exist all of a sudden just because a particular meeting ends. Christians don’t stop being Christians just because there is not a meeting to attend, just as congressmen don’t stop being congressmen when they are not in session.

Any simple gathering of two or more Christians in Jesus’ name constitutes a meeting of the Church.<sup>\$4.1.1</sup> **“Where two or three are gathered in My name, there I am in their midst.”** (Matt. 18:20) Scripture indicates that the vast majority of meetings were in homes (Acts 2:46, 8:3, 20:20, Rom. 16:5, 1Cor. 16:19, Col. 4:15, Phm. 1:2, 2Jn. 1:10). In larger cities, there may be several meetings going on daily at different houses. For logistical reasons, one person could not attend all of the meetings in a city at once, nor could several thousand people fit in one house at one time, nor was it important that they try. They simply met together to fellowship in the freedom of the Spirit according to their relationships with one another in Christ. With a network of overlapping relationships, gatherings rotated freely **“from house to house”** (Acts 2:46) as a Christian may have met with one circle of believers at one place, and another circle of believers at another place.

Unlike today, there were not disconnected meetings representing divisions between institutional “churches” that competed in the same city for mutually exclusive membership lists. No, the meetings of the one Church were simply



naturally occurring gatherings that came about as the Christians were led by the Holy Spirit in their relationships with one another. *Every meeting of Christians was associated with the same Church.* The Christians recognized each other as brothers and sisters in Christ and shared their lives together as one family.<sup>§3.1.2</sup> In contrast to terminology used in institutional “churches” such as “ceremony”, “official”, “attendance”, and “program”, a gathering of the Church might be more aptly described as people getting together at a friend’s house to share a meal and have fellowship. Any Christian could participate in any gathering going on in their city or any other city, since there was only one Church and they were already members of it.

### 1.1.3 Life of the Church

The Church is much more than the sum of all of its individual members, for the Church functions as a single spiritual entity.<sup>§2.1.1</sup> When Christians are “**born of the Spirit**” (John 3:3-8), they become a part of a *spiritual organism* – the Body of Christ. The Church is alive! There is spiritual Life in the Church because there is spiritual Life in the people – for the people *are* the Church. The Life of the Church comes through Jesus who is the Life. “**I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.**” (John 14:6) Jesus Christ does not just give us Life – Jesus Christ “**is our life**” (Col. 3:4)! “**He who has the son has life, he who does not have the Son of God has not life.**” (1Jn. 5:11-12) The Life not only exists in individuals, but also operates collectively...like a Body. The “**Body**” has Life because it is directly connected to Jesus Christ, the “**Head**” of the Church (Eph. 1:22, 4:15, 5:23, Col. 1:18). The Life is not a creed, ritual, philosophy, principle, doctrine, etc. but the very life of Jesus Christ living in His people. The Life of the Spirit may be expressed in any number of *spiritual* activities such as prayer, spiritual gifts, fellowship, evangelism, miracles, etc. Only those who are the Church are able to express the Life of the Church.

#### 1.1.3.1 Purity of the Church

There is a permanent chasm fixed between the spiritual Life of the Church and the unrighteous world. “**Do not become bound together with unbelievers. For what partnership does righteousness have with lawlessness? Or what fellowship does light have with darkness? What agreement does Christ have with Belial? Or what part does a believer have with an unbeliever?**” (2Cor. 6:14-15) The Church and the world are simply incompatible. To be in Christ is to forsake the things that are not of Christ. The world is leaven to the Church (1Cor. 5:6-8, Gal. 5:9) and the Church is leaven to the world (Matt. 13:33, Luke 13:21). Christians have been “called out” to forsake their lives of sin, lukewarmness, and backsliding in the world in order to follow Jesus. The call for Christians to walk in holiness before the Lord could not be any clearer (Matt. 5:48, 2Cor. 7:1, Col. 3:5, 1Th. 5:22, 1Ti. 5:22, Heb. 12:14).

It is imperative that the purity of the spiritual Life of the Church not be compromised. To the same degree that sin hinders a Christian's fellowship with God, it will hinder their fellowship in the one Church. **“And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.”** (Eph. 4:30) It is not just enough to be born of the Spirit: **“If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.”** (Gal. 5:25) Jesus will not tolerate sin in His Body. **“He takes away every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, and He prunes every branch that bears fruit that it may bear more fruit.”** (John 15:2) The problem with most institutional “churches”, however, is that Christians are trying to fellowship with people who are not all Christians.<sup>§3.3.2.1</sup> The Church cannot fellowship with that which is not the Church.

Does this mean that the Church is always perfect? At any given time there is always a remnant (Rom. 11:5) of the Church walking in holiness before the Lord **“who have not soiled their garments”** (Rev. 3:4). And while Jesus is coming for **“a pure and spotless bride”** (Eph. 5:27), John's revelation tells us that some elements of the early Church were anything but perfect (Rev. 2-3). The Christians in a given area may be very immature, ignorant, or weak, but that does not deprive them from being part of the Church. Indeed, not every person in the Church may be “perfect”, but they must at least be born again. Whatever level of spiritual maturity the Christians have in an area *is* the level of spiritual maturity the Church has in that area. The Christians in an area may have many problems, yet they still remain the

**“Wherever we see the Word of God purely preached and heard, there a church of God exists, even if it swarms with many faults.” – John Calvin**

Church. Consider that the Christians in Corinth had problems with divisiveness (1Cor. 1:11-13), sexual immorality (1Cor. 5:1), spiritual gifts (1Cor. 14), and the Lord's supper (1Cor. 11:20-21), yet it was still part of the Church – it just was very immature. This, of course, does not mean that this behavior was acceptable for that is why letters were written to the Corinthians to address those problems. If the Church in an area continues to allow sin to remain in their midst, their lampstand could eventually be removed.<sup>§4.1.2.5</sup>

### 1.1.3.2 Church Discipline

If a Christian falls into sin, Scripture gives several guidelines about rebuking, exhorting, correcting, and disciplining in order to **“gently restore”** (Gal. 6:1) and **“turn them back”** (Jas. 5:19-20) towards maturity in Christ. Confronting a Christian in sin need not be handled in a negative, judgmental act of formal condemnation, but should be embraced as an encouraging act of love that tries to solve problems and bring everyone to maturity in Christ. Such corrective action does not hinder the Life of the Church, but on the contrary, it is precisely designed to preserve the Life of the Church! But what if someone who is a Christian continues to persist in sin? In the *rare* occasion, that a genuine Christian will not repent after being confronted alone (Matt. 18:15), then by two or three witnesses (Matt. 18:16, 2Cor. 13:1, 1Tim. 5:19), and then before the entire assembly (Matt. 18:17), the Church is no longer to fellowship with them (Matt. 18:17, 2Th. 3:6,14, 1Ti. 5:20, Tit. 3:10, 2Jn. 1:10). **“...do not associate**

**with any so-called brother who is sexually immoral, or greedy, or an idolater, or a slanderer, or a drunkard, or a swindler – do not even eat with such a man.”** (1Cor. 5:11) Again, this radical action is designed to preserve the Life of the Church by **“purging the old leaven”** from the **“batch of dough”** (1Cor. 5:6-8). **“Do not let sexual immorality, any impurity or greed even be named among you as is proper among saints.”** (Eph. 5:3)

This process is intended to only be *temporary* in hopes that the person will later come to their senses and repent (2Cor. 2:6-8). Such disfellowship of an individual does not create a division in the Church, but instead separates out that which does not belong to the Church. (This process should in no way be confused with excommunication in institutional “churches” where someone can have their membership revoked in one institution and then they simply join another institution.) Here is the infrequent case where someone who may actually be a Christian is simply not allowed to *meet* with the Church. A disfellowshipped person might still be **“saved on the day of the Lord”** (1Cor. 5:5; cf. 1Cor. 3:15), but they are simply not entitled to meet with the rest of the Church because of their unrepentant behavior. Such a Christian is not to be regarded as an **“enemy”**, but to be warned as a **“brother”** (2Th. 3:15). (Newsflash for Roman Catholics: excommunication doesn’t mean you can kill people!) 😊 In the analogy of marriage, it would be considered more like a temporary separation rather than a permanent divorce. Should such an individual later repent, they would not need to become a member of the Church again (as if they needed to become a Christian again), but would simply begin meeting with the Church again. After the person repents, the Church should receive them back **“forgiving and comforting”** and **“reaffirming love to them”** (2Cor. 2:6-8).

**“The church has lost its ability to discipline members who live openly in sin. Consequently, we have lost our witness in the community.” – Billy Graham**

## 1.2 Counterfeit Philosophies

Many people do not recognize the Church today because they do not know what the Church is in the first place! Tragically, many Christians in institutional “churches” have spent their entire lives building on the wrong foundation (1Cor. 3:9-15). Did the Church forget what the Church is? Notice that the institutional “church” system today does not even remotely resemble the Church described in the New Testament.<sup>§3.2.2.1</sup> Indeed, the Church depicted in the Bible is *radically different* from the religion being practiced in most institutional “churches”.

### 1.2.1 Unbiblical Newspeak

When many Christians see the word “church” in their Bibles, they think it means something entirely different than what the word meant in the first century.

Today many Christians are under the delusion that a “church” is a particular *organization, building, or meeting* that they attend. Their “church” is an *object* that possesses some very strange properties – it has a color, it can start and stop, it can move, it can shut down, etc. The Church described in the Scripture, of course, has none of these weird properties. The men in institutional “churches” eventually had to create a new set of unbiblical terminology in order to discuss their unbiblical “church” object. Consider this common dialogue you might hear about an institutional “church” today:

*Frank:* Hey Bob! It’s been a while since I’ve seen you at church. Which church do you go to now?

*Bob:* I’ve started going to the First United Community Church.

*Frank:* Isn’t that the green building on the corner of 1st and Elm?

*Bob:* Yes, and we just added a new wing on the church this year.

*Frank:* I’ve heard they added more music to their services. How long does church last now?

*Bob:* The service still starts at 10:30 but doesn’t get out until noon under the new format.

*Frank:* Didn’t you used to go to Christian Community Church a few years ago?

*Bob:* Yes, but the denomination had to close the church down because it could not meet its budget.

The amount of unbiblical misconceptions contained in this short dialogue is simply amazing. Does it sound normal to you? How bizarre would this have sounded to the early Christians? They are confusing apples with oranges as they think they are talking about the Church, when they are really talking about institutional “churches”! Read the dialogue again and realize how foreign and nonsensical this is to the Scripture:

- “*which church*” – Isn’t there only one Church? What Frank is really asking is, “Which man-made organization do you attend?” According to this mindset, there can be hundreds of institutional “churches” competing in a given city.<sup>§2.2.1.1</sup> These institutional divisions are given names such as “First United Community Church”. Where do you find that name in the Bible? The members often refer to “my church” or “our church”. Can I have my own “church” too? ☺ In Scripture, there are not several “churches” located in one city; there is only one Church that is located in several cities.<sup>§1.1.2.1</sup>
- “*go to church*” – When did it become a building you can “go to”? According to this mindset, the “church” is a physical structure that has a certain color, shape, and size. For example, you could put a roof on a “church” or you may have a green “church”. What color was Jesus’ “church”? ☺ A “church” can even have wings! In Scripture, Christians do not “go to church”,<sup>§3.3.2.3</sup> Christians are the Church!<sup>§1.1.1</sup>
- “*church last*” – Can it run out of time? According to this mindset, people attend “church” during specific times because their “church” really only functions when they are having services.<sup>§4.2.2</sup> Their “church” for all practical

purposes essentially disappears as soon as the meeting lets out at noon. Where does it go after that? In Scripture, the Church is not a one-and-a-half hour meeting; it is all the Christians all the time.<sup>§1.1.2.2</sup>

- “close the church” – Is it now a business run by men? According to this mindset, a “church” can be created or dissolved just like any other man-made social club.<sup>§1.2.2.3</sup> Most of them are non-profit corporations that function no differently than any other business. In Scripture, the Church is not a physical organization that can be disbanded, it is a spiritual organism created by Jesus Christ that will endure forever.

Notice that you will not find strange phrases like these anywhere in the Bible. The reason why this kind of terminology is not found in the Bible is because the underlying concepts are also not found in the Bible! Indeed, this is but a mere sampling of the unbiblical “church gibberish” that is often spoken among the institutional “churches” today.<sup>§7.2.1.1</sup>

### 1.2.1.1 The Invisible Church?

Perhaps one reason that many Christians cannot identify the Church today is because they think it is invisible. Indeed, it is hard to recognize the Church after it has been filtered through the grid of all of the man-made organizations masquerading as “churches” today.<sup>§1.2.2</sup> This confusion has caused many Christians to be deceived into adopting the unbiblical doctrine of the “local church” and the “universal church”. This false doctrine tries to divide the Church into *two different kinds* of imaginary “churches” – one that is *visible* and one that is *invisible*. Most institutional “churches” consider themselves to be a “local church” – that is a visible representation of the people of God in their local area. But this raises questions as to why several other organizations also claim to be the “local church” for their area. Which one of them represents the true “local church” for their city? How is it that there are genuine Christians attending other “local churches” in town while at the same time some members of your “local church” may not seem to be Christians at all?

Because of these obvious discrepancies, the unbiblical “universal church” doctrine was manufactured to try to compensate for the theological failings of the “local church” doctrine. This imaginary “universal church” supposedly consists of all Christians scattered throughout the world and is thus *invisible* because nobody can know for sure who they are except God.<sup>§1.2.4.2</sup> Thus, while the “local churches” in their city are visibly divided into separate organizations, this does not bother them because they believe that the mystical “universal church” somehow remains invisibly united. Whenever they see the word “church” in the Bible they normally assume it is talking about their local institutional “church”, but whenever it no longer fits the context, then voila, they just switch the meaning and assume it must be referring to the “universal church”. The same word “Church” in the Scripture is made to mean “local” or “universal”, whatever they want in order to fit their theology. But the Bible does not teach this doctrine anywhere! *There is no “universal church”, “local church”, “visible church”, or*

“invisible church” mentioned anywhere in Scripture – there is only the one Church!

How ludicrous this strange doctrine of an *invisible* “church” would have sounded to the early Christians. If Paul ran into a member of the invisible “church” would it hurt? 😊 Obviously, this “universal church” has never been seen

**“To say that the true church has been reduced to the condition of being invisible is at once to decide the question, and to affirm that the church has entirely lost its original and essential standing, and departed from the purpose of God, and from the constitution it received from Him.” – J. N. Darby**

doing anything constructive – how can it, it is invisible! The impact of the early Church, of course, was quite visible – just read through the book of Acts, for example. There was no false dichotomy between a visible “local church” and an invisible “universal church”; *all the Christians were one Church and this was quite visible!* The Church is not a group of theoretically detached Christians who do nothing – what the Church is and what the Church does are both very real and tangible.<sup>§3.1</sup> The Church is not a physical organization; but a spiritual organism that has physical manifestations. There is no

artificial separation between the spiritual and physical, because there is simply one Church. Certainly, there are spiritual aspects of the Church which are unseen, but the physical presence of the Church and its impact on a community should be clearly visible.

### 1.2.1.2 The One True “church”?

Those who are looking for the right “church” will find that there is no shortage of organizations claiming to be the one true Church. Some organizations agree that there is only one true Church, and they claim it is only represented by *their* denomination, organization, or institution. Only *their* members are the true Christians. Only *their* particular organization is a valid “church” and all other “churches” are confused. They believe that *if* there were any Christians outside of their organization (and some would say there aren’t), such people are missing out on God’s will and may not even be “saved”. Entire theological doctrines have been constructed that hinge on which institutional “church” represents the true people of God. Several different organizations have made this cultic claim about themselves, leading to many intense debates about which man-made organization is really the one true Church:

- *Is it the first organization ever started?* Surely the first institutional “church” to exist must be the right one and the rest are counterfeits.<sup>§A.1</sup> But which one was the first? Would that be the creation of the Orthodox “church”, or the Roman Catholic “church” that split from them, or the Lutheran “church” that split from them, etc.? With a little imagination, almost every organization can

trace their roots back to the beginning, claiming that their particular branch alone has preserved the *true spiritual line*.

- *Is it the largest or fastest growing organization?* Surely being the largest organization is proof that God has blessed them the most. Hmmm. You mean like the Buddhists and Roman Catholics? Or perhaps phenomenal growth proves that God’s Spirit is with them?<sup>§7.2.4.1</sup> Hmmm. How about those Muslims and Mormons?
- *Is it the organization with the right leader?* Surely being able to trace your leader’s lineage back through apostolic succession must guarantee your organization’s authenticity. But based on which apostle?<sup>§5.2.1.4</sup> Just like the claim of being the first organization, multiple groups claim to have the conflicting lineages emanating from various apostles.
- *Is it the organization with the best doctrine?* Surely having the most pure doctrine would give you at least a stake in being the true “church”. But which “church” today would claim that they don’t have the correct doctrine?
- *Is it the last organization started?* Surely receiving the latest revelations from God would make a new improved “church” better than all of the previous “churches”. But why do all these new and improved “churches” differ so much from each other? Is someone not getting it right?

Which one of these *organizations* then is the one true Church? The answer is none of them – *the Church is not any man-made organization!* What if “the one true church” you have chosen begins to ordain homosexuals, promote abortion, worship the dead, or do any number of other blatant practices opposed by Scripture? Does it still get to remain “the one true church”? Without going into greater depth here to show you why each organization’s claim is wrong, it is sufficient for now simply to reiterate that the Church is not any such organization. Indeed, there is one true Church, but it is not represented by any organization of men. A man-made organization is not a Church, not a visible Church, not even part of the Church. Jesus Christ did not start the Methodist, Baptist, Orthodox, or Roman Catholic “churches”, various *men* did centuries later.<sup>§1.2.2.1</sup> Jesus Christ did not start any of these man-made *institutional divisions*, He only started the Church. Many people are sincerely looking for the one true Church, but the problem is that they have been looking in all the wrong places!

## 1.2.2 Institutional “churches”

The creation of institutional “churches” has perhaps inflicted the greatest damage upon the Church today. The Church founded by Jesus Christ has been hijacked by various men over the centuries and divided among thousands of denominational, non-denominational, inter-denominational, and independent organizations, non-profit corporations, associations, and sects.<sup>§2.2.1.1</sup> Each of these organizations falsely refers to itself as a “church” as if there were more than one Church. They consider themselves just one of the thousands of institutional *subdivisions* or *franchises* that make up the super-structure of the theoretical

“universal church”. You will not find any place in Scripture where God authorized men to divide His Church into separate organizations and place their artificial structures on top of it. No organizational superstructure that men try to impose upon the Church can ever define it or contain it. *The Church is not the sum of all the man-made institutions; it is the sum of all true Christians!* This should be fairly obvious since there are usually some non-Christian members in most institutional “churches”, but there aren’t any non-Christians in the Church!<sup>§1.1.1.1</sup> The Church is not represented by any particular man-made organization. When Jesus Christ returns, institutional “churches” will *not* be raptured (1Cor. 15:51-52, 1Thes. 4:16-17) together as organizational units. There will not be any denominations in Heaven. Those who create these various man-made organizations are blatantly committing the *sin of division*.<sup>§2.1.2</sup>

Institutional “churches” have created an entirely *unbiblical environment* which has greatly damaged the fellowship of the Church. Below is a table contrasting some of the major differences between the Church and the man-made institutional “churches”:

God’s Church	Institutional “churches”
Started and led by Jesus Christ	Started and led by men
Eternally established forever	Can be created, merged, and abolished
Contains only Christians	Contains Christians and non-Christians
Members chosen by Jesus Christ	Members meet confirmation requirements
Governed by Jesus Christ	Governed by man-made positions
Meet in the name of Jesus Christ	Meet in man-made institutional name
Members are the Church	Members “go to church”

Institutional “churches” are not just the old traditional mainline denominations, but also the contemporary charismatic independent organizations.<sup>§7.2.4</sup> The flavor of what goes on in their proceedings has nothing to do with whether they are an institutional “church” or not. *Every* institutional “church” is an unbiblical entity.<sup>§1.2.2.1</sup> Every one of them? Yes, and if you go to one, that would include yours too!

Some people have been confused because many true Christians may attend their institutional “church”. Certainly, some true Christians can usually be found in almost every kind of man-made denomination. Note that there are usually many Christians sitting in the stands at any football game too, but that does not make it a Church.<sup>§4.1.2</sup> There could be Christian members of a *non-profit corporation* to save the whales, but that does not make it a Church. Likewise, there may be many Christians attending a religious organization that calls itself a “church”, but that does not make it a Church either. In fact, *even if every member* who attended an institution were a Christian, it still would not be the Church because the Church does not operate under the authority of a man-made institution. Do you have ears to hear? If all the members of the Rotary club just happened to be Christians, for example, should people start calling it a Church? No, the number of Christians attending an institution does not make it a Church –



even if every one of them is a Christian – *because the Church does not function under the auspices of any man-made organization!*

Note that there are other kinds of Christian institutions such as mission boards, publishing companies, political advocacy groups, and other parachurch organizations whose intent is to advance the cause of Christ, but they also are not the Church and usually do not claim to be one. Of course, any Christians in these institutions are still part of the Church, but these institutions themselves are not part of the Church. Such artificial divisions are never needed in the Body of Christ, but this does not mean that it is necessarily wrong to participate in such organizations.<sup>§2.3.1.1</sup> Ironically, many of these types of parachurch organizations often experience more spiritual fruit than other institutional “churches”. But Christians should never be deceived into thinking that these organizations are a substitute for the Church.

Institutional structures may work fine for corporations, social clubs, and government entities in the world, but they are simply not valid structures for the Church.<sup>§5.1.1.3</sup> An institutional “church” is not an inconsequential structure that is otherwise harmless;<sup>§7.1.3.1</sup> it is an *unbiblical entity* that functions on the entirely wrong foundation. Institutional “churches” exist as man-made divisions in the Body of Christ<sup>§2.2</sup> with unbiblical fellowship<sup>§3.2</sup> and invalid meetings<sup>§4.2</sup> operating under fraudulent authority<sup>§5.2</sup> with false leadership<sup>§6.2</sup> overseeing a myriad of unbiblical practices.<sup>§7.2</sup> Because of this, no institutional “church” will ever be able to fully realize the purposes of God’s Church.<sup>§3.2.2.2</sup> If you are initially skeptical about how merely creating such an organization could be so bad, please read on for it will become excruciatingly clear!

### 1.2.2.1 Organizational Birth

Every institutional “church” that exists today was a later creation of men. For every institutional “church” you consider, there was a time back in history when it didn’t exist. Any organization or denomination that was started after about 33 AD could not possibly be the Church started by Jesus Christ. Why aren’t the Methodists, Baptists, Roman Catholics, or other such organizations mentioned anywhere in the Bible? Because they did not exist! Notice that Jesus did not start any of those groups; they were not created until hundreds of years later by men. If someone speaks about “starting a church” today, they can only be speaking of starting an institutional “church”, since the Church is already here and cannot be started again.<sup>§1.1.1.2</sup> The Church was started by Jesus Christ about 2000 years ago and thus is not in need of anymore “starting”. It has successfully operated under the same Management for all of that time and is not now in need of men today to apply a corporate restructuring!

It is actually quite simple to start an institutional “church” today. First, you simply need to make up a name that you want to call your “church”. If you are really clever, you might find a Scriptural sounding name to make it appear like your “church” is mentioned in the Bible.<sup>§2.2.1.4</sup> Second, you can register your “church” organization with the government by applying for 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation status.<sup>§1.2.3</sup> Of course, you could designate yourself as the “registered

agent” of the non-profit corporation and then you can give yourself any religious title you want such as “Pastor”, “Priest”, or “Apostle”.<sup>§6.2.1.1</sup> If you would like the power to marry people to be officially recognized, you can just get on the Internet and become an ordained minister in seconds. There, now you have a “church”. You can have any theology you want and even get tax breaks!

Now if you actually want people to come to your “church”, you can make up fliers and start a marketing campaign. 😊 It should not be too difficult to get some people to come. Offering some incentive like food usually helps! If nothing else,

**“The Church has been on the earth for a long time now. Yet God has never once asked anyone to manage a church, neither has He called upon a few more advanced brothers to set up a church.”**

**– Watchman Nee**

just try to get some of your relatives to come! To continue to grow numerically, however, is the main difficulty you will probably face, as it is the major concern of “church” leaders everywhere. Multimedia presentations, contemporary music, and dynamic speakers coupled with an appropriate non-offensive watered-down theology definitely seem to help these days. Feel free to occasionally mix in a few traditional elements to help

provide a feeling of continuity with the past. As you grow, you should always keep current with the latest business practices to continually improve the efficiency of your organization.

Now let’s see...aren’t we forgetting something? Oh yeah, did you want God’s presence to show up at your meetings too? Oops, now there you have a problem! Whatever gave you the idea that God was going to be involved in any of this?

**“But let each one watch how he builds. For no one can lay another foundation besides the one being laid, who is Jesus Christ. And if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, or stubble, each man’s work will be revealed...If anyone’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss, but he will be saved only as through fire.”** (1Cor. 3:10-15)

Where did you get the idea that *you* could start an organization called a “church”? It certainly isn’t mentioned anywhere in the Bible! Which of these things hasn’t any other social club done? An atheist could do the exact same things and start his own “church”. You must realize that if you have done these things, you have created an organization that has absolutely no relation whatsoever to the Church – *even if you can get some Christians to go to it*. You will have merely started another institutional “church” among the thousands that already exist.<sup>§2.2.1.1</sup>

### 1.2.2.2 Organizational Life

The spiritual Life of the Church<sup>§1.1.3</sup> stands in stark contrast to the *organizational life* of rituals, religious codes, elections, politics, and the traditions of men found in institutional “churches”.<sup>§7.2</sup> Since institutional “churches” are

merely man-made organizations, they are susceptible to the basic principles of the world just like any other *social club*. For many, being a member of an institutional “church” is merely a status symbol of involvement in their community, providing a network of social connections. Many institutional “churches” exhibit no more spiritual power than the Rotary club or any other social organization. *This does not mean that nothing spiritual can ever take place within their structure, but only that their existence itself is not Biblical.* Many social and political organizations have prayer, Scripture readings, community outreaches, and social functions, but that does not mean they have any relationship whatsoever to the Church. *Organizations of men will be run as organizations of men.* The organization itself is a work of man and therefore must function that way to a certain extent. They are started by men and led by men, perhaps even by Christian men, but not by Jesus Christ.<sup>§5.2.3</sup> Since they have chosen to operate under a man-made structure, they will be somewhat constrained by that structure. And in this regard, some organizations are run more efficiently than others.

Except for whatever spiritual content that might be present in their meetings, an institutional “church” is virtually indistinguishable from any other business. Most institutional “churches” have committee, board, or “elder” meetings that operate just like business meetings, and sometimes are even called “business meetings”. Many of their leaders conduct Sunday services wearing their business suits. They hire employees, manage payroll, have bank accounts, pay taxes, and some even sell merchandise just like any other business. (Strange, but I don’t remember any of these being discussed about the Church in Scripture?) Hierarchical org-charts, membership lists, pie-chart budgets, Robert’s Rules of Order, mass-marketing techniques, demographical studies, and many other business practices are all common fare in these institutional “churches” today. Many “churches” have even taken out loans and become indebted to the world which is incompatible with Scripture (Prov. 22:7,26, Rom. 13:8). Is Jesus running short of money? *Indeed, they look like a business and are run as a business, because in most cases they really are a business!* (If it looks like a duck and quacks like a duck...) Most of them have to deal with administrative overhead, laws, and taxes of corporations because they *are* corporations...*non-profit corporations.*<sup>§1.2.3</sup>

The spiritual nature of the Church has been sacrificed at an institutional altar prepared by men. Many institutional “churches” today have essentially written the book on, “How to run a Christian organization without the Holy Spirit.” If the Holy Spirit ever left some institutional “churches”, their institutional machinery would continue to run just fine. Obviously, atheistic non-profit organizations never had the Holy Spirit and they continue to operate just fine under these exact same principles. But none of these things has anything to do with the Church. The Church is not a business that is run by men, it is a spiritual organism run by the Holy Spirit.<sup>§3.1.1</sup> The Spirit of God cannot be contained by any institutional

**“[The church] quite often functions like a business rather than a body, a factory rather than a family, and a corporation rather than a community.”**

**– John McArthur**

structure! There is no Church apart from the Holy Spirit! The Church was *instituted* by Jesus Christ, but it is not a man-made *institution*. The Church is *organized*, but it is not a man-made *organization*.

### 1.2.2.3 Organizational Death

Just as the Church cannot be started, it also cannot be stopped. If you belong to an organization that was started by men, then you belong to an organization that can be stopped by men. Any organization that can be terminated by men is not the Church of which even **“the gates of Hades will not prevail against”** (Matt. 16:18). If a “church” in a community closes down, then obviously that organization was not the Church, since the Church of Jesus Christ remains. If there are still Christians living in that community, then it wasn’t the Church that died, but only an institution of men that died. Any “church” that can be closed down, go bankrupt, dissolve, or be abolished is not the same Church that was started by Jesus Christ. The various religious institutions, organizations, and denominations of men will come and go because they are built on the sand, but the Church which is built on the Rock will endure forever (Matt. 7:24-27). It is not uncommon for institutional “churches” to be closed down today for all sorts of reasons:

- *By bankruptcy* - the “church” is foreclosed upon by the bank because they could not make their mortgage payments.
- *By legislation* - the “church” does not keep pace with new laws and its charter is revoked for violating IRS regulations.
- *By economics* - the “church” is closed down by the denominational headquarters because it is not financially pulling its own weight.
- *By lawsuit* - the “church” is sued by a disgruntled member and is not able to recover from the court’s verdict.
- *By apathy* - the “church” dwindles in numbers until those remaining cannot maintain the infrastructure anymore.
- *By force* - the “church” is declared to be illegal and their building is confiscated and their officials arrested.

*Realize that every man-made institutional “church” will eventually be destroyed!* Consider that it was quite easy for the communist revolution in China to destroy the institutional “churches” started by the western missionaries. They just burned down their buildings, confiscated their property, killed their leaders and voila, the institutional “church” in China was no more. But they were not able to destroy the Church that met from house to house and still continues in China to this day! Those who are depending on institutional “churches” for their spirituality will eventually be in for a great shock. If you take the building, denomination, or organizational structure away from some people, they will have nothing left – take away their building and you have destroyed their “church”, take away their denominational status and they have lost their identity, take away their organizational structure and they degenerate into chaos. If their spirituality depends upon these unbiblical things, their spirituality will be harmed when those

things cease. How much better it would have been for them if they would have stopped supporting these man-made organizations and simply fellowshipped as the Church. None of these man-made organizations will make it to Heaven.

Unlike institutional “churches”, it is quite impossible to close down the Church. That is because the source of the Church is not physical, but *spiritual* in nature. Men cannot destroy that which is spiritual by that which is merely physical (Luke 12:4-5). In the Church, there is no organization to go bankrupt, no building or property to confiscate, and no headquarters to close down. That is why the early Church could not be destroyed even under the most intense persecution. Saul (who later became Paul) also understood this: **“Saul ravaged the Church going from house to house, dragging off men and women and put them in prison.”** (Acts 8:3) Saul had to go house to house, because he knew the Church could only be affected *person by person*. There were no buildings, property, headquarters, or man-made organizations to target. Ultimately, the only way to close down the Church would be to kill *all* the Christians and then prevent anyone else from becoming a Christian. Then and only then would there be no Church. Do not fear, however, for we have already read to the end of the Book and know that the Church will endure till the end!

### 1.2.3 Governmental Control

Most institutional “churches” operate under the influence of their secular government through regulations concerning registration and incorporation. Depending on the particular country, the government is able to exert different levels of control directly over the “church” organizations under their domain:

- *State-run “churches”*. (We will let you pick any color you want as long as it’s black.) The situation is especially grievous when tyrannical governments use strong-arm tactics, persecution, or even torture to exert control over their institutional “churches”. In some cases, the government directly selects the “church” leadership or plants spies to monitor and influence them. Most Christians recognize that it is wrong for the government to be in charge of the Church, when Jesus Christ (or at least the leader of their institution) is supposed to be in charge. Most Christians find this arrangement to be clearly unacceptable and instead identify with the “underground” Church in those countries.
- *Non-profit corporations*. (We will give you benefits as long as you abide by our rules.) Institutional “churches” that become non-profit corporations are regulated by the government in a similar manner to business corporations. Perhaps this is fitting since many of these “churches” are run by men just like a business anyway. The institutional “church” is required to designate “registered agents” who are in charge of the non-profit corporation such as a President, Vice President, Secretary, and/or Treasurer. Where do you find these “offices” of the Church recorded in Scripture? They are also required to select a man-made name to uniquely identify their organization.<sup>§2.2.1.4</sup> Many

do not realize that when a “church” becomes a non-profit corporation, *it becomes a government-chartered entity*. It establishes a *contract* that places the “church” under the direct regulation of the government in order to obtain privileges such as tax breaks, lawsuit indemnification, and property tax abatements. Unfortunately, with these “benefits” there are also strings attached. These “churches” have simply learned to tolerate this governmental meddling for they have been deceived into thinking that the benefits outweigh the disadvantages.

- *Registered “churches”*. (We will leave you alone as long as we can regulate your activities.) Some institutional “churches” may not become non-profit corporations, but instead are registered with the government as a “church” in order to achieve a certain status. These institutional “churches” do not sign a contract with the government like the non-profit corporations, yet they are still subject to government regulations and there are still strings attached. If there were no strings attached, then the government obviously would not care to register them. But oh do they care! *Registration is the process that makes it possible for there to be regulation*. Registration alone provides the legal status that allows the institutional “churches” to be regulated *by law* – no contract is necessary.

Governments today are thus able to regulate and tax institutional “churches” or even revoke their charter as a “church”. Even in the “free” United States, the government is able to dictate “church” building codes, zoning restrictions, non-profit corporate status, accounting practices, payroll taxes, property tax laws, hiring practices, marriage licensing, political involvement, advertising restrictions, handicap access, kitchen inspections, and day care facilities. (All of this when “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof..”?) These have already had the shocking effect of forcing homosexuals to be hired under equal access laws, limiting the issues a “church” can speak out on for fear of IRS regulations, seizing “church” property under forfeiture laws, and regulating how money can be donated and spent...just to name a few. If the government doesn’t approve of how the non-profit corporation is run, they can revoke its charter as a “church” and completely shut them down (and this has already happened many times). Of course, this is the type of behavior that might be expected in communist countries like Russia or China, but in the “free” United States?

### **1.2.3.1 Regulatable Entities**

Whether an institutional “church” is state-run, incorporated, or registered, the only reason that the government is able to regulate them is because they exist as institutional entities that *can* be regulated. The government could not exert any control over a “church” unless the “church” were a man-made institutional entity to begin with. {mount soapbox} Let it be made perfectly clear that Jesus has not authorized any secular government to be in control, or even partially in control of His Church! Jesus does not *share* His control with any government, nor has He

delegated any government as a “go between” concerning Him and His Church. The government is not in charge of the Church at all – not even a little bit! *Jesus Christ has always been and will always be solely in complete control of His Church!* The Church is part of the kingdom of God and it ultimately only submits to one King, Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ occupies the Head position of the Church and He ain’t going anywhere! {unmount soapbox}

Furthermore, it is *impossible* for a government to have any real control over the Church. Governments can easily control institutional “churches”, but not the Church. How could a government set out to control a spiritual entity that has no name, no address, no building, no headquarters, no employees, no income, and no property? Can a government exert its control over the Holy Spirit? You see, the only way a “church” can be controlled is if it is an organization of men that *can* be controlled by men.<sup>§1.2.2</sup> The Roman government was not able to control the early Church because there was no institutional organization to control. Even if they wanted to, it was impossible for the Church to register because they had no name, no address, no building, no headquarters, no employees, no income, and no property. The Romans certainly knew that they existed, but yet what tangible assets did they have that could be controlled? *There was no institution to register, because there was no institution!*

### 1.2.3.2 Voluntary Servitude

Since governments cannot control the Church, many have opted to do the next best thing by enticing institutional “churches” to come under their control *voluntarily*. Surprisingly, some institutional “churches” actually welcome such a governmental relationship. They believe that a merging of “church and state” would give their “church” a greater influence in the world, when in reality the world simply gains greater influence in their “church”. Whenever you mix the world and the Church in this way, the world always wins. The Church is called to **“come out from their midst and be separate”** (2Cor. 6:17). The Church is to convert the world, not to become joined to the world (2Cor. 6:14-18).

Most institutional “churches”, however, say they would never accept the government’s control, and yet they have voluntarily given the government *partial control* over their internal affairs through registration or incorporation. No institutional “church” is required to do this; they are unnecessarily entangling themselves with the government regulation *of their own free choice*. But the Church is not to become entangled with the kingdoms of this world. **“No active soldier is involved with the affairs of civilian life, in order that he may please the one who enlisted him.”** (2Tim. 2:4) The Church does not make contracts with secular governments or become incorporated under their regulations. **“No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other or else he will cling to one and despise the other.”** (Luke 16:13) Why do the institutional “churches” do this? Primarily because the government has held out a carrot of *tax exempt status* which has enticed them to voluntarily come under their control. These Christians have sold out to the world for “ten shekels and a shirt” (Judg. 17:7-13). Does that bowl of stew taste good to you, Esau (Gen. 25:29-34, Heb. 12:16)?

What these institutional “churches” do not realize is that once they give the government *any* amount of control, that can later be increased over time. Once a “church” enters into a contractual legal status, there are no limits on what the government may decide to regulate in the future. Just as it is happening in the United States,<sup>§1,2,3</sup> they are like the frog that won’t jump out of the pot because the heat is being turned up slowly. Those who feel safe because their government does not seem to be particularly “evil” today will have no recourse if the government becomes corrupt tomorrow. It is never okay to be voluntarily **“yoked together with unbelievers”** (2Cor. 6:14), even if the unbelievers seem to be “nice” at the time. This will have much greater implications in the future as the Church approaches the persecution of the end times. For then you may be *forced* to fellowship outside of the institutional “church” system if you are a true Christian. Wouldn’t it be better for you to function as the Church now simply because Jesus wants you to? Must it take the persecution of a worldly government to force you to begin to fellowship as you should have all along?

Ironically, incorporating to obtain a tax-exempt status is not really much benefit to the institutional “churches” anyway, since it is precisely what allows them to be taxed! In the United States, for example, if donors gave their money directly to leaders in the Church as personal gifts (currently up to \$14,000 per donor), it would not be taxed. But if the same donors give that same money to a tax-exempt “church” which is then paid to their leaders as a salary, it is taxed. It is actually taxed *twice* – once when it was earned, and then after it is donated to the “church”, it is taxed again when it is paid to a “church” employee. Some benefit, huh? These “churches” have sold-out to the government to get tax-exempt status...*so they can actually pay them more taxes!* This is where voluntary servitude actually becomes voluntary stupidity! The Church, on the other hand, does not need to be granted tax exempt status, because it is not an entity that can be taxed anyway. It would be like trying to put a tax on having some of your friends over for a cookout in your backyard. Institutional “church” buildings, headquarters, and non-profit corporations are easy to identify and tax, but how do you tax a belief in certain people’s heads? The Church cannot pay income tax or property tax, because it is not an organization that has an income or owns any property. How could it? It has no name, no address, no building, no headquarters, and no employees, so what exactly is there to tax? Taxing a spiritual organism would be like trying to tax the air!

But isn’t the Church supposed to submit to the government? Of course, Christians should submit to the laws of their government as much as possible (Rom. 13:1-5), but that does not mean they are to voluntarily go beyond what is required and become contractually entangled with them. “*Submit to*” *does not mean “join with”!* It does not matter if the government seems “nice” at the time, the Church is not an entity that makes contracts with the governments of men. Christians should submit to their government, but that does not mean they should sign contracts, incorporate under, or become partners with them! The Church belongs to the kingdom of God, not the kingdoms of man. Do you have ears to hear? Christians should never form man-made institutional entities that could be taxed or controlled in the first place. This is not a matter of submission because the government has *no law* requiring people to form religious organizations! The



Church would never *voluntarily* give the government any control over their internal affairs, and they certainly would never sell-out so that they can get an imaginary tax break!

### 1.2.4 Maligning the Church

Man-made institutional “churches” have been going around masquerading as the Church for so many centuries now, that most people today mistake their organizations for the Church. They should be arrested for impersonating the Church if there were such a crime! These man-made institutions claim to be a “church” and try to act like a “church”, but they are not even part of the Church!<sup>§1.2.2</sup> What could be the harm in erecting man-made organizational structures around some members of the Church? As described below, the very existence of institutional “churches” damages the reputation of the Church and thus indirectly maligns the person who is in charge of the Church – Jesus Christ. Many non-Christians have been turned away from Christ by institutional “churches” because this is what they are told Christianity is. How many people will end up in Hell because they have been presented with a false bill of goods?

**“The day we find the perfect church, it becomes imperfect the moment we join it.”**

**– C. H. Spurgeon**

#### 1.2.4.1 Evil “churches”?

It should not be very surprising that the world often does not think very highly of the Church. Volumes of atrocities carried out by institutional “churches” in the name of Christ have been blamed on the Church by a world that does not know the difference. Considering all the wars, inquisitions, and killings, it is certainly understandable that the reputation of the Church would suffer since these institutions claimed to be a “church”. Some of them have even burned Christians at the stake! (A “church” burning people in the Church?) ☺ While that is ancient history, still today there are “churches” extorting money, “church” leaders molesting children, and “Christian” guerrillas fighting Muslims and Jews. Do you really think that the Church led by Jesus Christ has anything to do with that? Because of this, some people are beginning to shy away from the label of “Christian” because of all the false preconceived notions it carries.

It should not take a rocket scientist to see that there is an obvious disconnect between the institutional “churches” and the Church. But like it or not, *this is the only “church” that much of the world knows*. The institutional “church” advertising campaigns, tall white steeples, and dogmatic creeds often stand as empty symbols to a dying world. To non-Christians, an institutional “church” looks just like any other social institution except for the additional element of “religion”. The world sees the politics, elections, empty rituals, and internal bickering and it is nothing they are really interested in. Institutional “churches” may appear to be “church-like” to the world because they have **“a form of**

**godliness**” but they **“deny its power”** (2Tim. 3:5). It would be more fitting if the institutional “churches” sang, “They will know we are Christians by our bumper stickers”, because seldom have they been known by their love.<sup>§3.1.2.2</sup>

Institutional “churches” have created all sorts of theological gobbledygook in order to come up with justifications for their unbiblical practices. Some have gone so far as to invent bizarre doctrines such as the father/mother god, ordination of homosexuals, and the worship of Mary. Many of them have become so degenerate that they tolerate almost any sin imaginable. They have coined new

**“No one sets out to become an apostate – it's never the result of one abrupt, drastic turn away from the Lord. Instead, apostasy is most often the product of a pattern of sinful compromises that harden and gradually steer a professing believer away from the truth.” – John MacArthur**

oxymorons such as “Homosexual Christian” and “New Age Christian” in the name of tolerance. (Do you suppose that someone could also be a “Murdering Christian”?) 😊 Some modern evangelical institutional “churches” might argue that organizations like this should no longer be considered “churches” because they have become “apostate” and no longer follow the Bible. But surprise, no institutional “church” is following the Bible or else they would no longer exist as an institutional “church”! Perhaps it is only fitting that counterfeit “church” entities

would also have such counterfeit doctrines and practices.<sup>§7.2</sup> All kinds of bizarre doctrines have been invented by man’s organizations, but they will never have a place in the Church.

Some institutional “churches” get defensive by these associations, because in their minds they are “no way near that bad”,<sup>§7.2.4</sup> They admit that they may not be “perfect”, but they still view themselves as being a “good church”. But of course, no institutional “church” is “good” *because they are not even a valid Biblical entity*. An institutional “church” is not deprived of being part of the Church because of some minor faults; it is not part of the Church because it is a man-made institution! An institutional “church” could be doing a lot of things right, but is still wrong precisely because *what it is* is wrong.<sup>§1.2.2</sup> The problem is not that some institutional “churches” have flaws – *their very existence is flawed!* No matter how many Scriptural practices an institutional “church” may employ, they are still unscriptural precisely because man-made institutional “churches” are unscriptural.<sup>§1.2.2</sup> They may try to act as Biblically as possible inside their organization, but they are still an unbiblical organization.

#### 1.2.4.2 Non-Christian “Christians”?

The question then becomes, why are so many so-called “Christians” in these institutional “churches” committing so many sins? Mostly because they are not really Christians! Goats may be similar to sheep in many ways, but the problem is that they are not sheep nor do they live like sheep (Matt. 25:31-46). The false doctrine of an “invisible church” has led to the invention of a new class of *pseudo-Christians* who are given official membership in institutional “churches” even

though they are not really Christians”,§1.2.1.1 Institutional “churches” attempt to justify this practice by misinterpreting the parable of the wheat and tares (Matt. 13:24-30) to assert that there are non-Christians in the Church! What? Yes, they claim that there are both Christians (wheat) and non-Christians (tares or weeds) in the Church (field), and since no one can tell for sure which is which, the true Christians will simply have to tolerate a union with the non-Christians until it can all be sorted out on judgment day. Well, there isn’t any doubt that there are both Christians and non-Christians who are members of man-made institutional “churches”, but there certainly aren’t any non-Christians who are members of the Church that Jesus Christ founded! **“The Lord knows those who are His.”** (2Tim. 2:19) We know from Scripture that *those who are not true Christians are not Christians at all* and have no place in the Church!§1.1.1 To tolerate non-Christians in the Church would be to tolerate leaven in the Church (1Cor. 5:6-8, Gal. 5:9). Absurd! Apparently the promoters of this false doctrine never bothered to read *Jesus’ own interpretation* of His parable that occurs just a few verses later (Matt. 13:36-43). Jesus said that **“the field is the world”** (Matt. 13:38), not the Church! The Church in this parable is the **“good seeds”** or **“wheat”**, not the field! Of course, there are both Christians (wheat) and non-Christians (tares or weeds) in the world (field), but not in the Church!

The toleration of these pseudo-Christians in the institutional “churches” has again only served to damage the reputation of the Church. What is the world supposed to think when there are so many good “church” members who molest children, murder their spouses, cheat and steal, and commit suicide? Even Hitler maintained membership in an institutional “church”! Consequently, many people don’t attend “church” anymore with the excuse that “There are so many hypocrites there.” (Yes, and if you “go to church”, you may be one of them!) Institutional “church” members today are often statistically indistinguishable from the world in regards to divorce, teenage pregnancy, and adultery. Why is that? Because they aren’t really Christians!

**“Going to church doesn’t make you a Christian any more than going to McDonalds makes you a hamburger!” – Keith Green**

Some devout “church” members may have once been born again, but then their children may sit right next to them almost expressionless without the same fervent love, worship, or devotion. In some cases, the children are automatically baptized and inducted as members of the “church” simply because of their *physical* birth. What kind of “Christians” are these? Of course, no one becomes a Christian through physical birth (John 1:13), but society assumes that they are because they have grown up to be members or even leaders in their “church”. They may faithfully light candles, usher, sing in the choir, stuff bulletins, or run the sound system, but they don’t have any place in the kingdom of God. Those who “go to church” are simply pretending to worship God along with a lot of other people who are pretending to worship God. They live fake religious lives together in a man-made organization. Being a member of a “church” has nothing to do with being a member of the Church.§1.1.1

Most institutional “churches” don’t have any idea about the “dark side” of some of their members. They cannot tell the difference between an axe murderer and a loving saint *because they all look the same when they all sit passively through a “church” service*. As long as people show up with a smile on their faces and tithe faithfully, no one will know the difference. When they read the morning paper the next day and see that one of their members murdered their spouse or molested a child, the congregation is always shocked: “We couldn’t see this coming. He faithfully came to church every week and seemed like a nice guy. He seemed no different than the rest of us.” And indeed perhaps he was just like the rest of them! There have been many such cases in the media damaging the reputation of the Church. Most institutional “churches” make no attempt to deal with such problems directly. Their leaders may preach long and hard against sin in an abstract sense, yet they never actually do anything about it. They suppose that as long as the person keeps coming to their services, something might eventually get through to them.

Of course, such nonsense is never acceptable in the Church. Institutional “churches” may tolerate “pseudo-Christians” in their carnal and lukewarm environments, but the Church does not. Leaven is not allowed to remain in the batch no matter how much money a person is willing to tithe. There are no “pseudo-Christians” in the Church, only Christians. The Church is not a “service” to be observed by passive spectators;<sup>§4.2.2.1</sup> each Christian is to be integrally connected with one another on a daily basis in close-knit spiritual fellowship.<sup>§4.1.1.2</sup> Thus if one Christian struggles or exhibits problems, the others cannot help but notice and come along side of them since their lives are intimately joined together. Among an environment of shared lives, any deep-seated issues are normally rooted out and dealt with long before they ever have a chance to escalate into major problems. If a person will not repent of their sin, then they are no longer allowed to meet with the Church.<sup>§1.1.3.2</sup> Such a person may indeed become an axe murderer *after* they are “**delivered over to Satan for the destruction of his flesh**” (1Cor. 5:5), but then the reputation of the Church is not damaged for they were no longer associated with the Church.

## 1.3 Practical Applications

The Church founded by Jesus Christ in the New Testament is the very same Church that still exists today! Whether you know it or not, you also are a member of this very same Church if you have been born again. *The same Church that Peter, James, John, and Paul belonged to is the same Church that we belong to*. You might say, “Where is it? I don’t see anything resembling the Church described in the Bible.” Well, unfortunately the Church in many places is hardly recognizable today because many Christians are engaged in various unbiblical practices that have rendered the Church essentially impotent. The state of the Church is dreadful in most areas only because the state of the Christians is dreadful in those areas. Indeed, it is hard to see much of anything that *looks* like the Church among a community of disobedient Christians, but the Church may still be there – it is just in a pitiful condition.<sup>§1.1.3.1</sup> To the extent that you find

*obedient* Christians is the extent to which you will still find the Church functioning essentially like it is described in Scripture. And indeed, there are now many places all over this world where the Church is properly functioning in a Biblical environment.<sup>§B.2</sup>

### 1.3.1 Join the Church

Obviously, the most important application is to make sure you are a member of the Church in the first place.<sup>§1.1.1.1</sup> It should be fairly obvious by now that not everyone who claims to be a Christian really is. **“Not everyone who says to Me ‘Lord, Lord’ will enter into the kingdom of Heaven, but only the one who does the will of My Father in Heaven.”** (Matt. 7:21) You might have been baptized and confirmed as a member of an institutional “church” or even be in a leadership position, but if you have not been **“born again”** (John 3:3-8) then you are not a member of the Church and you won’t be able to function in the Church. You can surround yourself with Christian friends, Christian music, Christian TV, Christian seminars, Christian camps, and Christian programs, but if you have not been born again of the Spirit then you are not part of the Church. **“But as many as received Him, to those believing in His name, He gave them the right to become children of God. Those who were not from a bloodline, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the human will, but born of God.”** (John 1:12-13) This means you may come from a long line of Christian relatives, you may desire to be a Christian, you may even *decide* to become a Christian, but **“unless anyone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God”** (John 3:3). Being devoted, highly knowledgeable, moral, praying, meditating, having a correct belief system, doctrinal statement, and faithful attendance will *not* get you into the kingdom of Heaven. Which of these did the Pharisees lack? They had all of this *and more*, yet they did not have Christ. **“For I say to you that unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter into the kingdom of Heaven.”** (Matt. 5:20)

**“There are many who sit in some churches week after week, year after year, without hearing the whole Gospel and knowing what it is to be born again.”** – Billy Graham

If you are not sure that you are a Christian, then you can be pretty sure that you aren’t. **“The Spirit himself witnesses to our spirit that we are children of God.”** (Rom. 8:16) If you do not have this witness of the Spirit, then you certainly cannot function in the Spirit. If you are not a Christian, then you are simply not in the Church and none of this would apply to you anyway. Many words could be said and have been said about the salvation experience, but in the end, a spiritual transformation must take place. This topic is better covered by the prequel to this book, and is truly left as an exercise for the reader. There will be a mandatory pass/fail test administered at the end of your life!

### 1.3.1.1 Identifying the Church

So many misconceptions about the Church have sprung up and accumulated over the centuries, that many Christians today simply fail to properly *discern* the Church. **“For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the Body, eats and drinks judgment on himself. Through this, many among you are weak and sick and a number sleep.”** (1Cor. 11:29-30) Many Christians now operate under the delusion that a “church” is a building or meeting, and then they identify themselves with the organization that has that building or meeting.<sup>§1.2.1</sup> Much of their confusion stems from the fact that they are operating from the wrong frame of reference. Whenever they see the word “church” in the Bible, they mistakenly think it is referring to their man-made institutional “church”. *They would impose the context of their false institutional system upon the Scriptures and then attempt to interpret the Scriptures through that false viewpoint.*<sup>§A.5</sup> But what is God’s frame of reference? How would the situation be assessed from a Biblical perspective? Consider some of the differences between these two perspectives:

Institutional Perspective	God’s Perspective
A person is happy that there are hundreds of “churches” in his city to choose from.	But God is grieved that Christians are divided across hundreds of man-made institutions.
A reputable person is a long-standing member of the denomination.	But he was never born again of the Spirit and thus will end up in Hell.
A member is kicked out of “church” for challenging the leadership’s doctrine.	But he was still part of the Church, because he was still a Christian.
A famous leader of a “mega-church” is a sought after dynamic speaker.	But he was secretly living in sin and lacked spiritual authority from God.
A person is accused of causing division by fellowshiping with others outside of their “church”.	But God is pleased because he was fellowshiping with others in the Church.

**“For man looks at the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart.”** (1Sam. 16:7) It is crucial that you begin to assess your situation from a Biblical perspective instead of relying on the false precepts of a man-made institutional system. Biblical truth can only be correctly understood in a Biblical environment. Being able to correctly discern the Body of Christ (1Cor. 11:29-30) is not “just another way of looking at it”, *but God’s way of looking at it* and is clearly revealed in the Scripture. It may require extensive re-training before you will begin to accept a Scriptural viewpoint after years of indoctrination in a false institutional “church” system. But unless you first begin to *identify* the Church correctly, you will never be able to *function* in the Church correctly. Awaken, Church, to understand who you are!

### 1.3.1.2 Identifying with the Church

Once you begin to understand what the Church really is, it is important that you begin to identify yourself with the Church. Just because a Christian is part of the Church doesn't mean that they are necessarily fellowshipping as they should.<sup>§2.1.1.2</sup> Undoubtedly, some Christians attending institutional "churches" have a certain theoretical understanding of the Church, but yet they do not identify with the Church by their actions. They primarily relate their Christian experience to only a subset of Christians who are members of their institutional "church", instead of relating to all members of the Church regardless of any institutional affiliation.<sup>§2.3.1.1</sup> Once you are able to identify the Church, you should then begin to *identify with the Church* – not just in some theoretical sense, but *by your actions*. To identify with the Church is to center your fellowship *around the context of the Church*, not around a particular institutional "church" of choice. You should develop a commitment to the Church as a whole, not just to a subset of Christians from one particular institution (1Cor. 12:25). You are commanded to **"love one another"** (John 13:34), not just the "one anothers" that attend a particular group.<sup>§3.1.2.1</sup> You should be willing to fellowship with any true Christians wherever they are found. To treat any brother or sister in Christ differently because of a particular institutional status (or lack thereof) is indeed divisive and sinful.<sup>§2.1.2</sup> **"There should be no division in the Body, but the members should have the same concern for one another."** (1Cor. 12:25) Anyone who is a Christian should be treated as a brother or sister in Christ regardless of whether you like them or not. In fact, if they are Christians then you will be stuck with them for all eternity so you better get used to it!

### 1.3.2 Embrace the Things of God

It is important to remember that not everything an institutional "church" does is necessarily wrong, but only *what it is* wrong. God is still able to pour out His Spirit on His *people* regardless of any institutional structure. Throughout history, many wonderful Christians have attended institutional "churches". Sometimes it was simply because they didn't know any better and sometimes it was the only form of fellowship available to them without risking death. Thus, we must not deny legitimate things from God just because they occurred in an illegitimate environment. An institutional "church" could be full of unbiblical institutional practices, but that doesn't mean that people there cannot still exhibit genuine faith, hope, and love (1Cor. 13:13). Even the most degenerate institutional "churches" will usually have a few true Christians who are serving God the best way they know how.<sup>§6.3.2.1</sup> They may genuinely worship God, help the poor, lead others to Christ, minister to prisoners, pray for the sick, teach their peers, and do many other wonderful things – even though the institutional environment in which these things are conducted is unbiblical and not the most conducive to spiritual growth.

While an institutional "church" may be doing any number of things wrong, it is still important to embrace the things of God wherever they may be found.

**“What does it matter? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed and in this I rejoice.”** (Phil. 1:18) It may be okay to condemn the unbiblical container, but it is *not* okay to condemn the contents that are from God.<sup>§2.3.1.1</sup> You do not have to approve of an unbiblical environment, but do not be like the Pharisees and despise brothers and sisters in Christ just because they are members of an institutional “church”.<sup>§2.2.1.5</sup> It is important for Christians to support whatever is of God, whether it occurs in an institutional “church” or not. Christians must learn to love what God loves and hate what God hates – and God loves *all* His children!

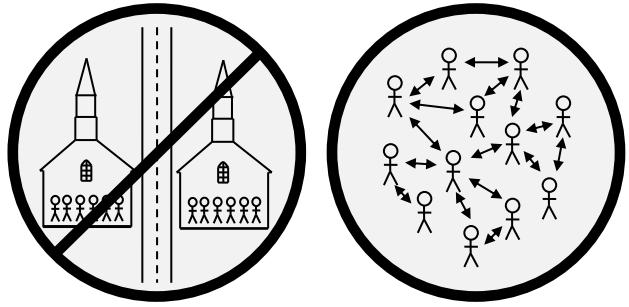
As a general rule, the more an institutional “church” is able to approximate Scriptural fellowship in their unbiblical structures, the more Life they will begin to experience.<sup>§3.1.1</sup> That is why some institutional “churches” have experienced better success with “small groups”, “home groups”, or “cell groups”. Here they have created a microcosm within their institutional structure that encourages a limited form of fellowship which *actually involves people!* (Now if they would just get rid of their unbiblical institutional existence they might be on to something.) 😊 Some institutional “church” members have gotten but a taste of what it is like to fellowship in the Church by attending a retreat, “church” camp, or revival meetings where they actually begin fellowshiping on a daily basis for a limited time. The more a group approximates the things of the Church, the more they will experience the life of the Church.

Thus, no one is saying that a glimmer of Life cannot survive in an institutional setting, but only that it is like trying to cram a square peg in a round hole. Unfortunately, because what an institutional “church” *is* is wrong, what it *does* will also tend to be wrong.<sup>§3.2</sup> There may be some good contents, but they are simply held in the wrong container. They may be having a limited form of spiritual fellowship, but it is often mired in an environment of unbiblical practices. They may have some new wine, but they have put it in an old wineskin.<sup>§7.1.1.2</sup> It seems that God does His best to dance around an organization’s institutional structure and fill any crack with as much Life that their system will allow – *just so He can still bless His people as much as possible*. The only reason that an institutional “church” ever experiences anything of God is usually because it contains some of God’s *people*. It is not because of their institutional structure; it is in spite of their institutional structure.<sup>§7.2.4.1</sup> Likewise, you should also be willing to bless the works of God wherever they may be found.

## 1.4 Challenge Questions

- What year was your “church” started? Who started it?
- Is your “church” a non-profit corporation? Is Jesus Christ listed as its “registered agent” or does it name some other man?
- Can anyone start their own “church” whenever they want to?
- Does your “church” own a building or property? Does the name “Jesus Christ” appear on the deed as the owner?
- Do you “go to church”? What color is it?





# Chapter 2: Church Unity

## 2.1 Scriptural Truths

The need for unity is so critically important in the Church today. Jesus has only one Church so it is imperative that we behave as one Church. The emergence of the institutional “churches”, however, has caused much confusion in the Church. Obviously, Christians will not behave as one Church if they don’t even know what the Church is.<sup>§1.1.1</sup> Why are there so many different “churches”? Which “church” is the one true Church? The only reason it is even possible to ask these questions is because of the *sin* of division.<sup>§2.1.2</sup> If all the Christians functioned as one unified Church, then there would be no such questions. The sin of division has resulted in all sorts of disputes, violence, and even wars. Why are there so many different institutional “churches” today? Because there is so much division in the Church today! Those who impose their man-made institutional divisions upon the Church only work to keep the Church weak and ineffective. There is still only one Church and those who create unbiblical institutional divisions are hindering Christians from walking in the fullness of spiritual unity as God has intended.

### 2.1.1 The Basis for Unity

As discussed in the previous chapter, there is only one Church.<sup>§1.1.2</sup> There are many institutions that falsely call themselves a “church” today, but there is only one Church. **“There is one Body and one Spirit (just as you were called in one Hope at your calling), one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all.”** (Eph. 4:4-6) All true Christians have these foundational elements in common which forms our basis of unity in the one Church. People do not need to strive to create one Church, because there already is only one Church according to Jesus Christ. Geographical proximity is irrelevant to this unity as various practices were carried out in reference to the whole Church (Acts 15:22-23, 1Cor. 11:16, 14:33, 1Th. 2:14).

Notice that Christians living in distant areas kept in contact with each other (Rom. 16:1, 1Cor. 16:19, 2Cor. 13:13, Phil. 4:22) and contributed assistance to each other (Acts 11:28-30, Rom. 15:26-28, 2Cor. 8:1-5). In this sense, the Church is indeed *catholic* or universal in its scope, but this should not be confused with the theology of an “invisible church”.<sup>§1.2.1.1</sup> (Note that the lowercase “c” in “catholic” is used to distinguish it from “Roman Catholic” which is in itself an oxymoron indicating a “sectarian universalist”.)

### 2.1.1.1 Living in Unity

Since Christians are united as one in the spiritual realm, it should not be difficult for them to live as one in the physical realm. *Walking in physical unity is a natural by-product of having spiritual unity!* The early Church did not strive to create an external unity by creating an organized religion, they were one in Spirit, and thus they simply lived as one. **“Now the multitude of believers were one in heart and soul.”** (Acts 4:32) This is what you can still expect among those who are true believers today! Unlike the institutional “churches”, no administrative procedures are needed to create a false sense of unity and artificially try to hold things together. Christians live together in unity externally because they are united in one Spirit internally. Those who have the Spirit, get their direction from that same Spirit. They all act as one Body because they all follow the same Head, Jesus Christ.

It is very important to recognize that *unity is not the same as uniformity*. The Church is not an organizational franchise like McDonalds, where each group offers the same menu and prices of McReligion. Unity has nothing to do with

**“One hundred religious persons knit into a unity by careful organization do not constitute a church any more than eleven dead men make a football team.” – A. W. Tozer**

conforming to the same “order of worship”, genre of music, liturgical format, or dress codes. Such things have nothing to do with the unity of the Church, but are merely man-made rules that have been created by the institutional “churches”. Consequently, you can find many institutional “churches” that are completely uniform in their practices, *and*

*yet they have no spiritual unity*. The congregation may appear to be totally united while they merely sit passively through a “church service”, but then when it is over, one goes out to evangelize, one goes home to watch football, and one goes home and beats his wife. Is this spiritual unity?

Certainly, some things may be uniform throughout the Church as a *by-product* of following the same Spirit, but this is because of spiritual unity, not uniformity. Walking in spiritual unity does not necessarily mean that everyone has to be doing the same thing, but only that everyone is acting in **“one accord”** (Rom. 15:5). A football team may be acting in unity as they run a particular play, but that does not mean that all of the players are doing the same thing. They are all working towards one goal, but they do not all perform the same role on the team. Jesus prayed, **“that they may be one as We are one”** (John 17:22) indicating a oneness in purpose. In this sense, the Church is working on the same play as we

all follow the same Coach, but that does not mean every person on the Team must be doing the exact same thing.<sup>§3.1.1.2</sup>

### 2.1.1.2 Preserving Unity

Just because all Christians belong to one Church does not mean that all Christians will always *experience* this unity in their fellowship with one another. There is no need to try to manufacture external unity, but only to walk in the unity that *already exists* in the one Spirit, one Lord, one Faith, etc. **“Be diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”** (Eph. 4:3) Christians can neither create nor eradicate this kind of unity, but they can certainly nullify its beneficial effects. Consider, for example, how children in the same family may occasionally fight with each other, yet they still remain members of the same family. A family in conflict does not need to strive to become a family – for they are already a family – they simply need to begin *behaving* like a family should.

**“When there are dissensions, and jealousies, and evil speakings...These things show that Christians have got far from God, and it is time to think earnestly of a revival.”**  
– Charles Finney

**“How good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell together in unity!”** (Psa. 133:1). It is God’s will that all Christians **“may be one”** (John 17:21), **“having the same mind, the same love, one in soul and one in thought”** (Phil. 2:2), **“standing in one spirit, striving together as one soul”** (Phil. 1:27), **“joined together with the same mind and the same judgment”** (1Cor. 1:10), **“all in harmony, sympathy, brotherly love, compassion, and humility”** (1Pet. 3:8), having **“the same mind with one another”** (Rom. 15:5), **“with one accord in one voice”** (Rom. 15:6).

When the Church walks as one, because they are one, the impact can be quite spectacular! Indeed, the early Church **“turned the whole world upside down”** (Acts 17:6). Imagine what the impact would be in your community if all the true Christians left their man-made denominations and began to walk together as one Church. If they all came together on the “same page”, praying as one, evangelizing as one, fellowshiping as one! Sadly, the best that most can do is to imagine it because they are certainly not experiencing it. Alas, the unity of the Church cannot be experienced by a community of disobedient Christians who have divided themselves into unbiblical institutions, but only by those who are obediently walking by the Spirit.<sup>§3.3.2.1</sup>

### 2.1.2 The Sin of Division

One of the most devastating problems ever to face the Church is the sin of division. Jesus himself said, **“If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand.”** (Mark 3:24; cf. Matt. 12:25, Luke 11:17) Division in the Church is not an inevitability that should be embraced; it is a willful sin committed by men. **“The works of the flesh are obvious...discord...disputes, divisions, sects...and**

**I forewarn you just as I previously forewarned you that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.**” (Gal. 5:19-21) Some deceived theologians actually teach that division is beneficial to bring “diversity” to the unbiblical institutional “church” system. But Paul said that those who cause divisions **“will not inherit the kingdom of God”** (Gal. 5:21)! Do you honestly think that Jesus Christ wants a divided Body? **“Is Christ divided?”** (1Cor. 1:13) Those who commit the sin of division are violating a multitude of Scriptures.<sup>§2.2.1</sup> Scripture describes those who cause division as: **“serving their own appetites by smooth talk and flattering speech”** (Rom. 16:18), **“perverted and sinful being self-condemned”** (Tit. 3:11), and **“worldly minded, not having the Spirit”** (Jude 1:19). Those who would attempt to divide the Church are committing sin and should be dealt with sternly according to the Scriptures: **“I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those causing divisions and obstacles contrary to the teaching which you learned and turn away from them.”** (Rom. 16:17) **“Reject a divisive person after a first and second warning.”** (Tit. 3:10) Likewise, the imperative for maintaining unity in the Church could not be any clearer in the Scripture (John 17:20-23, Rom. 15:5-6, 1Cor. 1:10, Eph. 4:3, Phil. 1:27, 2:2, 1Pet. 3:8).

While the Church cannot help but be united according to its spiritual nature (Eph. 2:22, 1Pet. 2:5), the division that is condemned in Scripture is the *separation of fellowship* out of prejudice, denominationalism, favoritism, politics, or other such barriers. Again, division is not a logistical problem related to geography or meetings as many have mistaken.<sup>§1.1.2</sup> Divisiveness is a sinful attitude of the heart that does not truly love everyone in **“the brotherhood of believers”** which is a fundamental sign of a genuine Christian (John 13:34-35, 1Pet. 2:17, 1Jn. 2:9-11). Going back

**“The divisions in the church are due to no other cause than to lack of love and walking after the flesh.”**  
**– Watchman Nee**

to the swimming pool analogy,<sup>§1.2.1.1</sup> a division does not form in the water just because someone refers to the deep end or the shallow end, but a division is created if someone physically builds a wall to separate the deep end from the shallow end. There should not be any “local water” that is in anyway separated from

the rest of the water. When Christians intentionally choose not to fellowship with other brothers and sisters in Christ because of prejudice, denominationalism, favoritism, politics, or other such barriers, they are committing the sin of division. (But this should not be confused with severing fellowship from a sinful individual due to Church discipline.<sup>§1.1.3.2</sup>) The sinful causes of division can generally be classified into three categories: attributes, disagreements, and leadership.

### 2.1.2.1 Division by Attributes

Many people sin by creating divisions over differences in physical attributes such as skin color, race, culture, ethnicity, nationality, economic status, or language. There will always be great diversity in the Church, *but diversity is not division*, just as uniformity is not unity.<sup>§2.1.1.1</sup> It is one thing to accommodate the diversity of culture or language in the Church, and quite another thing to divide Christians into different institutional “churches” because of it. There were no

such ethnic “churches” in Scripture. There was not a “Black church”, “Chinese church”, or “Hispanic church” that functioned as separate entities. The Church encompassed every kind of race, culture, and nationality. In just the book of Acts alone, the Church included *races* such as Asian (Acts 2:9, 20:4), Black (Acts 8:27, 13:1), and Semitic (Acts 2:11); *cultures* such as Greek (Acts 16:1-3), Roman (Acts 22:25), and Egyptian (Acts 2:10); and *nations* such as Syria (Acts 15:23), Macedonia (Acts 16:9-12), and Cilicia (Acts 15:41).

**“Parthians, Medes and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the regions of Libya near Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and converts, Cretans and Arabs – we hear them declaring the great deeds of God in our own languages!”** (Acts 2:9-11)

There was always great diversity in the Church from its very inception and *yet still only one Church!* Some Christians came from nations which had experienced years of hostility towards each other, but this did not in any way hinder their unity in Christ. When the Jewish Christians had reservations about fellowshiping with the Gentiles, for example, this barrier was quickly addressed (Acts 10:1-48, Eph. 2:11-18).

A Christian is a brother or sister in Christ regardless of any physical characteristics relating to skin color, race, culture, ethnicity, nationality, or language. **“There is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.”** (Col. 3:11; cf. Gal.

3:28) All Christians go to the same Heaven and there is no racial segregation there! God purchased men **“from every tribe and language and people and nation”** (Rev. 5:9). Every physical race has their roots in Adam and every spiritual believer has their roots in Christ. **“For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.”** (1Cor. 15:22; cf. 1Cor. 15:45) Indeed, it is obvious that **“God does not show favoritism, but those in every nation who fear Him and do what is right are acceptable to Him.”** (Acts 10:34-35) Christians are not to discriminate as they **“go and make disciples of all nations”** (Matt. 28:19; cf. Rev. 14:6). (Note that the word “nations” in these verses comes from the Greek word “*ἔθνος*” #1484 which relates to ethnicity.)

**“Nationalism – in other words, the dividing of the church into bodies – consisting of such and such a nation, is a novelty, not above three centuries old, although many dear children of God are found dwelling in it.”**

**– J. N. Darby**

Some Christians have even been divided over *subcultural* artifacts of Churchianity<sup>§7.2.3.4</sup> such as “order of worship”, genre of music, liturgical format, dress codes, etc. There isn’t one Church for this kind of Christian and another Church for that kind of Christian, there is simply only *one* Church. The early Church had just as many opportunities to divide over different attributes as any institutional “church” today, yet they overcame them and continued to fellowship as one Church.

### 2.1.2.2 Division by Disagreements

Doctrinal disagreements themselves can never cause division, only people can. Divisions are not caused by differing ideas; divisions are caused by the *people* who choose to make those ideas a basis for separation of fellowship. The disagreement isn't the sin; the wrongful separation of fellowship is the sin! So often has the sin of division been falsely justified under the guise of someone's quest for "doctrinal purity". A Christian's warped beliefs about eschatology, predestination, or how many angels fit on the head of a pin, at worst means that they might need to be straightened out by a mature person like you – *yet still a Christian and fellow brother or sister in Christ*. Some of you would not have been able to have fellowship with yourself five years earlier because you no longer agree with a doctrinal position you once held.

But what about essential doctrines regarding important things such as salvation? Doctrines that are essential for salvation such as knowing our one Lord rather than a false Christ (2Cor. 11:4, Gal. 1:6-9, 1Jn. 2:22, 4:3) do not divide Christians from Christians, *but divide the Christians from the non-Christians*.<sup>§1.1.3.1</sup> These essential

**“A man had been shipwrecked on a remote island...When a ship finally arrived, his rescuers were impressed with the three buildings he had built and asked him about them. ‘Well,’ the man replied, ‘this is my house, and that building over there is my church...’ ‘And what is the third building yonder?’ a rescuer asked. ‘Oh, that is the church I used to go to’, the man replied.”**  
– *Anonymous*

doctrines divide the Church from the world, not one “church” from another “church”! The unfortunate reality is that the vast majority of divisions between “churches” today have nothing to do with essential tenets of faith, but instead revolve around various petty doctrines created by men.<sup>§5.2.3</sup> Even when there are disagreements about salvation *among Christians*, it is still not necessarily grounds for division between one another. How's that? If one Christian thinks salvation is X and another Christian thinks salvation is Y, *but both are still genuinely born again*, then they must still recognize each other as Christians even though each thinks the other is slightly mistaken. This exact situation is addressed in Scripture where there was a dispute about whether circumcision was a requirement for

salvation (Acts 15:1-2, Gal. 2:11-13). *Notice that none of the brothers suddenly became “unsaved” simply because they disagreed with each other about the requirements for salvation!* They did not stop fellowshiping with each other; they did not start separate “churches” to represent their positions, nor was anyone excommunicated over it. They simply were committed to each other as brothers and sisters in Christ, and thus the issue was eventually resolved (Acts 15:1-31). A Christian does not suddenly stop being a member of the Church just because some confusion might enter their mind. Salvation is not a matter of being able to mentally recite the correct doctrinal position about salvation; it is a matter of *having* salvation through spiritual birth into a relationship with Jesus Christ. It is more important to

actually have salvation, than to have the right theology about salvation (but the latter is very important too). Most of the time, people are not arguing about the requirements for salvation anyway, but instead are arguing about man-made requirements for institutional “church” *membership*.<sup>§2.2.1.3</sup>

Those who disagree with the majority are often labeled as “heretics” and expelled from their organization. (You know, like those “evil” Christians such as John Wycliffe, Martin Luther, etc.) 😊 But this is not Scriptural! In Scripture, the word translated as “heretic” comes from the Greek word “ΑΙΡΕΤΙΚΟΣ” #141 which means “sectarian” (see also “ΑΙΡΕΣΙΣ” #139). A “heretic” is not one who merely has a different understanding of doctrine, but one who wants to create a new sect on the basis of that doctrine (or any other basis for that matter). *It is not wrong for a Christian to entertain an alternative viewpoint, but it is wrong to create a separate organization on the basis of that viewpoint!* Anyone who starts another “church” is the real heretic for they are creating yet another division among Christians.<sup>§1.2.2.1</sup> It is one thing to disagree with a fellow Christian, and quite another to divide into separate organizations because of it. Children in a family may disagree on many things, yet they still remain part of the same family. They do not each get the luxury of creating their own separate sub-family consisting of only the other children who agree with them! **“Wherefore, accept one another just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God.”** (Rom. 15:7)

This is not to say that coming to agreement on correct doctrine is not important, but only that it is not automatically grounds for disassociating fellowship from other Christians. Every effort should be made to **“agree with one another in the Lord”** (1Cor. 1:10; cf. Phil. 4:2) as genuine seekers of the truth. But if there is an occasionally doctrinal disagreement, it is not necessarily a sin or grounds for excommunication. Scripture records several examples of disputes among the Christians, but as **“iron sharpens iron”** (Prov. 27:17) they did not result in division because they had a fundamental commitment to each other as brothers and sisters in Christ. For example, Paul had a dispute with Barnabas over traveling with Mark that was so severe that they parted ways (Acts 15:36-40). Notice that they did not start separate institutional “churches” named “Apostle Paul Ministries” and “Saint Barnabas Fellowship”, for they still belonged to the same Church as their ministries literally took them in *different directions*. They both continued ministering on the “same team” and apparently were later reconciled (1Cor. 9:6, Col. 4:10, 2Tim. 4:11). There were also such factions among the Corinthians in the same city, even in the *same meeting* (1Cor. 3:3, 11:18-19), yet they still continued to function together as one Church (1Cor. 1:2, 2Cor. 1:1) without any need to form separate organizations with separate names.

Despite all of the disputes, arguments, and schisms recorded in Scripture, there was still only one Church. There was not one “church” formed for every disagreement; there was only one Church that sometimes had disagreements. The early Church had debate, not denominations! Consider that the *very same controversial issues* that cause divisions today – the gift of tongues (1Cor. 14:2-28), head coverings (1Cor. 11:3-16), women speakers (1Cor. 14:33-35), communion (1Cor. 11:20-34) – were just as prevalent among the Corinthians, yet they still remained one Church! The early Church had just as much opportunity to divide over these

doctrines as any institutional “church” today, yet they overcame them all and continued to fellowship as one Church.

### 2.1.2.3 Division by Leadership

Many will be surprised to learn that the sin of division is probably committed most often by Christian leaders. A doctrine by itself usually doesn’t cause a split; it usually takes a leader to convince others to separate their fellowship from the others. The person creating a wedge over a particular doctrine may not be obvious at first, but there is almost always someone leading the charge behind the scenes. Unfortunately, some leaders are really nothing but power-hungry dominators who seek control and influence by gathering disciples around themselves. Scripture cites several examples of charlatans like this who have been lurking around since the inception of the Church (Matt. 7:15-16, Acts 20:29-30, 2Cor. 11:1-13, Gal 1:7, 2Tim. 4:3-4, 2Pet. 2:1, Jude 1:8-10, Rev. 2:2). Paul’s final message to the overseers at Ephesus, for example, warned:

**“I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. And among you yourselves, men will arise speaking perverted things to draw away disciples after themselves. So be alert and remember that day and night for three years I never stopped warning each of you with tears.”** (Acts 20:29-31)

Wow! Realize that these Church leaders had even been personally trained by Paul! Such leaders never quite see themselves as “**savage wolves**” because they are sincere in their pursuit of some well-meaning but misguided cause that justifies their divisiveness.<sup>§7.2.2.3</sup> They may think they are truly awesome leaders

**“Our Lord sent His disciples out as sheep among wolves; now the wolves are being invited into the sheepfold.”**  
– Vance Havner

for Christ because of their unique talents, but somehow this subtly gets translated into getting others to follow after *themselves*. Some have given up their ambitions for fame in the world, *but instead they have replaced it with ambitions for fame in the Church*. Perhaps this is done subconsciously, but they are

inwardly coveting praise from the Church that rightfully and solely belongs to Jesus Christ. As it is in the world, it is a natural temptation for leaders to crave power – being a Christian leader does not make them immune from this common temptation of the sinful nature.

Some leaders do not cause division intentionally, yet they still allow it to happen as they let the masses elevate them in status to the point that they become objects of Christian “hero worship”. Many Christians become divided as each one aligns their loyalty after their *own preferred* leader. One leader is followed because he is a better teacher, another because he is more charismatic, another because he is a better administrator, etc. The end result is that the Christians divide their fellowship according to the leaders they follow. **“Each one of you**



says ‘I am of Paul’ or ‘I am of Apollos’ or ‘I am of Cephas’ or ‘I am of Christ’. Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul?” (1Cor. 1:12-13). Paul characterized this childish thinking as being “worldly” (1Cor. 3:1-3) and rebuked the Corinthians for “boasting about men” (1Cor. 3:21) since they should consider themselves as being “of Christ” (1Cor. 3:22-23). Although such leaders may not personally be guilty of directly promoting themselves, they must still be careful to deflect others’ praise to God, lest they also be judged with Herod’s fate (Acts 12:21-23). Such leaders sin not because someone may idolize them, *but because they continue to let others idolize them*. No true man of God would ever allow others to follow after himself in this manner!<sup>§6.2.1.2</sup>

Whether it is intentional or unintentional, a leader could not succeed in causing division unless other Christians are willing to go along with them (2Cor. 11:19-20). Christians who acquiesce to follow these leaders become accomplices to sin and are perhaps just as guilty by their complicity.<sup>§6.2.1.3</sup> The early Church had just as many opportunities to form divisions around their leaders as any institutional “church” today, yet they overcame them and continued to fellowship as one Church.

## 2.2 Counterfeit Philosophies

The sin of division is indeed rampant among Christians today. They are divided over attributes so that there are separate Black, Chinese, and Hispanic institutional “churches” all in the same city. They are divided over doctrines so that you can now find a “church” tailored to accommodate almost anything you want to believe (2Tim. 4:3). And they are divided over leadership so that denominational seminaries now train professional wolves to maintain their infrastructures (Acts 20:29-30). *Remember the early Church had all of the same temptations to divide as the institutional “churches” today, but they did not!* The fact that these things are still used as excuses for division speaks volumes about the immaturity of Christians today.

### 2.2.1 Characteristics of Division

The following subsections illustrate some of the basic characteristics of division that are present today. Obviously, these characteristics may be present to various degrees and one group does not necessarily have to do all of these things in order to be divisive. The presence of even one of these characteristics is sufficient to expose an organization’s divisiveness and their *sin* against Jesus Christ who desires one united Body!

### 2.2.1.1 Institutionalization

Most divisions in the Church usually become solidified into separate institutional “churches”.<sup>§1.2.2</sup> Institutional divisions do not come about by accident; *they are created by men who sin.*<sup>§2.1.2</sup> Every time someone starts yet another institutional “church”, someone is committing another sin of division. Institutional “churches” are not incidental structures; they represent real divisions over attributes, doctrines, and leadership. There should only be one Church in any given city, but men have created one “church” for every street corner! In a single city there may be hundreds of various “churches” dividing Christ’s people among competing causes. When people ask, “Which church do you go to?” they are basically asking you to specify which *division* you belong to.<sup>§2.2.1</sup> If all Christians belonged to the same Church, this would be a nonsensical question. Although some divisions may not manifest themselves as institutional “churches”, *every institutional “church” by its very nature is a division.* The nature of division is inherent within the very process of institutionalization. An institutional “church” could not become a non-profit corporation, select a unique name, or build their own building unless they were already functioning as a division, separate from the rest of the Church. The institutional “churches” which become non-profit corporations don’t even all belong to the same corporation!<sup>§1.2.3</sup> Such institutions cause Christians to choose sides between man-made groups that have nothing to do with the Church. They only serve to separate Christians in the Church and get them to belong to something that is not the Church.

One of the basic reasons why men start these institutional “churches” is because they feel that their particular brand of Christianity is unique (or superior) in theology, practice, or structure and thus they decide to form a new organization to set it apart from the rest of the “churches”. Such organizations are usually

**“I know that those who esteem these little organised associations to be the churches of God, see nothing but mere meetings of men in every other gathering of God's children.”** – J. N. Darby

started out of a sincere but misguided intention to advance the cause of Christ as they perceive it. But the sin of division is never justified no matter how much better someone thinks their organization is.<sup>§2.1.2.2</sup> A “cutting edge” institutional “church” might use non-sectarian labels like “non-denominational”, “inter-denominational”, or “independent”, but it is still a division operating as a separate organizational

entity apart from the Church.<sup>§2.2.3.4</sup> Most of these organizations claim to be a “church” which in itself is proof of their division. How is that? When one of them says that they are a “church”, it implies that there must be another “church” somewhere. If you are just a “church”, then the Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians down the street are also a “church”. Yet according to Jesus Christ, there is only one Church.<sup>§1.1.2</sup> You will not find a “church” mentioned in Scripture. (This is not just because there is no indefinite article in the Greek, but because there is indeed no concept of separate denominational “churches” in Scripture.) If you are a true Christian, then you are already part of *the* Church.

### 2.2.1.2 House “churches”

Many have begun to confuse the Church with a number of “house church”, “home church”, and “cell church” movements that are rapidly gaining in popularity today. These entities are different than the typical “small groups”, “cell groups”, or “home groups” that are merely mid-week meetings of an institutional “church” because they function as independent autonomous units. Most “house churches”, “home churches”, and “cell churches” have no particular affiliation, although some have been clustered together in loose associations. Thus, there is not one kind of “house church” per se, but many unrelated movements, some of which can be quite unscriptural and divisive in nature. Some of them are really nothing but *smaller* versions of institutional “churches”. And if given the chance to grow in numbers, they would be indistinguishable from any other institutional “church”. Such groups often implement the very same unbiblical practices as any other institutional “church”, but the only difference is that they are smaller and more informal. They have correctly rejected the idea that the “church” is a building, but instead still operate as if the “church” is a meeting in a home.<sup>§4.1.1</sup> Such “house church” movements may be much more Biblical in their use of terminology than the typical institutional “church”, but may still be man-made divisions – *just smaller ones*. Moving “church” goes from a building to a house doesn’t necessarily change anything. Being more informal, choosing a lay leader, sitting on a sofa, and singing with a guitar does not necessarily solve anything here regarding the sin of division. Some “house church” groups stress that meeting in homes is more Biblical than meeting in “church” buildings.<sup>§A.2</sup> Indeed, the early Church did meet in houses, but simply meeting in a house does not mean you are functioning as the Church. Unfortunately, many have mistaken these “house church” movements for fellowship in the Church, and thus confused the Church with something that *looks more like the Church* than a regular institutional “church”, but yet is still not the Church.

Many will be surprised to learn that there is actually no such thing as a “house church” in Scripture. In Scripture, a house is not a type of “church”, but merely one of many places that the Church can meet. Scripture speaks of **“the Church that meets”** at someone’s home, not that someone’s house is a “church”. As previously stated, the Church is not a meeting, *nor is it a meeting place*.<sup>§4.1.1.3</sup> Members of the Church may decide to meet in a house, but the Church is not confined to a house. The Church also met at the beach (Acts 21:5) and at the temple (Acts 2:46, 5:12,42), but no one goes around saying they have a “beach church” or a “temple church”. A house, beach, or temple are not types of “churches”, they are merely some of the *places* that the Church can meet. Today there may be several divided “house church” organizations in the same city, but in Scripture there was only one Church in a city that simply met in different houses. Do you understand the difference? Conversely, if members of the Church do just happen to meet in a house, it doesn’t necessarily mean they have become a “house church” or are necessarily meeting in division.

### 2.2.1.3 Membership

Most institutional “churches” offer some type of membership just like any other social club. Constituents are formally admitted to the organization after meeting the official membership requirements. In some cases, membership status is informally denoted by inclusion in a phone directory or mailing list, much like a club roster. These membership directories obviously do not list every Christian they know living in their area, but only people associated with their particular man-made organization. It is common for *non-Christians* to also become members of institutional “churches” as they can easily speak and act like Christians (and some mistakenly think they are Christians).<sup>§1.2.4.2</sup> This is possible because membership in an institutional “church” relates to a *physical identification* with a social organization, whereas membership in the Church relates to a *spiritual identification* with Jesus Christ. Men can decide who is a member of their “church”, but only Jesus decides who is a member of the Church.<sup>§1.1.1.1</sup> There are some institutional “churches” where not even a single member is really a Christian, but in the Church not even a single member is a non-Christian!

Membership in an institutional “church” is often required in order to obtain certain privileges such as voting, holding office, taking communion, participating in the service, or receiving aid. Simply being a Christian alone does not qualify you for these benefits, you must be a Christian and *also* a member of their institution. Some Christians have been faithful attenders of an institutional “church” for years, but are still denied these benefits because they haven’t officially “signed up” as members. Granted most of these “benefits” are entirely unbiblical anyway, but it shows the spirit of division exists even *inside* the institution (which is itself a division). The Christians who are members of the institution are *treated differently* than the Christians who attend there but aren’t official members. Would you withhold financial aid from a Christian in need just because they are not members of your institutional “church”? **“But whoever has worldly means and sees his brother in need but closes his heart toward him, how can the love of God abide in him?”** (1Jn. 3:17)

Although some of the more cultic groups believe a person is not truly a Christian unless they join their “church”,<sup>§1.2.1.2</sup> most institutions view membership in their “church” as a demonstration of your *commitment* to them. They may acknowledge that you are a Christian, but if you do not become a member of their “church” then they take that as a sign that you may not be completely devoted to them. In practice, most institutional “churches” are not committed to all Christians in the Church, but only to the Christians (and non-Christians) that

**“A church has no right to make anything a condition of membership which Christ has not made a condition of salvation.” – A. A. Hodge**

become members of their “church”. All of the “one another” verses in Scripture, however, are not restricted to just a select group of Christians within some man-made division.<sup>§3.1.2.1</sup> When a person becomes a Christian, they should automatically be committed to *all* Christians – not to just *some* of the Christians.

How absurd it is for someone to become a member of the Church when they become a Christian and then be told that they also need to have a *second membership* in an institutional “church”. The new convert says, “What? I thought I joined the Church when I became a Christian? And now you’re telling me I need to join another organization?” There is not a dual membership – one for the Church and another for a man-made “church” – and you will not find this nonsense anywhere in Scripture!

#### 2.2.1.4 Proprietary Names

One of the more obvious signs of division is the selection of a unique self-appointed name to differentiate one group of Christians from the others. Almost every institutional “church” selects a unique name to represent their “ministry” in order to distinguish themselves from the rest. Although some groups may never materialize as official organizations, they almost always select a unique name to set themselves apart. But anytime someone creates an additional label to identify what kind of “church” they are, they are not identifying with the only Church that there is.<sup>§1.1.2</sup> Have you ever wondered why the names of institutional “churches” today are not found anywhere in the Bible? Because they did not exist! There are no names of institutional “churches” in the Scripture, because there were no institution “churches”! The man-made institutional “churches” were started by *men*, named by *men*, and in some cases even named after *men*! Why do so many Christian groups seem to have such an incredible need to make up names for themselves? There is certainly no Scripture that tells them to make up a unique name for themselves. And anyone who thinks that God gave them the name for their new institution is simply mistaken, because God has not authorized Christians to divide themselves from each other by selecting different organizational names.<sup>§7.2.4.3</sup> Ironically, the only entity that requires organizations to select unique names for themselves is not God, but the government who requires *non-profit corporations* to register a unique name.<sup>§1.2.3.1</sup>

No, the basis for choosing a divisive name is usually just the plain old ugly sin of pride! The institutional “churches” are not content just to fellowship as ordinary Christians; they literally have to make a name for themselves. Their sin is like those who built the tower of Babel: **“Come let us build for ourselves a city with a tower that reaches to the heavens so that we can make a name for ourselves...”** (Gen. 11:4) They are more interested in making a name for themselves as they build their own institutional kingdom, rather than building up the kingdom of God, which requires no additional name. In one sense, if people are already meeting as an institutional “church”, then picking a name is probably not much worse since they are already meeting in division. But isn’t it strange that none of the Christians in the early Church ever developed this “need” to make up names for themselves? By some amazing feat, Christians in the early Church were able to fellowship with each other just fine without any additional made-up names! Even today, the “underground” Church in persecuted countries goes out of their way to make sure that they do *not* have such a name.

Sometimes it may not be clear whether a group of Christians is operating in division or not,<sup>§2.2.1.5</sup> but once they select a name to distinguish their group, there is no longer any doubt. The divisiveness of such groups is finally revealed when they become proud enough to label themselves as being different from the others. This has been the downfall of many groups who once fellowshiped as the Church. Perhaps some group may seem like a perfect “church” in every other regard, but as soon as they adopt a self-appointed name for themselves they begin participating in the sin of division. They are not content to be associated with just the “plain old group” of believers in Jesus; so instead they select a new and unique identity to represent themselves. At the very least, *this divides their organization from the Christians who refuse to sin by meeting under any unbiblical man-made identity*. It demonstrates that they love their self-appointed empire more than they love these brothers, since they are willing to sacrifice fellowship with other Christians for the sake of maintaining their unbiblical identity. *Any true Christians would gladly be willing to lose their divisive name for the privilege of fellowshiping with other brothers and sisters who will only meet in Jesus’ name*. But when institutional “churches” are confronted, their selfish pride usually becomes blatantly obvious for they are not willing to give up their prestigious made-up names.

Now some organizations would say that the name of their “church” is Biblical. Certainly, phrases such as “new creation”, “upper room”, “living water”, etc. are found in Scripture, *but they were not names of “churches”!* An institution can pick a Scriptural sounding name, but it is not Scriptural to have a particular name! Some of the more clever groups have titled their institutions after generic terms used for the Church in the Bible such as “Church of Christ”, “Church of God”, or “Body of Christ”. Indeed, for some of them it is probably necessary that they co-opt a Biblical name for their institution in order to fit their notion that they are “the only true church”.<sup>§1.2.1.2</sup> Thus, whenever their members see this phrase in Scripture, they will think it is referring to the name of their man-made institutional “church”. (Ah, but what happens when the “Church of Christ” members run into the “Church of God” members?) ☺ In Scripture, the “Church of Christ”, “Church of God”, and “Body of Christ” are not three different denominations; they are just three of *many* common phrases used for the *one* Church.<sup>§1.1.1</sup> The terms used for the Church in Scripture generically apply to all Christians (denoting unity), whereas some institutions are now using them as *proprietary names* to refer only to their specific group of Christians (denoting division).

It is hard for some to understand why selecting “a little ol’ name” is such a big deal to God, but the significance is spiritually discerned. Names are not inconsequential, but carry real spiritual significance. Those who select a name for themselves, inevitably link their identity as Christians to that name. To meet in the name of the X “church”, is to meet under the authority of the X organization. Whatever X is, it isn’t the authority of the Church started by Jesus Christ. Christians are not to meet under the identity of X, Christians are to meet in the name of Jesus and under His authority alone (Matt. 18:20, 1Cor. 5:4, Phil. 2:9-10). *Meeting under any other man-made name is not authorized anywhere in the Bible!* God is

a jealous God and will not let His Spirit be tied to the authority of a man-made structure. Do you have ears to hear?

Of course, Christians cannot help it if others choose to pigeonhole them or label them by some derogatory name, but the Christians should never accept an organizational name for themselves or meet in such a name. As previously discussed, Christians are not meeting in division just because someone can externally label them, but they are definitely meeting in division if they have chosen a man-made name to distinguish themselves. Going back to the swimming pool analogy,<sup>§1.1.2.1</sup> there is obviously a big difference between someone referring to the water at the deep end of the pool and a group actually erecting a barrier in the pool and calling themselves “The Deep End”. It may be permissible for Christians to give names and titles to inanimate objects such as books, programs, or events, but never to the Church. If someone decides to give a building, project, or corporation a name, just make sure no one thinks that name has anything to do with the Church! Do not meet in the name of a building, do not meet in the name of a project, do not meet in the name of a non-profit corporation – meet in the name of Jesus!

### 2.2.1.5 Divisive Actions

It is rare, but not every division necessarily creates an official organization, establishes membership requirements, or chooses a self-appointed name to identify their group. In a given area, there could be a group of Christians that have not done any of these things, but are still divisive towards other Christians *by their actions*. Just because a group doesn’t have a man-made name, for example, doesn’t mean they are operating as the Church which also doesn’t have a man-made name. For example, there could be two separate groups of “no-name” Christians both seemingly operating on Scriptural grounds, but yet they don’t want to have anything to do with each other. They may not be divided in name, but they are still divided in reality. They may both say they are just Christians, yet they treat members of the other group differently from theirs, not as members of one Church. *Simply lacking a name or organizational structure is not a guarantee that a group is not acting in division.* A nameless group may also be operating in a spirit of division against their brothers and sisters in Christ who are caught up in institutional “churches”. Do not become the sect of non-sectarian believers! Just because someone attends an institutional “church” does not mean that they cease to be a Christian or can be treated any differently.<sup>§2.3.1.1</sup> That would be like “reverse discrimination” where a group tries to divide from all the other divisions. Notice that Paul also rebuked those who said “**I am of Christ**” as this too can be divisive if you harbor a subtle pride and look down upon those who say “**I am of Paul**” or “**I am of Apollos**” in a condescending manner (1Cor. 1:11-13). The fact that you may even be right, does not mean that your attitude is right. “**But if you bite and devour one another, watch out, or you will be destroyed by one another.**” (Gal. 5:15) No group of Christians should exclusively say, “We are the Church”, but rather should recognize that they are only part of the Church. Are

not deceived Christians also your brothers and sisters in Christ? Are they at least worthy of your loving correction?

Christians are not allowed to show favoritism regarding other believers (Jas. 2:1-4). Those involved in divisive actions do not truly love *all* of the brothers, but only *some* of the brothers. They treat Christians that they fellowship with in their group one way and Christians who are outside their group another way.<sup>§2.2.1.3</sup> They do not **“submit to one another”** (Eph. 5:21) in the Church, they only submit to one another in their group. Thus, they *disobey* the “one another” Scriptures that apply toward *all* Christians, not just their particular organization.<sup>§3.1.2.1</sup> Does someone stop being a Christian just because they are not a member of your group? Such groups can often say things like, “This is the way *we* do things here.” or “They are not flowing with *us*.” Their use of “we” and “us” is not referring to the Church, but only their particular organization. Their members naturally speak of “my church” or “our church” when they talk about their group. (When did the “church” become yours and what are these other “churches” that aren’t yours?) The idea that **“they went out from among us because they were not of us”** (1Jn. 2:19) is not in reference to different “churches”, but to those who were non-Christians.<sup>§1.1.3.1</sup> *If there is any “we”, “us”, “my” or “our” that does not include all Christians, then there is a division.* The only group of “we” or “us” among Christians should be the whole Church. This behavior is similar to when Jesus rebuked the disciples for becoming divisive simply because someone else did not **“follow with us”** (Mark 9:38-40, Luke 9:49-50). Similarly, many “churches” are more concerned about finding out who is “with us” than who is “with Jesus”.

## 2.2.2 Consequences of Division

The damage inflicted upon the Church by the sin of division has resulted in disputes, violence, and even wars. Those who tolerate the sin of division work to undermine the spiritual fellowship of the Church. Many Christians recognize the problem of division, but believe that the reality of the situation today is simply unavoidable. *They have been conditioned to co-exist with division instead of seeking to eliminate it.* Those who are content to tolerate the division of the institutional “churches” are tolerating sin and ultimately accomplices to that sin.<sup>§2.1.2</sup> As a result, Christians have been herded into difference organizations, going in different directions, competing and even fighting among themselves. The diversity of gifts that God has intended for one Church have been divided among Christians who do not fellowship with each other, not because they have personal animosity towards each other, but simply because they belong to different institutions. What is the Church *as a whole* doing in your community?

### 2.2.2.1 Selecting a “church”

Whenever someone picks out a “church” to go to, they are selecting an unbiblical entity to attend. The only reason why someone can even ask, “Which church do you go to?”<sup>§3.3.2.3</sup> is because of institutional division. If Christians correctly understood that there is only one Church, this would be a nonsensical



question. None of the early Christians ever picked out a “church” to go to, because there was only one Church. There is still only one Church today and it is not an object that you can “go to”.<sup>§1.2.1</sup> Most Christians today automatically assume that they must attend an institutional “church”, because they do not know how to fellowship any other way.<sup>§3.1.1</sup> They believe it is too late to do anything now about the division among thousands of institutional “churches”, so the only thing they know to do is pick out the best “church” they can and try to be content. This raises the question then, “Which is the *best* church to go to?” The reason why someone selects one particular institutional “church” over another is usually determined by either a *needs-based* or *theology-based* approach.

The group of needs-based Christians tends to select a “church” based on which organization will best meet their needs: “Are the people caring?” “Does it have good childcare or youth programs?” “Will I be able to sing in the choir?” If they can’t find a “church” that they are completely satisfied with, they usually just end up going to the one that they *liked the most* out of the ones they visited. These people do not care so much about the particular theology of the “church” as long as it meets their needs. These people may not seem to be particularly divisive on the surface, yet they are still tolerating the sin of division. They did not start the division themselves, but they are willing to participate in it and keep it going. Once people begin to associate themselves with a particular “church”, *they associate themselves with the division that it represents*. They may have some theoretical understanding of the unity of the Church, but in practice their primary identity, association, and loyalty is based on a single man-made institutional “church”. They would surely acknowledge that there are Christians in the other “churches”, but their *fellowship and service* are only centered around the particular organization they have chosen.<sup>§1.3.1.2</sup>

The group of theology-based Christians, on the other hand, tends to select a “church” based on theological tenets or denominational doctrine. Some of them are merely shoppers at a theological smorgasbord: “Do they allow sprinkling so that I won’t have to get my clothes wet?” “Will they give me a second chance to improve in purgatory?” “Are we allowed to dance and watch movies?” Many people in this category tend to be strict adherents to a set of theological ideals: “Do they subscribe to a certain systematic theology?” “Does the denomination have a line of apostolic succession?” “Do they adhere to a certain liturgy?” Some of them are dogmatic about their theology, and if someone is not in the right “church” then they think they are unsaved or at least out of God’s will. Their reaction to division is to simply belong to the right “church” and hope that others will stop *their divisiveness* and join their “church”. They may not believe that there is any division, since their “church” is “the only true church” and thus any other organization would obviously be wrong.<sup>§1.2.1.2</sup> These people tend to be more divisive than the others as they are willing to separate fellowship from other Christians simply because they are not in the right organization, that is, if they even acknowledge that there are other Christians outside their group. They do not apologize that their fellowship and service are only centered around their particular organization, because they are convinced that it is right. But their naivety does not justify their sin of division, which is evident by both their attitude and actions.<sup>§2.1.2</sup>

### 2.2.2.2 Inoperable Scriptures?

Wherever Christians embrace the division of the institutional “churches”, there are entire sections of Scripture that are rendered essentially inoperable. Here are just a few examples:

- *Disfellowship*. In the New Testament, someone could be disfellowshipped from the one Church, and then by design they would have no other Christian fellowship, not even in another city.<sup>§1.1.3.2</sup> But today, if an institutional “church” excommunicates someone, that person can simply join a different institutional “church” down the street or even start their own “church”!
- *Leadership*. In the New Testament, the leaders in the Church were accepted by all Christians, such as those that traveled between cities. But today, each institutional “church” or denomination appoints or elects their own set of leaders that have authority only within their particular organization. Which set of these are the true Church leaders?<sup>§6.2.3</sup>
- *Direction*. In the New Testament, discussions were open to all Christians (Matt. 18:15-17, Acts 6:3,5, 15:22, 1Cor 6:1, 14:29, 2Cor 8:19) and directives were applicable to all Christians (Acts 15:22-23, 1Cor. 11:16, 14:33, 1Th. 2:14). But today, each institutional “church” or denomination makes its own decisions that apply only within confines of its particular division.<sup>§5.2.3</sup> Christians are then asked to choose between different sets of conflicting practices among the various institutional “churches”.
- *Evangelism*. In the New Testament, the Church had a single effective witness to their communities. But today, each “church” runs their own evangelism program (if they even have one) which is only geared at bringing in new members to their “church”. Could you imagine the impact if every Christian in your community was united as one in reaching out to the lost?<sup>§3.1.3</sup> How many people will be eternally lost because of this wicked sin of division?

The Scriptures on these topics are quite clear, yet it is not possible for the institutional “churches” to comply because of their unbiblical divisive system. You cannot redefine what the Church is, and then expect the rest of the Scripture to work. Biblical truth can only operate correctly in a Biblical environment. The solution to these problems, of course, is not to try to come up with unbiblical work-arounds in order to co-exist with institutional division, but to eliminate the divisions that cause these problems to begin with! Come Lord Jesus!

### 2.2.3 Distorted Concepts of Unity

It is somewhat ironic that most institutional “churches” give lip service to the concept of unity in the Church, while they continue to operate as unbiblical institutional divisions. Since these institutions mistakenly think they are a “church”, it is no wonder that they have equally strange notions concerning “church” unity. They tend to think that the “universal church” is the sum of all

institutional “churches” and thus some strive to achieve areas of *institutional commonality*.<sup>§2.2.3.3</sup> This kind of institutional “unity” was ultimately achieved by the Roman Catholic “church” during the Middle Ages where people were compelled to keep in line under the threat of torture and death. But is that unity? Those that don’t understand the spiritual unity of Christians in one Lord, one faith, one Baptism, etc. are working instead to achieve *structural uniformity* in one systematic theology, one type of worship service, one leadership hierarchy, etc.<sup>§2.1.1.1</sup> Despite centuries of this approach, there are now more institutional “churches” than ever. Understanding why their past misguided efforts at unity have failed, and always will fail, certainly begs the question, “How then can true unity ever be achieved?” Unfortunately, many will never understand the answer to this question precisely because they really do not understand the true nature of the Church.

Consider an analogy where each institution sits atop of its own ivory tower it has constructed and tries to entice the stragglers in the courtyard below to come into *their* tower. To justify their divisiveness, they have invented various theologies about how they can be *unified while remaining divided* in their separate towers. They may have open doors on their towers,<sup>§2.2.3.1</sup> keep unity within their tower,<sup>§2.2.3.2</sup> build corridors between their towers,<sup>§2.2.3.3</sup> claim that a tower is not a tower,<sup>§2.2.3.4</sup> or to merge all the towers into one really big tower<sup>§2.2.3.5</sup> – when the goal should be to have *no towers!* The people need to tear down all of those towers (representing institutional division) and meet in the common courtyard (representing the open grounds of the Church). The point is not to argue about who had the first tower, the biggest tower, or the best tower, or to try to build the “one true tower”; *the goal is not to meet in towers at all!*<sup>§1.2.2</sup>

One reason why the institutional “churches” reject the idea of meeting in the common courtyard is that they have invested so much in building their towers that they would never consider tearing them down now. They might even admit that tearing down all towers could possibly work, but they reject it as being too “extreme” considering how much it would cost them. If you ask an institutional “church” what their alternative plan is for achieving unity

among all Christians, you will typically find that *they don’t have any plan*. They just *subconsciously* operate on the premise that everybody else should tear down towers and then join them in their tower. Yet if you confront them with the truth, sometimes even they can see that this is foolish proposition. Some would say, “We don’t know how to achieve unity, it is up to God to supernaturally make it happen”, yet they refuse to obey Jesus and repent of their sin of meeting in

**“To a true child of God, the invisible bond that unites all believers to Christ is far more tender, and lasting, and precious; and, as we come to recognize and realize that we are all dwelling in one sphere of life in Him, we learn to look on every believer as our brother...This is the one and only way to bring disciples permanently together. All other plans for promoting the unity of the Church have failed.”** – A. T. Pierson

division. They might cite any number of the bogus ideas mentioned below, but if you will sit down and analyze them, it becomes quite obvious why they can *never* work. The reason why the institutional “churches” do not know how to achieve unity is precisely because they automatically reject the *only* possible step towards a solution – their man-made institutional divisions they created must cease to exist. Meeting in the open grounds of the common courtyard is the only solution. Not only does logic necessitate it, but the Spirit of Christ demands it!

### 2.2.3.1 The Open Invitation

Under this false concept of unity, an institutional “church” thinks they are promoting unity because they openly welcome visitors regardless of any previous denominational affiliation. They believe they are furthering the cause of unity because they do not discriminate against anyone who would be willing to visit *their* organization. They have no animosity towards any other institution in their community and always try to coexist with them peacefully. Their “doors are always open” to anyone who wants to fellowship with their organization, even if they don’t ever become members. They don’t see how they could possibly be causing division, because there is no barrier on their part that would prevent anyone from *joining them*. The funny thing about this distorted concept is that almost every institutional “church” has this exact same policy! And this policy of “openness”, of course, only works in one direction! Such an institution is happy to have a member of another institution visit their service, but they don’t want to lose any of their members to the other institutions. They are “open” to anyone who wants to come and be a part of them, but they are not “open” to dissolve their own organization and fellowship with others. Thus, people are free to attend institutional “church” X and people are free to attend institutional “church” Y, but institutional “churches” X and Y still remain divided from each other. An institution may leave the door to their tower wide-open, yet they will not tear their tower down and meet in the common courtyard. After centuries of this one-directional “openness”, institutional division still continues to thrive because this distorted concept can *never* lead to Biblical unity.

### 2.2.3.2 Unity within Division

Under this false concept of unity, an institutional “church” acts as if the word “unity” simply means to keep the unity *within* their denomination. They may agree entirely with the Scriptural principles of unity discussed here, except they think that they only need to apply *within* their organization. They may emphasize the principles of commitment and loyalty within their institutions, because they are concerned about losing their members to other institutions through “church hopping”. (However, they don’t seem to be quite as concerned when someone “hops” from another “church” into their “church”.) Some institutional “churches” even preach sermons on the importance of unity, but only as it relates to squelching contention within their congregation. Ironically, the point of these sermons is not that their institution should cease to exist as a division, but only

that they should remain unified within their particular division. If a Christian in their organization were to promote a different doctrine, they would brand this person as a “heretic” for *causing division within their division*.<sup>§2.1.2.2</sup> (Those who suggest that their unbiblical institution be dissolved may be accused of causing division by advocating unity!) ☺ An institution may preach excellent sermons on preserving “unity” *within* their tower, yet they will not tear their tower down and meet in the common courtyard. After centuries of this distorted preaching on unity, institutional division still continues to thrive because this distorted concept can *never* lead to Biblical unity.

### 2.2.3.3 Institutional Ecumenism

Under this false concept of unity, institutional “churches” think they are promoting unity by meeting together on occasion with some other institutional “churches” for common purposes. Sometimes they try to unify around a set of doctrines using the “least common denominator” approach that compromises the truth in order to participate in a type of ecumenical institutional consortium. (Some “Council of Churches” have even sought to unify with pagan religions!) They think that getting several divisions to cooperate in some limited capacity will somehow bring about the unity of the Church. Unfortunately, such efforts usually amount to nothing more than the oxymoron of *harmonious division*. The prevailing attitude of the leaders is: “I’ll bring my group and you bring your group and we’ll do this event together and then when it is over I’ll leave with my group and you leave with your group, and hopefully none of the people will change groups.” But nothing is ever unified! Before the function starts, during the function, and after the function is over, the same institutional “churches” continue to exist as divisions. The divisions are happy to get along with each other as long as they can still retain their unique unbiblical identities.<sup>§2.2.1.4</sup> Several glasses of water may be kept great distances apart or they can even be placed right next to each other, but the water continues to exist in separate glasses. Institutional divisions can cooperate all they want, but they still operate individually as separate divisions, not one Church. The institutions may build inter-denominational corridors between their towers, yet they will not tear their towers down and meet in the common courtyard. After centuries of these ecumenical proceedings, institutional division still continues to thrive because this distorted concept can *never* lead to Biblical unity.

### 2.2.3.4 Non-Denominationalism

Under this false concept of unity, an institutional “church” thinks they are promoting unity because they are “non-denominational”. They realize that the word “denomination” is actually synonymous with “division”, so they simply claim that their institution is not a denomination. They don’t think their institution is like those other divisive “mainline denominations” since they are open to accepting people from any theological background. They don’t want to believe

that they are yet another institutional division “just like all the rest of them”, so they *label themselves* as “non-denominational”, “inter-denominational”, or “independent”. They think that if their man-made institutional “church” is simply *not called* a denomination, then it isn’t a division. But just because they do not call themselves a “denomination”, does not mean that they are not an institutional division. The Church is indeed non-denominational, but it is not a non-denominational *institution*. Regardless of whether an institution is non-denominational, inter-denominational, or independent, it is not any less divisive than any other man-made institution. (Indeed, many non-denominational “churches” have actually grouped together to form non-denominational denominations!) All they really have is an institutional division that *says* it isn’t a division, but they still have a unique name, membership requirements, and institutional practices just like any other division.<sup>§2.2.1</sup> It doesn’t matter how an institution classifies itself, *it is still a man-made division precisely because it is still a man-made institution*. An institution can claim that its tower is “non-denominational”, yet they will not tear their tower down and meet in the common courtyard. After centuries of various “non-denominational” movements, institutional division still continues to thrive because this distorted concept can *never* lead to Biblical unity.

### 2.2.3.5 Merging

While many can see the fallacies of the previous concepts, it is admittedly much harder for some to discern the error of merging institutions as a way to unity. Under this false concept of unity, an institutional “church” thinks they will promote the cause of unity by merging together with another institutional “church”. Two separate institutional “churches” may be merged into a new institution, but they are now just a bigger institutional “church”. (That is not to say that fewer institutional “churches” wouldn’t be an improvement!) ☺ Even if every institutional “church” were merged into one gigantic institutional “church”, you would simply have one gigantic unbiblical man-made institution still containing some non-Christians, but not one Church. But wouldn’t it be better to merge all of the institutional “churches” into a single denomination? This has mostly already been achieved before – ever heard of the Roman Catholic “church”? But institutional unity is not the same thing as *spiritual* unity.

The problem with this concept can be illustrated nicely by considering a small town that only has one Methodist “church”, for example. Wouldn’t that surely count as having one united city Church? Here, some Christians in an area are meeting as a single unbiblical organizational identity, but that is not the one Church. If every Christian in town just happened to be a member of the Rotary club, that would not count as having one Church either.<sup>§4.1.2</sup> Even if there is only one physical man-made institution, that would not necessarily represent the spiritual membership of the Church. If you were to consider that the only “church” in the next town over is a Baptist “church”, the division now becomes even more apparent. To truly experience unity in the Church, there would not be one institutional “church” in an area, there would be no institutional “church” in an area – all unbiblical institutional divisions must cease to exist. The goal is not

to try to create a man-made institutional singularity, but rather to embrace the spiritual unity of one Church.<sup>§2.1.1</sup> Some institutions may merge into a bigger tower, yet they will not tear that tower down and meet in the common courtyard. After centuries of institutional mergers (and their subsequent splittings), institutional division still continues to thrive because this distorted concept can *never* lead to Biblical unity.

## 2.3 Practical Applications

Obviously, Scripture itself does not have anything specific to say about how to deal with thousands of man-made institutional “churches” because they did not exist when the New Testament was written.<sup>§1.2.2</sup> There were no mainline denominations, there were no “church” buildings, there were no institutional structures. As you begin to function in the Church, you may have trouble figuring out how to respond to these unbiblical man-made inventions. These sinful institutional divisions were never part of God’s plan and clearly should be abolished, but until that happens what are you supposed to do?

### 2.3.1 Attending Institutional “churches”

How are you supposed to function as one Church in a city divided by several institutional “churches”? You might have a close relationship with a Baptist and another with a Presbyterian and yet they both may refuse to fellowship with each other. If you follow the practices of one institutional “church”, then you will be disobeying the practices of another “church”. It is impossible to simultaneously follow all of their conflicting doctrines and practices at the same time! And how is leadership supposed to function in a divided city? The leaders of one denomination do not recognize the leaders of another denomination. You cannot submit to the “pastor” of the Baptist “church” and the “pastor” of the Methodist “church” at the same time. Since each denomination claims that their set of leaders is correct, how do you know which ones are valid?

What exists in most cities is Christians who are isolated from each other in different institutional “churches”, surrounded by some members who are not even Christians, functioning in an unbiblical system because they don’t know any better. The tragedy is that the Church is designed to function with the spiritual gifts of all the Christians in a community, but instead these gifts have become individualistic and confined within a particular institutional “church”, not allowed to interact in the Church as a whole.<sup>§3.2.3</sup> While some groups of Christians may have many obvious strengths, their weaknesses are often as equally glaring since they are isolated from other Christians who would bring balance. Each fragmented group is like a Body that is partially impaired – one group only has hands, one group has no feet, etc. (1Cor. 12:14-21). How are Christians in a city-wide Church supposed to function in such a crippled, divided, unbiblical environment?

There are obviously no Scriptures addressing how to fellowship among multiple institutional “churches” in a city, for this is nothing but the sin of division.<sup>§2.2.1.1</sup>

### 2.3.1.1 Institutions Become Irrelevant

God does not view the Church through the institutional grid that has been artificially imposed by man. As you begin to recognize the Church, you may wonder how you should deal with the particular institutional “church” you have been attending. It is not unusual to become angry as you begin to understand the division and unbiblical practices that have been created by man-made institutional “churches”. And it is perfectly understandable for you to want to be against these fraudulent institutional divisions, *but you may not be against the Christians* who have been deceived into attending them.<sup>§1.3.2</sup> Do not harbor grudges, bitterness, or unforgiveness towards your brothers and sisters just because they are part of an institutional “church”. Do not despise the valid contents just because they are stored in an invalid container; or as the saying goes, “Don’t throw out the baby with the bathwater.” While the institutional “churches” themselves are not part of the Church, any Christian who happens to attend an institutional “church” is part of the Church. A Christian should be able to fellowship with any other Christian regardless of whatever additional institutions they may be attending. Don’t forget that some of you reading this right now also used to attend an institutional “church”. You would not stop fellowshiping with Christians just because they belong to the Rotary club, nor should you stop fellowshiping with Christians just because they belong to the Baptist club or the Methodist club.

The physical man-made grid of the institutional “church” system is completely irrelevant to the spiritual purposes of the Church. Most people know Christians who attend other institutional “churches”, yet they do not fellowship with them in any meaningful way as members of the same Church. If you cannot correctly discern the Body (1Cor. 11:29-30), then you will obviously have trouble functioning as a member of the Body. But once you begin relating to *Christians*

**“God cares nothing about our manmade divisions and groups and is not interested in our self-righteous, hair-splitting, and religious, man-made formulas and organizations. He wants you to recognize the UNITY of the body of Christ.”**

**– M. R. DeHaan**

instead of institutions, the institutional structures soon become irrelevant to your fellowship in Christ (or perhaps at most a minor nuisance). Just find some other Christians who love Jesus and begin to fellowship with them.<sup>§3.3.2</sup> Notice that when there is persecution, Christians in the underground Church do not seem to care at all if someone is Baptist, Presbyterian, or Pentecostal. Just because some Christians are involved in divisive institutional “churches” does not change the fact that they are still members of the Church. Such Christians may indeed be

carrying around all kinds of superfluous institutional baggage, but they are nonetheless Christians whom you can encourage to grow in the Lord. Do not let any man-imposed divisional barrier hinder whatever fellowship may be possible



with your brothers and sisters in Christ, no matter how misguided you think they may be. There may be exceptions, however, for how you deal with leaders of institutions who are directly responsible for causing division (Rom. 16:17, Tit. 3:10).

### 2.3.1.2 In the “church”, but not of the “church”

After discovering the truth about the Church, some Christians may continue to attend an institutional “church”. It is not necessary that you leave an institutional “church” as much as you leave the institutional “church” *mentality*.<sup>§2.3.3</sup> If you have not yet found other Christians who are willing to conduct their fellowship in a Scriptural manner, it may be advisable for you to continue visiting institutional “churches” in order to maintain some fellowship with other Christians. Quite often you will find that many of even your closest friends in an institutional “church” will not meet with you for fellowship outside of their unbiblical institutional environment. Thus, if no one will go with you outside the camp, then you may have to go to them. Continuing to fellowship with others in an institutional “church” may not be ideal, but you are hardly under the judgment of God or condemned to Hell for doing so. You must realize that this type of fellowship at best will probably be limited, but limited fellowship may be better than no fellowship at all.<sup>§3.2.3.1</sup> If these other Christians truly love Jesus, then they too may eventually come to the point that they no longer want to meet on the grounds of institutional division in an unbiblical “church”.<sup>§2.2.3</sup>

While Christians who understand the Church would not mind being *visitors* at an institutional “church”, most would never want to be an official *member* of such an institution.<sup>§2.2.1.3</sup> Our fellowship is with Christians, not with institutions! To formally associate with a particular institutional “church” is to participate in the division that it represents. If you are still a member of an institutional “church”, you will probably want to cancel your membership (whether official or unofficial) once you no longer want to identify with a man-made institutional division. You may remain *in* an institutional “church” but you are not *of* the institutional “church”, just as Christians are in the world but not of the world. You should be identifying with the Church, not with some particular institutional “church”.<sup>§1.3.1.2</sup> You may attend several institutional “churches” and fellowship with many Christians, but your identity should be found in none of them. Consider that a Christian may be a member of the Rotary club, the Republican party, and a Presbyterian “church”, but none of these organizations has anything to do with his identity as a Christian. If someone were to ask him what kind of *Christian* he was, he would not identify himself as a “Rotarian”, or a “Republican”, nor as a “Presbyterian”, because these man-made organizations are simply irrelevant to his identity as a Christian, a member of the Church.

### 2.3.2 Reforming Institutional “churches”

Some Christians may wish to remain in their institutional “churches” quite innocently at first, but over time it often becomes more and more difficult for

them to simply overlook their unbiblical institutional practices,<sup>§7.2</sup> In order to participate in the institution, they would naturally try to submit to the institutional leaders and follow the organization's by-laws as much as possible, but this often places them in compromising positions when "church" policies or theology directly violates the Scripture.<sup>§5.3.2.2</sup> Some are tempted to *compromise* and go along with various unbiblical practices of the institutional "church" simply because by nature they do not want to cause trouble or stir up dissention. *But just because you fellowship in an institutional "church", does not give you an excuse to violate Scripture right along with them.* Hiding behind the walls of an institutional "church" does not give you cover for disobeying Jesus Christ, nor does it release you from any of your obligations as a Christian in the Church.<sup>§5.3.2.2</sup>

### 2.3.2.1 Missionaries to the "churches"

Once the nature of the Church is understood, some just want to walk away from their institutional "church" and have nothing more to do with them. But others tend to be "reformers" who feel obligated to try to stay and change things. They love their friends too much to simply walk away and let them continue to be deceived by a false institutional environment. Thus, they want to stay and be a kind of "missionary" to their institutional "church" in hopes of showing other Christians the truth about what the Church is. While this may be a noble cause, there are usually only two consequences to this action – either the institutional "church" will cease to exist as an unbiblical division or you will ultimately be forced to leave. And unfortunately, the latter is normally the case!

Those of you who try to reform an institutional "church" are usually seen as a threat to the institutional leaders' power structure and accused of spreading false doctrine, or more ironically, causing division.<sup>§2.2.3.2</sup> Rather than changing their ways, it is easier for them to get rid of the "troublemaker" so they will usually *ask you to leave, make you want to leave, or force you to leave.* You might think that the leaders would owe it to you to at least consider the issue with an open mind, but that is almost never the case. Do not be surprised that after all of your years of dedicated service to the "church", the leaders will be quite happy to see you leave. This may be hard for you to accept now as you are reading this, but you will probably not be missed at all! This is a common theme in the testimony of many who have discovered the Church, only to be forced out of their institutional "church".<sup>§B.2</sup> Institutional "churches" are rarely abolished as there are tremendous politics and positions of power at stake which created their division in the first place. Some institutional "churches" have existed as unbiblical divisions for hundreds of years, so it is highly unlikely that they will have any interest to suddenly start obeying the Word of God now and give up their division.

If you endeavor to take on this "missionary" role, you should be warned that the truths of the Church are spiritually discerned and not easily understood by most institutional "church" members, especially if they are not Christians. *It is virtually impossible to recruit people or make them see the truth of the Church unless God has prepared their hearts spiritually.* Explaining the truth about the Church may confirm or awaken what is already in someone's heart, but otherwise no amount of Scriptural proof will seem to have any affect. You may be surprised

to find that many of the model “church” goers that you think would eagerly accept the truth about the Church, reject it entirely. You must realize that most of them have invested their entire lives in the unbiblical institutional “church” system and have thrived in it, which is why they are model “church goers”. But being good at playing “church” has no bearing whatsoever on a person’s spirituality in the Church. Just because someone is a committed member of an institution does not mean that they are necessarily committed to the truth. Indeed, it will often cause some to become even more defensive and resistant to the truth. Thus, you are advised to be careful with whom you share these truths. It is not necessarily wise to go around and dump these truths on just anyone. Notice that Jesus himself withheld the truth at times from those who could not bear it (John 16:12) and sometimes told others to withhold the truth (Matt. 8:4, 9:30, 12:16, 16:20, 17:9, Mark 1:44, 3:12, 5:43, 7:36, 8:30, 9:9, Luke 4:41, 8:56, 9:21). Some may try to use this book to recruit people out of institutional “churches”, but unless the seed of truth already exists in them, you probably won’t be able to convince them otherwise. Simply let the Lord lead you when and where to share these truths!

### 2.3.2.2 Institutional Elimination

If you are truly committed to being a “missionary” to an institutional “church”, you must ultimately be committed to its eventual demise as an unbiblical institution – *otherwise you would be compromising the truth of Scripture!* For an institutional “church” to be truly reformed, is for it to completely cease to exist. The goal is not to improve one particular tower, the goal is to eliminate the towers and meet in the common courtyard on the open grounds of the Church.<sup>§2.2.3</sup> The problem is not that there are some unbiblical practices that need reforming in the institutional “churches”; the problem is that institutional “churches” are themselves unbiblical! It is not really a matter of making adjustments to their practices, because *what they are* is wrong! If you keep trying to apply the principles of the Church in an institutional “church” you will probably just end up beating your head against the wall.<sup>§7.1</sup> There are many Biblical truths that will never be able to function in an institutional environment for it is like mixing oil and water.

To exist as an institution is to exist as division in the Body of Christ, which is completely unscriptural and unacceptable in the Church. If you are truly a successful “missionary”, then the Christians attending the “church” will renounce their institutional identity, eliminate their proprietary name, unincorporate, revoke their institutional memberships, etc. and thus the unbiblical organization itself will cease to exist as an institutional division. The Christians, of course, would then simply need to identify themselves with the Church and begin fellowshiping with one another in a Scriptural manner. *No relationships among Christians need to cease; only the institution itself should cease!* In fact, their relationships would then be greatly enhanced as they begin to experience spiritual fellowship with one another in a Scriptural manner. There would no longer be any unbiblical institutional barriers, false leadership structures, or other unbiblical practices to hinder the Life of the Church as God has intended.

### 2.3.3 Leaving Institutional “churches”

People leave institutional “churches” all of the time for all sorts of reasons: personality conflicts, doctrinal disagreements, finding a better “church”, moving to a new area, or even getting kicked out. When one institutional “church” doesn’t work out for some reason, most Christians just find another institutional “church” to join. In these cases, someone may have left an institutional “church”, but still the mindset of the institutional “church” has not necessarily left them. They are not leaving an institution because they recognize the Church; *they are simply leaving one institution to join another institution*. They are merely leaving one “church” for another “church”, because they still do not recognize the Church. Some people get so emotionally wounded or “burned” by an institution that they stop going to “church” altogether.<sup>§3.2.3.1</sup> Here again, they may have left their “church”, but they still have not embraced the Church. Should they ever decide to seek fellowship again, most of them would simply find another institutional “church” to go to because the institutional “church” *mentality* has not left them. You can take the man out of the institution, but it is difficult to take the institution out of the man. Lot’s wife left Sodom, but Sodom did not leave her (Gen. 19:26).

Obviously, there is no Scriptural example of a Christian leaving one institutional “church” and joining a different “church” because there weren’t any institutional “churches”! A Christian back then could not leave the Presbyterian sect and join the Methodist sect because they did not exist. There was only one

**“It was not the details of the sacramental and priestly system which drove me from the Establishment, deadly as they are in their nature. It was that I was looking for the body of Christ...”** – J. N. Darby

Church, and it wasn’t a building, meeting, or organization that a Christian could physically leave. The early Christians did not go to “church” and thus they could never leave a “church”.<sup>§3.2.3</sup> Thus, when “leaving” is spoken of here, the emphasis is on leaving the institutional mentality, which *may or may not* result in physically leaving a particular institutional “church”. Leaving an institutional “church” does not

mean you can leave Christian fellowship.<sup>§3.2.3.1</sup> The emphasis simply shifts from fellowshiping with an institution, to fellowshiping with Christians, regardless of any institutional affiliation. Institutional affiliation simply becomes irrelevant!<sup>§2.3.1.1</sup>

#### 2.3.3.1 A New Direction

After some time, many Christians eventually decide to step out of the limitations of their unbiblical institutional environments to begin functioning as the Church as God intended. If no Christians ever left the confines of their institutional “churches”, then a practical unity in the Church could never be realized.<sup>§2.2.3</sup> It is not that it is necessarily wrong for you to continue to attend an institutional “church”, but then again, there isn’t much that is necessarily right about it either. Once you begin to identify yourself with the Church, you may

soon lose the desire to fellowship with other Christians on the grounds of institutional division. Not because you are reacting to a particular practice within the division, *but because you no longer want to be a party to the division itself*. It makes little sense to be constrained to fellowship with Christians in a divisive institutional environment, if you can just as easily fellowship with other Christians in a Scriptural manner. At some point in time, it often becomes counterproductive to keep trying to put new wine into an old wineskin (Matt. 9:16-17, Mark 2:21-22, Luke 5:36-38). How wearisome it is to continue to put up with unbiblical fellowship,<sup>§3.2</sup> unbiblical meetings,<sup>§4.2</sup> unbiblical authority,<sup>§5.2</sup> unbiblical leadership,<sup>§6.2</sup> and unbiblical practices<sup>§7.2</sup> which hinder true spiritual fellowship in the Church. **“Why do you seek the living among the dead?”** (Luke 24:5).

Some may have to leave an institutional “church” because they are no longer welcome,<sup>§2.3.2.1</sup> *but many choose to leave once they simply no longer have a reason to stay*. You may be surprised at how many genuine Christians who truly love the Lord have simply stopped attending institutional “churches” because they are longing for something better. As you begin to base your fellowship with other Christians on your commonality in Christ, you may soon find that you no longer need an institutional framework to prop up your relationships. You may reach a point when you don’t want to waste your time constantly *reacting* to the unbiblical policies of the institutional “church” as much as you want to spend your time focusing on Jesus in spiritual fellowship with the Church.

**“In so far as my own life is concerned, it is going to be poured out to the last to get His people to the fullness of His will, and I am not going to accept [division] which is so far short of it.”**

**– T. Austin Sparks**

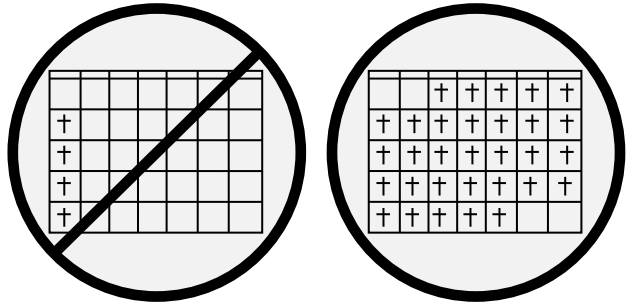
### 2.3.3.2 Counting the Cost

But before anyone stops attending their institutional “church”, they should first ask themselves, *“Are you sure you are ready to leave?”* Some people may be intellectually ready to leave the institutional “church” system, but spiritually they are not yet ready to accept the consequences. Many have left their institutional “churches” only to later return to Egypt because they failed to count the cost of what it means to fellowship as the Church.<sup>§3.3.1.3</sup> There is a personal cost to spiritual fellowship as you sacrifice your own independence, anonymity, superficiality, and compartmentalization of institutional religion.<sup>§3.1.2.1</sup> If you leave an institutional “church”, many of your current relationships will probably not be maintained beyond a casual acquaintanceship because the glue of institutional commonality will no longer be there to hold it together. You may come to discover that much of your fellowship was not actually based on commonality in Christ, but only on commonality within an institutional “church”. Thus, when your “church” attendance ends, your relationships with them also end, because many will not be willing to maintain fellowship with you outside of their institutional structure.

The unfortunate reality is that some who grasp the truths concerning the Church are simply not prepared to pay the cost of implementing them in their lives. They are not ready to part with a comfortable institutional environment, lose social status, or suffer persecution just for the sake of the truth alone.<sup>§3.3.1.2</sup> They would sing, “If none go with me, then I won’t follow.” Some would never consider leaving the confines of their nice institutional environment *unless they knew how they could benefit from it personally*. But this kind of thinking has no place in the kingdom of God. Are you truly committed to following Jesus? No matter what the cost? Ultimately there is a huge cost to those who are willing to be the Church, instead of just playing “church”. Going to “church” once a week and sitting passively in a pew doesn’t ask much of you. It is much easier to coast through life under the false safety net of Churchianity,<sup>§7.2.3.4</sup> rather than live the total commitment required of a true Christian. Christians persecuted in other countries continue to fellowship in the underground Church at the risk of their very lives. They have to fellowship this way because they have no other options. But surprise, there is really no other option for you either if you have truly decided to follow Jesus! Of course, if other Christians choose to obey the Scriptures with you, your experience will be much better, but your ability to obey should not hinge upon what other people do. You may have to plow the fallow ground long and hard in order to establish fellowship with others on the grounds of the Church, but the fellowship of the Church is worth fighting for!

## 2.4 Challenge Questions

- Which “church” do you go to? How is it that two people in the same town can each both “go to church” and yet they don’t both end up in the same place?
- Does your “church” have an institutional name? Why didn’t any of the Christians in the Bible form separate organizations and assign themselves unique names?
- Why does your “church” meet separately from other “churches” in your town that have virtually the same theology and practices? What prevents them from meeting together as one organization?
- Does your “church” treat Christians who are not members differently from those who are? Do non-members have all of the same privileges or are they treated as second-class Christians?
- Is your “church” willing to let any other Christian in town have use of their building and facilities for free?



# Chapter 3: Church Fellowship

## 3.1 Scriptural Truths

After learning exactly what the Church is, it is now appropriate to begin discussing exactly what the Church does. Unfortunately, many keep making the same mistake of trying to mimic the pattern of the early Church without really understanding what the Church is. Such efforts generally prove to be futile because the spiritual house cannot be built (1Pet. 2:5) unless it is built on the correct foundation (1Cor. 3:10-15). *You cannot do what the Church does without first being what the Church is!* Does sitting anonymously through a “church” service for an hour each week constitute Biblical fellowship? Is sitting in rows and staring at the backs of other people’s heads the way the family of God relates to each other? No, Biblical fellowship can only be experienced in a Biblical environment. Some may have a vague idea about what the Church is, but even that does not mean they will be able to do what the Church does. That is because fellowship in the Church involves more than just *knowing* what the Church is, it is a matter of *experiencing* what the Church is. You cannot experience the fellowship of the Church apart from the Life of the Church.<sup>§1.1.3</sup> This is so vitally important. It would be a grave mistake to skip ahead and try to apply the following chapters without first experiencing the spiritual fellowship that makes all these things possible.

### 3.1.1 Fellowship of the Spirit

The term “fellowship” in Scripture is translated from the Greek word “KOINΩNIA” #2842 which conveys the ideas of sharing, communion, partnership, and community. But what is the basis for our fellowship in the Church? A brief study of the word “KOINΩNIA” in Scripture will quickly answer this question. Here are a few examples:

- **“fellowship of His son, Jesus Christ our Lord”** (1Cor. 1:9)
- **“fellowship of the blood of Christ”** (1Cor. 10:16)
- **“fellowship of light”** (2Cor. 6:14)
- **“fellowship of the Holy Spirit”** (2Cor. 13:14)
- **“fellowship in the gospel”** (Phil. 1:5)
- **“fellowship of His sufferings”** (Phil. 3:10)
- **“fellowship of faith”** (Phm. 1:6)

Notice that the fellowship of the Church is clearly spiritual in nature. The same things that provide the basis for our spiritual unity are the same things that provide the basis of our spiritual fellowship – one Body, one Spirit, one Hope, one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, and one God (Eph. 4:4-6). These things alone provide the basis of our fellowship in the Church. In order to have **“the fellowship of the Spirit”** (2Cor. 13:14), one must first have the Spirit. **“But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.”** (Rom. 8:9) Without the Holy Spirit, a person can have no place in the Church. Those who do not possess the Life of the Spirit will only bring death to the assembly of Christians. Even if you have been born again, *you must continue to be filled with the Spirit* (Acts 4:8,31, 9:17, 13:9,52, Eph. 5:18). The presence of the Spirit should not be a sporadic activity that only occurs during a heightened emotional time during a “worship service”; fellowship in the Spirit is to be a continuous experience. Christians cannot disconnect and reconnect to the Spirit whenever it suits them, but must continue to walk in the Spirit at all times. **“If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.”** (Gal. 5:25)

The Church is a *spiritual organism*, not a physical organization.<sup>§1.1.3</sup> A spiritual organism has fellowship in the Spirit, but a physical organization can only have fellowship in the flesh. **“For those of the flesh set their mind on things of the flesh, but those of the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.”** (Rom. 8:5) Worldly organizations and social clubs fellowship in the flesh because they are held together by compatible personality types, liturgical tastes, common interests, similar opinions, or cultural traits.<sup>§3.2.1</sup>

The Church, however, is not based on fellowship in the flesh, but on fellowship in the Spirit. **“We have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God.”** (1Cor. 2:12) Fellowship in the Church is not natural, but *supernatural*. The world will never understand the type of intimate fellowship that is only made possible by the Spirit of God. Christians

**“Human fellowship can go to great lengths, but not all the way. Fellowship with God can go to all lengths.”**

**– Oswald Chambers**

may be completely incompatible in the flesh, yet they still can have fellowship in the Holy Spirit. **“So from now on, we recognize no one according to the flesh.”** (2Cor. 5:16) That is because our fellowship is not dependent on personalities; our fellowship is centered around Jesus Christ. **“And our fellowship is with the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ.”** (1Jn. 1:3) Jesus Christ must always be the central “fellow” in our fellowship!



### 3.1.1.1 Priesthood of Believers

As previously discussed, people become members of the Church when they are born again of the Spirit.<sup>§1.1.1.1</sup> **“But the one who is joined to the Lord is one in Spirit.”** (1Cor. 6:17) Under the Old Covenant, priests were instituted to serve as *intermediaries* between God and man, but that system was abolished under the New Covenant where each Christian is now given *direct access* to the Holy Spirit. Under the New Covenant there is only **“one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.”** (1Tim. 2:5) There are no longer any other “middle men” as it is the responsibility of each Christian to know the Lord personally and to serve Him directly through the power of the Holy Spirit. *Everyone* must know God personally not just a committed nucleus of core members. **“And no one will ever teach his neighbor or his brother saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ because everyone will know Me from the least to the greatest of them.”** (Heb. 8:11) There will be no grandchildren in Heaven, only children (John 1:12-13). **“I will be their God and they will be My people.”** (Jer. 24:7, 32:38, Ezek. 11:20, 37:23, Heb. 8:10)

Thus, there is no longer just one “priest” that can minister per group,<sup>§3.2.2.3</sup> for under the New Covenant, every Christian is a priest before God! **“And You made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God and they will reign on the earth.”** (Rev. 5:10; cf. Rev. 1:6, 20:6) **“But you are an elite class, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s possession.”** (1Pet. 2:9; cf. 1Pet. 2:5)

Old Covenant	New Covenant
Elite group of priests served before God	Everyone is a priest before God
Some leaders were filled with the Spirit	Everyone is filled with Holy Spirit
Exceptional people had spiritual gifts	Everyone exercises spiritual gifts
A few prophets walked with the Lord	Everyone knows the Lord personally

There are no “go betweens” in the Church to hide behind or blame **“for each one should carry his own load”** (Gal. 6:5). *A priest does not need another priest to go before the Lord for himself*, for *everyone* can hear directly from the Lord. **“And as for you, the anointing that you received from Him remains in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you.”** (1Jn. 2:27; cf. John 6:45, Rom. 15:14, Heb. 5:12) Many Christians are intellectually aware that we are all supposed to be priests, but very few actually live their lives that way. Will you?

The reason that the Lord gives people His Spirit was similar in both the Old Testament and New Testament – to empower individuals to do *His work*. The same Spirit that was once given to Kings, Prophets, and Priests is now given to you so that you will be empowered to do the will of God. *Everyone* is able to do the works of Jesus. **“Truly, truly I tell you, those who believe in Me will do the works that I do and they will do greater than these because I am going to the Father.”** (John 14:12) The Spirit is not given just so that people can feel good and have a “bless me” party. Every Christian is now a priest, and thus every Christian is expected to minister as a priest.<sup>§3.1.3</sup> Could you imagine what it would be like if an all-star cast of “pastors” in your town were assembled into a “dream team” and

told to function together as one Church? Okay, now let us improve on this hypothetical and imagine that *every* Christian were walking in the miraculous power and anointing of Jesus Christ. Welcome to the Church!

### 3.1.1.2 Spiritual Gifts

Spiritual fellowship is further enhanced as each Christian shares their spiritual gifts with one another:

**“Now there are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of services, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of operations, but the same God works all things in everyone. But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”** (1Cor. 12:4-7)

Christians are given various spiritual **“gifts”** (Rom. 12:6, 1Cor. 12:4), **“functions”** (Rom. 12:4), **“manifestations”** (1Cor. 12:7), **“operations”** (1Cor. 12:6), and **“services”** (1Cor. 12:5) to express in the Church. There is not any particular official word to encompass all these meanings in Scripture, so the term “spiritual gifts” will simply be used here for consistency purposes. Spiritual gifts are given by the Lord (1Cor. 12:18,28, Eph. 4:11) for the expressed purpose of **“equipping the saints for the work of ministry to build up the Body of Christ”** (Eph. 4:12). There are four major lists of spiritual gifts presented in Scripture. Notice that all of the lists *overlap* each other, yet none of them are exactly the same:

Rom. 12:6-8	1Cor. 12:8-10	1Cor. 12:28-30	Eph. 4:11
		apostles	apostles
prophesying	prophecy	prophets	prophets
	knowledge		
exhorting			
teaching		teachers	teachers
	wisdom		
	miracles	miracles	
	faith		
giving			
			evangelists
	healing	healing	
serving		helpfulness	
leadership		administration	pastors
	discernment		
mercy			
	tongues	tongues	
	interpretation	interpretation	

Note that all four lists of spiritual gifts were written down by the same guy who was attempting to describe the incredible diversity of spiritual gifts that were emerging in the Church. Paul was not legislating which set of gifts were allowable; *he was merely describing many of the gifts that were available*. Paul made no effort to make the lists the same each time – they do not contain all the same items, they do not contain the same number of items, and they do not use the same terms to describe the same items. Sometimes the gifts are referenced by nouns describing the role (prophet, evangelist, teacher) or function (prophecy, evangelism, teaching), and other times they are referenced by verbs describing the act (prophesy, evangelize, teach) or action (prophesying, evangelizing, teaching). Thus, through the gift of *prophecy* a *prophet* may *prophesy* a *prophetic* word and through the gift of *teaching*, a *teacher* may *teach* a *teaching*. All these forms are used throughout these lists, and all these forms are even used within the same list!

Unfortunately, there are several common misconceptions today concerning spiritual gifts. First, *there is not a finite number of spiritual gifts* describing what Christians can or should be doing. This should be obvious as none of the lists contain all the items and each list contains at least one item that is not mentioned in any of the other lists. Isn't it strange that Paul could not keep the number and names of spiritual gifts straight, since they were different each time in each list? And there are other items that were not mentioned on those lists such as preacher (1Tim. 2:7, 2Tim. 1:11), deacon (Phil. 1:1, 1Tim. 3:8,10,12-13), and leader (Acts 15:22, Heb. 13:7,17,24). If each of these lists were meant to be exhaustive then the Romans would be arguing with the Corinthians and Ephesians about how many spiritual gifts there were and what they were! Second, *there is no limit on the number of spiritual gifts* a person may have. Paul is referred to as an apostle (Rom. 1:1, 1Cor. 1:1, 2Cor. 1:1, Gal. 1:1, Eph. 1:1, Col. 1:1, 1Tim. 1:1), preacher, teacher (1Tim. 2:7, 2Tim. 1:11), prophet (Acts 13:1), deacon (2Cor. 3:6, Eph. 3:7) and gifted as a healer (Acts 14:9-10, 28:8-9), evangelist (Rom. 15:20), miracle worker (Acts 28:3-5, 2Cor. 12:12), and speaker of tongues (1Cor. 14:18). Other individuals in Scripture are also cited as having multiple spiritual gifts such as Peter, John, Philip, Barnabas, Silas, and Timothy. Third, *no spiritual gift places one person above another*. All spiritual gifts are interdependent (1Cor. 12:20-21), indispensable (1Cor. 12:22), and equally honored (1Cor. 12:23-25). Just because one is gifted as an evangelist or prophet does not place him above a teacher, overseer, or any other Christian for that matter (1Cor. 3:5). Spiritual gifts should never be confused with institutional offices or positions<sup>§6.2.2</sup> that carry official ranks or titles.<sup>§6.2.1.1</sup> Each one should simply serve others as they are directed by the Lord.

**“The pressing issue before us is that everyone must serve... the work must be done by the entire church...”**

**– Watchman Nee**

**“Each one has received a gift to serve one another as good stewards of the multi-faceted grace of God.”** (1Pet. 4:10) Notice it says that **“each one has”**, not **“only one has”**, because every Christian is a priest. (The existence and abuse of supernatural gifts are beyond the scope of this discussion.)

### 3.1.2 Family of God

Those who are truly connected to Jesus will also be connected to one another. The same Spirit that connects us to the Head is the same Spirit that connects the Body together. **“What we have seen and heard, we also proclaim to you that you also may have fellowship with us and our fellowship is with the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ.”** (1Jn. 1:3) Just like the spokes of a wheel, we are all connected to Jesus *and* to each other by the same Spirit. Those who claim to fellowship with Jesus Christ **“but walk in darkness”** (1Jn. 1:6) will not be able to experience spiritual fellowship with one another. Perhaps they could have fellowship in the flesh, yes, but not fellowship in the Spirit. It is only because we share in the Spirit that we can truly have spiritual fellowship with one another. **“But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another.”** (1Jn. 1:7) Having membership in an institutional “church” will not necessarily enable anyone to have fellowship in the Church.<sup>§1.1.1.1</sup> It is only as we have genuine fellowship **“with the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ”** (1Jn. 1:3) that we can truly have fellowship with one another.

The Church is more than just a collection of independent Christians, for we are connected together as a **“body knit together”** (Col. 2:19), **“members of one another”** (Rom. 12:5, Eph. 4:25), **“contending as one man”** (Phil. 1:27), **“submitting to one another”** (Eph. 5:21). The Church does not function through anonymous “attendance” at meetings, the Church functions through spiritual relationships with one another. Scripture uses the concept of a spiritual **“family”** (Gal. 6:10, Eph. 2:19, 1Tim. 3:15, 1Pet. 2:5) to underscore our inherent commitment to our brothers and sisters in Christ. Your relationships with other Christians should be every bit as intimate, informal, committed, and caring as any biological relative. Indeed, your

**“The church isn’t just a particular building or congregation but the spiritual fellowship of all who belong to Jesus Christ. If we belong to Christ, we also belong to each other.” – Billy Graham**

birth in this spiritual family even takes precedence over your physical family (Matt. 10:35-37, 12:46-50, Luke 14:26). **“There is no one who has left a house, brothers, sisters, mother, father, children, or fields for My sake or the gospel’s sake, but will receive a hundred times as much now at this time houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and fields with persecutions, and in the coming age, eternal life.”** (Mark 10:29-30) Just as a child does not get to decide who his brothers and sisters are in his physical family, Christians do not get to pick and choose who they can fellowship with in their spiritual family. It does not matter if you like them or not, you are automatically connected together with them in the Spirit as one family.<sup>§1.3.1.2</sup>

Scripture also uses the concept of the **“Body of Christ”** (1Cor. 12:12-27) as all the individual members function together as one Body.<sup>§1.1.2</sup> **“From Him the whole Body is fitted and held together by every supporting joint according to the work in proportion to each part causing the Body’s growth by building itself up in love.”** (Eph. 4:16) Each member of the Body does not act independently, but

works together in harmony, coordinated by the directions of the Head. **“And the eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you’ or again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you’.”** (1Cor. 12:21) The mindset of a “lone ranger” Christian is completely incompatible with Scripture.<sup>§3.2.3.1</sup>

Notice the kind of committed relationships that the early Christians had:

**“And all the believers were together and held everything in common; and they sold their property and possessions and distributed them to everyone accordingly to those who had need. Every day they continued to meet in the temple with one accord. They broke bread from house to house and shared their meals in gladness and simplicity of heart.”** (Acts 2:44-46)

It is not recorded that the Christians were commanded to share as a community in this way, for that was just the natural (or should we say supernatural) result of fellowship in the Spirit. And this is the same type of communal life that can arise from fellowship in the Spirit today. This was not just a one-time occurrence that can never be repeated again; this is what is still happening now!<sup>§B.2</sup> This type of lifestyle is not an unreachable ideal, theoretical pipe dream, or unrealistic goal; *this is the norm that should be strived for*. This isn’t the “icing on the cake”; this is the cake! This is the fruit that should automatically result unless hindered by men’s works of the flesh. *If Christians are not sharing their lives together, then you can expect that something is fundamentally wrong.*<sup>§3.2</sup>

### 3.1.2.1 Committed Relationships

Fellowship in the Spirit is not an optional exercise that only occurs whenever it is mutually beneficial or convenient to the parties involved. As we walk in the Spirit, this *necessarily* connects us to one another for we are each **“members of one another”** (Rom. 12:5, Eph. 4:25). Christians should be actively involved in one another’s lives **“daily”** (Acts 2:46, 5:42, 6:1, Heb. 3:13). Fellowship is not a once-a-week meeting that only lasts for one hour, but should be a *continuous* expression of the Spirit through daily relationships with one another. Commitment to Christ goes hand-in-hand with commitment to His Church, because the Head is not separate from the Body. Christians can do many things individually in the context of their personal relationship with the Lord (prayer, worship, evangelism, etc.), but some things can only be done corporately in fellowship with other Christians through relationships with one another. For example, Christians are commanded to:

- **“be devoted to”** (Rom. 12:10)
- **“honor”** (Rom. 12:10, Phil. 2:3)
- **“be like minded toward”** (Rom. 12:16, 15:5)
- **“edify”** (Rom. 14:19, 1Th. 5:11)
- **“accept”** (Rom. 15:7)
- **“admonish”** (Rom. 15:14, Col. 3:16)

- **“greet”** (Rom. 16:16, 1Cor. 16:20, 2Cor. 13:12, 1Pet. 5:14)
- **“wait for”** (1Cor. 11:33)
- **“care for”** (1Cor. 12:25)
- **“serve”** (Gal. 5:13, 1Pet. 4:10)
- **“carry burdens of”** (Gal. 6:2)
- **“bear with”** (Eph. 4:2, Col 3:13)
- **“forgive”** (Eph. 4:32, Col. 3:13)
- **“be kind to”** (Eph. 4:32, 1Th. 5:15)
- **“sing to”** (Eph. 5:19, Col. 3:16)
- **“submit to”** (Eph. 5:21, 1Pet. 5:5)
- **“teach”** (Col. 3:16)
- **“encourage”** (1Th. 4:18, 5:11, Heb. 3:13, 10:25)
- **“spur on”** (Heb. 10:24)
- **“confess faults to”** (Jas. 5:16)
- **“pray for”** (Jas. 5:16)
- **“be hospitable to”** (1Pet. 4:9)
- **“fellowship with”** (1Jn. 1:7)

**“...one another”**. Obviously, “one another” requires at least another one! You cannot experience these things in isolation from other Christians. These things were not given as optional advice; they are the *commands*. There are also things we are commanded *not* to do to **“one another”** (Rom. 14:13, Gal. 5:15,26, Col. 3:9, Jas. 4:11, 5:9). Obedience to these commands does not depend at all on whether you feel like it or not. Failure to obey these commands is *sin*, plain and simple. **“Therefore to the one who knows good to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.”** (Jas. 4:17) These commands are not meant to be followed begrudgingly, but should be the natural result of an attitude of mutuality, togetherness, and unity in the Spirit. Many Christians will carelessly skim over these Scriptures without ever really grasping their *responsibilities* towards one another in Christ. Go back and read the list again slowly! Does any of this sound like a loose connection of independent Christians who function together only when it is mutually beneficial? What ever happened to self-sacrifice, giving till it hurts, extravagant love, and depth of commitment?

Because of our commitment to one another, Christians are also commanded to deal very sternly with anyone who **“calls himself a brother”** but is sexually immoral, greedy, impure, idolater, drunkard, swindler (1Cor. 5:9-11, Eph. 5:5-7), idle (2Th. 3:6), divisive (Tit. 3:10), bitter (Heb. 12:15), godless (Heb. 12:16), etc. Although this kind of “tough love” can be quite difficult at times, obedience to these commands is still not optional (Matt. 18:15-17). **“See that no one falls short of the grace of God; that no bitter root grows up causing trouble and thereby many be defiled.”** (Heb. 12:15) The Church is not a “hands off” impersonal gathering of acquaintances who learn to tolerate each other’s sin.<sup>§1.1.3.1</sup> “This problem doesn’t concern me”, “I don’t like confrontation”, and “That’s not my ministry” are not valid excuses. The responsibility of rebuking someone caught in a sin cannot be shirked and passed off to any kind of leader, but is directly given as the responsibility of *every* Christian. Notice that Matthew 18:15-17 does *not* read like this: “If your brother sins against you, go and tell the pastor. But if he will not listen to him, have him

bring along one or two elders. If he refuses to listen to them, have the pastor denounce him before the church.” No, the responsibility of rebuking and correcting in love begins directly with anyone who sees a brother or sister in error.<sup>§1.1.3.2</sup> **“Brothers, see that none of you has an evil unbelieving heart departing from the living God.”** (Heb. 3:12)

As you can see, Christians are *accountable* to one another in virtually every way. What a stark contrast to the institutional “church” system where there is no accountability as the members attend meetings anonymously<sup>§4.2.2</sup> and their leaders do not have to answer to their congregations<sup>§6.2.1.3</sup>. In the Church, however, each person is directly accountable to God...who has then commanded us to hold each other accountable to Him. **“Am I my brother’s keeper?”** (Gen. 4:9). Yes! *But this accountability only goes in one direction.* We hold each other accountable only to God, *not to ourselves or to an organization!* Your brother is not accountable to you, you hold your brother accountable to God; you are not accountable to your brother, your brother holds you accountable to God. It is clear in Scripture that there is no special accountability to leaders, beyond what is incumbent upon all Christians.<sup>§5.1.2.1</sup> This does not mean we don’t have to submit to others, but only that we do not ultimately answer to them.<sup>§6.1.3</sup> On judgment day, only God will be sitting on the throne and each man will have to give an account to Him alone (Heb. 9:27, Rev. 20:11-13).

### 3.1.2.2 Environment of Love

What then should be the predominant emphasis of Christian fellowship? Ultimately, all of the “one another” commands listed above could be summed up in the single command to **“love one another”** (John 13:34, 15:12, Rom. 12:10, 13:8, 1Th. 4:9, 1Pet. 1:22, 4:8, 1Jn. 3:11,14,23, 4:7,11-12, 2Jn. 1:5). **“A new command I give you, that you love one another. As I have loved you, so you also must love one another.”** (John 13:34) Love is ultimately the fulfillment of the entire Law (Matt. 22:35-40, Mark 12:38-21, Rom. 13:8-10, Gal. 5:14, Jas. 2:8). Love is not just performing a set of specific deeds but a way of life: **“Let everything about you be done in love”** (1Cor. 16:14), **“Pursue love”** (1Cor. 14:1), **“Walk in love”** (Eph. 5:2).

**“Love for God is evidenced by our Love for others.”**

**– Anonymous**

This kind of love is not humanistic, fleshly, or sentimental, but is deeply committed, sincere, and true. We must love each other in the Spirit (Col. 1:8), not in the flesh. **“Love is patient, love is kind. Love is not jealous, not boastful, not proud, not rude, not self-seeking, not short-tempered, not thinking evil. Love does not rejoice over wrong, but rejoices with the truth. Love covers all things, trusts all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.”** (1Cor. 13:4-8) Who wouldn’t want to fellowship in an environment like that? Welcome to the Church!

Is the Christian life merely about “church” services, programs, and tithing? People may argue about the merit of those activities, **“but the greatest of these is love”** (1Cor. 13:13). The Pharisees were extremely focused on all their religious duties too, but they did not have love (Luke 11:42). **“Whoever does not love, does**

**not know God, because God is love.”** (1Jn. 4:8) All of the validity of speaking in tongues, prophecy, knowledge, faith, generosity, and martyrdom is useless without the foundational environment of love (1Cor. 13:1-3, Col. 3:14). The love for the **“brotherhood of believers”** (1Pet. 2:17) is a fundamental sign of a genuine Christian (1Jn. 3:14). If this love for the brothers and sisters is missing, then *something is fundamentally wrong*. **“Anyone who says he is in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness.”** (1Jn. 2:9) So many organizations keep trying to play “church” without this fundamental commitment to each other. **“Dear children, let us not love in word or tongue, but with actions and truth.”** (1Jn. 3:18) Fellowship is more about sharing together in His sufferings (Phil. 3:10) than simply gaining head knowledge. Would you rather be known as someone who had a great theological intellect, or someone who had great love? The world is to know that we are Christians by our love, not by our bumper stickers, newspaper ads, and signs on “church” buildings. **“By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”** (John 13:35)

### 3.1.3 Outreach

Just like natural life, one of the primary characteristics of spiritual Life is that it reproduces. Any valid spiritual fellowship will inherently want to reach out to other fellows. The Church is commanded to reach the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ (Matt. 24:14, John 4:35-38, 2Cor. 5:18-20, 2Tim. 4:2,5). **“Therefore go make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”** (Matt. 28:19) Christians are not to isolate themselves into a utopian community hidden away from the world, for we are the **“salt of the earth”**, the **“light of the world”**, a **“city on a hill”** (Matt. 5:13-14), **“shining like stars in the universe”** in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation (Phil. 2:15). The Church must go out into the world because the world can’t come into the Church.<sup>§1.1.3.1</sup> Scripture documents that this can be accomplished in a variety of ways: witnessing to others one-on-one (John 4:6-26, Acts 8:26-40), open-air preaching (Luke 4:43, Acts 2:14), performing miracles (Matt. 9:2-8, Acts 3:1-10), etc. **“Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed.”** (Phil. 1:18) If reaching out to others is not a normal result of your fellowship, then perhaps you are not having the right kind of fellowship. **“Therefore knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men.”** (2Cor. 5:11) If the believers you fellowship with are not

**“If you have no wish to bring others to heaven, you are not going there yourself.”**

**– C. H. Spurgeon**

actively interested in sharing the gospel, then *something is fundamentally wrong*. Any group that does not share the Life, probably did not have the Life to begin with. They can’t share what they don’t have! Experience has shown that groups

who become self-focused or inward-centered soon decline spiritually, resulting in politics, backbiting, and empty rituals. Their meetings eventually degenerate into nothing more than “bless me” parties with limited anointing since they are not walking on the front lines of God’s will.



Certainly, not everybody will be spiritually gifted as an evangelist, but everybody is still required to **“do the work of an evangelist”** (2Tim. 4:5). Jesus said, **“Follow after Me and I will make you become fishers of men.”** (Mark 1:17) Evangelism is not meant to be a sporadic activity where every once in a while you get under enough guilt that you go out and perform your evangelistic “duty” thereby easing your conscience so that you can feel spiritual again. Evangelism is lifestyle – a natural result of spiritual Life, that is, if you are really connected to the Life. Evangelism does not have to be a “hit and run” or “lump and dump” activity, but is a *privilege* of sharing of our spiritual lives. **“So longing for you, we were pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our lives because you became dear to us.”** (1Th. 2:8)

Evangelism is one example of the responsibility that comes with the privilege of serving as a priest. If you are a priest, then who are you a priest to? **“He has committed to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors on behalf of Christ, as if God were appealing through us.”** (2Cor. 5:19-20) The Spirit wasn’t given to you just for you; the Spirit was given to you so that you could minister to others. What exactly did you think a priest was supposed to do? Just passively sit through a “church” service once a week? No! We are to do the same things that Jesus did...and even greater. **“Truly, truly I tell you, those who believe in Me will do the works that I do and they will do greater than these because I am going to the Father.”** (John 14:12) That’s right, the same things that Jesus did are the same things that you are supposed to do. (Christianity would be a great religion if it weren’t for that Bible!) ☺ **“Those who say they abide in Him must also walk as He walked.”** (1Jn. 2:6; cf. 1Pet. 2:21) Miraculous signs sometimes accompany those who are reaching out to others in order to confirm the gospel (Mark 16:17-18, Acts 8:13, 14:3, Rom. 15:19, Heb. 2:4). At the end of your life, will the only signs that follow you be that you tithed and kept a pew warm? A great deal more on this topic has already been covered by many other books, so only a few relevant points have been highlighted here.

### 3.2 Counterfeit Philosophies

The community of sharing in a close-knit spiritual family described above is usually very attractive to most Christians. Most Christians instinctively know that this is the way things ought to be among brothers and sisters in Christ, and yet few rarely experience anything close to this. Why is this? Although many organizations set it as their goal to emulate the pattern of Acts 2:42-47, they never seem to be able to achieve this in their institutional environment. For apart from a valid context of Biblical fellowship, other aspects of the Church will not function properly. *There is no Church apart from the Life of the Church!* Most institutional “churches” do not have the right kind of meetings,<sup>§4.2</sup> authority,<sup>§5.2</sup> leadership,<sup>§6.2</sup> or practices<sup>§7.2</sup> precisely because they do not have the right kind of fellowship. Thus, the best they can hope to do is to superficially mimic that which would otherwise naturally result from the Life of the Church. Those who can...do, and those who can’t...fake it!

How is it that so many organizations claim to be a “church”, and yet they don’t experience anything like the Church depicted in the New Testament? They claim they are following the Scriptures, yet they don’t experience anything like the fellowship described in those same Scriptures.<sup>§3.2.2.1</sup> In futility, they resort to their institutional methods and struggle in the flesh to artificially imitate that which flows quite naturally from the Life of the Spirit. Nevertheless, they press on! There is no need to discuss how to fellowship in an institutional “church” because there should not be any institutional “churches” to begin with!<sup>§2.3.2.2</sup>

### 3.2.1 Fellowship of the Flesh

The creation of institutional “churches” did not come about through fellowship in the Spirit, but through fellowship in the flesh. The institutional basis for their existence is usually not any different than any other worldly organization. Whatever gives an institutional “church” its unique identity in the flesh *apart from fellowship in the Spirit* usually establishes the basis for its existence.<sup>§1.2.2</sup> Otherwise, there wouldn’t be any need for them to exist! There are many fleshly characteristics that provide the common grounds for fellowship in an institutional “church”:

- *Liturgical tastes* - musical genres, preaching styles, contemporary/traditional services.
- *Personality types* - emotional/logical, charismatic/reflective, activist/passive dispositions.
- *Common interests* - political activism, denominational doctrines, educational programs, professional goals, food co-ops.
- *Cultural traits* - race, culture, ethnicity, nationality, economic status, or language.

These are some of the fleshly attributes that hold many institutional “churches” together and give them a distinct identity. These are the types of things that make one institutional “church” different from the other institutional “churches” and maintain their grounds for division.<sup>§2.2.1.1</sup> Apart from *institutional relationships* based on these common interests in the flesh, many of these institutional “churches” would simply cease to exist. Some groups may have once started with the Spirit but then later degenerated into an institutional “church” after they began relying on these things of the flesh. **“Are you so foolish that having begun in the Spirit you are now being perfected in the flesh?”** (Gal. 3:3)

No one is saying that there can never be any spiritual activity within an institutional “church”, but only that that is not the basis for their existence. The institutional “churches” that unify around a particular combination of these characteristics divide themselves from other institutional “churches” that unify around a different combination of these characteristics. Ironically, *the fleshly things that provide “unity” within an institutional “church” are the same things that create division in the Church*. The fleshly “unity” within institutional “churches” works against the spiritual unity of the Church. They are diametrically

opposed. **“For the flesh has desires against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh.”** (Gal. 5:17; cf. John 3:6, Rom. 8:5, Gal. 6:8, Phil. 3:3) The religious spirit of the “church” fights against the Spirit of the Church! **“But even then as the one born according to the flesh persecuted the one born of the Spirit, so it is also now.”** (Gal. 4:29) Of course, Christians most certainly have flesh, but we simply do not fellowship with one another on that basis (2Cor. 5:16).

### 3.2.2 Priesthood of Couch Potatoes

As mentioned above, *everyone* in the Church is to function as a priest (1Pet. 2:5,9, Rev. 1:6, 5:10, 20:6), sharing their spiritual gifts (1Cor. 12:7,11, Eph. 4:7) and serving one another (Gal. 5:13, 1Pet. 4:10) on a daily basis (Acts 2:46, 5:42, 6:1, Heb. 3:13). But this is hardly the case in most institutional “churches”. The average institutional “church” member does not function as a priest and is neither responsible nor accountable for anything. By far, the vast majority do nothing but attend a one hour program once a week.<sup>§4.2.2</sup> The typical “church” member is not expected to preach the gospel, feed the hungry, minister to prisoners, or visit the sick.<sup>§3.1.3</sup> In harsh reality, their main responsibility is to tithe so that others can do these things for them. Have you noticed that being a “partner” with most ministries simply means giving them your money? They are happy to be impersonal supporters of an institution with a good moral cause, but just don’t expect them to devote their lives to God or anything. Undoubtedly, some of them are actually non-Christians so it would be foolish to expect much more from them anyway.

The members who are Christians, however, are conditioned to become *institutionalized* and essentially trained to become passive spectators. Their spiritual gifts lie dormant and have atrophied because someone else has become a priest for them. They do not grow by spiritual osmosis<sup>§4.2.2.4</sup> any more than couch potatoes build muscles by watching sports on TV. The nature of the Church is not experienced by passively sitting in a pew on Sunday mornings and listening to sermons, even if the sermons are wonderful. Indeed, anything beyond sitting in a pew is usually viewed as “extra credit” for nothing else is required of the typical “church” member. Although this passivity is now considered normal behavior for Christians today, *they do not realize that they have been deceived into bondage and are sinning as lazy disobedient Christians*. Lord have mercy! Here is an interesting “chicken or the egg” paradox to consider: Did the institutional “church” environment create lazy disobedient Christians or did lazy disobedient Christians create the institutional “church” environment?

#### 3.2.2.1 Where’s the Beef?

Most institutional “churches” claim to be a “church” and yet daily spiritual fellowship is rarely found among them. How can something claim to be a “church” when it has almost no characteristics of the Church described in Scripture? Institutional “churches” are very good at buildings, pews, stained glass, robes, altars, organs, and all sorts of other things that aren’t found

anywhere in the New Testament, yet they have almost no daily fellowship, accountability, spiritual gifts, or outreach which are *commanded* in the New Testament!<sup>§7.2.1.1</sup> They may have a “fellowship hall” or a “fellowship hour”, but rarely do they have any genuine fellowship of the Spirit! Shaking the hand of the greeter on the way in, sitting passively through a “church” service, and then shaking the “pastor’s” hand on the way out hardly counts as Biblical fellowship! Indeed, many institutional “churches” seem to function just fine *without any* fellowship of the Spirit.<sup>§1.2.2.2</sup>

However attractive an institutional “church” may be, it is only a poor substitute for intimate relationships among believers. Institutional programs and meetings will never be able to take the place of love shared between one another. Your institutional “church” may have majestic ornamentation, elaborate theology,

**“The Church exists for nothing else but to draw men into Christ, to make them little Christs. If they are not doing that, all the cathedrals, clergy, missions, sermons, even the Bible itself, are simply a waste of time.”**

**– C. S. Lewis**

and outstanding programs, but it is hard to **“love one another deeply”** (1Pet. 4:8) when you only see the backs of other people’s heads for an hour each week, and then only have a few minutes of superficial conversation at the end of the service. Everyone keeps a polite distance from each other with the philosophy of “Don’t touch my life”.<sup>§3.1.2.1</sup> That way there are no conflicts with each other, but then no one is really being helped either. They have

“safety in numbers” as they maintain a comfortable anonymous distance from each other. The men who run these institutional “churches” try to choose the best meeting formats, contemporary practices, and Sunday school materials, *but what about daily fellowship, accountability, intimate relationships, and spiritual gifts?* They major in the minors and minor in the majors. Institutional “churches” work long and hard to perfect their elaborate practices, structures, and hierarchies, and then overlook the very basis of spiritual fellowship as a “minor detail”. That will come later, right? What is this other foundation they are building on (1Cor. 3:10-15), if it isn’t the fellowship of the Spirit? These unbiblical environments they have created do not exist in addition to daily fellowship, but instead have replaced daily fellowship.<sup>§7.1.3.3</sup>

Since institutional “churches” are not a part of the Church, it is not surprising that they do not do much of the work of the Church. Without intimate spiritual fellowship, an institution may look like a sandwich, but it is all bread! They have **“a form of godliness but deny its power”** (2Tim. 3:5). The fellowship described in the book of Acts is usually nothing but a theoretical ideal to them, nothing that most of them ever really expect to achieve. The fellowship of the Spirit that they so very much desire is merely held out as an unreachable fantasy.

### 3.2.2.2 Orange Trees in Antarctica

Now some would maintain that they do have good fellowship in their institutional “churches”. Oh, really? Are you fellowshiping with one another *daily* outside of the scheduled meetings? Are you involved in sharing each other’s

lives in normal everyday settings? Are you actively ministering your spiritual gifts outside of “church” services? Are you obeying all the “one another” commands in Scripture? And is *everyone* fully engaged in this type of fellowship or just a committed nucleus or smaller core of the group? **“From the least to the greatest”** (Heb. 8:11)? Occasionally, some may indeed experience a limited form of fellowship, but in an institutional setting it is impossible to fully experience the depth of fellowship that God intends.<sup>§1.3.2</sup> The institutional “churches” of men are simply not capable of this – but the Church of God is. Trying to experience Biblical fellowship in an unbiblical environment is like trying to grow orange trees in Antarctica. Institutional “churches” keep trying to generate fruit, but they are simply doing it in the wrong environment. They are trying to put **“new wine into old wineskins”** (Matt. 9:16-17, Mark 2:21-22, Luke 5:36-38). They may be sincerely trying to follow the Bible and yet ignore that same Bible when it contradicts their very existence as a man-made institution.<sup>§2.2.1.1</sup> They may have every ecclesiastical implement that men can dream up, but they are trying to add Biblical Life to an unbiblical foundation. They can try to liven up dog food by adding spices, but they are still eating dog food. An institutional “church” is simply not the container God has designed for His Spirit.

Many Christian leaders realize that their fellowship is not quite what it ought to be, but they keep trying to fix it within their unbiblical institutional frameworks. Many of them first start out by building a wonderful institutional structure, and then keep wondering why it is so difficult to add dynamic spiritual fellowship to it. Yet they press on! Unlike the Church, the institutional “churches” *do* contain **“tares among the wheat”** (Matt. 13:24-30) and **“leaven”** in the **“batch of dough”** (1Cor. 5:6-8) in addition to all their unbiblical practices. They keep trying to fellowship as a group of Christians when not all of them may even be Christians.<sup>§1.2.4.2</sup> Some of the members may be sincerely trying to cultivate an environment of spirituality, but then others mess it up and interject their own worldly ideas, carnal opinions, or anything else that is not led by the Spirit.<sup>§7.3.1</sup> **“What fellowship has light with darkness?”** (2Cor. 6:14) But none of these things can be tolerated in the Church.<sup>§1.1.3.1</sup> That is why the Church is an ideal place for the fellowship of the Church! No kidding!

### 3.2.2.3 The Priesthood of One

In most institutional “churches”, the priesthood of all believers has been reduced to only a *priesthood of one* which functions out of an unbiblical position called the “pastor” or “priest”.<sup>§6.2.3.2</sup> Everyone else forgoes their own spiritual responsibilities and depends on one designated leader to do their priestly duties for them. It is the hired hand’s job to visit the sick, prisoners, and call on new converts.<sup>§3.1.3</sup> This designated priest is usually the only person who is allowed to operate his spiritual gift during the Sunday service. No one else is allowed to share other spiritual gifts in the meeting, and if they are, they usually must be pre-approved or filtered through him. But there is no such thing in Scripture as a single “pastor” who functions as the head of a local congregation.<sup>§6.1.2.3</sup>

Many “mega-churches” today are held together almost exclusively on the personality and charisma of a single head “pastor”.<sup>§2.1.2.3</sup> Women in these environments often fawn over the “pastor” as the alpha-male of the group and sometimes submit to him over their own husbands. (Perhaps this is one reason why a lower percentage of men attend institutional “churches” than women, since they are not very attracted to an emasculated religion where they have to “dress up” and passively sit in a pew.) The “church” members succumb to their leader’s vision, ministry, and flavor of Christianity as they become recipients of both their strengths *and weaknesses*. As a result, *most people never progress beyond their “pastor’s” level of spirituality.*<sup>§6.2.3</sup> If someone else has a different viewpoint or emphasis, they are usually quenched, marginalized, or forced to move on to another “church”.<sup>§5.2.2</sup> Sometimes the designated priest will allow others to use their spiritual gifts in lesser settings, but rarely will they let others invade their turf during the main Sunday service. After all, the designated priest is professional “clergy”, while the others are only “laity” who might get it wrong or mess things up. No one is saying that the designated priest may not indeed be gifted,<sup>§6.3.2.1</sup> *but he is not the only one!* The priesthood of all believers is subverted by any unbiblical system of clergy/laity.<sup>§6.2.1</sup> No Christian should ever look to a man as his priest, because every Christian is a priest!

When there is only one designated priest, the diversity of spiritual gifts often degenerates into a focus on only one spiritual gift – the gift of teaching. Teaching has been elevated to be the premier spiritual gift today almost to the exclusion of all the others. The designated priest is often hired solely based on his teaching ability and he may know nothing about the spiritual gift of pasturing. Teaching often occupies up to 50 percent of a “church” service and is the primary focus of most seminaries today. But such a distortion of a single spiritual gift is hardly acceptable in the Church. Only having one teacher is a travesty in an environment where *everyone can teach* (Col. 3:16). Teaching is not even the greatest of the

**“However successful may be certain so-called spiritual giants or great revivalists, their works are a failure if they fail to bring in body ministry.”  
– Watchman Nee**

spiritual gifts (1Cor. 12:28, Eph. 2:20) but it is usually treated that way in most institutional “churches”. Ironically, the teaching that occurs in most institutional “churches” is usually not the *spiritual gift* of teaching, but an exercise in conveying head knowledge through skilled oration. Knowledge is not the same thing as spirituality. Such teachers may not have

any real spiritual insights to share with others, but instead were merely hired for their scholarly achievements and smooth speaking delivery that they learned at seminary. They may eloquently read the swimming manual to people who are drowning, while they themselves do not know how to swim. The Corinthians had abused spiritual gifts by elevating certain gifts such as tongues to an unhealthy status, and now this generation has done the same thing with the gift of teaching. No spiritual gift should ever be allowed to dominate to the exclusion of others, since every gift is indispensable in the Body of Christ (1Cor. 12:22-26).

### 3.2.3 Dysfunctional Fellowship

Some who have left the institutional “church” system looking for something better have themselves fallen into various types of *dysfunctional fellowship*. They may have begun to understand the nature of the Church, but have gotten stuck in some disproportionate and unbalanced modes of emphasis that have been plaguing groups for years:

- Some degenerate into theological discussions that are geared toward obtaining head knowledge.
- Some only sit and criticize everything that is going on around them without trying to make anything better.
- Some predominately focus on worshipping God without really serving one another in any practical way.
- Some think the only thing that matters is evangelism to the exclusion of almost everything else.
- Some become legalistic and think Christianity is all about obeying a set of rules and procedures.
- Some want to wield the power of God so they become preoccupied with certain charismatic gifts like prophecy or speaking in tongues.

Simply leaving a false institutional structure does not mean you will automatically be properly fellowshiping in the Spirit. Leaving what is wrong does not automatically replace it with what is right. Simply understanding what the Church is does not automatically provide you with daily fellowship, accountability, intimate relationships, and spiritual gifts. Leaving an institutional “church” has no bearing on whether you are truly committed to fellowshiping with one another in Christ in a Biblical manner.<sup>§2.3.3</sup>

#### 3.2.3.1 The Lone Ranger

Some who have left the institutional “church” system have made the mistake of becoming “lone ranger” Christians. They no longer want to have fake institutional fellowship, but instead have ended up with *no fellowship*. They clearly saw everything that was wrong with their institutional “church”, but then again, they didn’t really see anyone else “doing it right” either. As a result, they basically dropped out of any regular or substantial Christian fellowship. Some of them may have been hurt by an institutional “church” and simply don’t want to get too close to those *fallible* Christians who may let them down again. In the end, they find that almost everyone and everything has something wrong with it, so a lot of them just sit at home and watch TV! Many lone rangers are really just “lonely strangers”. But substituting no fellowship for a fake fellowship is hardly an improvement. **“Let us not forsake our assembling together as is the custom with some.”** (Heb. 10:25) Some convince themselves that they don’t really need much fellowship anyway and soon become comfortable in doing nothing. They

may say they don't really *need* much fellowship, when the critical thing is that they should *want* fellowship, which is a sign of every true believer.<sup>§3.1.2</sup> Some of them may say they would like to have fellowship, but in practice they still live their lives apart from fellowship.

The basic problem with many lone rangers is that they have only a theoretical understanding of the Church. They may correctly identify the Church, but they are not really identifying *with* the Church. *They have left what the Church isn't, but they are still not fellowshiping with what the Church is.* They effectively ignore scores of Scriptures commanding the intimate and daily fellowship with "one another" and sharing spiritual gifts. It is kind of hard to love one another if you are seldom in the presence of another one! The concept of an isolated lone ranger Christian who floats in and out, belonging only to a theoretical "universal" Church, functioning in his own "private ministry" is completely incompatible with Scripture (1Cor. 12:20-21, Col. 2:18-19). **"Whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire and goes against sound judgment."** (Prov. 18:1)

These lone ranger Christians often have an *individualistic or independent attitude* that is incompatible with the family of God.<sup>§3.1.2</sup> Some of them have problems with authority and do not submit to others in the Church.<sup>§6.1.3</sup> If a lone

**"It could be said that going to church will not make one a Christian. But of this we are even more sure: refusing to fellowship with believers will not make you one either."**

**– Billy Graham**

ranger persists in sin, it does no good to try to disfellowship them,<sup>§1.1.3.2</sup> since they did not have any fellowship in the first place! God's plan is not to form a loose association of individualistic Christians scattered throughout an "invisible church" that do not associate together.<sup>§1.2.1.1</sup> The Church is a **"body knit together"** (Col. 2:19), as **"members of one another"** (Rom. 12:5, Eph. 4:25), **"contending as one man"**

(Phil. 1:27), **"submitting to one another"** (Eph. 5:21). You should be wary of any kind of movement that would keep you isolated, detached, anonymous, or apart from intimate fellowship with the Body of Christ. Some lone rangers might go around *sampling* various ministries, but they are actually committed to no one.<sup>§3.1.2.1</sup> Even when they are physically surrounded by other Christians in a meeting, their individualistic attitude prevents them from actually fellowshiping with others. Some of them were lone rangers at heart long before they left their institutional "churches". Lone rangers are usually only concerned with taking care of their own affairs before God. Rarely do they **"rejoice with those who rejoice"** or **"weep with those who weep"** (Rom. 12:15; cf. 1Cor. 12:26) to any depth because they are not properly connected as part of the Church. They are not really building anything together with anybody, but are only concerned about living their own lives. **"For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it."** (Matt. 16:25; cf. Mark 8:35, Luke 9:24)

### 3.2.3.2 Relationship Idolatry

Quite the opposite of lone rangers are those who have fallen into *relationship idolatry*. These Christians understand the importance of relationships in the



Church, but have elevated those relationships above the fellowship of the Spirit. Again, our fellowship is with the Spirit,<sup>§3.1.1</sup> not with other people's flesh. Never let fellowship with others become an excuse for neglecting your own personal intimacy with Christ. Some people are tempted to go along with things merely for the sake of the group, but you must not go along with anything that compromises the truth. The value of close-knit relationships, maintaining unity, and submitting to one another are all definitely important, but never at the expense of the Holy Spirit or the Scripture. This same type of problem occurs in institutional "churches" where peer pressure is used to keep people in line with their program. There, you may be accused of "not going with the flow", "causing division", "or "hindering fellowship" if you do not participate in their unbiblical practices. Some have actually been told to stop teaching the truth because, "Some families won't come anymore." With fewer people to tithe, they fear that it would hinder the "greater good" they imagine. They are inevitably willing to silence the truth in order to maintain their organizational "unity". By walking in the Spirit, you very well may be harming the fabric of their *institutional fellowship* by not going along with the crowd.<sup>§3.2.1</sup> But Jesus said, "**Do you think I came to bring peace in the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division.**" (Luke 12:51), and indeed Jesus caused much division among the *religious* people of His day (John 7:43, 9:16, 10:19).

Other Christians engage in a type of *narrow fellowship* as they only maintain relationships with people they like or agree with, without any true commitment to the Church as a whole. As time passes, the list of whom they can fellowship with usually gets smaller and smaller every year. People get crossed off their list as soon as they hurt their feelings, have a heated argument, violate their trust, or in some other way prove to be fallible. Sometimes their list gets so short that they can basically only fellowship with members of their family. They have an attitude of "us four and no more" since there is no one else they will trust enough to have fellowship with. This type of *family idolatry* is really just another form of the sin of division based on attributes.<sup>§2.1.2.1</sup> Their fellowship is based on something that is biological, rather than spiritual. Creating division on the basis of ethnicity, language, or nationalism is really no different than establishing fellowship on the basis of having a common last name. "**If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple.**" (Luke 14:26; cf. Mark 10:29-30) If you are not supposed to walk according to your own flesh, then why would you want to walk in keeping with others' flesh? On one extreme, there are the lone rangers who think they are only looking to Christ and need no one else, and on the other extreme, there is relationship idolatry where people are looking to other Christians instead of looking to Christ. Here is a bit of general advice: those who are leery of relationships should be cautious of being alone and those who are leery of being alone should be cautious of relationships.

### 3.2.3.3 Negative Fellowship

Some who have left the institutional "church" system have later fallen into what amounts to *negative fellowship*. They may meet with other people who

understand what the Church is, but then all they do is complain about everything that the Church *isn't*. Much of their fellowship tends to be based on the truth about what's wrong with institutional "churches". Not that it isn't important to understand and discuss such truths, but they are simply not the basis for our fellowship in one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, etc. (Eph. 4:4-6). *Fellowship in the Church is not the fellowship of what is wrong with institutional "churches"*! Such people always seem to have a negative criticism of others instead of a positive fellowship in the truth. They sow seeds of ingratitude, judgment, and depression, instead of thankfulness, forgiveness, and hope. **"Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is virtuous and praiseworthy, think about these things."** (Phil. 4:8-9) Some of them despise authority<sup>§3.1.2</sup> and merely gather to complain about what is wrong about everything, yet they are not engaged in spiritual fellowship involving prayer, studying the Scripture, sharing spiritual gifts, etc.<sup>§3.1.1</sup> They may be experts at identifying what is wrong with the institutional "churches", but yet they themselves are not really engaged in what the Church is. They will meet and reinforce their grievances against the institutional "church" system, and much of what they talk about *may even be true*, but their commonality is merely another subtle form of fellowship in the flesh,<sup>§3.2.1</sup> not fellowship in the Spirit.

### 3.3 Practical Applications

Many Christians will agree with practically everything discussed in this chapter about fellowship – that is, in theory – but they do not experience it in practice. Why not? Because they are simply not willing to make the commitment of time and effort to fellowship this way. They may dream of having fellowship like this, but it is only a pipe dream because they are unwilling to leave the comfort of their pew. *Ultimately, many people like to worship Jesus more than they like to follow Jesus.* They will honor Him with their lips, but not with their lives. Again, what is following the truth worth? Scripture admonishes, **"let each one be careful how he builds"** for if someone is building on **"another foundation besides the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ"** their works will be destroyed (1Cor. 3:9-15). Instead of building on the foundation of institutional "churches" of men, you should now re-focus your energies by building on the foundation of the Church led by Jesus Christ (1Cor. 3:11, Eph. 2:19-22). **"In whom you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God by the Spirit."** (Eph. 2:22) After learning these truths, some Christians become so focused on reacting to unbiblical institutional practices that they never end up building anything positive in its place.<sup>§3.2.3.3</sup> Even if the entire institutional "church" system were abolished, it doesn't necessarily mean that Christians would automatically begin to conduct their fellowship properly in the Church. The first part of this chapter provides an excellent blueprint of the type of fellowship that you are to start building. It worked well for the early Church, it is still working well in places all over the world, and it can also work for you. It is not enough just to know what the Church is; you must also begin to fellowship as the Church. This means *you!*

### 3.3.1 The Wilderness

Many have left the institutional “church” system in search of Biblical fellowship only to experience a sort of “wilderness” period. As you begin to travel **“outside the camp”** (Heb. 13:13), you may soon arrive at a “no-man’s-land” where you no longer find acceptance in an institutional “church”, but neither have you found other amicable Christians who also want to experience Biblical fellowship together in the Church. This may be because you are one of the first in your area to recognize the Church, or simply because you have not yet run into others who may already be fellowshiping this way.<sup>§3.3.2.2</sup> It is unfortunate, but many areas do not offer much more than a **“Church in the wilderness”** (Acts 7:38). There may be some other people trying to conduct their fellowship in the Church, but they are often few and far between.

Those who walk through this wilderness period may experience institutional withdrawal<sup>§3.3.1.1</sup> or even suffer persecution from the institutional establishment.<sup>§3.3.1.2</sup> Some have related this wilderness period to an analogy involving King Saul’s persecution of David (1Sam. 15-31). The Lord rejected Saul, who was king of the establishment, yet David who had God’s true anointing had to flee as an outcast. Saul was not content to let David simply withdraw to the wilderness; instead he had to pursue him and even tried to kill him. In the end, David’s anointing as king was eventually recognized, but not without enduring persecution and learning many lessons through his experiences in the wilderness. In the same way that David had to suffer in the wilderness, some Christians may also have had to walk through the wilderness. **“So let us go to Him outside the camp bearing His reproach. For we do not have an enduring city, but we seek one that is coming.”** (Heb. 13:13)

Depending on the situation, a wilderness experience may last a long time or could be almost non-existent. Some of you may struggle in the wilderness the rest of your lives and still never live to see the full expression of the Church that God intends for your area. Sometimes it may take years for you to find even *one* other Christian in your area who is willing to obey the Scriptures in this manner. Most institutionalized Christians will never be interested in meeting with you because you do not have a worship team, daycare, or youth program. But don’t feel bad, because the early Church didn’t have any of these things either. They just believed the gospel and fell in love with Jesus and this was enough! So do not be discouraged, for there are no limits as to what God can build amongst a group of believers that are entirely devoted to Him, no matter how small. It is better for two or three to be gathered in a lonely place *with* the Lord, than for thousands to be prominently gathered *without* the Lord. Regardless of how long a wilderness experience may last, the process of building quality relationships in the Church must still be pursued. It is important to remember,

**“Unless the church quickly recovers the authoritative biblical message, we may witness the spectacle of millions of Christians going outside the institutional church to find spiritual food.”**  
– **Billy Graham**

however, that the goal is not to stay in the wilderness. God did not lead Israel out of Egypt into the wilderness so that they could stay in the wilderness, but so that they could enter the Promised Land. There are several testimonies of Christians who have left the institutional “church” system that can provide much encouragement in this area.<sup>§B.2</sup>

### 3.3.1.1 Unlearning and Relearning

On a personal level, a wilderness period may serve as a very important part of your spiritual development, and perhaps this is by design. Indeed, you might have to *unlearn* many years of unbiblical “church” practices before you are fully able to understand and embrace the Scriptural truths about the Church. Otherwise, people tend to keep interjecting the same failed institutional practices into the Church out of ignorance.<sup>§7.3.1</sup> It is not always easy for people to be weaned from the institutional baggage that they have trained to accept for their entire religious lives. It may take some time to renew your mind from all the “brainwashing” you received in the false institutional environment (Rom. 12:2).

Some who leave the institutional “church” system will go through a period of *institutional withdrawal* where they begin to miss certain aspects of institutional “churches” like singing in the choir, pot luck dinners, holiday ceremonies, ice cream socials, etc. (Not that such things couldn’t have expressions outside of an institutional “church”.) It may initially seem strange the first time you end up staying at home on a Sunday morning. Just like being home sick, some of you may become “church” sick. This is certainly understandable since an entire religious culture of Churchianity has been erected around centuries of unbiblical practices.<sup>§7.2.3.4</sup> There are many unhealthy dependencies that people have become accustomed to in the institutional system. Many of you are used to letting a designated priest do everything for you<sup>§3.2.2.3</sup> while you simply observe a nice choreographed show once a week.<sup>§4.2.2.1</sup> But such things are not compatible with the Church described in Scripture. Some institutional practices can be replaced with valid Biblical substitutes in the Church, but in most cases, it is just institutional baggage that simply must be discarded.

As you unlearn the unbiblical ways of the institutional “churches”, you may also have to *relearn* many truths concerning the Church. Sometimes God has to tear down things before He can build them back up (Jer. 31:28), especially when they have been built on the wrong foundation. Many new lessons can be learned as you begin to exercise your own spiritual muscles and share your spiritual gifts with each other. As you progress through this period, you might grow spiritually in any number of ways:

- You might learn how to serve others and begin to utilize your spiritual gifts after years of sitting passively through institutional “church” services.<sup>§3.1.1.2</sup>
- You might undergo a period of healing as you begin to deal with emotional pain or bitterness previously caused by institutional “church” politics.<sup>§5.2.2.3</sup>
- You might lose relationships that were based on institutional affiliation as you begin to have intimate fellowship with others centered around Jesus.<sup>§3.3.2</sup>

- You might develop perseverance and strengthened character as you endure rejection and persecution from others in the institutional “church” system.<sup>§3.3.1.2</sup>
- You might develop a deep personal intimacy with Jesus after being dependent on impersonal “worship services” that provided a false sense of spirituality.<sup>§4.2.2.4</sup>

As you actually begin to *experience* Scriptural fellowship, many things that may have confused you for years in the institutional system may finally begin to make sense. As with many things in Christianity, some spiritual truths will not be understood fully until you have first experienced a corresponding amount of spiritual growth. If you are just beginning to realize these truths today, you are encouraged to read this book again in a couple of years because you will be surprised by how much you missed and how much more will be applicable to your situation then. Right now you are probably just seeing the tip of an iceberg and some of you probably know just enough now to be dangerous!

### 3.3.1.2 Persecution from the Establishment

Once you begin to fellowship in the Church, some of you can expect to receive a certain amount of derision from the institutional “church” system. As you begin to experience deeper levels of spiritual growth and freedom in the Lord, it often comes at the cost of rejection and even persecution at the hands of misguided Christians in the institutional “church” system. It is actually *common* that after years of hard work, loyal commitment, and dedicated service in an institutional “church”, many members will intentionally avoid you and spread false rumors about you behind your back.<sup>§2.3.2.1</sup> You must remember that the Scriptural principles of the Church are completely foreign to those who have been indoctrinated under the false institutional “church” system. If you are still attending an institutional “church” in order to fellowship with other Christians, you may appear to be very confusing to those with an institutional mentality:

**“Thus there is no promise in favour of the system by which men organise churches, whilst there is a promise for that ‘assembling together’ which so many of the children of God despise.” – J. N. Darby**

- If you continue to fellowship in their institutional “church”, they may become suspicious of your motives and concerned that you may lead other people astray.
- If you occasionally return to an institution that you had left, they may avoid you or greet you with strange looks because you are not a part of their club anymore.
- If you contact some of the institution’s members for fellowship *outside* of their institution, they may become alarmed at what they consider to be an unauthorized or subversive action towards their organization.

- If you leave their institutional “church” for good, then they may conclude that you must have been offended or are simply looking for a different “church”.
- If you do not attend another institutional “church” after leaving theirs, they may think that you have fallen away from the faith.
- If you simply begin meeting with other Christians in your home, they may conclude that you must be starting your own “church”.

And of course they would be wrong! From an institutional perspective, anyone who decides to obey the Word of God simply cannot win! If you are not part of their group, *or at least another group like them*, then you will probably always be suspect in their eyes. It does not always matter to them so much that you do not attend their institutional “church”, as long as you still attend another institutional “church” elsewhere.<sup>§5.2.2.1</sup> Just belonging to the institutional system somewhere gives them a certain comfort level about you. You might be having dynamic Christian fellowship in the Spirit every day outside of the institutional system, but for some reason they would feel much better about you if you belonged to a spiritually dead institutional “church”. Isn’t it ironic that they worry about whether Christians in deep close-knit daily relationships are getting enough fellowship, when they themselves have almost *no* fellowship in the institutional “church” system? Imagine that! They are under the delusion that sitting passively through a “church” service and shaking hands with the “pastor” on the way out is somehow counted as “fellowship”, but true spiritual fellowship does not count because you don’t belong to an institutional “church”! When they see you fellowshiping in the Church which doesn’t have a name, a fixed meeting place, or an annual budget, they become alarmed and think that you must belong to a “cult”.<sup>§4.3.2.3</sup> Indeed, there is no question that the early Church would have been considered a “cult” by the institutional “churches” today.

### 3.3.1.3 Returning to Egypt

For various reasons, some people appear to embrace the Church for a season, only to later return back to the institutional “church” system. Of course, some of them never had any understanding of the Church, but simply wanted to “check it out” as if it were the latest Christian fad. But once these people begin to realize what they have stumbled into, they often go running back like a dog running scared with its tail between its legs. They may be comfortable sitting in a pew as a passive spectator in an institutional “church”, but will not be able to get away with that anymore in the Church. Even non-Christians can get along just fine in an institutional “church” environment, but they will not go unnoticed in the Church. They stand out like a fish out of water because they simply are not able to swim in the water of the Holy Spirit.

Some Christians may leave the institutional “church” system only to discover that they are not spiritually ready to function as a member of the Church.<sup>§2.3.3.2</sup> Although they may have some theoretical understanding of the Church, *they find that ultimately they are not willing or able to fellowship as part of the Church*. They are not ready to build committed interpersonal relationships with others in

Christ, because they would rather remain anonymous in a church service.<sup>§4.2.2.2</sup> They are not ready to take responsibility in caring for others, because they would rather have a designated priest do that for them.<sup>§3.2.2.3</sup> They are not ready to take the risk of sharing spiritual gifts with others, because they would rather have someone else be in charge of a pre-planned agenda.<sup>§4.1.2.3</sup> Some of them may have achieved great status as an usher, worship leader, Sunday school teacher, or even a “pastor”, but none of this prestige can help them in the Church. They may have a hard time functioning without their coveted positions as they transition to become just a regular “nobody” in the Church.<sup>§6.3.2.1</sup> They may have been getting straight A’s in an institutional “church”, but when it comes to the Church, they find out that their credits don’t even transfer. ☺ What may appear to be a solid spiritual life may simply not be able to function without the normal institutional machinery to prop it up.<sup>§7.1.3.1</sup> If you think you are a Christian and yet cannot maintain your faith outside of an institutional environment, then perhaps you should return until you can figure out why.<sup>§2.3.1.2</sup>

Some may find that they simply cannot survive in the wilderness.<sup>§3.3.1</sup> Without any institutional structure to hide behind, it may become apparent that they didn’t have much of anything spiritual to begin with. They may have once set out from Egypt, but now they want to go back (Num. 14:3-4). **“It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.”** (Exod. 14:12) Whether they suffer from institutional withdrawal, grow weary of institutional persecution, or just prefer the luxury of sitting idly by in a padded pew, in the end, the cost of following the truth may simply be too high for them. Thus, they go running back to their institutional “church” where they can feel comfortable in doing absolutely nothing. (Or they may go back to a different institutional “church” in order to avoid any potential embarrassment.) They may have initially left an institutional “church”, but the mentality of the institutional “church” really never left them.<sup>§2.3.3</sup> **“As a dog returns to its vomit, so is a fool who repeats his folly.”** (Prov. 26:11) These people may have seen a brief glimpse of the Church, but they ultimately were not willing or able to walk it out.

### 3.3.2 Building Relationships

Regardless of where relationships are formed, *fellowship with other Christians is not optional.*<sup>§3.1.1</sup> In the end, if you think you understand the Church but do not have accountable fellowship with others, then you effectively understand nothing.<sup>§3.2.3.1</sup> You are now part of a Body, members of one another, as you forge out a life together in Jesus Christ. As mentioned above, there are scores of Scriptures *commanding* you to be intimately involved with “one another” in committed relationships.<sup>§3.1.2.1</sup> But these commands are not as telling as the fact that you should inherently *desire* such fellowship with others anyway (John 13:34-35, 1Pet. 2:17, 1Jn. 2:9-11). If you leave an institutional “church” and find that Christians do not just continuously show up at your door, perhaps *you* need to become the initiator of some relationships. Your fellowship should be open to anyone who is a brother or sister in Christ, not just one particular group of Christians.

Fellowship with others is based on relationships and relationships can indeed get quite messy – hurt feelings, bruised egos, unmet expectations, doctrinal disagreements, etc. This is precisely how it was in the early Church and perhaps how it will continue to be until we all come to maturity. Having fellowship in the Church is not a panacea for creating a problem-free environment.<sup>§7.2.3.3</sup> It is easy to leave an institution when problems arise, but there are no easy exits and escape routes when it comes to relationships in the Church. Christians do not run away from each other, but must face their difficulties and overcome them together. Relationships in the Church may become strained at times, but this should never result in division.<sup>§2.1.1.2</sup> Christians simply need to grow up and learn to work things out together in love.

It is also important that you don't try to restrict your fellowship only to the group of Christians who know what the Church is.<sup>§2.2.1.5</sup> We fellowship with the Church even when the people don't know that they are a part of the Church! In the Church founded by Jesus Christ, the institutional grid that is placed over the fellowship of Christians does not exist. Undoubtedly, it is often more difficult to maintain close relationships to Christians who cling to unbiblical practices of the institutional "church" system, but in many communities that may be all that is available. Perhaps there will not be the depth of fellowship in the Spirit as one might hope, *but some fellowship might be better than no fellowship at all.*<sup>§2.3.1.2</sup>

Although you could potentially fellowship with any other Christian, you may notice that your associations usually tend to be loosely correlated with the quality of your relationships. Notice that Jesus did not try to fellowship with the masses as the head of a "mega-church", but developed close relationships with a small core of people instead. There are members of the Church all over the world, but you will not be able to build a relationship with each one. You probably will not be able to meet every other Christian living in your local area, and even if you did, you probably wouldn't have the time to maintain a close relationship with each one.<sup>§1.1.2.2</sup> Thus, you will naturally tend to spend more time with those you have closer relationships with, resulting in a fluid and overlapping network of relationships. In this context, just because you may not know another Christian in your area, does not mean you are excluded or divided from them; for whenever you come into contact with another Christian you should immediately recognize that they are part of the same Church and fellowship with them accordingly.

### 3.3.2.1 Fellowshiping with Christians

One of the primary problems in institutional "churches" is that Christians are trying to have fellowship with some people who are not even Christians. Fellowship in the Spirit can only occur among those who are filled with the Spirit. If you do not have the Holy Spirit, then you have no place in the Church.<sup>§1.3.1</sup> Someone could be a "pastor", superintendent, convention delegate, usher, choir director, or just a regular "church" member, but if they have not been born again of the Spirit, they are not even a Christian (Rom. 8:9,14, 1Jn. 3:24, 4:13).

Trying to fellowship with everyone who merely names the name of Christ is also an effort in futility. God dwells among those who are actually living for Him, not those who are merely talking about Him. Some are able to give a nice



testimony about how they were once “saved” when they were younger, but if they do not **“walk by the Spirit”** (Gal. 5:25) today, there can be little fellowship with them. Don’t be content to fellowship with people whose Christianity is just a hobby, philosophy, or set of rules to follow, but fellowship with people whose love for Jesus defines their very lives. What kind of spiritual fellowship can you expect among backslidden, lukewarm, carnal Christians? Those who persist in a sinful state must be dealt with because unrepentant sin cannot be tolerated.<sup>§1.1.3.2</sup> Those who are backslidden need to be slid forward! Those who are lukewarm need to be heated up! There can be no unity in the Spirit apart from the Spirit.<sup>§2.1.1</sup> It is hard to have spiritual fellowship with those who are spiritually lacking. Most Christians are unwilling to let their guard down and share the intimate details of their lives with mere acquaintances who do not seem to really love the Lord.<sup>§3.1.2.1</sup> This is always a struggle for institutional “churches” because it is hard to foster spiritual fellowship in such an unspiritual environment. It is hard to open up and be personal among the impersonal.

Just because some have left their institutional “churches” in search of something better does not mean that they are necessarily walking in the Spirit either. The Church is not just the group of people who have left institutional “churches”. The goal is not to gather all of the outcasts from the institutional “church” system, for you will find that some of these people were cast out for good reasons! Trying to fellowship with every weirdo who left an institutional “church” is likewise an exercise in futility. Many may indeed experience freedom when they leave the boredom of institutional religion, but this does not mean they are truly submitted to the lordship of Jesus Christ or committed to His Church.<sup>§2.3.3</sup> They may understand the concept of the Church, and yet still not be engaged in true spiritual fellowship with one another. They may say, “We don’t go to church, we are the Church”, but it really doesn’t matter unless the power of the Spirit is actually being lived out among them in practice. Otherwise, the result is no different from those in the institutional “churches” who also do not follow the Spirit. The right fellowship cannot occur unless you are fellowshiping with the right people – and that is any genuine Christian who is filled with the Holy Spirit, because that is what the Church is.<sup>§1.1.1</sup>

**“Our love to God is measured by our everyday fellowship with others and the love it displays.” – Andrew Murray**

### 3.3.2.2 Finding the Right People

How then do you go about finding the right people to fellowship with? Just begin fellowshiping with genuine Christians wherever they may be found.<sup>§1.3.1.2</sup> It is not as important to find other people who are “like minded” as it is to find people who are “Christ minded”. Try to get close to others who are close to God. Don’t look for an organization to fellowship with, look for other *Christians* to fellowship with! Unfortunately, some would not even consider fellowshiping as the Church unless it looked like it was already a well-established group that they could simply join.<sup>§2.3.3.2</sup> Thus, some of them have made the mistake of looking to

various “house church” movements assuming that they would be the defacto place to find the correct fellowship. They figure that those who are meeting in houses must be the right people, since the early Church also met in houses. Indeed, many “house churches” may espouse many of the same truths presented in this book, yet some of them still operate as unbiblical man-made organizations, albeit smaller ones.<sup>§2.2.1.2</sup> They may look more like the Church by meeting in houses, and yet they still have little fellowship outside of a once-a-week meeting,<sup>§4.2.2.3</sup> still have a single “pastor” serving as a priest,<sup>§3.2.2.3</sup> and still do not have open meetings.<sup>§4.1.2.3</sup> No one should look to a house any more than they should look to a building. You should simply fellowship with other genuine Christians wherever they may be found.

But by the same token, you should not go out of your way to ignore people associated with “house churches” either, for just because a group has been labeled as a “house church” does not mean that they are not functioning as the Church. Fortunately, there are many communities where Christians are already conducting their fellowship in a Biblical manner. But just like the underground Church in some countries, they are not always easy to find since they don’t have an organization, a building, or a name, and probably aren’t listed in the yellow pages. 😊 However, there are a few resources available that may provide some assistance to you.<sup>§B.2</sup>

### 3.3.2.3 Where Do You Go to “church”?

As you begin to fellowship with others in the Church, you may find it awkward when people ask, “Where do you go to church?” This nonsensical question, of course, is part of the unbiblical newspeak that cannot be answered correctly as far as the Scripture is concerned.<sup>§1.2.1</sup> When you are asked this, you could just answer them directly:

- “I don’t *go to* Church.”

This answer would be true and Scripturally accurate, but would perhaps leave the wrong impression. They might think that you are not having fellowship with other Christians, or wonder if you are even a Christian. Quite often the conversation will often end right there as they will not inquire any further. This is not necessarily ideal because there is no reason to make yourself look bad to other Christians on purpose. Some may quote you, “**Do not forsake the assembling of yourselves...**” (Heb. 10:25), but then you might have an opportunity to explain how indeed you do have fellowship (and how they probably don’t). If you think you might have an opportunity to hold a more serious conversation, here are some other answers that are more provocative and may arouse some curiosity:

- “I can’t *go to* Church because I never leave it!”
- “What do you mean by that? That is like asking, ‘Where do you *go to* Restaurant?’”
- “I don’t go to Church because it isn’t Biblical to *go to* Church.”

These answers almost beg for an opportunity to probe the issue further. But there are certainly times when you won't want to open a can of worms if there is not enough time to adequately address the situation. What would you say then? You must realize that when people ask, "Where do you go to church?" they are really asking you to specify which man-made denomination, organization, or institution you associate with. Since Christians should never identify themselves by such divisions, it might be better to give an answer to a question they didn't ask, that is, "Who you do fellowship with?" Thus, when they ask "Where do you go to church?" the question could be nicely answered by saying something like:

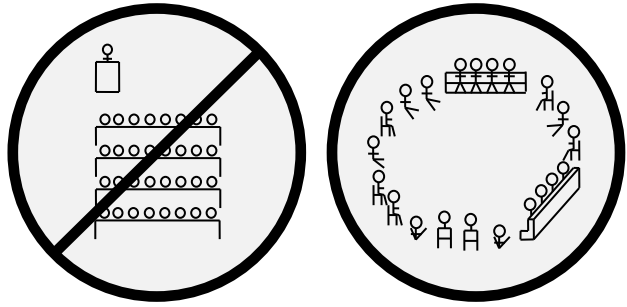
- "I fellowship with a group of believers that meet in various homes."

This answer usually satisfies most people and the issue usually doesn't go much further. Your mileage may vary! Sometimes they might respond with a comment about a "home church" movement that they heard about,<sup>§2.2.1.2</sup> but at least they usually feel comfortable that you are not out on your own and that you are not out of fellowship.

### 3.4 Challenge Questions

- Do you consider yourself to be a priest before God? If not, is there someone else who is acting as a priest for you?
- How many genuine Christians are you personally connected to in spiritual fellowship? Is there even one Christian you can share your life with in a deep and meaningful relationship?
- Could your organization continue to function without a building? Could your organization continue to function without the Holy Spirit?
- How many of the people sitting next to you in your institutional "church" do you treat as family? How many of them would you trust with your life?
- What spiritual gifts has God given to you? When was the last time you shared them with others?





# Chapter 4: Church Meetings

## 4.1 Scriptural Truths

In order for Christians to have spiritual meetings, they must first have a foundation of spiritual fellowship with one another.<sup>§3.1.1</sup> Let that sink in for a moment. It would be a grave mistake to jump here and try to have meetings without first having the spiritual fellowship that makes them possible. Without the context of spiritual fellowship, there will not be spiritual meetings. In fact, such meetings will probably do more harm than good (1Cor. 11:17). The Church is not a meeting; the Church is the *people* who meet together in fellowship with one another.<sup>§1.1.1</sup> The Church simply meets under whatever circumstances of time, place, and manner that the Life of the Church directs. *Meeting together is just a natural extension of daily spiritual fellowship with one another.* “**And let us consider how to incite one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking the gathering together of ourselves as is the habit of some.**” (Heb. 10:24-25) Meetings of the Church should occur as a natural outgrowth of daily spiritual fellowship, not as a *replacement* for it.<sup>§4.2.2</sup>

### 4.1.1 What is a Meeting?

What exactly counts as a meeting of the Church? Well, in order to have fellowship with “one another”, you obviously have to meet with another one. A simple gathering of even as few as two Christians in Jesus’ name can constitute a meeting of the Church. “**For where two or three have gathered together in My name, there am I in their midst.**” (Matt. 18:20) No other name, affiliation, ceremony, ritual, or religious artifact is required for members of the Church to fellowship with one another in Christ’s presence. The “one anothering” commanded in Scripture,<sup>§3.1.2.1</sup> is not conducted in some sort of official ritual or formal ceremony, but is simply the normal result of Christian relationships in daily fellowship with one another. A meeting of the early Church was not a

formal liturgical event that was passively observed by a congregation of spectators. A meeting does not need to have any official aura to it in order to be a meeting – it doesn't need to be preplanned, it doesn't need to be announced, it doesn't need an agenda, and it doesn't need a special quorum (other than two that

**“If you are but ‘two or three’, who have faith for it, meet together: you will find that Christ is with you. Call upon Him.”**  
– J. N. Darby

is). *A meeting doesn't even have to be thought of as a meeting in order to be a meeting.* There does not have to be someone in charge who says “Okay let's start the meeting now” in order for it to be a meeting. Two Christians who get together to discuss when they should have a meeting are already having a meeting to

discuss when to have yet another meeting. A meeting can be as casual as a few Christians getting together for fellowship at a coffee shop. Some prefer the term “getting together” instead of “meeting” because it sounds more casual, yet it is still a meeting of Christians and thus a meeting of the Church.

#### 4.1.1.1 Who Should Meet?

It should be fairly obvious by now that only the Church can have meetings of the Church – Christians meeting together for fellowship with other Christians. The Church is not just any religious meeting, but only a meeting of the “called out ones”.<sup>§1.1.1</sup> The Church does not fellowship with just anyone who claims to be a Christian, but only those who *are* Christians.<sup>§3.3.2.1</sup> Christians who *already* have fellowship through intimate relationships with one another will naturally be meeting together.

Occasionally, some non-Christians might witness a meeting of the Church (Acts 5:12-13, 1Cor. 14:23), but they would not be participants of the meeting in the normal sense. The Church often met together in publicly accessible places, so of course the non-Christians were able to *observe* them, yet **“none of the rest dared to join them, but they were highly esteemed by the people”** (Acts 5:13). Indeed, if a non-Christian stumbled upon a meeting of the Church, the effects on them may or may not be beneficial (1Cor. 14:22-25). A non-Christian that ventures into a meeting would perhaps best be described as an *uninvited guest*. They would not necessarily be asked to leave, but the meeting was neither designed nor intended for them. At best they could only be spectators, because unless they are converted, they could never be participants. How could they? They cannot be led by the Spirit, if they don't have the Spirit! **“What fellowship has light with darkness?”** (2Cor. 6:14) They are not part of the Church, so they can hardly participate in a meeting of the Church.

A meeting of the Church is also no place for backslidden Christians to come and pretend to worship God once a week, but is a natural continuation of daily fellowship of those who are filled with the Spirit. Those who are not spending time with the Lord, entering into the prayer closet at home, or meditating on the Scriptures for themselves will hardly be able to contribute anything in a group setting. If you are wondering what kind of meeting a congregation of backslidden, lukewarm, carnal Christians would have, just visit the average institutional

“church”. The Sunday services conducted by most institutional “churches” are *not* meetings of the Church as they usually include any number of non-Christians or carnal Christians and sometimes are even led by them!<sup>§4.1.2</sup> The spirituality of a meeting will only reflect the spirituality of the individuals present. If the people are not filled with the Spirit, then their meetings will not be filled with the Spirit.<sup>§3.3.2.1</sup> There could be any number of people who claim to be Christians gathered together in a room, but without the right Life they will not experience the right meetings.

#### 4.1.1.2 When to Meet?

Contrary to popular misconceptions, there is no record in the Scripture that the Church held regularly scheduled meetings of any kind! The Church did not just meet on Sunday (and/or Wednesday), as is the common practice of the institutional “churches” today. Instead, Christians met together on a “**daily**” basis (Acts 2:46, 5:42, 6:1, Heb. 3:13). It should be pointed out that “**daily**” includes *every day* of the week – not just Sunday! This does not mean that every Christian attended a designated meeting every day, but only that fellowship was occurring among the believers on a daily basis. As far as we know, Jesus never held any regularly scheduled meetings with His disciples either, but simply experienced life together with them each day.

Some have concocted an erroneous theory that the Church *only* met on Sunday as sort of a “Christian Sabbath”. This false doctrine, however, was not established until 321 AD by the decree of the Roman Emperor.<sup>§7.2.1.1</sup> The rationalization usually given for this doctrine is based on three Scriptural references regarding “**the first day of the week**” and the “**Lord’s day**” (Acts 20:7, 1Cor. 16:2, Rev. 1:10). But notice that the last two of those verses do not even reference a meeting of the Church! The “**Lord’s day**” was not a codeword for a weekly meeting; it was just *one* meeting among those that were occurring every day! Yes, of course, the Church met on “**the first day of the week**”, *just as they did every other day of the week*! Using this same flawed reasoning, there is just as much Scriptural “proof” that the Church *only* met on Saturday which is the Jewish Sabbath (Acts 13:44, 16:13, 17:2). Absurd! Again, it should be pointed out that “**daily**” (Acts 2:46, 5:42, 6:1, Heb. 3:13) includes Saturday and Sunday as well as every other day of the week. Of course, it is not wrong to meet on the first day of the week too, but it is not the *pattern* of the New Testament Church which fellowshiped every day of the week. Notice that the Church did not meet daily because of any written command; they met daily because that is what naturally flows from fellowship with one another in the Life of the Spirit.

#### 4.1.1.3 Where to Meet?

The Church can certainly meet anywhere the Lord leads, but Scripture clearly indicates that the vast majority of their meetings were in homes:

- The believers gathered together in a **“house”** during the Pentecost (Acts 2:2).
- The believers broke bread from **“house to house”** (Acts 2:46).
- The believers were taught from **“house to house”** (Acts 5:42).
- Saul tried to destroy the Church by going from **“house to house”** (Acts 8:3).
- Believers gathered at **“Mary’s house”** to pray (Acts 12:12).
- Paul and Silas met with the brothers at **“Lydia’s house”** (Acts 16:40).
- Paul taught believers from **“house to house”** (Acts 20:20).
- The Church met at Priscilla and Aquila’s **“house”** (Rom. 16:5, 1Cor. 16:19).
- The Church met in Nympha’s **“house”** (Col. 4:15).
- The Church met in Philemon’s **“house”** (Phm. 1:2).
- False teachers try to subvert whole **“houses”** at a time (Tit. 1:11).
- Believers are not to allow false teachers into their **“house”** (2Jn. 1:10).

Sometimes there were also larger gatherings of the Church at the temple courts (Acts 2:46, 5:12,42), on the beach (Acts 21:5), and in other public places (Acts 20:20), but most of the believers’ daily fellowship occurred in people’s homes. Certainly, there was no rule that said Christians *must* meet in homes, but it was simply their *primary setting of choice* (and some would say that this was intended by God’s design). Meeting in homes on a daily basis provided the environment of intimacy in a family-like setting that best suited the Life of their spiritual fellowship. Again, this was not a rule, but a *practice* of the Church and one that is still sought as the primary setting of choice by those who have this Life today. Notice that there are no “church” buildings mentioned anywhere in Scripture since they were not built until centuries later. The early Church did not fail to build “church” buildings because of persecution, ignorance, or a lack of funds – they *rejected* the idea of having “church” buildings for spiritual reasons.<sup>§A.2</sup>

## 4.1.2 Meetings of the Church

Not every meeting involving Christians is necessarily a meeting of the Church. For example, suppose that the Foobar Company holds a business meeting to evaluate its products and by coincidence all of the employees that showed up just happened to be Christians. Obviously, these Christians are not meeting together as the Church; they are meeting together as employees of Foobar. They are not there to pray, worship, or break bread together; they are there to evaluate products for the company. They are not meeting under the authority and purposes of Jesus’ name; they are meeting under the authority and purposes of Foobar. There are certainly members of the Church in that meeting, but it is not a meeting of the Church. (Conversely, if there is a meeting of the Church and all of those present just happened to work at Foobar, neither would that make it a Foobar meeting.) If this Foobar meeting were considered a meeting of the Church, then almost any worldly event could be considered a meeting of the Church. Again, there may be several Christians sitting in the stands at a football game, but that does not make it a meeting of the Church.<sup>§1.1.2.2</sup> If spiritual fellowship is not taking place between the Christians, then it is not a spiritual meeting – the *number* of Christians present does not matter.



#### 4.1.2.1 Meeting as the Church

Now let us take this a step further. Having a meeting *of* the Church is not necessarily the same thing as meeting *as* the Church. This distinction may seem semantically insignificant, but the underlying principle is firmly established in Scripture. There is clearly a difference when Christians meet together for side issues like political causes, sports, homeschooling, singing groups, food co-ops, etc. which is not quite the same as **“when you come together as the Church”** (1Cor. 11:18). Lots of Christians get together and play bingo, for example, but that is not what the Church is. These ancillary meetings may begin with Christian prayer, have Christian music, or even discuss Christian matters, yet they are still not meeting as the Church. Someone may consider them to be meetings *of* the Church since Christians may have gathered themselves together for some purpose, but they are still not necessarily meeting *as* the Church ought to meet. No one is claiming that these meetings are not useful, but only that they are not a substitute for meeting as the Church.

Consider a secular analogy where all the players on a softball team represent their particular company in the city’s recreational league. These people all belong to the same corporation, but the softball game is not their normal corporate setting – they do not conduct corporate business, no contracts are signed, no memos are taken, etc. They are certainly all members *of* the same corporation, but they are not meeting together *as* the corporation. Such is the case with institutional “church” meetings where several true members of the Church may meet in an institutional environment, but they are not necessarily meeting as the Church ought to meet. Do you have ears to hear?

When Jesus said, **“For where two or three have gathered together in My name, there am I in their midst.”** (Matt. 18:20), He was not implying that Christians are on their own when they are alone by themselves (Matt. 28:20, Heb. 13:5), but emphasizing that He will be **“in their midst”** in a corporate sense. Experientially, such a meeting takes on deeper spiritual dimensions than would be expected merely from the sum of the individuals present, for Jesus often seems to be working in their corporate midst in a special way.<sup>§4.1.2.5</sup> Notice the language of this Scripture: **“When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and also my spirit with the power of our Lord Jesus...”** (1Cor. 5:4). In this situation, the Christians were instructed to deal with a particular issue only when they were assembled in this manner. Obviously, the Christians met together for daily fellowship in many ways, but notice they were only to deal with this matter when they were assembled together as the Church. Sometimes this type of meeting is framed in the context of when **“the whole Church comes together”** (1Cor. 14:23). These are times when the Lord is simply calling the saints together corporately. Although it is perfectly acceptable to have meetings *of* the Church to fellowship in a wide variety of ways, it is vitally important that Christians also meet together *as* the Church.

#### 4.1.2.2 In Jesus' Name

To meet as the Church is to assemble **“in the name of the Lord Jesus”** (1Cor. 5:4) according to the manner He specifies. To meet in Jesus' name is to meet under His authority, His purpose, and His direction. A meeting in Jesus' name is conducted according to the agenda that He directs through the power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>§4.3.1</sup> There is no mystical power invoked by merely mouthing the words “in Jesus' name”. For if it were, then which version of Jesus' name should be used and in which language? Is it in Jesus', Joshua's, Yesu's, Yeshua's, or Yehoshua's name? (Of course, there is not even a letter “J” in Hebrew or Greek!) Or perhaps you didn't know that Jesus and God have the same name (John 17:11)? Notice that Scripture doesn't say “names” of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19), but the singular “name” for they all possess the same name of authority. No, to meet in Jesus' name is not to utter a particular set of words; *it is to actually meet in obedience to Jesus under His authority and for His purposes*. Only then could you expect Jesus to be in your midst.

Many institutional “churches”, however, utter the words “in Jesus' name” as a *magical incantation* that they think somehow legitimizes whatever they want to do. But just saying the phrase “in Jesus' name” has no bearing on whether they are *actually* meeting in Jesus' name. If the Satanists were to say an opening prayer with “in Jesus' name”, would Jesus be obligated to be in their midst too (Matt. 18:20)? If an institutional “church” decided to sacrifice babies on a pagan altar while saying “in Jesus' name”, then would it really be in Jesus' name? No! Just having two or three Christians meet is not enough, just having two or three Christians meet and say “in Jesus' name” is not enough, there needs to be two or three Christians *actually* meeting in Jesus' name according to His authority.<sup>§5.1.2</sup> A congregation of lukewarm Christians in an institutional “church” may say “in Jesus' name” at the end of every prayer, but they are not meeting in Jesus' name for they are not meeting in the manner He has specified. If they were to actually meet under the authority of Jesus' name, the first thing they would have to do is repent of their divisive and sinful practices, in which case they would no longer be able to exist as an institutional “church”. This is not to say that God's presence cannot manifest in an institutional “church”, because He surely has, but it is done in spite of their unbiblical institutional environment.<sup>§7.2.4.1</sup>

#### 4.1.2.3 Open Participatory Meetings

When Christians meet together as the Church any number of things could happen: singing, fellowship, breaking bread, teaching, reading Scripture, prayer, sharing spiritual gifts, etc. Not necessarily any or all of these things must occur at any given meeting which is led by the Holy Spirit.<sup>§4.3.1</sup> **“Whenever you gather together, each one has a psalm, teaching, revelation, tongue, or an interpretation. Let all these be done for edification.”** (1Cor. 14:26) Some refer to this type of meeting as a “1 Corinthians 14 meeting” after the manner described in the Scripture (1Cor. 14:26-33). Others refer to it as an “open meeting” as they are *open* to whatever the Lord leads in the meeting without a preset agenda. The word

“open” here is not in reference to open *attendance* (in that it is open to the general public), but in reference to an open *agenda* (in that any Christian may contribute). Having open participatory meetings is not a new idea or something to experiment with, it is the Lord’s command: **“If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things I write to you are the Lord’s command. But if anyone ignores this, then let him be ignored.”** (1Cor. 14:37-38) Although anything could happen in an open meeting before the Lord, the following is a general pattern of the types of elements that are often present:

- *Receiving* - everyone listens to the Lord to discern what is on His heart (John 10:3-5,27).
- *Sharing* - everyone shares whatever songs, hymns, revelations, teachings, prophecies, prayers they receive from the Lord (Eph. 5:19, Col. 3:16).
- *Discerning* - everyone discerns whether what is being shared is from the Lord and how it applies (Acts 15:28, 1Cor. 14:29).
- *Obeying* - everyone obeys the things that are from the Lord (Acts 15:29, 1Cor. 11:16, 14:37).

This pattern, for instance, was evident in the dispute over circumcision where Paul and Barnabas received a revelation from God (Gal. 2:2), shared and discussed it with the Church (Acts 15:4,12), discerned what direction **“seemed good to the Holy Spirit”** (Acts 15:28), and then wrote it down as directives to be followed (Acts 15:29).

Some people have tried to artificially categorize fellowship into different types of meetings. For example, if Christians get together to fellowship in the Spirit and are led to pray for a situation (Acts 4:24, 12:12), someone might say they are having a “prayer meeting”. Or if another time they get together and are led to worship the Lord in song (Eph. 5:19, Col. 3:16, Jas. 5:13), someone might say they are having a “worship meeting”. The only problem is that the terms “prayer meeting”, “worship meeting”, “fellowship meeting”, “Bible study meeting”, “gospel meeting”, etc. are not mentioned anywhere in the Bible. These terms may describe a particular meeting after the fact, but this is not the terminology of the Bible or how the early Christians thought about their meetings. The Christians simply met in the name of Jesus and fellowshiped according to the leading of the Holy Spirit – whatever that was, is what kind of meeting it was.<sup>§4.3.1.3</sup> **“Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing a psalm. Is anyone among you sick? Let him summon the older men of the Church and let them pray over him with oil in the name of the Lord.”** (Jas. 5:13-14) The Lord may indeed call His children together for any number of purposes.

#### 4.1.2.4 Mutual Deliberations

One of the reasons for meeting together as the Church is to deliberate on matters together as one Body before the Lord. Remember, the concept of assembling together to deliberate is built right into the meaning of the word “Church”.<sup>§1.1.1</sup> So what exactly are the “called out ones” of the Church supposed to deliberate? For beginners, Scripture directs the Church to judge all disputes and

matters concerning fellow believers (1Cor. 5:12-6:5), including the final step when someone is disfellowshipped from the Church (Matt 18:16).<sup>§1.1.3.2</sup> If a secular jury is able to come to a unanimous decision concerning life or death, how much more is the Church able to discern God's will through the leading of the Holy Spirit. Note that such issues were only to be addressed when the believers were assembled together as the Church (1Cor. 5:4-5). Unlike a secular council that *votes* to decide what they want to do,<sup>§5.2.3.3</sup> the Church assembles to *discern* what the Lord wants them to do.<sup>§5.1.3.3</sup>

Discernment of truth is not relegated to any individual leader, but to the corporate Church. Scripture says that when a prophet speaks **“let the others discern”** (1Cor. 14:29). Individuals may share insights and revelations they receive with the Church, but discerning is done corporately. *This is the safety net God has given to the Church.* The mere fact that an individual leader speaks and says that something is from the Lord is not enough – the Body must discern. So many have been led astray by a single leader who falsely claimed to have a word from the Lord.<sup>§6.2.3</sup> Certainly, it is not difficult for one individual leader to be deceived, but that is why the Church is a Body. Thus, even if a prominent leader in the Church such as Peter were deceived (Gal. 2:11-14), the Church is still not led astray. Theology must never be left to be decided in a vacuum by a single individual. An individual leader may fall into error, but **“the Church of the living God is the pillar and foundation of the truth”** (1Tim. 3:15). Thus, when directions are received from the Lord, they are openly discussed before the *whole* Church assembled with their leaders (Acts 15:22, Phil. 1:1). In Scripture, the important issues of the day were considered by all the regular, average, run-of-the-mill Christians such as:

- Judging prophecy (1Cor. 14:29)
- Clarifying doctrinal issues (Acts 15:4,12,22)
- Disciplining individuals (Matt. 18:15-17, 1Cor. 5:4-5)
- Giving money (Acts 11:28-30)
- Settling disputes (1Cor. 6:1)
- Selecting leaders (Acts 1:23, 6:3,5)
- Greeting guests (Acts 18:27, 21:17)
- Sending out people (Acts 9:30, 13:3, 15:40, 17:10,14, 2Cor. 8:19)

Obviously, these things are unheard of in most institutional “churches” today since their “lay” members would never be trusted with such matters. Notice that none of these decisions were made by a single leader, nor were they deliberated behind closed doors in a committee, board, or “elder” meeting.<sup>§5.2.3.2</sup> The reason why all Christians may participate in the process is that all Christians are filled with the Holy Spirit and are able to hear from the Lord. We are all priests among a kingdom of priests (1Pet. 2:5,9, Rev. 1:6, 5:10, 20:6). In every case, the Church as a whole is responsible for hearing the Word of the Lord and obeying His directives – a pattern consistent throughout the New Testament.

#### 4.1.2.5 Lampstands

There is mention of seven lampstands in the book of Revelation that represented the Church in seven cities of Asia Minor (Rev. 1:20). These lampstands have certainly raised a number of interesting questions: Why are only seven cities mentioned? Did the Church in other cities such as Corinth, Galatia, and Phillipi have lampstands too? There have certainly been many theories that have been put forth about this, but it is important first to understand exactly what these lampstands represent. A lampstand merely holds a light which is representative of God's presence (2Sam. 21:17, 1Ki. 11:36, 2Ki. 8:19, 2Chr. 21:7). Certainly, in a personal sense, God is present with every believer as He said, **"I will never leave you nor forsake you."** (Heb. 13:5; cf. Matt. 28:20) But the lampstand here is representative of God's presence in a *corporate sense* – when they come together as the Church.<sup>§4.1.2.1</sup> Again, there is a noticeable difference experientially as most Christians are able to recognize God's manifest presence and long for it when it is absent. Have you ever experienced a dry, lifeless, boring meeting where the presence of God was nowhere to be found?<sup>§4.2.1</sup> Some Christian organizations conduct all kinds of meetings, but the question is, does God show up? If there are Christians at a meeting, then Jesus is certainly with each one of them, and yet His manifest presence may not be found among the group in a corporate sense. Why is that?

Also notice that the Church in a city can have its lampstand removed: **"If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place."** (Rev. 2:5) Was Jesus just giving an idle threat? Notice that the Church in Ephesus to whom this was written no longer exists today (Rev. 2:1-7). What does it mean to have a lampstand removed? Does it mean that all the Christians living in an area will suddenly become non-Christians? No, it probably just means that God will no longer visit them with His manifest presence, if they do not repent. Should God come among a group of willfully unrepentant Christians and endorse them by blessing them with His manifest presence?<sup>§7.2.4.1</sup> This did not mean that every Christian in that area was sinning, but only that when they come together as the Church they are *tolerating* sin in their midst (Rev. 2:2,20). **"No doubt there are sects among you, in order that those who are approved may become evident among you."** (1Cor. 11:19) This is also reminiscent of the situation in the Old Testament when God removed His presence from Judah and Jerusalem (2Ki. 17:20, 24:20, Jer. 25:10,52:3). Certainly, the Israelites continued to be God's people, but they had reached the point that God could no longer bless them as a group with His presence. Of course, God was still present with individuals like Jeremiah and Daniel, but at that time He would no longer bless Israel with His manifest presence in a corporate sense.

It is also interesting to consider the reverse situation – what does it take for a city to get a lampstand? If only one Christian lives in a city, does it get a lampstand? Was Sodom and Gomorrah blessed with God's manifest present just because Lot lived there? How about if there are thousands of lukewarm, backslidden, carnal Christians living in a city, do they get a lampstand? What if a non-Christian starts an institutional "church", builds a building, and puts a sign

out in front – do they get a lampstand too? No conclusions about these things will be drawn here, but are left as an exercise for the reader.

## 4.2 Counterfeit Philosophies

Some institutional “churches” have meetings all the time. In fact, that may be just about all they have. They may have little to no spiritual fellowship described in the previous chapter, but they do have meetings. It is precisely because they do not have the right kind of fellowship, that they do not have the right kind of meetings. Atheists, Satanists, and cults all have meetings too, but they are obviously not meetings of the Church. The fact that a group has meetings, has lots of meetings, or even has lots of Christians in their meetings has no bearing on whether or not Jesus Christ condones those meetings.<sup>§4.1.2.2</sup>

The kind of meetings a group has usually provides a fairly accurate gauge in revealing their level of spiritual maturity.<sup>§4.1.2.3</sup> Some Christians do not receive anything from the Lord at their meetings and some do not even know that they can receive anything.<sup>§4.3.1.3</sup> Some Christians might receive something from the Lord, but their institutional environment does not allow them to share and may even discourage such things.<sup>§5.2.2</sup> Some Christians lack discernment and will share almost anything at all, causing a continual stream of truth and error to mingle together and dilute any true word from the Lord. Still others will go on to discuss what is shared and discern what is from the Lord, yet they never actually implement anything in their lives. They treat a word from the Lord as something optional, not as a command to be obeyed because they do not understand the nature of spiritual authority.<sup>§5.1.2</sup>

Some institutional “churches” have *experimented* with open participatory meetings, but their members may just sit there silently waiting for the leaders to initiate everything. They fail because they are trying to have the right kind of meetings, without first having the right Life that makes them possible.<sup>§3.1</sup> They are trying to have an open participatory meeting without first establishing a Biblical environment of spiritual fellowship. An institutional “church” may not experience any “one anothering”, spiritual gifts, or power of the Holy Spirit, but you can be sure that they will still be having meetings.<sup>§3.2.2.1</sup> They may even have hundreds of meetings, but if they are not fellowshiping in the Spirit, they are not meeting as the Church.

### 4.2.1 Lifeless Meetings

Put your hand up if you have ever been to a dull, dry meeting where you come away with a sense of death instead of Life. People sing lifeless words of a song that just seem to bounce off the ceiling and fall to the ground. The preacher reads from his well-prepared notes, but the members are bored and can’t wait for the sermon to end. The prayer time is a burden as they begin to wade through a prepared list of items. The “order of worship” printed in the bulletin hasn’t changed in years and yet for some reason the Holy Spirit is not present. (Okay

you can put your hands down now.) It may seem better some weeks, but then other weeks are just dry and stale, leaving everyone bored, deflated, and lifeless. When non-Christians visit meetings like this, it is no surprise that they often lose all interest in Christianity. What is going wrong here?

Most institutional “churches” just go about conducting their normal meetings and then just hope that the Lord will “show up”. Some of them have conducted thousands of meetings and the Lord has never “shown up”! Why isn’t the Lord blessing so many institutional “churches” with His manifest presence they desire?<sup>§4.1.2.5</sup> Wouldn’t you expect that with such large numbers attending a “mega-church”, the Lord would be obligated to visit them every week? The Lord’s visitation is such a rare occasion in some institutional “churches” that if it

**“Too many church services start at eleven sharp and end at twelve dull.”**

**– Vance Havner**

does happen they refer to it as a “revival”. Some of them schedule “revival meetings” once a year where they try really hard to get the Lord to show up. (If you can schedule a “revival”, why not schedule one every week?) ☺ They try to sing the right songs, have the right teaching, and say the right prayers in hopes that a lofty and impersonal God would look down upon their meager offerings, and if it is good enough, descend into their midst. And yet the Lord is not impressed (Amos 5:21-23). They work hard at making their meetings as excellent as possible, but they are still having the *wrong kind* of meetings. The stained glass may sparkle, the order of worship is on schedule, the sound levels are set, the robes neatly ironed, etc. *The wrong kind of meeting could be wonderful, but it is still the wrong kind of meeting!* Everything during the service could be done in the best possible manner, *and yet the Lord’s heart is still not being touched.*

Much of what the institutional “churches” do in the Lord’s name is not for the Lord at all, but only for themselves.<sup>§4.1.2.2</sup> They schedule a multimedia presentation, worship band, and a dynamic speaker to entertain themselves in their meetings; and then somehow hope that the Lord is happy with it too. They are gathering to meet their own needs, but what about the Lord’s needs? **“The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.”** (Matt 8:20) There may be hundreds of people outwardly pretending to worship God, but who is really worshiping Him in their heart? The Holy Spirit might hover over the congregation looking for someone to fill, but alas there is no receptive vessel. **“For the eyes of the Lord move to and fro throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to Him.”** (2Chr. 16:9) When a person who *is* filled with the Spirit comes to such a meeting, he may not be able to participate with the group at all. He will still be able to worship the Lord in his inmost being, but simply cannot engage in the fleshly religion of the group. But even if everyone else around him may be devoid of spiritual Life, he can still receive from the Lord – not because of the meeting, but in spite of the meeting! Many times the Lord has overlooked the unbiblical institutional environment to meet with those whose hearts are genuinely worshipping Him.<sup>§7.2.4.1</sup>

The unbiblical nature of what institutional “churches” do in their meetings is not as deafening as what they don’t do in their meetings.<sup>§3.2.2.1</sup> With few

exceptions, the people do not function as priests or share their spiritual gifts in their meetings. These things are *forbidden* in most institutional “churches”! Their meetings are designed precisely so that these things do not happen, which is also evidenced by the fact that they do not happen. Some institutional “churches” believe in the existence of spiritual gifts, but their meetings are not designed to foster them and you won’t ever see them happening in their meetings on Sunday morning. If someone were ever to share a spiritual gift outside of the normal scripted program, there is usually just a brief period of awkward silence and then they just move on to the next thing on the schedule.

The root problem here is not necessarily that the format of the meeting is wrong, as much as the people in the meeting are wrong! The people are not filled with the Spirit, and thus the meeting is not filled with the Spirit. Without the Life of the Church, there can only be lifeless meetings. Christians will not experience the presence of God if they harbor fleshly desires, dissention, unconfessed sin, etc.<sup>§3.2.3</sup> If people’s hearts are not right, then the meetings cannot be right regardless of the structure.

#### 4.2.2 Attendance-Based Religion

In practice, most institutional “churches” predominantly view their “church” as a meeting. Many of them realize that the “church” is not the building, but instead view the “church” as the meeting inside the building.<sup>§4.1.1</sup> Their main activity occurs once a week during a one hour meeting when their “church” is in

**“Is it not therefore exceeding strange, that people should place so much piety in the attendance upon public worship, concerning which there is not one precept of our Lord’s to be found and yet neglect these common duties of our ordinary life, which are commanded in every page of the Gospel?” – William Law**

session. They only function as a “church” while they are in this meeting which is their main event. Outside of their meetings most of them do not have much, if any, spiritual fellowship with one another.<sup>§3.1.1</sup> As a result, the primary duty expected of the members under this religious system is *attendance*. Since the institutional “churches” function in an attendance-based environment, it is critical that the people be at the meetings when they occur. With only one or two meetings being held each week, the meetings themselves become of utmost importance.<sup>§4.2.2.1</sup>

There is obviously a huge difference between walking together in daily fellowship described in the Scripture and “attending” something. Attending a meeting costs very little and accomplishes very little.<sup>§2.3.3.2</sup> All you have to do is sit still for about an hour, and then when it is over you can go home and do whatever you want. But this is not a **“body knit together”** (Col. 2:19), **“members of one another”** (Rom. 12:5, Eph. 4:25), **“contending as one man”** (Phil. 1:27), **“submitting to one another”** (Eph. 5:21), but rather individuals attending an impersonal meeting. When the meeting is over each one goes their own separate way, independent of



everyone else. Such behavior is completely foreign to the Scripture where **“if one member suffers, all the members suffer”** (1Cor. 12:26; cf. Rom. 12:15). Attendance-based religion is entirely nonsensical as far the Scripture is concerned. People who attend institutional “churches” are not necessarily facing God’s eternal wrath, but they simply are not meeting in the Biblical environment of fellowship that God has prescribed. Their meetings may even seem wonderful, but where is the daily fellowship, accountability, sharing of spiritual gifts, sacrifice, and commitment?<sup>§3.2.2.1</sup>

#### 4.2.2.1 The Big Show

When there are only one or two meetings each week to go to, a much greater emphasis is placed on the quality of the meetings. An institutional “church” basically only has one or two shots a week to make an impact on people lives, so they had better get it right! Visitors and potential members are left to judge the organization based solely on the quality of the meeting – was the music good, was the speaker entertaining, was the atmosphere too formal, did the meeting last too long, etc. Thus, efforts are made to try to avoid any awkward moments in the meeting: “What should we do about Gladys who sings off key but keeps signing up for special music?” “Should we let Frank give the Sunday School report again after the embarrassment he caused last year?” The regular members are also sensitive to the quality of the meeting and likewise feel satisfaction if the meetings go well, or conversely feel uneasy when mistakes are made.<sup>§4.2.2.4</sup> On the way home they might critique the sermon delivery or rate the quality of the music. They might say they had a “good service” if they had a dynamic speaker, special music, or a good drama presentation. Over time, the emphasis of these meetings has unintentionally shifted to becoming a *subtle form of entertainment*.

**“It is scarcely possible in most places to get anyone to attend a meeting where the only attraction is God.”**  
**– A. W. Tozer**

Broadway Variety Show	Institutional “church” Service
Performers are paid a salary to put on a quality show	Pastor and choir director are paid a salary to conduct a good service
Big name star gets top billing and others act as supporting cast	Pastor holds the top position and his staff acts in supporting roles
Special guest appearances by Hollywood celebrities and rock stars	Special guest appearances by Christian celebrities and rock stars
Theatre architecture, decorations, and lighting are designed to enhance the performance	Sanctuary architecture, decorations, and lighting are designed to enhance the service
Special costumes are worn by the actors in the show	Robes are worn by the clergy and choir members in the service

Broadway Variety Show	Institutional “church” Service
People in the audience passively observe the performance as spectators	Congregation members passively observe the performance as spectators
The order of acts is pre-planned and handed out in the program	The order of service is pre-planned and handed out in the bulletin
The event is supported by people buying tickets	The event is supported by the members’ tithing

Some “church” members will immediately be offended by references to their service as a “show”, “performance”, or “entertainment”. They are often shocked when they learn that most of these practices were borrowed from the world and brought into their “churches”.<sup>§7.2.2</sup> But many institutional “churches” do not see anything at all wrong with borrowing elements from the world in order to enhance their services. In fact, some of them hire worldly consultants to aid them in their planning and designs. The latest music styles, fashions, and designs of the world are brought into their “churches” to make them more appealing to the world. They intentionally try to make their programs as appealing as possible to the carnal flesh in order to help elicit emotional responses from the people. They accept the idea that “the end justifies the means” with the belief that these things will help draw in non-Christians and entice them to convert.

Such is the philosophy of many “mega-churches” who try to see how many people they can cram into one meeting or under one roof. This is also the unspoken goal of most smaller “churches” that strive to increase their attendance and become prestigious, but just have not gotten there yet. They focus on these numerical indicators, which is why some of them post their attendance and giving records for each week. These institutional “churches” falsely assume that if their meeting becomes bigger, then it means the kingdom of God must also be growing. Thus, they just want to try to get as many people in the door as possible – Christian or non-Christian. *They do not care how much leaven they have in the batch as long as the batch is big.* But Scripture says, **“Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole batch? Purge out the old leaven in order that you may be a new batch, for you must**

**“Many churches have de-emphasized preaching and worship in favor of entertainment, apparently believing they must lure converts by appealing to fleshly interests. As if Christ Himself were in some way inadequate, many church leaders now believe they must excite people’s fancies in order to win them.”**

**– John McArthur**

**be unleavened.”** (1Cor. 5:6-7; cf. Gal. 5:9) As discussed below, *these are not meetings of the Church*, but simply distorted forms of evangelistic meetings where just a few Christians speak to a passive crowd of spectators.<sup>§4.2.3</sup>

And where exactly is any of this found in the New Testament? Where was the big show, pre-planned meetings, attendance records, and guest musical groups? Didn’t the early Church know that these things would really “pack them in”? Why didn’t they just go over and see how the pagans were doing things like

they do today? The false religions have pretty good attendance numbers and they don't even have a real god! The early Church certainly had meetings, but they certainly did not meet in this way! These institutional "church" services are completely contrary to the meetings of the Church discussed in 1 Corinthians 14. They are not functioning as priests with **"each one having received a gift serving one another as good stewards"** (1Pet. 4:10), because the members sit passively as if it were a spectator sport. There is not open participatory sharing where **"each one has a psalm, a teaching, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation"** (1Cor. 14:26), for the laity's "microphone time" is usually limited if not entirely restricted. They do not share their lives together and **"exhort one another daily"** (Heb. 3:13) in intimate fellowship, for they attend impersonal meetings once or twice a week. Again, the problem is not that they have meetings, but that they have the wrong kind of meetings.

#### 4.2.2.2 Ten-O-Clock Charlie

Since the Sunday service is practically the only time for people to showcase their spirituality, everyone has learned to come with their best on "game day". Both the clergy and laity literally "suit up" by getting dressed up in their own respective ways for the weekly event. The clergy gear up to put on a good show and the laity gear up to see a good show. Everybody comes ready to play with their religious "game face" on. When the meeting starts, the clergy begin to act in a melodramatic way that is completely different than when they were joking around on Saturday. Some of them may be very likable characters outside of "church", but when they step on stage they become strangely different – like an actor with a role to play when they step on stage. The laity also put on smiles and appear to look much more meditative and somber than when they were fighting with their spouses on the way in to "church". Everybody wants to be on their best behavior during the "spiritual hour".

**"It is common for those that are farthest from God, to boast themselves most of their being near to the Church." – Matthew Henry**

This could be likened to a football game where the clergy get on the football field and battle for yards against the enemy, while the laity cheer in the stands or have support roles like playing in the band or working the concessions. *But when the game is over everybody goes home and returns to their normal lives.* The football players take off their suits, the band puts their instruments away, the concession stand closes, and the fans go home. Outside of the weekly game, there is no *continuing context* for these roles except for preparing for the next game. Football players usually don't wear their pads and helmets in restaurants, band members don't go shopping carrying around their trumpets and saxophones, and fans don't just start cheering for their team in the middle of the workday. Everyone takes on this new context *only while the game is being played* and then they revert back to their old normal selves when the game is over.<sup>§4.2.2.3</sup>

Such is the case with Ten-O-Clock Charlie when it comes to institutional “church” meetings. A Ten-O-Clock Charlie is someone who behaves a certain way throughout the week, but then acts somewhat differently when 10:00 on Sunday morning rolls around. There are all kinds of Ten-O-Clock Charlies and many of them are not even Christians! Some of them look like angels during “church”, but then live like the devil the rest of the week.<sup>§1.2.4.2</sup> Some Ten-O-Clock Charlies may even play an active role in the meetings. They might usher, sing in the choir, pass out bulletins, run the sound system, etc. No real spirituality is required to do any of these “jobs”. They could swear at their wife, beat their kids, and kick their dog at home, and still make a fine usher at “church”! But regardless of how active they are in the meeting, when the meeting is over, so is their religious contribution. Apart from the context of the “church” service, they won’t get too many opportunities to share their “spiritual gift” of ushering or passing out bulletins for the entire rest of the week.

The vast majority of Ten-O-Clock Charlies might be best classified as “carnal Christians”. This doesn’t mean that they are necessarily mass murderers between Sundays, but their spirituality is still not the same throughout the week as it is when Sunday rolls around. Of course, they would say they still believe in Jesus

**“Christians don’t tell lies  
they just go to church and  
sing them.” – A. W. Tozer**

throughout the week, yet they do not live their lives accordingly. (If Sunday is their Holy day, then what does that make all of their other days?) ☺ They go from their otherwise worldly existence, become

spiritual during the meeting, and then return to their otherwise worldly existence. Some of them can really talk up a storm on Sunday morning, but rarely do they talk about Christ during the rest of the week. They can go from joking around before the meeting, to somber meditation during the meeting, to hyping an upcoming football game after the meeting. This doesn’t mean they are necessarily in sin between meetings as much as they are generally engrossed in the everyday things of the world. During their normal day they think very little about Christ and a lot about their jobs, school, sports, TV programs, shopping, etc.

Even some of the best “church” members are Ten-O-Clock Charlies. They might live like “average” Christians throughout the week, but when the service starts they are suddenly able to really turn it on. During the meeting they might share in depth or lead out in prayer, but when the meeting is over, they soon return back to their normal level of mediocre Christianity. This is also true of many clergy who get a spiritual high once a week when they are able to impress the congregation with their oration skills. Clark Kent really is Superman throughout the week, but he just doesn’t have any opportunity to display his powers until the meeting starts! Outside of the meeting, most of their time and energy is spent simply preparing for the next meeting where they will be able to showcase their talents again.

A Ten-O-Clock Charlie may be clergy or laity, active or passive, committed or uncommitted, but what they all have in common is that they are only at their peak as a Christian when there is a meeting to go to. They are indeed *hypocrites* because they live one way during the meeting and another way outside of the meeting. Some merely “**wish to look good in the flesh**” (Gal. 6:12) as they have a

noticeably artificial or plastic demeanor about them in the meeting that is obvious to everyone. Here is what Jesus had to say about these kinds of people: **“You are like white-washed tombs that outwardly indeed appear beautiful, but inwardly are full of dead men’s bones and all impurity. And thus you outwardly indeed appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and of lawlessness.”** (Matt. 23:27-28)

#### 4.2.2.3 Meeting-Centricity

The consequence of attendance-based religion is that people become *meeting-centric* instead of Christ-centric. Their Christian spirituality is centered more around “church” meetings than a daily personal relationship with Christ. Their Christian experience is sporadic as the bulk of their spirituality only occurs during the intervals that meetings are held. Outside of the meetings, very little spiritual activity occurs in their lives. If you took a video camera and only recorded them every Sunday morning from 10:00-11:30 AM until they died, you would just about capture all of their spiritual activity. They merely attend one service each week (which only amounts to about .6 percent of their time), and then the other 313 days of the year they live their lives out on their own in the world. Of course, some may go to “church” two or even three times a week, but their Christianity is still self-contained inside these meetings – events that are merely arranged into their schedule. Some may jump from service to service, seminar to seminar, or meeting to meeting, but they are only experiencing *punctuated Christianity*. The only way they know to feel spiritual is to simply attend more meetings. This is not to say that attending meetings couldn’t be edifying and encouraging, but just not something to be dependent upon in place of an intimate relationship with Christ himself.

Meeting-centric Christians may be some of the most dependable “church” goers and when a meeting starts, you can usually count on them to be there. *But being committed to “church” meetings is not the same thing as being committed to Christ.* Someone may have a great attendance record, but very little spiritual intimacy with Jesus. Some may feel good about being at “church” every time the doors open, but Jesus wants them to walk with Him *every minute of every day.*

**“The Lord is my shepherd’,  
is on Sunday, is on Monday,  
and is through every day of  
the week...” – Hudson Taylor**

Scriptures such as **“be filled with the Spirit”** (Eph. 5:18) and **“pray without ceasing”** (1Th. 5:17) are not once-a-week commands! Jesus said to **“take up your cross daily”** (Luke 9:23). These commands do not take effect just when there is a meeting but are to be obeyed all the time. Meeting-centric people do not walk as 24/7 Christians, but more like a 4/2 Christians. They might have some relationship with Christ, but they don’t have a *sustained* relationship with Christ. Do you suppose there are job openings for *part-time* “Christians” in the kingdom of God?

Notice that the commands to **“serve”** (Gal. 5:13, 1Pet. 4:10), **“care for”** (1Cor. 12:25), **“pray for”** (Jas. 5:16), **“admonish”** (Rom. 15:14, Col. 3:16), **“teach”** (Col. 3:16), **“confess**

**sins to**” (Jas. 5:16), **“forgive”** (Eph. 4:32, Col. 3:13), **“edify”** (Rom. 14:19, 1Th. 5:11), **“encourage”** (1Th. 4:18, 5:11, Heb. 3:13, 10:25), and **“fellowship with”** (1Jn. 1:7) **“...one another”** are not once-a-week commands, but a *daily* part of being nourished through close-knit relationships with one another.<sup>§3.1.2.1</sup> Again, if people were obeying the Scriptures they wouldn’t have a chance to become meeting-centric since their needs would already be met by serving one another daily with their spiritual gifts.<sup>§4.1.1.2</sup> But meeting-centric people are generally not interested in fellowshiping with Christians each day, *because they do not even fellowship with Christ each day!* They usually have shallow fellowship with others precisely because they have shallow relationships with Christ. They are content to play “church” once or twice a week, when they should desire to fellowship with Christians every day (Acts 2:26). They are content to exhort one another weekly, but Jesus wants them to **“exhort one another daily”** (Heb. 3:13). They pray **“give us this day our daily bread”** (Matt. 6:11), but then only go to “church” on the Sunday service to get their *weekly* bread.

What would happen if someone were to attempt to conduct a marriage the same way that most folks approach religion? They would basically pursue other relationships for six days a week and then only meet with their spouse for an hour once a week. Do you think this would make for a good marriage? Is this the type of relationship that Jesus wants? Of course not! Going to “church” to experience staged, preplanned worship is like scheduling a time to kiss your wife! But this is precisely the type of superficial relationship that many people have with Jesus. Do you not know that we are the Bride of Christ (Rev. 21:2,9, 22:17)? A good marriage involves things like passionate love, caring, devotion, sharing and intimacy in a daily relationship. It cannot be sustained solely through ceremonial rituals and performances in a “service”.<sup>§7.1.3.2</sup> Those who only relate to Jesus in this shallow way are merely religious adherents, not true lovers of God.

#### 4.2.2.4 Spiritual Osmosis

Over time, most institutional “church” members begin to develop a form of meeting *dependency* as they learn to wait till Sunday to have their spiritual needs met. They go to their weekly church “service” to get serviced, like a car pulling into a gas station in order to get “filled up” for the next week. Without a meeting to prop them up, their spirituality becomes stagnant. They rely on the meeting to give them enough spiritual boost to last them throughout the week. As a result, their *perceived* relationship with Christ is heavily tied to their experience in the meeting. Many people are easily manipulated into a temporary emotional high during a meeting and then they try to run on the fumes as long as possible. They may feel a rush during an ecstatic time of worship, they might feel moved by the special music, or they might feel stirred by the sing-songy patter of the sermon. These things are all external to them, yet they make them *feel* closer to Christ. If the meeting has gone well, the members will generally go home with warm feelings inside and a sense of satisfaction. They bask in the warmth of *other’s shared spiritual experiences* and then internalize them as their own. These spiritual feelings deceive them into thinking that they themselves are now indeed somehow more spiritual. The praise and worship was spiritual, and so they now

feel spiritual. The sermon was anointed, and so they now feel anointed. They are under the delusion that another's spirituality somehow rubs off onto them through some form of *spiritual osmosis*. They act as if the spirituality of the leader's accomplishments has somehow been transferred over to their own account.

But while attending a meeting may make them *feel* more spiritual, the reality is that in most cases they are not any more spiritual than when they walked in. *The members feel spiritual without having done anything spiritual!* Perhaps someone else heard from the Lord, but did they hear from the Lord? Did they get to use their own spiritual gifts? No, they just sat passively through an hour-long meeting. They are like the moon admiring the beautiful light it radiates, yet it does not generate any light of its own! It is like going to a movie that makes you laugh, cry, and experience all sorts of intense feelings, but in the end *you are just sitting still in a seat*. You relate with all of the experiences of the main character and are caught up in the emotions *as if you were there*. But when the lights are raised you become aware that you have just been passively sitting in a theatre. Afterwards you are not anymore skilled at being a kung-fu artist, international spy, or spaceship captain than when you walked in, yet you *feel* like you somehow shared in the experience. It is like getting all excited after watching your favorite sports team win a game – *except that you didn't even play!* Such meetings do nothing but produce generation after generation of high maintenance, low impact Christians.

Some people's spiritual self-worth is completely tied to the quality of the meeting. The meeting must go well in order for them to feel good about their spiritual condition. Even the clergy's self-esteem often depends on how well the meeting goes as they assess their own spirituality based on their performance in the "show". But just like going to a movie or savoring a victory, the glow always wears off on the way home. Some may talk about the "show" afterward and try to get the feelings to linger, but soon the ambience fades away as they eventually face the realities of the world again and go about their normal routines. They cannot sustain the high they get from a retreat or "church" camp, because the feelings do not last. *They do not realize that they are dependent on meetings to make them feel spiritual.* Christians should not seek after an experience, but God himself! Not that Christians can't feel emotional during a meeting, but the emotions are to follow spiritual realities, not substitute for spiritual realities.

#### 4.2.2.5 Remote-Control Christianity

Remote-control Christianity is just a natural extension of meeting-centric Christianity. If a "church" is primarily a meeting, then today's technology can provide all of the benefits of the meeting without actually having to be there! The same external stimuli that elicit spiritual feelings in a meeting can now be piped into the home with the flip of a switch. And this is not just limited to television. If someone is not feeling spiritual, they can just play Christian music, listen to Christian talk radio, or surf the Internet to Christian websites. It won't be long until "online churches" begin springing up with "Distance-Ed" Christianity! Instead of being limited to a meeting once or twice a week, they can dial up their

Christianity whenever they need another Christian “fix”. They are still experiencing punctuated Christianity, *but now they can control the frequency*. This is not to say that someone couldn’t gain knowledge, repent of a sin, or worship the Lord by sitting through an institutional meeting. But now these exact same things can be accomplished by sitting passively at home watching a “church” service on TV!

While some people use technology to supplement their “church” services, others have used it to replace them completely. There are now entire industries supported around the televangelist model. Many people today actually prefer *media-centric* Christianity instead of meeting-centric Christianity. Some of them are not “people persons” so they actually prefer the anonymity of staying home. They prefer a problem free broadcast without personal conflicts, politics, or confrontation. Not only that, but they can also control their own content. They can limit their programming to their favorite ministries and the preachers they agree with. Many like the television shows more than meetings because the producers can annotate the sermons, cut out any mistakes, and make them fit in a half hour. They can record their favorite programs and watch them at their leisure, fast forward over the boring parts, or replay the highlights. All this in the comfort of their own homes! They have literally compartmentalized Christianity into a box that they can control on their own terms!

Someone might point out the downside is that these people won’t be sharing their spiritual gifts or helping out others. *Yes, but most of them wouldn’t do any of those things at an institutional “church” meeting either!* They can be anonymous in a “church” meeting or they can be anonymous at home. They can give money to a “church” or they can give money to a television show. They can sit passively in a pew at “church” or they can sit passively on the couch at home. Many of them rightly come to the conclusion that they are really no worse off by staying at home. Some institutional “churches” look down at this system of impersonal contact, but are they really any different? Shaking hands with a greeter when they enter and shaking hands with the “pastor” when they exit can hardly be considered fellowship.<sup>§3.2.2.1</sup> In both cases, there is still only an impersonal relationship with an organization. You could be a faithful “partner” with a ministry and give them money for years, but if you fall on hard times with huge medical expenses or bankruptcy will they give any money back to you? Or will they say **“be warmed and well fed”** (Jas. 2:16) for “that is not our ministry”? Someone might argue that “going to church” is worth the trip because the feelings and emotions produced from *live entertainment* are just better.<sup>§4.2.2.1</sup> But others wonder why anyone ever bothers to go to “church” when they can get the same thing on television: “Why do people go to rock concerts when they can just buy the group’s tape?” “Why go to a football game when you can watch TV from your couch and get instant replay too?” Remote-control Christianity is just the natural result of the institutional environment carried out to its logical conclusion. It just saves the trip in!

No one is saying that using Christian media is wrong, but only that the way that some people are using it is not the kind of relationship that Jesus wants with His children. *Jesus does not want a relationship of punctuated Christianity whether it be through meetings or through media*. Jesus wants us to be able to



come directly to Him every day without being dependent on external stimuli. If you were stranded on a desert island would your relationship with Christ be diminished without any meetings or technology to sustain you? The Scripture, **“Do not forsake the assembling together of yourselves”** (Heb. 10:25) was not written to compel people who watch non-interactive, impersonal television programs to start attending non-interactive, impersonal “church” meetings. *Both environments are equally unbiblical for precisely the same reasons!* If people are ever going to bother to assemble together because of the Scriptures, then they ought to assemble in the manner specified by the Scriptures.<sup>§4.1.2.2</sup>

### 4.2.3 Distorted Evangelistic Meetings

It should be pointed out, however, that the type of meeting conducted by the institutional “churches” is somewhat Biblical in a distorted sense. There actually is a type of meeting described in Scripture where one person stands up front and talks to a crowd of passive spectators. This, of course, is not a meeting for Christians described in 1 Corinthians 14, but an evangelistic meeting for *non-Christians*. In Scripture, an evangelistic meeting would consist of a Christian who would preach the gospel to a crowd of non-Christians with the goal of leading them to Christ (Acts 2:14, 3:11-12). In this type of meeting, the evangelistic preacher might be the only Christian present among a congregation of heathens. Notice that what the institutional “churches” are really doing is substituting a form of an evangelistic meeting for their “church” services. Obviously, this is completely different from a 1 Corinthians 14 meeting for Christians, where *everyone* in the meeting could speak and share **“a psalm, a teaching, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation”** (1Cor. 14:26). Notice the contrast between these three types of meetings:

Evangelistic Outreach	“church” Service	Church Meeting
One apostle or evangelist speaks	One “pastor” or “priest” speaks	Every Christian present may speak
Crowd passively listens (or perhaps heckles)	Crowd passively listens (or perhaps sleeps)	Everyone actively shares their spiritual gifts
Geared toward non-Christians	Geared for Christians and non-Christians	Geared only toward Christians
Urges people to live the Christian life.	Urges people to live the Christian life.	Strengthens those who are already Christians.

Notice how the institutional “church service” closely resembles the pattern of an evangelistic meeting. The “pastor” or “priest” will stand up front and preach to his congregation to try to convert them or instruct them to improve their level of spirituality. Ironically, it is perhaps somewhat fitting for institutional “churches” to employ this model of meeting since many *members* of their congregations are in fact non-Christians. Thus, many institutional “churches” have “altar calls” at the end of their meetings in hopes that some of their members might actually get

saved! This is not Biblical outreach; it is *unbiblical inreach*! What would happen if one of their members were saved in this environment? They too would learn to sit passively through the meetings hoping others are brought into the fold so that they too can sit passively through the meetings! The more important question is, when do the believers in these institutions ever share their spiritual gifts with one another as discussed in 1 Corinthians 14? Simple, they don't! This type of unbiblical meeting doesn't meet the needs of the saints nor does it go beyond the confines of its walls to reach the lost.

But didn't Paul have this kind of meeting where he droned on all night and Eutycus fell asleep (Acts 20:9)? No, Paul's "sermon" was not a monolog that droned on all night, he had a *dialog* with them all night. The Greek word used in this Scripture is "ΔΙΑΛΛΕΓΟΜΑΙ" #1256 which means "to conduct a discussion" and is where we get the English word "dialog" from. Paul did not talk *at* them all night in a sermon; he discussed issues *with* them in a dialog. One is suitable for the Church; the other is not. Not that someone can't teach for an extended period of time, but everyone should be able to contribute in an open discussion among the saints.<sup>§4.1.2.3</sup>

## 4.3 Practical Applications

As Christians begin to build relationships with one another in the Church, they will naturally begin to meet together in a variety of ways.<sup>§4.1.1</sup> Remember, a meeting is not an official ritualistic ceremony, but simply, **"Where two or three are gathered in My name, there I am in their midst."** (Matt. 18:20) You might gather in living rooms, garages, parks, hotel conference rooms, apartment clubhouses, gymnasiums, stadiums, or anywhere else that is convenient. No worship band, sound system, charismatic speaker, bulletins, building, stained glass windows, pews, or other accessories are necessary in order to meet. You can easily gather together without a made-up institutional name, organizational hierarchy, non-profit corporation, or any other unbiblical or divisive practice. If someone else gives your meeting together a name, do not meet in that name or accept that name for yourselves.<sup>§2.2.1.4</sup> You are to simply gather together in the name of Jesus. Period! *No other name is permitted or required.* Again, the right meetings will not occur unless you are having the right spiritual fellowship outside the meetings. You must continue to be led by the Holy Spirit, before, during, and after any meeting. Don't think you can live like Ten-O-Clock Charlie and then expect to be able to contribute anything.<sup>§4.2.2.2</sup> If you can come to a meeting and then leave a meeting unchanged, then what was the purpose of the meeting? Was it just a time for you to have religious entertainment?

### 4.3.1 Meetings Led by Jesus

Christians may get together for all kinds of meetings *of* the Church, but they also need to begin meeting *as* the Church.<sup>§4.1.2.1</sup> It is fine for you to get together for luncheons, sports, food co-ops, homeschooling, political causes, etc., but do

you ever meet together as the Church? The Church is much more than a loose collection of Christians who occasionally “hang out” together with similar interests.<sup>§3.2.1</sup> To advocate a meetingless form of Christianity is clearly opposed to Scripture (Heb. 10:25)! Some of you may be content to have limited fellowship in institutional “churches” for a season, but where are you going to experience a gathering of the saints in the manner described in 1 Corinthians 14? Some will continue to hop between institutional “churches” looking for the perfect meetings, but never seem to find them. *The challenge is to stop looking for an ideal place of fellowship and become such a place!* There is no reason to dance around the unbiblical practices of the institutional framework when you can just as easily meet together in a Scriptural manner.<sup>§2.3.3.1</sup> Instead of wearing yourself out by running in and out of various institutions to maintain relationships, you may eventually come to ask yourself, “Why are we trying to meet in these institutions?” *At some point you need to stop seeing yourselves as independent Christians and start functioning as the Church.* Otherwise, you may be just as guilty of incorrectly discerning the Body of Christ as the institutional “churches” (1Cor. 11:29-30). Many institutional “churches” think they are the Church but are not, while those who fellowship as the Church often fail to see themselves as the Church. You may indeed break bread together with other Christians on occasion, but when you do, do you think of yourselves as the Body of Christ?

#### 4.3.1.1 Let Jesus Call the Meetings

It is important to remember that **“Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain.”** (Psa. 127:1) Jesus really is the Head of the Church!<sup>§5.1.2</sup> Do you really believe that? Christians are not responsible for running the Church, Jesus is. Jesus said, **“I will build My Church”** (Matt. 16:18). If you are not happy with the Church, do not take it upon yourself to keep calling meetings to try to fix it, but look to Jesus. Some of you might be tempted to try to throw something together just so that you can legitimize yourselves by having a “meeting” to go to. But throwing a collection of disconnected Christians together in a room doesn’t necessarily accomplish anything. Unless the Lord has properly knit you together, you will soon revert back to a *meeting-centric* mentality like the institutional “churches”.<sup>§4.2.2.3</sup> The Church is not meant to be an occasional event or meeting, it is a way of life. The Church is not just some sort of experiment that can be tried out for a while, the Church is led by Jesus Christ. Do not think you must “try out” the latest trends or jump on the bandwagon for the latest Christian fad; simply obey the voice of the Holy Spirit.

If meetings are to be led by Jesus, then the meetings first need to be called by Jesus. If no one is able to hear from Jesus, then you certainly would have a problem. Jesus is the Head of the Church and it is Jesus who leads His Church. Do you believe that is possible? Or must men step in and take over the reins? Meetings of the Church are not dictated by the calendar, business practices, or men’s whims, but Jesus is to decide if, when, where, and how you are to meet. Those who are trying to fellowship as the Church aren’t necessarily immune from having man-called meetings or man-led meetings either. Even if a respected

leader calls a meeting, it doesn't mean that Jesus will necessarily show up and jump through the hoops. Instead of calling a meeting and hoping the Lord will show up,<sup>§4.2.1</sup> why not let Jesus call the meeting and then you will know that He will be there. You will not have to ask the Lord to come to *your* meeting; the Lord will already be at *His* meeting!

#### 4.3.1.2 Let Jesus Run the Meetings

When Jesus calls a meeting, it doesn't mean you can then do whatever you want in that meeting. Jesus Christ is to have free reign in the midst of His people every day and in every way. It is okay for there to be an agenda as long as it is *set by Jesus* and not by you.<sup>§5.1.3.2</sup> It is not up to the "pastor" to decide what can be shared in *his* meeting; it is up to Jesus to decide what is to be shared in *His* meeting. Jesus may prompt several Christians to bring up things to share at a meeting, which is quite different from a leader who puts the outline of a meeting in the bulletin according to his pre-planned agenda. Don't assume that any particular leader or special visitor would necessarily have any role in a given meeting. Just because a Christian rock star would happen to visit, for example, doesn't automatically mean that the meeting would have anything to do with him or his music.

The open participatory meeting described in 1 Corinthians 14 gives us an example of what a meeting led by Jesus might look like:

**"Whenever you come together, each one has a psalm, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. If anyone speaks in a tongue, let two or at most three speak in turn, and let one interpret. But if there is no interpreter, let him be silent in the Church, and let him speak to himself and to God. And let two or three prophets speak, and let the others discern. And if revelation comes to another sitting, let the first be silent. For you can all prophesy in sequence so that all may learn and all may be encouraged. And the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets, for God is not one of disorder, but of peace."** (1Cor. 14:26-33)

Such a meeting is completely foreign and perhaps even frightening to the average institutional "church" member. Many reading this now are angered at the thought that they should be having meetings of this kind. Others may be willing to *tolerate* a meeting like this, but they could never see themselves participating as part of the "**each one**" or "**all**". Indeed, some who initially embraced the Church have returned back to the man-controlled environments of the institutional "churches" simply because they did not have the maturity to function in this kind of meeting.<sup>§3.3.1.3</sup> *Some of you may just have to face the fact that you do not like to be in meetings that are led by Jesus.* Many Christians will fellowship in almost any type of format *except* in the manner specified in 1 Corinthians 14.<sup>§4.1.2.3</sup> They would much rather passively sit through a man-made program when they can remain an anonymous spectator.

It is often difficult at first for people to learn to wait on the Lord and let Jesus run the meeting. Don't be afraid to wait quietly before the Lord for a period of time. The temptation for some, however, is to step forward and initiate something in the flesh at the first period of silence. They may try to steer the meeting in a certain direction in order to meet their expectations. They may become impatient with the way things are going because they ultimately don't think Jesus is doing anything. But Jesus is a gentleman and He won't force you to follow Him. If someone tries to take over the meeting, the others need to address it and continue to follow Jesus's leading. If the people don't know the difference, then again, they would have a problem.

**“The sheep hear his voice and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he brings out all his own, he goes before them and his sheep follow because they know his voice. And they will not follow a stranger, but will flee from him because they do not know the stranger’s voice.”** (John 10:3-5)

People need to learn to control their carnal impulses, leave behind their preconceived notions, set aside their own expectations, and let the Holy Spirit lead the meetings.<sup>§7.3.1</sup> Meetings will generally take care of themselves as people are led by the Holy Spirit.

#### 4.3.1.3 Let Jesus Lead You in the Meetings

If Jesus is going to lead a meeting, then He is going to have to lead the people in the meeting. This means *you!* You have to be ready to share! You must be willing to start a song, read a Scripture, share a spiritual insight, or pray for someone *as the Lord leads*. That is part of what it means to be a priest!<sup>§3.1.1.1</sup> **“Each one has received a gift to serve one another as good stewards of the multi-faceted grace of God.”** (1Pet. 4:10) Don't be shy and sit back passively waiting for someone else to call upon you; assertively share what is on your heart whenever the Holy Spirit calls upon you! Don't be looking around for someone else to say something that God has placed on *your* heart. It is quite appropriate for there to be periods of silence as people wait on the Lord, but do not remain silent and disobey God if He has given you something to say. Don't be afraid or think “It's not good enough”; if Jesus is leading you, then it is good enough! Jesus can lead you if you are willing. Are you willing? Here are a few practical guidelines:

- Don't just say the first thing that comes to mind, but let the Holy Spirit prompt you when to share the things He has placed in your heart. **“If anyone speaks, let him speak as if it were the words of God.”** (1Pet. 4:11) Don't bore everyone with a long story detailing the trivia of your life; keep it short, simple, and to the point. Keep your worldly, course joking, loud, critical, opinionated talk to yourself (Eph. 5:4) – we don't care! The goal is not to have a

round-robin, amateur hour, where everyone is supposed to say something. We don't want to hear from you; *we only want to hear from Jesus in you.*

- Don't have a sing-along time where each person requests their favorite song, but let the Holy Spirit lead you in worship. **“Let the word of anointing dwell in you richly with all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs of grace, singing in your hearts to God.”** (Col. 3:16) Let the Holy Spirit bring to mind any songs that He wants to be sung. You might even be led to worship without singing any songs. No worship leader, choir, or instruments are necessary to worship God; all that is needed is the Holy Spirit.
- Don't have mechanistic prayers that occur at a specific time for a limited duration, but let the Holy Spirit lead you in prayer. **“And similarly, the Spirit also helps our weakness, for we do not know how we ought to pray, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with inexpressible groanings.”** (Rom. 8:26) Don't have fixed prayers, preach a sermon in a prayer, always look to one person to pray, or feel compelled to pray just because everyone else prayed but you – pray in the Spirit (Eph. 6:18)! Don't pray for every possible prayer request or feel compelled to pray through some list, but pray in faith for the things that are on Jesus' heart. If someone asks for you to pray for his aunt's neighbor's hangnail, perhaps Jesus would want you to pray for her salvation instead!
- Don't have a designated teaching time or a designated teacher, but let the Holy Spirit teach you. **“And as for you, the anointing that you received from Him remains in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you. But as His anointing teaches you about all things and is true and is not a lie and as He taught you, remain in Him.”** (1Jn. 2:27) Let the Holy Spirit prompt you to share the things He has taught you. Remember teaching should not be a monologue,<sup>§4.2.3</sup> but a dialog where the people are engaged in an interactive discussion (Acts 15:1-31, 19:9, 20:7-9).
- Don't have Bible studies where everyone tries to share their own opinions (also known as “pooling your ignorance”), but let the Holy Spirit speak to you in keeping with the Scriptures. **“For the Word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword and piercing as far as division of soul and spirit, both of joints and marrow, and able to judge thoughts and intentions of the heart.”** (Heb. 4:12) You don't need to scientifically parse and nitpick over the words of God as much as you need to hear from the Word of God, which is Jesus Christ himself (John 1:1,14, Heb. 4:12-13, Rev. 19:11-13).
- Don't put on a sanitized show for visitors, but let the Holy Spirit deal with real heart felt issues. **“Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another that you may be restored.”** (Jas. 5:16) When have you ever confessed your sins at a meeting in an institutional “church”? Don't have a counseling session, group therapy, or play twenty questions every time someone shares a problem, but lift these things up to the Lord. Don't be embarrassed by mistakes, awkward silence, poor sounding worship, clumsy situations, or growing pains, but come before the Lord just as you are.

The Holy Spirit might lead you to do any of these things or none of these things at a given meeting. Following the Holy Spirit is scary stuff to the ritualistic institutional mentality. He may have you do something entirely different or perhaps something that has never been done before. Consider that much of what is now recorded in the New Testament was done without any Scriptural precedent. The Church just followed the leading of the Holy Spirit, and then that set the new precedent!<sup>§7.1.1</sup> There is no longer any excuse for, “This is the way we have always done things” when you can be led by Jesus himself. So much more could be said about this, but other books may be consulted that are entirely devoted to this topic.<sup>§B.1</sup>

### 4.3.2 Dealing with “Success”

When you begin to meet together with others as the Church, you may not look like much at first. You may be small in number, spiritually immature, and lacking in leadership as outcasts in the wilderness.<sup>§3.3.1</sup> Your first meetings may have awkward situations, personal problems, clumsy words, and poor sounding worship music. You may appear to be unimpressive, rinky-dink, or amateurish to the institutional “churches” and you may not even appear to be anything in your own eyes (Num. 13:33). In contrast, there may be an institutional “church” in town with a dynamic speaker, excellent worship team, professional musicians, multimedia capabilities, and many mature Christians. The difference, however, is that *the former is meeting as the Church and the latter is not!* However impressive an institutional “church” may be, they are not the Church and the Christians there are usually involved in many unbiblical practices, including the sin of division.<sup>§2.1.2</sup> They may appear to have many wonderful contents, but they still have an invalid container.<sup>§1.2.2</sup> In some respects, it may be better for you to lack the multimedia capabilities and professional worship band, because then you will have nothing else to do but to focus on the Lord himself.<sup>§3.3.1</sup> Is Jesus Christ alone not enough? When you meet together as the Church, no matter how unimpressive you may be, you are functioning as the Church in God’s eyes and you will receive His blessings. And as you grow over time, the institutional “churches” may begin to take notice of you...

**“The house built on the sand  
may oftentimes be built  
higher, have more fair  
parapets and battlements,  
windows and ornaments,  
than that which is built upon  
the rock...” – John Owen**

#### 4.3.2.1 Coping with Visibility

Many institutional “churches” strive to achieve a status of prominence in their community as the visible representation of the people of God for their area.<sup>§3.3.1</sup> The type of visibility that comes from having a sign in front of a building, a tall steeple, and newspaper ads, however, is a far cry from the

visibility that comes from spiritual activity (Acts 2:47, 5:11), signs and wonders (Acts 5:12-13), and committed love (John 13:35) described in the Scriptures. Here, they are confusing their physical prominence for spiritual fruit.<sup>§7.2.3.1</sup> The spiritual nature of the Church will be manifested in the physical, but the converse is not true. Having a physically prominent institution does not have any bearing on whether there is any spiritual legitimacy. If it did, then any number of large cults could claim to be the Church (and most of them do by the way).

Those of you who are meeting as the Church may be very few in number without any physical adornments or prominence, yet you are still a valid representation of the Church. In the early days, it took quite some time before the Romans began to take note of a small unimpressive “Jewish sect” (Acts 24:5, 28:22) that met from house to house. And now there are many places today where the Church has begun to flourish and the institutional religions are beginning to take note of them because they have finally grown to the point that they look “successful” (at least according to the worldly way that institutional “churches” measure things). But the growth and subsequent prominence of the Church in an area can bring about a whole new dimension of challenges to be faced. Sometimes Christians, particularly in persecuted areas, are afraid to meet together openly for fear that they may be noticed by outsiders. They would prefer to remain underground and don’t want people to be able to label them in any identifiable manner. But others can’t wait for people to notice their meetings because they think that somehow having a recognizable group somehow legitimizes them. In either case, having visibility should be neither a goal nor a curse, but merely a by-product of whatever spiritual activity is occurring.

#### 4.3.2.2 Aren’t You Just Another “church”?

Some of you may be hesitant to meet as a group because you worry that others will then label you as being “just another church”. You might fellowship with individual Christians, but shy away from meeting together as the Church for fear that others will then write you off and say, “You have your church and we have ours.” You may have gone to great lengths to avoid the divisiveness of the institutional “church” system and are hurt by the thought that someone would accuse you of “starting another church”. But inevitably this becomes the case as soon as you grow to the point that some of the institutional “churches” begin to notice you. From the institutional perspective, those of you who are meeting as the Church are just another “church” that is no different from themselves. It does not really matter if you are more Biblical than they are, because they feel safe in ignoring you once they have pigeon-holed you into being “just another church” like them. That is because the institutional “churches” do not understand the difference between meeting on the basis of unity as opposed to meeting on the grounds of division. They see the groups of people meeting in the towers and a group of people meeting in the courtyard below and *they don’t see any difference between the towers and the courtyard*.<sup>§2.2.3</sup> To them, almost any ol’ group of people can be a “church” and if they eventually notice a group of people meeting in the courtyard, then they will conclude that someone has obviously “started another church”.



Some people in the institutional “church” system may look at those fellowshiping as the Church as just another movement to “check out”. Compared to their institutional environment, your meetings may look like a “revival” to them so they may want to visit and see what the Lord is doing. Indeed, when you begin to function as part of the Church that is two-thousand years old, you will appear to be something new to them, since the Scriptural concepts of the Church are completely foreign to their experience. But these people usually don’t stay around for long because they are not really looking to become committed to daily fellowship with others; they were just looking for something new to “attend”.<sup>§4.2.2</sup>

#### 4.3.2.3 Who is the Real Cult?

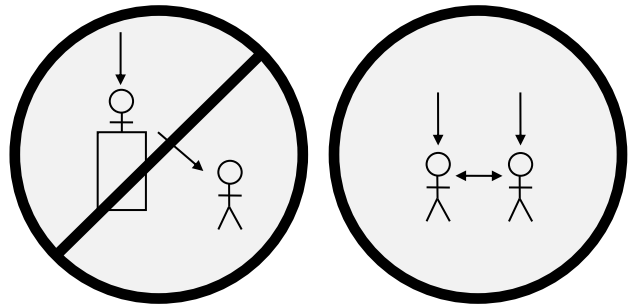
If an institutional “church” were to acknowledge a difference between the towers and the courtyard, it would probably be one of pity towards the courtyard.<sup>§2.2.3</sup> That is because they believe that the people in the courtyard simply have not yet acquired enough resources to build a nice tower like themselves. They may have known other groups of people who once started out in the courtyard (perhaps even themselves), but only till they were eventually able to move into their own towers.<sup>§7.3.1</sup> It is only when Christians persist in remaining in the courtyard that the institutional “churches” get nervous and begin to label them as a “cult”. They do not know what to do with the Church that doesn’t have an institutional name, building, or set meeting time. You might think that they would be happy for others to have such daily intimate Christian fellowship; but they are not, because those who operate as the Church stand as an indictment to those who do not. *Many institutional “churches” will actually become jealous because you are obeying the Scripture!* They especially get angry when they examine your orthodox theology and can find no cultic beliefs to accuse you of. They just get exasperated and say, “Well, you must be wrong anyway!” If you really were just another “church”, you might think the institutional “churches” would be happy to coexist with you just like all of the other “churches” in town; yet for some reason they are often compelled to go out of their way and single you out as a “cult” because they feel threatened by you.<sup>§3.3.1.2</sup> Ironically, it is the institutional “churches” that are really cults for they are *sects* that were formed long ago on the basis of division.<sup>§2.1.2</sup> (Besides, how else would you characterize a group that is controlled by a single leader who wears a special robe and dictates what others in the group are allowed to do in their meetings?) The institutional “churches” have been cults for so long that they think it is normal, while those who fellowship as the Church now appear completely foreign to them.

It should be pointed out that most of the mainline denominations such as the Lutherans, Methodists, Baptists, etc. were all once labeled as “cults” by the previous establishment when they first started out too. Indeed, the early Church was also called a “cult” (Acts 24:5, 28:22), so why is it surprising that anything would be different about the Church today? What else would the world call a group of religious fanatics that follow an unseen Leader (Acts 2:36), perform strange rituals (Acts 2:38), share things in common (Acts 2:44), sell their possessions (Acts 2:45), and are

feared by society (Acts 5:13)? Pretty strange, huh? If someone doesn't accuse you of being a cult, then perhaps you are doing something wrong. 😊 **“And indeed, those who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”** (2Tim. 3:12) Paul was accused of being a **“troublemaker”** and **“stirring up riots”** as a **“ringleader”** of a **“cult”** (Acts 24:5). Of course, there is not much you can do if people decide to label you as a “cult” or by any other name for that matter. Again, if someone tries to give you a name, do not meet in that name or accept that name for yourselves. §2.2.1.4 Just be content to fellowship together in the name of Jesus on the open grounds of the Church. Any others who choose to obey Jesus will certainly meet you there, if they were not already there before you.

## 4.4 Challenge Questions

- Is your relationship with other Christians primarily defined by a meeting? Does the majority of your fellowship with other Christians only occur once a week?
- Can all of the elements of your “church” service be experienced just as equally well over the television?
- Does your “church” have an altar call? Are there non-Christian members in your “church”? Are you sure?
- Are important matters discussed before the whole Church? Do you get to participate in the process?
- How well do you fellowship in the Spirit on Monday through Saturday?
- Do you say “in Jesus’ name” at the end of your prayers or do you actually meet in Jesus’ name? Do you know the difference?



# Chapter 5: Church Authority

## 5.1 Scriptural Truths

When someone claims to have authority it is prudent to examine where they get their authority from. **“By what authority are you doing these things or who gave you this authority to do these things?”** (Mark 11:28) This is especially important as it relates to authority in the Church since many Christians seem to lack even a basic understanding of how authority is supposed to operate. Do Church leaders have authority to do whatever they want? How should decisions be made in the Church? Those who fail to properly recognize God’s authority in the Church may find themselves acting in rebellion to God which is a serious sin. **“For rebellion is like the sin of witchcraft and insubordination is like evil of idolatry.”** (1Sam. 15:23).

It should be fairly obvious that God is the final authority for all matters in the universe that He created. This very world came into existence through the authority of God’s spoken command (Heb. 11:3). Any valid authority originates from God and God alone (John 19:11, Rom. 13:1, Jude 1:25). Jesus Christ declared, **“All authority in Heaven and on earth has been given to Me.”** (Matt. 28:18) That is because Jesus is God and **“the head over every power and authority”** (Col. 2:10; cf. Eph. 1:21, 1Pet. 3:22). Any authority that is not derived from God is an *invalid* authority and acting in rebellion to God. Anyone who operates under the “color of authority” and yet cannot trace their delegated authority back to God would be a fraud and should not be obeyed.

Authority is generally defined to be the power or right to exercise command over subjects. Subjects are compelled to comply with the authority’s commands for any number of reasons such as moral obligation, promise of reward, love, fear of punishment, or by the use of force. The common Greek word for authority used in the Scriptures is “ΕΞΟΥΧΙΑ” #1849 which is normally translated as “authority”, “power”, or “right”. A simple study of this word in Scripture reveals several entities who have been given authority: angels (Rev. 14:18, 18:1), governments (John 19:10-11, Rom. 13:1-5), militaries (Matt. 8:9, Luke 7:8), evil principalities (Eph. 6:12, Col. 1:13,

2:15), Satan (Luke 4:6, Acts 26:18, Eph. 2:2, 1Jn. 5:19), and the Antichrist (Rev. 13:2,7). The basis for authority can be generally classified into three different categories: *physical power*, *moral government*, and *spiritual authority*. These different types of authority have been present since the Garden of Eden, corresponding to several classic trichotomies:

Physical Power	Moral Government	Spiritual Authority
Rule by force	Rule of law	Rule by love
Inherent positions	Elected/appointed position	No fixed positions
Governs the body	Governs the soul	Governs the spirit
Physical creation	Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil	Tree of Life

The first two categories form the basis of *positional authority* which is the authority structure used by most organizations, corporations, bureaucracies, militaries, and governments in the world.<sup>§5.1.2</sup> But as you will soon see, positional authority is *not* the type of authority used in the Church which operates on the basis of *spiritual authority* alone.<sup>§5.1.2</sup>

### 5.1.1 Positional Authority

Positions of authority in the world have been established by men based on the principles of physical power and moral government. In these systems, an official may delegate some of his authority to subservient positions, establishing a *chain of command* in a top-down hierarchical manner. The lower subjects often perform harder work, but they continue to participate either because of promised benefits and/or the threat of punishment that come from the higher-ups. The subjects are given the hope that one day they too may be able to “climb the ladder” and gain the benefits of a higher position or office. When an official dies or steps down, the authority of his position is then usually passed on to another successor.

These positions of authority do not necessarily have anything to do with following God’s will. The rules that a group follows can be quite arbitrary or even immoral in nature as long as they are able to enforce them within the group. Creating authority structures within groups to save the whales or knit quilts doesn’t necessarily have anything to do with God, but allows men to establish organizations to further their goals. This does not mean that it is necessarily wrong to become an officer in an organization, but it is merely a position of men.

#### 5.1.1.1 Basis for Positions

Physical power or *rule by force* is the simplest form of positional authority as it compels the subjects to obey under the threat of brute force or raw power. Physical power is sometimes represented in Scripture by the Greek term “ΔΥΝΑΜΙΣ” #1411, which is usually either translated as “power” or “authority”. Positions of authority in these systems are held on the *basis of ability*. A *pecking*

*order* often develops where the alpha-male keeps the others in line by means of brute force. Should the leader become weakened or die, the second strongest will then rise to take his place, and so on. This pecking order extends all the way down the line to the very bottom of the ladder where the weakest can be “hen pecked” by almost anyone else. Though the weaker animals endure harsher treatment, they still remain with the group since they might die without the herd’s protection and food sharing arrangements. Animals that might otherwise kill each other in a dog-eat-dog world of the “survival of the fittest” can form a semblance of order to maximize their self-preservation. This arrangement is also used by men when they yield to their baser animalistic instincts of their fallen nature (Rom. 7:5, Gal. 5:19-21). Just like the animals, a form of control can be maintained among degenerate people who operate under a “might makes right” mentality. This can range from a bully pushing other kids around on the playground, to the mafia’s complex business arrangements, to a dictator that rules by tyranny. It is also speculated that this is the type of authority that Satan possesses to keep the other demons under his control (Mark 3:22-26). Positions of authority derived from physical power are neither appointed nor elected, because the position of power is inherent to the physical structure – the strongest is simply the strongest.

Entity	Head	Subject	Benefits	Punishments
Animals	Alpha-male	Herd	Protection	Exile, death
Family	Father	Children	Nurturing	Lost privileges
Mafia	Godfather	Gangster	Protection	Injury, death
Fallen Angels	Satan	Demons	Protection	Loss of position

Moral government is a more civilized form of positional authority which is based on the *rule of law*, instead of rule by force. Men are able to contract together and create positions of authority in order to achieve mutually agreed upon goals through the *consent of the governed*. They often establish rules and by-laws to govern their affairs while offering incentives for achievement and/or punishments for noncompliance. The operation of this type of authority can perhaps best be illustrated by a policeman directing traffic. A policeman standing in the intersection does not have the power to *physically* stop a car from going through by brute force, but he simply holds out his hand and they stop because they recognize his authority on the basis of law. Positions in these systems of moral government do not necessarily have anything to do with a person’s physical ability. The policeman, for example, could be very small and unimposing and yet the traffic still yields to his directions. If a driver refuses to recognize the policeman’s authority, then the policemen cannot stop him (at least at that intersection). Men have established authority structures based on moral government to create all sorts of governments, businesses, organizations, clubs, societies, and *institutional “churches”*.<sup>§1.2.2.1</sup> Positions of authority derived from moral government are designated through election or appointment.

Entity	Head	Subject	Benefits	Punishments
Kingdom	King	Commoner	Defense, services	Fine, prison, death
Democracy	President	Citizen	Defense, services	Fine, prison, death
Business	CEO	Employee	Salary, benefits	Demotion, firing
Club	President	Member	Social networking	Demotion, expulsion
Religion	Clergy	Laity	Social networking	Excommunication

God did not originally desire for governments like this to exist, for the only government that God had in mind was a theocracy (Judg. 8:23, Jer. 31:33, Rev. 21:3). But when Israel rejected God’s rule (1Sam. 8:7, 12:12), God became angry and allowed them to have a king as a form of judgment against themselves (1Sam. 8:11-18, Hos. 13:11). If a nation is not going to submit to God, it is probably merciful that God allows them to establish governments in order to restrain immoral men from themselves (Rom. 13:4).

### 5.1.1.2 Positions in the World

Scripture is clear that Christians must submit to the authority structures that are instituted among men. That is because God’s authority has *indirectly* been given to them. **“By me, kings reign and rulers decree justice. By me, princes govern, and nobles – all who rightly judge.”** (Prov. 8:15-16). God’s authority operates *through* these positions of men and if they disobey God, it is up to God to bring them to account. **“Vengeance is mine, I will repay’, says the Lord.”** (Rom. 12:19; cf. Deut. 32:35, Isa. 63:4). This is no different than if an intermediate supervisor in a corporation gets out of line, it is up to the upper management to bring him to account. Ultimately, God is the highest authority and He will eventually bring about final justice.

Ordinarily one might suspect that such made up positions of men would not have any authority from God at all, *except for that fact that God said that they do:*

- **“Everyone must submit to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except from God and those that exist have been established by God. Thus, he who resists the authority has opposed what God instituted, and those who have opposed will receive judgment upon themselves.”** (Rom. 13:1-2)
- **“Remind them to submit to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to slander no one, to be peaceful, gentle, showing humility to all men.”** (Tit. 3:1-2)
- **“Submit to every human institution for the Lord’s sake, whether to a king as the supreme or to governors sent by Him to punish those who do wrong and praise those who do right....Give honor to everyone, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king.”** (1Pet. 2:13-17)

Why should Christians submit to the positional authority structures of this world? Well, the short answer is, “Because God said so!” *The spiritual authority of God*

*commands us to submit to the positional authority structures of this world.* But this does not mean that God necessarily condones their actions.<sup>§5.3.1.1</sup> We submit to them **“for the Lord’s sake”** (1Pet. 2:13); not because we fear them, but **“because of conscience”** (Rom. 13:5). Even Jesus submitted to the Pontius Pilate for he recognized that he had been granted authority from above (John 19:11). So if you are really submitting to God, then you also will submit to the positions of authority in the world as He commands. **“For by Him all things were created in the heavens and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones, dominions, rulers, or authorities.”** (Col. 1:16)

Of course, an exception is made when the authorities order men to disobey God’s commands. In these cases, **“We must follow God rather than men.”** (Acts 5:29; cf. Acts 4:19). Non-Christians also understand this principle as they protest in acts of civil disobedience when their consciences perceive that the government is acting immorally. Unless there is a clear contradiction of God’s instructions, however, Christians must continue to submit to the positions of men as God has commanded.

**“When we disobey lesser authorities, we are guilty of disobeying Christ...To say you honor the kingdom of Christ while you disobey His authority structure is to be guilty not only of hypocrisy but of cosmic treason.”**  
– R. C. Sproul

### 5.1.1.3 No Positions in the Church

While there are positions of authority in the world, Scripture is quite clear that there are *no* positions of authority in the Church! Jesus was completely familiar with the positional authority systems used in the world when He *explicitly* forbade them among Christians:

**“You know that the rulers of the nations exercise lordship over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It is not so among you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you will be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you will be your slave – just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve...”** (Matt. 20:25-28; cf. Mark 10:42-44, Luke 22:24-27)

Jesus did not say that positional authority is not a valid authority structure in the world, but only that it is not to be used in the Church. **“It is not so among you”** applies to all Christians! But because those who hold positions in institutional “churches” often have trouble understanding plain English, let us examine these verses more closely to be very precise about what Jesus is forbidding.

First, the phrase **“exercise lordship over”** is translated from the Greek term “ΚΥΡΙΕΥΩ” #2961 or “ΚΑΤΑΚΥΡΙΕΥΩ” #2634 which both come from the root word “ΚΥΡΙΟΣ” #2962 meaning “lord” or “master”. A “lord” is someone who holds a position of authority over another person (not a reference to a position in the

British monarchy). ☺ Men are obviously forbidden to hold positions as lords in the Church because only Jesus is Lord! Jesus said, **“You call Me Teacher and Lord and you are right, for I am!”** (John 13:13). Jesus alone **“exercises lordship over”** the Church. Some institutional leaders have tried to defend their lordship over others based on a translation that substitutes the words as “lord it over” here instead. Here an ambiguous “it” has been *inserted* into the text which they interpret to mean that they can still exercise lordship over others as long as they are not rubbing “it” in and being overbearing with their power. Perhaps it is fitting that their imaginary positions hinge on this single word “it”, since the word “it” *is not present in any Greek text!* The Greek terms “ΚΥΡΙΕΥΩ” and “ΚΑΤΑΚΥΡΙΕΥΩ” do not have the word “it” hiding somewhere inside of them. These words do not carry a connotation of being egotistical, tyrannical, or overbearing, *nor are they used this way in any other verse in Scripture.* Christians are simply not allowed to **“exercise lordship over”** others in *any* manner, period! Jesus was not simply condemning leaders who were flaunting their positions; he was condemning the use of positions themselves! In case there was ever any doubt, the intention of Jesus’ command was also clearly reiterated by both Paul, **“Not that we are lords over your faith, but fellow workers with you in your joy.”** (1Cor. 1:24) and Peter, **“Not exercising lordship over the heritage, but becoming examples to the flock.”** (1Pet. 5:3) Both of these verses again use the exact same Greek words “ΚΥΡΙΕΥΩ” and “ΚΑΤΑΚΥΡΙΕΥΩ”.

Second, the phrase **“exercise authority over”** is translated from the Greek term “ΕΞΟΥΧΙΑΖΩ” #1850 or “ΚΑΤΑΕΞΟΥΧΙΑΖΩ” #2715 which both come from the root word “ΕΞΟΥΧΙΑ” #1849 which is again the normal word for authority.<sup>§5.1</sup> Jesus again indicates that men are not allowed to exercise any authority over other Christians. Once again there is no overbearing connotation in these words, and this time none of the translations have chosen to insert an imaginary “it”. In fact, this word for authority is *never* used anywhere in Scripture to indicate that a Christian can hold a position of authority

**“I believe it might be accepted as a fairly reliable rule of thumb that the man who is ambitious to lead is disqualified as a leader.”**

**– A. W. Tozer**

over another Christian. Of course, this is to be expected since Jesus had clearly prohibited the use of positions of authority in the Church!

Finally, Jesus’ command is made entirely clear by the context. Jesus contrasts the phrases **“exercise lordship over”** and **“exercise authority over”** with the concepts of being a **“servant”** or **“slave”**. You should be informed that being a **“servant”** or **“slave”** is not normally thought of as a position *over* others! Servants and slaves do not preside over; they serve *under*.<sup>§6.1.2.1</sup> **“If anyone wants to be first, he will be last of all and servant of all.”** (Mark 9:35; cf. Matt. 23:11-12) This is completely upside down to the way positional authority works in the world.

Jesus condemned the use of positions in the Church again later when He said: **“But you are not to be called ‘Rabbi’, for only one is your Teacher and you are all brothers. And do not call anyone on earth your ‘Father’, for only one is your Father and He is in Heaven. Nor are you to be called ‘Leaders’, for only one is your Leader, the Christ.”** (Matt. 23:8-10) Let that sink in for a moment.



In keeping with His previous statements, Jesus was not providing an exhaustive list of every particular title to avoid, but giving general examples condemning the use of any such religious title,<sup>§6.2.1.1</sup> *Any man who claims to hold a position of authority in the Church is a fraud and directly contradicts the teachings of Jesus Christ!* To those of you who are now scrambling to try to think of some argument to the contrary: Will you submit to the authority of Jesus' teaching in the Scriptures? The Church receives its concept of authority from the teachings of Jesus, not from the institutional concepts of the world! Positional authority applies for the things of this world and spiritual authority applies for things in the Church. Do not confuse the two! **“Render the things of Caesar to Caesar and render the things of God to God.”** (Matt. 22:21, Mark 12:17, Luke 20:25)

### 5.1.2 Spiritual Authority

In contrast to positions of authority derived from physical power or moral government, the Church operates under spiritual authority where all things are submitted to Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church (Eph. 1:22, 4:15, 5:23, Col. 1:18). Spiritual authority is supreme for it proceeds *directly* from God. The kingdom of God is a spiritual kingdom that operates on completely different principles than physical power and moral government. It does not operate by the rule of force: **“Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit”, says the Lord of hosts.** (Zech. 4:6) Nor does it operate by the rule of law: **“We have been released from the Law so as to serve in newness of Spirit, not in the oldness of the written code.”** (Rom. 7:6) Whenever you receive directions from God on a particular matter, you can proceed with great confidence in spiritual authority as you obey God's will. Spiritual authority is not generally understood by the people of this world because they simply do not understand the Spirit of God (Isa. 55:8-9, Mark 11:28, John 1:5).

With spiritual authority, there are no hierarchical positions of men – there is only a hierarchy of One – everyone and everything is directly subordinate to Jesus Christ! **“And God placed all things under His feet and appointed Him to be head over all things for the Church.”** (Eph. 1:22) There are no middle management positions in the Church, for each Christian is a priest<sup>§3.1.1.1</sup> who reports directly to the Head, Jesus Christ (Ezek. 34:23, John 10:16, 1Cor. 11:3). **“For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.”** (1Tim. 2:5) No one in the Church is required to report to any intermediate position, since each person is directly accountable to God and God alone (Matt. 12:36, Rom. 14:12, 1Cor. 7:24, Heb. 4:13). Christians may exercise authority over things such as evil spirits and diseases (Matt. 10:1, Mark 3:15, 6:7, Luke 9:1, 10:19), *but never over other Christians!* There is only one position of authority in the Church and it is held exclusively by Jesus Christ.

Unlike the Pharisees and Sadducees who exercised positional authority over others, *Jesus held no such position.* He had no official position or title, nor did He accept the recognition of men (John 2:24-25). Yet people followed Jesus because He led on the basis of spiritual authority! **“For He was teaching them as one having authority and not as their scribes.”** (Matt. 7:29; cf. Mark 1:22,27, Luke 4:32,36) Even the secular Roman Centurion was able to recognize Jesus' spiritual authority (Matt. 8:5-13, Luke 7:1-10). Through spiritual authority, Jesus was able to cast out demons,

heal the sick, and even raise the dead. *Now that is authority!* Without any election, appointment, or approval of men in official positions, Jesus' authority proceeded directly from God.

Christians today are also able to walk in this same spiritual authority as they follow Jesus. Obviously, in order for you to function with spiritual authority, you must first be filled with the Spirit.<sup>§1.3.1</sup> If something is not done by the Holy Spirit,

**“In order to the existence of such a ministry in the Church, there is requisite an authority received from God, and consequently power and knowledge imparted from God for the exercise of such ministry; and where a man possesses these, although the bishop has not laid hands upon him according to his traditions, God has Himself appointed him.”**

**– John Wycliffe**

it is not of God and has no place in His Church. Christians cannot manufacture spiritual authority on their own, but must cooperate under Jesus' authority and do things in *Jesus' name*. Christians are able to cast out demons (Mark 16:17, Acts 8:7, 16:18), heal the sick (Mark 16:18, Acts 3:6-7, 5:16), and raise the dead (Acts 20:9-10) in Jesus' name because they are operating *under* Jesus' authority. Just saying “in Jesus' name” is not enough; you must actually be doing things by His authority.<sup>§4.1.2.2</sup> If you simply say, “In Jesus' name I command you to walk” without actually having the authority of Jesus, the sick are not healed. Some Jews tried to cast out demons “in Jesus' name” without having the spiritual authority to back it up and they just got beat up and ran away naked and bleeding

(Acts 19:13-16). *Spiritual authority only operates in alignment with the will of God.* **“Let your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven.”** (Matt. 6:10) Christians will only have spiritual authority in their lives to the degree that they are acting in accordance with God's will (Matt. 7:21-23, 12:50).

### 5.1.2.1 Mandatory Obedience

On the flip side of authority is the concept of obedience. Instead of asking, “Who has authority?” one could alternatively ask, “Who or what must I obey?” God's authority is not given as a theoretical concept, but is to be *obeyed*. It is one thing to know about God, and yet another thing to obey Him! The phrase “mandatory obedience” used here refers to those things that *must* be obeyed in an absolute or military sense, in contrast to things that *may* be submitted to in an optional or voluntary sense. Only that which someone is *obligated* to obey would represent real authority. In Scripture, the Greek terms that commonly mean to obey in this mandatory sense are “ΥΠΑΚΟΗ” #5218, “ΥΠΑΚΟΥΩ” #5219, and “ΥΠΗΚΟΟΣ” #5255. Scripture teaches mandatory obedience is required in several areas such as **“children obey your parents”** (Eph. 6:1, Col. 3:20, 1Tim. 3:4) and **“servants obey your master”** (Eph. 6:5, Col. 3:22). Okay, but what about obeying Church leaders? None of these Greek terms are ever used to indicate a Christian is required to obey a Church leader! Christians are to obey **“God”** (Heb. 5:9), the

“truth” (1Pet. 1:22), the “faith” (Acts 6:7, Rom. 1:5, 16:26), the “gospel” (Rom. 10:16, 2Cor. 9:13, 2Th. 1:8), and spiritual authority in general (Rom. 15:18, 16:19, 2Cor. 2:9, 7:15, 10:5-6, Phil. 2:12, Phm. 1:21, 1Pet. 1:14), but *never* do they indicate that a Christian is required to obey a Church leader. Instead, it will be later shown that the Church functions on a system of *voluntary submission* to one another in the Lord.<sup>§6.1.3</sup>

Okay, but what about the verse in Hebrews 13:17? “**Be persuaded by those who lead you and yield to them.**” (Heb. 13:17) Oh, that’s not it?...You must mean the one that was translated something like this: “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves.”<sup>§A.5</sup> Perhaps no other verse has been misconstrued more often by the clergy to justify their false positions of authority over the laity. Notice that the word they translate as “obey” comes from the Greek word “ΠΙΘΕΩ” #3982. Any reference book will verify that the word “ΠΙΘΕΩ” means “to be persuaded or trust” and it is translated that way almost everywhere it appears in every version of the Bible. The Greek word “ΠΙΘΕΩ” is etymologically related to “ΠΙΣΤΕΥΩ” #4100 which is translated as “belief”, “faith”, or “trust”. The Greek concept here is that if someone is truly persuaded or believes in something, it will be backed up by their actions (Jas. 2:17). Thus, *the effect is indeed similar to obedience* – not because someone is required to obey, but because someone was persuaded to trust. There is a clear difference between being forced to obey someone and voluntarily yielding to someone.<sup>§6.1.3</sup> If any of the other Greek terms mentioned above had been used to indicate mandatory obedience it would have been case closed, end of discussion, but none of them were used! It will later be discussed how the terms “rule over”<sup>§5.2.2.2</sup> and “submit”<sup>§6.1.3.1</sup> in this verse have also been misconstrued. Without knowing Greek, you might have expected this anyway since *only one verse* would not stand in contradiction to all the other clear teachings of Jesus Christ and the apostles which prohibit the use of positions of authority in the Church.<sup>§5.1.1.3</sup>

### 5.1.2.2 Messengers from God

Spiritual authority in the Church is not really a matter of deciding *who* to obey but *what* to obey. We already know the “who” is Jesus Christ, but the question then is discerning “what” is from Him.<sup>§5.1.3</sup> We simply recognize what has spiritual authority from the Lord and then submit to it. Whatever is from the Lord is to be obeyed regardless of who the messenger was that conveyed it. Such was the case in the Old Testament where prophets delivered the *words of God* to the people, not their own words. If a prophet spoke of his own accord and it did not come to pass, he was to be killed (Deut. 18:20-22). The prophets declared, “**Thus saith the Lord**”, not thus saith Isaiah, Ezekiel, or Jeremiah. The Israelites were not required to obey these prophets, but they were expected to obey the words of God that they spoke. “**For prophecy was never created by the will of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.**” (2Pet. 1:21)

Sometimes God will speak through sources that are not quite so obvious. For example, David was able to recognize that God had sent Shimei to curse him (2Sam. 16:5-14); it took a donkey to talk some sense into Balaam (Num. 22:21-33); and God can even make the rocks cry out (Luke 19:40). Thus, you must learn to be able to

discern the voice of God through almost any source. Do not reject something just because it does not come from an established authority figure; submit to it if it is from God! By the same token, having a message from God does not establish any position of authority. Shimei did not hold a position of authority over King David, the donkey was not master of Balaam, and you do not now have to start submitting to the rocks! ☺ Spiritual authority is not tied to any specific man or any specific position; spiritual authority comes from God alone. Just because Agabus delivered some messages from the Lord, for example, did not give him a position of authority to boss others around (Acts 11:28, 21:10-11). *It is the message from God that has the authority, not the messenger.*

Messengers from God are not just limited to prophets, since any Christian could give a prophecy, teaching, word of knowledge, word of wisdom, or interpret a tongue.<sup>§3.1.1.2</sup> Every Christian is a priest and is capable of receiving a word from the Lord. Thus, operating under spiritual authority is much more demanding than positional authority since you must be willing to submit to directions from the Lord coming from potentially anyone.<sup>§6.1.3.1</sup> Unlike most institutional “churches”, there is not just one man or position at the top to pay attention to and obey.<sup>§6.2.3</sup> Consider how everyone in the Church was allowed to participate in an open discussion regarding the dispute over circumcision. Although different viewpoints from the Judaizers, Peter, Paul and Barnabas were shared, it seems that James was instrumental in helping the Church discern what **“seemed good to the Holy Spirit”** (Acts 15:28). (Why didn’t they just submit to Peter who was the head of the Roman Catholic “church”?) ☺ Spiritual directions like this can come from the Lord through *anyone* (1Cor. 14:26). Sometimes a particular individual may be singled out such as Peter (Acts 11:1-18), James (Acts 15:13-21), Paul (Gal. 2:11-14), or Agabus (Acts 11:28, 21:10-11), but many times there was no one in particular – the brothers simply consulted together (Acts 9:30, 11:29, 13:2-3, 17:10,14).

It should not be surprising, however, that direction often comes from those who are leaders in the Church, since one of the reasons they became leaders in the first place is that they are attentive to the leading of the Holy Spirit.<sup>§6.1.2</sup> But Christians must obey directives from the Lord, regardless of whether they come through a leader or not. This is not obeying a man; this is obeying God through a message delivered by a man. **“And therefore we also constantly give thanks to God that having received the word of God you heard from us, you did not accept it as the word of men but as it truly is, the word of God that operates in you who believe.”** (1Th. 2:13) The men who pass on directives from God are nothing more than conduit, like electricity flowing through a wire. To the carnal mind, it may look like Christians are obeying a particular leader, just as some think the Church followed Peter (Acts 2:14)...or was it Paul (Acts 13:2)...or was it James (Acts 15:13)? (I’m sure they will let us know if they can ever agree on who it was.) ☺ Jesus leads His Church through a multitude of spiritual gifts that are distributed among the Body.<sup>§3.1.1.2</sup> Don’t make the mistake of only accepting a word from God if it comes directly to you, because God often communicates through others in the Church.<sup>§5.1.3.3</sup>

### 5.1.2.3 Commands from God

Commands given through spiritual authority must be obeyed, not because they come from a Christian leader, but because they are from God. **“Remember the words previously spoken by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord spoken through your apostles.”** (2Pet. 3:2) Just as in the Old Testament, there are many examples of commands that were given by the Lord *through* various leaders in the New Testament.

**“For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus.”** (1Th. 4:2) These instructions, directives, and commands did not have authority because the messenger held a “position”, but because they were *from the Lord*.

**“If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that the things I write to you are the Lord’s commandment.”** (1Cor. 14:37) Rejection of God’s commands is not a rejection of the messenger, but a *rejection of God* who gave the command. **“Therefore, he who rejects this does not reject man but God who gives you His Holy Spirit.”** (1Th. 4:8) Any command that doesn’t carry the Lord’s authority is merely a **“commandment of men”** (Matt. 15:9, Col. 2:22, Tit. 1:14).

**“In all things seek to know God’s Will and when known obey at any cost.”**

**– Jonathan Goforth**

Notice that most of the verses which have been misconstrued to imply that the commands of a particular leader must be obeyed, clearly designate that the spiritual authority of the command is *from the Lord*, not by any authority held by the leaders:

- **“For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to put any more burdens on you than these essentials.”** (Acts 15:28)
- **“But to the married I charge (not I, but the Lord) that the wife must not separate from her husband.”** (1Cor. 7:10)
- **“Although I have much boldness in Christ to command you to do what is fitting, yet I appeal to you on the basis of love.”** (Phm. 1:8-9)
- **“For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus.”** (1Th. 4:2)
- **“We charge you brothers in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to withdraw from every brother who lives disorderly and not according to the teaching you received from us.”** (2Th. 3:6)
- **“And to such persons we charge and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work quietly and eat their own bread.”** (2Th. 3:12)
- **“I charge you in the presence of God who quickens all things and Jesus Christ who testified the good confession before Pontius Pilate, to keep this commandment without stain or blame until the appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ.”** (1Tim. 6:13-14)

Now where do you suppose the authority of these commands came from? (Hint: read the italicized phrases!) Where is the Scripture in which Paul commands the people to obey him because he is an apostle? “Submit to me

because I am ‘The Apostle Paul!’” (No doubt the Corinthians would have been a lot better off if they would have submitted to him.) ☺ Nobody in Scripture is ever commanded to obey because of the authority vested in the position of a “pastor”, “priest”, “apostle”, “bishop”, or “pope”. Disbelief? Go ahead and search the New Testament yourself, because it is not in there!

All the verses that have been misconstrued to imply positional authority are more correctly interpreted in line with spiritual authority. There are a few verses, however, that do not specify where the authority of the command comes from (1Th. 4:11, 2Th. 3:4, 1Tim. 1:3, 1:18, 4:11, 5:7, 6:17). Paul obviously delivered these commands, but did they originate with Paul, or did they come from God and were merely passed on by Paul? The answer to this question is contained within the Greek words themselves as the words “ΠΑΡΑΓΓΕΛΛΩ” #3853 and “ΠΑΡΑΓΕΛΛΙΑ” #3852 refer to “to passing on a message”. Again, this imagery is entirely consistent with spiritual authority as it illustrates how the servants of the Lord merely stand beside Him and pass on His instructions. Thus, it is inherent by the Greek words themselves that the authority is from the Lord, not the messenger. The apostles could have used any number of Greek words to carry the weight of an absolute command (“ΔΙΑΚΤΕΛΛΟΜΑΙ” #1291, “ΔΙΑΤΑΓΜΑ” #1296, “ΕΝΤΕΛΛΟΜΑΙ” #1781, “ΕΝΤΟΛΕ” #1785, “ΕΠΙΤΑΓΕ” #2003, “ΕΠΙΤΑΚΤΩ” #2004, “ΚΕΛΕΥΩ” #2753), but none of them are ever used to indicate a Christian is required to obey a Church leader. Christians were commanded to obey the spiritual authority of the “teaching” (Rom. 6:17, 2Th. 3:6,14) passed on by the apostles, but never the apostles themselves.

If someone still wants to maintain that the authority of a command comes from someone holding a position, then let us apply the same criteria that Jesus used – “**Was it from Heaven or from men?**” (Mark 11:27-33). Did the command originate with a leader or did it come from God *through* a leader? Was the Church obligated to obey Paul’s commands? No, at least not according to Paul! Paul made sure that the readers knew the difference between what was coming from the Lord (1Cor. 7:10) and what was merely coming from him (1Cor. 7:6,12,25,40, 2Cor. 8:8). Of course, even that which came from Paul was still made on the basis of spiritual insight (1Cor. 7:25,40), but *never* on the merits of any “position” that he held.

In contrast to the authoritarian decrees you would expect from an official exerting his positional authority, Scripture is filled with the apostles *appealing, pleading, begging, beseeching, and urging* the brethren, but never demanding obedience to themselves. Such appeals were made based on wisdom from the Holy Spirit (1Cor. 7:40, 2Pet. 3:15), persuasion by God (1Cor. 14:37, Phil 3:15, 2 Tim. 4:1), spiritual reputations (1Cor. 7:25, 16:15-16, Col. 4:7-8), the practices of others (1Cor. 11:16, 14:33), and the Scripture (1Cor. 9:8-9, 10:7, 1Pet. 1:15-16), but *never* based upon the authority of any position. Paul, in particular, writes a great deal trying to persuade the Corinthians to listen to him, even though he was the very apostle that was used to establish the Church there! If the prestigious “apostle” Paul had positional authority over them, why not just give the orders and be done with it? What’s with all this pleading, begging, and beseeching? Notice that the Bereans didn’t just automatically obey “The Apostle Paul” either, but checked everything with the Scriptures to see if it was from God (Acts 17:11). The Bereans were not rebuked for failing to recognize the authority of Paul’s imaginary position, but instead were commended for their “noble” character.

### 5.1.3 Spiritual Discernment

The operation of spiritual authority in the Church is actually quite simple: If something is from God then it has authority and is to be obeyed, and if something is not from God then it has no authority and should be ignored or resisted. The question then is how do you know whether something is from God or not? Obviously, the only way that anyone could ever know what God requires is if God chooses to reveal it to us. God's will is primarily understood from the Scriptures, but there are other ways in which God can reveal his will to us as well. Christians must be able to correctly discern what God's will is in order to properly function under spiritual authority.

#### 5.1.3.1 General Principles

There are many issues that arise in life that are not directly addressed in the Scriptures. Such matters can often still be resolved by applying general principles in keeping with God's character revealed in the Scriptures. Sometimes these principles can be discerned as God speaks to a Christian's heart through their *conscience*. **“I will put My laws in their minds and write it in their hearts.”** (Jer. 31:33) Those who use the slogan, “What Would Jesus Do?” (WWJD?) are basically looking to their conscience and their knowledge of Scripture in order to apply general principles to a particular circumstance. Unfortunately, living by general principles is limited at best. General principles will not specify whom you should marry, what job to take, or which house to buy. General principles may instruct you all about marriage and which type of people not to marry, but it does not specifically say if it is God's will for *you* to marry or whom you should marry. There are probably hundreds of books written about how to know God's will, yet none of these books can tell you who to marry either. *The problem with general principles...is that they are too general!*

General principles only offer some of the possibilities of what could be done, but not specifically what *you* should do. You might develop strong convictions about any number of spiritual principles, but you cannot simultaneously do them all. Should you spend all your time protesting abortion? But then who will pray for the sick at the hospitals? Shouldn't you also be ministering to the poor? And then when are you going to find time for your family? Don't forget to pray without ceasing! You simply cannot do everything that generally *ought* to be done. If you choose to do one thing, then you can be accused of a “sin of omission” because you are not doing another thing. If you rely on general principles alone, you will face a world of chaos because you simply cannot do everything you ought to do all at once. Consider that it is God's will that **“none should perish but for all to come to repentance”** (2Pet. 3:9). Then shouldn't you go through every phone book praying for everyone to be saved? Obviously, there are hundreds of things like this that may be considered God's will in general. Unfortunately, there is simply not enough time in the universe for anyone to do every righteous act that could be done based on general principles.

### 5.1.3.2 Specific Revelation

Specific revelation fills in the gaps where general principles fall short. General principles may instruct you to work, but specific revelation can tell you which job to take. General principles may instruct you to evangelize, but specific revelation can tell you when and where to share the gospel. Specific revelation does not contradict general principles; it is just, how should we say it...more specific! For example, Paul attempted to preach the gospel in Asia Minor out of general principles, but was stopped from doing so by specific revelation from the Holy Spirit (Acts 16:6-10). If he would have ignored this specific revelation and persisted in preaching the gospel there based on general principles, he would have been disobeying God. In fact, Paul received the very gospel itself from Jesus by specific revelation. **“I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel preached by me is not from man, for I received not from man nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.”** (Gal. 1:11-12)

In order to walk by specific revelation, you must be able to hear what God is *saying to you now* rather than just relying on general principles from what God said to others in the past. Of course, you cannot hear from the Lord whenever you want, He must actually speak first. *But anyone who claims to follow Jesus is capable of hearing from Him because Jesus said they could.* **“The sheep hear his voice and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he brings out all his own, he goes before them and his sheep follow because they know his voice.”** (John 10:3-4) Unfortunately, many choose to walk solely by general principles because they can’t/don’t/won’t hear Jesus speaking anything to them. The god that some Christians pretend to follow is no different than any other idol that does not speak – their god is dead. Some may consult God for major decisions or in moments of crisis, but they do not realize that He is willing to speak to them anytime about almost anything. Can God lead you when to take another route to work to avoid construction that you didn’t even know about? Can God prompt you when to speak to a specific stranger out of the hundreds passing by? There are so many things God is willing to direct you in that are not derivable from general principles alone. Are you willing to listen?

Jesus operated with spiritual authority because He always followed the will of the Father. What was His secret? **“The Son can do nothing of Himself, except that which He sees the Father doing. For whatever things the Father does, these also the Son likewise does.”** (John 5:19; cf. John 5:30, 12:49, 8:28-29, 14:24) Yet it seems that there was always someone trying to get Jesus to settle for general principles instead of specific revelation:

- Didn’t Satan tempt Jesus based on the general principles of Scripture (Matt. 4:6)?
- Wouldn’t it have made sense for Jesus to go to the feast with His family (John 7:2-6)?
- Why didn’t Jesus try to heal everyone at the pool of Bethesda (John 5:3)?
- Didn’t Jesus know that the Messiah was supposed to rule over the people (Matt. 16:22)?
- What could have possibly been wrong with going to heal Lazarus (John 11:21)?



- Wouldn't it have been better for the money to have been given to the poor (John 12:5)?

For those who only rely on general principles, many things might seem valid, but Jesus lived according to the specific revelation from God (John 7:6). The Pharisees had the same general principles available to them from the Old Testament that Jesus did, but Jesus chose to walk by specific revelation of the Spirit instead. Do you want to know WWJD? *Jesus would find out the specific will of the Father and do that!* Jesus did not settle for merely walking by general principles. If you are going to walk as Jesus walked, you too will have to walk by specific revelation as Jesus did. **“Those who say they abide in Him must also walk as He walked.”** (1Jn. 2:6) The book of Acts demonstrates how the disciples were continually directed by specific revelation. A better motto for Christians would be something more like WIJSFYTRDN? (What Is Jesus Saying For You To Do Right Now?) Perhaps it's too long for a bumper sticker, but that is how Christians should live their lives. Once you receive God's direction on a particular matter, you can proceed with great confidence in the spiritual authority of walking in God's will.

**“The fanaticism which discards the Scripture, under the pretense of resorting to immediate revelations is subversive of every principle of Christianity. For when they boast extravagantly of the Spirit, the tendency is always to bury the Word of God so they may make room for their own falsehoods.”**

**– John Calvin**

Of course, *any true revelation you receive from God will always be in alignment with the Scripture*, because God does not contradict Himself. God may speak more than is contained in the Scriptures, but God will not speak less than what is already written. Whatever revelation you think you may have received from God can never displace the previous revelation from God recorded in the Scriptures!

### 5.1.3.3 Collective Discernment

If you can hear from God, then you must learn that you are not the only one. One of the primary ways that God speaks to us is through other members of the body (1Cor. 12:4-7, 1Pet. 4:11). Not every revelation will come to you and not every revelation is meant for you. It is also possible that you may not always hear from God correctly. Sometimes people do hear from the Lord, but then it is colored or tainted by their own preconceived notions.<sup>§7.2.4.3</sup> How do you know if you are receiving a revelation from God or if you are being deceived by another spirit? What do you do if two different people claim to hear from God and yet they contradict each other? What if there is a dispute that cannot be resolved from the general principles of Scriptures? This is exactly why the Church has been given the Holy Spirit. You are not alone; you are knit together as part of the Body of

Christ.<sup>§3.1.2</sup> While you may receive personal guidance from the Lord, each Christian is not allowed to have their own personal “truth”,<sup>§5.3.1.2</sup> The Church collectively is **“the pillar and foundation of the truth”** (1Tim. 3:15). You must learn to submit to one another and to hear Christ in each other through mutual deliberations.<sup>§4.1.2.4</sup>

When the Church deliberates, it is not to *decide* what the will of the Lord should be, but to *discern* what the will of the Lord is.<sup>§4.1.2.4</sup> The Church does not do whatever it wants; the Church obeys what the Lord wants. The Church deliberates in order to come to agreement about what the Lord’s will is, *not to decide what the Lord’s will is*. Do you have ears to hear? Christians meet together as the Church to hear and obey the Lord Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. That is how groups of Christians separated by vast geographical distances can each *independently* arrive at the same conclusions, because they all receive them from the same Decision Maker – Jesus Christ. A group of people filled with the Holy Spirit is able to discern the Holy Spirit. This is difficult for the carnal mind to understand, because it stands in stark contrast to the decisions of men made at the board meetings and conferences of institutional “churches”.

The Church does not make decisions detached from Jesus; they are one with Jesus (John 17:20-23). **“We have the mind of Christ.”** (1Cor. 2:16) Scripture says Jesus is **“the truth”** (John 14:6) and yet it also says that the Church is **“the pillar and foundation of the truth”** (1Tim. 3:15). How can that be? Because they are one in the Spirit! The Church discerns what the Lord wants, which of course, *is what they also want!* This was evident, for example, when the Church met together to deliberate over the dispute concerning circumcision (Acts 15:1-31). Notice that they wrote, **“It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us...”** (Acts 15:28) Why is that **“and to us”** in there? Wouldn’t **“It seemed good to the Holy Spirit”** have been sufficient? Christians participate in the process as they are one in the Spirit with the Lord.<sup>§3.1.1</sup> The Body is not disconnected from the Head (Col. 2:19)!

### 5.1.3.4 Scripture

Many have been led astray because they fail to obey the authority of God’s word contained in the Scriptures. *God does not need to speak again to us personally if He has already spoken on a matter in the Scriptures.* Christians do not need to “hear from the Lord” as to whether they should steal or murder, for example, since His will has already been made clear on those matters in the Scriptures. The Scriptures are not devoid of God’s revelation; it is just previous revelation. The spiritual principles that God spoke in the past through the Scriptures are “standing orders” that still have authority today.

The Scriptures have spiritual authority because they were inspired by God. The only thing man can do is to recognize the spiritual authority contained in the Scriptures; they cannot generate it themselves by their own approval. The Scriptures also do *not* have authority just because they were adopted by a “church council” for they were accepted by the Church long before any “church council” convened to discuss the subject.<sup>§7.2.2.1</sup> And the Scriptures will still be true if an apostate “church” later discards the parts that they don’t agree with. No, the Scriptures have authority because they are true and the reason that they are true is

that they are from God. Now if we could just convince institutionalized “churches” to submit to the authority of the Scriptures that would be a start! *For if Christians in the institutional “churches” would submit to the authority of Scripture, there would soon no longer be any institutional “churches”.* A denomination’s teaching cannot interpret or supplement the Scriptures if it blatantly contradicts them!<sup>§A.1.2</sup>

But isn’t the claim that the Scriptures are from God just a matter of opinion? The authority of Scriptures always was and still is recognized by the corporate discernment of the Church. So if you want to claim it is only an *opinion*, then recognize that it is the universal opinion of the Church! Christians from diverse backgrounds belonging to every conceivable denomination for two thousand years attest that the Scriptures are inspired by God. Christians who are filled with the Holy Spirit are able to recognize what is inspired by the Holy Spirit. It takes one to know one (1Jn. 4:6)!

**“Freedom for the Church comes from the necessity of the Word of God. Otherwise, it becomes arbitrariness and ends in a great many new ties.” – Dietrich Bonhoeffer**

The authority of the Scriptures is not just an opinion, but contains *objective truth* that is confirmed by history, archaeology, and science. But doesn’t the Scriptures also contain some errors and contradictions? No! Such questions are beyond the scope of this discussion, but have been answered in the prequel to this book.

## 5.2 Counterfeit Philosophies

Many Christians today are quite confused about the nature of spiritual authority. Some act as if authority comes from a leader, “The pastor said it, so that’s the end of it”; or that it comes from knowledge, “Bill has been studying his Bible for 40 years so let’s listen to him”; or that it is a popularity contest, “The vote was 52% to 48% so homosexuality is now acceptable in the church.” The institutional mentality thinks that prominence comes from the one on top who rules, but Jesus said it comes from the one on the bottom who serves.<sup>§6.1.2.1</sup> They think of authority in terms of outward subjection because they do not understand the inward Spirit. True spiritual authority does not come from these externals, but comes from knowing God and walking with Him. Problems in the Church will always arise whenever people are not walking by the Holy Spirit. Such people are not submitting to God’s spiritual authority, and indeed, without the Holy Spirit they cannot do otherwise (Rom. 8:5-8). They are making decisions and taking actions that are outside of God’s will and thus are actually rebelling against God’s authority. A leader may feel empowered because he holds a position of authority in his “church”, yet he may have no spiritual authority whatsoever in the Church.<sup>§5.2.1.3</sup>

## 5.2.1 Institutional Offices

Most institutional “churches” have created positions of authority to govern their affairs in direct disobedience to Jesus Christ.<sup>§5.1.1.3</sup> They now have it exactly backwards for they demand submission to their institutional positions while they ignore any true spiritual authority. Some have tried to justify their positions of authority based on a few poor translations that used the word “office” in a manner that contradicts Jesus’ prohibition against positions of authority in the Church.<sup>§A.5</sup> The Greek terms in Scripture that would normally indicate a religious office are “ΙΕΡΑΤΕΙΑ” #2405 and “ΙΕΡΑΤΕΥΩ” #2407 referring to a priest, and “ΑΡΧΗΚΥΝΑΓΟΓΟΣ” #752 referring to a religious official. But these terms are *never* used anywhere in relation to a position in the Church. Instead, a few translations have mistranslated the word “office” from the Greek words “ΔΙΑΚΟΝΙΑ” #1248 meaning “service or ministry” (Rom. 11:13) and “ΤΡΑΞΙΣ” #4234 meaning “practice or acting” (Rom. 12:4). Neither of these Greek words has anything to do with an “office” as we understand the word today. Notice that these Greek words are never translated as “office” anywhere else (including the other occurrences in the same translation). Even more incredible, some translations actually *inserted* the word “office” into three verses (1Tim. 3:1,10,13) where there isn’t *any* corresponding Greek term in *any* Greek text! Fortunately, these inaccuracies have been corrected and do not exist in most Bible translations.

### 5.2.1.1 Misconstrued Positions

Erecting positions in the Church inherently creates an unnatural conflict between God’s spiritual authority and man’s institutional positions. The strangeness of this superimposed grid of artificial institutional positions is self-evident: What if four people are qualified to be overseers, but there are only three “elder” positions? If an “elder” in an institutional “church” resigns his position, does his maturity in the Lord suddenly cease? Should someone who is spiritually gifted as a teacher be squelched because only the “pastor” position is allowed to do the teaching? Why all this nonsense? Because leadership to them is a position, not a spiritual gift of service.<sup>§6.1.4</sup> The failure to understand the difference between spiritual authority and positional authority has fueled a cyclical pattern that has continually reoccurred throughout history:

1. God raises up a righteous leader full of the Holy Spirit who humbly teaches with spiritual authority against the corrupt religious establishment.
2. A grass-roots movement forms as Christians benefit from his teaching and begin to voluntarily submit to him.
3. Institutional loyalties form around this movement as Christians begin to limit themselves to only his leadership.
4. Christians in this environment begin to expect obedience to this leader and dissenters are excommunicated from the group.

5. The leader dies and must be succeeded by another man to fill his now vacant *position*.
6. Later a not-so-righteous person, not-so-very-full of the Holy Spirit inherits the position and begins leading the institution into apostasy.

And then this process starts all over again! Notice that Christians at first were attracted to the *teaching*, but then began obeying the *leader*, and later began obeying the *position* that was left vacant by the leader. Over time, the situation becomes inverted – the people are now expected to obey a position of authority, ignoring the very spiritual authority that they were once originally attracted to! This pattern is not unusual, since it happens all the time – it happens in governments, it happens in corporations, and it happens in *institutional “churches”*. But it does not happen in the Church, because the Church doesn’t follow after a single leader like this.<sup>§3.2.2.3</sup> The misguided notion that we should respect an institutional position over the truth is entirely foreign to the Church in the New Testament.

### 5.2.1.2 Institutional Figureheads

Once a position of authority is established in a “church”, it becomes possible for a person with no spiritual gift of leadership to later occupy that position. And this is exactly what happened with the onset of institutional “churches” as figureheads came to occupy unbiblical positions of authority.<sup>§7.2.2.1</sup> It is easy to be a “talking head” in the pulpit, but it is not so easy to live an exemplary life of serving others. Many preachers become strangely different on Sunday morning when they wear a funny robe, stand somewhat more aloof in theatrical postures, and speak to the audience with their “announcer’s voice”.<sup>§4.2.2.1</sup> They practice alone in front of the mirror using voice inflection and hand gestures to make emotional altar calls like they were taught in seminary, but are so far removed from anything remotely resembling a true leader in the Church. **“A student is not above his teacher, and everyone who has been fully trained will be like his teacher.”** (Luke 6:40; cf. Matt. 10:24-25) Is this also what you aspire to be?

**“It is difficult to get a man to understand something, when his salary depends upon his not understanding it.”**  
**– Upton Sinclair**

Such preachers may be great pontificators of theology, but they are not really serving anybody as Jesus commanded.<sup>§6.1.2.1</sup> The idea that “I serve you by telling you what to do” doesn’t count! Such leaders are only **“shepherding themselves; clouds without water blown along by the winds; autumn trees without fruit, twice dead and uprooted; wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame; wandering stars for who the blackest darkness has been kept forever”** (Jude 1:12). Do your leaders look down from a salaried position atop an ivory tower, or are their lives open and vulnerable to others in mutual relationships? They may be great at preparing sermons, delivering speeches, and managing budgets, but do

they wrestle in prayer for hours, befriend those who are struggling, and run after those who have strayed?

**“Woe to the shepherds of Israel who only feed themselves! Should not shepherds feed the flock? You eat the fat, clothe yourselves with the wool, and slaughter the choice sheep, but you do not feed the flock. You have not strengthened the weak, healed the sick, bound up the injured, brought back the strays, or searched for the lost, but with force and cruelty you have dominated them.”** (Ezek. 34:2-4)

Many leaders of institutional “churches” today look at their ministry as nothing more than jobs along a career path that includes a salary, fringe benefits, and free housing. They are nothing more than “hired hands” paid to stand behind a pulpit. Just as in Micah’s case, they were simply hired to serve as “priests” (Judg. 17:7-13, 18:4). **“The hireling is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. When he sees the wolf coming, he leaves the sheep and flees and the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. He flees because he is a hireling and is not concerned about the sheep.”** (John 10:12-13) Many clergy would never have taken a position to begin with, if it weren’t for the salary and fringe benefits.<sup>§6.3.2.3</sup> They have created worldly *careers* for themselves at the expense of the kingdom of God. They have manufactured a new unbiblical vocation of “professional” Christians.<sup>§6.2.1</sup>

### 5.2.1.3 Immoral Leaders

Even worse than being a figurehead, some who come to occupy positions of authority will use their position to do evil. When a child molester, charlatan, or even an atheist is able to obtain one of these positions in an institutional “church”, they are still able to exercise all the authority of that position. Not because they have any spiritual authority, but because they have obtained an institutional position. Some may seem like good candidates when they are first hired, but if they later develop a hidden “dark side” they are still able to exercise the authority of their position. This will always remain a possibility because *God is not obligated to fill position holders with the Holy Spirit!*<sup>§5.2.1.4</sup> God did not create these unbiblical institutional “church” positions and then promise that whoever occupied those positions would automatically be anointed by the Holy Spirit. A position is nothing but an institutional artifact that is occupied by a man, a man who will always be capable of doing evil. There are “priests” molesting children, “pastors” who are homosexuals, “apostles” committing financial fraud, and “popes” who have murdered thousands. Having a position in something called a “church” obviously does not make that position immune from corruption. As the old saying goes, “Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” Corrupt officials may be able to occupy positions in institutional “churches”, but they would never be tolerated as spiritual leaders in the Church.

The problem of creating positions of authority over God’s people was clearly illustrated in the nation of Israel under the Old Covenant. When the people rejected God’s rule and selected a king, they were warned upfront about the

consequences of giving a man a position of authority over them (1Sam. 8:9-18). Saul may have seemed like a nice guy before he was anointed as king (1Sam. 10:1), but later was tormented by an evil spirit and became obsessed with killing David (1Sam. 18:10). Indeed, there were a total of 42 kings over Israel and Judah and 32 of them were *evil*! That's 76 percent evil men occupying an "anointed" position over God's people! And the positions of authority in the priestly system didn't fare much better. The priests Nadab and Abihu (Aaron's sons) offered up "**strange fire**" before the Lord (Lev. 10:1-3), and later the priests Hophni and Phinehas (Eli's sons) fornicated in the tabernacle (1Sam. 2:12-36). Didn't all of them have a good religious upbringing? 😊 The same High Priest position later persecuted Jesus (John 18:19-24, Matt. 26:62-67, Mark 14:60-65) and the apostles (Acts 5:27-40, 23:1-5). Wasn't the High Priest an "anointed" position established by God? Thus, it is easy to see why positions of authority were not allowed in the Church under the New Covenant.<sup>§5.1.1.3</sup>

When the people are taught to obey a position regardless of the man who occupies it, they will continue to obey that position even when an evil man comes to power. And yet someone with spiritual authority may be ignored entirely if he does not have an official position. If Jesus himself walked in anonymously, he would probably not be allowed to do anything in most institutional "churches". Without an officially recognized position, even the most spiritual gifted person would merely be considered as "laity" from the organization's viewpoint.<sup>§6.2.1</sup>

**"If Paul had come, he could not have preached (he had never been ordained); if a wicked ordained man, he had his title and must be recognised as a minister; the truest minister of Christ unordained could not."**

**– J. N. Darby**

#### 5.2.1.4 Succession of Positions

If the first error was creating positions of authority in the Church, the second error was believing the authority of these positions could be passed down to others. Positions of authority are succeeded along physical lines, but the anointing of the Holy Spirit is *not* given along physical lines. Suppose that Joe Blow is a highly sought-after dynamic speaker who later establishes "Joe Blow Ministries". But after Joe Blow dies, the organization cannot seem to find another replacement with the same anointing as Joe Blow. Many qualified candidates could be selected as the new president of "Joe Blow Ministries", but for some reason the ministry will never be as effective as it once was under Joe Blow. After the new person is hired, *for some reason it just is not the same*. Why is this? It is because God raises up men, not positions!<sup>§5.2.1.4</sup> God anointed Joe Blow with the Holy Spirit, not the "Joe Blow" position. The position may continue to be passed down, but it may not take many generations until the position is eventually occupied by an empty shell.<sup>§5.2.1.2</sup> This is no different than the succession of the evil kings of Israel and Judah who also held a position over the people of God, yet the anointing of the Holy Spirit didn't automatically come with the job!

The false doctrine of apostolic succession likewise teaches that “church” authority is derived from the “position” of one of the original apostles that was passed down from successor to successor in an unbroken chain. Thus, any “church” which cannot document an unbroken chain of apostolic succession would be invalid.<sup>§1.2.1.2</sup> Those who hold to this doctrine, however, cannot seem to agree on the rules. Does it have to come through Peter or can it come through any of the other eleven apostles? *Paul clearly was an apostle but he did not succeed anyone’s position* (Acts 9:26, Gal. 1:22)! What about all the other later apostles like Barnabas, Jesus’ brothers, Andronicus, Junia, Epaphroditus, Timothy, and Silas?<sup>§6.1.4.1</sup> And there is certainly no shortage of other people claiming to be “apostles” today.<sup>§6.2.3.3</sup> So if you are out shopping for positions to follow, there seems to be any number of apostolic lines to choose from. 😊

Notice that the apostles were dead and had nothing to do with the men who were imagined to succeed them centuries later. If the apostles did not make arrangements for their successors to be appointed before they died, then obviously that practice does not have apostolic authority! What if an apostolic successor that is chosen denies the faith or becomes apostate? Are you still going to follow him? If history is any indication, such corruption has been rampant among those who have claimed apostolic succession. Scripture is not able to settle any disputes between the apostolic successionists *because none of this is in the Scripture anyway!* For some strange reason, Jesus apparently forgot to tell us the rules for apostolic succession. Why didn’t Jesus explain to us how all of this was supposed to work? He did! Jesus Christ taught that there are no such positions in the Church!<sup>§5.1.1.3</sup> There can’t be a succession of positions if there are no positions in the Church!

Some have tried to find a doctrine of apostolic succession hiding somewhere in this verse: **“And the things you heard from me through many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will also be able to teach others.”** (2Tim. 2:2) Wow, what a stretch! Notice that the things they **“heard”** (not a position) from **“me”** (who was Paul, not Peter) they would **“entrust”** (not elect after death) to **“faithful men”** (not just one person) who can then **“teach”** others (not hold a position). According to this same Scripture, you should not trust the unfaithful men who later manufactured this false doctrine! 😊 But of course the *teaching* of Scripture should be passed on,<sup>§5.1.2.3</sup> but that is not a position! God does not fill positions with the Holy Spirit; He fills men with the Holy Spirit!

## 5.2.2 Institutional Control Freaks

Most institutional “churches” implement authoritarian positions of control in order to preserve their unbiblical doctrines, practices, and structures. How else can they run an efficient organization if they have to rely on that unpredictable Holy Spirit? If they don’t maintain sufficient control, they fear that heresy will run wild among their ignorant masses. After all, some of their members are not even Christians! Thus, they design their meetings so that there is no opportunity for any opposing view to be presented. They usually do not allow any input from their congregation during their meetings, and if they do it is typically done in a



limited or controlled manner. Any opposing viewpoint would obviously be wrong, heretical, or demonic if it did not come from their leader:

- The leader alone can receive revelation directly from God.
- The leader alone has the power to kick heretics out of the “church”.
- The leader alone can properly interpret the Scriptures.
- The leader alone provides a “covering” to protect the people from error.

The leader assumes that God would obviously tell him first if anything needed to change. Thus, there is usually no place for another prophetic voice in his “church”, for that would imply that the leader wasn’t doing everything right to begin with. No one else can be a priest or share a spiritual gift unless, of course, it is *pre-screened* by the leader (Amos 7:12-13). The leader does not have to submit to any other spiritual authority, since his “office” makes him the supreme authority over his congregation. The leader at the top of the organization effectively places a lid on the rest of the group which no one is allowed

**“The authority by which the Christian leader leads is not power but love, not force but example, not coercion but reasoned persuasion.”**

**– John Stott**

to surpass.<sup>§3.2.2.3</sup> Such a position of control obviously contradicts hundreds of Scriptures regarding the priesthood of all believers,<sup>§3.1.1.1</sup> sharing of spiritual gifts,<sup>§3.1.1.2</sup> and open participatory meetings.<sup>§4.1.2.3</sup> Any leader who feels the need to control the truth, probably never had it anyway.

### 5.2.2.1 Covering Theology

Many are not aware of the “covering” doctrine for it is only promoted in a few institutional “churches”. This false doctrine is taught to create a fear that unless everyone is under submission to their leaders’ positional authority, they will not be “covered” or protected. They teach that those who are not in proper submission to them are in rebellion against God and will fall into error and may even suffer bodily harm. This is especially important to those who claim to be the only true “church”.<sup>§1.2.1.2</sup> This false doctrine was utilized by the protestant “discipleship” and “shepherding” movements which taught that everybody had to be under someone else called a “discipler”. In some cases, the leaders controlled people’s lives to the degree that they dictated whom they could or couldn’t marry. For those who believe in this “covering” doctrine, it doesn’t even matter whose “covering” you are under just as long as you are under somebody. Somehow it just makes them feel safer to know that an official has authority over you, even if the official is from an apostate denomination. This is the same mentality Micah had when he bought his own “covering”: **“Now I know that the Lord will be good to me, seeing that I have a Levite as my priest.”** (Judg. 17:13)

Of course, this false “covering” doctrine is found nowhere in the New Testament as the only reference to a “covering” you will find there is a head covering (1Cor. 11:4-7). Instead, the “covering” doctrine is clearly refuted by the

Scripture, which clearly condemns any type of positional authority over other Christians.<sup>§5.1.1.3</sup> But why should we let Scripture spoil all the fun? 😊 Let us not be deprived of examining all of the ludicrous aspects of this false doctrine for its sheer entertainment value:

- Who is your “pastor’s” or “priest’s” covering? Okay, now who is that person’s covering? And then who is that person’s covering? When you climb up their ladder of “coverings” you eventually arrive at someone at the top (“apostle”, “bishop”, or “pope”) who has *no covering*! Aha, everybody is required to have a covering except for them! Somebody in the system eventually is allowed to hear directly from God – and it probably isn’t you! “Pay no attention to that man behind the curtain!” 😊
- Protestant groups promoting this false doctrine are actually acting in direct *rebellion* to their own concept. Any such “covering” would have presumably originated with the twelve apostles and then been passed down through apostolic succession. Most Protestant leaders cannot establish an apostolic lineage and thus they do not have a proper “covering”. And if your leader is not “covered”, then you are not “covered” either and are walking in rebellion.
- If Protestants want to maintain that a valid “covering” can be established apart from apostolic succession, then voila, anyone else can also claim to be “covered” in the same way. If a leader can hear directly from God and start a new denomination to provide a “covering” for you, then *you* also could hear directly from God and start your own “covering”. Thus, anyone can have the exact same level of “covering” that the denominational leaders claim to have!
- If history is any indication, this “covering” doctrine has definitely *not* protected thousands of institutional “churches” who claim to have had such a “covering”. Many of the mainline denominations have fallen into gross doctrinal error leading to complete apostasy. Some covering! Of course, their “covering” did not even protect them from falling for this false “covering” doctrine. 😊

For some strange reason, all the writers of the New Testament have neglected to explain how this “covering” doctrine was supposed to work. Who was Paul’s “covering” when he was rejected by the other apostles (Acts 9:26, Gal. 1:22)? Who was “covering” Barnabas after he parted ways with Paul (Acts 15:36-40)? And what kind of “covering” were the leaders providing to the early Church that had **“left your first love”** (Rev. 2:4), **“hold to the teaching of Balaam”** (Rev. 2:14), **“hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans”** (Rev. 2:15), **“tolerate the woman Jezabel”** (Rev. 2:20), and were **“dead”** (Rev. 3:1), **“lukewarm”** (Rev. 3:16), **“wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked”** (Rev. 3:17). There must have been a lot of holes in that “covering”! No, there was never any such “covering” for them or anyone else, because such positional authority in the Church was directly forbidden by Jesus Christ!<sup>§5.1.1.3</sup>

### 5.2.2.2 Those That Rule?

A few older translations of the Bible occasionally use the words “rule” and “ruler” in a manner that *appears* to contradict the clear statements of Jesus Christ who banned Church leaders from exercising authority over other Christians.<sup>§5.1.1.3</sup> Part of this confusion stems from the fact that the word “rule” back in the 17th century could mean “to guide or have influence over”, while the word “rule” today is generally taken to mean “absolute control, dominion, or authority over”. Thus, because of *language drift*, people are misinterpreting these verses to mean something now that they did not necessarily mean back then. There is definitely a big difference between a leader who influences or guides and a leader who exercises control or dominion over.<sup>§6.1.2</sup> Notice that the verses in question no longer contain the words “rule” and “ruler” in modern translations, not because they are “watering down” the Bible, but because they are making the translation more *accurate* for the English language used today.<sup>§A.5</sup>

There is really no need to wrangle over English semantics, however, since the Greek words used in these verses make the meanings quite clear. The verses commonly misconstrued to assert an authoritarian rule actually contain the Greek words “ΤΡΟΙCΤΗΜΙ” #4291 meaning “to go before or care for” (Rom. 12:8, 1Th. 5:12, 1Tim. 3:5, 5:17); “ΗΓΕΟΜΑΙ” #2233 meaning “to lead, guide, or esteem” (Acts 15:22, Heb. 13:7,17,24); and “ΚΑΝΩΝ” #2583 meaning “sphere of activity” (2Cor. 10:15). None of these words indicate a “rule” of control, authority, or dominion as some have tried to claim. By contrast, there is an entirely different set of Greek words that could have been used to indicate a rule of control, authority, or dominion such as “ΑΡΧΗ” #746, “ΑΡΧΩ” #757, or “ΑΡΧΩΝ” #758, yet they are *never* used anywhere in relation to a Christian leader ruling over another anywhere in the Bible. Scripture is astoundingly consistent in using Greek words that underscore leadership by spiritual authority, while it *never* uses any of the Greek words that could possibly indicate positional authority in the Church. In Scripture, the spiritual leaders care for, guide, and serve the Body,<sup>§6.1.2.1</sup> but there are *never* any rulers (“ΑΡΧΗ”, “ΑΡΧΩ”, “ΑΡΧΩΝ”) who exercise positional authority over others in the Church. **“Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own Lord he stands or falls, and he will stand for the Lord is able to make him stand.”** (Rom. 14:4)

### 5.2.2.3 “church” Politics

Along with the positions of men comes the politics of men. Institutional “churches” that have positions will also experience the politics of those who aspire to obtain those positions. This is not any different than what occurs in other worldly clubs and social organizations. This political temptation even affected the disciples who once argued about who was the greatest, but Jesus would have none of it (Luke 22:24-27). The natural tendency of the flesh to become self-conceited and self-important has now merely been disguised in religious pursuits. Those who are serious about serving the Lord are now taught to channel their devotion into climbing the ladder of clerical positions. The younger ones enter the system and

strive to be like their leaders who reward them with their own positions of influence. If someone starts out as a “small group leader”, they aspire to be an “elder”. If they are an “elder”, they aspire to be a “pastor”. If they are a “pastor”, they aspire to be an “apostle”. The unwritten rule is that the higher position you have, the more spiritual you must be! Scripture teaches us to eagerly desire the greater spiritual gifts (1Cor. 12:31, 14:1,39, 1Tim. 3:1), not to aspire to greater institutional positions. Spiritual gifts are for serving others; positions are for ruling over others. Instead of a desire to *serve* the Church, some covet the greater recognition, wealth, influence, or power that comes with a position in a “church”.<sup>§6.1.2.1</sup>

Most institutional “churches” would never use the word “politics” as members jockey for position, lobby members of a committee, or campaign at denomination conferences, but “a rose by any other name...” Almost anyone who has been a member of an institutional “church” for a while has certainly seen the politics, and may have even come up on the short end of the stick:

- Bob had kept his eye on the choir director position for a long time, but was passed over for the pastor’s son.
- Isn’t it a shame that George didn’t get to be a delegate to the convention this year after all the work he had done?
- The only reason that Fred wants to be appointed as the Sunday School Superintendent so that he can get a pay raise.
- Bill has been a small group leader longer than Roy, so why did Roy get to fill the vacant elder position?
- The congregation voted to retain Frank as the pastor, yet the denominational headquarters overrode them and brought in an outside pastor.

Do you really believe that any of this has a place in the heart of God? Help us Lord! Politics in institutional “churches” is nothing but a religious facade that has

**“The ambitions of men in a dog-eat-dog world have simply found their way into a dog-eat-dog “church”.**

nothing to do with the kingdom of God. It does not matter if the positions are democratically elected in an open system, they are still unbiblical positions! Ambition, jealousy, hurt feelings, and jockeying for position are all possible in

any system of positional authority, including any institutional “church”. But such behavior has no place in the Church, for Jesus said, **“It is not so among you.”** (Matt. 20:26) There can be no fighting over positions if there are no such positions!

### 5.2.3 Decisions of Men

The positions of men in the institutional “churches” have led to the decisions of men. It is not surprising that there is so much division because the leaders in charge of each institutional “church” are making their own independent decisions instead of following the leading of the Holy Spirit. They convene committees, boards, and conferences that vote, lobby, and caucus to come up with their decisions. One group decides to do it this way and another group decides to do it that way. But what about God’s way? Some institutional “churches” will make a

decision one year and then reverse themselves the next year. *The positions of men make the decisions of men resulting in the traditions of men in the “churches” of men!* The cause of so many problems in the Church is what has originated from men, not from God! Many are simply not comfortable operating under spiritual authority in the kingdom of God because it is not something they can manipulate, control, or vote on. They would rather bring the kingdom of God down into an institution of men that they can manipulate by earthly means.

But what if *Christian* men are making the decisions? What would be wrong with that? Some of those reading this right now still cannot understand the difference between *making* decisions and *obeying* God’s decisions.<sup>§5.1.3.3</sup> When the institutional mentality approaches Scripture, it appears to them that Christian men simply discuss an issue and then come to their own conclusions. They do not understand the difference between commands that are passed down with spiritual authority and edicts that are handed down from positional authority. So how are you supposed to tell the difference? To the carnal mind, it all looks the same, but genuine Christians can easily tell the difference! The disastrous decisions of men among the institutional “churches” usually become obvious over time, but it is not necessary to wait for centuries till the fruit of apostasy becomes evident. No, there are several indicators which immediately invalidate the decisions of men.

### 5.2.3.1 The “What” is Wrong

Decision making in most institutional “churches” is *subjective* according to men’s volition which is why there is so much division between the institutional “churches”. Should baptism, for example, be performed by pouring, sprinkling, or dunking? Who gets to decide? The decision-making processes may vary widely between denominations, but few would dispute the fact that their leaders are making their decisions – “the pastor decided”, “the elders ruled”, “the conference voted”, etc. Some of them have compiled all their decisions into a “church discipline” as a sort of rulebook for their denomination. So what, you ask? *So men should not be making any decisions!* The Church receives its direction from God, not by the authority of men.<sup>§5.1.2.2</sup> The Church is a kingdom *of* priests, not a kingdom *with* priests.<sup>§3.1.1.1</sup> Indeed, this is very hard for most institutional “churches” to understand since their leaders hold positions of authority and decide everything for them. They do not realize that *Jesus is the Head of the Church and all decisions concerning the Church are His alone to make!* Jesus said, **“I will build My Church”** (Matt. 16:18). The “what” is wrong because it is never a matter for an institutional “church” to decide what they want to do, it is a matter for the Church to discern what Jesus wants to do.<sup>§5.1.3.3</sup>

One reason why many institutional “churches” fail to receive God’s decisions is that they do not believe that they *can* hear from God. It would be one thing if they claimed that God had revealed something to them, but this is usually not the case at all! In fact, for the vast majority of the practices they have created, *there was never even a claim that they came from God.* For example, no one initially made the claim that God said that “pastors” should wear robes, or that the congregations should sit in pews, or that buildings should have stained glass

windows.<sup>§7.2.1.1</sup> So why pretend that they are from God now? Of course, even if there were such a claim, it would not necessarily make it true, but at least having such a claim to consider would have been a step in the right direction.

### 5.2.3.2 The “Who” is Wrong

Most decisions in institutional “churches” are usually made by a single man (“pastor”, “priest”, “apostle”, “bishop”, or “pope”) or by a select group of men (committee, board, or “elders”). This is entirely unbiblical! In Scripture, no single leader ever got to make decisions for the Church<sup>§6.2.3</sup> – not Peter, James, John, or Paul. If they would have let Peter make the decisions like a “pope”, then perhaps everyone would have to be circumcised in order to be Christians (Gal. 2:11-14). Someone might think, “That’s right, no one man should make the decisions, that is why we have committees.” ☺ But no selected group of men ever got to make decisions for the Church either.<sup>§6.2.1</sup> Instead, decisions were made by the **“whole Church”** (Acts 15:12,22) assembled *with* their leaders (Acts 15:22, Phil. 1:1), not *by* their leaders. Important matters were discussed openly until God’s will became clear to everyone (Acts 15:28).<sup>§4.1.2.3</sup> The *Church* is the foundation of the truth, not just a few select men in the Church (1Tim. 3:15). No genuine leader in the Church today would ever dare make his own decisions or participate in a committee that makes decisions behind closed doors.

Some institutional “churches” would argue that their leaders are sincerely trying to receive their directions from the Lord. But even then, the “who” is still wrong because the *whole* Church must discern.<sup>§4.1.2.4</sup> Even claims of divine revelation must still be judged by the whole Church. **“And let two or three prophets speak and let the others discern.”** (1Cor. 14:29) Again, this is the safety net that God has given to the Church. For example, Paul received a direct revelation from God, but this did not mean that he got to decide anything (Gal. 2:2). Instead, his revelation was submitted to the whole Church who assembled together to deliberate over the matter (Acts 15:1-31). Notice that no assembly of the Church ever decided that “pastors” should wear special collars, or that “church” buildings should have steeples, or any other such nonsense.<sup>§7.2.1.1</sup> The Church would never come up with such ludicrous ideas, precisely because these things were never in the heart of God. No decision by an elite group of “church fathers” could ever be valid, especially if some of them were not even Christians!<sup>§7.2.2.1</sup>

Some Christians may be willing to consent to the decisions made by their leaders, but the “who” is still wrong. That is because *the whole Church must be able to participate in the discerning process or the process is wrong*. Passive abdication is not the same as active discernment! In the Church, even one of little account can judge important matters (1Cor. 6:4). Of course, most institutional “churches” today would never entrust their unenlightened “laity” to deliberate over anything serious. And perhaps rightly so since many of them are not even Christians! Thus, even if everyone in an institutional “church” was allowed to participate, the “who” would still be wrong because they *include non-Christian members and exclude non-member Christians!* Their membership does not match the membership in the Church and thus they do not have the right “who”.<sup>§1.1.1.1</sup>

### 5.2.3.3 The “How” is Wrong

The “how” is perhaps the most important aspect and yet the hardest for the carnal mind to understand. Men can never make the right decisions unless they are able to hear from the Holy Spirit.<sup>§7.3.2.1</sup> Some are not even trying to hear the Holy Spirit, and some are trying but they simply cannot hear anything. Without the Holy Spirit, men have no choice but to decide things in the flesh. They will come up with almost any conceivable way to make decisions rather than to simply receive them from God. **“But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives to all men generously without blame, and it will be given to him.”** (Jas. 1:5) Instead, they will look around to see what others are doing or what others did in the past – *almost anything except hearing from God now!* They look to the latest Christian fads or the world’s business practices and then try to decide whether or not they should bring such things into their “church”. Some approach theology like a religious smorgasbord and decide what they want to put on their plates and hope that the Lord will add His blessing to whatever they choose.<sup>§4.2.1</sup>

The decisions made in many institutional “churches” are completely arbitrary: “Should we buy the blue robes or the black robes?” They may even “wait on the Lord” about it in prayer and when they don’t hear anything then they just pick a color. If it seems that a decision could go this way or that way, *then they have not yet discerned God’s way!* Sometimes they say, “We prayed about it and decided to do such and such” as if praying about something first, justifies whatever it is *they* choose to do later. Their decisions are nothing more than their own presumptions. Why doesn’t God speak to them on these issues? Black robes, blue robes...how about no robes? They are trying to figure out the right color of robes, when perhaps God does not want them buying robes at all!<sup>§7.1.3</sup> They approach God’s will as if it were just a matter of trial and error. They may try something out for a while and if it doesn’t work out then they just change it. This is not the voice of God! The Church is not some *experiment* for men to try out their new ideas.

Many institutional “churches” make their decisions by a majority vote which is not only unbiblical, but its roots are based in humanism. Directions for the Church do not come from a majority of men but by a minority of one – Jesus Christ. *The Church is not a democracy; it is a theocracy!* In modern times there are men at denominational conferences voting about whether homosexuals can hold positions of authority. One year it doesn’t pass and another year it does pass. Is this the voice of God? They aren’t receiving directions from God, they are *voting* on the politically correct issues of the world at their “church” conventions.<sup>§5.2.3.3</sup> Is God’s will decided by a popularity contest? Consider the amount of leaven in their batch when every year a huge portion of their delegates are essentially voting for evil, regardless of whether it passes or not. “Well, the vote is in, 52% to 48%, so sacrificing children on the altar fails again this year.” *What kind of “Christians” are these other 48% you are associating with?* And if one of these contested resolutions eventually does pass, does that mean the “church” had been in error the year before? Is God changing His mind or are men changing their votes?

The voting in most institutional “churches” still has the wrong “who” anyway since they usually only let a select group do the voting. But what if they would let all of the members in their congregation vote? Letting everyone participate may

**“The fundamental principle of church service is that the members be of one accord. The Bible does not teach majority rule. It teaches one heart and one mind.”**

**– Watchman Nee**

seem more Biblical, but letting them *vote* is unbiblical. The Church does not assemble together to decide things by a vote, but to discern the will of God. The Church arrives at a *unanimous consensus* through the leading of the Holy Spirit.<sup>§4.1.2.4</sup> Obviously, this would never work in an institutional “church” because many of their members are not even Christians. They will never come to a

consensus in the Spirit if they do not follow the leading of the Spirit. Thus, they vote! Of course, there is nothing wrong with delegates, elections, and voting for the institutions *of the world*; they just don’t belong in the Church.

Decision making in the institutional “churches” is wrong on all accounts: “what” they think they are doing is wrong, “who” they have doing it is wrong, and “how” they are going about it is wrong. And voila, they end up with the traditions of men in the “churches” of men!<sup>§7.1.3</sup> Now let us pretend that there were an institutional “church” somewhere that tries to have the right “what” by hearing from God; tries to have the right “who” by letting the whole congregation participate; and tries to have the right “how” by coming to consensus in the Spirit. Could there be anything wrong with that? Well, if true Christians ever sought to function together this way, one of the first things that they might collectively discern is that they can no longer fellowship as an institutional “church”! Indeed, the very act of letting Christians corporately discern anything might immediately lead to the dismantling of their institution.<sup>§2.3.2.2</sup> This is one very obvious reason why institutional “churches” must continue to control the decision making in the unbiblical ways that they do in order to maintain their very existence.<sup>§1.2.2</sup>

## 5.3 Practical Applications

Many Christians seem to lack a proper understanding of authority and how to apply it to their lives. Some are submitting to positions they don’t need to submit to,<sup>§5.1.1.3</sup> while others are not submitting to positions that they should submit to.<sup>§5.1.1.2</sup> In both cases, if you do not correctly recognize God’s authority, then you will not be able to walk according to God’s will. There is simply no substitute for being able to hear from God. **“My sheep hear My voice; I know them and they follow Me.”** (John 10:27)

### 5.3.1 Authority in the World

While it is not practical to discuss every aspect of authority, this subsection is provided as a brief tangent because once Christians begin to understand spiritual



authority in the Church, some of them think they no longer have to submit to the positional authority structures that God ordained for this world.<sup>§5.1.1.2</sup> Spiritual authority does not eliminate the authority structures of this world; it merely exists on a higher plane. *Spiritual authority applies for the kingdom of God, but positional authority still applies for the things of this world.* Jesus said, **“Render the things of Caesar to Caesar and render the things of God to God.”** (Matt. 22:21, Mark 12:17, Luke 20:25). One problem some Christians have is they keep thinking the way things work under spiritual authority in the Church is the way things should work in the world. They don't! People in the world are not filled with the Holy Spirit and do not understand spiritual authority, which is why God instituted the authority of physical power and moral government to govern the realms of the body and the soul. The positionless authority of the Church is not meant for the world, and the positional authority of the world is not meant for the Church.

Your understanding of authority in the spiritual realm will not negate the realms of authority that govern your body and soul. From a spiritual perspective we are now **“raised up and seated with Jesus Christ in the heavenly realms”** (Eph. 2:6), and yet the “earth suits” (2Cor. 4:7, 2Pet. 1:13) we wear are still subject to the positions of authority in this world. As an analogy, it is like you are controlling an avatar in a video game which is subject to various rules, and yet you maintain a separate existence outside of the game. Christians are not **“of the world”**, but they are still **“in the world”** (John 17:13-18). Understanding the operation of spiritual authority does not nullify the position you have been given in this world. For example, in the kingdom of God, **“There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”** (Gal. 3:28; cf. 1Cor. 12:13, Col. 3:11), but in this world Jews are still bound by a pre-existing covenant (Rom. 3:1-2, 9:4-5), slaves are still commanded to submit to their masters (Eph. 6:5-8, Col. 3:22-24, 1Tim. 6:1-2, Tit. 2:9, 1Pet. 2:18), and women are still instructed to submit to their husbands (1Cor. 14:34, Eph. 5:22-24, Col. 3:18, 1Tim. 2:11-12, Tit. 2:5, 1Pet. 3:5). While there are no such distinctions in the spiritual realm, in this world there most certainly are! We all are neither equal in physical ability nor do we hold the same positions in this world.<sup>§5.1.1.1</sup> *The world is not fair!* **“Doesn't the potter have authority over the clay to make one vessel for honor and another vessel dishonor out of the same lump?”** (Rom. 9:21) This does not mean that a Jew, master, or husband is spiritually superior, but only that the bodies they occupy as earthlings are subject to different rules here. A Gentile female slave may have felt especially cheated by her disposition in this world, yet those who have faith realize that it is not about this world! It may be desirable to try to improve things in the world in this regard, but in the meantime you must learn to be content with the place God has given you in life (Phil. 4:11-13).

There is an order of precedence that should be considered when confronted with conflicting types of authority: *Specific revelation*<sup>§5.1.3.2</sup> *supersedes general principles*,<sup>§5.1.3.1</sup> *which supersedes moral government*,<sup>§5.1.1.1</sup> *which supersedes physical power*.<sup>§5.1.1.1</sup> Scripture demonstrates this order of precedence through Paul's preaching of the gospel. Paul normally bent over backwards in submission to men in positions of *physical power* for the privilege of sharing the gospel with them (1Cor. 9:19-23). But when men tried to physically stop Paul from preaching the gospel (Acts 23:12, 25:3), Paul did not submit to them and instead appealed to the authority of *moral government* for justice (Acts 25:10-11). And when the government

prevented him from preaching the gospel (Acts 16:22-23), Paul did not submit to them either for *general principles* dictated that he must preach the gospel (1Cor. 9:16). And even when Paul was preaching the gospel out of general principle, sometimes he was stopped from preaching because of *specific revelation* (Acts 16:6-7). Yes, the Holy Spirit stopped Paul from preaching the gospel. Go figure!

It should be fairly obvious that Christians should always submit to the higher authority when given such dilemmas. Satan has been given authority in this world (Luke 4:6, Acts 26:18, Eph. 2:2, 1Jn. 5:19), but we obviously don't submit to him because there is a higher authority. Ultimately, God is the highest authority and will always bring about final justice. Thus, whenever any lower authority contradicts God's authority, **"We must follow God rather than men."** (Acts 5:29; cf. Acts 4:19) Scripture is equally clear that Christians must continue to submit to the lower authorities in absence of directives from higher authorities. So if you do not have any specific revelation from God on an issue, that does not mean you can then do whatever you want, but must still submit to the lesser authorities of general principles, moral government, or even physical power as God directs.

### 5.3.1.1 Submitting to Evil Authorities

Some Christians claim they no longer have to submit to the authority structures of the world if the officials abuse their authority or act in an evil manner. But that is not how God's delegated authority works as is evident from several of Jesus' parables (Matt. 21:33-41, 25:14-30, Mark 13:34, Luke 16:1-9, 19:11-27). The government, for example, does not immediately lose all its authority as soon as one of its employees does something wrong. If that were so, most governments would not last for more than about one second. 😊 Indeed, God will ultimately hold governments accountable for how they rule (Deut. 32:35, Dan. 2:21, 4:17, 5:20, Psa. 2:12, 22:28, Amos 9:8). Yet if someone abuses the authority of their position, they nonetheless will still retain their position until God brings about judgment. For example, Satan, who is regarded as the ultimate evil, rebelled against God and yet still maintains a position of authority in the world (Luke 4:6, Acts 26:18, Eph. 2:2, 1Jn. 5:19). How can Satan still possess authority, when he clearly is not acting in line with what God desires?<sup>§5.1.1.1</sup> Scripture teaches **"the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable"** (Rom. 11:29). Consider some of these examples from the New Testament:

- The evil Roman Empire crucified Jesus and threw Christians to the lions, yet Christians were commanded to submit to that government (Rom. 13:1-2, Tit. 3:1, 1Pet. 2:13-15). Jesus submitted to the authority of the Roman officials even to death (John 19:11) and Paul appealed to the head of the Roman government for justice (Acts 25:10-11).
- The pharisaical system of Israel was full of hypocrisy (Matt. 23:13-33), yet both Jesus (Matt. 23:2-3) and Paul (Acts 23:1-5) still honored their authority within their rabbinical system.
- The Roman system of taxation was quite corrupt and funded many evil campaigns, yet Christians were still commanded to pay taxes (Rom. 13:6). Even

Jesus himself paid taxes (Matt. 17:24-27) and commanded others to do so as well (Matt. 22:15-22).

- Slavery is often abusive, yet slaves who became Christians were still commanded to honor that authority structure of the world and submit to their earthly masters (Eph. 6:5-8, Col. 3:22-24, Tit. 2:9, 1 Pet. 2:18), especially if their masters were Christians (1Tim. 6:1-2).

This does not mean that God condones an authority's evil actions, but in the meantime, you must continue to submit to them. Of course, God could give you instructions to defy an evil authority, but *in absence of such direction* you should learn to submit to the authorities God has established with a joyful attitude.<sup>§6.1.3.2</sup> Some crybaby Christians have a rebellious attitude and take offense at the first hint of the slightest governmental inconvenience. They can hardly endure the irritations of taxation, superfluous laws, dictatorship, and mismanagement *which do not necessarily even count as evil!* What a far cry from the attitude of those who **“joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, knowing that you yourself have a better possession that remains”** (Heb. 10:34). Or those who **“were tortured and yet refused release so that they might obtain a better resurrection”** (Heb. 11:35-40). Did these people know something that you do not? Notice that the writers of the New Testament did not waste even one verse railing against the evil government over them. Those who have faith are able to submit to evil authorities and persevere because they know they belong to another realm.<sup>§5.3.1</sup> **“All these died in faith without obtaining the promises, but seeing them and welcoming them from afar and admitting that they were aliens and strangers on the earth.”** (Heb. 11:13) Do you have ears to hear?

### 5.3.1.2 Anti-Authoritarians

Some Christians claim they don't have to submit to any authority structures of the world, period. It does not matter if the authority is evil or not, they do not recognize any authority structure of men. They understand the error of establishing positions of authority in the Church,<sup>§5.1.1.3</sup> but then have gone to the extreme of rejecting *all* positions of authority in the world. Jesus did not say that all positions of authority in the world were invalid, but just that **“It is not so among you”** (Matt. 20:25-28) in the Church. Rejecting the positions of men in the Church does not mean you can then ignore the positions of men in the world! You might reject the authority structures of the world as being imaginary, but it will seem all so real when they throw you in jail or confiscate your property, because they do indeed possess authority over you granted from above (John 19:11). Do not make the mistake of rejecting the concept of submission,<sup>§6.1.3</sup> just make sure you are submitting to the right things. Some believe they are “Sovereign Citizens” in the kingdom of God and thus do not need to submit to any man. These anti-authoritarians despise those in authority and whenever a conspiracy theory is raised against an authority figure, they are quick to believe it and spread rumors and innuendos to malign them (2Pet. 2:10, Jude 1:8). (If it is on the Internet, then it must be true!) ☺ **“Likewise these dreamers defile the flesh and despise**

**authority....they slander things they do not understand...”** (Jude 1:8-10) Although some of their accusations may indeed be true, it does not justify their sins of gossip, slander, and rebellion.

Such people may think they understand spiritual authority, but in reality they do not because they *disobey* God’s commands to submit to the authority

**“All authority is under Christ. When we disobey lesser authorities, we are guilty of disobeying Christ. You cannot serve the King and honor His authority by rebelling against His appointed governors. To say you honor the kingdom of Christ while you disobey His authority structure is to be guilty not only of hypocrisy but of cosmic treason.”**

**– R. C. Sproul**

structures of this world.<sup>§5.1.1.2</sup> They likewise do not **“submit to one another”** (Eph. 5:21) in the Church either.<sup>§6.1.3.1</sup> Instead, they tend to be lone rangers and prefer to dig a hole in the ground and live like hermits where no authority can bother them.<sup>§3.2.3.1</sup> They fail to submit to God’s spiritual authority operating through other Christians and thus they do not recognize leadership in the Church.<sup>§6.3.1.1</sup> This simply degenerates into “Whatever I want to believe has authority.” Or to put it in Scriptural terms, **“Everyone did that which was right in his own eyes.”** (Judg. 17:6, 21:25) In the Church, each individual does not get to determine their own “personal truth” in isolation from

others,<sup>§5.1.3.3</sup> for the Church collectively is **“the pillar and foundation of the truth”** (1Tim. 3:15).

### 5.3.2 Authority in Institutional “churches”

How should a Christian deal with the false authority structure established in an institutional “church”? If you try to fellowship with Christians in that unbiblical environment, it should not be surprising that there will tend to be conflicts between God’s spiritual authority and the institution’s positional authority.<sup>§5.2</sup> Although you may wish to attend an institutional “church” in peace, it is not unusual for the officials to view you as a threat and begin to make unbiblical demands of you by the authority of their institution.<sup>§3.3.1.2</sup> You must remember that the positions of men in an institutional “churches” *do* have authority just like any other man-made institution through the “consent of the governed”.<sup>§5.1.1.1</sup> Thus, you should still respect the authority of their positions unless God instructs you to do otherwise, just as you would submit to the authority of the Grand Pooh-bah if you attended the Water Buffaloes Lodge. But this does not mean that you can ignore spiritual authority whenever you visit an institutional “church”. Sometimes we submit to men that don’t have spiritual authority and sometimes we don’t submit to men that have positional authority.

### 5.3.2.1 Compliance with Foolishness

From a Biblical perspective, there is certainly a lot of foolishness operating in institutional “churches”, but this does not mean that someone who wants to build relationships with others couldn’t put up with a little foolishness there. Consider how Jesus told His disciples to respond to the religious leaders of His day: **“Therefore, observe and do whatever they tell you, but not according to their deeds, for they say things and do not do them.”** (Matt. 23:3) Realize that an institutional “church” is just a man-made organization that is no different than any other secular club. Most institutional “churches” are non-profit corporations that have officers and regulations just like other businesses.<sup>§1.2.2.2</sup> Thus as a Christian, you may not need to act any differently in an institutional “church” than you would if you visited any other secular club. You would try to be respectful of the organization’s officials, by-laws, and practices *for the privilege of furthering God’s purposes there*, much like a missionary would regard the officials, laws, and customs in a foreign land.<sup>§2.3.2.1</sup> In general, you would stand up when they stand up, sing when they sing, bow your head when they bow their heads, and sit down when they sit down. There you have it! That just about covers everything you have to do in an institutional “church”! 😊 Remember, even an axe murderer is able to sit in a pew and do these things, so it is not too difficult!<sup>§1.2.4.2</sup>

Some institutions, however, go way beyond the authority that anyone could imagine for something that claims to be a “church”. Some of them have cultic practices that control what people say and do even outside of any religious context. Suppose the “pastor” required everyone to wear a particular uniform, for example. Of course, there is no Scriptural mandate for such nonsense, but there is nothing intrinsically immoral about wearing a particular uniform either. As ludicrous as this is, you would still have freedom to conform to their dress code if you wanted to attend their club (short of any direction from God to the contrary). Most Christians wouldn’t have any trouble wearing a uniform to participate on a sports team, for example, so treatment of this institutional “church” policy would not be much different. Obviously, such practices have nothing to do with the Church, but then again an institutional “church” is not the Church.<sup>§1.2.2</sup>

### 5.3.2.2 Resistance to Foolishness

Some make the mistake, however, of thinking that they must comply with all the institutional “church’s” unbiblical traditions.<sup>§7.1.3</sup> There is some foolishness that you may be able to put up with and other foolishness that simply cannot be tolerated as an obedient Christian. **“Do not answer a fool according to his folly, lest you will also be like him. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes.”** (Prov. 26:4-5) You must not participate in anything sinful or cultic that would violate the Scriptures, your conscience, or any other revelation from God. For example, an institutional “church” might sing a hymn that is theologically questionable or conduct a ritual that grieves the Holy Spirit. In such cases, you would need to quietly and respectfully abstain from participation. Do

not forget that there really is a God who is *intolerant* of their sinful practices, even if they call themselves a “church”. You are not allowed to hide behind a false institutional framework and disobey God along with the rest of them.<sup>§2.3.2</sup> Submitting to unbiblical practices in the name of tolerance or unity will not provide cover for a sin of complicity.

But sometimes just quietly abstaining is not enough. Depending on the situation, God may ask you to rebuke the Christians in the institution who are going along with sin. *They are not immune from sin just because they belong to an institution that sins!* “**If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him.**” (Luke 17:3) If you belonged to a secular club and found out they had a sinful practice, you would want to abstain from that practice and warn any other Christians in the club about it as well. An institutional “church” should not be treated any differently. Spiritual authority from God always supersedes the positional authority of men, even if the positional authority is flaunted under the guise of a “church”. Each Christian will

**“Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason, I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other – my conscience is captive to the Word of God... Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise.” – Martin Luther**

individually be held accountable for any sinful behavior they engage in, even if it occurs under the cover of an institutional “church”. **“We must follow God rather than men.”** (Acts 5:29; cf. Acts 4:19) “I was just doing what the pastor said” will not be a valid excuse on judgment day.

### 5.3.2.3 Ignoring False Structures

Part of the key to fellowshiping with Christians in institutional “churches” is to stop looking at people through a man-made institutional grid, and start looking at the situation from God’s perspective.<sup>§2.3.1.1</sup> Spiritual authority has absolutely nothing to do with the false institutional religious structures that men have tried to superimpose over the kingdom of God. For example, suppose the “pastor” of a huge “mega-church” is rebuked in the name of the Lord by an anonymous stranger with unkempt hair and scraggly clothes who comes in off the street. The “pastor” will probably ignore him entirely thinking, “Who is this guy? He is not a member of my church. He has no authority here.” Yet, if his rebuke was really from the Lord, it will be held against him nevertheless. The “pastor” may feel comforted in hiding behind his false institutional position, but that will not spare him when he stands before God on judgment day. **“If you look on the one wearing fine clothing and say, ‘Sit here in a good place’, but say to the poor man, ‘Stand over there or sit by my footstool’, have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil motives?”** (Jas. 2:1-4) Whatever lowly or lofty status someone possesses in an institutional “church” does not have any bearing in the Church.

Those who fellowship as the Church often understand this well enough, but what about the reverse situation? Suppose that the “pastor” of a huge “mega-

church” rebukes *you* for doing something. You should not automatically ignore him either thinking, “This guy holds an unbiblical position in a false institutional ‘church’ so he probably knows nothing about the Church and may not even be a Christian.” You would be making the same error. You must still discern whether the message is from God no matter how goofed up you think the “pastor” is. And it is entirely possible, and perhaps likely, that the “pastor” may be a brother in the Lord that is truly functioning with a spiritual gift of pastoring.<sup>§6.3.2.1</sup> He may have indeed been called by God but has simply been locked into a false institutional system because he did not know any better. He may be entirely wrong about his unbiblical position, but he may still be speaking with spiritual authority. Just because you reject the false leadership structure of an institutional “church”, does not mean that you can then ignore everything they say.<sup>§6.3.1.1</sup> There should always be an attitude of submission to all things of God.<sup>§6.1.3.2</sup> God has raised up many kinds of leaders in the Church and to fail to recognize someone’s spiritual authority just because they attend an institutional “church” would be equally foolish.

The point is that you must still be able to recognize spiritual authority regardless of the source. Don’t automatically accept or reject a message based upon institutional status or lack thereof. It would be a mistake to always do everything that the institutional “church” requires and it would be a mistake to always do nothing that the institutional “church” requires. Both of these positions are wrong for it places the focus on reacting to an institution instead of focusing on God. Christians should simply do everything that God requires, and this may or may not coincide with what an institution requires. The institutional structure is simply irrelevant to the things of God.<sup>§2.3.1.1</sup> So how do you know whether you should go along with an institutional practice, abstain from the practice, or rebuke the practice? Simple, if you are a Christian, then you can be directed by the Holy Spirit. How else would you even know what the Holy Spirit desires unless you are filled with the Holy Spirit to begin with?

### 5.3.3 Authority in the Church

Without any positional authority structures to hold things together, how then does anything get done in the Church? Positional authority is used to maintain order in men’s institutional “churches”, but is not needed in the Church where everyone is filled with the Holy Spirit. Spiritual authority is not any less authority just because the people are not externally compelled to do things. Spiritual authority is *real* authority proceeding directly from Jesus Christ.<sup>§5.1.2</sup> Jesus *really* is in charge of the Church! Jesus is alive and well and *really* does speak directly to His children! The Holy Spirit is not a religious fantasy that needs the structures of men to prop it up. *The Scriptural concepts of leadership, submission, commandments, and obedience are all very real principles that operate quite effectively on the basis of spiritual authority alone!* No institutional positions of men are needed or required.

Some don’t believe that the average Christian can discern what is from God, and some don’t believe that God will speak to them anyway. That is unfortunate,

but that is all many have ever known or experienced in institutional “churches”. Many reading this now may still look at spiritual authority as if it were only an unrealistic theory. They don’t really believe that spiritual authority actually works, for without a man on top to rule them, they think that everything would degenerate into chaos. They are afraid that someone could come in and make up anything and say it is from God, and then all would be led astray. But what do you think many of their leaders have been doing? Indeed, anyone can say something is from God, but the difference is that some things really are from God and other things aren’t. You can say whatever you like, *but spiritual reality is backed up by God*. The fig tree really gets cursed, the sick really get healed, and the dead really get raised. If God rebukes you through another person, it does not matter if you believe it or not, the consequences will be real.<sup>§5.1.2</sup> **“So shall My word be that proceeds out of My mouth; it shall not return to Me void but will accomplish whatever I desire and it will succeed in the purpose I sent it.”** (Isa. 55:11) You can claim that it is subjective, but the Holy Spirit is real and the consequences of spiritual authority are real. Under a rule by spiritual authority, you can see how important it is for the people to continually walk by the Spirit. There is no other safety net or institutional framework to fall back on. If the Christians in an area do not follow the leading of the Holy Spirit, then the Church will not be effective there for very long.<sup>§4.1.2.5</sup>

Ironically, most leaders are already doing whatever they want in their institutional “churches”.<sup>§7.2.4.2</sup> But in the Church, Spiritual authority is entirely *restrictive!* You cannot do whatever you want; you must only do what God wants.<sup>§5.1.2</sup> Although anyone is free to speak in the Church as the Lord leads, the Church is able to discern and anything that is not from God is readily exposed.<sup>§5.1.3.3</sup> You may be surprised to know that there are rarely any disagreements among those who fellowship as the Church, and when they arise they are soon resolved by the Holy Spirit. Among those who truly love one another, who only want to know the truth, who are willing to lay down their lives for each other, this is no problem! Many who attend institutional “churches” cannot fathom how this could be and right now are thinking that this is impossible. And perhaps rightly so because such things don’t work that way in their institutional “church”, where everyone may not even be a Christian. Trying to function like the Church within an institutional “church” simply does not work!

### 5.3.3.1 Consulting with Others

Undoubtedly there may be times when you may not like, understand, or believe a message that another Christian claims is from God...or maybe at least at first. Perhaps the messenger did not convey it well, perhaps it was not adequately explained, or perhaps you don’t want to obey it. It is also possible that the message was just plain wrong, but that is why there is a Body. Consulting with other believers is extremely helpful in discerning what the Lord’s will is. **“Every matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.”** (2Cor. 13:1; cf. Deut. 17:6, 19:15, Matt. 18:16, 1Tim. 5:19, Heb. 10:28) When contention arose over Paul’s revelation concerning circumcision, he submitted it to the other brothers (Gal. 2:1-10). If there is contention between you and another brother, would you be willing to



consult two or three other witnesses in an attitude of submission?<sup>§6.1.3</sup> Not trying to save face out of pride, but as an open and honest seeker of the truth? Amongst all the institutional “churches” you could probably scrape up two or three “Christians” to justify almost anything your heart desires. Whooptido! *But are you willing to listen to two or three others who are functioning together as the Church, who you know and respect and have a committed relationship with?* If you are truly led by the Spirit, then you will be willing to listen to others and may later come to realize that sometimes you are wrong.

There is “safety in numbers” *among Christians who are genuinely filled with the Holy Spirit*, but this does not mean that everything that calls itself a “church” is therefore infallible.<sup>§A.1.1.3</sup> Indeed, just because a particular institutional “church” agrees on something does not mean that it has anything to do with the Lord’s will.<sup>§5.2.3</sup> Different institutional “churches” have come to consensus and decided that homosexuality, abortion, praying to Mary, and all sorts of other nonsense is okay, but none of it came from God through the Holy Spirit.<sup>§7.2.4.3</sup> This is not just limited to institutional “churches”, since the early Church in several cities also had some major problems (Rev. 2-3). Just because a group of Christians collectively gathers to discern something is not enough; *it must actually be from the Lord*. It is not a matter of numbers; it is a matter of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, without the Holy Spirit, these are dangerous concepts that can easily be abused. Having group consensus perhaps increases the likelihood that something may be right, but it does not necessarily make it right.

If a group of Christians is not correctly following God, then you must not follow them. “Everyone else was doing it” will not be a valid excuse on judgment day, even if the “everyone else” claims to be Christians. Moses, for example, did not listen to 250 community-appointed leaders who claimed that God was with them (Num. 16:2-3). Likewise, Paul did not heed Agabus’ prophecy or the advice of all the other Christians who **“pleaded with him not to go to Jerusalem”** (Acts 21:10-14). Let it be strongly emphasized again that those who truly fellowship together as the Church rarely disagree about anything. But if in the end, you still believe that God has spoken to you contrary to others’ council, then you must still humbly follow God instead. *And then again, you may still be wrong!* Some things just take time before **“the ones approved become evident among you”** (1Cor. 11:19). The controversy over Paul’s revelation was not resolved the first time it came up, for it took a while before all were able to recognize the truth (Acts 15:1-31). But this requires an honest seeking of the truth with an attitude of submission,<sup>§6.1.3.2</sup> not an attitude of “Whatever I believe is automatically right.”

### 5.3.3.2 Speaking to Others

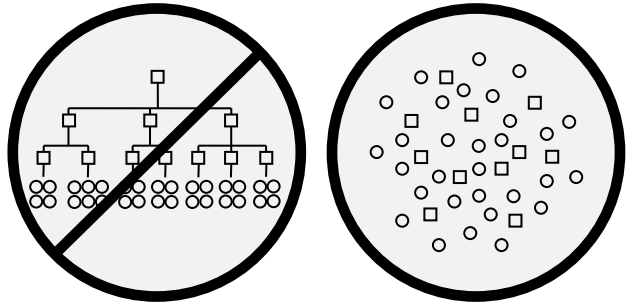
Sometimes you yourself must be a messenger as the Holy Spirit prompts you to speak to someone else. Yes, this means *you!* **“Speak these things and exhort and reprove with all command. Let no one despise you.”** (Tit. 2:15) You need to be able to hear from God and speak as the Holy Spirit leads.<sup>§5.1.3.2</sup> When you exhort others in Jesus’ name, you are not speaking by your own authority. **“If anyone speaks, let him speak as if it were the words of God.”** (1Pet. 4:11) When

you truly begin to understand spiritual authority, then you will begin to understand extraordinary verses such as: **“Whoever sins you forgive, they have been forgiven them; whoever sins you retain, they have been retained.”** (John 20:23; cf. Matt. 16:19, 18:18) Some of you are shocked thinking, “Only a priest would be able to do something like that?” Yes, but we are all priests!<sup>§3.1.1.1</sup> Obviously, the power to forgive sins does not reside with you; *it only resides with Jesus who lives in you*. Only by the leading of the Holy Spirit is Jesus able to accomplish His work *through* you as you cooperate with His authority. When you understand how to operate under Jesus’ spiritual authority, you will be able to do anything that Jesus did and more (John 14:12). Those you speak to, especially those in institutional “churches”, may indeed **“despise you”** (Tit. 2:15) or ignore you if you have no official position, but if your words are from God they will nonetheless accomplish their purpose. You do not need to be credentialed by men to speak the words of God!

When you speak with spiritual authority it is okay to be bold, but don’t think you can go around acting like God just because you carry a message from God. Scripture teaches, **“Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but appeal to him as a father.”** (1Tim. 5:1) Whenever someone is in error the goal should be to **“restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness”** (Gal. 6:1). If God has sent you to be a *messenger*, it does not mean you can also take it upon yourself to be the *enforcer* of the message. If the person does not heed God’s message, then **“Vengeance is Mine, I will repay’, says the Lord.”** (Rom. 12:19) Just like the apostles, you can appeal, plead, beg, beseech, and urge all you want, but you must learn to leave the message in God’s hands to enforce. Again, the people pleaded with Paul not to go to Jerusalem, but **“after Paul would not be dissuaded, we kept silent having said, ‘The Lord’s will be done!’”** (Acts 21:14). Remember, other Christians are not accountable to you, but only accountable to God.<sup>§3.1.2.1</sup>

## 5.4 Challenge Questions

- Does your “church” defy the teachings of Jesus Christ by having fixed positions of authority?
- Can you hear directly from God through the Holy Spirit? Do you?
- Does any Christian have authority over you? Do you have authority over another Christian?
- Does a committee, board, or “elders” make the decisions for your “church”? Do they vote?
- Are you willing to accept the authority of Scripture when it contradicts the authority of the leaders of your “church”?
- Are you able to hear the voice of God and obey regardless of the messenger? What if it comes from someone who does not go to your “church”?
- Can you personally pass on a message, command, or rebuke with the authority of God?



# Chapter 6: Church Leadership

## 6.1 Scriptural Truths

Only after spiritual authority is correctly understood is it possible to understand leadership in the Church. There are many principles on which leadership may function in general, and spiritual authority is only one of them. Man consists of body, soul, and spirit, and thus can be led by appealing to his flesh, morality, or spirituality.<sup>§5.1</sup> This is important to recognize because leadership in the institutional “churches” has been based on positional authority, while leadership in the Church is based on spiritual authority. If someone holds a position in an institutional “church”, it does not have any bearing on whether or not they are a leader in the Church. It is not uncommon to find officials in institutional positions with absolutely no spiritual authority in their lives, and conversely to find Christians with great spiritual authority in their lives without any official leadership position.<sup>§6.1.2.2</sup> The Church is clearly not without leaders, but the question is, how does that leadership function?

### 6.1.1 What is Leadership?

In the world, a leader is generally understood to be the person in charge, the head of an organization, or the one with the most power or influence. There are many worldly leadership theories espousing concepts such as motivation, facilitation, influence, decisiveness, persuasion, and vision. Some people are considered to be “natural leaders” who seem to possess these qualities innately. Others believe that leadership qualities can be learned, for there are a myriad of seminars available to help people improve their management skills. The goal here is not to analyze every secular theory about leadership, but only to point out the worldly basis for them.

It is important to be able to recognize the differences between *authority*, *position*, and *leadership*. Sometimes these concepts are closely related, but they

are not all exactly the same thing. In the world, for example, a single leader normally holds the top position and exercises authority in an organization. But this is not always the case – the person in charge may or may not have authority, may or may not have an official position, and may or may not have leadership abilities. Consider some of the following scenarios:

- A person may be a leader without any authority or position. For example, David was clearly the popular leader in Israel and yet he did not hold a recognized position of authority while Saul was the official king (1Sam. 18:5-16).
- A person may have authority without any position or leadership. For example, a Christian may be an excellent teacher and speak with great spiritual authority and yet have no leadership skills or official position in an institutional “church”.
- A person may occupy a position without having any leadership or authority. For example, the “pastor” of an institutional “church” may be appointed to an official position and yet have no real leadership skills or spiritual authority in the eyes of the congregation.

Leadership can indeed become quite complicated when you consider all the different permutations between authority, leadership, and position. If someone says “Take me to your leader”, who would you bring them to if there were multiple leaders operating in multiple realms of authority? Who do you follow if the leaders of the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of the *same* government are all at odds with each other? If you lived during Old Testament times, would you follow the prophet, the priest, or the king? Indeed, it can become quite confusing, but all of these could be considered to be leaders in various capacities.

## 6.1.2 Spiritual Leadership

Leadership in the Church, however, is not based on the leadership concepts of the world. The Church does not get its management techniques from corporate America or model its administration after the world’s governments. It is important that Christians get their ideas of leadership from the New Testament, not from the world! Jesus has made it abundantly clear that no man may hold a position of authority over other Christians in the Church.<sup>§5.1.1.3</sup> But just because there are no positions of authority, does not mean that there isn’t any leadership in the Church. While no Christian may hold a position of authority over another Christian, yet there is still *spiritual leadership*. Jesus is the Head of the Church and so any subsequent leadership must come directly or indirectly from Him.<sup>§5.1.2</sup> Thus, whenever someone operates under spiritual authority, Jesus is effectively leading the Church *through* them. A particular person only *appears* to lead in a given instance because God has spoken through them. Spirituality is not generated by jars of clay, but is contained in the jars of clay (2Cor. 4:7). From an outside observer, it may look like one person speaks then the people obey their words.<sup>§5.1.2.2</sup> But are those the words of men or the words of God?

In the Church, people do not possess spiritual authority because they are leaders; they are recognized as leaders because they have spiritual authority. Leadership in the Church does not come through appointment or election to a position; leadership comes from the Holy Spirit. *A person's natural charisma, wealth, political power, and intellect are completely irrelevant to spiritual leadership in God's Church.* Saul was very impressive in the flesh, but he needed to be **“changed into a different person”** by the Holy Spirit (1Sam. 10:6). Paul was chosen by God to be an apostle and yet he was an unskilled speaker (2Cor. 10:10, 11:6). Even Jesus did not have any fleshly characteristics that anyone would desire Him (Isa. 53:2-3). Only those who are **“full of the Holy Spirit”** are able to serve in the Church (Acts 4:8, 9:17, 11:24, 13:9, 13:52, Eph. 5:18). Not just anyone was even qualified to wait on tables, but only those who were filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:3,5). Without the Holy Spirit, the greatest manager the world has ever seen could do nothing in the Church.

**“According to Scripture, virtually everything that truly qualifies a person for leadership is directly related to character. It's not about style, status, personal charisma, clout, or worldly measurements of success.”**  
**– John MacArthur**

### 6.1.2.1 Servant Leadership

Jesus is the Head of the Church and the ultimate authority, so let us examine what Jesus had to say about leadership:

- **“Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted.”** (Matt. 23:12; cf. Matt. 18:4, Luke 14:11, 18:14) **“The last shall be first and the first shall be last.”** (Matt. 20:16; cf. Matt. 19:30, Mark 9:35, 10:31, Luke 13:30) In the kingdom of God, things are upside-down from the world. If you want to live, then you must die (John 12:24). If you seek to save your life, then you will lose it (Matt. 10:39). If you give, then you will receive (Luke 6:38). If you are weak, then you are strong (2Cor. 12:10). If you are poor, then you are rich (Jas. 2:5). If you want to be wise, then you must become a fool (1Cor. 3:18-19). Likewise, leadership in the Church works backward from the world. If you want to lead, then you will serve in humility. Notice how many times Jesus repeated these phrases in the Gospels.
- **“You know that the rulers of the nations exercise dominion over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you will be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you will be your slave – just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve...”** (Matt. 20:25-28; cf. Mark 10:42-44, Luke 22:24-27) Jesus instituted a radically new concept of leading by *servicing* people instead of wielding positions of authority over others. In order to be a leader in the Church you must be a servant. Not getting over people, but getting *under* them and serving them. Those who are the greatest in the

kingdom of God are the *servants*, not the masters (Mark 9:35, 10:43, Matt. 23:11). Jesus was the greatest leader because Jesus was the greatest servant.

- **“If I then, the Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example in order that you should do as I have done to you.”** (John 13:14-15) Jesus taught His disciples to be leaders by serving others, not by obtaining positions of authority. Notice that the disciples followed Jesus’ example and served the Church by *waiting on tables* almost to the point of neglecting their other duties (Acts 6:1-6). Most people do not view washing feet or waiting on tables as positions of authority! Christians are commanded to **“serve one another”** (Gal. 5:13, 1Pet. 4:10), just as Jesus set an example of serving throughout His life.
- **“But you are not to be called ‘Rabbi’, for only one is your Teacher and you are all brothers. And do not call anyone on earth your ‘Father’, for only one is your Father and He is in Heaven. Nor are you to be called ‘Leaders’, for only one is your Leader, the Christ. But the greatest among you shall be your servant.”** (Matt. 23:8-11) Jesus said there are no religious titles or offices in the Church, but that **“you are all brothers”** (Matt. 23:8). Every Christian is a member of the family of God and there is not a hierarchy among siblings! Of course, some brothers may be older, wiser, or more mature than others, yet they are still just brothers. How could any brother or sister ever substitute for a direct relationship with the Father?

Well, there you have it! Contrary to the hierarchical structures of the institutional “churches”, this is basically all Jesus had to say about leadership. Imagine that! Did the founder of Christianity forget to instruct the disciples about

**“The very first thing which needs to be said about Christian ministers of all kinds is that they are ‘under’ people as their servants rather than ‘over’ them...Jesus made this absolutely plain. The chief characteristic of Christian leaders, he insisted, is humility not authority, and gentleness not power.”**

**– John Stott**

all the ecclesiastical positions and who had to submit to whom? What about elections, terms of appointment, and seminary training? Jesus did not forget these things; Jesus was not interested in these things! True leaders in the Church have always been able to operate just fine without holding any such positions or titles forbidden by Jesus.<sup>5.1.1.3</sup> If you truly understand spiritual authority, then you will be serving others, not presiding over them. *No one who understands spiritual authority would ever hold a position over another Christian.* A true leader would never try to rule over you, but will get under you to **“build you up”** (2Cor. 10:8,

13:10). The very purpose of leadership is **“to equip the saints for the work of service to build up the Body of Christ”** (Eph. 4:12). Thus, leadership in the Church is a form of *facilitation* – facilitators who raise up others to be facilitators.

Jesus’ teachings on leadership form the basis of what is commonly referred to as “servant leadership” or “leading by example”. Christians are recognized as leaders in the Church by serving others (Rom. 16:1-2, 1Cor. 16:15-16, Col. 1:25) and being examples by their lifestyles (1Cor. 11:1, 2Th. 3:7-9, 1Pet. 5:2-3). Once some people

understand what true leadership in the Church really means, they suddenly are not so interested in being a leader. Many people would never aspire to leadership if they realized they don't get to be the head honcho with all the glory, fame, and power. Everyone wants to be in charge, but nobody wants to **"wait on tables"** (Acts 6:1-6). Serving is no fun to them because they don't get to boss anyone around or go on a power trip. There is no ladder to climb, there are no executive perks, there is only work to do serving others and building up the Church. Epaphroditus, for example, almost worked himself to death serving the Church (Phil. 2:25-30). This does not mean that everyone who serves will necessarily be recognized as a leader, but everyone who is a leader most definitely will be a servant.

Leaders in the Church lead by following Christ's example. **"Be imitators of me as I also am of Christ."** (1Cor. 11:1) To whatever degree a Christian might be an example before the Lord, is the degree to which the Body should recognize and respond to such leadership (1Cor. 4:16-17, 16:15-16, Phil. 3:17, 4:9, 1Th. 1:6-7). Any charlatan could come in and say he has a word from the Lord, but it is only those who exhibit true spiritual authority in their lives who are respected and given credibility in such matters.<sup>§5.3.3</sup> Every valid leader in the Church inherently operates under spiritual authority or else they wouldn't be leaders in the first place! Being a leader is not a matter of being perfect (Phil. 3:12) as much as exhibiting a changed life that is devoted to serving others. True leaders of the Church love the truth and would hate to be followed when they don't speak it. If a true leader were ever to make a mistake, they would never be happy with someone following them into error.

### 6.1.2.2 Leadership without Position

There are many examples in the world of natural leaders who lead without holding any official position whatsoever. Sometimes a leader is just the person who sees a need and steps forward to help out. Sometimes there is a crisis where an unsung hero emerges to lead a group of people to safety. Sometimes there may be an official figurehead, while the people *unofficially* follow someone else who operates behind the scenes. In all these cases, the real leader may have no official recognition, no appointment, no election, and yet is clearly functioning as a leader. Even in the animal kingdom, do you suppose that the lead goose flying in the V-formation is elected to the position?

**"A true and safe leader is likely to be one who has no desire to lead, but is forced into a position of leadership by the inward pressure of the Holy Spirit and the press of the external situation."**

**– A. W. Tozer**

**"Go to the ant...which having no chief, office, or ruler, stores its food in the summer and gathers its provision at harvest."** (Prov. 6:6-8)

Leadership without position is depicted in the Old Testament which is how God led the Israelites from the very beginning as a theocracy. God raised up leaders who were filled with the Holy Spirit and their authority came directly from Him without any election or appointment to man-made positions. The book

of Judges, for example, documents several men who led Israel without any official position. There was no legal requirement that anyone had to submit to Samson, Gideon, etc., because there was no such thing as the “Judge” position! When were they elected? Who appointed them to be in charge? These leaders were not officials, they were all very unofficial! When Samson died, no one was elected or reappointed to the “Samson” position. And when the people tried to create the “Gideon” position, Gideon said, **“I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you, the Lord shall rule over you.”** (Judg. 8:23) And who appointed Moses to be in charge (Acts 7:35)? God did! *Notice that God raised up leaders, not positions!* And God still raises up people today! People are anointed and filled with the Holy Spirit, not positions in organizations!<sup>§5.2.1.4</sup>

Leadership without position is also nicely illustrated in the difference between Samuel and Saul. Like the other leaders before him, the prophet Samuel fulfilled a natural leadership role in Israel although he was never officially elected or appointed by any man. But later the time came when the people no longer wanted to be led by God *through* unofficial leaders, because they wanted a king with an official position instead. Changing to a system with an official position might seem like a trivial difference to some, but it was a *rejection of God!* **“Listen to the voice of the people in all they are saying to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me as king over them.”** (1Sam. 8:7) They wanted an official king instead of God himself who was the King of kings! They would rather follow the official positional authority of a man (Saul) than the “unofficial” spiritual authority of God *through* a man (Samuel). In the same way, many Christians have accepted man’s rule of positional authority in institutional “churches” and rejected God’s rule of spiritual authority in the Church. *But the Church is still a theocracy!*

Leadership without position is also the system that Jesus instituted for the Church in the New Testament.<sup>§5.1.2</sup> Notice that Paul never held the CEO position in an organization called “Apostle Paul Ministries” for he was neither elected nor appointed by man to any position. **“Paul, an apostle, not from men or through men, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father.”** (Gal. 1:1) There was not a vacant “apostle” position just waiting for Paul to apply for and none of the other twelve apostles appointed Paul to any position either. After Paul became a Christian, he felt no obligation whatsoever to report to the preexisting apostles (Gal. 1:15-17). In fact, Paul was not even accepted by the other apostles at first (Acts 9:26, Gal. 1:22), but was still an apostle nonetheless.

Indeed, if there really were positions of authority in the Church, then there must have been a severe identity crisis, because they didn’t always seem to know who the leaders were. When the Church faced its first major doctrinal issue (Acts 15:1-31), for example, wouldn’t you expect the “pope” that Jesus appointed as His successor would just take charge and decide everything?<sup>§6.2.3.4</sup> Who does James think he is spouting off like that? 😊 And Paul didn’t seem to know who the leaders were either: **“But from those seeming to be important (what they were doesn’t matter to me for God doesn’t accept men by appearance), they contributed nothing to me.”** (Gal. 2:6; cf. Gal. 2:2) Hello, Paul? Did you ever hear of Peter, James, and John? Perhaps someone forgot to tell him that the twelve disciples were the head-honchos of the Church. Didn’t he see their titles on the



nameplates outside their office doors? Or at least they should have at least been printed on the bulletin! 😊 This identity crisis must have been contagious, because the Corinthians didn't seem to know that Paul was supposed to be their boss either (1Cor. 9:2). Paul had trouble establishing his own credibility among the very Church he labored in planting as he had to spend three chapters trying to convince them that they should listen to him (2Cor. 10-12)! What was the matter with those people? Didn't they know this was "The Apostle Paul"? Why did they not simply obey the authority of his "apostolic office"?§5.2.1.4

But none of this should be surprising since Jesus himself held no position among men either. In fact, Jesus went out of His way to insure that nobody would try to install Him into an office (John 6:15, Luke 5:15-16). *Jesus wasn't a Pharisee, Sadducee, Priest, Scribe, nor did He hold any other position in Israel or the Roman government!* And yet this "nobody" who walked among them is the King of kings and Lord of lords (1Tim. 6:15, Rev. 17:14, 19:16)! Jesus followed His own teaching for He held no official title or position among men. Thus, it is no wonder that the leaders of the early Church did not have any official offices either, since they were simply following Jesus' own example. Of course, there were clearly leaders in the Church, but they just did not have any titles or positions forbidden by Jesus.§6.2.1

### 6.1.2.3 Plurality of Leadership

By God's own design, there is always a plurality of leadership in the Church. Every Christian is a priest (1Pet. 2:5,9, Rev. 1:6, 5:10, 20:6) and every Christian has a spiritual gift (1Cor. 12:7,11, Eph. 4:7, 1Pet. 4:10). There is a great diversity of spiritual gifts that provide direction for the Church with multiple people operating the various types of gift.§3.1.1.2 There is not just one teacher, there is not just one prophet, nor is there just one leader. Any Christian has the ability to lead in any situation on the basis of spiritual authority. Any Christian could potentially be God's messenger§5.1.2.2 and pass on His commands.§5.1.2.3 Any Christian could give a prophecy, teaching, word of knowledge, word of wisdom, or interpret a tongue. So in this regard, any Christian could appear to lead in any given situation. So how many leaders are there then? As many as there are! There is not any fixed set of official positions in the Church.§5.1.1.3 The New Testament concept of a plurality of elders, for example, is similar to the Old Testament concept where the elders deliberated at the city gates (Deut. 21:19, 22:15, Josh. 20:4, Prov. 31:23, Lam. 5:14) without any official appointment or election. They were just recognized as elders because they were! Thus, there was never any institutional concern to insure there were an odd number of "elder" positions (i.e. 3, 5 or 7) so that there wouldn't be a tie when they *vote*.§5.2.3.3

Among other things, a plurality of leadership provides a safeguard against error in the Church. Most institutional "churches" follow the hierarchical structure of the pagan religions where there is only one leader in charge of any given rung of the organizational ladder.§6.2.3 Thus, when one man goes astray, the entire organization underneath him goes astray. *But in the Church, no single man was ever put in charge of anything!* There was never just one "apostle"

position.,<sup>§6.1.4.1</sup> there was always a plurality of emissaries (Acts 1:2, 2:42, 6:6, 8:14, 15:1-22). There was never just one “pastor” position,<sup>§6.1.4.2</sup> there was always a plurality of overseers (Acts 11:30, 14:23, 15:2,4,6,22,23, 16:4, 20:17-18, 1Tim. 4:14, 5:17, Tit. 1:5, Jas. 5:14, 1Pet. 5:1). There was never just one “deacon” position,<sup>§6.1.4.3</sup> there was always a plurality of servants (Acts 6:5). One man was not even put in charge of something as simple as waiting on tables! Wouldn’t one man be qualified to manage such an insignificant matter? Without an understanding of spiritual authority, it is hard for the institutional mentality to understand how anything could function if there is not a single man in charge, for they can only envision chaos.

Leadership in the Church is the corporate responsibility of all believers. In computer terms, it is like having a network of distributed computers instead of a central mainframe. Notice that Paul’s epistles were addressed to the *entire* Church in the area, not an individual leader (Rom. 1:7, 1Cor. 1:1-2, 2Cor. 1:1, Gal. 1:1-2, Eph. 1:1, Phil. 1:1, Col. 1:1-2, 1Th. 1:1, 2 Th. 1:1). Why didn’t Paul just address them to the “pastor” in charge?<sup>§6.2.3.2</sup> Indeed, Paul did just the opposite – he wrote to the entire Church and then told *them* to greet their leaders for him (Heb. 13:24)! Paul directly addressed the “brothers” over 130 times in his writings, but they were never addressed to the “pastor” of the Church. (Paul’s *personal letters* to Timothy and Titus don’t count since they were private correspondence not addressed to the Church.) All important matters were addressed to the whole Church (Acts 15:30-31, Col. 4:16, 1Th. 5:27), not to an individual leader. **“I charge you all by the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers.”** (1Th. 5:26-27)

Notice that Paul didn’t operate his ministry as if he was solely in charge of anything. He usually traveled with partners and all the epistles he wrote to the Church were *co-authored* (with the exceptions of Romans and Ephesians). Most people seem to be unaware that Timothy also co-wrote six epistles in the New Testament (2Cor. 1:1, Phil. 1:1, Col. 1:1, 1Th. 1:1, 2Th. 1:1, Phm. 1:1)! Paul also co-wrote books with Sosthenes (1Cor. 1:1) and Silas (1Th. 1:1, 2Th. 1:1, 1Pet. 5:12), and **“all the brothers with me”** (Gal. 1:2). Wasn’t the mighty “apostle” Paul qualified to write these books by himself?

#### 6.1.2.4 Responsibilities

Leadership in the Church is not being *in charge of* people; it is being *charged with* people. The former is to take control of God’s people, while the latter is to serve God’s people. There is no dispute that leaders must give an account to God for how they lead, but this does not mean that Christians are required to give an account *to them*. Each Christian is held accountable to God alone for their faithfulness regarding the abilities entrusted to them (Matt. 25:14-30, Luke 12:48, 1Cor. 4:2, 1Pet. 4:10). Leaders have been given greater responsibilities and correspondingly greater accountability to God. **“Let not many of you become teachers, my brothers, knowing that we shall receive greater judgment.”** (Jas. 3:1) Teachers are accountable for how they teach (Jas. 3:1), prophets are accountable for how they prophesy (Rom. 12:6), leaders are accountable for how they lead (Heb. 13:17), etc. But this does not mean any Christian is ever accountable *to them*. **“Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own Lord he stands or falls, and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.”** (Rom. 14:4) As previously

discussed, a Christian may have many responsibilities in the Body of Christ, but this does not confer upon them any type of positional authority whatsoever. For example, no one thought that the seven chosen to wait on tables suddenly became anyone's boss (Acts 6:1-6). God will hold leaders accountable for how they lead, but nowhere in Scripture is a Christian held accountable to a leader. If you are walking in sin, a leader may justifiably get on your case and confront you to obey God, but never to obey himself. Everyone is accountable to God, and we should help hold one another accountable *to God*, not to ourselves.<sup>§3.1.2.1</sup>

### 6.1.3 Voluntary Submission

In contrast to mandatory obedience to positions, the Church operates under a system of voluntary submission to leadership. As previously discussed, the question, “Who do you submit to?” is an entirely different issue than “Who must you obey?”.<sup>§5.1.2.1</sup> When people in institutional “churches” see the word “submit” in the Scripture, they often misinterpret it to mean obedience to a position of authority.<sup>§5.1.1.3</sup> But this is not what the Scriptures teach, nor what the word “submit” means. The word “submit” simply means “to yield or surrender” without any specification as to whether it is voluntary or mandatory. Submission can either be *voluntary* in the sense of yielding (i.e. submit to a friend's advice) or *mandatory* in the sense of obeying (i.e. obligation to follow an officer's orders). Thus, one may submit either because they are required to obey or because they choose to obey. In both cases *an act of compliance can be observed*, but the act alone does not indicate whether the submission was voluntary or mandatory. Conversely, an act of compliance to someone does not necessarily imply that a position of authority is involved. You may choose to submit to a bully on the playground to avoid escalating hostilities, for example, but that does not mean the bully is now your official supervisor. You may choose to submit to your friend's advice, but that does not mean that your friend now holds a position of authority over you. *Just because we choose to submit to something does not necessarily mean it has authority over us.*

Christians often submit to all kinds of things that don't have any authority over them. For example, Christians are encouraged to submit to others out of humility (Phil. 2:3-5), to maintain peace (Rom. 12:18, 14:19, Heb. 12:14, 1Pet. 2:12), and to win others to Christ (1Cor. 9:19-23, Tit. 2:10, 1Pet.3:1-2). Christians may submit to a tyrannical dictatorship, a neighborhood bully, or a co-worker who is a jerk – all for the purpose of demonstrating the love of Christ, **“that the teaching of our Savior may be attractive in all things”** (Tit. 2:10). Christians should exhibit an attitude of humility towards others.<sup>§6.1.3.2</sup> **“If possible, as far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.”** (Rom. 12:18) We may submit to someone for no other reason than that God wants us to submit to them, but that does not mean that we are now under their authority. If you submit and **“turn the other cheek”** (Matt. 5:39) to someone, it doesn't mean you have appointed them to a permanent position over you! And if you voluntarily submit to a Christian leader, it does not mean that they now have authority to start bossing you around.

### 6.1.3.1 Submitting to One Another

But doesn't Scripture say that Christians are supposed to submit to the leaders in the Church? Yes, of course, but it is far worse than that! *Christians must submit to everyone in the Church*, regardless of whether they are leaders or not! **“Submit to one another in the fear of Christ.”** (Eph. 5:21) Here again, there is submission without any positional authority implied. The word “submit” is translated from the Greek word “ΥΠΟΤΑΧΩ” #5293 meaning “to subject yourself” or “yield to one’s advice” denoting submission in a voluntary sense. If we were to interpret this word “submit” as strict militaristic obedience to positional authority, it would sure make a funny hierarchy! (Should I submit to George or Bill? Hey, wait a minute...they have to submit to me too!) ☺ The Greek word “ΥΠΟΤΑΧΩ” is used again where Peter writes, **“Likewise, you younger submit yourselves to the older and everyone clothe yourself with humility...”** (1Pet. 5:5) Does this mean there were thousands of positions of authority? “I am 23 and you are only 22 so you must obey me!” Does the oldest member of the “church” even get to tell the “pastor” what to do? ☺

The testimony of Scripture is quite consistent: *Christians mandatorily obey spiritual authority and voluntarily submit to leadership*. Again, this is entirely consistent with an accurate translation of Hebrews 13:17. It has already been shown why the words “obey”<sup>§5.1.2.1</sup> and “rule over”<sup>§5.2.2.2</sup> are not representative of the underlying Greek words, so it should be no surprise that the word translated as “submit” coming from the Greek word “ΥΠΕΙΚΩ” #5226 means “to yield or give way” in a manner again consistent with voluntary submission. But of course, you should **“Be persuaded by those who lead you and yield to them.”** (Heb. 13:17) Christians should not be a burden to those who are trying to serve them (Gal. 6:17). What a mistake that would be! It would be just as foolish to ignore your leaders as it would be to mindlessly obey them. If God has raised up a leader, **“then let him lead diligently”** (Rom. 12:8). Don't try to make leadership difficult among you. Christians should **“submit to such and to everyone who helps in the work and labors”** (1Cor. 16:16). It is actually quite easy to submit to those who are serving you. **“But we ask you, brothers, to know those who are laboring among you and caring for you in the Lord and who are admonishing you and consider them highly in love because of their work.”** (1Th. 5:12)

Christians should be encouraged to submit to their leaders, but *never* out of an obligation to obey a hierarchical position. Submitting to one another is a good thing, but submitting to only one man separated from the wealth of spiritual gifts and experience of the Body is a huge mistake.<sup>§3.2.2.3</sup> Submitting to Christian leaders should be no big deal, because we should submit to *every* Christian regardless of whether they are leaders or not.

### 6.1.3.2 Attitude of Submission

In the Church there is not just submission, but there is an *attitude of submission* – not a legal parsing of who has to obey what, but an attitude of serving others. This was the attitude of John the Baptist who recognized that **“He**

**must increase, but I must decrease.”** (John 3:30) Notice the authority Paul had was **“the authority that the Lord gave for building up and not for tearing down”** (2Cor. 10:8, 13:10). The apostles did not consider themselves to be Lords, Priests, Gurus, or CEO’s over others, but as **“bond servants”** and **“slaves”** (1Cor. 9:19, Rom. 1:1, Jas. 1:1, 2Pet. 1:1). And isn’t this what Jesus taught them? **“But whoever wants to become great among you will be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you will be your slave – just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve...”** (Matt. 20:27-28)

Everyone should have this attitude of submitting to others and learning from them which is so very important in the Church. Those who don’t, usually fail to see their own flaws and when they get off track, no one may be able to bring them back to sound doctrine. God has given us other brothers and sisters in the Lord so that we can benefit from their experience without having to go through the lessons of “hard knocks” on our own. Since the Church is a Body, the hand should not begrudgingly say, “There goes that eye spouting off again.” but should say, “I am glad there is an eye to help me.” **“The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you’, or the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’”** (1Cor. 12:21) If you are not an eye in the Body, then you should gladly learn to yield to someone else’s seeing. Don’t be rebellious, jealous, or hurt because *you* didn’t get to be the eye in that instance. The hand should not proudly insist on seeing, even after the eye has already seen. If you are not correctly submitted to the Body, then you probably are not correctly submitted to the Head either.<sup>§3.2.3.1</sup>

### 6.1.4 Spiritual Gifts of Leadership

Leadership in the world functions through natural abilities, but leadership in the Church functions through *supernatural* abilities. Notice how many of the spiritual gifts mentioned in Scripture are typically associated with leadership: administration (1Cor. 12:28), leading (Rom. 12:8), apostle (1Cor. 12:28, Eph. 4:11), pastor (Eph. 4:11), teacher (Rom. 12:7, 1Cor. 12:28, Eph. 4:11) and prophet (Rom. 12:6, 1Cor. 12:10,28, Eph. 4:11). A leadership role is any function or duty that a person has been spiritually gifted to perform in service to the Church. *Everyone in the Church is a priest, but not everyone is spiritually gifted with leadership abilities!* Notice that God only gave some to be leaders (Eph. 4:11). Everyone has a right to participate in an open meeting as the Lord leads, but not everyone possesses the same spiritual gift, purpose, or ministry. Every Christian is a member of the Body, but again, not everyone can be the eye (1Cor. 12:17). **“Not all are apostles, not all are prophets, not all are teachers, not all work miracles, not all have gifts of healings, not all speak other languages, not all interpret.”** (1Cor. 12:29-30) Everyone may be able to teach (Col. 3:16), but not everyone is necessarily gifted as a teacher. Everyone may be able to **“do the work of an evangelist”** (2Tim. 4:5), but not everyone is spiritually gifted as an evangelist. Likewise, anyone may be able to lead in a given situation through spiritual authority, but not everyone has been spiritually gifted as a leader.

Again, leadership has nothing to do with holding an “office” or a “position”,<sup>§5.1.1.3</sup> but is a matter of *servicing* the Church as God enables.<sup>§6.1.2.1</sup>

Leadership is meeting the needs of people, not ruling over them. Consider an example in the world where some friends decide to have a Superbowl party. One person volunteers to bring the chips, another the drinks, and another offers to host it at his house. Now if we were to think like an institutional “church”, that would mean there is now a “chip position” and “drink position” that report to the “host position” (and everybody else of course would be laity). 😊 Absurd! Nobody thinks of the person who brings the drinks as an office of authority, but as a role that was filled by someone who saw a need. The “drink position” doesn’t get to boss around the other people watching TV, and nobody gets jealous at the guy who wields the powerful “chip position”!

The Church is most certainly organized, but that does not mean there has to be positions of authority to get the job done. Instead, individuals may be assigned to handle specific *roles of responsibility* (Acts 6:3, 15:22). The responsibility to wait on tables (Acts 6:1-6), for example, was created on the fly as the need arose. And God continues to raise up people today to step forward and take leadership as needs arise. Someone still needs to share the gospel, someone still needs to teach, someone still needs to help the poor; but just don’t think anyone has to boss everyone else around in the process! Notice that none of the leadership roles in the Church was “the guy who gets to tell everybody else what to do”. Some leadership roles require greater degrees of responsibility than others, and yet each role is interdependent (1Cor. 12:20-21), indispensable (1Cor. 12:22), and honored equally (1Cor. 12:23-25). Spiritual gifts of leadership say nothing about a person’s intellect or talent, but only about their spiritual ability to serve in the Church.

Unlike the fixed positions in institutional “churches”, there is no limit to the ways that leaders may serve in the Church. As previously discussed, the variety of spiritual gifts (Rom. 12:6-8, 1Cor. 12:8-10, 28-30, Eph 4:11) shows there is not a definitive set of roles or even consistency in what they are called.<sup>§3.1.1.2</sup> Three of these spiritual gifts in particular are discussed below since they have traditionally been the most often misunderstood by institutional “churches” which have turned them into institutional positions. They are *emissary* (“apostle”, “bishop”, “missionary”), *overseer* (“pastor”, “elder”, “presbyter”), and *servant* (“deacon”, “minister”).

#### 6.1.4.1 Emissaries

An emissary is someone who Jesus Christ sends out to establish the Church in a new geographical area. The word “emissary” is translated from the Greek word “**ἈΠΟΣΤΟΛΟΣ**” #652 which literally means “sent out ones”. The twelve disciples became emissaries when they were sent out by Jesus (Matt. 10:1-20). What was that? You say that there is no mention of an “emissary” in your Bible? That is correct because most Bibles do not *translate* the word “**ἈΠΟΣΤΟΛΟΣ**”, but instead have merely *transliterated* it so that it appears as “apostle”. As a result, the meaning of the word has generally been lost, because the word “apostle” today essentially has no meaning outside an institutional religious context.<sup>§A.5</sup> But to the Greeks in the first century, however, an “**ἈΠΟΣΤΟΛΟΣ**” was simply a messenger, ambassador, or *emissary* and it is still usually translated that way in several verses (John 13:16, 2Cor. 8:23, Phil. 2:25).

Jesus sent out emissaries with the ability to perform signs, miracles, and wonders in His name to validate the gospel message (2Cor. 12:12, Acts 5:12). After an emissary established the Church in a new area, they would normally serve as an example to them for a period of time. For example, Paul served about 18 months in Corinth, 3 years in Ephesus, and 2 years in Rome in order to build up these groups of believers. The servant nature of the emissaries was quite evident as they were willing to wait on tables almost to the point of neglecting other responsibilities (Acts 6:1-6). Once the Church in an area became self-sustaining, the emissary would then *move on* to other places. The heart of an emissary is to be “sent out” to establish the Church **“where Christ is not named”** (Rom. 15:20). Thus, there is no such thing as a *stationary* “apostle” that manages several institutional “churches” from a CEO position in a denominational headquarters.<sup>§6.2.3.3</sup> The transient nature of emissaries affords them several rights although we read that Paul did not invoke any of these rights (1Cor. 9:1-15).

Emissaries are neither elected nor appointed by men, but are directly commissioned by Jesus Christ (Rom. 1:1, 1Cor. 1:1, 2Cor. 1:1, Gal. 1:1, Eph. 1:1, Col. 1:1, 1Tim. 1:1). Many scholars maintain that emissaries must have personally **“seen the Lord”** or they are not genuine (Acts 1:21-22, 1Cor. 9:1). This was at least true of the original twelve disciples (1Cor. 15:5) and later Paul (Acts 26:15-18, 1Cor. 9:1, 15:8). But there were also several other emissaries besides these: Matthias (Acts 1:26), Barnabas (Acts 14:4,14), Jesus’ brothers (Gal. 1:19, 1Cor. 9:5), Andronicus and Junia (Rom. 16:7), Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:25), and possibly Timothy and Silas (Acts 17:14-15, 2Cor. 8:23, 1Th. 1:1, 2:6). Some of these could have been among the 72 that were also sent out by Jesus (Luke 10:1). Jesus himself was also an emissary (Heb. 3:1) since He was “sent out” to this world by God. But that is not all! Scripture indicates that there will still be emissaries living during the end times (Rev. 18:20), so obviously emissaries did not cease after the last letter of the Bible was written. Just like Paul, an emissary can still be as **“one untimely born”** (1Cor. 15:8). And once you understand that an emissary is a spiritual gift, not a position, the need to spread the gospel to new areas will obviously continue until the very end of this age.

The closest thing to an emissary in institutional “churches” today is not what they call an “apostle”, but a “missionary”. “Missionary” is the Latin word for “apostle”, and unlike most institutional “apostles” who stay in one place as executives over lower ranking “pastors”, most missionaries are actually “sent out” to other geographical areas. Most missionaries are still not emissaries in the Biblical sense, however, because they have never seen the Lord, do not perform signs and wonders, etc. Some of these “missionaries” are not even Christians and only do humanitarian work such as feeding the poor or running hospitals without any evangelistic sharing of the gospel. Such missionaries may certainly be doing a good work, but they should not be confused with Biblical emissaries.

#### 6.1.4.2 Overseers

An overseer is someone who Jesus Christ raises up to “watch over” the affairs of the Church. An overseer does not have a position of authority, but instead serves,

cares for, and helps the stragglers as they shepherd the flock. The role of an overseer is represented by three different Greek terms in Scripture:

- “ΕΠΙΣΚΟΠΟΣ” #1985 means “to watch over or inspect” and is normally translated as “overseer” unless the translators thought it was referring to a position in an institutional “church” and then they translated it as “bishop”.<sup>§A.5</sup> This word has also been transliterated as “episcopate” as promoted by the Episcopalian denomination.
- “ΤΡΕΣΒΥΤΕΡΟΣ” #4245 means “to be advanced in age” and is normally translated as “older” unless translators thought it was referring to a position in an institutional “church” and then they translate it as “elder”.<sup>§A.5</sup> This word has also been transliterated as “presbyter” as promoted by the Presbyterian denomination.
- “ΤΟΙΜΕΝ” #4166 means “to shepherd” and is normally translated as “shepherd” except for *one* place that the translators thought it was referring to a position in an institutional “church” and then they translated it as “pastor”.<sup>§A.5</sup> This word is not normally transliterated, so the making of a Poimenarian denomination is just waiting in the wings. 😊

Normally one might think that these three words could be referring to three different leadership roles, except that the Scripture relates all three words together in one concept. While these three terms emphasize different leadership attributes, it is easily proven by Scripture that they are used interchangeably to refer to the *same* leadership role:

- The “**elders**” were called to be “**overseers**” and charged to be “**pastors**” of the flock (Acts 20:17,28). Notice that all three different Greek terms were used referring to the exact same leaders.
- The “**elders**” were charged to be “**pastors**” of the flock by serving as “**overseers**” (1Pet. 5:1-2). Again all three different Greek terms were used for the same leaders!
- The qualities of an “**elder**” are being discussed and then it suddenly shifts to the word “**overseer**” referring to the same leaders without missing a beat (Tit. 1:5-7).

Any distinctions made between these terms as separate institutional positions are purely imaginary without any Scriptural support. These terms continued to be used interchangeably in the writings of the early Christians as well. The Scripture does not designate any one officially correct name for this leadership role, so the term “overseer” will simply be used here for consistency purposes. There are only three Christians specifically mentioned by name in Scripture who were designated as overseers: Peter (1Pet. 5:1, John 21:16), John (2Jn. 1:1, 3Jn. 1:1), and Paul (Phm. 1:9). (Hey, weren’t they supposed to be apostles?)

Like emissaries, overseers are neither elected nor appointed by men, but are *chosen by the Holy Spirit* (Acts 20:28). Ideally, the emissary who establishes the Church in a new area will later return to recognize those who have emerged as



overseers (Acts 14:21-23, Tit. 1:5). This *affirmation* of leadership should in no way be confused with ordination or appointment to a position in an institutional “church”.<sup>§6.3.1.1</sup> Such recognition did not occur on the emissary’s first visit because it was necessary to wait to see whom the Holy Spirit would raise up to serve. Scripture lists several qualities to help identify those who have been spiritually gifted as overseers (1Tim. 3:2-7, Tit. 1:6-9). Overseers were always local residents who emerged as leaders among their brethren, but never candidates that were brought in from the outside to fill a position. Again, there was always a *plurality* of overseers in any given area without any limit on the number who may serve,<sup>§6.1.2.3</sup> and the writings of the early Church demonstrate that the plurality of overseers continued well beyond the New Testament period. There is no such thing as a “chief overseer” (or “chief pastor”)<sup>§6.2.3.1</sup> except for Jesus Christ himself (Heb. 13:20, 1Pet. 2:25, 5:4). In contrast to positions of authority in institutional “churches”, Scripture is perfectly clear: **“Shepherd the flock of God among you as overseers; not by compulsion, but voluntarily through God; not greedy for money, but willingly; not exercising lordship over the people, but becoming examples to the flock.”** (1Pet. 5:2-3)

#### 6.1.4.3 Servants

A servant is someone who Jesus Christ raises up to serve the Church by meeting specific needs. The word “servant” is translated from the Greek word “ΔΙΑΚΟΝΟC” #1249 referring to those who serve in a *voluntary* sense. Again, most institutional “churches” have never heard of this “servant” role, because they don’t realize that this is the same Greek word that has been *transliterated* as “deacon”. This word “ΔΙΑΚΟΝΟC” appears 29 times in Scripture and is normally translated as “servant”, except for five times where it was imagined to be referring to a position of authority, and then the word “deacon” was substituted (Phil. 1:1, 1Tim. 3:8,10,12-13). Why this inconsistency? Obviously, the word “servant” does not make a good name for a position of authority! Thus, they chose to transliterate the word as “deacon” instead. But what exactly is a “deacon”? Apart from a position in an institutional “church”, you would not know what a “deacon” is because the word has no meaning today outside of an institutional religious context.<sup>§A.5</sup> There are several Christians specifically mentioned by name in Scripture who were designated as servants: Paul (2Cor. 3:6, Eph. 3:7), Apollos (1Cor. 3:5), Stephanas (1Cor. 16:15), Phoebe (Rom. 16:1-2), Tychicus (Eph. 6:21, Col. 4:7), Epaphras (Col. 1:7), Archippus (Col. 4:17), and Timothy (1Th. 3:2).

It is generally accepted by scholars that the servant role in the Church began when the duty of “**waiting on tables**” was turned over to seven men (Acts 6:1-6). Waiting on tables was not a position of authority, but simply a role that needed to be filled. Most normal people do not view waiting on tables as an institutional position that gets to boss other people around. Rightly so, since it is difficult to think of a “servant” as any kind of position over others!<sup>§6.1.2.1</sup> Although all Christians are commanded to “**serve one another**” (Gal. 5:13, 1Pet. 4:10), not everyone is necessarily given the leadership responsibility of a servant.<sup>§6.1.2.4</sup> Again, only those who were “**full of the Spirit**” were allowed to serve the Church in this

manner (Acts 6:3,5). Scripture lists several qualities to help identify those who have been spiritually gifted as servants (1Tim. 3:8-13). To the institutional mentality it may seem strange that these qualities are necessary, since almost anyone in their organization could be chosen to usher, light candles, or run the sound system.

## 6.2 Counterfeit Philosophies

Those who hold positions in institutional “churches” are probably furious by now, yet they have no defensible position – at least as far as the Scripture is concerned. Some have worked their entire lives climbing the ladder of imaginary ecclesiastical positions only to realize now that there are no such positions in the Church. The sinful practices of false leadership are well documented throughout Scripture (Ezek. 34, 2Cor. 11:12-15, Jude 1:12). Unfortunately, many of these practices have

**“Satan doesn't really want to destroy the church, He just wants to be the head of it.”**

come to be the norm for today's false leaders: they seduce the unstable (2Pet. 2:14), are greedy (2Pet. 2:14), love to be first (3Jn. 1:9), gossip about other Christians (3Jn. 1:10), snub other brothers (3Jn. 1:10), feed only

themselves (Jude 1:12), boast about themselves (Jude 1:16), flatter others to their advantage (Jude 1:16), divide the Church (Jude 1:19), and are devoid of the Spirit (Jude 1:19). Perhaps you have seen some of them! It is understandable that those who have been brainwashed and spoon-fed their entire lives under such unbiblical leadership would have such a difficult time recognizing true leadership in the Church. **“Can a blind man lead a blind man?”** (Luke 6:39; cf. Matt. 15:14) Christians today need discernment more than ever to identify false apostles (Rev. 2:2), false prophets (Matt. 7:15-16, 2Pet. 2:1), false evangelists (Gal. 1:6-9), false shepherds (Acts 20:29-30), and false teachers (2Tim. 4:3-4, 2Pet. 2:1). Such people may possess great charisma and natural leadership abilities, but they are clearly not from God (Jer. 14:14).

### 6.2.1 Clergy and Laity

Almost every institutional “church” today employs some type of hierarchical system that distinguishes the “clergy” from the “laity”. The “clergy” are the institutional leaders who exercise authority over the other ordinary members called the “laity” who submit to their control. The clergy are active in ministry, while the laity are passive supporters. The clergy usually have superior oratory skills, Bible knowledge, management skills, and seminary degrees in comparison to the less-gifted, common, ordinary laity. As a result the clergy are given a privileged status and honored with official positions, jobs, titles, offices, special clothing, salaries, fringe benefits, and/or housing that are not available to the laity.<sup>§6.2.1.2</sup> Some clergy are idolized by the laity as *spiritual superheroes* and are even prayed to after they are dead! Rarely do the clergy wield their authority like abusive tyrants, but they still exercise unbiblical positions of authority.<sup>§6.2.1.2</sup> But if someone opposes them, then it is usually “my way or the highway”. This system raises a few people up *while pushing most people down*. Of course, it is possible

for any ordinary “lay” person to be transformed into a “clergyman” simply by attending seminary or through another process of “ordination”.

The terms “clergy” and “laity”, however, do not appear in any version of the Bible because men did not invent these concepts until hundreds of years later. The terms “clergy” and “laity” were later distortions of the Greek words “ΚΛΕΡΟΣ” #2819 meaning “lot or inheritance” and “ΛΛΟΣ” #2992 simply meaning “people”. Both of these Greek words *do* occur in Scripture, but “ΚΛΕΡΟΣ” *never* referred to a ruling class of Christians and “ΛΛΟΣ” *never* referred to a group of less-gifted ordinary Christians! Instead, both of these terms are used to refer to *all* Christians. For example, Peter wrote, **“But you are an elite class, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people [ΛΛΟΣ] worth preserving.”** (1Pet. 2:9) using the word “ΛΛΟΣ” to refer to the priesthood of *all* Christians. And later Peter wrote, **“Do not exercise authority over the lot [ΚΛΕΡΟΣ], but become examples to the flock.”** (1Pet. 5:2-3) using the word “ΚΛΕΡΟΣ” to refer to *all* Christians who are God’s inheritance. How did Peter manage to get this clergy/laity thing backwards? Here, the laity (“ΛΛΟΣ”) are the **“royal priesthood”** and the clergy (“ΚΛΕΡΟΣ”) are the **“flock”!** The terms “ΚΛΕΡΟΣ” and “ΛΛΟΣ” both occur throughout Scripture, yet now you can see why they are *never* translated as “clergy” and “laity” for their meanings do not correspond to the false doctrine that was later manufactured.

It makes sense that institutional “churches” would pattern their clergy/laity systems after the *Old Testament* since they clearly are not following the pattern of the Church specified in the *New Testament*. There are no longer any intermediaries between God and His people in the Church.<sup>§3.1.1.1</sup> The Church is a kingdom *of* priests, but the institutional “churches” have become a kingdom *with* priests! Any clerical system with positions of authority is completely unbiblical because it directly contradicts the teachings of Jesus Christ (Matt. 20:25-28, Mark 10:42-44, Luke 22:24-27) and the apostles (21Cor. 1:24, 1Pet. 5:3).<sup>§5.1.1.3</sup>

### 6.2.1.1 Religious Titles

Some clergy hold ecclesiastical titles derived from Biblical terms that are *taken out of context*,<sup>§6.2.2</sup> while others have made up imaginary titles that aren’t found anywhere in the Bible:

Spiritual Gift	Biblical Sounding Titles	Other Made-Up Titles
Emissary	Apostle, Missionary, Bishop	Cardinal, Denominational Head, Superintendent
Overseer	Pastor, Priest, Elder, Presbyterian, Episcopate	Rector, Reverend, Board Member, Trustee
Servant	Deacon, Minister	Usher, Secretary, Building Deputy, Janitor

In any case, Jesus said, **“But you are not to be called ‘Rabbi’, for only one is your Teacher and you are all brothers. And do not call anyone on earth your ‘Father’, for only one is your Father and He is in Heaven. Nor are you to be called ‘Leaders’, for only one is your Leader, the Christ.”** (Matt. 23:8-10) Obviously, Jesus was not providing an exhaustive list of every particular title to avoid, but condemning the use of religious titles in general. The disobedience of some religious institutions is so blatant that they actually refer to their clergy as “Father”, “Holy Father”, or even “Pope” (which means “Father”). Certainly Paul was like a father to many (Phil. 2:22, 1Th. 2:11, 1Tim. 1:2, 1:18, 2Tim. 1:2, 2:1, Tit. 1:4, Phm. 1:10), but no one ever called him by the religious title of “Father”. Obviously, the bigger problem is not what a particular institutional position is called, but that there are institutional positions in the first place!

It is important to understand the difference between using descriptive phrases for *identification purposes* and bestowing official titles on positions which Jesus condemned. To offer an illustration, nobody thinks of “Joe the plumber” as a position of authority or a title of honor, but just that Joe is a plumber. Joe’s occupation of plumbing here is simply used to help identify this Joe from all the other Joes someone might know. Likewise, Christians who consistently performed a certain role in the Church often became identified with a term that described what they were doing. Such labels did not constitute positions or offices, however, but were merely descriptive terms referring to the spiritual gifts of service a Christian performed. For example, Scripture clearly mentions that Paul was an apostle, but never does it refer to “The Apostle Paul” as the title of a position. The former is a function of how God gifted Paul to serve, and the latter is an imaginary title not found in any version of the Bible! As previously discussed, a spiritual gift is not the title of a position, nor is there anything unique about a spiritual gift when it is referred to in noun form.<sup>§3.1.1.2</sup>

It was quite common to use descriptive terms to help identify people, but they were never viewed as titles of authority. For example, there were a lot of “Johns” in the Bible: there was **“John the Baptist”** (Matt. 3:1), **“John Mark”** (Acts 15:37), **“John the older”** (2Jn. 1:1, 3Jn. 1:1), and John **“the disciple whom Jesus loved”** (John 21:20). But when someone referred to “John the Baptist”, nobody thought that there was an official “Baptist” position of authority that John occupied. There was no “Baptist” position before John and no election was held to fill the “Baptist” position after John died. This John just happened to baptize a lot of people and thus he was referred to as “John the Baptist”. Likewise, despite the popular misconception, Jesus’ last name was not “Christ”! The word “Christ” (or “Messiah”) is often used with Jesus’ name to uniquely identify Him from the hundreds of other people at that time who were also named Jesus (Joshua). Such descriptive terms helped identify those with common Hebrew names such as Mary (Miriam), Judas (Judah), and James (Jacob). Yet nobody revered **“Mary Magdalene”** (Matt. 27:56), **“Judas Iscariot”** (Matt. 10:4), or **“James the Lesser”** (Mark 15:40) as titles of authority. Do you understand the difference between identifying a person and bestowing upon them a title of honor?

### 6.2.1.2 Positions of Honor

The clergy's privileged status in an institutional "church" is usually obvious for they are often given *special seats* on stage or wear *special clothing* to distinguish themselves from the ordinary laity. But Jesus said, **"Beware of the scribes who want to walk around in robes and like recognition in the marketplaces and important seats in the meetings and places of honor at the suppers."** (Luke 20:46; cf. Matt. 23:5-7, Luke 14:7-11) It is not uncommon for the clergy to become self-conceited elitists, esteeming themselves in unbiblical positions that God never intended to exist. Indeed, there are many clergy today like Diotrophes **"who loves to be first"** (3Jn. 1:9). Some clergy even allow men to bow down before them, but no genuine Christian would ever allow this to happen (Matt. 4:10, Acts 10:25-26, 12:21-23, 14:11-15, Rev. 22:8-9). Some flaunt their positions of honor before the laity with the teaser that, "One day you too could become clergy like me." That's right, one day the title, the office, the salary, the parsonage, the retirement package, and all the other perks could be yours! Some "pastors" from smaller congregations may be thinking, "For the measly benefits I get, you can have it." But that is precisely the point! Regardless of how measly the benefits are, they are endowed on only one position of honor. None of the laity gets any of these things, nor are they offered to them. These clergy acquire fame and fortune by virtue of their false positions of authority, seminary degrees, and charisma, *but not from God*.

Besides the formal ecclesiastical honors bestowed upon them, the clergy's privileged status even carries over to *informal* settings. The "pastor" may act very informally in smaller settings, yet they still behave as the *big fish in a small pond*. When the "church" has a recreation day, for example, the "pastor" is often placed in charge of one of the intramural teams. Is the "pastor" position inherently endowed with athletic prowess? Or when the "church" holds an informal potluck supper, everyone turns to the "pastor" who is expected to say the prayer. Is there no one else in the "church" who is qualified to pray for a meal? If the "pastor" *takes* the position of honor, then that says something about him. **"Do not take the place of honor...take the lowest place."** (Luke 14:7-11) But if he is *given* the position of honor, then that says something about the people. **"If you look on the one wearing fine clothing and say, 'Sit here in a good place', but say to the poor man, 'Stand over there or sit by my footstool', have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil motives?"** (Jas. 2:3-4). These things may hardly seem like great honors, but the "pastor" is still the one who is automatically given the distinguished position. This does not mean that people who serve in the Church are not worthy of honor and respect (Phil. 2:29, 1Tim. 5:17, 1Cor. 12:24), but they should not be bestowed with unbiblical positions of authority.

### 6.2.1.3 The Sin of the Nicolaitans

The practice of having separate classes of "clergy" and "laity" is possibly addressed in the New Testament with regards to the sin of the Nicolaitans (Rev. 2:6,15). Although little is known about the Nicolaitans, the word comes from the

Greek terms “ΝΙΚΑΩ” #3528 and “ΛΑΟC” #2992 and literally means “to conquer the laity”. Apparently, some Christians in Ephesus and Pergamos did not obey Jesus’ teaching and created a clerical class of “Nicolaitans” who set themselves above the laity. Jesus directly rebuked them saying He “**hates**” (Rev. 2:6) the sin of the Nicolaitans and anyone who holds to that doctrine should “**Repent therefore or else I am coming to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.**” (Rev. 2:15-16) Again, this does not mean that there isn’t leadership in the Church, but only that those who have constructed these clergy/laity systems are *sinning* in direct violation of Jesus Christ’s commands.<sup>§5.1.1.3</sup> These unbiblical classes are yet another form of the sin of *division*,<sup>§2.1.2</sup> creating barriers between Christians on the basis of their education, talent, or charisma.

The sins that result from creating a class of clergy are well documented in Scripture: exerting positional authority over others (Matt. 20:25-28, Mark 10:42-44, Luke 22:24-27), usurping everyone’s responsibility to be a priest (1Pet. 2:5,9, Rev. 1:6, 5:10, 20:6), making their own decisions (1Th. 2:13, 2Pet. 1:20-21), hoarding responsibilities instead

**“Nicolaitanism developed into the clergy/laity system that we have in most of the church today. What is wrong with this is that the Lord never intended that one group of people in the church (clergy) would rule and reign over another group (laity).”**

**– Watchman Nee**

of building up others to do them (Eph. 4:12-13), acting as intermediaries for God (Heb. 8:11, 1Jn. 2:27), passing judgment on others (Rom. 14:4,13), taking places of honor (Luke 20:46-47, 14:7-11, Matt. 23:5-7, Jas. 2:1-4), obtaining religious titles (Matt. 23:8-10), and dividing the Body (Rom. 16:17-18, Gal. 5:19-21, Tit. 3:10-11, Jude 1:19). Many clergy live isolated lives from the laity and only interoperate with them in an institutional ritualistic context on Sunday mornings. As a result, any true spiritual gifts they may have are not properly integrated in the Church as they live elitist lives that are *unaccountable* to

the Body of Christ and *unchecked* when they rule in error. It is important to remember that *some clergy are actually sincere, loving, hard-working Christians with good intentions*, but have simply been deceived by this false institutional system and are acting out of ignorance.<sup>§6.3.2.1</sup> Although they may be sincere, they are still sincerely wrong. They may be humble, kind, and devoted, yet they still sin because they have erected a barrier and elevated themselves above the other brothers and sisters in Christ.

While the clergy’s sin may be obvious, it should be pointed out that *the laity also sin in complicity* by passively forsaking their own spiritual responsibilities. The responsibilities of the Church were never delegated to a single leader, but were the *responsibility of each and every Christian*. Unfortunately, most of the laity today are quite content to sit back and “leave it to the professionals”. The institutional environment has formed a symbiotic relationship in which the laity want to have priests and the clergy are willing to be priests for them. Thus, the clergy cannot be held solely to blame for this sin when the reality is *the people like it this way*. “**The prophets prophesy falsely, the priests rule on their own authority, and my people love to have it so.**” (Jer. 5:31) Like people, like priest (Hos. 4:9)! After all, if every Christian was serving one another with their spiritual

gifts in proper Biblical fellowship,<sup>§3.1</sup> what would they need the clergy for? Are only the clergy supposed to evangelize, visit the sick, and minister to prisoners? No, *you* are supposed to do that (Matt. 25:44-45, John 14:12)!

Some clergy are working themselves to death trying to fulfill all of the ministry duties by themselves that have rightly been *assigned for the entire Church to do!* But it is not as though the clergy are trying to work themselves out of a job by getting all the laity to become clergy (Eph. 4:12-13). Some clergy may welcome the laity’s involvement to help decrease their workload and create a greater sense of belonging, as long as it does not erode their power base or tread on their “spiritual turf”. Some of them organize what amounts to an “amateur hour” where the laity are allowed to interact together in cell groups. Or they let the laity do the safe “unspiritual” tasks of folding bulletins, ushering, lighting candles, or running the sound system. But no matter how involved the laity may be, the problem is that the laity are still laity and the clergy are still clergy.

## 6.2.2 Redefined Spiritual Gifts

Most institutional “churches” have confiscated Biblical terms describing spiritual gifts and then *redefined them* to become titular ecclesiastical positions. Terms such as “apostle” and “pastor” do appear in the Bible, for example, but the institutional “churches” have turned them into positions of authority outside of their Biblical contexts.<sup>§6.1.4</sup> Thus whenever the average “church” goer sees one of these terms in Scripture, they are deceived into thinking it corresponds to the *title* of a position in their institutional “church”.<sup>§6.2.1.1</sup> But a Biblical “pastor” is not the CEO of a “local church” that gives a sermon once a week on Sunday morning;<sup>§6.2.3.2</sup> and a Biblical “apostle” is not just the next higher layer of management over “pastors” that is never actually sent anywhere.<sup>§6.2.3.3</sup> In Scripture, apostles and pastors are not institutional positions at all, but are just two of the spiritual gifts mentioned among the lists of spiritual gifts.<sup>§3.1.1.2</sup> The ecclesiastical positions created by the institutional “churches” are completely incompatible with the characteristics of the spiritual gifts described in Scripture:

Institutional Positions	Spiritual Gifts
Appointed or elected by men	Distributed by God
Based on natural abilities	Based on supernatural abilities
Limited number of offices	Unlimited number may serve
Holds an official title	Performs informal service
Finite term of duty	Indefinite duration of service
Operate by positional authority	Operate by spiritual authority

Spiritual gifts may come and go, but positions are forever! If spiritual gifts could be mistaken for positions, then how many positions do you suppose Paul held? In Scripture, Paul has been designated as an apostle, teacher, preacher, prophet, servant, and gifted as a healer, evangelist, miracle worker, and speaker of

tongues.<sup>§3.1.1.2</sup> Obviously, Paul did not simultaneously hold nine official titles representing separate positions in a hierarchical organization, but was merely gifted by God in many different ways to serve. The spiritual gifts that have been imagined to be “positions” or “offices” are included in the same lists right along with the other spiritual gifts. The spiritual gift of **“apostle”**, for example, is mentioned right along in the same lists as **“miracles”**, **“helps”**, and **“kinds of tongues”** (1Cor. 12:28-30). Notice that there is no divider as to where the imaginary “positions” stop and the “regular” spiritual gifts start. No one treats these other spiritual gifts as positions of authority over others. Are you in a jam? Why don’t you visit Frank two doors down in the “office of miracles”? Having trouble with foreign languages? Perhaps Sam in the “speaking in tongues” position can help you out. How absurd! One spiritual gift cannot be separated out and turned into a position any more than any other spiritual gift. Institutional “churches” are not allowed to arbitrarily pick out certain spiritual gifts and make them into positions, because Jesus Christ said there are no such positions.<sup>§5.1.1.3</sup>

### 6.2.2.1 The Big Three

Many institutional “churches” have implemented some version of the “big three” positions of “apostle”, “pastor/elder”, and “deacon”.<sup>§6.1.4</sup> Notice that these three gifts have been arbitrarily selected out from among the lists of spiritual gifts: **“apostles”** (1Cor. 12:28-30, Eph. 4:11), **“pastors”** (Eph. 4:11), and **“deaconing”** (Rom. 12:6-8). Again, if these three gifts can be considered to be positions of authority, then why aren’t **“giving”**, **“mercy”**, **“encouraging”**, **“miracles”**, **“helps”** and **“speaking in tongues”** since they are included in the exact same lists? These three spiritual gifts of leadership have been foolishly separated out from all of the other spiritual gifts and imagined to be fixed official positions of authority based on the following arguments:

- Lots were cast to replace Judas so that there would be twelve fixed “apostle” positions (Acts 1:15-26). But the book of Acts does not indicate whether God endorsed this action and some theologians believe this was a mistake, proposing that Paul was clearly meant to fill that role (especially since Matthias was never mentioned again). In any case, the idea that there were only twelve fixed apostle positions is clearly in error since Scripture mentions at least *eight* other apostles who were given this spiritual gift besides the original twelve.<sup>§6.1.4.1</sup>
- Seven men were chosen to relieve the apostles’ responsibility of waiting on tables which some teach to be the origins of the “deacon” position (Acts 6:1-6). But why wasn’t the “pastor” position mentioned in any of this? Is waiting on tables a position of authority over others or a role of service? Do you suppose they were limited to only seven fixed “positions” or could the Church pick more men to fill that role if they doubled in size? Again, the book of Acts merely explains what they did without supplying any underlying theological justification.



- The salutation to the Philippians specifically mentions overseers and deacons (Phil. 1:1). But notice this letter was written “to all the saints” which only *included* these leaders. Again, the fact that these two spiritual gifts of leadership were specifically mentioned does not mean that they were positions of authority.
- The attributes of overseers and deacons are specifically listed in Scripture (1Tim. 3:1-13, Tit. 1:6-9). But these were not *qualifications* for hiring job applicants to fill a position; they were *qualities* of those who were spiritually gifted to serve in the Church. If they were merely qualifications for a position, then even an atheist who was married to one wife, did not drink, had obedient children, etc. might satisfy the requirements to be hired. (Oops, this has already happened in some institutional “churches”!) 😊

Furthermore, let it be emphasized that the words “position” or “office” are never used anywhere in these verses. There is nothing in these verses to indicate that any of these people got to exercise authority, make decisions, wear special robes, hold special titles or any other nonsense forbidden by Scripture. Some spiritual gifts most definitely require *greater responsibility* which does bear mentioning,<sup>§6.1.2.4</sup> but that does not make them positions of authority over others.

### 6.2.2.2 The Five-Fold Ministry

Some institutional “churches” have created positions modeled after the so-called “five-fold ministry” of “**apostles**”, “**prophets**”, “**evangelists**”, “**pastors**”, and “**teachers**” (Eph. 4:11). Then they usually make a distinction between a person’s spiritual gift and the institutional “office” they hold. For example, they claim the *office of “pastor”* does not have to be necessarily filled by someone who is especially gifted as an overseer, but could be filled by someone who is gifted as a teacher or prophet instead. They might have several people who give prophecies, but only one would be given the *office of prophet* that carries special recognition and authority. Such distinctions, of course, are not found anywhere in the New Testament as there is no such thing as the “office of” anything.<sup>§5.2.1</sup> Some view these offices of the “five-fold ministry” as less-formal positions, but in the Church there are not *unofficial positions*, there are no positions!

Ironically, most institutional “churches” who believe in the “five-fold ministry” never actually recognize anyone in the *office* of the prophet, evangelist, or teacher for some reason. They may indeed have these other spiritual gifts, but they are not allowed to hold an office of authority like the “apostles” and “pastors”. Have you ever seen an institutional “church” ordain a “prophet”, for example? (“Okay Bill, we appointed you to the office of prophet for this year, so you better get busy and learn how to predict the future.”) 😊 As previously mentioned, a “prophet” cannot be separated from the spiritual gift of prophecy.<sup>§3.1.1.2</sup> How many prophecies must a person give before they can be appointed to the *office* of a prophet? The problem with the concept of the “five-fold ministry” is that they have taken *only one of the lists of spiritual gifts* (Eph. 4:11) and imagined it is somehow superior to the other lists. But what about the “seven-

fold ministry” (Rom. 12:6-8), the “eight-fold” ministry (1Cor. 12:28-30), and the “nine-fold ministry” (1Cor. 12:8-10)? Shouldn’t we turn all of those spiritual gifts into offices too? If the institutional “churches” are going to insist on turning spiritual gifts into offices, then let us not be deprived of its entertainment value:

- The “five-fold ministry” contradicts the “big three” positions.<sup>§6.2.2.1</sup> They both have “apostles” and “pastors”, but somehow the “deacon” position got left out of the “five-fold ministry”.
- They think that an “apostle” is the highest position because it is the first item mentioned in the list, yet they overlook the fact that the “prophet” and “evangelist” positions should then get to boss the “pastor” position around which isn’t mentioned until fourth in the list.
- For the denominations that believe “apostles” and “prophets” passed away with the writing of the New Testament, this means the “evangelist” position should now be the highest remaining office since it comes next in the list.
- The “eight-fold ministry” (1Cor. 12:28-30) should clearly be considered superior to the “five-fold” ministry because it starts out numbering the “positions” according to their importance. Both lists begin with “apostles” and “prophets” and then teachers are in third place. Notice that “pastors” didn’t even make this list so they should all be fired immediately! 😊

The problem with inventing artificial doctrines like this and then trying to superimpose it upon the Scripture is that it is not consistent with the entire testimony of Scripture.<sup>§c.2</sup> Entire doctrines should never be manufactured from a single verse, especially when there are other verses that clearly contradict such interpretations.

### 6.2.3 One Man at the Top

Perhaps the most unbiblical doctrine of them all is the idea that there can be a single position at the top of a hierarchical structure over the Church. When you trace the chain of command up through the hierarchy of most institutional “churches”, you will eventually arrive at only one man at the top of the organization who holds the ultimate power. Jesus is Lord, but institutional “churches” have installed men in positions as mini-lords. In the Roman Catholic organization, the top position is the “pope” and under Protestantism it is usually an “apostle”, “bishop”, or “denominational head”. And if an institutional “church” is too small for that, there is still only one position in charge in the form of a “pastor”. The “pastor” position created by the Protestants is actually just a derivative of the Roman Catholic priest.<sup>§6.2.3.2</sup> Whenever a group splits and forms a new organization, they just replace the man at the top with someone else – the hierarchical structure does not change. Protestantism merely broke down the monolithic Roman Catholic pyramid structure and replaced it with their own smaller pyramid structures. The same unbiblical positions of authority forbidden by Jesus remain, except that now they don’t have to kiss anyone’s ring. 😊

This concept of having one man at the top was primarily borrowed from the pagan religions where only one priest is allowed to be the intermediary for the false god. For them, it is a necessity that only one man be in charge in order to maintain control; for if others are also allowed to *make up* instructions from their false god, then the instructions will eventually begin to contradict each other and the facade will become apparent. In the same way, it is necessary for most institutional “churches” to have only one leader at the top of their pyramid structure so that their decisions of men do not begin to contradict each other.<sup>§5.2.3</sup> While this may be effective in maintaining control *within* a particular denomination, consider all the disagreements *between* denominations with so many different men in control of these organizations.<sup>§2.2.3</sup> The idea that all Christians in the Church can independently hear from God and still be on the “same page” without any such positions is indeed a mystery to the institutional “churches”.<sup>§5.1.3.3</sup>

**“You understand and admit that it was no lofty hierarchical system...no system vesting high-handed monarchical power, over each church, in the person of a single individual...”**  
**– H. Grattan Guinness**

Giving power to a single leader at the top of an organization is a *cultic* practice that has been proven throughout history to be inherently dangerous, leading millions of Christians astray. Jesus was completely familiar with the pyramid structures of the world when He explicitly rejected it in the Church.<sup>§5.1.1.3</sup> It is quite natural for men to want to consolidate power into a single position, but Jesus said, **“It is not so among you.”** (Matt. 20:26) It does not matter how loving, respected, and talented the man in charge is; *it is unbiblical for there to be only one man in charge*. The dangers of having one man in charge are obvious since it only takes a single leader to stray in order to lead the entire congregation into sin and error. So many have been deceived by charlatans who have sold them a false bill of goods, all the while claiming to be from God. It does not even matter if the leader had good intentions (or even consulted a committee first); if he is in error, then the whole “church” is led into error. But none of this is even possible in the Church *by God’s design*. The priesthood of all Christians,<sup>§3.1.1.1</sup> mutual submission,<sup>§6.1.3.1</sup> plurality of leadership,<sup>§6.1.2.3</sup> and corporate discernment<sup>§5.1.3.3</sup> are built-in to provide multiple safeguards to prevent error from arising in the Church. Christians must never let the coloring of one personality destroy the character of the Church.<sup>§3.2.2.3</sup> Sometimes the leader will refer to it as “my ministry” and may even name it after himself.<sup>§2.2.1.4</sup> That is why God raises up multiple leaders so that one man cannot direct the Church with his own will, treat the Church as his property, or impress his own personality upon the Church. The only person who can be solely trusted to lead the Church with such “dictatorial” power is Jesus Christ! He alone is our Lord!

If there is no Scriptural support for having one man at the top, then why does almost every institutional “church” have a single leader in charge? Surprisingly, no justification was given for how this pagan practice eventually infiltrated the Church until hundreds of years later. Then finally someone came up with an argument from the *Old Testament* claiming that Moses was the sole leader over

Israel and had hierarchical structure under him so it must be okay. And yet Moses himself was never elected or appointed by men, and his desire was **“that all the Lord’s people were prophets and that the Lord would put His Spirit upon them”** (Num. 11:29). This of course was the very thing that God had in mind for the Church that was implemented under the *New Covenant* (Jer. 31:31-34). Institutional “churches” may indeed try to model their structures after the Law under the Old Covenant,<sup>§A.2.4</sup> but the Church operates by the Spirit under the New Covenant.

Later, another erroneous argument claimed that the messages John wrote to the *angel* of each Church was really a “pastor” in charge of each congregation (Rev. 2-3). What an incredible imagination! While the underlying Greek term “ἄγγελος” #32 could be generically translated as “messenger”, most Bible translations use the word “angel” in these verses because the context takes place in the heavenly realms. Apparently the Church in each city has something like a guardian angel, just like individuals do (Psa. 34:7, 91:11, Matt. 18:10, Heb. 1:14). But even if we were to assume that these verses were referring to an earthly person, such a messenger, Biblically speaking, would not have been a “pastor”, but a courier such as Timothy (Phil. 2:19) or Tychicus (Eph. 6:21, Col. 4:7) who carried messages to the Church in various cities.

### 6.2.3.1 The Chief Elder

Some institutional “churches” agree that there should be a plurality of elders,<sup>§6.1.2.3</sup> but what they have implemented instead is a plurality of elder *positions*. They recognized the abuses of investing power into a single position, but still have official positions vested in an “elder” board or committee instead of relying on the spiritual nature of servant leadership. They think that having equal positions called “elders”, somehow makes their positions seem more Biblical. But Jesus said there are no positions of authority over others in the Church.<sup>§5.1.1.3</sup> An “equality of elder positions” is not the same as an “equality of all believers”, because it still maintains a sinful system of clergy/laity.<sup>§6.2.1</sup> The group of clergy with “equal positions”, for example, is not equal to the group of laity who have no positions!

What is more interesting though is that over time, one “elder” almost always becomes more equal than the others! 😊 While the “elders” may originally start out as an equal governing body, one “elder” usually emerges as the “chief elder”. The “chief elder” is the “elder” who becomes the spokesman for the group and usually preaches the sermon on Sunday mornings. If other “elders” are ever allowed to teach on occasion, they are only viewed as fill-ins for the “chief elder” who maintains the more dominant position. Due to his prominent visibility from preaching, the “chief elder” position usually becomes synonymous with the “pastor” position, eventually receiving a salary, office, fringe benefits, or free housing that none of the other “equal elders” receive.

Those who have invented this doctrine of a “chief elder” maintain that Peter, James, or Paul (they can’t seem to agree on who it was) was the “chief elder” because whichever one appeared to be the most visible spokesman in a certain setting. They are apparently ignorant that Peter, James, and Paul were *apostles*

(not “elders” or “pastors”) and that different leaders emerged as “chief spokesmen” in almost every circumstance.<sup>§5.1.2.2</sup> Even more imaginative are those who try to extrapolate the existence of a “chief elder” from the phrase **“those of reputation”** (Gal. 2:2). For the record, Paul (apparently unable to find the imaginary “chief elder”) sought out those who **“seemed to be”** men of *reputation* (not office holders) and met with a *plurality* (not a single “chief”) of *apostles* (not “elders”) which Paul himself did not acknowledge as being anything (Gal. 2:6). No true Christian would ever claim to be a “chief elder” because that position belongs exclusively to Jesus Christ (Heb. 13:20, 1Pet. 2:25, 5:4).

### 6.2.3.2 The Protestant Pastor

The Protestant concept that the “pastor” is the head of a “local church” is particularly astonishing. Some institutional “churches” have invented a wealth of “pastor” positions (“Assistant Pastor”, “Youth Pastor”, “Counseling Pastor”, “Singles Pastor”) who all report to the “Head Pastor” position. So how did the “pastor” become such a powerful position, when the word “pastor” only appears at most *once* in the New Testament (Eph. 4:11)? Hmmm, let’s see...there is no mention of what a “pastor” is, no mention of what a “pastor” does, and no mention of any qualifications for a “pastor”...so obviously the “pastor” must be the head of the “church”! (Perhaps the genius who came to this conclusion conveniently discovered that he was a “pastor”). 😊 Isn’t it strange that none of the epistles were addressed to the “pastor”,<sup>§6.1.2.3</sup> important

**“The choosing of pastors is an encroachment on the authority of the Holy Ghost, who distributes gifts according to His will.”**

**– J. N. Darby**

travelers coming to town were not greeted by the “pastor” (Acts 18:27, 21:17), and collections of money were not given to the “pastor” (Acts 11:30). Indeed, some “pastors” today seem to be somewhat aware that their job is strangely unbiblical!

No, the Protestant concept of a “pastor” did not come from the Scriptures at all, since it was not invented till over a thousand years later when Martin Luther appointed ex-Roman Catholic priests to become “pastors” in his denomination. Most Protestants condemn the concept of Roman Catholic priests, and yet they have instituted Protestant “priests” who preach from the same pulpit and administer the same “sacraments” of marriage, baptism, and communion as the Roman Catholic priests. Where in Scripture does it mention that only a “pastor” can perform these things? Most Protestants seem to be totally unaware that they are running the exact same Roman Catholic pyramid structure inside their institutional “churches”, just minus the “pope”.

How do these “pastors” continue to justify their unbiblical positions of authority? Most of them don’t for they are completely ignorant of what they claim to be. They were simply raised to believe that the “pastor” is the head of a “local church” and have never looked into it any further. A “pastor” may be very nice, well-intentioned, caring, and serving, but he occupies an unbiblical position that Jesus never authorized for His Church.<sup>§5.1.1.3</sup> The “pastor” may deliver accurate

Biblical exegesis each week using the Scripture to prove the points of his sermon, *yet he ignores the Scripture that rejects the very existence of his position*. Are these the people you are trusting for your Bible exegesis? For shame, for shame! And all of this flies in the face of what Scripture clearly teaches about the *spiritual gift* of overseeing.<sup>§6.1.4.2</sup> Of course there are spiritual “shepherds” in the Bible, but they do not have a position of authority over a “local church”.

When “pastors” are confronted about their unbiblical positions, they are often forced to consider the Scriptures *for the first time* on this topic, not to see what it objectively teaches, but to struggle to find any rationalization whatsoever to justify their unbiblical jobs. Many will respond by erroneously quoting Scriptures pertaining to an *apostle* to justify their position as head of their “church”. They apparently do not understand the difference between an emissary<sup>§6.1.4.1</sup> and an overseer.<sup>§6.1.4.2</sup> They notice how an apostle such as Paul established the Church in a new area, and mistake that for being the same as a “pastor” who presides over an existing “church”. They might cite verses claiming any number of rights, but the context of the passages they read always pertains to *apostles*, not “pastors”.<sup>§6.3.2.3</sup> A Protestant “pastor” is either blissfully ignorant of what the Scriptures teach or else engaged in a fraudulent charade to maintain an unbiblical position – neither state is very good! And if they are reading this book right now, they are no longer left with the former option. If you are a “pastor”, are you willing to scrap your unbiblical empire?

### 6.2.3.3 Apostle’s Syndrome

In many denominations, an “apostle” is considered to be the highest institutional position of authority that can be attained. Some denominations refer to this top position as “bishop”, but the Greek word translated as “bishop” (Acts 1:20, Phil. 1:1, 1Tim. 3:1-2, Tit. 1:7) is actually “ΕΠΙΣΚΟΠΟΣ” #1985 which again is equivalent to an overseer,<sup>§6.1.4.2</sup> not an emissary.<sup>§6.1.4.1</sup> In any case, many denominations use an unbiblical institutional hierarchy that goes something like this: “deacons” report to the “elders”, the “elders” report to the “pastor”, and the “pastor” reports to an “apostle”. All quite Biblically based right? Nonsense! Within this imaginary framework, it is quite common for ambitious “pastors” to succumb to the delusion of *apostle syndrome*. In these cases, the ego of the “pastor” grows to the point that he eventually feels like he has earned the power and authority of an “apostle”. Since he was raised to believe that an “apostle” is the highest position in the “church”, that is what he now claims to be.<sup>§7.2.4.3</sup> Some of them will even start their own “churches” just so that they can hold the position of “apostle” there.

But notice that none of the apostles in Scripture ever aspired to become apostles – they were called by God. Who in their right mind would aspire to a life of “toil”, “hunger”, “brutal treatment” being “homeless”, “dishonored”, “persecuted” and “slandered” as “refuse” and “the scum of the earth” (1Cor. 4:10-13)? Or were you under the delusion that apostles have nice homes and work as CEO’s in air-conditioned offices with their titles on name plates outside their doors? These self-appointed “apostles” today want to claim all of the rights of an emissary, but they are not emissaries, nor do they do the work of an

emissary.<sup>§6.1.4.1</sup> They have not personally seen the Lord, they do not perform signs and wonders, and most importantly they are not sent anywhere to share the gospel where the name of Jesus is unknown. Instead, these so-called “apostles” preside over existing institutional “churches” or start new franchises of their denomination *where the Church already exists*. They are not Church planters; they are “church” supplanters! If any of them actually were an apostle they would be “sent out” sharing the gospel abroad, not managing existing “churches” as the CEO over other “pastors”. Again, an apostle is not a position, it is not a “chief pastor” over other “pastors”, nor does it exercise authority over others.<sup>§5.1.1.3</sup>

#### 6.2.3.4 The Roman Catholic Pope

The Roman Catholic denomination claims that Peter was the first “pope”, the “Bishop of Rome”, the “Chief Pastor”, the “Vicar of Christ” as Christ’s representative on earth. They believe a certain man is able to occupy the “Jesus position” and that the authority of this position has been passed down in an unbroken chain through apostolic succession.<sup>§5.2.1.4</sup> This erroneous claim is primarily based on the following verses:

- Jesus told Peter, **“You are Peter and on this rock I will build My Church.”** (Matt. 16:18-19), but the Roman Catholics interpret this to mean that Peter was given the *position* of head of the Church. Here they have mistaken **“this rock”** to mean Peter instead of his preceding affirmation that Jesus is **“the Christ, the Son of the living God”** (Matt. 16:16). Now which one of those two would you build the Church on? **“For no one can lay another foundation besides the one being laid, who is Jesus Christ.”** (1Cor. 3:11) There is also some word play going on here as the Greek nickname that Jesus gave “Peter” is “ΠΙΕΤΡΟΣ” #4074 meaning “stone or pebble”, but the “rock” is the Greek word “ΠΙΕΤΡΑ” #4073. This theme is consistent throughout Scripture as Peter, *like every believer*, is merely a **“stone”** (1Pet. 2:5, Rev. 2:17), while Jesus alone is referred to as the **“rock”** (Rom. 9:33, 1Cor. 10:4, 1Pet. 2:8). Jesus alone is the **“cornerstone”** (Matt. 21:42-44, Mark 12:10, Luke 20:17-18, Acts 4:11, Eph. 2:20, 1Pet. 2:6-7) on which the Church is built.
- Jesus gave Peter **“the keys of the kingdom of Heaven”**, but the Roman Catholics claim that Peter *alone* was given a special power of binding and loosing (Matt. 16:19). Strange, because only two chapters later Jesus said that *all* Christians have been given this exact same power (Matt. 18:18). Once you understand spiritual authority,<sup>§5.1.2</sup> you will realize that every Christian has these same “keys”. So Peter certainly holds the keys to the kingdom of Heaven, as does every Christian who is also a priest.<sup>§3.1.1.1</sup>
- Jesus told Peter to **“feed My sheep”** (John 21:15-17), but the Roman Catholics have extrapolated this to mean that Peter was made the “Chief Pastor” of the whole Church. They must be unaware that Scripture commands *every* overseer to feed the sheep (Acts 20:28, 1Pet. 5:1-3). Are they all “popes” too? Scripture is clear that Jesus alone is the **“Good Shepherd”** (John 10:11,14), **“Great Shepherd”** (Heb. 13:20), and by Peter’s own declaration, Jesus is the

**“Chief Shepherd”** (1Pet. 2:25, 5:4). Sorry folks, but Jesus is not dead – He is still the *only* head of the Church and He shares that position with no earthly substitute (Matt. 28:18, Eph. 1:22-23, 5:23, Col. 1:18).

If there really were a position of “pope”, then why isn’t it mentioned in *any* of the epistles? Scripture speaks about apostles, overseers, and deacons, but where does it say anything about the “pope” position? There is no mention of the qualifications for the “pope” or who reports to whom or how the successor is picked or any other such nonsense. How could the Bible be completely silent about the most critical *position* of them all? The Bible contains several passages where the office of “pope” ought to be mentioned if it existed (Eph. 4:11, 1Cor. 12:28), but it is mentioned nowhere. Considering all that has been written about these lesser “offices”, how could the office of the “pope” be so neglected? Paul wrote several letters to and from Rome mentioning over 50 people by name (Rom. 16, Col. 4:7-14, 2Tim. 4:9-2, Phm. 1:23-24) and yet Peter was not one of them. How could Paul so rudely fail to mention the “pope”? If these are arguments of silence, then let it be noted that the Scripture is indeed silent about a “pope”!

Not only is a “pope” not mentioned in Scripture, but the concept completely contradicts the Scripture. The word “pope” comes from the Latin word “papa” meaning “father” and he is called “Holy Father”, but Jesus said, **“Do not call anyone on earth your ‘Father’...”** (Matt. 23:9) The “pope” allows men to bow down before him, but Peter would not let Cornelius or anyone else bow down to him (Acts 10:25-26). The “pope” is not allowed to be married, but Scripture says those who **“forbid people to marry”** are **“hypocritical liars”** (1Tim. 4:1-3). According to their own made-up rules, even Peter would not be qualified to be “pope” for he was married (Matt. 8:14-15, Mark 1:30-31, Luke 4:38). The “pope” is allowed to invent new laws when he speaks “*ex cathedra*”, but Scripture teaches that **“there is only one lawgiver and judge”** who is Jesus (Jas. 4:12). It is not surprising that these “popes” have gone on to make up so many traditions of men, just like the Pharisees.<sup>§7.1.3</sup>

Is there any evidence in Scripture that Peter was superior to the other apostles? Absolutely not! When the disciples argued about who was the greatest (Luke 22:24-30), why didn’t Jesus simply tell them that Peter was to be the “pope”? When James’ and John’s mother asked for her sons to sit by Jesus side, did Jesus forget that He already gave the position of “pope” to Peter only four chapters earlier (Matt. 20:20-28)? No, Jesus said no one could exercise authority over others in the Church<sup>§5.1.1.3</sup> and He did not make any exception for Peter. Some argue that Peter must be superior because sometimes his name is listed first, but then again there are several lists where Peter is not listed first (John 1:44, 1Cor. 1:12, 3:22, Gal. 2:9). Obviously, being first in a list does not create a position of authority. Also notice that James, not Peter, acted as the “chief spokesman” at the first “church council” (Acts 15:13-21). Indeed, if there ever was such a thing as a “pope”, a much better case can be made that Paul was the “pope”:

- Paul wrote about 3/4 of the New Testament books, while Peter only wrote two small letters.
- Paul’s writing was quoted by Peter as having the authority of Scripture (2Pet. 3:15-16), not the other way around.



- Paul clearly ministered to the Church in Rome and there is no solid evidence that Peter was *ever* in Rome! It should be obvious that Paul’s imaginary successor from there would be the true “pope”, not Peter’s.
- Paul rebuked Peter for his hypocrisy (Gal. 2:11-14), not the other way around. How dare anyone rebuke the “pope”! 😊
- Paul was not married (1Cor. 7:8), but Peter was married (Matt. 8:14-15, Mark 1:30-31, Luke 4:38) and thus disqualified from being “pope”.
- Paul says he was not inferior to any of the other apostles (2Cor. 11:5,12, 12:11) which would not be true if Peter was the “pope”.
- Paul’s labors exceeded those of other apostles (2Cor. 11:23) and in the book of Acts his ministry (Acts 13-28) was more dominant than Peter’s ministry (Acts 1-12).

Looks like Paul was the real “pope”! Perhaps the Roman Catholic denomination got the wrong guy? After all, it is easy to make mistakes when you make up doctrines hundreds of years after the fact!

Aside from the condemnation of Scripture, history also documents the illegitimacy of the “pope” position. Those who study the origins of the “pope” usually find the Roman Catholics’ claims quite amusing, since there was no such thing as a “pope” in the early Church. The reason why Peter and all of his imaginary successors never acted like a “pope” is because they did not know they were supposed to be the “pope”! Nobody told the early Christians that they were supposed to bow down to Peter and call him “Holy Father”. Nobody was able to go back and tell Peter about all the special powers he did not know he had and what special clothing to wear. Even after the concept of the “pope” was invented, the institutional “church” leaders disagreed about the chain of “popes” until the *secular* Roman emperor Phocas unilaterally declared Boniface III to be the universal “pope” in 607 A.D. Sorry, but six hundred years after the fact is a little too late to go back and make up such an absurd doctrine about the “pope”. From there, history goes on to record a plethora of crimes committed by the “popes” such as sexual promiscuity, fraud, bribery, and murder, all of which are well documented but will not be enumerated here. It is claimed that the office of the “pope” has been responsible for killing more people than Hitler or any other tyrant! Ever read “Foxe’s Book of Martyrs”? Christ’s representative on earth killing other Christians? Incredible! This is not intended to unnecessarily bash the “pope”, but just to point out that this position is just as unbiblical as any other position in any other institutional “church”.

## 6.3 Practical Applications

Once someone decides that the Scriptures carry more authority than the leaders of their institutional “church”, they may finally begin to discover how leadership in the Church is really supposed to function. Leadership in the Church is just as critical in these days as it ever was. The Church still exists, but without proper leadership it simply will not function very well. Everyone must come to recognize that God has raised up true spiritual leaders in the Church, while also

recognizing that they simply don't have any positional authority over others. Strong Biblical leadership is an incredible blessing, not a curse!

### 6.3.1 Formation of Leadership

When the Church begins functioning in an area, there may not be any recognizable leaders at first. It may take some time for Christians to become properly knit together in daily spiritual fellowship to the point that Biblical leadership begins to emerge. And until the time arrives that *God* appoints them, no one should be recognized as a leader! Some may feel uneasy because they do

**“If God raises up pastors from amongst you, or sends them among you, it is well; it is a blessing. But ever since the day when the Holy Spirit formed the church, we have no record in the word that the church has chosen them.”**

**– J. N. Darby**

not have any leaders like the institutional “churches”, *but do not force the issue and artificially appoint or elect someone to be a leader!* It is God's job to raise up leaders, not yours. If God has not done it yet, then you are not to do it for Him. Don't get impatient, *because it is Scripturally valid to be leaderless for a time* until leaders emerge that have been chosen by God. Paul often spent several years building up the Church in a new area and then would leave them *without any leaders*. Only after the Church had

been functioning on their own for a time would Paul later return and recognize those who had emerged as leaders.<sup>§6.1.4.2</sup> In one case, Paul was unable to return and asked Titus to recognize the leaders for him (Tit. 1:5). But notice how many years had passed without any publicly recognized leader. Again, if it were simply a matter of creating a position of authority, Paul could have *appointed* someone before he left. Why would Paul need to return if the congregation could have simply *elected* their own leaders?

Once the Biblical environment of the Church becomes firmly established among believers, spiritual gifts will naturally, or should we say supernaturally, begin to manifest as God apportions them to **“each one”** (1Cor. 12:7,11, Eph. 4:7, 1Pet. 4:10). And among those spiritual gifts, God will give some to be leaders (Eph. 4:11). The importance of leadership in the Church cannot be emphasized enough. While it may be okay to be leaderless for a time, spiritual leaders are vital to the functioning of the Church. The Church is **“built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Jesus Christ himself as the cornerstone”** (Eph. 2:20).

#### 6.3.1.1 Recognition of Leaders

How do you know who your leaders are if there are no positions or titles in the Church? What kind of position is **“submit to such and to everyone who helps in the work and labors”** (1Cor. 16:16; cf. 1Thes. 5:12, Heb. 13:7)? Leaders in the Church are normally recognized by their service in the Church. When someone lives a life of serving others and meeting their needs, others will naturally begin

to trust them. When Christians are fellowshiping properly, it may indeed be difficult for an outsider to figure out who the leaders are,<sup>§6.1.2.2</sup> for they may only be recognized internally among those they are serving (1Cor. 9:2, 2Cor. 8:23, Phil. 2:25). Leadership in the Church starts with serving, but it is more than just serving, because the spiritual leaders must be chosen by God.<sup>§6.1.2.1</sup> An atheist could begin to serve others in the Church, but that would not make him a spiritual leader. The janitor of an institutional “church” definitely serves, and yet for some reason the people don’t necessarily look to him as their spiritual leader either.

Leaders in the Church are not chosen by men; *they are chosen by God and then recognized by the Church*. The recognition part would be invalid unless they were first chosen by God (Acts 6:3, 20:28, Gal. 1:1). Even Paul wasn’t recognized as an apostle by the others at first, *yet he was still one anyway* (Acts 9:26, Gal. 1:22). The question then is how does someone know whom God has chosen? Normally an apostle would recognize those who have been functioning as leaders together with the Church (Acts 6:2, 14:23, 2Cor. 8:19, Tit. 1:5). But how are leaders supposed to be established today if there is no founding apostle? If an institutional “church” doesn’t believe there are any more apostles, how can they ever have any leaders? If the Church springs up in a remote area from a TV or radio broadcast, who will recognize their leaders? The Scriptures do not explain how new leaders should be recognized apart from an apostle or how they are replaced after an apostle dies. So what is the Church supposed to do now?

At a practical level, there are several questions you can ask to help you recognize who your spiritual leaders are: Who would you look to in a crisis? Who do you confide in when you have personal problems? Who is hearing from the Lord, sharing the gospel, healing the sick, raising the dead? A small group of people will likely come to mind, and these are probably some of your leaders. Such leaders won’t need a special title or official position, but are just genuine believers who serve the Church with spiritual authority as brothers among brothers. If God has called you to be a leader, then lead! You need not worry about gaining recognition of men, just lead and your deeds will eventually become obvious to men. Being recognized as a leader has nothing to do with wearing a robe, receiving a salary, living in a parsonage, or having an office with a title on the door.<sup>§6.2.1.2</sup> Which of these things did the apostles have?

Those of you who are just beginning to fellowship as the Church should not be afraid to recognize your leaders. You should not shy away from publicly acknowledging those whom God has raised up to be leaders among you. Don’t be like the anti-authoritarians and purposely meet without any leaders.<sup>§5.3.1.2</sup> How foolish that would be! The Church is not leaderless, the Church assembles together *with* their leaders (Acts 15:22, Phil. 1:1). Christians are not a group of anarchists, we respect the authority of the Lord and voluntarily submit to those He has gifted to be leaders.<sup>§6.1.3.1</sup> Leadership is often a burden and those who go unrecognized may become discouraged and lose the desire to lead. Without adequate leadership, it is common to fall into dysfunctional fellowship where nobody initiates anything and everyone begins to become “me” focused.<sup>§3.2.3</sup> God has given some to be leaders so recognize them and let them lead (Eph. 4:11-13)! **“When leaders in Israel take the lead, when the people willingly offer themselves – praise the Lord!”** (Judg. 5:2).

It is okay if the leaders sometimes take a more prominent role in meetings than others. If God has given you a gift, do not be afraid to use it. Don't exhibit a false humility; if you have the words of God then speak them out. Paul described himself as an apostle (Rom. 1:1, 1Cor. 1:1, 2Cor. 1:1, Gal. 1:1, Eph. 1:1, Col. 1:1, 1Tim. 1:1) and servant (2Cor. 3:6, Eph. 3:7); Peter described himself as an apostle (1Pet. 1:1), overseer (1Pet. 5:1), and servant (2Pet. 1:1); John described himself as an overseer (2Jn. 1:1, 3Jn. 1:1). Recognition of leadership is not merely limited to these spiritual gifts which have commonly been mistaken to be positions of authority.<sup>§6.2.2</sup> The Church also recognized those who had *other spiritual gifts* such as prophet (Acts 13:1, 15:32, 21:10), evangelist (Acts 21:8), teacher (1Tim. 2:7, 2Tim. 1:11), etc.

It is important to recognize those who are serving others as leaders in the Church, but just realize that recognition does not establish a position of authority over others. Also remember that the Church never recognized just one leader for there was always a plurality of distributed leadership.<sup>§6.1.2.3</sup> There was never just one "pastor", but always a plurality of overseers.<sup>§6.2.3</sup> If only one person has been recognized to be a leader after some time has passed, then there is probably something wrong, because God did not give only one to be a leader (Eph. 4:11).

### 6.3.1.2 Dealing with Dominators

Christians who begin fellowshiping as the Church do not necessarily have immunity from false leadership. Paul was well aware of this when he called together the overseers at Ephesus and told them: **"I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. And among you yourselves, men will arise speaking perverted things to draw away disciples after themselves."** (Acts 20:29-30) False leadership was present in the early Church *even when there were no positions*, clergy/laity, titles, places of honor, robes, salaries, or any other such nonsense.<sup>§6.2</sup> Just because a leader rightfully lacks a title or position does not mean that they are somehow immune from exhibiting sinful behavior. True spiritual leaders who are serving the Church are also capable of falling into sinful behavior.

What should you do then if someone comes in and begins to dominate a meeting? Others may have things to share too but they can't seem to get in a word edgewise. Some might be tempted to let them drone on and on because he may not be saying anything necessarily wrong and they don't particularly like confrontation. A dominator could monopolize a meeting for hours, correctly expounding on a given theological topic, but it simply may not be what God was wanting for that time. He may get a spiritual high as he monopolizes the conversation, but he is not building up others to share their gifts (Eph. 4:12-13). **"You have drunk the clear waters, but must you muddy the rest with your feet?"** (Ezek. 34:18) Sometimes they might give others time to talk, but then they try to regain control back to their agenda.

What should be done in these cases? The Church should simply not go along with their agenda. It will be hard for a dominator to lead if no one else is following their lead. At the first possible opportunity, someone should interject, "Well that is an interesting topic, but what else has the Lord laid on people's hearts?" The sheep must learn to follow the voice of Jesus. **"My sheep hear My**

**voice; I know them and they follow Me.”** (John 10:27) If someone is truly speaking from the Holy Spirit then let them speak no matter how long it is, but if they are not, then it is simply a waste of time no matter how religious sounding it is. Again, let the leaders lead, but don't let them rule over others.<sup>§5.2.2.2</sup> Listen to your leaders, learn from them, and yield to them; just don't let them create empires around themselves and establish their own organizations as so many have done.

## 6.3.2 Rethinking Institutional Positions

This section has been included to address some common issues that arise in institutional “churches” where leadership is treated as a position. Since institutional “churches” are controlled by positions of authority, there is often contention over the rules that govern those positions: Who is qualified to occupy a particular position? What authority is given to a particular position? How long can someone occupy a particular position? Regardless of what answers are given to these questions, they are always wrong *because there are no such positions in the Church!* People keep coming up with the wrong answers because they keep asking the wrong questions. This unbiblical fighting over unbiblical positions in unbiblical institutional “churches” is entirely...unbiblical! Once Christians realize that leadership is not a matter of holding an official position, they are able to begin to reevaluate these issues from a Biblical perspective.

### 6.3.2.1 “Pastors” Who Really are Pastors

What is the “pastor” of an institutional “church” to do when he finally realizes that his job, the career that he has spent most of his life pursuing, is entirely unbiblical? Some have become “pastors” simply because they were good orators, without exhibiting spiritual authority in their lives or serving anybody.<sup>§5.2.1.2</sup> Some “pastors” were never called by God and some have come to discover that they were not even Christians. Unfortunately, when these “pastors” are confronted with the Scripture, it is rare that even one of them will repent of their unbiblical position. You must realize that this is the career path they have spent their entire lives working toward in an unbiblical institutional environment. If you try to confront them in love, many of them will only harden their hearts. Don't bother them with the Scripture now!

But what about the “pastors” in institutional “churches” that are really sincere Christians just trying to serve God the best way they know how? They may have had a genuine calling of God on their lives, but have simply channeled it into a false institutional system because they did not know any better. They may have labored for years leading others to Christ and serving others, but have simply been doing it in the wrong environment. They may have started out with much fire and zeal for the things of God, but over time it has just become a job to them. The institutional environment does that to them. Some of them have grown weary of their administrative duties running a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation and the paperwork equivalent to running a business. They strove to be the man at the top,

but then they found out it can be lonely at the top.<sup>§6.2.3</sup> Many of them have burned out trying to single handedly do the work that was delegated to the *entire* Church to do. They struggled to bear the weight of a false pastoral system that was never prescribed by God. God intended for them to function as one leader among a plurality of leaders, but instead they are isolated from the other leaders in their community and surrounded by subordinate “yes men”. Their strengths may surely be a blessing to many, but their weaknesses are often equally glaring since they are left unbalanced by the other spiritual leaders in their community.

An institutional “pastor” who holds an unbiblical position may be sinning every Sunday morning, but that does not necessarily mean that he hasn’t been called to be a leader. Anyone that God has called to lead will still be a leader regardless of any institutional status. But this also does not excuse them of their sins in an institutional “church”. Such brothers should be rebuked gently without partiality (1Tim. 5:1,19-21). Even Peter and Barnabas sinned as leaders, but that didn’t mean they couldn’t lead anymore (Gal. 2:11-14). Obviously, some “pastors” may have a lot to repent of, but if they really have been called by God, they cannot repent of who they are. **“The gifts and calling of God are irrevocable.”** (Rom. 11:29)

“Pastor”, if you really are spiritually gifted to be an overseer in the Church, then that is what you should strive to do. You just cannot continue to do it anymore under an unbiblical institutional umbrella. You are no longer allowed to hide behind the shield of an unbiblical institutional structure and wield authority

**“Let me say to each of my beloved brethren in the work, that notwithstanding how strong your ministry may be, how rich may be your gift, and how useful you are, you are a Nicolaitan if you monopolize all services. You have nothing to boast of; rather, you must confess your sin. Your personal piety will destroy the church instead of building it up. The right and correct way of work is to lead all the brothers and sisters into service.” – Watchman Nee**

just because others prefer it that way. It is time to stop playing games in your unbiblical institutional “church” and broaden your ministry to serve the Body of Christ in your area. If you are really a leader, then you must dissolve the false institutional structure and attempt to transition the believers to begin fellowshiping as the Church. This has actually happened successfully many times! No relationships among genuine Christians ever need to cease; they just need to begin to fellowship as the Church instead of an institutional “church”.

Afterward you may indeed be recognized as one of many pastors, but you can no longer have an institutional position as head of a “church”. This does not mean you are not a leader; it just means that you do not hold a position of authority anymore. This does not mean

you cannot hear from the Lord; you are just not the only one! This does not mean that you can no longer teach; you just cannot hoard that function for yourself. You must simply learn to be a brother among brothers, even if you are an older or wiser brother. If you really are a leader in the Church, then you will begin serving others not ruling over them.<sup>§6.1.2.1</sup> Stepping down from being the head honcho may

be the most difficult thing you ever do, for it will not be easy to humble yourself and learn to submit to others in a shared leadership environment. But once unshackled from the unbiblical administrative duties of the job, most “ex-pastors” actually experience new freedom to focus on the ministry that they were originally called to do.

### 6.3.2.2 Women Leaders

Can a woman hold a leadership position in the Church? Nope. How about homosexuals? Nope. But don’t feel bad, because straight males can’t hold a position in the Church either! Why? *Because there are no such positions in the Church!* Now can a woman be spiritually gifted as a leader in the Church? Absolutely! All spiritual gifts, and that includes the leadership gifts, are available for women for in Christ there is neither male nor female (Gal. 3:28). Spiritual gifts are given to **“each one”** (1Cor. 12:7,11, Eph. 4:7, 1Pet. 4:10). There have been women leaders starting all the way back in the Old Testament: Miriam was a leader (Mic. 6:4) and prophetess (Exod. 15:20), Deborah was a leader and prophetess (Judg. 4:4), and Huldah was a prophetess (2Ki. 22:14). Notice that none of these women held any official religious office in Israel, yet they were still leaders. Did women stop being leaders in the New Testament? Of course not! Women served in every leadership capacity in the early Church.

- *Women were “apostles”*.<sup>§6.1.4.1</sup> Junia was **“outstanding among the apostles”** (Rom. 16:7). That’s right, not only was Junia an apostle, but she was an outstanding one at that! Although some contend that “ΙΟΥΝΙΑΝ” #2458 could have been male, the best scholarship shows that all other people known by that name were female and indeed the writings of the early Christians confirm that she was female. Once people realize that an emissary is not a CEO position,<sup>§6.2.3.3</sup> there doesn’t seem to be as much resistance to women being “sent out” to spread the gospel.
- *Women were “elders”*.<sup>§6.1.4.2</sup> Notice that a mother can be an **“elder”** as the same Greek word “ΠΡΕΣΒΥΤΕΡΟΣ” #4245 is used in *feminine form* to refer to women (1Tim. 5:2). (Understanding Greek is important here, because when it says an “elder” must be **“the husband of one wife”** (1Tim. 3:2), that would only refer to males, since the Greek uses the masculine form.) Scripture also lists several qualities of those who serve as an **“eldress”** (Tit. 2:3-5). Notice again the feminine Greek word “ΠΡΕΣΒΥΤΙΣ” #4247 is used here for “elder” women.
- *Women were “deacons”*.<sup>§6.1.4.3</sup> Phoebe was a **“deacon”** of the Church in Chenchrea (Rom. 16:1-2). Scripture lists several qualities to help identify those who are spiritual gifted as a **“deaconess”** (1Tim. 3:11). Notice the Greek word “ΓΥΝΗ” #1135 used here can just as equally be translated as “women” referring to female “deacons”.

Men, nobody is asking you to like it, you just need to acknowledge the facts! Regardless of whatever theory you might have about women’s roles in the

Church, females in leadership roles were clearly mentioned by name! Paul also mentions several female *co-workers* by name: Priscilla (Rom. 16:3), Mary (Rom. 16:6), Tryphena, Tryphosa, Persis (Rom. 16:12), Eudia and Syntyche (Phil. 4:2-3). The Church even met in the houses of women leaders: Priscilla (1Cor. 16:19), Chloe (1Cor. 1:11), Nympha (Col. 4:15), and perhaps Lydia (Acts 16:11-15).

But how can women be leaders if they are not allowed to teach (1Tim. 2:11-15) or even speak (1Cor. 14:33-35) at meetings? Such verses were not merely Paul's advice (1Cor. 14:36-38) nor were they given for cultural reasons (1Tim. 2:13-15) and cannot be dismissed on that basis. So under what context then do these verses apply? One possible interpretation is that these verses were written to address situations where wives were speaking out in a disruptive manner that was **“domineering”** (1Tim. 2:12) and not **“submissive”** (1Cor. 14:34, 1Tim 2:11) to their husbands. This view is further supported by the fact that the marriage relationship is mentioned in both contexts (1Cor. 14:35, 1Tim. 2:13-14) and that the Greek words “ΓΥΝΗ” #1135 and “ΑΝΔΡΟΣ” #435 could be translated as “wives” and “husbands”, instead of women and men in general. Regardless of how these verses are interpreted, however, *Scripture clearly imposes some restriction on women during meetings which cannot simply be dismissed.*

Scripture is equally clear, however, that the restriction from teaching or speaking is *not absolute*. Scripture's command to **“teach one another”** (Col. 3:16) is not gender specific and applies to women as do all the “one another” verses.<sup>§3.1.2.1</sup> The “elder” women were specifically instructed to teach the younger women (Tit. 2:3-5), and Priscilla also taught the man Apollos (Acts 18:24-26). (Notice how Priscilla usually gets top billing when mentioned with her husband Aquila.) ☺ Scripture is also clear that women can *pray* and *prophesy* during a meeting of the Church (1Cor. 11:5-6). Last we checked, praying and prophesying both involve *speaking*! Phillip the evangelist even **“had four unmarried daughters who were prophetesses”** (Acts 21:9). When Paul said women are allowed to pray and prophesy in public (1Cor. 11:5-6), he surely does not contradict himself only three chapters later (1Cor. 14:33-35) by saying that women cannot open their mouths under any circumstance. Certainly there are restrictions for women who are disruptive, since the same chapter has similar restrictions on tongue speakers (1Cor. 14:28), prophets (1Cor. 14:29-31), and anyone else who is disorderly (1Cor. 14:40). But none of this implies women cannot be leaders. The purpose here is not to defend any particular theology regarding women speaking or teaching, but merely to affirm that women can indeed exercise spiritual leadership gifts in the Church, because Scripture clearly mentions several women leaders by name. Once spiritual authority is properly understood, it is obvious that both male and female are able to speak with spiritual authority when the words are not their own but come from God.<sup>§5.1.2.2</sup>

### 6.3.2.3 Financial Support

Is it okay to have salaried positions in the Church? Absolutely not. Not even for the choir director, the organist, the janitor, or the secretary! Why? *Because there are no such positions in the Church!* But this does not mean that leaders in the Church cannot receive gifts of financial support. In particular, Scripture



identifies those who have an itinerate ministry of preaching the gospel such as apostles of being worthy of support (1Cor. 9:4-14, 3Jn. 1:7-8). Because of their extensive travels, they would not normally be able to hold permanent jobs and provide their own financial support. Scripture teaches, **“Those receiving instruction in the word must share all good things with the instructor.”** (Gal. 6:6; cf. 1Cor. 9:11) This principle is further justified by common sense, **“Whoever serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat its fruit? Who tends a flock and does not drink the milk of the flock?”** (1Cor. 9:7; cf. 2Tim. 2:6), and the example of Mosaic Law, **“Don’t you know that those who perform sacred work eat the food of the temple and those who serve at the altar partake with the altar? So also the Lord has directed those who proclaim the gospel, to receive their living from the gospel.”** (1Cor. 9:13-14) Note that this right to support was *not* a salary, but the meeting of basic physical needs. Jesus established this standard when He sent out His disciples: **“Stay in that house, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker is worthy of his wages.”** (Luke 10:7; cf. Matt. 10:10) Paul also affirmed no more financial support to apostles beyond **“the right to eat and drink”** (1Cor. 9:4). What a far cry from the grand mansion, lavish salary, retirement plan, private jet, and luxury yachts that are claimed by so many false institutional “church” leaders! To those who hold a salaried institutional position at the expense of the Body of Christ: *Get a real job!*

Whoever it suddenly dawned on to receive a salary was the first to set an *unbiblical* precedent. Here is a list of all the ministers in the New Testament who received a salary: Ø. Would you like the list repeated again? ☺ Yes, that’s right – Jesus, Paul, the twelve apostles, and every other minister in the New Testament never received a salary. Is your “pastor” greater than these? Who was more worthy to receive a salary than the Son of God...and yet He didn’t! Jesus did not charge admission at the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7) and His teaching was far better than any “church” conference you might find today. Jesus did not expect the masses to feed Him; He fed the masses (Matt. 14:15-21, Matt. 15:32-38, Mark 6:35-44, Luke 9:12-17, John 6:5-13). Now that is leadership! Notice that Paul also **“did not use this right”** (1Cor. 9:12) among those he served. He received gifts from others where he was not teaching in order to serve others where he was teaching!

**“Did I commit a sin in humbling myself that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel to you for free? I robbed other Churches, taking support to serve you. And when I was present with you and in need, I was not a burden to anyone, for the brothers from Macedonia supplied my need. And in everything I have kept myself from being a burden to you and will continue doing so.”** (2Cor. 11:7-9)

Paul accepted financial gifts where he did not have any right, but would not accept gifts where he did have the right! **“That in proclaiming the gospel I may offer it without charge and so not make full use of my rights in preaching it.”** (1Cor. 9:18) In case you haven’t noticed, charging money for the gospel is not an attractive sell to non-Christians! As a result, Paul sometimes made tents for a living in order to provide his own support (Acts 18:2-4, 1Thes. 2:9). Paul was clearly not

a leader preoccupied with money, but labored among the believers with an attitude of a servant (2Cor. 12:15).

Notice that all of these Scriptures so far have been about *apostles*, but what about overseers? **“Let the older ones who lead well be deemed worthy of double honor, particularly those who work at preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, ‘Do not muzzle an ox while it is threshing,’ and ‘The worker is worthy of his wages.’”** (1Tim. 5:17-18). Overseers would also have the same right to their basic needs based on the very same principles; but again **“the worker is worthy of his wages”** was not a salary (Luke 10:7). The phrase “double honor” does not mean “double income” as some have imagined, for the Greek word “TIMH” #5092 simply means “respect” in this context. Even though overseers may indeed possess this right, Paul clearly exhorted them *to forgo this right* and work to provide their own support as he did.

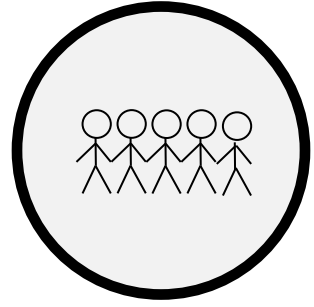
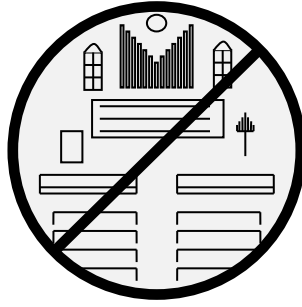
**“For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example, because we were not idle among you. Nor did we eat anyone’s bread for free, but with labor and hardship we worked night and day so as not to burden any of you. Not because we do not have the right, but in order to make ourselves an example for you to follow.”** (2Th. 3:7-9; cf.

Acts 20:32-35, Eph. 4:28)

Overseers who have the servant attitude of Christ and follow this Scripture would never demand support from those whom they serve. It is one thing to urge Christians to give generously to support others, but quite another thing to demand payment for yourself. Overseers are never to be **“greedy for money”** (1Pet. 5:2). Material support should never be a Christian’s primary concern, for we only need enough support on earth to carry on the Lord’s work here. **“But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things shall be given to you.”** (Matt. 6:33) God promises to meet all your needs, but not necessarily your wants or desires (Phil. 4:19). This does not mean it is wrong to support an overseer, since Christians are free to give to anyone as the Lord leads (Rom. 12:13). But it is definitely not an expectation, and certainly not a requirement to fund an imaginary institutional position.<sup>5A.3</sup>

## 6.4 Challenge Questions

- Who are your leaders? How do you know they are from God?
- Do you have clergy that are treated differently than the laity?
- Do your leaders serve you or do they command you? Do they actually help people or do they just dabble in theology?
- Do you think you are a leader? Who are you serving?
- Do you obey everything your “pastor” says? Why don’t you obey everything the “pastor” of another denomination says?
- Who do you submit to? Do you submit to anyone?



# Chapter 7: Church Practices

## 7.1 Scriptural Truths

Specific physical arrangements, methods, and procedures concerning the Church are rarely mentioned in the New Testament. Scripture directs Christians to meet, worship, pray, baptize new converts, celebrate the Lord’s supper, etc., and yet it does not delve into any specific liturgical procedures concerning them. Does this mean then that Church can just do whatever it wants?<sup>§7.2.4.2</sup> No, the Church only does what Jesus wants.<sup>§5.1.2</sup> It would be a grave mistake to try to establish practices without first having the Life that makes them possible. *Biblical truth will only operate correctly in a Biblical environment!* It all makes sense only as it is lived out. You cannot redefine Biblical terms to fit an institutional environment or superimpose them on an artificial structure and then expect the rest of the Bible to work. That would be like trying to drive your car underwater and then justifying it by using automotive *terminology* – you can argue that your car still has an engine, transmission, and exhaust system, but none of those components were designed to function underwater. This does not mean that your car does not contain valid parts,<sup>§1.3.2</sup> but it simply will not function correctly in this wrong environment.<sup>§3.2.2.2</sup> Likewise, institutional “churches” make use of all kinds of Biblical sounding rules, policies, and procedures; but without a Biblical environment of spiritual fellowship, they will never experience the right practices.

### 7.1.1 What is the Correct Structure?

Scripture does not appear to be too concerned about the details of form or structure for the Church simply aligned their practices to keep in step with the Holy Spirit.<sup>§7.1.1.1</sup> That is because the spiritual Life of the Church is always more important than any logistical particulars that subsequently flow from that Life. Some institutional “churches” make the mistake of thinking that if they can just implement the perfect structure, they will then experience the right Life. Century

after century, various groups keep trying to recreate the structure of the “New Testament Church” and then codify their practices thinking that it was a particular structure that gave them Life; when on the contrary, *it was the Life that gave them a particular structure*. The fallacy is obvious. If you observe a happy family eating a pizza would you then conclude that eating pizza was a “structure” that families need in order to be happy? No! Even if a group patterns their institutional “church” after the New Testament, that would not give them the Holy Spirit. Satanists could organize themselves after the pattern of the “New Testament Church”, but that would not help them either. It is not a physical structure that causes growth in the kingdom of God, but only lives that are changed by the Holy Spirit through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.<sup>§1.3.1</sup>

The correct “structure” for the Church is always the one that proceeds from the Life of the Church – it is *dynamic* according to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Through the leading of the Holy Spirit, there were many practices that evolved in

**“We give too much attention to method and machinery and resources, and too little to the source of power.”**

**– Hudson Taylor**

the Church. For example, lots were cast to replace an apostle (Acts 1:21-26), a widow’s list was established (1Tim. 5:9-11), and seven men were chosen to wait on tables (Acts 6:1-6). What precedent gave them authority to do these things? Were these practices meant to form an immutable “structure” that no one could deviate from for all

eternity? No, it is only in hindsight that others have later superimposed an imaginary “structure” upon the practices of the Church. *The early Christians simply followed the leading of the Holy Spirit without the slightest idea that they were establishing immutable laws that would be mindlessly perpetuated for the rest of eternity by those who are themselves not filled with the Holy Spirit*. Many things that once flowed from the Life of the Church are now nothing more than dead traditions that are foolishly passed on from generation to generation as if they had some kind of *intrinsic* value of their own.<sup>§7.1.3</sup>

### 7.1.1.1 Preeminence of Life

In the Church, the physical must take a back seat to the spiritual. *The Life of the Church must dictate the practices of the Church*, not the other way around. Only the members of the Church possess this Life – pews, stained glass, steeples, organs, hymnals, and any other inanimate objects do not possess this Life. If there is no Life in the people, then no amount of practices, traditions, or structures can bring about this Life.<sup>§1.3.1</sup> Forming a new “house church” or trying to make up a structure from this book will not give you Life either. The Church is not about having the right external structure; it is about having the right internal Life. All the correct practices will then naturally flow from that Life which, of course, may appear quite orderly or perhaps even “structured”.<sup>§7.3.2.2</sup> The Holy Spirit is simply to be followed regardless of whether something has been done before or whether it looks structured or not. Many try to put God in a box based on what He has done in the past, but what God has done in the past does not limit what he may do

in the future. The practices of the Church must keep in step with the Life of the Church. **“If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.”** (Gal. 5:25)

Many institutional “churches”, however, have it precisely *backwards* – they don’t have practices that flow from the Holy Spirit, they rely on their practices instead of the Holy Spirit! Their traditions have grown to the point that they have taken on a whole new life of their own. They feel obligated to practice all the traditions they have accumulated over the centuries and any true Life must try to squeeze in around them.<sup>§7.2.1.1</sup> They have been setting up scaffolding to build a glorious house, and then they just live in the scaffolding. That is not to say that it is impossible for an institutional “church” to experience some Life within their institutional structure, but that was not part of God’s design.<sup>§7.2.4.1</sup> Institutional structures may work great for religion, but not for relationships. Consider this bit of wisdom: “With the Spirit, almost any structure could be made to work, but without the Spirit, not even the best structure will work.” If you have the Holy Spirit, the externals are incidental details that will get worked out, but if you do not have the Holy Spirit, the externals are necessary to hold an institutional structure together. What then is the best structure for the Church? Whatever the Holy Spirit directs for the Life of the Church today!

**“The church is looking  
for better methods; God is  
looking for better men.”  
– E. M. Bounds**

### 7.1.1.2 Wine and Wineskins

The Church may receive new practices at any time as if follows the leading of the Holy Spirit. But whenever God pours out new wine, there is often a new wineskin to accompany it.

**“But no one puts a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch pulls away from the garment and makes the tear worse. Neither do they put new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the wineskins burst, the wine pours out and the wineskin is ruined. But, they put new wine into fresh wineskins and both are preserved.”** (Matt.

9:16-17; cf. Mark 2:21-22, Luke 5:36-38)

The Life is much more important than the structure that contains the Life, so if the structure itself begins to restrict the Life, then God inevitably tries to change the structure, not the Life. And if the structure will not be changed, then the Life will eventually leave. *New wine can only survive in an old wineskin for a while.*<sup>§1.3.2</sup> When the Life of the Church is no longer welcome, it simply goes elsewhere.

The reoccurring problem, however, is that men tend to ritualize, codify, and idolize their old practices at the expense of the Life. They ultimately end up following the practices instead of the Holy Spirit who set the practices. **“The builder of the house has greater honor than the house.”** (Heb. 3:3) They have come to value the wineskin more than the wine itself.<sup>§7.1.3.3</sup> Obviously, those who

systematically reject new practices in the Church are committing a huge mistake, since *every existing practice of the Church was new at one time or another*. Correspondingly, many of the institutional “churches” not only miss what the Holy Spirit is trying to do now, but they end up fighting against Him in order to preserve their precious traditions.<sup>§3.3.1.2</sup>

## 7.1.2 Traditions of God

There is nothing wrong with observing traditions in the Church as long as they are led by the Holy Spirit, *not by men*. **“Stand firm and hold to the traditions as you were taught whether through word or through our letter.”** (2Th. 2:15; cf. 1Cor. 11:2, 2Th. 3:6) The word “tradition” in Scripture comes from the Greek word “ΠΑΡΑΔΟΤΙC” #3862 which means “passing down by word of mouth”. Someone can pass down the things of God by word of mouth (1Cor. 11:2, 2Th. 2:15, 3:6) or they could pass down the things of men by word of mouth (Matt. 15:1-9, Mark 7:5-13, Col. 2:8). In both cases, they are traditions – the question is whether the traditions are from men or God. Are they passing down what other *men said*, or passing down what the *Holy Spirit says*? Paul was not being egotistical when he exhorted others to follow the pattern and example of his life (Phil. 3:17, 4:9, 2Tim. 1:13), for his patterns came from the Lord: **“Become imitators of me as I also imitate Christ.”** (1Cor. 11:1) Jesus expected His pattern of serving others to be followed (John 13:15). So the question is not really whether something is a tradition or not, the question is whether it is from God or not!

Those who systematically reject anything that even looks like a pattern, practice, procedure, or tradition would be making a huge mistake. Scripture documents several practices of the Church that were clearly procedural in nature: the widow’s list (1Tim. 5:9-11), waiting on tables (Acts 6:1-6), letters of commendation (1Cor. 16:3, 2Cor. 3:1), collecting special gifts (1Cor. 16:1-2), etc. Where did these new practices come from? They were not from the Old Testament and the New Testament hadn’t been written yet! These practices were not created at the whims of the apostles,<sup>§5.1.2.3</sup> they came from the leading of the Holy Spirit. The apostles did not sit around and make up their own traditions for the Church to follow; they passed on the very words of God and expected others to do the same (2Tim. 2:2).

### 7.1.2.1 Duration of Practices

Some wrongly think of traditions as unchangeable rules that carry the weight of law and must endure forever. But again, the word “tradition” simply means “passing down by word of mouth” which has no bearing on whether or not something can later be changed. Someone may always drive the same route to work, but that does not mean they *must always* drive the same route to work. Just because a particular practice is constantly repeated over a long time doesn’t make it an irrevocable law that can never be changed. The traditions of the early Church were not set in stone, but were *prevailing practices* – practices that were subject to change as the Holy Spirit directed. One day the apostles waited on tables, for example, and then the next day they didn’t (Acts 6:1-6). Who gave them the authority

to change this “tradition”? Notice that the Bible does not go into any detailed descriptions concerning most of these practices or even *mandate* them. For example: Who maintains the widows list? When is a letter of commendation required? Can more than seven waiters be chosen if the Church grows? Again, these were flexible practices designed to enhance the Life of the Church – *not to dictate, suppress, or control it!* As situations change over time, God will often bring about new practices to meet new needs, encounter new problems, or emphasize different giftings. This sort of thing happened all the time in the early Church without any former precedence (Acts 6:1-6, 1Cor. 7:1-17, 16:1-4, 1Tim. 5:9-11, Tit. 1:5).

Thus, any practice is only valid for the duration that God wants it to apply. It is no longer valid *if the Holy Spirit changes it*. God is the one who sets the practices and God is the one who can change the practices. And the practices will continue to change as the Holy Spirit continues to pour out “**new wine**” (Matt. 9:16-17, Mark 2:21-22, Luke 5:36-38). If you are really following the traditions of the New Testament, then you can expect your practices will change because *the precedence of the New Testament teaches that practices will change!* This, of course, does not affect the *doctrines* of the Church; thus, things such as praying to statues, condoning homosexuality, and molesting children, for example, will never be considered new practices of the Church. The only practices that may change apply to *valid* expressions of the spiritual Life of the Church. For example, the practical outworking of musical and artistic expressions may change over time as the Church worships Christ in various ways.<sup>§7.3.2.3</sup> Again, the Church has no problem with accepting new traditions; the problem comes from accepting the *traditions of men*.<sup>§7.1.3</sup>

**“If we examine the history of the Church we shall find that there has never been an extensive reformation except by new measures.”**

**– Charles Finney**

### 7.1.2.2 Scope of Practices

It is not unusual for there to be minor differences in practices among those who are functioning as the Church.<sup>7.3.2.3</sup> Not every directive that God gives necessarily applies to everyone in the same way. The Church is a Body consisting of many different members (1Cor. 12:12-27), and just like the human body, God did not make every person with the same height, weight, or appearance. Notice that the instructions Jesus gave to the early Church in the cities of Asia Minor were all different (Rev. 2-3). Jesus Christ has no problem whatsoever in coordinating thousands of groups of believers to accomplish His purposes on the earth. Jesus may have the Church in one area do things one way and the Church in another area do things another way.

Thus, any practice is only valid in the scope where God wants it to apply. While some practices may vary between different locations, many practices apply universally to the entire Church (Acts 15:22-23, 1Cor. 11:16, 14:33, 1Th. 2:14). Again, it doesn’t matter how far apart the Christians are scattered, because they all follow the same Decision Maker.<sup>§5.2.3</sup> *The Church is not ruled locally by men; it is ruled*

*universally by Jesus Christ.* This concept is simply astonishing to most institutional “churches” since they do not hear from the Lord in this manner and they have trouble believing that any such thing could even be possible. Thus, they don’t see any other choice but to make their own practices which is why there is so much division between the denominations.

### 7.1.3 Traditions of Men

Any practice that is not led by the Holy Spirit is a tradition of men. **“Beware lest anyone take you captive through philosophy and empty deception according to the tradition of men – according to the principles of the world and not according to Christ.”** (Col. 2:8) If something is **“not according to Christ”**, then it is of men (or perhaps something worse) and has no place in His Church. The ways of men are simply not the ways of God (Isa. 55:8-9). It is God’s Church, not man’s Church. Contrary to popular opinion, men are not free to tinker around with God’s Church and add traditions to it anyway they see fit – they are prostituting the Bride of Christ. **“The bride belongs to the bridegroom.”** (John 3:29), but these men have positioned themselves over the bride as charlatans.<sup>§6.2.3</sup>

Most institutional “churches” think they can make up any traditions they want.<sup>§7.2.4.2</sup> They say, “I don’t see how adding such minor practices can hurt anything?” Yes, and this is exactly why there are so many traditions of men in the “churches” of men! Tolerating practices that aren’t from God is not “neutral”, it inflicts damage on the Church. They are blemishes to the purity of the Church **“having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but holy and blameless”** (Eph. 5:27). The traditions of men do not cause spots; they are the spots! The traditions of men are as the **“leaven of the Pharisees”** (Matt. 16:6-12). The Pharisees also had traditions, but their traditions were not from God. Likewise today, many love their religion, but their hearts are far from Jesus. Whenever the traditions of men are tolerated they lead to a works-based religion of extra-Biblical works,<sup>§7.1.3.1</sup> works without faith,<sup>§7.1.3.2</sup> and works instead of faith.<sup>§7.1.3.3</sup>

#### 7.1.3.1 Extra-Biblical Nonsense

Just because a tradition is not found in the Bible does not automatically make it wrong, but it does automatically make it *nonessential*. It is an indisputable fact that any later tradition is completely unnecessary for maintaining a right relationship with Jesus Christ. How do we know this? Because none of them were practiced by any of the apostles or any other Christian in the New Testament! Every Christian in the early Church was able to be saved just fine without any knowledge of the institutional “church” traditions. Whatever traditions of men someone thinks they need, the early Church did not need them at all! God never commanded such strange practices, nor did they ever enter His mind (Jer. 32:35). If someone just now became **“born again”** (John 3:3-8) and you hand them a Bible, they would have no idea that they should want to have a steeple, altars, organ music, stained glass, robes, etc. How do we know this? Because none of the



Christians for the first several hundred years ever had these ideas and they got along just fine! Yet, these are the things that Churchianity runs on today.<sup>§7.2.1.1</sup>

What is the harm in these extra-Biblical traditions of men? *The traditions of men teach people to value things that have no value.* They are occupying people's time and energy with things that are not from God. The traditions of men distract people from the simplicity of knowing Christ; they are being distracted over the **"many things"** while completely missing the **"one thing that is needed"** (Luke 10:41-42). They **"strain out a gnat but swallow a camel"** (Matt. 23:24). Anyone who places an emphasis on any of these additional traditions is simply deceived. **"But even if we or an angel from Heaven should preach a gospel beside what we preached to you, let him be accursed."** (Gal. 1:8) Those who have *added* extra works to the gospel by their traditions stand condemned.<sup>§7.2.2.1</sup> Their traditions are not just extra-Biblical, but as you will see many of them are actually pagan practices that are directly *forbidden* in the Bible.<sup>§7.2.2.2</sup> Whenever you treat an unnecessary tradition as necessary, you are erecting an *idol* that distracts from the worship of Christ who desires no such things.<sup>§7.1.3.1</sup> Instead of asking, "Why can't we have these things?" the more revealing question is, "Why do you think you need those things?"<sup>§7.2.1.3</sup>

**"The gospel alone is sufficient to rule the lives of Christians everywhere – any additional rules made to govern men's conduct added nothing to the perfection already found in the Gospel of Jesus Christ."  
– John Wycliffe**

### 7.1.3.2 Works without Faith

Some do not have the problem of **"faith without works"** (Jas. 2:20), but instead have the opposite problem of "works without faith". They may not have any *faith* at all, yet they are extremely *faithful* in performing their traditions of men. **"These people draw near to Me with their mouths and honor Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me and their worship of Me is only traditions of men learned by rote."** (Isa. 29:13; cf. Matt. 15:1-9, Mark 7:5-13) Many institutional "churches" are full of pomp and circumstance, but where is the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit? They have **"a form of godliness but deny its power"** (2Tim. 3:5). They want to accomplish works *for* God, yet apart from the Spirit of God. They can sing without worshipping, tithe without giving from the heart, and occupy a pew without entering the presence of the Lord.

**"If you died with Christ to the principles of the world, why as one living in the world are you subject to its decrees, 'Do not touch or taste or handle' which are all used for corruption according to the commandments and doctrines of men. These indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, humility, and bodily severity, but not any value against fleshly indulgence."** (Col. 2:20-23)

Indeed these traditions of men may look good in appearance, but they are **“whitewashed tombs which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead men’s bones and everything unclean”** (Matt. 23:27).

The traditions of men existed long before they were perfected by the Roman Catholic and Orthodox “churches”. The religious nature of man always seems to prefer a works-based religion where he is in control of the works. The Israelites had a religious system of works that were specified by God, yet He was still not pleased by their empty rituals (1Sam. 15:22, Jer. 14:10-12, Hos. 5:6, Mal. 1:10). Similarly, many institutional “churches” today are mechanically repeating a set of religious works

**“If Christianity is not supernatural, it is nothing.”  
– Andrew Murray**

in hopes of pleasing an abstract God that they don’t really know. Their “church services” are like ritualistic funeral memorials held once a week in honor of their ancient dead leader. Since they don’t

really know God, they try to please Him from afar by mindlessly performing repetitive ceremonies. **“And when you pray, do not use meaningless repetition like the pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words.”** (Matt. 6:7) The traditions of men are merely dead works that are not pleasing to God. Many may not have any idea where their traditions came from or why they are necessary, but they will never let their traditions die.<sup>§7.2.2</sup>

### 7.1.3.3 Instead of Christ

Even worse, some have begun to follow their traditions to the exclusion of God himself. Some traditions may infiltrate the Church innocently enough, but over time people begin to value them, and then begin to require them to the point that *they eventually supersede the very commands of God*. Jesus said:

**“They worship Me in vain, teaching doctrines that are rules of men. You leave the commandment of God and hold the tradition of men....You happily set aside the commandment of God in order that you may keep your tradition!...You nullify the Word of God by your tradition that you have handed down and you do many similar things like that.”** (Mark 7:7-9,13; cf. Matt. 15:1-9)

Such traditions of men are no longer viewed as optional, but now carry the *weight of law*. And just as it is with the Law, **“Those who do these things will live by them.”** (Gal. 3:12) Those who obey the “traditions of the fathers” often become enslaved to a works-based religious spirit.<sup>§7.1.3.2</sup> The Galatians fell into this error when they began to value circumcision and other works of the Law instead of walking by the Holy Spirit. **“Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit are you now being perfected by the flesh?”** (Gal. 3:3)

The religious, pharisaical, and legalistic spirit behind the traditions of men are similar to the *antichrist spirit* (1Jn. 2:18, 2Jn. 1:7). Aside from references to the apocalyptic character (Dan. 11:36-39, Matt. 24:5,24, 2Th. 2:3-4, Rev. 13:11-15), the term “antichrist” is transliterated from the Greek word “*ΑΝΤΙΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ*” #500 and

literally means “instead of Christ”. The traditions of men operate by the antichrist spirit because they offer people a set of religious works to perform, *instead* of experiencing a relationship with Jesus Christ. Men will create elaborate ceremonies, magnificent buildings, repetitive prayers, ornate clothing, or almost anything else to show their devotion to God – anything, that is, except to be born again and know God personally (Acts 17:22-23). Tragically, many faithfully observe the rituals performed in their institutional “church” and come away thinking they have done their religious duty for the week; but they do not know Christ at all.<sup>§7.2.3.4</sup> *They want a religion about Jesus instead of a relationship with Jesus!*<sup>7.2.3.4</sup> Over time they are gradually conditioned to depend on their religious traditions rather than God himself. The non-Christians who attend these institutional “churches” are shown a system of religious rituals instead of the presence of the Holy Spirit and they are not very interested. Such traditions of men are not enhancements; they are stumbling blocks to the ignorant masses. Such things do not help Christianity; they have replaced Christianity.<sup>§7.2.1.1</sup>

Such traditions of men have become a subtle form of *idolatry* where images, icons, and statues are now worshipped instead of Christ. The very objects that were added to supposedly help people worship, have themselves become the objects of worship, stumbling millions of people who mindlessly pray to them. What one considers to be an *icon* that supposedly aids their worship of Christ, to another is an *idol* that is worshipped instead of Christ. **“Therefore, being the**

**“The chief danger in the twentieth century will be religion without the Holy Spirit, Christianity without Christ...” – William Booth**

**offspring of God, we should not suppose that the Divine Being is like gold, silver, or stone – an image formed by the art and skill of man.”** (Acts 17:29) Scripture is clear that no image, icon, or statue is ever to be involved with the worship of God (Exod. 20:4,23, Lev. 19:4, 26:1, Deut. 4:15-18, 27:15). **“What value is an idol to the man who carved it, an image that teaches lies? For its maker trusts in his own creation.”** (Hab. 2:18; cf. Jer. 10:5, Ps. 115:4-8) Instead of spending time venerating icons, why don’t you worship Jesus instead! No physical implements should ever be necessary to help you worship God better. There are no such training wheels! You must be able to worship God simply in **“spirit and truth”** (John 4:23-24).

## 7.2 Counterfeit Philosophies

The institutional “churches” can never have the correct practices because they are not even part of the Church.<sup>§1.2.2</sup> If an institutional “church” really wanted to experience the practices of the Church, the first thing they would need to do is disband and encourage the Christians to begin fellowshipping as the Church.<sup>§2.3.2.2</sup> Instead, most institutional “churches” implement any number of traditions of men within the confines of their unbiblical institutional “church” structure. They do not have Church traditions; they have institutional “church” traditions. Their traditions of men are easily identified by asking questions such as: What do they

mean?<sup>§7.2.1</sup> Where did they come from?<sup>§7.2.2</sup> and What is their fruit?<sup>§7.2.3</sup> Some have asked why this section is so long? Well, it's because there are so many invalid practices! And now this section is even longer because I had to tell you that. 😊

## 7.2.1 What Do They Mean?

Most Christians today simply have no idea what their institutional “church” traditions really mean. To the ignorant masses it literally seems like “hocus-pocus” (look up the origin of the word) as they trust that their religious incantations must somehow please God. Their traditions of men are automatically passed on from generation to generation devoid of their original context.<sup>§7.2.1.1</sup> Even if a practice once started out as a good thing, the resulting rules, policies, and procedures often continue to be mindlessly perpetuated long after the Spirit has departed.<sup>§7.2.1.2</sup> Such traditions can hardly enhance someone's worship of God if they have no idea what they are supposed to mean! And what's worse, not only don't they know, they also usually don't care! Many are unaware that some of their traditions are actually *pagan practices*,<sup>§7.2.2.2</sup> but they have been going on for so long now that time has simply lulled them to sleep. This is not because there is some evil conspiracy by the clergy to intentionally keep the people in darkness. No, the fact of the matter is that many of the clergy are just as ignorant of their own traditions as their congregations. They just receive them from the previous generation and pass them on to the next, but whatever meaning they originally had has long been forgotten. If you confront them with what their traditions really mean they say, “Who cares what it used to mean, nobody believes any of that anymore.” And if you want to be a good Christian, then they expect you too to mindlessly follow in their “traditions of the fathers”.<sup>§7.2.2.1</sup>

### 7.2.1.1 The Average Joe

Many who think they are strictly adhering to the Bible are often shocked when they learn that most of what their institutional “church” does is not based on the Scripture at all. To illustrate the religious ignorance of the institutional masses, one only needs to consider the common institutional “church” experience of the average Joe:

On Sunday morning, Joe gets dressed up with a suit and tie and goes to the First United Community Church that has a nice steeple and stained glass windows. Joe attends the Sunday school class and afterward goes to the 10:00 service. He sits down in his favorite pew and follows along with the “Order of Worship” printed in his bulletin. He enjoys watching the altar boys light the candles while he listens to the choir sing an anthem. After that, a seminary-trained clergyman wearing a special robe and a white collar goes to the pulpit in front of the altar and delivers a sermon. Then the meeting is adjourned and Joe goes home and watches the football game.

What is wrong with this picture? Amazingly, many Christians cannot seem to find anything wrong with this. Perhaps this is because it is so similar to their own “church” experience. They don’t see anything unusual about it because this is the normal religious pattern of Churchianity that they grew up with.<sup>§7.2.2.5</sup> Yet incredibly enough, *Joe did not experience one ounce of Biblical Christianity!* What? That’s right! Everything that Joe experienced was nothing but the traditions of men that have been accumulated over many centuries:

Tradition	Date	Origination
Dressing up	310s AD	As Christianity became secularized, the members began wearing their best clothes in case government officials came to visit.
Clergy costumes	320s AD	Clergy wore clothing patterned after the pagan priests to distinguish themselves from the laity. (Eventually was required to be worn at all times in 502 AD.)
Sunday Sabbath	321 AD	Sunday was ordered to be the day of rest by decree of the Roman Emperor Constantine.
“church” buildings	323 AD	Replicas of pagan temples were built by the Roman Emperor so the Christians would have temples like the other pagan religions.
“church” names	323 AD	The Roman Emperor named the Christian temples after various dead “saints” just as the pagan temples were named after their gods.
Altars	323 AD	Altars built in the front of the sanctuaries were patterned after the altars the pagans had used for animal sacrifices.
Choirs	330s AD	Designated choirs came from the pagans who chanted during their services. (Congregation singing was altogether banned in 367 AD.)
Order of worship	500s AD	Made mandatory in Sunday services by Roman Catholic Pope Gregory the Great.
Pulpit	600s AD	Originally a bucket to stand on for making announcements. (Later became the Protestant pulpit in 1520 AD.)
Candles	850 AD	Taken directly from the pagan practice of burning sacred candles in rites for the dead.
Stained glass	1100s AD	Embedded with iconography evolved from pagan illustrations found in the catacombs.
Pews	1300s AD	Seating arrangement designed by Roman Catholicism to keep the laity separated from the clergy.
Seminaries	1500s AD	Instituted by Roman Catholicism to combat the spread of Protestant doctrines.

Tradition	Date	Origination
10:00 AM services	1500s AD	Martin Luther liked to sleep in so he simply pushed the starting time back to later in the morning.
Protestant pastors	1520 AD	Ex-catholic priests were hired by Martin Luther to perform various ceremonies and rituals in his denomination.
Steeple	1600s AD	Sir Christopher Wren modified Gothic architecture originally derived from pagan obelisks used as phallic symbols.
Neckties	1700s AD	The tradition today was popularized by men in France competing to wear the fanciest napkin at dinner.
Clerical collars	1780s AD	Methodist circuit riders wore bandanas over their noses to keep the dust out and slid them down around their necks when they preached.
Business suit	1800s AD	George Bryan Brummell is credited with inventing the “British look” that evolved into today’s business suit.
Sunday school	1840 AD	Popularized by D.L. Moody in the slums of Chicago to attract non-Christian children.

The normal “church” experience of the average Joe is completely foreign to the Scripture! *None of these traditions are specified in the Bible!* None of these things were experienced by Christians in the early Church. Not one! How many of these things does your “church” do? Whether you think these things are right or wrong, they are all *extra-Biblical*.<sup>§7.1.3.1</sup> Not to mention the other ludicrous practices Joe would have experienced if he were Roman Catholic such as prayers for the dead (300 AD), praying to Mary and other dead “saints” (379 AD), prohibiting the clergy to marry (385 AD), doctrine of Purgatory (593 AD), kissing the pope’s feet (709 AD), worship of icons (787 AD), holy water (1009 AD), rosary beads (1090 AD), indulgences (1190 AD), transubstantiation at mass (1215 AD), confessing sins to priests (1215 AD), priest’s power of absolution (1268 AD), infallibility of the pope (1870 AD), and the immaculate conception of Mary (1954 AD). Of course, a tradition is not necessarily wrong just because it cannot be found in the Scripture, *but it is definitely wrong if it blatantly contradicts the Scripture!*<sup>§7.2.3.2</sup>

The average Joe may be very loyal to attend his religious service each week, but he has no idea that many of these rituals and customs were originated by the pagans.<sup>§7.2.2.2</sup> Joe is merely mechanically repeating a set of practices each week, trusting that they are pleasing to a God he doesn’t know.<sup>§7.1.3.2</sup> Let’s re-examine the religious experience of the average Joe again, only this time seeing it for what it really is:

On a day decreed by the Roman Emperor Constantine, Joe gets dressed up like a 19th century Britishman and puts a fancy napkin under his chin so that he can look his best for God. He goes to a man-made organization that meets in a building patterned after the pagan temples of ancient Rome complete with an obelisk and iconography evolved from the pagans. Joe attends a class originally intended to reach heathen children and afterward goes to the 10:00 service because Martin Luther liked to sleep in. He sits down in a pew designed to keep the laity corralled like cattle in a stockyard. Joe follows along with the hard-coded “Order of Worship” once required by the pope so that there is little room for the leading of the Holy Spirit in the service. He enjoys watching people light candles for the dead while he listens to the choir sing, just like the pagans used to chant their rituals. After that, a special clergyman wearing pagan attire and a bandana around his neck goes to the pulpit in front of the pagan altar originally designed for animal sacrifices and delivers a non-interactive monolog. Then the meeting is adjourned and Joe goes home and watches the football game.

Do you see what the “churches” have become? What kind of Christian would knowingly participate in such pagan and worldly practices? Many of these average Joe’s are not Christians anyway, but this is what they are being taught that Christianity is!<sup>§7.2.3.4</sup> Now contrast the average Joe’s experience with the experience of a typical Christian who fellowships as a part of the Church. Here, there are no traditions of men or artificial rules, just genuine relationships among believers sharing their lives in daily fellowship under the leading of the Holy Spirit.<sup>§3.1.2</sup> Joe goes to “church” and experiences dead works from the traditions of men, while a Christian in the Church experiences fellowship in the Holy Spirit. Oh, if only we could reach Joe and tell him about a personal relationship with the living God so that he could be born again of the Spirit.<sup>§3.1.1</sup> If only he could be exposed to fellowship in the Church and experience the manifest presence of the living God.

### 7.2.1.2 Inventing New Rationalizations

Even though an institutional “church” may have no idea what their traditions mean, it is imperative to them that they keep them at all costs! They are more interested in preserving their “way of life” than they are following Jesus who is the Life.<sup>§1.1.3</sup> When you point out the pagan origins of their traditions, they often become defensive and try to justify them with *new* doctrines just so that they can hang on to their traditions. Here are just a few of the many examples where the institutional “churches” have taken bogus practices and tried to dress them up with new meanings in order to justify themselves:

Practice	Original Meanings	New Rationalizations
“church” buildings	Replicas of pagan temples were built by the Roman Emperor. <sup>§A.2</sup>	It is a holy place of worship just like the temple in the Old Testament.
Suits and ties	Peculiar worldly fads founded in vanity and competition.	Christians should dress up so that they look their best for God.
Clergymen	False hierarchical positions of authority forbidden by Jesus Christ. <sup>§5.1.1.3</sup>	The clergy are like Moses and the judges who worked under him.
Altars	Pagan altars for animal sacrifices were part of the Roman temple design.	People go to the altar to confess their sins and pray to receive Christ.

And the list goes on and on! Not to mention all of the rationalizations that have been made up to celebrate the pagan holidays of Saturnalia<sup>§A.4.1.1</sup> and Eostre.<sup>§A.4.1.2</sup> Of course, you will not find any of these made up excuses discussed when these practices were first introduced into the “churches”. No, these ideas were all made up long after the fact to justify their ludicrous traditions. Who cares what they used to mean, the show must go on! The institutional “churches” won’t change their practices; *so they just change the meanings of their practices!* The justifications they have made up for their traditions have been repeated so often that these new meanings are now commonly accepted by the ignorant masses. As a result, the traditions of men have led directly to false doctrines of men which nullify the very commands of God (Matt. 15:1-9, Mark 7:5-13). Thus, not only is the average Joe’s repetitive actions wrong, so are his thoughts about them. These traditions of men have led people like Joe to mistakenly believe that dressing up somehow pleases God (Jas. 2:1-4), a “church” building is God’s temple (2Cor. 6:16), clergy serve as intermediaries before God (Matt. 23:8-10), and worship is conducted in a “service” (John 4:21-24). What absurd doctrines have come from those seemingly innocent traditions of men!

If Joe were to discover the pagan origin of some of these practices, he might naturally refuse to go along with them. And what would be the reaction? “You need to respect the traditions of the elders and submit to the authority of the church.” If he persists, he might be labelled as “rebellious” or denounced by the “church” because he is not loyal to their traditions. Such seemingly innocent traditions create false doctrines, divide brothers in Christ, and defile the people with pagan practices. Do you have ears to hear?

### 7.2.1.3 Defending the Indefensible

Anyone who objectively examines these practices will soon see that the institutional “churches” have piled tradition upon tradition to create a house of cards. Their traditions have become so ingrained that if you do not have a steeple, altar, organ, stained glass, robes, etc. they think there is something wrong with your “church”. These things are no longer incidental practices; they have become



the “traditions of the fathers” that must be defended at all costs! They defend their traditions of men as if they were a *required* part of their faith. Their leaders will get red in the face arguing vehemently over things as ludicrous as eating squid on Tuesdays or wearing purple shoes to “church”. So much time is spent bickering about things that simply do not matter! They act as if these things were *essential* parts of their Christianity only because they were raised to value them under an unbiblical religious system. But Jesus said, **“Don’t be anxious about your life – what you may eat, what you may drink, or what you may wear on your body. Isn’t life more than food and the body more than clothing?”** (Matt. 5:25; cf. Rom. 14:17) The institutional “churches” adamantly defend their silly artifacts *as if they somehow mattered to Christ*. But no new convert who reads the Scriptures would ever have the slightest idea that Jesus cares about any of those things. Yet these things are so important to the institutional “churches” that they are prepared to excommunicate people over them. The pharisaical spirit still lives on!<sup>§7.2.4.4</sup>

When you point out the absurdity of their traditions, their arguments often become quite amusing as they make up the most farfetched rationalizations to defend their unnecessary extra-Biblical nonsense.<sup>§7.1.3.1</sup> Rather than *supporting* their practices with the Scriptures, they argue, “Show us in Scripture where it explicitly says we can’t do it?” They think that if something isn’t explicitly forbidden in the Scriptures, then they are free to do whatever they want.<sup>§7.2.4.2</sup> The Scripture clearly denounces division (Rom. 16:17, Gal. 5:19-21, Tit. 3:10), but they argue, “Where does Scripture say that we *can’t* form an institution called the Methodists?” Jesus said to call no man “Teacher”, “Father”, or “Leader” (Matt. 23:8-10), but they argue, “Where does Scripture say that we *can’t* call a man ‘Pastor’?” Just like the Pharisees, they nitpick over words but entirely miss the Spirit of what was written.<sup>§7.2.4.4</sup> Scripture may not explicitly say that you can’t have these extra-Biblical things, but when did *Jesus* ever say that you could? Instead of arguing, “Why can’t we have a steeple, altar, organ, stained glass, and robes?” the more revealing question is, “Why do you *need* to have a steeple, altar, organ, stained glass, and robes?”<sup>§7.1.3.3</sup> Such institutional “churches” clearly value their traditions over the Scripture themselves. We know this because when it is pointed out that their traditions contradict the Scriptures, they continue to obey their traditions instead of the Scriptures!

#### 7.2.1.4 Why Can’t Johnny Read?

When Christians finally begin to read the Scriptures for themselves, it usually doesn’t take too long until they realize that the institutional “churches” have sold them a false bill of goods. In the early days, the institutional “churches” didn’t want Johnny to be educated, so he couldn’t read the Scriptures. Then when Johnny could read, the institutional “churches” denied him access to the Scriptures in his language so that they could continue to perpetuate their fraud. But now that Johnny can read and the Scriptures are available to him, *he still may not read them* because his institutional “church” says that he will not be able to understand them properly. Johnny is supposed to leave everything to the professionals for he surely couldn’t correctly interpret the Scriptures anyway. 😊

But if Johnny were to actually read the Scriptures for himself, he would be in for a big shock.

If Johnny would read the Gospels, he would realize that Jesus was not an effeminate cleric that simply went around saying “Peace be to you”, but was literally a down-to-earth person who was nothing like what is being modeled by the leadership in most institutional “churches”. Can you envision Jesus as the

**“Thousands of people have entered churches without discovering a vital experience with Jesus Christ. The substitutes have been handed them in the guise of religious rituals, good works, community effort, or social reform...none of which can gain a person a right relationship with God.”**

**– Billy Graham**

manager of a non-profit corporation or a denominational head? Do you honestly think that if Jesus walked the earth today that he would relate with the people by wearing a clerical robe in a once-a-week service with responsive readings, incense, organs, doxologies, and benedictions? Can you imagine Jesus relating to His twelve disciples in an ecclesiastical “high church” manner? “Peter, please recite responsive reading no. 416 and after that John will lead us in hymn no. 236. Then let us all pray together the prayer found written in your bulletin.” 😊 What is this nonsense! Is this the Christian life of fellowship in the Holy Spirit? Institutional

“churches” have created a fictional concept of Jesus as a substitute for knowing Jesus himself. Jesus is not an abstract impersonal God that is pleased by a set of mindless religious actions. Jesus is not a plastic figurine in a windshield that acts as a good luck charm. Jesus is a real person who wants to have a personal relationship with you!

If Johnny would read the book of Acts, he would realize that the miraculous realm of the Church is nothing like the institutional “church” he attends. Can you see the obvious disconnect? Do you read about the robes, the stained glass, the pews, the altar, the strange hats, and people kissing rings? Not in the Bible! The religious experience of the average Joe has almost no resemblance at all to Biblical Christianity.<sup>§7.2.1.1</sup> This becomes obvious by both what people are doing and what they are *not* doing. And how about you? Do you share the gospel with others (Matt. 28:19)? Do you address your leaders by a title (Matt. 23:8-10)? Do your leaders exercise authority over you (Matt. 20:25-28, Mark 10:42-44, Luke 22:24-27)? It’s time for a Biblical reality check! No semantical parsing by a seminary-trained clergyman is required to understand these verses! Can you read Jesus’ clear statements? Okay, now will you obey them?<sup>§c.3</sup>

## 7.2.2 Where Did They Come From?

Another thing to consider when evaluating traditions is the source of the practice. Where did all these traditions come from? Well, it is quite easy to see where these traditions of men did *not* come from – Jesus and the apostles did not start any of them, nor are they found anywhere in the New Testament. If these

traditions did not come from them, then where did these traditions come from? How were so many unbiblical traditions of men able to infiltrate the Church and deceive so many Christians? It is really quite simple – the traditions of men came from the decisions of men!<sup>§5.2.3</sup> Yes, even when the decisions came from *Christian* men. Notice that in most cases, no one *ever* claimed that God told them to do these things. If such a tradition were truly necessary, then shouldn't God have told them to do it? Yet, none of them ever claimed to have a prophecy, dream, or revelation from God; *they just made these things up all by themselves*. It would probably require a very large book on the history of Christianity to give a detailed account on the source of every tradition of men, but some of the main categories are discussed below.

### 7.2.2.1 The Traditions of the Fathers

Many institutional “churches” try to hide behind history claiming that they are simply following the “traditions of their fathers”. Just like the Pharisees they wonder, **“Why don't your disciples walk according to the traditions of the elders?”** (Mark 7:5; cf. Luke 3:8) Notice that these institutional “churches” don't refer to their practices as the “traditions of God”, but as the “traditions of the fathers”...which is really just a nicer way of saying the “traditions of men”. *Fathers are just men!* Some institutional “churches” trust in their “church fathers” more than they trust in God. Remember Jesus said, **“Do not call anyone on earth your ‘Father’...”** (Matt. 23:9) They will rely on their “church fathers’” interpretation of the Scriptures, instead of reading the Scriptures themselves.<sup>§A.1.2</sup> But just exactly who are these “church fathers” they keep referring to? They were *not* Peter, James, John, or Paul or any of the other apostles. No one in the early Church started any of the bizarre traditions of men that are now so firmly entrenched in the institutional “churches” today.<sup>§7.2.1.1</sup> Those who claim they are following the “traditions of the fathers” are *not* following the traditions of the *early* “church fathers”; they are following traditions made up by men several centuries later.<sup>§A.1.2</sup> Shouldn't the Church still prefer the **“teaching of the apostles”** (Acts 2:42) recorded in the Scripture over the contradictory teachings of later “church fathers”?

If there were any doubt about the spiritual state of some of these “church fathers”, one merely needs to examine their *fruit*.<sup>§7.2.3</sup> Based on their own writings, there is little indication that some of them were ever *born again of the Spirit*.<sup>§A.1.2</sup> Does the “church father” write about their conversion to Christ, the leading of the Holy Spirit, or personal relationship with God? Or do they merely write about abstract philosophical and theological religious concepts? In contrast to those who exhibit the true marks of a Christian such as sharing the gospel, performing miracles, and ministering to the poor, many of these “church fathers” held unbiblical titles, wore robes to distinguish their places of honor, and separated themselves from the laity.<sup>§6.2.1</sup> Of course, some of the early leaders were genuine Christians, but Jesus himself pointed out that some tolerated the teachings of Balaam (Rev. 2:14), Jezebel (Rev. 2:20) and the Nicolaitans (Rev. 2:6,15) as early as 95 AD. Should you follow the teachings of those “church fathers” too?

Over the centuries, it was the “church fathers” that changed baptism of new converts by immersion (Acts 2:38, 8:38, 10:47-48) to baptizing heathens and infants by sprinkling; changed the Lord’s supper (1Cor. 11:20-21, Jude 1:12) to the “Lord’s snack” of a cracker and thimble of grape juice; and changed the daily intimate fellowship in homes (Acts 2:46) to weekly impersonal meetings held in a temple. *Some “church fathers” acted more like the Pharisees than Christians!*

Of course, there were always some pockets of true believers throughout history found among groups such as the Lollards, Waldensians, and Anabaptists, for example, but most of the time they were persecuted and martyred at the hands of these same “church fathers”.<sup>§1.2.4.1</sup> Not that any of these groups were perfect either, but at least they did not go around murdering other Christians just because they disagreed with them. Many wonderful Christian pioneers did not have a chance to become “church fathers” because they were killed by the “church fathers”! Are these *murderers* the people you are relying on for your “church” traditions? **“Which of the prophets didn’t your fathers persecute?”** (Acts 7:52) Before his conversion, Paul was also zealous for the **“traditions of the fathers”** (Gal. 1:14) and he went around killing Christians too! Do you see a trend? Sounds like you might want to stay away from these “church fathers”!

### 7.2.2.2 Borrowing from the Pagans

Most Christians say they are against bringing pagan rituals into the Church, that is, until they find out that many of their long-held practices came from the pagans! This includes practices such as clergy/laity, altars, buildings, ecclesiastical titles, and choirs to name a few. Some might think that these things were derived from the Old Testament, but in reality they came from the pagans and only contrived to be from the Old Testament *afterwards* when they needed to rationalize why they were following pagan practices.<sup>§7.2.1.2</sup> The Roman Emperor Constantine, for example, did not get any of these ideas from reading the Old Testament; he simply observed what the pagans were doing and then applied it to the institutional “churches” he built.<sup>§A.2</sup>

**“The church is blending into the community by embracing what the world enjoys and, in turn, bringing inside the church the world’s ideas and interests.” – Billy Graham**

These *pagan practices* were common during the 1st century, but they were never accepted by Christ or His Church!<sup>§7.2.3.2</sup> No, it was not until centuries later that they began to infiltrate the Church at the hands of the so-called “church fathers”. Many other pagan practices have since seduced the “churches” including the pagan rituals associated with Christmas and Easter.<sup>§A.4.1</sup> The institutional “churches” today could hardly boast of **“accepting nothing from the pagans”** (3Jn. 1:7).

The institutional “churches” cannot argue that these practices are neutral, *if they are clearly pagan in origin*. Why were the “church fathers” bringing pagan practices into their “churches”? The “church fathers” never claimed these practices were from God, they simply looked around at the pagan religions and borrowed ideas from them. Still today, many clergy do not hesitate to look around

and bring any worldly practice into their “church” as long as it “works” (meaning that it will bring more people in and thus increase their revenue). Of course, there are many things that will “work” in that manner – how else do you suppose the pagan religions have survived for so long? It sure isn’t from the leading of the Holy Spirit! In fact, most cults don’t seem to be having any trouble getting people to come to their “church” services by using these exact same practices. They also have clergy/laity, altars, buildings, ecclesiastical titles, and choirs *and they had them in their “churches” first!*

### 7.2.2.3 Good Instead of God

No one is claiming that there was a grand conspiracy by evil clergymen to impose false practices on the people without their knowledge. For the most part, these traditions were not established by men’s evil intentions, but as the saying goes, “The road to Hell is paved with good intentions.” Most clergy have good intentions as they work hard to improve their “churches” with *their own ideas*. Regardless of whether their intentions were innocent or well-meaning, the problem is that *men*, not God, was the source of their traditions. Men are not supposed to implement *any* of their own ideas, even if they think they are good ones; they are supposed to be obeying God’s directives.<sup>§5.1.2.1</sup> Again, no one is saying that all of these traditions are intrinsically evil, but simply that they are not God’s will for His Church.

Here the basic mistake is thinking that a good idea is the same thing as God’s idea, but there is one too many “o’s” in good (good ≠ God). Nothing that originates in the mind of man will ever be able to improve the kingdom of God! **“There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.”** (Prov. 14:12, 16:25) Indeed, there are many “churches” today that are run on nothing but the “good” ideas of men.<sup>§5.2.3</sup> Oh, for the Spirit of God to fall on them! In reality, much of what is considered to be “good” ideas are really just *worldly* ideas. Contemporary “churches” have borrowed business practices, multimedia techniques, mass marketing, and “Robert’s Rules of Order” from the world in order to make their organizations more “professional”.<sup>§1.2.2.2</sup> Such things may be good ideas if you are running a business, but the Church is not a business. Men will sit around in these “church” committees and try to decide things when they should be on their knees listening and obeying the voice of God. Such “good” ideas are not necessarily wrong because they are not found in the Bible, they are wrong precisely because they didn’t come from God. If they are not from God, then they have no place in His Church.

### 7.2.2.4 Old Wine in Old Wineskins

One of the most difficult categories to discern is when a tradition *did at one time originate from God*, but now is no longer from God. Many people will mindlessly perpetuate a tradition forever, even though the Holy Spirit may have intended for it last only for a season, for limited purpose, place, or

circumstance.<sup>§7.1.2.1</sup> When God leads in a new direction, men will often reject His leading and continue to cling to their *familiar ways*, mechanically perpetuating the old practice.<sup>§7.1.1.2</sup> Consider an example from the Old Testament where God told Moses to put a snake on a pole which cured those who looked upon it (Num. 21:4-9); but then seven hundred years later the Israelites were burning incense to it and worshipping it like an idol (2Ki. 18:4). Here the original practice was directly ordained by God, but later became an abomination directly condemned by God.<sup>§7.2.2.4</sup> There are many modern examples where what once may have started out as a good practice has now degenerated into a tradition of men.

Practice	Original Meaning	Religious Tradition
Organ	Why not use the latest cutting-edge musical innovations of the day to praise God?	Now it is an ancient musical instrument often considered a necessity to worship God.
Sunday school	Designed to reach out and evangelize the “un-churched” children of the inner city.	Now it is a daycare to keep children entertained while the adults have “church” service.
Amish clothing	Gray and black clothing with suspenders was once “plain”, not drawing worldly attention to themselves in society.	Now their 16th century clothes make them stand out like sore thumbs and attract attention to themselves.

These traditions now produce almost the opposite result from what was once originally intended. The question then is not whether something was *once* of God, but whether it is *now* of God. God may have originated a practice, but if God changes that practice and the people do not change, then *they are now following the tradition instead of following God*. As a result, some things that were once conducive to the Life of the Church,<sup>§7.2.1.2</sup> have later degenerated into dead works.<sup>§7.1.3.2</sup> **“And no one who has drunk the old wine wants the new, for he says, ‘The old is good enough.’”** (Luke 5:39) Remember, the old wine was once from God too! They are not trying to put new wine in an old wineskin; *they are content with the old wine in the old wineskin*.<sup>§7.1.1.2</sup> They miss both the new wineskin and more importantly, the new wine. Their old wineskin is more important to them than the new wine!

Certainly, we know that God’s nature never changes, but that does not mean that His directions to particular men at certain times and places do not change. The ceremonial laws of the Old Covenant were clearly from God, for example, but Christians obviously no longer practice these things because we are under the New Covenant. Again, Scripture records that the Church had practices that were given by the Holy Spirit and then later changed by the Holy Spirit.<sup>§7.1.2.1</sup> Oftentimes the problem isn’t that men refuse to follow what God’s new direction is, so much as they are no longer listening to God so they do not know what His new direction is! They are not blatantly refusing to obey; they just don’t know what they are supposed to be obeying because they are no longer following the active and living Word of God (Heb. 4:12).

### 7.2.2.5 Gimme That Old Time Religion

Some “churches” make the mistake of thinking that if they could just turn the clock back and return to their roots they can restore the glory days of Christianity. They reject some of the modern practices today and want to revert back to the older traditions. There always seems to be some sort of reform, revival, or renewal movement that attempts to restore the “churches” to a time when they thought Christianity was pure. The thinking here is that the institutional “churches” were doing well at some time period, so they just need to bring back the practices of that era and the good times will return. But just how far back should they go?

- Was the Church ruined by the modern business and marketing practices of the 1900’s? Perhaps we should return to the traditional structure of the 1800’s with hymns, pews, steeples, and an organ like the “church” the older generation grew up in. Grandma and Grandpa were good folks, they couldn’t have been that wrong!
- Was the Church ruined by the Protestant divisions created during the reformation period in the 1500’s? Perhaps we should revert back to the traditions of the middle ages and restore the consolidated authority of the Roman Catholic “church”?
- Was the Church ruined by the pagan practices introduced by the Roman Emperor Constantine in the 300’s? Perhaps we must return to the point just after the Scripture was written and restore the “apostolic” traditions of the “New Testament Church”.

So at what point should the traditions be fixed? All of these groups have traditions, but simply don’t agree on what traditions and from what time period. Given these alternatives, returning to the “apostolic” traditions might seem to be the best choice (and undoubtedly would be an improvement for most). Okay then, exactly which “apostolic” traditions would those be? Would that be the ones before or after the apostles stopped waiting on tables (Acts 6:1-6)? Or before or after the widow’s list was established (1Tim. 5:9-11)? And are you willing to greet one another with a “**holy kiss**” (Rom. 16:16, 1Cor. 16:20, 2Cor. 13:12, 1Th. 5:26, 1Pet. 5:14)? Notice that all of these traditions were *changes* within the early Church. If the traditions were fixed during the earliest times of the Church, the apostles would still be waiting on tables. *The goal should not be to return to a set of earlier traditions, but to follow the practices led by the Holy Spirit today!* It is not about following traditions decided by men, not 18th century men, not 4th century men, or even 1st century men – *but about following Jesus through the leading of the Holy Spirit.* (By the way, most institutional “churches” claiming to follow the New Testament traditions do not have their leaders waiting on tables, do not have a widow’s list, and do not give holy kisses.)

Would returning back to the earliest traditions really keep the Church pure anyway? No, they weren’t even able to protect the “New Testament Church” from corruption!<sup>§A.1.1.3</sup> There is no need to speculate, since Jesus himself gave a

negative “report card” about the early Church in several cities (Rev. 2-3). We wouldn’t even have most of the New Testament except that it was written to address the myriad of problems the Church was constantly facing. And this was under the direct guidance of the original apostles who had walked with Jesus and were anointed with miraculous power! Do you think an organization of men today can do any better? The corruption and errors only continued to increase after that, resulting in the establishment of the first institutional “churches” under the influence of the secular Roman government.<sup>§A.1</sup>

Thus, the question is not really *when* was the Church pure, but *where* was the Church pure. It seems that God always has a remnant: **“So therefore, even in the present time, there has become a remnant chosen by grace.”** (Rom. 11:5) There have always been some places where the Church was pure even though there was corruption in other places. Remember, Jesus did not have anything bad to say about the Church in two of the cities (Rev. 2:8-11, 3:7-13). Likewise today, there is a blanket of corruption surrounding the false institutional “church” system, and yet there are still many places where the Church is functioning just fine.<sup>§B.2</sup>

### 7.2.3 What is Their Fruit?

A final thing to consider when evaluating traditions is to observe their fruit. Jesus said, **“You will know them by their fruit.”** (Matt. 7:16-20; cf. Matt. 12:33, Luke 6:43-44) But what exactly should be counted as “fruit”? Scripture teaches that the fruit of the Spirit is **“love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control”** (Gal. 5:22-23), not stained glass, pews, icons, organs, and robes. Jesus said to **“produce fruit in keeping with repentance”** (Matt. 3:8, Luke 3:8), not to erect monuments, statues and basilicas in honor of Him. Jesus himself did not do any of the things that are normally cited as “fruit” in institutional “churches” today: He did not build a building, He wrote no books, He started no programs, and His congregation deserted Him when He died. Spiritual fruit has nothing to do with having a huge congregation, elaborate buildings, or a large budget.<sup>§7.2.4.1</sup> Which of these do the false religions lack?

Consider the fruit that Jesus provided as evidence to John the Baptist: **“The blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the gospel is preached to the poor.”** (Luke 7:22) Do these things occur in your “church”? They did in the early Church! What a stark contrast to the fruit produced by the traditions of men: dead works, mindless rituals, idolatry, legalism, infighting, murder...need we go on? The traditions of men do not improve, supplement, or enhance the Church; they hinder, suppress, and damage the Church.<sup>§7.1.3</sup> For as important as all these religious artifacts have been made out to be, none of these traditions of men matter at all in the kingdom of God. In the end, **“every tree that does not produce good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire”** (Matt. 3:10; cf. Matt 21:43, Luke 3:9, 13:7).

The fruit of the traditions of men can perhaps best be seen in the Roman Catholic and Orthodox “churches”. They have been in business the longest of all of the institutional “churches” and claim to be “the one true church”.<sup>§5.2.1.4</sup> They kiss rings, venerate icons, pray to Mary, hold masses for the dead, and mindlessly



adhere to an amazing number of traditions of men, many which originated from pagan rituals. Wouldn't it be better to heed the teachings of Christians who share the gospel, heal the sick, and raise the dead, than official figureheads who bear no other fruit than to wear robes, light candles, and preach sermons?<sup>§7.2.2.1</sup> If you question their members today, most of them usually have no idea what it means to be born again of the Holy Spirit (if they even knew there was a Holy Spirit). Although they would never admit it, this is the direction that many Protestant "churches" are heading, and some of them have already arrived!<sup>§7.2.4</sup>

### 7.2.3.1 Institutional Achievements

What did you do last week at "church"? Probably the same things you do every week at "church"! But what is really being accomplished? Does sitting passively in a pew listening to a sermon count as "fruit"? Are you really making progress, or will you still be doing the exact same things twenty years from now? Perhaps your building, attendance, or budget may be bigger, but are lives really being changed? That is not to say that institutional "churches" don't get anything done – for they surely do! But so does every other secular non-profit organization that doesn't rely on the Holy Spirit. By utilizing demographic studies, mass marketing, pie chart budgets, board meetings, organizational charts, "Robert's Rules of Order", and "church" growth seminars, an institutional "church" is able to duplicate the same type of worldly success found in any other secular corporation.<sup>§1.2.2.2</sup> There is no doubt that these practices have greatly enhanced the efficiency of the "churches" when measured on such a scale of worldly success. But this has nothing to do with the kingdom of God.

Men strive to build up their institutional "churches", but Jesus is interested in building up His Church. The two are not the same! An organization could command a large congregation, have a huge budget, and build really impressive buildings, and yet have accomplished absolutely nothing in the kingdom of God.<sup>§7.2.4.1</sup> Year after year, there are marketing campaigns to attract even more people, collect even more revenue, and build even bigger buildings, and yet the kingdom of God may not be advanced at all. That is because these things do not necessarily have anything to do with producing fruit that builds up the Church. How do we know this? *Because Jesus Christ and His apostles did none of these things!*

**The most wonderfully  
constructed wood, hay, and  
stubble, will still burn just  
fine. (1Cor. 3:10-15)**

Not that these things are inherently wrong, but the amount of money, time, and resources spent on things that do not matter is grossly disproportionate to the benefits they could have yielded in the kingdom of God.<sup>§7.2.3.3</sup> Massive expenditures for "church" recreational facilities, for example, may seem impressive, but have done little to actually lead people to Christ. Rather than *going out* to share the gospel with people on their own turf, do you suppose non-Christians are enticed to play on "Christian" basketball courts and lift weights for Jesus? ☺ By that logic, do you suppose that a multi-million dollar "Christian"

golf course be useful in reaching out to business executives? But what could that same money have done for overseas missions? Are institutional “churches” really trying to expand the kingdom of God, or are they more interested in entertaining themselves? Do these institutional accomplishments really mark the pinnacles of Christian success?

Institutional “churches” may think they are accomplishing things *for* God, but much of it is simply being done in the flesh.<sup>§3.2.1</sup> Jesus walked on the water (Matt. 14:25), where the institutional “churches” would buy a boat; Jesus cursed the fig tree and it died (Matt. 21:19), where the institutional “churches” would use an axe; Jesus spoke and the person was healed (Matt. 9:6-7), where the institutional “churches” would give them pain killers. (Not that there is necessarily anything wrong with medicine.) Without the operation of the Holy Spirit, the institutional mentality has no other choice but to rely on the arm of the flesh. This does not mean that God doesn’t use physical procedures or methods for He surely does.<sup>§7.1.2</sup> But such things are being done in the flesh apart from the leading of the Holy Spirit – and there is a big difference!

Most institutional “churches” function just fine without the leading of the Holy Spirit, just like any other secular non-profit corporation!<sup>§1.2.2.2</sup> They do not hear Jesus telling them anything, so they generate programs, practices, and structures in order to get things done *for* Jesus. They can grow as an organization without ever having to listen to Jesus, and in fact they might even grow more if they don’t! If they suddenly started obeying Jesus, they might actually decrease in numbers and experience internal conflict as they begin to deal with all the sin and unbiblical practices in their midst. The institutional leaders wonder, “How am I supposed to structure my meetings in the bulletin if I have to rely on the unpredictable Holy Spirit?” Deep down they really don’t trust in Him completely, which is why they have created institutional programs, rituals, and committees to get things done instead. They must do this because the Holy Spirit won’t do this!

### 7.2.3.2 Negative Enhancements

Some actually view the traditions of men as improvements that have evolved over the centuries as the institutional “churches” matured. They think the early Church was *too unorganized*, but now they have hierarchical structures, business techniques, and “Robert’s Rules of Order” to make them more efficient. They think the early Church *lacked financial resources*, but now their fundraising has enabled them to afford nice “church” buildings, parking lots, and recreation centers. They think the early Church was *simplistic and naive*, but now they have sophisticated liturgies, mass marketing campaigns, and seminaries to help them move forward. Really? Have the affluent and sophisticated institutional “churches” today advanced to where they **“have need of nothing”** or would Jesus say that they are actually **“wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked”** (Rev. 3:17)? Are the sophisticated institutional “churches” today now superior to that disorganized, poor, and simplistic Church mentioned in the New Testament? Nonsense! Such institutions are not the Church that has “grown up”, they are man-made “churches” that are “messed up”! The sophisticated institutional

“churches” today are no match for the power experienced by unorganized, decentralized, simplistic, uneducated, and persecuted Church of the first century.

Most of the practices that are now being viewed as “improvements” today were readily available to the early Church, but were *purposely rejected* by them in obedience to the commands of Jesus Christ. The reason the Church did not adopt a hierarchical leadership structure wasn’t because they hadn’t thought of it, but because Jesus had explicitly forbidden it (Matt. 20:25-28, Mark 10:42-44, Luke 22:24-27). The reason the leaders of the Church did not wear exaggerated clothing to distinguish themselves wasn’t because they didn’t have good tailors, but because Jesus condemned it (Matt. 23:5-7, Luke 20:46). The reason the Church did not have “church” buildings wasn’t because they didn’t have the money, but because Jesus told them they would not be worshipping in a temple anymore (John 4:21-24, 1Cor. 3:16, 6:19). The reason the Church did not have repetitive liturgies, chants, and prayers wasn’t because they were naive and unsophisticated, but because Jesus told them not to (Matt. 6:7). And the list goes on and on. Such practices are not enhancements; they are “negative enhancements”. These destructive practices cannot be considered beneficial, optional, or even neutral add-ons, *because they directly contradict the teachings of Jesus Christ!*

### 7.2.3.3 Unbiblical Problems

Those who have unbiblical practices also tend to have unbiblical problems. The types of unbiblical problems facing institutional “churches” usually stem from the fact that they themselves are unbiblical man-made institutions. Here are a few examples:

- Should we use our limited funds to put a new roof on the building or repave the parking lot?
- Should we keep our “pastor” for one more term or should we hire a new one?
- How can we liven up our Sunday service to keep people from joining the other popular church in town?
- What additional safeguards can we adopt to avoid getting sued by former disgruntled members?
- Why does Bill keep getting reappointed to the deacon position when nobody really likes him?
- What accounting practices need to change in order to conform to the new IRS regulations?
- Do you think we could fire the worship leader and hire a new one without losing a lot of the choir members?

Notice that out of all the Scriptures written to address the Church’s problems, *none of these unbiblical problems were ever mentioned*. You cannot find the answers to these problems in the Bible, because these problems did not exist. There are no Biblical answers for these unbiblical situations! Don’t you suppose that the early Church would have also needed instructions on how to rotate

“pastors”, raise funds for building projects, or hire worship leaders? What are the Biblical procedures for firing the church secretary?

Of course, the early Church had problems too, but they were of a completely different nature. Since the Church consists of people, they primarily had “people problems” as they dealt with unrepentant sin (1Cor. 5:11), charlatans (2Cor. 11:13), doctrinal disputes (Acts 15:2), etc. These types of “Biblical problems” still face the Church today because the nature of the Church has not changed. (The Church wouldn’t be so bad if it weren’t for all of those people!) ☺ The sign of spirituality is not whether the Church has problems, but whether they are able to deal with their problems in a spiritual manner (Gal. 6:1). The institutional “churches”, on the other hand, have essentially made themselves immune to the “people problems” experienced in the Church. Having trouble with someone? Just control them with impersonal services, hierarchical command structures, and “Robert’s Rules of Order”. If they do not comply, then just kick them out of your organization and let someone else deal with them!

Today there are entirely new categories of unbiblical problems not mentioned anywhere in the Bible, precisely because their unbiblical practices are not mentioned anywhere in the Bible! They have unbiblical problems with “hired” personnel, because they have unbiblical clerical positions. They have unbiblical problems with finances and regulations, because they are unbiblical non-profit corporations. And on and on it goes. There are leaders begging for money in fundraising campaigns, politics over who gets what position, lawyers hired to fight lawsuits, government regulations affecting their tax-exempt status, rivalries and conflicts between “churches”, etc. America, this is your “church”! These are not problems associated with the Church, these are the types of problems normally associated with a *business*. This is not surprising since many institutional “churches” are indeed non-profit corporations.<sup>§1.2.2.2</sup> The amount of time, money, and resources wasted dealing with problems caused by these unbiblical practices is simply astonishing. Most of the pressing issues discussed at one of these “church’s” business meetings usually have absolutely nothing to do with Biblical Christianity.

The reason that none of these problems were ever mentioned in the New Testament is because they weren’t even possible in the Church. This is still true today. *Those who fellowship as the Church today still do not face any of these unbiblical problems.* And it is wonderful! There are no parking lots, tax codes, mortgages, employees to fire, or any other such nonsense to contend with. This is simply unfathomable to the institutional mentality!

### 7.2.3.4 The Religion of Churchianity

The religion being practiced by the institutional “churches” today is radically different than the Christianity practiced during the first three centuries.<sup>§A.1</sup> Over time, the traditions of men have become so entrenched in the institutional “churches” as to circumvent most of Biblical Christianity. The average Joe is not experiencing the traditions of men in addition to Biblical Christianity; he is experiencing the traditions of men *instead* of Biblical Christianity.<sup>§7.2.1.1</sup> The average Joe today believes that his entire religious duty is simply to attend

“church”. Joe is not living a dynamic Christian life of daily fellowship, sharing the gospel, and ministering to others and then supplementing it by attending a traditional Sunday service. No, the Sunday service *is* his Christian experience! Joe may not even have another thought about Jesus the entire week. Many institutional leaders realize this, but then their solution is simply to get Joe more involved in their meetings and programs. Joe doesn’t need more meetings and programs; Joe needs Jesus! Tragically, there are many people today like Joe whose entire Christian experience is nothing but the traditions of men. The traditions of men have supplanted the very essence of Biblical Christianity, forming a new religion of *Churchianity*.<sup>§7.1.3</sup> Churchianity is offered to those who would rather have a religion about Jesus than a relationship with Jesus.

The religion of Churchianity tells people how to dress, when to stand up and sit down, what is suitable music, and sometimes even whom to marry and what food to eat. If you break one of their official “church” laws you may be in danger of having your membership revoked from their club. Some even have unwritten rules which are supposed to be implicitly understood by the members.

**“The institutions of Churchianity are not Christianity.”**  
– Oswald Chambers

For example, a Christian might not be allowed to have a leadership position in their “church” unless he holds certain unspoken doctrinal views, even though there is not any such official policy. Churchianity has become just another world religion in the same class as Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism. Unfortunately, many non-Christians see the lifeless shell of Churchianity and conclude they are not interested in *Christianity*.<sup>§1.2.4.1</sup> If only they could experience a personal relationship with Jesus Christ!

## 7.2.4 Our “church” isn’t That Bad

Many Christians have a hard time accepting the fact that their dynamic, cutting-edge, independent, evangelical “church” is indeed just another institutional “church”.<sup>§1.2.2</sup> They may agree that there are traditions of men in other denominations, but they justify themselves thinking, “Our church is not that bad.” But if you belong to *any* “church”, then this section surely applies to you! Your exciting modern multi-media celebration may not be anything like the dead ecclesiastical traditions of the “high church” denominations, but you fail to see that your “church” is built around the same flawed foundation as the other institutional “churches”, *but only to a lesser degree*.

Objection	Reality
Our church meets two other times during the week, not just on Sundays.	Yes, but you are still experiencing punctuated Christianity. <sup>§4.2.2.2</sup>
Our pastor is very humble and does not boss us around.	Yes, but he still holds an unbiblical position of authority. <sup>§5.1.1.3</sup>

Objection	Reality
Our church service does not have formal ecclesiastical traditions.	Yes, but you still have unbiblical “church” services.§4.2.2.1
Our church humbly meets in a rented school instead of an ornate building.	Yes, but it is still treated as a makeshift “temple”.§A.2
Our meetings are really spiritual and have good teaching.	Yes, but you still fellowship in a meeting-centric fashion.§4.2.2.3
Our laity are involved in the service and actively encouraged to share.	Yes, but there is still a division between clergy and laity.§6.2.1
Our church is very informal, flexible, popular, growing, dynamic, etc.	Yes, but it is still an unbiblical institutional division.§1.2.2

All of these things still stem from the same flawed institutional roots as the most blatant offenders. You may be much less institutional than others, *but you are still founded on the same institutional premises*. You may reject the dead traditions of the mainline “churches”, but you merely have new and improved versions of the same traditions. A lesser form of wrong is still wrong. It is not that everything you are doing is necessarily wrong, but only that *what you are* is still wrong .§1.3.2 And it doesn’t matter how good your worship band is!

It is easy for the Protestant denominations to reject the unbiblical practices of the Roman Catholic and Orthodox “churches”, but they have a hard time accepting that they are only mini-versions of the same false structure.§6.2.3 The Protestant “churches” are really just the illegitimate daughters of the Roman Catholic “church”. Most of their unbiblical practices and theology have been borrowed directly from the Roman Catholics with only minor changes in the details. For example, instead of having a “priest”, they have a “pastor”. Instead of having a “pope”, they have some kind of “denomination head”. Instead of having “church councils”, they have “church conferences”. If you walked into one of their sanctuaries, you might not be able to tell the difference between their “church”

**“The Reformation did not directly touch the question of the true character of God’s church.” – J. N. Darby**

and a Roman Catholic “church” (except for a possible statue of Mary). Many Protestants still have an altar, pulpit, pews, stained glass windows, and all sorts of other traditions of men that were automatically adopted as carry-overs from the Roman Catholics. The Protestants are still trying to run the same Roman Catholic institutional system; *they just think they are doing it better*. Protestantism is really just Roman Catholic-lite. Martin Luther did not go nearly far enough!

These things are difficult for many to accept, especially when their dynamic contemporary “church” is considered to be one of the “best in town”. Or at least one of the best in their eyes, or else they probably wouldn’t have gone there to begin with.§2.2.1 Some of them simply looked around and saw that it was not as *bad* as all of the other “churches” they visited. But the Church is not a “good” institution, or a “not so bad” institution, it is not an institution at all!§1.2.2 It is not the *amount* of institutional practices that makes it wrong, for an institutional “church” to exist at all is wrong...to any degree.

### 7.2.4.1 But God is Blessing Us

Some believe that God must surely approve of their institutional “church” or else they wouldn’t be so large, financially blessed, or growing numerically. This type of causality reasoning, however, is flawed just on the basis of logic alone. Perhaps God does not approve of your institutional “church” at all, but you are experiencing growth due to something else totally unrelated. Aren’t other false religions doing well these days? Perhaps Satan is giving an institutional “church” worldly success in order to keep its members under deception. Many secular non-profit organizations who oppose Christianity also have large organizations and big budgets and they do not even acknowledge God! Does this mean God is blessing them too? Was the greatness of Babylon proof that they were pleasing to God because they were allowed to judge Israel (Hab. 1:6)?

Some have used this flawed logic to assume they alone must be right because God is blessing them so much. They feel that their tremendous success gives them a “mandate” to promote their superior form of Christianity. But if such success were indeed indicative of God’s approval, then how can so many different institutional “churches” flourish when they each have *irreconcilable conflicts* in doctrine, structure, and practices! If both a Baptist “church” and a Presbyterian “church” are experiencing success, for example, then is God in favor of dunking or sprinkling? Does one denomination’s apparent success prove that they are doing everything right? Conversely, if your institutional “church” is not currently experiencing growth, does it prove that God is *against* you? Much of the increase in contemporary evangelical “churches” is really not growth anyway, but is merely *transferred attendance* due to “church” hopping from the mainline denominations, with few new conversions to Christ. Religious men are indeed busy building their institutional kingdoms, but this does not necessarily have anything to do with the kingdom of God.<sup>§7.2.3</sup>

“But we are really experiencing God’s presence in our Sunday services”, they claim. And this could be true, but do not mistake the warm feelings from contemporary worship music or the excitement from a dynamic speaker for the Spirit of God.<sup>§4.2.2.4</sup> You may indeed have some fire, but it may be strange fire (Num. 3:4). You can also evoke special feelings by sitting around a campfire with a guitar singing “Row, row, row your boat” or be captivated by a riveting story. You can feel warm all over through transcendental meditation, communing with spirit guides, or swaying back and forth to “Hare Krishna”, but such heightened experience is no indication of whether God is in it or not. Likewise, many charismatic “churches” have arrived at a *formula* for eliciting emotional worship through their choice of songs. Regardless of how exciting your worship time is, it does not legitimize your group. A much better indicator of God’s fullness is whether you are functioning in daily fellowship, sharing spiritual gifts, and serving one another.<sup>§3.1.2</sup> If you really believe your institutional “church” is experiencing God’s blessings, then why isn’t it experiencing these things?

The fact of the matter is that Christians are indeed blessed, but it isn’t because they have created institutional “churches”. Are you experiencing blessings *because of* your institutional status, or *in spite of* your institutional

status? God is simply about blessing *His people*, not because of man's institutional structures, but in spite of them!<sup>§1.3.2</sup> Jesus is present whenever two or three are gathered together in His name because they are His people, regardless of any unbiblical institutional mindset they may have adopted. The early Church did not have any such institutions and they did just fine!<sup>§7.1.3.1</sup> More than fine, they exceeded the power that any institutional "church" is exhibiting today. Do you really think God is blessing you because of your buildings, stained glass windows, robes, altars, organs, and pews? No, God is not interested in these inanimate objects, God wants to bless His children.

Notice that many of the great revivals of history did little to change the unbiblical institutional environment. People may experience lots of excitement at a revival meeting, but where is the lasting accountability, committed relationships, and daily fellowship? The Baptists reclaimed baptism by emersion, Charismatics rediscovered spiritual gifts, Pentecostals reemphasized the importance of holiness, etc., yet the dead institutional shell remains. The tragedy is that long after a revival wanes, the people will be left with nothing but yet another unbiblical institutional framework that continues to be mindlessly perpetuated. If you really want to experience a true revival, you should consider obeying the Scriptures and begin fellowshiping as the Church!

To whatever degree God has been able to bless His people confined in institutional environments, how much more so has God blessed His people who fellowship as the Church without the constraints of an institutional environment. *Whatever Life you think you are experiencing in an institutional "church" is not nearly as much as you would experience if you were fellowshiping as the Church in obedience to the Scriptures.* If God can still bless His people even though they are weighted down with institutional baggage, traditions of men, and false doctrines, how much more so will He bless them when they have been freed to worship Him in "**spirit and truth**" (John 4:23-24)? God pours out His Spirit, but it cannot be contained in any institutional structure. The institutional "churches" are simply not a suitable environment to contain a move of the Holy Spirit.<sup>§1.3.2</sup>

## 7.2.4.2 We Can Do Whatever We Want

Most institutional "churches" believe they have the authority to do whatever they want within their own organization, and they are right! They have created their own organization, so they have the right to run it however they want – and indeed they do!<sup>§1.2.2.1</sup> Then they say, "If you don't like it this way then go somewhere else because this is how *we* do things here." They don't really understand spiritual authority<sup>§5.1.2</sup> for they just do whatever is right in their own eyes (Judg. 17:6, 21:25). They feel free to tinker around with the Bride of Christ anyway they see fit. They call on God to bless their programs, ignoring the fact that they are *their* programs, not God's. When their leaders are honored for their institutional accomplishments they may say "Praise God", but in their hearts many of them are really accepting glory for themselves too! The institutional "churches" are managed by their leaders just like any other social, religious, or political organizations and the laws they pass during their "church" conferences merely obfuscate what is handed down as the decisions of men.<sup>§5.2.3</sup> *The positions*



*of men make the decisions of men resulting in the traditions of men in the “churches” of men!*

Ironically, the institutional establishment claims that those who fellowship as the Church are the ones who are doing whatever they want because they do not follow their traditions of men (Mark 7:5). It only appears that way to them because the Church follows the directives of the unseen Holy Spirit which is foreign to them. If those who fellowship as the Church really were just another organization, then shouldn't they also be allowed to make up their own practices just like the rest of them? No, they must be destroyed! 😊 The institutional “churches” claim they are following the “traditions of the fathers”, but their fathers were merely doing whatever they wanted which is how they got their traditions in the first place! The Church, however, does not do whatever it wants, nor does it follow what the “church fathers” want – *the Church follows what Jesus wants*. What a concept! We don't follow traditions, nor do we oppose traditions, we simply follow Jesus. Yes, that's right! The institutional “churches” need to stop voting and deciding things by committee, and start listening to the voice of God and obeying Him. Believe it or not (no, believe it) Jesus still speaks today!

**“We are not going to organize something for God to bless.”**

**– Leonard Ravenhill**

### 7.2.4.3 God Told Us To

It is rare that an institutional “church” leader ever claims to receive revelation from God before they start something new, but what if they did? “God told me that I am supposed to be the pastor.” “God told me to build a church building.” “God told me to call ourselves the First United Community Church.” While such claims are dubious as far as the Scripture is concerned, why would an otherwise respectable man of God just make up such things? Do you think the leaders of the institutional “churches” are *intentionally* leading their congregations into error? Certainly there have been charlatans who have purposely deceived their people, but what about caring “pastors” who honestly and sincerely believe they have heard from God?<sup>§6.3.2.1</sup> Are they all mistaken?

This phenomenon is not new, *because God is simply answering them according to their idols*. **“Anyone of the house of Israel who sets up idols in his heart and puts before his face a stumbling block of iniquity and then comes to the prophet, I the Lord will answer him according to the multitude of his idols.”** (Ezek. 14:4) If someone thinks that the Church needs a building, then low and behold they think God wants them to build a building. If someone thinks that Mary was immaculately conceived, then low and behold they think God wants them to pray to her. If you harbor a religious tradition in your heart, then God may answer you according to your idol as well. *Let it be strongly stated that some of these people think they are really be hearing from God*. But they only hear what they want to hear! When they inquire of the Lord they are given an answer according to the idolatry in their heart. For example, if someone prays to a dead “saint”, and if it is important enough, God may actually answer their prayer even

though He knows that they will mistake the answer as coming from a dead “saint”. The answer may indeed come from God (Ezek. 14:9, 1Ki. 22:23, 1Sam. 16:14), but they are interpreting it according to their own preconceived notions. Likewise, people often misinterpret the Scripture through the prism of their idols as they look to find support for their pet doctrines that are simply wrong. **“And for this reason, God sends them a strong delusion so they will believe the lie.”** (2Th. 2:11) It all stems from tainted hearts that are not completely yielded to the Holy Spirit.

#### 7.2.4.4 Modern Day Pharisees

The Pharisees may no longer exist as a sect of Judaism, but the spirit of the Pharisees continues to live on as a modern day sect of Churchianity.<sup>§7.2.3.4</sup> The pharisaical attitude is no longer based on Old Testament laws, but is now based on unwritten “church” rules: “If you want to be spiritual you need to go to this meeting.” “God won’t bless you unless you tithe to us.” “Don’t run in church!” “You are not a true Christian if you don’t go to our church.” The Pharisees exemplified a common problem that continues among Christians to this day. Jesus warned His disciples to **“watch out and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees”** (Matt. 16:6-12). The religious devotion of the Pharisees was unsurpassed

**“The Pharisees are not all dead yet, and are not all Jews.” – John McClintock**

by any other group and yet Jesus seemed to only have bad things to say about them (Matt. 23:13-33). Jesus related well with sinners, tax collectors, and just about every other group except for the

Pharisees. What were they doing wrong to bring about such words of condemnation from Jesus? Just like the institutional “churches” today, the Pharisees valued their rules, practices, laws, traditions, codes, structures, and regulations more than the Spirit of God. They loved their old wineskin more than the new wine!<sup>§7.2.2.4</sup>

The Pharisees claimed to follow God, but they did not recognize Jesus who was God in the flesh. They said, **“This man is not from God because he does not keep the Sabbath.”** (John 9:16) They accused Jesus of being of the devil (Mark 3:22, John 8:48), tried to stone Him (John 8:59, 10:33) and ultimately crucified Him (John 19:7,15). Likewise, modern day Pharisees are not content to simply allow the truth to coexist with their error, *they must eliminate the truth!* **“And you say, ‘If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers in shedding the blood of the prophets.’”** (Matt. 23:30) Many institutional “churches” operate in this same Pharisaical spirit that burned people at the stake, conducted inquisitions, and fought religious wars.<sup>§1.2.4.1</sup> Most institutional “churches” today believe that they would never be capable of doing such horrendous things, yet it is doubtful that many of them would even be able to recognize Jesus if He walked down the aisle on Sunday morning.<sup>§7.2.1.4</sup>

It is difficult for contemporary evangelical “churches” to accept the fact that their “pastor” may really just be a modern-day Pharisee. Their “pastor” stands above them at the altar in his robe (or suit and tie), delivers all the important prayers, and performs all of the religious rituals just like an Old Testament priest. Their “pastor” may seem so nice and caring, but so were the Pharisees. They

argue that their leaders are genuine Christians who are deeply committed to the Scriptures, prayer, and evangelism. Apparently they must be unaware that the Pharisees were *also* deeply committed to the Scriptures (John 5:39), prayer (Matt. 6:5), and evangelism (Matt. 23:15)! They would ridicule the Pharisees for all of their extra-Biblical traditions, when their leaders have installed just as many traditions of their own.<sup>§7.2.4</sup> When their leaders add new practices they think they are merely keeping in step with the times...well what did you think the Pharisees thought they were doing?

## 7.3 Practical Applications

Okay, but where do you go from here? It is one thing for people to recognize that certain practices are wrong, but only Jesus can lead you into the practices that are valid today. Christians must be able to hear from the Lord, because if they merely rely on a set of traditions, they too will fall into error. Many look to the “New Testament Church” as being perfect, but consider all of the gross errors that prevailed as early as 95 AD.<sup>§A.1.1.3</sup> Remember that both Adam and Satan fell despite having “perfect” environments. Likewise, meeting in a “house church” today may seem like a better structure compared to an institutional “church”,<sup>§2.2.1.2</sup> *but having a new wineskin does not guarantee that you will have new wine*. Some would try to hang on to their past and simply “patch” their current institutional “church” experience with elements of truth, but this won’t solve anything either. Even if an institutional “church” were to get rid of all of its unbiblical practices, they would still remain an unbiblical institutional entity.<sup>§1.2.2</sup>

Would you like someone now to tell you what the practices of the true Church really are? If so, then you probably better go back and re-read this chapter again. Even after all that has been written, some are still more concerned about having the right practices than they are about having the right Life which will then lead them to the right practices. If they were given a specific set of “how to’s” here, they would probably just mindlessly perpetuate them too. One of the dangers is that people might even begin to look to this book as a supreme guidebook to follow. To think that a book like this could ever replace the direction of the Holy Spirit is quite naive. Those who would try to mimic the practices of the “New Testament Church” are as equally wrong as those who try to mimic the practices of the institutional “churches”. You should not be trying to mimic anything; you should be looking to Jesus and receiving your directions from Him. The early Church is often referenced because it gives us a clearer picture of the truth than the institutional

**“What I complain of is, that the thoughts of men have been followed, and that which the Spirit has recorded as having existed in the primitive church has been imitated, instead of searching for what the word and the Spirit have declared concerning our present condition.”**

**– J. N. Darby**

“church” system we have today. But this is not so that you can go back and try to codify their practices and then mindlessly perpetuate them instead. *We are not seeking to relive the same practices of the early Church; we want the same Life of the early Church, which will then dictate the practices we are to have now.* We are not looking to revert back to the Church in its infancy, but to become the pure and spotless Bride **“having no stain or wrinkle or any such thing, but holy and unblemished”** (Eph. 5:27).

### 7.3.1 Rejecting Traditions of Men

Just like peeling back the layers of an onion, once you begin to remove the traditions of men, the true essence of Church may finally begin to come into focus. Once people are finally stripped of all their religious facades, it quickly becomes apparent what true spirituality they really possess. Without the external stimulation of institutional programs to prop them up, it will soon become evident who really has faith. Unfortunately, some who leave their institutional “churches” to fellowship as the Church are often tempted to bring their institutional baggage with them. They may have finally discovered a better wineskin, yet they are still trying to fill it with their same old wine. They may now find new freedom as they fellowship in the Church, but are tempted to revert back to their old institutional “church” patterns instead of waiting for the Lord for direction. They may fall back to the way they used to pray, or how they used to worship, or look to the programs used in their institutional “church”. Instead of returning to Egypt, they want to bring Egypt with them.<sup>§3.3.1.3</sup> In practice, those who have just come out of the institutional environment may require a significant amount of spiritual growth before they can adapt to fellowship in the Church.<sup>§3.3.1.1</sup> Many have been trained their entire lives to function in a false institutional environment, so it is quite natural for them to turn to their familiar religious ways when the need arises. This is not out of malice, for they are simply trying to be helpful in the only way that they have ever known.

Countless groups have started out to fellowship as the Church only to end up looking exactly like the institutional “churches” they once rejected. They may start out with a revival or move of the Holy Spirit, yet over time they eventually become wrapped in yet another institutional shell. For example, denominational offshoots such as the Anabaptists, Moravians, and Methodists once started out with great promise and yet less than a hundred years later they ended up looking just like any other institutional “church”. How does this happen (Gal. 5:7)? The formation of an institutional “church” is not an accident; it is a constant temptation of the flesh that must be diligently resisted! Every generation is tempted to look to a man, rituals, programs, or anything else other than total reliance on the Holy Spirit. *It only takes one small thread of error for the entire tapestry to be unwoven.* The first steps toward institutionalization never seem ominous at first, but they inevitably lead down a path to the same stale fruit observed in the mainline denominations. Once you let in even the slightest amount of institutional leaven, the downward spiral soon follows. What the Church is cannot be helped by what the Church isn’t! The institutional practices

of the world may indeed make an organization run better, but then it becomes just that, an organization of the world and something that is no longer the Church.<sup>§1.2.2</sup>

Some have excitedly begun to fellowship as the Church without really understanding the whole picture. They might start off by implementing one or two new Scriptural concepts, but then are unwilling to obey the Scripture all the way. They may reject the institutional hierarchy, yet still be tempted to look to a certain defacto leader as the “pastor” of the group. They may reject the “traditions of the fathers”, yet later fall into the same error of making their own decisions. **“It has happened to them according to the true proverbs, ‘The dog returns to its own vomit’ and ‘A sow that is washed goes back to wallow in the mud’.”** (2Pet. 2:22) If you go back and visit these “startups” a few decades later, they may be almost indistinguishable from the institutional “churches” they left. They may have better practices than the institutional “church” they left, but they still function as an institutional “church”.<sup>§7.2.4</sup> Such is the case with some “house churches” that may seem to have more Biblical basis than others, but are really just miniature forms of regular institutional “churches”.<sup>§2.2.1.2</sup> Remember, almost every mainline denomination once started out in rejection of the previous establishment, but just look at them now.

What is the safeguard against falling back into these institutional devices? There is none other than total reliance on the Holy Spirit. Once a group tries to contain, codify, or control Him, they will again have resorted to the arm of the flesh. If someone tries to re-introduce the traditions of men, the others must be diligent to address them then and there. And they will come! *Eternal vigilance is necessary on the part of the saints.* Some Christians may have an initial reservation about a practice when it is raised in a meeting, but have a tendency to passively tolerate it because they trust the person who brought it up or it reminds them of their religious past. But these things need to be rooted out with total abandonment! Forceful men lay hold of the kingdom of God (Matt. 11:12). The unbiblical practices of the institutional “churches” must never be allowed in the Church.

### 7.3.2 Accepting Traditions of God

Some make the mistake of thinking that they should not have any practices. It is their *practice* to avoid anything that could be considered a practice! But in reality, they do have practices that make up what is considered *normal* for them. They usually have some regular places that they meet, a common set of songs they sing, and a normal way in which their meetings flow. Their “set of norms” may be slightly different than a group of Christians in another city who also don’t think that they have any practices either. But they both need to realize that this is okay.<sup>§7.3.2.3</sup> The early Church was not afraid to use the word **“tradition”** (1Cor. 11:2, 2Th. 2:15, 3:6) and neither should you. Just realize that such traditions are not immutable laws that can never be changed. They should just be the normal practices that flow from the Holy Spirit. If the institutional “churches” ever want to mimic your “success”, you may find it amusing when they mindlessly try to sing the same songs or follow a similar meeting format. But you should not try to

avoid having practices just because someone else might misconstrue them to be something that they are not.

### 7.3.2.1 Direction of the Spirit

How then does the Church know which practices are from God? Simple, it is because they receive them from God! *You must be able to hear from the Holy Spirit in order to have the practices of the Holy Spirit.* If you cannot hear from the Lord, you will be relegated to following the latest fad, trial and error, doing what seems right, or simply guessing. This is exactly why there are so many traditions of men and exactly what you are *not* supposed to do. Do you understand the difference yet? If there isn't at least a claim that a practice was directed by God, then that practice is surely suspect. It is actually quite easy to discern which practices are from God: *It is the Church that discerns the traditions of God; it is men who make up the traditions of men.* Again, this becomes obvious just by examining what the traditions mean,<sup>§7.2.1</sup> where they came from,<sup>§7.2.2</sup> and observing their fruit.<sup>§7.2.3</sup>

As previously discussed, any new directives from God should be discerned by the whole Church assembled with its leaders, not just by one individual or committee.<sup>§5.1.3.3</sup> God's direction concerning circumcision, for example, came to Paul as a **“revelation from Jesus Christ”** (Gal. 1:11-12, 2:2) but was openly confirmed by the Church as a whole (Acts 15:1-31). What a contrast to a board of “elders” that brainstorm behind closed doors to hammer out a political agenda to impose upon their members! The Church is able to hear from the Lord *every day*, not once a year at a “church conference”.

Once the Church has discerned the Lord's will, then it is simply a matter of obedience. Christ's decisions for the Church are not suggestions, but are to be *obeyed* (Acts 16:4)! You cannot simply change your minds if things don't work out well because it was not your decision to make. If an insight *from the Lord* came to George, you cannot start down the path and then blame George if things don't go well. You are all responsible for discerning the directions of the Lord and who they come through is irrelevant. If you can either blame George or praise George for the results, then you are following George instead of Jesus. The Holy Spirit may establish certain practices and He also may abolish them. Thus, you must make sure you are always following the Holy Spirit and not the practices.<sup>§7.2.4</sup>

### 7.3.2.2 Order of the Spirit

The Holy Spirit is not the author of chaos, but of order. **“For God is not of disorder, but of peace....Let all things be done properly and in order.”** (1Cor 14:33,40) Order will flow from the leading of the Holy Spirit – *just make sure that you are following the Holy Spirit instead of the order.* Having “order”, however, does not necessarily mean things must be routine or monotonous. The Holy Spirit might bring about radical change, deep repentance, and challenge your comfort zones (but of course these will all be done in the proper “order”). 😊 Neither does “order” mean controlling, restrictive, ritualistic, or ceremonial, which are the

norm for man-made institutions. In contrast, there is much freedom in the Holy Spirit, but everything needs to be done at the proper time and place according to His leading. *Following the Holy Spirit leads to order, but having order does not necessarily mean you are following the Holy Spirit.* It is important for the Church to be organized, but it is not a man-made organization.<sup>§1.2.2.2</sup> Many secular corporations obviously have great structure and order, but they do not have the Holy Spirit. There is a big difference between following “Robert’s Rules of Order” and following the Holy Spirit’s order!

It should be pointed out that there is not necessarily anything wrong with pre-planning or re-occurring events as long as it is the Holy Spirit who does the pre-planning or wants the events to re-occur. A man might say “Let’s do this on that day” or the Holy Spirit might lead you to do something on a certain day – *but the two are not the same thing!* The problem in the institutional “churches” is not that things are pre-planned, but that they are pre-planned by men, not the Holy Spirit. *You are simply to do what the Holy Spirit says; whether you know about it in advance or repeat it in the future is irrelevant.* If over the course of time, something begins to look like a practice (or dare we say “tradition”) then that is fine as long as the Holy Spirit is still directing it. When the Holy Spirit stops, then you stop. Again, it is not wrong for you to have various practices as long as it is the Holy Spirit who sets those practices.

### 7.3.2.3 Freedom of the Spirit

Notice that Scripture mentions only a few specific practices for the Church as believers walked with great liberty and freedom in the Holy Spirit. **“Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.”** (2Cor. 3:17; cf. Jas. 2:12) Freedom in the Spirit does not mean you are free to do whatever you want.<sup>§7.2.4.2</sup> **“Everything is permissible, but not everything is profitable; everything is permissible, but not everything is edifying.”** (1Cor. 10:23) When the Church assembles together to deliberate, there may not necessarily be a lightning bolt with a direct word from the Lord, yet the Church can still discern for **“We have the mind of Christ.”** (1Cor. 2:16) Simply be filled with the Holy Spirit and then **“do whatever the occasion requires, for God is with you”** (1Sam. 10:7). If you are truly walking in the Spirit then what the Spirit wants may also be what you want. The two can be the same thing! **“Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart.”** (Psa. 37:4) If you truly **“delight yourself in the Lord”** your heart will also desire what He desires. This is not freedom *from* the Spirit, but freedom *in* the Spirit!

Because of this freedom in Christ, it is not unusual for there to be minor differences in practices among those who are fellowshiping as the Church today.<sup>§7.1.2.2</sup> Some have referred to these as different “flavors”, “streams”, or “movements”, but these labels are purely artificial. It is actually quite normal for Christians in different areas to have different needs, different problems, and different giftings. You might sing different songs, operate with different spiritual gifts, use different forms of evangelism, pray in different ways, etc., but you are all still part of the same Church. Sometimes Christians in the same Church may

disagree about practices such as head coverings, speaking in tongues, or the Lord's Supper, but they are nonetheless still the Church.<sup>§2.1.2.2</sup> Whenever disputes arise, Christians should gather together with their leaders and discern what the Lord's will is.<sup>§5.1.3.3</sup> There is no reason to quibble over a controversial doctrine from an ambiguous verse when the Church can still receive discernment from the Lord today. The same God who inspired the Scriptures can still give you clarification of the Scriptures. Attempts to reconcile such disagreements are beyond the scope of this discussion, but there are many other books written on these topics.<sup>§B.1</sup> Genuine Christians may disagree about some practices, but they must continue to fellowship as one Church without forming divisions around these practices.

The early Church never had any reason to make everyone do everything the same way regarding things that were non-essential. Christians should not let others sit in judgment over them in areas where they have freedom in Christ (1Cor. 10:29, Gal. 2:4). Christians clearly have personal freedom in Christ in regards to celebrating holidays, for example.<sup>§A.4.1</sup> **“Therefore, don't let anyone judge you in regard to eating and drinking, or in respect of a festival, new moon, or Sabbath day.”** (Col. 2:16) Christians also

**“Only what God has commanded in His word should be regarded as binding; in all else there may be liberty of actions.”**  
– John Owen

have similar flexibility regarding dietary preferences. **“Do not let the one eating despise the one not eating, or the one not eating judge the one eating, for God has accepted him.”** (Rom. 14:3) Don't become like institutional control freaks and think that everyone else has to do whatever you are doing.<sup>§5.2.2</sup> It is more

important to be concerned about what Jesus wants to do among you, than what Jesus is doing among others (John 21:22). Christians must be careful, however, not to use their freedom as a stumbling block to others (1Cor. 8:9) or as an excuse for sin (Gal. 5:13, 1Pet. 2:16).

## 7.4 Challenge Questions

- Is your “church” participating in any of the pagan practices mentioned above? Do they also claim to be following God?
- Can you honestly imagine that Jesus' dealings with His disciples were anything like the way your “pastor” or “priest” conducts a religious service?
- Can the practices of your “church” be found in the Scriptures? If not, then by what authority are they done?
- If your “church” has a practice that is not found in Scripture, can you at least document when someone claimed to have received that direction from the Lord?
- Why didn't the early Church have any issues dealing with budgets, taxes, salaries, hiring, firing, parking lots, or building maintenance? Why does yours?



# Conclusion

If not this, then what? Perhaps you don't like it, but can you find anything wrong with this picture of the Church according to the Scriptures? Would you agree that no concept of the Church can be correct *if it contradicts the authority of the New Testament*? Do you know of another model that can account for *all* the Scriptures? If you think this is just one way of looking at things, can you admit that it is at least an equally valid possibility? And if you can accept that, can you also agree that the institutional "churches" are doing some things that are at least very suspect? Notice that the normal institutional reaction does not deny that the teachings of this book are Scriptural, but they usually just begin to rationalize their own questionable practices instead – practices that would never be derived or even imagined from a straightforward reading of the Scriptures. As you read through the book of Acts, for example, does it honestly look anything like the once-a-week Sunday morning service you experience in your institutional "church"?<sup>§7.2.1.4</sup> If you really believe that your institutional "church" can somehow pass as being Biblical, are you open to the fact that there could at least be a **"more excellent way"** (1Cor. 12:31)? Do you want to follow Jesus as much as possible or as little as possible? If you really **"love the truth"** (2Th. 2:10), *are you prepared to follow the truth, no matter where it leads?*

## c.1 The Challenge

Just as wisdom cries out and raises its voice in the public squares (Prov. 1:20-33), the truth of the Church has been lifted up as a standard and the critics are challenged to show otherwise. One of the beautiful things about this book is that once you have read it, it may not be so easy to suppress the seeds of truth that have been planted. Today you might argue, "I like my church the way it is" or "Our pastor is so awesome", but one day your words may ring hollow in your own ears. Over time, you may begin to experience for yourself the unbiblical nature of "church" politics, hierarchical authority structures, and the traditions of men. And then when wonderland doesn't seem as wonderful to you as it does right now, the truths of this book will ring all the louder. It does not matter how right things seem to be going in your institutional "church", if what your "church" *is*, is wrong.<sup>§1.2.2</sup> You might say, "Oh, that is just your opinion," but now perhaps it has also become your opinion! How's that? Deep down many Christians will not be able to deny that *this is also their own honest interpretation of the very same verses*. Some just don't want to admit it or obey it because they have too much at stake in their institutional "churches". But is that the Spirit of Christ? By now you may have found something in this book to criticize, *but what about all of the other things that you can't deny?* Would you stand on a mountain of unbiblical institutional "church" practices and then reject these truths about the Church because one or two things were not explained to your satisfaction? What

about all the areas that you *do* agree with that your institutional “church” is still not doing? Are you willing to violate your own conscience in those areas just to continue to live a lie of convenience?

Unless you have been skipping around, you have just been presented a systematic analysis of the Church that is consistent with Scripture. The implications of this truth can only lead us to wonder what kind of supernatural forces have been at work to produce such spiritual blindness to deceive so many for so long. Are you really trying to understand what is being said, or are you just trying to find things to nitpick at because you have already decided that you are not going to change from your institutional environment? Honestly? Some may feel conflicted or offended when they realize that their religious experience does not line up with the Scriptures, and some will even find themselves fighting against the Church. Yet at the same time, these concepts are eagerly received by those who love the truth as it fans the flames of their faith. If you want to try to dismiss this book as just another theory, then realize that it is at least a good theory for it can account for all the Scriptures, while the institutional “church” systems employed by most Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Orthodox “churches” clearly cannot.

## c.2 The Testimony of Scripture

If you are skeptical, then please, oh please, study these things in the Scriptures for yourself. It is not uncommon for institutional “churches” to try to lash out and tarnish those who fellowship as the Church with all kinds of ad hominem attacks.<sup>§3.3.1.2</sup> They can do that all they want, *and yet the Scriptures will still be true!* You are asked to be like the Bereans and look into the Scriptures for yourself before jumping to any conclusions (Acts 17:11). You are asked to do this even if you may not agree with everything, because there is confidence that most Christians who are honest with themselves will eventually arrive at the same conclusions. Feel free to consult a Greek interlinear, Strongs, Vines, or whatever other Bible tools you have to investigate these Scriptures. *It is time for you to leave the realm of popular opinion and investigate the Scriptural facts!*

If someone wants to argue against these truths, they should be prepared to account for the comprehensive testimony of Scripture. Some have constructed entire theologies around the *interpretation of a single verse* that seems to make a really compelling point, but then their interpretation contradicts other verses when the Scripture is examined as a whole. Do not make the mistake of ignoring hundreds of undeniable examples, patterns, and commands in Scripture regarding the Church, in order to rationalize an institutional theology that is based on only one or two verses from one particular Bible translation. Many people exist in a theological microcosm without ever understanding the big picture. The Scripture must be taken as a whole according to the context and intent in which they were written, not a piecemeal approach where someone picks a verse here or there and twists them out of context in order to justify their preconceived theological notions.

When confronted with the entire testimony of Scripture, some may become confused thinking that the Bible contradicts itself. Hopefully this book will contradict itself no more or no less than they think that the Bible contradicts itself! ☺ One of the cardinal rules of Bible interpretation is to let the Scripture interpret Scripture. Let the Scriptures that are clear and specific prevail upon Scriptures that are less clear or ambiguous. For example, any valid theory about leadership in the Church must be in alignment with the clear statements of Jesus Christ that there are no positions of authority (Matt. 20:25-28, Mark 10:42-44, Luke 22:24-27), seats of honor (Matt. 23:5-7, Luke 14:7-11, 20:46), or religious titles (Matt. 23:8-10) in the Church. When a Greek word could be interpreted to have two different connotations, then the meaning that confirms the clear teachings of the rest of Scripture must be chosen.<sup>§5.1.2.3</sup> Notice there are several Greek words that unequivocally could have indicated mandatory obedience,<sup>§5.1.2.1</sup> absolute commands,<sup>§5.1.2.3</sup> or authoritarian rule <sup>§5.2.2.2</sup> to support the notion of ecclesiastical positions, but none of those Greek words are *ever* used to indicate positional authority among Christians. Thus, if you still think that Scripture allows positions of authority in the “church”, then *you* are the one who would have a contradiction on your hands.

**“The Word of God well understood and religiously obeyed is the shortest route to spiritual perfection. And we must not select a few favorite passages to the exclusion of others. Nothing less than a whole Bible can make a whole Christian.” – A. W. Tozer**

The Bible must also be interpreted according to the historical, literary, and cultural contexts in which it was written. Newly invented concepts cannot later be superimposed upon the Bible with any academic integrity. You are not allowed to take a Biblical word from the first century and then redefine it to fit in an unbiblical institutional environment today. Biblical truth can only be correctly understood in a Biblical context! Don’t change the Scripture to conform to your experiences; change your experiences to conform to the Scriptures. For example, the word “church” in the Bible never referred to a white building with a steeple that people go to once a week on Sunday morning. Likewise, the word “pastor” in the Bible never referred to the head of a Protestant “church” who wears a robe, delivers a sermon, lives in a parsonage, and collects a salary.<sup>§6.2.3.2</sup> In fact, you would not have any idea what a “pastor” is in the Bible without examining all of the related Scriptures, because the word “pastor” only occurs once in most English translations of the New Testament without any mention of what it is.<sup>§6.1.4.2</sup> It is okay to scrutinize any individual verse as much as desired, but then it must also be viewed in context and how it relates to all other verses so that all the Scripture agrees without any contradictions. In the end, you may not like what the Scripture says, but are you willing to obey it?

## c.3 The Call to Obedience

This book may seem cumbersome at times as it unravels all the complexities of the institutional “church” system, but fellowshiping in the Church is really quite simple. Be born again and follow the leading of the Holy Spirit.<sup>§1.3.1</sup> Any Christian in the early Church would have been oblivious to any of the ludicrous intricacies of denominational conferences, non-profit incorporation, hierarchical leadership structures, marketing strategies, temple architecture, etc. If you went up to a Christian in the early Church and asked them about any of these things, they wouldn’t have any idea what you were talking about.<sup>§1.2.1</sup> They just loved Jesus and followed Him! Fellowship in the Church is not about joining a movement; it is simply about following Jesus. This book may be able to tell you much about the Church, but it is no substitute for actually fellowshiping as the Church. The challenge is to put these things into practice. Many of these truths of the Church may seem easy to grasp intellectually, but walking them out on a daily basis can be difficult at times.<sup>§2.3.3.2</sup> These truths may seem heavy to some, but this teaching on the Church is really just milk (1Cor. 3:2, Heb. 5:12-13).

If you have just now read through these concepts for the first time, it is recommended that you come back and read the book again about a year later after you have tried to implement these things for a while. There will be so many concepts that you may not be able to initially grasp at a deep level. Many things may seem to make sense when you read it through the first time, but there is far more here than the average person from an institutional background will be able to assimilate all at once. Indeed, most Christians will already agree with much that is written in this book, and yet they are simply not obeying it. It is not easy for people to quickly sacrifice all they have acquired in a comfortable institutional environment where they feel wanted, needed, or talented for the sake of the truth alone. When you decide to become a doer of the word, instead of a hearer of the word only (Jas. 1:22-25), a whole realm of spiritual growth will open up to you that you never dreamed of. And it is all right there in the Scriptures that you may have

**“If God has called you, do not spend time looking over your shoulder to see who is following you.”**

**– Corrie Ten Boom**

read a hundred times, but were not in a position to understand because of your institutional conditioning. Some people want to know: “What will I get out of this?” “Who else is already doing this?” or “What will others think?” These are all the wrong questions! If you are really committed to the truth of Scripture, then shouldn’t you be willing to obey Jesus Christ in these things regardless of who else is involved or what you think you can get out of it? God is looking for faithful men who will be whole-heartedly committed to Him. Is that *you*?

Before you reject any of this for being too purist, theoretical, or hypothetical, you should know that the Church described in this book is functioning just fine in thousands of places all over the world today.<sup>§B.2</sup> The same gospel is still bearing fruit and growing today (Col. 1:6). This is not a utopian theory or unachievable pipe dream – everything written here has been independently verified by the lives of

Christians who have been putting these things into practice every day! This may seem new to you, *but nothing here is new!* The truths of the Church still work just as well today as they did in the first century. This was not just for another time; *this is being lived out today!* These truths of the Church are founded in the Scriptures, confirmed by the Holy Spirit, demonstrated by the early Church, and still experienced by Christians today! And there is nothing preventing you from applying these same truths of the Scripture to your life *right now*. If you are already a Christian, then you are already a member of the Church and simply need to begin functioning like one.<sup>§1.3.1.2</sup> No other accessories are required! Sorry, but there isn't anything else you can sign up for here and no other organization you need to join.

How about it then? Are you willing to stop playing “church” and start functioning as the Church? Are you done shopping in a religious toy store full of man-made implements? Have you grown weary of the politics of an institutional social structure? Are you ready to give up the artifacts of institutional life and start living the Christian life of faith, hope, and love in the power of the Holy Spirit? Are you willing to tear down the religious facade and deal with your own heart-felt problems among a group of genuine Christians who just want more of Jesus? Do you long for the presence of God amidst an environment of indescribable love?

Let the journey begin!



# Appendix A:

## Historical Examples

Now let us take some of what we have learned and apply it all the way through in analyzing the importance of a few religious traditions. After people begin fellowshiping as the Church for a few years, there are usually a few topics that come up in particular. This supplemental material explores some more detailed aspects of the institutional “church” machinery that surpass the initial purposes of this book. Yes, Alice, the rabbit hole does go deeper! 😊 This appendix includes quotations from the writings of the early Christians in order to set the historical record straight for those who imagine that they have been following “the traditions of the church fathers”.<sup>§7.2.2.1</sup> But let it be stated that none of these quotations are needed in order to prove any particular points of the book. A similar analysis could have been done on several other topics, but these should provide a good start for anyone who is seeking the truth.

### A.1 From Church to “church”

How did the early Christians transition from functioning as a Biblical Church to an institutional “church”? Those who are members of man-made denominations such as the Roman Catholic and Orthodox “churches” today believe they are merely a continuation of the early Church. They say they are dutifully following the *oral traditions* passed down by the “church fathers” to justify their myriad of unbiblical traditions of men.<sup>§7.1.3</sup> They reject the Protestants’ claims to authenticity because they cannot document any historical continuity of their institutional organizations from the beginning. But surprise, there were no such man-made institutional “churches” from the beginning. The identity of the Roman Catholic and Orthodox “churches” did not emerge until centuries later, but they can make the claim of being the first institutional “churches”. The ongoing historical context of the Church, however, continued to exist in pockets of believers both inside and outside of the Roman Catholic and Orthodox “churches”, despite the fact that the institutional establishment kept trying to kill them.<sup>§1.2.4.1</sup>

As you will clearly see documented below, the practices of the Church did not come from the Roman Catholic “church”, the Roman Catholic “church” broke from the practices of the early Church. The early Church flourished for nearly three centuries before false leaders began to establish unbiblical positions of authority in the first widely recognized institutional “churches”. By this time, many Christians were no longer functioning as a spiritual organism, and thus they eventually devolved into a *physical organization* condoned by the secular Roman government. This should not be surprising, since the influences that deceive Christians into starting institutional “churches” today are the exact same

influences that initially deceived them back then.<sup>§7.3.1</sup> The same desires to create false positions of authority, build proprietary organizations, and adopt superfluous traditions of men were just as tempting in the early Church as they are now.

### A.1.1 What Went Wrong?

The marked decline of spirituality among the early Christians is clearly documented by their own writings. Anyone who believes the Church just continued to advance and improve into its current form is simply not aware of Church history. It was not an advancement, but a clear and indisputable *decline* that led to creation of the first institutional “churches” around the fourth century. Such institutional practices were not improvements as the “church” matured, for they were explicitly rejected by the early Church and the Scriptures.<sup>§7.2.3.2</sup> The writings of the early Christians document this decline regarding unbiblical oral traditions,<sup>§A.1.1.1</sup> corruption of leadership,<sup>§A.1.1.2</sup> cessation of spiritual gifts,<sup>§A.1.1.3</sup> construction of “church” buildings,<sup>§A.2.2</sup> institutional tithing,<sup>§A.3.3</sup> and observance of pagan holidays such as Christmas <sup>§A.4.1.1</sup> and Easter.<sup>§A.4.1.2</sup> Does your institutional “church” do any of these things? *The early Church did not!* A similar analysis could have been done with icons, clerical robes, incense, and a number of other unbiblical practices that were also condemned by the early Church. In all of these cases, history records that many Christians followed the teachings of Scriptures up until about the fourth century, at which time an *abrupt shift* occurred. Why did so many Christians depart from the Scriptural traditions practiced by the early Church and create unbiblical institutional “churches”?

#### A.1.1.1 Drifting from the Scriptures

The early Church firmly held to a position similar to *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone) in that the authority of Scripture obviously superseded any oral tradition or other “church” teaching.<sup>§5.1.3.4</sup> But notice the sudden shift from this position with the emergence of the institutional “churches” during the fourth century.

*Scripture:*

- **“They worship Me in vain, teaching doctrines that are rules of men. You leave the commandment of God and hold the tradition of men...You happily set aside the commandment of God in order that you may keep your tradition!...You nullify the Word of God by your tradition that you have handed down and you do many similar things like that.”** (Jesus Christ, quoted by *Mark*, c. 50 AD)
- **“That in us you may learn not to go above what has been written.”** (Paul of Tarsus, *Corinthians*, Book II, c. 55 AD)

*Early Church Confirmation:*

- “When, however, the Gnostics are refuted from the Scriptures, they turn round and accuse these same Scriptures, as if they were not correct, nor of



authority. They claim they are ambiguous and that the truth cannot be extracted from them by those who are ignorant of tradition. For they allege that the truth was not delivered by means of written documents, but by oral tradition.” (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book III, c. 180 AD).

- “If it is nowhere written, then let him fear the woe that comes on all who add to or take away anything from the written word.” (Tertullian, *Against Hermogenes*, c. 200 AD)
- “[A false leader] says, ‘Let nothing be innovated, nothing maintained, except what has been handed down.’ But what is that tradition? Where do we find this practice descending from the authority of the Lord and of the Gospel? Or does it come from the commands and the epistles of the apostles? For that, those things which are written must be done.” (Cyprian, *Epistle LXXIII*, c. 250 AD)

#### *Institutional “church” Reversal:*

- “Of the dogmas and practices preserved in the Church, some we possess from written teaching and others we receive from the tradition of the apostles, handed on to us in mystery. In respect to religion, both are of the same force. No one will contradict any of these, no one, at any rate, who is even moderately versed in ecclesiastical matters.” (Basil the Great, *On The Holy Spirit*, c. 375 AD)
- “But in regard to those observances which we carefully attend and the whole world keeps, which derive not from Scripture but from tradition, we are given to understand that they are recommended and ordained to be kept, either by the apostles themselves or by plenary councils, the authority of which is quite vital in the Church” (Augustine, *Letter to Januarius*, c. 400 AD)

What an incredible reversal! This does not mean that all oral tradition should be ignored, but clearly it should never be placed on equal footing to the Scripture. Such oral tradition was valued by the early Church, yet it was always held *subservient* to the Scriptures. Again, it was not until around the fourth century that the institutional “churches” decided to hold their oral traditions equal to the Scriptures.<sup>§7.2.2.1</sup> But this contradicts the writings of the *early* “church fathers” who supposedly gave them their oral tradition, because they said that the Scripture is the supreme authority!

“There is, brethren, one God, the knowledge of whom we gain from the Holy Scriptures, and from no other source....Whatever things, then, the Holy Scriptures declare, at these let us look, and whatsoever things they teach, these let us learn.” (Hippolytus, *Against Noetus*, c. 205 AD)

“It will be your duty, however, to present your proofs out of the Scriptures, as plainly as we do.” (Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, c. 213 AD)

“If, indeed, there is anyone who can discover something better, and who can establish his assertions by clearer proofs from Holy Scriptures, let his opinion be received in preference to mine.” (Origen, *De Principiis*, Book II, c. 225 AD)

Why should the institutional “churches” submit to the authority of Scripture over their oral traditions of their “church fathers”? Because the *early* “church fathers” *they claim to follow* told them to! Instead of relying on their supposed “inside information”, quite the contrary we see that the early “church fathers” merely looked to the Scriptures and attempted to interpret what they mean – just as anyone can still do today.

“Those who are ready to toil in the most excellent pursuits will not desist from the search after truth, till they get the demonstration from the Scriptures themselves.” (Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies*, Book VII, c. 195 AD)

“This work has been committed to the earthly treasure house of common speech, a writing which anybody can read, and when it is read aloud, it can be understood by anyone.” (Origen, *Commentary on John*, Book I, c. 225 AD)

Scripture confirms that no “secret knowledge” from the “church fathers” is ever needed to interpret the Scriptures. **“For we do not write you anything other than what you can read and understand, and I hope that you will understand to the end.”** (2Cor. 1:13) The “church fathers” searched the Scriptures and expounded on the Scriptures and the very idea that their writings would one day be considered equal to the Scripture would have been immediately condemned by them! These “church fathers” never considered their own words to be sacred or inspired like the Scriptures. Thus, if you really want to follow the “traditions of the fathers”, then you cannot consider their oral tradition equal to Scripture, because the early “church fathers” said not to! Ultimately, the real reason some institutional “churches” want their oral tradition to be considered *equal* with Scripture is because in practice they place their own contradictory traditions *over* the Scripture.<sup>§7.2.3.4</sup>

The traditionalists argue, “Should we be willing to throw away 2000 years of the traditions of the church fathers merely to observe someone’s interpretation of Scripture today?” No, you should throw away 1700 years of the traditions of men, to embrace the original teachings in Scripture from Jesus Christ and the apostles...*which were also supported by the early “church fathers”!* You know, those same “church fathers” who explicitly condemned the very traditions that the Roman Catholic and Orthodox “churches” claim they started! Christians should not be following any “church fathers”, they should be following Jesus! If you are following the traditions of the “church fathers”, then you are merely following fallible men! You should never be looking to the writings of the “church fathers” over the Scriptures themselves.

### A.1.1.2 Corruption of Leadership

For hundreds of years, the early Church continued to embrace the priesthood of all believers according to the Scriptures.<sup>§3.1.1.1</sup> But notice the sudden shift from this position with the emergence of the institutional “churches” during the fourth century.

*Scripture:*

- **“For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.”** (Paul of Tarsus, *Timothy*, Book I, c. 63 AD)
- **“But you are an elite class, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s possession.”** (Simon Peter, *Peter*, Book I, c. 63 AD)

*Early Church Confirmation:*

- “All the disciples of the Lord are priests, for they inherit here neither lands nor houses. Rather, they serve God and the altar continually...” (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book IV, c. 180 AD)
- “The spiritual man is, then, the truly kingly man. He is the sacred high priest of God.” (Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies*, Book VII, c. 195)
- “We are the true worshippers and the true priests, who, praying in spirit, offer a sacrifice in spirit: prayer, which is a proper and acceptable victim to God.” (Tertullian, *On Prayer*, c. 198 AD)

*Institutional “church” Reversal:*

- “The bishop is the minister of the word, the keeper of knowledge, the mediator between God and you in the various parts of your divine worship. He is the teacher of piety and next after God. He is your father, who has begotten you again to the adoption of sons by water and the Spirit. He is your ruler and governor; he is your king and potentate; he is, next after God, your earthly god, who has a right to be honored by you.” (*Apostolic Constitutions*, Book II, c. 390 AD)
- “As to a good shepherd, let the lay person honor him, love him, reverence him as his lord, as his master, as the high priest of God, as a teacher of piety.” (*Apostolic Constitutions*, Book II, c. 390 AD)

How could they go so wrong? Many are quick to blame the downfall of the Church on the Roman Emperor Constantine and the eventual merging of “church and state” with Rome’s official adoption of the Christian religion. Although Constantine claimed to have a religious experience, he was clearly *not a Christian* while he oversaw many of the “church’s” affairs, appointed bishops, and even gave himself the pagan title of “Pontiff”. (It was not until his deathbed that Constantine was baptized and supposedly converted.) Since Constantine’s interests were often politically motivated, many pagan and worldly practices were allowed to intermingle with Christianity in the name of tolerance.<sup>§7.2.1.1</sup>

The damage Constantine inflicted upon the Church is undeniable, but what kind of true spiritual leaders would have allowed themselves to go along with such unbiblical practices in the first place? From about the fourth century on, there is little indication that many of these so-called “church fathers” were ever *born again of the Spirit*.<sup>§1.1.1.1</sup> Such men did not become part of the family of God by spiritual birth, but became institutional members of a quasi-political religious organization under the control of the Roman Empire. There is no doubt that these men firmly believed in the Christian *cause*, but this was no different than those who join organizations to save the environment or advance a political cause. They wanted to serve Christ without actually being filled with Christ! Some were committed to their religion and were even willing to suffer and die for their organization, but so are the leaders of false religions who were also never born again. How was their zeal for their religion (Rom. 10:2-3) any different than the Pharisees?<sup>§7.2.4.4</sup> All of their “church councils” make no difference whatsoever *if most of the attendees were not born again of the Spirit*.<sup>§5.2.3.2</sup> Why else would they allow so many pagan practices to infiltrate the Church?

In reality, several false leaders had infiltrated the Church long before Constantine entered the scene.<sup>§6.3.1.2</sup> Consider what some of the early “church fathers” wrote concerning some of the so-called “bishops” of Rome:

[Zephyrinus, 199-217 AD] “...an ignorant and illiterate individual, and one unskilled in ecclesiastical definitions. And inasmuch as Zephyrinus was accessible to bribes, and covetous, Callistus, by luring him through presents, and by illicit demands, was enabled to seduce him into whatever course of action he pleased. And so it was that Callistus succeeded in inducing Zephyrinus to create continual disturbances among the brethren.” (Hippolytus, *Book IX*, c. 225 AD)

[Callistus, 217-222 AD] “Callistus propounded the opinion, that, if a bishop was guilty of any sin, if even a sin unto death, he ought not to be deposed. About the time of this man, bishops, priests, and deacons, who had been twice married, and thrice married, began to be allowed to retain their place among the clergy....But he asserted that likewise the parable of the tares is uttered in reference to this one: ‘Let the tares grow along with the wheat;’ or, in other words, let those in the church who are guilty of sin remain in it.” (Hippolytus, *Book IX*, c. 225 AD)

[Stephen, 254-257 AD] “...while we remember his audacity and pride, we bring a more lasting sadness on ourselves from the things that he has wickedly done....And in this respect I am justly indignant at this so open and manifest folly of Stephen, that he who so boasts of the place of his episcopate, and contends that he holds the succession from Peter, on whom the foundations of the Church were laid, should introduce many other rocks and establish new buildings of many churches.” (Firmilian, quoted by Cyprian, *Epistle LXXIV*, c. 256 AD)

How could such a thing happen with apostolic succession firmly in place? Such a thing happened precisely because apostolic succession was firmly in

place!<sup>§5.2.1.4</sup> These early “church fathers” said that the “bishops” of Rome were corrupt and heretical, and yet both the Roman Catholic and Orthodox “churches” still rely upon their corrupt traditions. Why didn’t they heed the warnings of these “church fathers”? The emergence of false leaders in the Church should be no surprise, however, since there were false leaders in the Church from the very beginning. Don’t you remember Paul’s warning: **“I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. And among you yourselves, men will arise speaking perverted things to draw away disciples after themselves.”** (Acts 20:29-30) Such things should be anticipated and must always be diligently guarded against in the Church.<sup>§7.3.1</sup>

### A.1.1.3 Decline in Spirituality

All the spiritual gifts mentioned in Scripture were quite prevalent among the early Church for several centuries.<sup>§3.1.1.2</sup> Is it any surprise that the supernatural gifts of the Spirit also began to disappear from the institutional “churches” during the fourth century?

*Scripture:*

- **“And in the Church, God has placed first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, and different kinds of tongues.”** (Paul of Tarsus, *Corinthians*, Book II, c. 55 AD)
- **“Each one has received a gift to serve one another as good stewards of the multi-faceted grace of God.”** (Simon Peter, *Peter*, Book I, c. 63 AD)

*Early Church Confirmation:*

- “For the prophetic gifts remain with us, even to the present time. And hence you ought to understand that [the gifts] formerly among your nation have been transferred to us.” (Justin Martyr, *Dialogue of Justin*, c. 160 AD)
- “We do also hear many brethren in the Church, who possess prophetic gifts, and who through the Spirit speak all kinds of languages, and bring to light for the general benefit the hidden things of men, and declare the mysteries of God...” (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book V, c. 180 AD)
- “Now all these signs [including tongues and prophecy] are forthcoming from my side without any difficulty.” (Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, Book V, c. 207 AD)
- “Among us there is no one who from time to time does not feel the gift of grace of the Spirit. We begin to have insights into the mysteries of the faith. We’re able to prophesy, to speak with wisdom. We become steadfast in hope, and receive the gifts of healing, and demons are made subject to our authority.” (Hilary of Poitiers, *Homilies on the Psalms*, c. 350 AD)

*Institutional “church” Reversal:*

- “This whole place is very obscure: but the obscurity is produced by our ignorance of the facts referred to and by their cessation, being such as then

used to occur but now no longer take place. And why do they not happen now? Why look now, the cause too of the obscurity has produced us again another question: namely, why did they then happen, and now do so no more?" (Chrysostom, *Homilies on First Corinthians*, XXIX, c. 370 AD)

- "How then, brethren, because he that is baptized in Christ, and believes on Him, does not speak now in the tongues of all nations, are we not to believe that he has received the Holy Ghost?...Why is it that no man speaks in the tongues of all nations? Because the Church itself now speaks in the tongues of all nations." (Augustine, *Tractates on John*, XXXII, c. 400 AD)

As you can see, the supernatural gifts of the Spirit did not cease to exist when the New Testament was completed or the last apostle died or any other such nonsense. In fact, the supernatural gifts of the Spirit *never* ceased to function in the Church, for there is a historical record of them occurring all the way up until today. No, the reason that the spiritual gifts began to cease in the institutional "church" during the fourth century is because they were not walking by the Spirit. Perhaps Constantine could be blamed for the formation of institutional Christianity, but he cannot be blamed for taking away the Holy Spirit. Indeed, the decline of spirituality among many Christians had begun long before then:

"Thus has the vigor of faith dwindled away among us; thus has the strength of believers grown weak. And therefore the Lord, looking to our days, says in His Gospel, 'When the Son of man cometh, think you that He shall find faith on the earth?' We see that what He foretold has come to pass." (Cyprian, *On the Unity of the Church*, c. 250 AD)

Again, Jesus himself pointed out that parts of the Church were already falling into error as early as 95 AD. Notice the severity of the Church's problems: **"you have left your first love"** (Rev. 2:4), **"you hold to the teaching of Balaam"** (Rev. 2:14), **"you hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans"** (Rev. 2:15), **"you tolerate the woman Jezabel"** (Rev. 2:20), **"you are dead"** (Rev. 3:1), **"you are lukewarm"** (Rev. 3:16), **"you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked"** (Rev. 3:17). Jesus reports that the Church in five out of seven cities was already in *serious trouble*. That's 71 percent! These were not minor disputes about "How many angels can fit on the head of a pin?", these problems were so severe that Jesus threatened to **"remove your lampstand from its place"** (Rev. 2:5), **"fight against them with the sword of My mouth"** (Rev. 2:16), **"cast into great suffering"** (Rev. 2:22), and **"blot out their name from the Book of Life"** (Rev. 3:5). What an incredible decline in the state of the "New Testament Church" within only 60 years after Jesus' ascension! Was this also Constantine's fault? No, the only reason that false leadership and unbiblical traditions were able to become codified into institutional "churches" is because many of them were no longer walking according to the Holy Spirit. But while many Christians were clearly led astray, there was always a remnant that remained faithful.<sup>§7.2.2.5</sup>

## A.1.2 Hypocritical Traditionalists

So which of these “church fathers” are you going to believe? The earlier ones who almost unanimously supported the Scriptures, or the latter ones during the fourth century who almost unanimously contradicted the Scriptures? Why didn’t the later “church fathers” hold to the teachings of their early “church fathers”? Many today believe they must follow “the traditions of the fathers” and yet the “church fathers” they choose to follow did not follow the traditions of the early “church fathers”. What hypocrisy! Do you traditionalists now want to say that the early “church fathers” such as Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Origen were all heretics too? Why isn’t your institutional “church” following the traditions of these *early* “church fathers”? Of course, none of these Christians were infallible either, for they were just men. But as a general rule, Tertullian points out that the earlier the writings, the more likely they are to adhere to the Scriptures:

“We are accustomed, for the purpose of shortening argument, to lay down the rule against heretics of the lateness of their date. For in as far as by our rule, priority is given to the truth, which also foretold that there would be heresies, in so far must all later opinions be prejudged as heresies, being such as were, by the more ancient rule of truth, predicted as one day to happen.” (Tertullian, *Against Hermogenes*, c. 200 AD)

Of course, there are always exceptions to this rule as some “church fathers” began contradicting the Scriptures in certain areas almost immediately. But that is why we must always trust the Scriptures over the writings of any “church father”.<sup>§A.1.1.1</sup>

Those who leave the authority of Scripture and give equal footing to the oral traditions of the “church fathers” have opened themselves up to a morass of contradictions. In particular, the writings of these later “church fathers” blatantly contradict the Scriptures and even contradict each other! Many institutional “churches” only cherry-pick the writings of the “church fathers” that agree with their cherished man-made traditions, while ignoring the writings of all the other “church fathers” that contradict them. By using this same technique, anyone could claim to support almost any kind of unbiblical doctrine imaginable! If you claim to embrace the writings of some “church fathers”, will you also embrace the writings of the other “church fathers” that condemned your traditions?

But more importantly, why is your institutional “church” obeying the traditions of the “church fathers” instead of the Scriptural teachings set forth by Jesus Christ and the apostles? The traditionalists can hardly contend that the later “church fathers” built upon the original foundation of the Church when they explicitly contradict the Scriptures. Why are they following the later “church fathers” who lived during an historical period of undisputed corruption under the influence of a secular Roman government? If you really want to get back to that “old time religion”,<sup>§7.2.2.5</sup> then why aren’t you walking in the traditions that the *Scriptures* teach!

## A.2 The Christian Temple

Among all the traditions of men, perhaps the most sought after, highly prized, pinnacle achievement of institutional “churches” today is the “church” building. To the institutional mentality, the “church” building is considered a necessity. And if it is not considered a necessity, then it is usually at least a priority. If you have a “church”, then you need a “church” building. Some will not consider a group to be a legitimate “church” until they first meet in a building. If a group doesn’t yet have a “church” building, they will eventually begin fundraisers, drives, and pledges to save or borrow enough money to purchase a building. In the meantime, they usually rent a designated place as a makeshift “church” building. So here we clearly have a tradition entrenched among the institutional “churches”, but is it a tradition of men or a tradition of God?

### A.2.1 The Origins of “church” Buildings

Let us start out by giving the institutional “churches” the benefit of the doubt and assume that Jesus wanted Christians to have “church” buildings. Okay, now when do you suppose that He told them to do this? For starters, there are no “church” buildings mentioned in Scripture, there is no verse instructing Christians to erect “church” buildings, nor is there any mention that the Church ever built “church” buildings. Instead, the Church’s fellowship occurred from house to house.<sup>§4.1.1.3</sup> The Church in Jerusalem also used the Jewish temple as a public meeting place, *but notice they never built a temple of their own*. In a society with no “separation of church and state”, meeting at the temple courts would be analogous to meeting at a public park today. The Church also utilized the synagogues in some cities (Acts 9:20, 13:5,14, 14:1, 17:2,10,17, 18:4,19,26, 19:8, 22:19, 26:11) in a similar manner. These *pre-existing public facilities* were utilized by the Church when convenient, but they never built “church” buildings of their own. If Jesus had told the apostles to build “church” buildings, then Peter, James, and John were walking in disobedience, *because they never built any such buildings*. The early Christians literally functioned as a “Church without walls”.

Okay, perhaps Jesus told the Church to build “church” buildings, but it took them some time since they were “just getting started”. On the contrary, historical and archeological evidence shows that there were no dedicated “church” buildings for almost 300 years! (During the third century, a few individuals had built larger rooms or additions on their *houses* for the Church to meet in, but these were part of their private residences.) Did the Church fail to build their own temples because they lacked money? No, Scripture records that they had plenty of money. **“For neither was anyone needy among them, for all who were owners of lands or houses were selling them, and brought the money from the things sold and placed it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each according as anyone had need.”** (Acts 4:34-35; cf. Acts 4:36-5:2) The Church was not acquiring buildings, they were selling them! Was it because they feared persecution? No, Scripture records that they often assembled together en masse in



visibly open and public places (Acts 5:12-14, 20:20, 21:5). Although there was some persecution at times, there wasn't constant persecution in every nation for nearly three centuries! Do you suppose that the Church was so backward and ignorant that they didn't know how to build a building? No, no, no! Certainly, you might have heard any of these distortions repeated time and time again, but no matter how many times they repeat them, it never makes them true. If God truly told the Church to build "church" buildings, you must conclude that all Christians must have been walking in sin for the first three centuries!

Okay, well perhaps God didn't tell the Church to build "church" buildings until the fourth century. If this were true, then why didn't the *Church* build the "church" buildings? That's right, the tradition of building dedicated "church" buildings did not begin in the Church, but with the secular Roman government! During the early fourth century, the Roman Emperor Constantine noticed that all of the other religions had elaborate temples to meet in except the Christians, so he decided that temples should be built for them too. Basilicas were then constructed by the government using the same design as the pagan temples. (What else could they pattern them after, since the Church did not have any buildings?) These Christian temples came complete with a pagan altar in front for animal sacrifices and a raised platform where the pagan priest would stand. Since the pagan temples were named after their gods, Constantine decided to name the Christian's temples after some of the prominent "saints" (such as Saint John Lateran Basilica in 320 AD and Saint Peter's Cathedral in 324 AD). After the construction was completed, the Christians were invited to start meeting in these structures. Since Christianity had become the secularized religion of Rome by then, many "cultural Christians" began coming. ("If you build it, they will come.") 😊 But as convenient as all of this was, much of the Church still rejected these temples and refused to meet in them. So even when the first "church" buildings were constructed, *it was not done by the Church*. If God had really wanted to start the "church" building tradition, why didn't He tell it to the Church?

## A.2.2 The Church Rejects "church" Buildings

What exactly was the Church's problem with "church" buildings? Wouldn't common sense alone dictate that the Church ought to have buildings to meet in? All the businesses, governments, and pagan religions met in buildings, so why shouldn't the Church have buildings? At the very least wouldn't a "church" building be considered morally "neutral"? Yet, the early Church was clearly not neutral regarding "church" buildings; *the Church was dead set against them*.

*Scripture:*

- **"An hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem....An hour is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth."** (Jesus Christ, quoted by *John*, c. 85 AD)

- **“The God who made the world and everything in it, the Lord of Heaven and earth does not dwell in temples built by hands.”** (Paul of Tarsus, *Acts*, c. 63 AD)

*Early Church Confirmation:*

- “Rusticus, the perfect, said, ‘Where do you assemble?’ Justin Martyr replied, ‘Where each one chooses and is able. Do you imagine that we all meet in the very same place?’” (Justin Martyr, *Martyrdom of the Holy Martyrs*, c. 160 AD)
- “The Word, prohibiting the constructing of temples and all sacrifices, indicates that the Almighty is not contained in anything.” (Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies*, Book V, c. 195 AD)
- “You mistakenly think we conceal what we worship since we have no temples or altars. Yet how can anyone make an image of God? Man himself is the image of God. How can anyone build a temple to Him, when the whole world can’t contain Him? Even I, a mere human, travel far and wide. So how can anyone shut up the majesty of so great a Person within one small building? Isn’t it better for Him to be dedicated in our minds and consecrated in our innermost hearts – rather than in a building?” (Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, c. 200 AD)
- “We refuse to build lifeless temples to the Giver of all....Our bodies are the temple of God.” (Origen, *Against Celsus*, Book VIII, c. 248 AD)

*Institutional “church” Reversal:*

- “It will be well, therefore, for your sagacity to make such arrangements and provision of all things needful for the work, that not only the church itself as a whole may surpass all others whatsoever in beauty, but that the details of the building may be of such a kind that the fairest structures in any city of the empire may be excelled by this.” (Eusebius, *The Life of Constantine*, Book III, c. 340 AD)
- “Let the building be long, with its head to the east, with its vestries on both sides at the east end – so it will be like a ship.” (*Apostolic Constitutions*, Book II, c. 390 AD)

Why did the early Church have such animosity against such a harmless little ol’ building? The fact of the matter is, God did not tell the Church to build “church” buildings, God told the Church *not* to have “church” buildings (Acts 17:24; cf. Acts 7:48, 2Cor. 5:1) Those who were **“stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears”** became angry when Steven told them this, just as some of you reading this now are becoming angry because God does not dwell in your Christian “temple” either (Acts 7:48-51). Jesus made it clear that worship was no longer to be confined to a specific place (John 4:21-23). Instead of asking why the early Church didn’t want “church” buildings, you should be asking why *Jesus* didn’t want them to have “church” buildings.

Even in the Old Testament, God did not ask for a temple. **“Where of all places that I have walked with all Israel, did I ever say to any of their leaders whom I commanded to shepherd My people, ‘Why have you not built Me a**

**house of cedar?”** (1Chr. 17:6) When David asked for permission to build a temple, God replied **“the Lord will build a house for you”** (1Chr. 17:10)! What is this house that God will build? Notice that the prophecy God gave to David was *not* ultimately fulfilled in Solomon (1Chr. 17:4-14). Read this very carefully! Who do you think God is talking about when He says, **“I will be his Father and he will be My son.”** (1Chr. 17:13)? Who is this son of God (Heb. 1:5)? And then God says, **“I will set him over My house and My kingdom forever and his throne will be established forever.”** (1Chr. 17:14) Solomon does not sit over God’s **“house and kingdom forever”** for he died and the kingdom was split in two. No, Jesus is this Son of God (Mark 1:11)! The temple it is speaking of here is not a physical temple that can be destroyed, but a spiritual temple that endures forever. *The Old Testament temple was never meant to be remodeled into a Christian “church” building.* The purpose of the Old Testament temple passed away as it was fulfilled in Christ. **“They serve as an example and shadow of heavenly things.”** (Heb. 8:5)

If the temple was the shadow, then what is the spiritual temple that it represented? *It is you!* **“Do you not know that you are the temple of God and the Spirit of God dwells in you?”** (1Cor. 3:16) God no longer dwells in temples built by men (Acts 17:24), He now dwells in the men! **“We are His house...”** (Heb. 3:6) **“You are God’s building.”** (1Cor. 3:9) God does not dwell in a “church” building; He dwells in the Church.<sup>§1.1.3</sup> **“And you are being built into a spiritual house as living stones for a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”** (1Pet. 2:5) There is no reason to build temples, because the people *are* the temple. **“For we are the living temple of God; just as God said, ‘I will dwell in them and walk among them and I will be their God and they shall be My people.’”** (2Cor. 6:16) **“In Him the whole building is fitted together growing into a holy temple in the Lord and in Him you also are being built together into a dwelling of God by the Spirit.”** (Eph. 2:21)

*Thus, we see that the Church never had any reason to build “church” buildings.* The Church is supposed to **“go into all the world and proclaim the gospel”** (Mark 16:15, cf. Matt. 28:19), not to isolate themselves behind four walls and try to coerce the world to come into their buildings. The early Church proved that “church buildings” are not essential for either numerical growth or spiritual power. In fact, the Church grew by 3000 in a single day without any “church buildings” (Acts 2:41). *Even today, without the exorbitant cost of building and maintaining unnecessary “church buildings”, the Church is able to devote extensive resources for the things that really matter.* And if the Church really did want to build a building, would they pattern it after a Roman temple with a pagan altar, Platonic architecture, and an Egyptian obelisk?<sup>§7.2.1.1</sup> And whose name should they put on the deed?<sup>§1.2.3.1</sup>

Let it again be clearly stated that there was and is *nothing intrinsically evil or immoral about meeting in a building.* A Christian who owns property may allow the Church to use his facilities, for this is obviously how the Church was able to meet from house to house. It is just that those who fellowship as the Church today don’t seem to have much use for meeting in a temple, just as the early Church didn’t. Instead, they preferred to meet in houses because it was more conducive to intimate spiritual fellowship. The Temple of God actually prefers to meet in

houses! Perhaps it is by God's providential design that open participatory meetings are able to function much better in smaller intimate settings that encourage open sharing in a comfortable family environment...like a home. And this is exactly what the early Church did! Indeed, there seems to be something spiritually refreshing about fellowshiping in a nomadic environment as pilgrims, rather than relying on a fixed religious temple. Again, this is not a rule, but a principle flowing out of Life. Apart from everything else, meeting in a home won't necessarily do anything for you either.<sup>§2.2.1.2</sup> Meeting in a home will not give you Life, but those who do have Life often prefer to meet in homes.<sup>§4.1.1.3</sup>

### A.2.3 Idolatrous Temples

Now to those traditionalists out there,<sup>§A.1.2</sup> *it is an undisputable fact that the institutional "churches" who have constructed "church buildings" are not following the "buildingless" tradition of the early Church!* Instead, they are walking in a tradition started by the secular Roman government. The construction of "church" buildings clearly began as a tradition of men and still continues to this day as a tradition of men. What is different now that wasn't true back then? For whatever reason you may think you need a "church" building, the early Church had the same reason all the more and yet rejected them! So why do the modern "churches" want "church" buildings so bad *when the early Church did not want them at all?* Why are "church" buildings a *priority* for the modern institutional "churches" when they were *irrelevant* to the early Church?

Most leaders of the institutional "churches" love their buildings and would do anything to protect them. They are not "neutral" objects that they could live without; they are possessive about their treasured idols.<sup>§7.2.1.3</sup> Their buildings are not equally shared with their members – you do not own a piece of the building, you cannot come and go as you please, you cannot use it however you want, you have no authority to let others use it. When confronted with the truth, most leaders would never give up their beloved temples that they worked so long and hard to build. Just suggesting the idea of getting rid of their temples and replacing them with Biblical fellowship is quite shocking to them. Go ahead and ask them yourself. They say, "We will fall apart" or "That would destroy us" and they are probably right because their building is probably one of the main things that hold them together, not spiritual fellowship in Christ. The institutional "churches" are now completely dependent on this man-made *building-centric* tradition. If you were to take away their building, then they literally wouldn't have a "church" anymore. Indeed, whenever an institutional "church" actually loses their building, they almost always end up disbanding.

### A.2.4 Old Testament Pseudo-Theology

So where does this leave the average Joe?<sup>§7.2.1.1</sup> They won't tell Joe about how the Roman Emperor built pagan temples for the Christians, so they had to fabricate a new story. Since there was no Scriptural basis for "church" buildings

found in the New Testament, they had to invent a new pseudo-theology based on the Old Testament. *Thus, they have made the “church” building into a Christian reincarnation of the Jewish temple.* Again, they have to live under the pattern of the Old Testament because they do not possess the Spirit of the New Testament. They are not a part of the true spiritual Temple that Jesus is building, so they have built a physical temple in its place. Instead of experiencing resurrected Life, they have resurrected a building! And it is not just the “church” building that they have patterned after the Old Covenant. They also have a “pastor” that conducts ceremonies up front at the altar like a Levitical priest<sup>§3.2.2.3</sup> that is supported by bringing their tithes<sup>§A.3</sup> into their “Christian” temple.

Some organizations are comfortable with calling their “church” building a temple and some even use the word “Temple” in the name of their “church” (i.e. Baptist Temple, Temple of God, etc.). But the more interesting groups are those who treat their “church” building as a temple, yet deny that it is a temple. They are not comfortable with the term “temple” because it gives them an image that would be too “religious”. So instead they just call their building a “church”. They don’t say, “I am going to the temple today” or “I have to drop off the kids at the temple”; they say, “I am going to church today” or “I have to drop off the kids at church”. They act as if their “church” is a place, but more specifically a building...a dedicated religious building...a temple. Hmmm? Their “churches” usually even look like temples. Many of them have the same distinguishing architecture and features like other religious temples – stained glass windows, steeples, vaulted ceilings, altar, pews, and their name on a sign out front. If there weren’t a cross on top, you couldn’t necessarily tell by looking whether it was a synagogue, mosque, shrine, or any other temple. Many of them even sing songs proclaiming that their “church” is a temple. They sing phrases like “this is holy ground”, “holy temple”, and “gathered in His temple”. They tell their children, “Don’t run in church” because they want them to reverence the “church” as a *holy place*. (If the children are Christians, then is the temple actually running in the “church”?) 😊

*So the average Joe worships in a pagan temple, imagines it to represent the Old Testament temple, yet doesn’t have Jesus Christ dwelling in his temple!* These traditions of men do not enhance the Church; they are contrary to the teachings of Jesus Christ and hinder the spiritual fellowship of the Church.<sup>§7.2.3.2</sup> This Old Testament pseudo-theology is just another false doctrine created by men hundreds of years later.<sup>§7.2.1.2</sup> Look at how many other traditions of men have been perpetuated because of this one false doctrine: meeting centrality, “church” names, temple worship, altars, stained glass, steeples, etc.<sup>§7.2.1.1</sup> All this foolishness caused by just one innocent little ol’ tradition of men!

## A.3 The Christian Tax

If the “church” building is the pinnacle of an institution’s success, then close behind in second place is the tithe. The tithe is the primary funding mechanism for the entire institutional “church” infrastructure. “Pastors” are often constrained

from speaking the truth freely for fear that they may offend some of their tithing base. Apart from a predictable tithing base, there would be no salaried clergy, building loans, or program budgets. Tithing today essentially works like a *Christian tax* that funds the institutional “churches”. Without the tithe, the institutional machinery would come crashing to a halt; but this is not true of the Church. The Church has no need of a tithing system for it has no Levitical priesthood or temple to support. There are no salaries, property, budgets, taxes, buildings, or parking lots to fund a Church that has no name, no address, no headquarters, no building, no employees, no income, and no property. The Church always has lots of money at its discretion, but the Church does not require any money in order to function.

### A.3.1 The History of Tithing

Tithing existed long before Israel was required to tithe according to the Law. The word “tithe” simply means “a tenth” without implying any particular system of giving. The first mention of tithing in the Bible occurs when Abraham gave a **“tenth of everything”** he had at that time to Melchizedek upon returning from a victory in battle (Gen. 14:17-24). This tithe was a *one-time* event involving all his possessions and was never repeated again. The next instance of a tithe occurs after God pledged to give Jacob the Promised Land and Jacob responded by saying **“of all that You give me, I will surely give You a tenth”** (Gen. 28:10-22). Notice that both of these tithes were *voluntary* acts of devotion in response to what God had done for them. These individual acts of worship did not involve anyone else, nor were they mandated for anyone else. Tithing as a religious ritual was only made *mandatory* for the Israelites when the Law of Moses was given. Here are some of the details:

- The tithe only applied to *agricultural produce* from the land (Lev. 27:30,32). This included grain, fruit, trees, wine, oil, herds, and flocks (Deut.14:23, Neh. 10:37). The tithe did not apply to man-made items, but only to living things created by God. For example, if a farmer made ten plows, he would not give up one of his plows in a tithe to the Lord.
- The tithe was only given by *landowners* who farmed (Deut. 14:22). Employees, servants, and hired hands did not tithe, because it was not their land. Those who had any other occupations in fields such as construction, pottery, sewing, and fishing were also exempt from tithing.
- The tithe was only assessed on the *increase* (Deut. 14:22, 26:12). The tithe did not apply to the total, net, or gross assets that a person acquired for the year. For example, if a person had 10 bushels of grain at the beginning of the year, harvested 100 new bushels of grain, and then after expenses and consumption, was left with only 10 bushels of grain at the end of the year, he would pay no tithe. He would not tithe 10 bushels (10 percent of the 100 bushels), or 1 bushel (10 percent of the 10 bushels), he would pay *nothing* for he did not have any increase that year.

- The tithe *never applied to money* (Deut. 14:24-26). Money was only allowed as a *transfer mechanism* when the traveling distance was too far, not something itself that was tithed upon. In other words, you could pay a tithe *with* money, but you didn't tithe *on* the money. And when money was used, it had to be *20 percent more* than the normal value, making the total payment 12 percent of the increase (Lev. 27:31)!
- The tithe was only made *once a year* after the harvest (Deut. 14:22). The tithe was given to the Levites in the outlying areas once every three years (Deut. 14:28, 26:12, Amos 4:4). There was never any weekly payment, nor was it possible to tithe anytime during the rest of the year for the crops were either still growing or it was winter.
- The tithe was *shared with tither* (Deut. 12:7,17-18, 14:23,26). The tithe was to be *eaten* by the one tithing along with others as a celebration before the Lord. This is another reason why people did not tithe on inorganic things such as money. 😊
- The tithe could only be brought to the *Levitical priests at the temple* in Israel (Deut. 12:5-6, 12:17-19, 14:23, Num. 18:21,24). The tithe could not be brought just anywhere or given to just anyone, but had to be given at the specific place designated by God.

There were other laws too regarding the first born (Num. 3:12-13, 40-45, 8:16-18) and the first fruits (Lev. 23:10-14, Num. 18:12-18), but these are in addition to the commandments concerning the tithe.

### A.3.2 Institutional Tithing Today

Almost every institutional “church” today teaches that tithing is *mandatory* for their members. Some of them teach that their members are “robbing God” if they do not tithe to their organization (Mal. 3:8-10). Some poor people struggling to make ends meet have even been coerced to go into debt to pay their tithe because of this teaching. This notion, however, is *based on the Law of Moses* which was only binding upon the Israelites, not the Romans, Greeks, Babylonians, or anyone else. And it certainly does not apply to Christians as we “**died to the Law**” (Rom. 7:4), “**have been released from the Law**” (Rom. 7:6), and are “**no longer under its supervision**” (Gal. 3:25), for “**Christ is the end of the Law**” (Rom. 10:4), “**having abolished the Law with its commandments and regulations**” (Eph. 2:15), “**canceling the written code...by nailing it to the cross**” (Col. 2:14). The Old Testament tithe is indeed Biblical for Jews, but not for Christians! Are you also going to abide by Israel’s dietary restrictions, sacrifice animals on the altar, stone rebellious children, and wear blue tassels on your clothing which are also specified in the same Law? If you insist on tithing according to the Old Testament Law, then be warned that “**all who are of the works of the Law are under a curse**” (Gal. 3:10). A complete theological discussion of the proper relationship of the Christian to the Law is beyond the scope of this book, but suffice it to say that Christians are simply not bound by its legal obligations.

Since the institutional “churches” do not operate according to the Holy Spirit, they have again turned to the Old Testament to derive their own tithing rituals and procedures. *Notice that they do not actually follow the commandments specified about tithing*, but instead have made up a completely new unbiblical system of tithing on money.

Old Testament Tithe	Institutional “church” Tithe
Tithe occurs once a year	Tithe occurs once a week
Tithe is paid with agricultural produce	Tithe is only paid with money
Only land owners who farm pay a tithe	Every member is expected to tithe
Tithing is based on the net increase	Tithing is based on the gross salary
Tither partially shares in the tithe	Institution keeps all the money

As you can see, the tithe was based on an agrarian society in Biblical times that does not work well with the monetary system used in the world economy today. But what would the tithe look like today if someone were really going to try to tithe today according to the Old Testament Law?

- The “pastor” would only receive the tithe once every year. Not so many people would aspire to this occupation if they knew the position would only get paid annually!
- The “pastor” would only receive a tithe in the form of agricultural products. They would not receive any money from doctors, lawyers, engineers, or business owners. (But they might get a few tomatoes if one of them had a garden.) 😊 You would soon find out that the “pastors” are not interested in your chickens; they want your money!
- The “pastor” would only receive a tithe based on your increase. Hypothetically, if you were to try to tithe on money, it would not have anything to do with the net or gross. You would simply look at your bank account at the end of the year and see if you have more savings than the previous year, and then pay only a percentage on the difference of the increase. If you had not saved any money that year, you would pay nothing.
- The “pastor” would have to give some of the tithe back to the tither. Are you going to *eat* your money as prescribed by the Law? If the “pastor” were given money, he would most likely have to purchase food and share it with the tither. Or were you thinking you would be entitled to a kickback? 😊

Now are you “pastors” really sure you want to follow the Old Testament requirement to tithe? The members probably won’t be too thrilled either when they realize they were supposed to be paying 12 percent of the total value when they pay with money. (Is your institutional “church” going to retroactively go back now and collect 2 percent in back taxes?) 😊 And all of this, of course, operates under the flawed theory that your “pastor” is like a Levitical priest and your “church” building is like the temple of Israel. Nonsense! As you can see, the tithe required in the Old Testament is completely different from the practice of tithing invented by the institutional “churches” today. They use the Old



Testament to tell people they *have* to tithe, but then completely ignore the same Scriptures that tell them *how* to tithe. They have simply made up a new lucrative tax system with absolutely no Biblical support and then told their members that they are required by God to pay it! Their members are just paying unbiblical dues to their unbiblical club. Certainly, an institutional “church” has the right to charge their members dues like any other club, but just don’t let them remain under the delusion that it has anything to do with God or the Bible! These “pastors” don’t want you to get out your Bibles and read *how* the tithe is supposed to be given because they don’t want to be paid annually in chickens!

### A.3.3 The New Testament Principle of Giving

Not only is the Church not bound by the Old Testament Law, but it is now *impossible* for Christians to tithe in a manner specified by the Law. There is no longer a Levitical priest to tithe to, because now we are all priests (1Pet. 2:5,9, Rev. 1:6, 5:10, 20:6). There is no longer a temple to bring the tithe to, because now we are that temple (1Cor. 3:16-17, 2Cor. 6:16, Eph. 2:21). Like so many other things found in the Old Testament, the Law was **“only a shadow of good things to come”** (Heb. 10:1), but **“the realities belong to Christ”** (Col. 2:17). Notice that there are only three instances where the tithe is mentioned in the New Testament:

- Where Jesus condemned the Pharisee’s attitude in tithing while neglecting the important matters of God (Matt. 23:23, Luke 11:42).
- Where a Pharisee boasts about his tithing and yet stood condemned before God (Luke 18:12).
- Where the tithe to Melchizedek was greater than a tithe under the Law because he represented the priesthood of Christ (Heb. 7:4-9).

*None of these references indicates that tithing should continue as a law under the New Covenant.* Jesus never collected a tithe from His disciples. The apostles never set up a system of tithing in the Church. This was also confirmed by the writings of the early Christians. The current system of tithing implemented by institutional “churches” today was not invented until hundreds of years later!

*Scripture:*

- **“Give and it will be given to you, a good measure, pressed down, shaken, and running over will be poured into your lap. For by what measure you use it will be measured to you.”** (Jesus Christ, quoted by *Luke*, c. 60 AD)
- **“Let each one give as he purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or out of necessity, for God loves a cheerful giver.”** (Paul of Tarsus, *Corinthians*, Book II, c. 55 AD)

*Early Church Confirmation:*

- **“As for the persons who are prosperous and are willing, they give what each thinks fit.”** (Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, c. 160 AD)

- “Instead of the Law commanding the giving of tithes, He taught us to share all our possessions with the poor.” (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book IV, c. 180 AD)
- “On the monthly day, if he likes, each puts a small donation, but only if it is his pleasure and only if he is able. For there is no compulsion; all is voluntary.” (Tertullian, *Apology*, c. 197 AD)

*Institutional “church” Reversal:*

- “The form of which ordination and engagement the Levites formerly observed under the Law...Which plan and rule is now maintained in respect of the clergy, that they who are promoted by clerical ordination in the Church of the Lord may be called off in no respect from the divine administration, nor be tied down by worldly anxieties and matters; but in the honor of the brethren who contribute, receiving as it were tenths of the fruits, they may not withdraw from the altars and sacrifices...” (Cyprian, *Epistle LXV*, c. 250 AD)
- “Let the bishop use as a man of God those tithes and first-fruits that are given according to the command of God.” (*Apostolic Constitutions*, Book II, c. 390 AD)

Now if you think you have just discovered a financial windfall because you don’t have to tithe, then you really don’t understand the New Covenant at all. You are not required to give God 10 percent of something; *you are required to give God 100 percent of everything!* The standard has gotten higher, not lower. Just as the case with hatred (Matt. 5:21-22), lust (Matt. 5:27-28), and divorce (Matt. 5:31-32), the bar has been raised under the New Covenant. You can no longer just give 10 percent and then do whatever you want with the rest – all of your money and possessions now belong to God! **“Every one of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be My disciple.”** (Luke 14:33; cf. 1Cor. 6:19-20, Rom. 12:1) If you were asked to sell everything you had and give to the poor like the rich young ruler, would you do it (Matt. 19:21, Mark 10:21, Luke 18:22)? *You are required to give any amount that the Lord leads you to give.* Are you prepared to live your life this way? If you think you can still hide behind a 10 percent tithe to your institutional “church”, you now know that you are not obeying what the Old Testament or the New Testament teaches!

Of course, *Christians will still be giving to others*, but they just are not required to tithe. The New Testament standard is to give with a cheerful heart. Instead of tithing as an obligation of the Law, believers now give freely with gratitude in their heart in response to God’s wonderful blessings, recognizing God’s ownership of all things. **“Let each one give as he purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or out of necessity, for God loves a cheerful giver.”** (2Cor. 9:7) This is not a new idea, for this is how voluntary giving was done in Israel before the requirements of the Law (Exod. 25:2, 35:22,29, 36:3). So much was freely given in this manner that Moses once had to order them to *stop* giving (Exod. 36:6-7). This type of excessive giving is also not uncommon among those who fellowship as the Church (Acts 4:34-35). Every mention of giving in the Church was voluntary, expressed by phrases such as **“not only first to give but also desiring it”** (2Cor. 8:10-11), **“beyond the ability of their own accord”** (2Cor. 8:3), and **“liberality of**

**sharing**” (2Cor. 9:13); *but never one mention of giving 10 percent!* When Paul asked for a collection to be made for the saints in Jerusalem, people were simply asked to give out of their prosperity (1Cor. 16:2). Paul’s request that they collect the money each week in advance for a *one-time* gift did not establish a new institutional tithing system, but was done so that he would not have to wait on the collection when he arrived. Of course, Christians are not forbidden from giving away 10 percent of their money if the Lord leads them to do so; *it is just not required.* They would still do so voluntarily with a cheerful heart, realizing that the other 90 percent also belongs to the Lord too.

One of the questions frequently asked is, “Who are you supposed to give to then?” If *you* are a priest and *you* are the temple of God, should you tithe to yourself? 😊 Jacob also had this same problem. Jacob promised to give 10 percent to the Lord, but who did he give it to? There were no Levitical priests and there was no temple in his day either. Once you discover the New Testament principle of giving, it is no longer a matter of finding a designated holy man or institution to give your money to. Christians simply give to others as the Lord leads them. Collections of one-time gifts were given directly to meet the needs of others, not to fund organizations or build buildings (Acts 11:29, 1Cor. 16:1, 2Cor. 9:5, Phil 4:18). There was no ongoing system of professional clergymen or a temple to support, so there was no ongoing reason to collect a tithe.

## A.4 Religious Holy Days

Of particular importance to many institutional “churches” are their religious holidays. Most of them observe special religious ceremonies according to a liturgical calendar such as Advent/Christmas and Lent/Easter. In honor of these religious holidays, they roll out additional decorations, candles, incense, cantatas, and programs. During these religious seasons, the “pastors” often prepare special sermons each week leading up to the climax Sunday which focuses exclusively on the special holy day. When other cultural holidays such as Mother’s Day, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Thanksgiving, etc. are added to the preaching cycle, more than a third of the Sunday sermons are already spoken for in some “churches”. *But none of these holidays were ever celebrated by the early Church.* In Scripture, the observance of any type of special day was a matter of personal freedom in the Lord. **“Therefore, don’t let anyone judge you in regard to eating and drinking, or in respect of a festival, new moon, or Sabbath day.”** (Col. 2:16) There was never any prescribed liturgical calendar that was imposed upon the Church because the observance of holidays was left to the individual. **“One regards one day above another, another regards every day the same.”** (Rom. 14:5) So why did the later so-called “church councils” seek to enforce standardized religious days upon their members, when the Scripture considers it to be an element of personal freedom? Jesus did not keep the Sabbath the way the Pharisees wanted and they concluded that He wasn’t from God (John 9:16)! Would you conclude that a brother is in error because he does not share your view of holidays?

## A.4.1 Pagan Holidays

A Christian's personal freedom in the Lord to celebrate holidays, however, does not include freedom to celebrate *pagan* holidays (Deut. 12:30-31, Jer. 10:2). There are several valid Christian positions regarding holidays, but participating in pagan practices is not one of them. Freedom in the Lord does not mean you have freedom to sin (Gal. 5:13, 1Pet. 2:16). Celebrating a pagan holiday and all its associated trappings is a form of *worship* honoring pagan deities that is expressly forbidden (Exod. 23:13,24, Deut. 13:6-8, 2Chr. 25:15). Unfortunately, many institutional "churches" engage in *syncretism* where they have attempted to Christianize certain pagan holidays. This is completely incompatible with Scripture: **"And do not inquire after their gods saying, 'How do these nations serve their gods, so I also may do likewise?' You shall not worship the Lord your God in their ways, for every abomination which the Lord hates they have done for their gods."** (Deut. 12:30-31)

Many institutional "churches" know better than to celebrate a blatantly pagan holiday such as Halloween, yet most still celebrate the pagan practices associated with Christmas and Easter. It is not uncommon for institutional "churches" to decorate Christmas trees and have Easter egg hunts, for example. Apparently they think that if most of the members are not aware of their pagan origins, then somehow that makes it okay.<sup>§7.2.1</sup> The early Church, however, never celebrated Jesus' birthday in association with the winter solstice for the pagan sun god,<sup>§A.4.1.1</sup> and they never celebrated Jesus' crucifixion in association with a pagan fertility ritual on the new moon after the spring solstice.<sup>§A.4.1.2</sup> Any syncretistic participation in the worship of these astronomical objects is expressly forbidden. **"And when you look up to the sky and see the sun, the moon, stars, and all the heavenly bodies, do not be enticed to worship them and serve them."** (Deut. 4:19; cf. Job 31:26-28) The detailed origins of every pagan practice cannot be adequately addressed here, so only some of the more relevant aspects will be discussed below.

### A.4.1.1 Celebrating Saturnalia

The largest holiday observed by most institutional "churches" today is Christmas, and yet the birth of Jesus was not celebrated by the early Church at all. It was not even a matter of personal freedom – *nobody thought to celebrated it!* The Bible commands Christians to commemorate Christ's death, but nowhere does it suggest that we should commemorate His birth. In fact, the reason that nobody knows for sure the day or year Jesus was born is because nobody cared. The early Church had absolutely no interest in celebrating Jesus' birthday, because birthday celebrations were considered to be a pagan practice. So where did the tradition of Christmas come from then? History records that December 25th was observed as a pagan holiday thousands of years before Jesus was born. The celebration of December 25th has been traced back to the birthday of Nimrod (Gen. 10:8-12) who was worshipped as the sun god and is credited with building the tower of Babel and establishing the pagan Babylonian religions. Indeed, the

Babylonians, Egyptians, Persians, Greeks, and Romans all celebrated December 25th as the birthday of the sun god. They celebrated this day as the winter solstice since they mistakenly thought it was the shortest day of the year and thus marked the birth of the sun which awakened from its rest as the days began to lengthen. This day was also observed by the Germanic, Celtic, and Nordic tribes in conjunction with their festival of Yule including mistletoe and evergreen trees. The Romans in particular celebrated the festival of Saturnalia for the harvest god Saturn and December 25th was decreed to be “Natalis Solis Invicti” meaning “birth of the unconquered sun” in honor of the Persian sun god Mithras. Consider some of the pagan practices that were associated with the worship of the sun god:

Tradition	Date	Origination
December 25th	2000s BC	This was the birthday celebrated for the pagan sun god. Scholars agree that Jesus was not born anytime near December since the shepherds were still in their fields (Luke 2:8) and Rome would not require everyone to travel for a census (Luke 2:1) during the coldest and rainiest month.
Decorated trees	600s BC	The Egyptians, Romans, and Druids all decorated fir trees in their celebrations of the winter solstice. Evergreens symbolized the everlasting nature of the ancient god Baal-Bereth meaning “lord of the fir tree”. This ancient practice of decorating trees is condemned in Scripture (Jer. 10:3-4).
Mistletoe	300s BC	Druids gathered mistletoe and burned it in sacrifice to their gods in celebration of the start of winter. The custom of kissing under the mistletoe was later developed by the Aryans under the belief that it would aid in their fertility.
Wassailing	300s BC	The practice of going door-to-door singing Christmas carols comes from a Celtic procession where songs were sung from orchard to orchard to awake the apple trees and scare away evil spirits in order to ensure a plentiful harvest for the next year.
Gift giving	217 BC	Presents were commonly exchanged during Saturnalia. The practice never had anything to do with the wise men since they arrived a long time after Jesus’ birth (Matt. 2:1-12) and their gifts were only given to Jesus, not to each other.

Tradition	Date	Origination
Santa Claus	200s BC	The persona of an omniscient overweight white-bearded elderly man wearing a red suit who rides on a sleigh comes from the Norse god Thor. Only centuries later did the corruption of the name "Saint Nicholas" become attached to this pre-existing pagan deity.
Yule log	200s BC	Logs were burned in the fireplace during the Yule festival in honor of the Norse god Thor which later gave rise to the legend of "Santa Claus" coming down the chimney.

Notice that all of these pagan practices were conducted in conjunction with the winter solstice *long before Jesus was born*. Are you participating in any of these things? The early Church did not!

So how did Christians eventually become deceived into celebrating this pagan holiday? As it turns out, leaders during the fourth century instituted the Feast of the Nativity in order to combat heresies that denied the bodily incarnation of Jesus Christ. The rest of the world, however, largely ignored their celebration and so they later decided to move their feast to December 25th in order to compete against the pagan practices of Saturnalia. The placement of the Feast of the Nativity on December 25th is not mentioned until 336 AD and was added to the Philocalian calendar in 354 AD. By this time, many carnal Christians were already participating in the pagan Saturnalia practices so it was thought that they could simply *co-opt* this holiday by diverting their attention to this feast instead. Thus, they tried to redefine the imagery of the pagan's "Sun of Righteousness" to refer to Jesus as the "Son of Righteousness". Unfortunately, this syncretistic practice had the opposite effect as the pre-existing pagan elements merely became incorporated into this new feast. Thus, instead of reforming the practices of the pagans, the institutional "churches" merely joined with them.

*Scripture:*

- **“Thus says the Lord, ‘Do not learn the ways of the heathen...for the customs of the people are vain. They cut a tree out of the forest and a craftsman shapes it with an axe. They adorn it with silver and gold; they fasten it with hammer and nails so that it will not totter.’”** (*Jeremiah, c. 627-586 BC*)

*Early Church Confirmation:*

- “On your day of gladness, we neither cover our door-posts with laurels, nor intrude upon the day with lamps? At the call of a public festivity, you consider it proper to dress your house up like some new brothel....We are accused of a lower sacrilege, because we do not celebrate along with you the holidays of the Caesars in a manner forbidden alike by modesty, decency, and purity.” (*Tertullian, Apology, c. 197 AD*)

- “The Saturnalia, New-year’s, Midwinter’s festivals, and Matronalia are frequented: presents come and go, new-year’s gifts, games join their noise, and banquets join their din! The pagans are more faithful to their own sect, which claims no solemnity of the Christians for itself!” (Tertullian, *On Idolatry*, c. 200 AD)

*Institutional “church” Reversal:*

- “On this day also the Birthday of Christ was lately fixed at Rome in order that while the heathen were busy with their profane ceremonies, the Christians might perform their sacred rites undisturbed...They call it the ‘Birthday of the Unconquered’ [Mithras]. Who indeed is so unconquered as our Lord...? Or, if they say that it is the birthday of the Sun, He is the Sun of Justice.” (ascribed to John Chrysostom, *On the Nativity of John the Baptist*, c. 380 AD)
- “Brethren, observe the festival days; and first of all the birthday which you are to celebrate on the twenty-fifth...” (*Apostolic Constitutions*, Book V, c. 390 AD)

Perhaps the Feast of the Nativity may have once seemed like another “good idea”,<sup>§7.2.2.3</sup> but the syncretistic implementation was disastrous. The pagan elements became inseparable from this “Christian” holiday as they were mingled together from its inception. It is hard for people today to envision this, but up until the 19th century, Christmas was a day of public boisterous drunken revelry and violence in the streets on the magnitude of Marti Gras or New Year’s Eve. The Puritans would have nothing to do with this sinful holiday and even passed a law in 1659 AD to ban it. But Christmas eventually got a complete makeover largely due to Clement Clarke Moore’s classic poem written in 1822 AD and a concerted marketing campaign which attempted to take Christmas off of the streets and bring it into a more peaceful family-oriented setting. By the early 20th century, corporate America took over to commercialize the holiday into the glittering shopping extravaganza that it is today. In 1941 AD, the Thanksgiving holiday was even moved from November 30th to November 23rd in order to provide an extra week of Christmas shopping each year. Despite repeated attempts to make up new stories to Christianize the pagan’s practices (i.e. Santa Claus is merely Saint Nicholas, Martin Luther invented Christmas trees, gift giving came from the wise men, etc.), the pagan and worldly origins remain unmistakably clear.<sup>§7.2.1.2</sup> History records that Jesus was definitely *not* the original “reason for the season”. Ironically, the pagan groups today are more than happy to explain where these practices really came from, for they have always been in favor of returning to the “true meaning of Christmas”.

#### A.4.1.2 Celebrating Eostre

Most institutional “churches” today consider Easter to be the most important religious holiday of the liturgical year. The early Church, however, never celebrated Easter which was an ancient pagan fertility ritual celebrated during the

first full moon after the vernal equinox. The name “Easter” comes from Eostre (or Ostara) the Saxon goddess of spring and is synonymous with Astarte the Phoenician goddess of the moon. This goddess is also loosely connected to the worship of Asherah poles and Ishtar the Babylonian goddess of fertility. Some of the practices associated with this pagan holiday include:

Tradition	Date	Origination
Colored eggs	2000s BC	The ancient Egyptians, Persians, Greeks, and Romans used colored eggs during their pagan spring festivals as symbols of rebirth and fertility.
Easter bunny	2000s BC	The Easter bunny (or Easter hare) was an ancient symbol of fertility because of its abundant reproduction cycle.
Hot cross buns	1500s BC	Sacred buns were offered to goddess Astarte by Cecrops the founder of Athens.
Egg hunts	1500s AD	Children in Germany were told that if they were good, the Easter bunny would sneak into their house while they were asleep and lay colored eggs for them to find in the morning.

Should a Christian knowingly be engaging in these pagan practices? Again, notice that these practices were steeped in pagan idolatry long before the institutional “churches” attempted to Christianize them. Many evangelical “churches” now readily admit that “Easter” is indeed the name of a pagan goddess and instead name their holiday “Resurrection Day”, yet their members continue to partake in the same pagan practices.

The early Church, in contrast, celebrated the *Passover* in remembrance of Christ’s death. This is not just a matter of semantics for the Greek word “ΠΑΣΧΑ” #3957 refers to the Jewish Passover, not Easter. While Jesus was celebrating the Passover with His disciples, He commanded them: **“Do this in remembrance of Me.”** (Luke 22:19) The disciples were no longer to celebrate the Passover in remembrance of their deliverance from Egypt, because now they were to celebrate it in remembrance of Jesus, the pure and spotless lamb who was slain on the exact day of the Passover; for now we are saved by His blood and the wrath of God “passes over” us. Jesus lifted up the *Afikomen* and said **“this is My body”** (Matt. 26:26, Mark 14:22, Luke 22:19, 1Cor. 11:24) and He lifted up the *Cup of Redemption* and said **“this is My blood”** (Matt. 26:27-28, Mark 14:23-24, Luke 22:20, 1Cor. 11:25) – both are elements of the Passover ceremony holding special significance. **“For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you declare the death of the Lord until He comes.”** (1Cor. 11:26) History records that the Jews and Gentiles alike in the early Church faithfully celebrated the Passover each year in remembrance of Christ with the bread and the wine as the Scripture commands. **“For Christ, our Passover, has been sacrificed, therefore let us keep the Feast.”** (1Cor. 5:7-8)

So how did some “churches” later become deceived into celebrating the pagan holiday of Easter instead of the Passover? As it turns out, the leaders at Rome did not like it when the Passover sometimes fell in the middle of the week,



so they began to hold their celebration on the following Sunday instead. The Church in Asia, however, continued to celebrate the Passover on the exact day as was passed on to them by the apostles John and Philip. This created a dispute and in 190 AD the so-called “bishop” of Rome attempted to excommunicate Polycrates of Ephesus and all of the Church leaders in Asia for following the apostolic tradition. These “heretics” were referred to as the “Quartodecimans” which comes from Latin meaning “fourteen” because the Passover is always celebrated on Nisan 14. Later, Constantine convened the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD which decided that Easter should be celebrated throughout the Church, which was set as *the first Sunday after the first ecclesiastical full moon on or after the vernal equinox*. They even added a rule that if the Passover just happened to fall on Easter Sunday, Easter must be postponed until the following Sunday. Unfortunately, the disagreement over the date wasn’t the only problem, since the Roman “church” was not really celebrating the Passover anyway, but had distanced themselves from it completely in their festivities.

#### *Scripture:*

- **“Do this in remembrance of Me.”** (Jesus Christ, quoted by *Luke*, c. 60 AD)
- **“For Christ, our Passover, has been sacrificed, therefore let us keep the Feast.”** (Paul of Tarsus, *Corinthians*, Book I, c. 55 AD)

#### *Early Church Confirmation:*

- “For Anicetus could not persuade Polycarp to forego the observance [of Passover] inasmuch as these things had always been observed by John the disciple of our Lord, and by other apostles with whom he had been conversant.” (Irenaeus, *Lost Writings*, c. 180 AD)
- “These all kept the Passover on the fourteenth day, in accordance with the Gospel, without ever deviating from it, but following the rule of faith.” (Polycrates, *Epistle to Victor*, c. 190 AD)
- “Again, he who considers that ‘Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us’ and that it is his duty to keep the feast by eating of the flesh of the Word, never ceases to keep the paschal feast; for the Pascha means ‘Passover’, and he is ever striving in all his thoughts, words, and deeds, to pass over from the things of this life to God, and is hastening towards the city of God.” (Origen, *De Principiis*, Book VII, c. 248 AD)
- “Following their example up to the present time all the bishops of Asia – as themselves also receiving the rule from an unimpeachable authority, to wit, the evangelist John, who leaned on the Lord’s breast, and drank in instructions spiritual without doubt – were in the way of celebrating the Passover feast, without question, every year, whenever the fourteenth day of the moon had come, and the lamb was sacrificed by the Jews after the equinox was past.” (Anatolius, *The Pascal Canon*, c. 283 AD)

#### *Institutional “church” Reversal:*

- “If any one celebrates the Passover along with the Jews, or receives the emblems of their feast, he is a partaker with those that killed the Lord and His apostles.” (attributed to Ignatius, *Epistle to Philipians*, c. 350 AD)

- “It is therefore your duty, brethren, who are redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, to observe the days of Easter exactly, with all care, after the vernal equinox....But no longer be concerned about keeping the feast with the Jews, for we now have no communion with them.” (*Apostolic Constitutions*, Book II, c. 390 AD)

Have you noticed a pattern yet? In clear defiance to Jesus’ instructions (Matt. 26:26-28, Mark 14:22-24, Luke 22:19-20), the “church” in Rome no longer celebrated the Passover, and what they did celebrate was not on the Passover anyway. Instead of partaking of the bread and wine in the context of a meal, they substituted a wafer cracker and a thimble of grape juice and divorced them completely from their meanings in the Passover ceremony (calling it “mass” or “communion”). In order to distance themselves from the Jews, they no longer celebrated the Lord’s death in the Passover (1Cor. 11:26), but instead began to celebrate Easter as more of a generic resurrection holiday, inclusive of the pagan traditions as well. The Romans in particular had always celebrated the vernal equinox as the death and resurrection of Attis who was supposedly born of the virgin fertility goddess Cybele. Thus, when their pagan holiday coincided with Easter, the pagans often quarreled with the Christians about which deity was really the imitation of the other. Indeed, the pagan groups today are still more than happy to set the Christians straight about the origins of their practices, for they have always been in favor of returning to the “true meaning of Easter”.

#### A.4.1.3 We Don’t Really Mean It

Up until now, many may have been completely unaware that they have been perpetuating pagan practices in their holiday celebrations each year. This is not to pass judgment on them, because many have innocently done this in ignorance. But what will *you* do now? Again, there is not necessarily one right course of action for there are several valid possibilities discussed below. But unfortunately, even after learning these things, some have chosen to harden their hearts and persist in their pagan practices. They continue to celebrate these syncretistic pagan holidays because they don’t *feel* like they are doing anything wrong. They say, “We are not really worshipping these things. We don’t take these pagan meanings seriously.” And now you know why Israel had trouble tearing down the Asherah poles (Deut. 12:2-3, 1Ki. 3:3, 15:14, 22:42-43, 2Ki. 12:2-3, 14:4, 15:4, 15:35)! **“But while these people worshipped the Lord, they also served their idols, both their children and children’s children – as their fathers did, so they do to this day.”** (2Ki. 17:41)

If these things are really not idols to you, then let’s see how willing you would be to give them up. Unfortunately, some would never give up their warm family traditions passed down to them even though they are blatantly pagan in origin, having nothing to do with Jesus. How they love their special raisin cakes (Hos. 3:1). They teach their children worship songs about pagan deities who bring them gifts during the night and then with a straight face say they are not involved in any pagan practices. They pretend that these false gods exist and then celebrate

all the traditions associated with their pagan practices. *They are trying to celebrate Jesus' birth and death in a manner that Jesus does not approve of.* Think about it, if Christmas and Easter were primarily about following Jesus, do you think the world would really be this interested in them? Of course, there would be nothing intrinsically wrong with giving gifts in July, or bringing a tree into your house in October, but what message does it send when Christians only observe these pagan practices in conjunction with a pagan holiday? Do you find a need to give gifts or decorate a tree during the rest of the year, or only when there is a pagan holiday? If these things were truly Christian, then why not do them every day?<sup>§A.4.4</sup> Of all of the topics in this book, this issue tends to be disproportionately controversial as many Christians are simply unwilling to give up their sacred pagan traditions for the sake of the truth alone.

### A.4.2 Cultural Holidays

What about cultural holidays that do not involve pagan gods, but are secular in nature such as Mother's Day, Memorial Day, Thanksgiving, etc.? Clearly, Christians would have personal freedom in the Lord to celebrate such days if they so desire. Just like missionaries in a foreign land, it might even be expected that Christians as ambassadors for Christ would engage in the customs of their culture to a certain extent in order to make Christ known in a relevant manner. Jesus as a Jew, for example, celebrated Hanukah (John 10:22-23) which was not prescribed by Mosaic Law, but was merely a Jewish *cultural* holiday. This would be similar to celebrating cultural holidays today such as Thanksgiving, for example, which was originally designated to give thanks to God.

By the same token then, wouldn't it still be possible to salvage the Christian elements from Christmas and Easter and reclaim those parts of the holiday? With Christmas, for example, elements such as nativity scenes, candy canes, holly, and lights can all be considered to be decisively Christian in their origins. After all, there is nothing wrong with teaching your children about Jesus' birth and resurrection, because it is in the Bible! So if all of the pagan elements were ignored, wouldn't it still be possible to celebrate Jesus' birth and resurrection in a totally Christian way? The secular culture is going to celebrate these holidays anyway, so why not try to use them to our advantage to share the gospel? Again, *celebrating the Christian components of these holidays would be an area of personal freedom in the Lord.* But let it simply be stated that after two millennia of this approach, the pagan practices remain the dominant influence. Institutional "churches" may choose to celebrate the Christian components of Christmas and Easter or dress up like Bible characters on Halloween, but this merely insures that the *days* chosen by the pagans will inadvertently continue to be celebrated. And this unfortunately continues to bring all the inherent problems related to syncretism.<sup>§A.4.1</sup> If Christians want to have holiday celebrations, wouldn't it be better for them to ignore the pagans and pick their own days? If someone really wants to celebrate Jesus' birth, for example, why not celebrate it closer to the time He was actually born (probably sometime in the spring)! Why must we have

celebrations on the pagans' holidays? Is there something inherent that says that Christians' own celebrations cannot be as good as the pagans'?

### A.4.3 Jewish Holidays

Instead of trying to celebrate certain holidays with the world, some Christians have opted to celebrate the holidays that God instituted for Israel instead. Why celebrate any man-made unbiblical holidays, when God himself has already provided a perfectly good set of holidays to celebrate? Thus, just as Jesus commanded the disciples to celebrate the Passover in remembrance of Him, some Christians celebrate all seven feasts commanded in the Old Testament (Lev. 23) *in remembrance of the Lord*. From their very inception, these feasts were merely shadows of things to come as they all find their ultimate fulfillment in Christ.

Jewish Feast	Date of Celebration	Fulfillment in Jesus Christ
Passover (Lev. 23:4-5)	First full moon of Spring	The Passover lamb (John 1:29, 1Cor. 5:7, Rev. 5:6,12)
Unleavened Bread (Lev. 23:6-8)	Day after Passover (7 days)	Victorious over sin (1Pet. 2:22, 1Cor. 15:56-57)
Firstfruits (Lev. 23:9-14)	Sunday after first Spring harvest	Raised from the dead (Rom. 6:4, 1Cor. 15:3-4)
Pentecost (Lev. 23:15-22)	50 days after Firstfruits	Sent the Holy Spirit (John 14:26, Acts 2:1-4)
Trumpets (Lev. 23:23-25)	113 days after Pentecost (Jewish new year)	Returns at the trumpet sound (1Cor. 15:52, 1Thes. 4:16)
Day of Atonement (Lev. 23:26-32)	9 days after Trumpets	Presides on judgment day (John 5:22, Rom. 2:16, Acts 17:31)
Tabernacles (Lev. 23:33-36)	5 days after Day of Atonement (7 days)	Tabernacles with us (John 1:14, Heb. 8:1-2, Rev. 21:3)

If you are looking for some holidays to celebrate, perhaps you might consider these. After all, Jesus and all the apostles did! And so did much of the early Church comprised predominately of Jewish believers. Notice the beautiful symmetry as the four spring feasts have already been fulfilled by Christ and the three fall feasts have yet to be fulfilled when Christ returns. Obviously Christians are not required to keep these feasts according to the Mosaic Law, but they are certainly welcomed to celebrate them in remembrance of Christ if they so desire.<sup>§A.4.1.2</sup> Unfortunately some Christian groups have become confused and taken the position that they are *required* to celebrate these feasts according to the Law. **“You observe days and months and seasons and years. I fear for you that perhaps I have labored among you in vain.”** (Gal. 4:10-11) Some of these *Judaizers* have even gone to the extreme of celebrating all Jewish cultural holidays (including Hanukah and Purim which are not even prescribed by the Law), as if there were some merit in following Jewish customs. Scripture is quite

clear, however, that Gentiles do not need to become Jews in order to be Christians (Acts 15:1-31, Gal 2:14-16, 3:1-5).

#### A.4.4 No Holidays

Some Christians do not celebrate any holidays in particular, but view every day the same. **“One regards one day above another, another regards every day the same.”** (Rom. 14:5) One of the early Christians referred to them as the “advanced class”:

“I have to answer, that to the perfect Christian, who is ever in his thoughts, words, and deeds serving his natural Lord, God the Word, all his days are the Lord’s, and he is always keeping the Lord’s day...But the majority of those who are accounted believers are not of this advanced class; but from being either unable or unwilling to keep every day in this manner, they require some sensible memorials to prevent spiritual things from passing altogether away from their minds.” (Origen, *De Principiis*, Book VII, c. 248)

Will Jesus’ birth not be just as glorious to behold in July? Doesn’t Jesus’ resurrection from the dead make you equally happy on Tuesdays? Indeed, our thoughts should be directed to our Lord *every day!* We do not need to set aside certain days in order to be spiritual; we must walk by the Spirit every day. This does not mean that we should necessarily look down upon others, but **“Let each man be fully convinced in his own mind.”** (Rom. 14:5) God commanded the Jews in the Old Testament to set aside special holidays, and although the fulfillment of these days is found in Christ, it shows that setting aside certain days above others is not inherently sinful and may even be beneficial for some.

#### A.5 Translation Conspiracies?

You may have noticed that the Biblical Greek text has often been consulted to provide a more accurate translation of the Scriptures on various topics. This is because many Biblical words today are being translated with institutional religious meanings that were never originally intended. Several religious terms in this book, for example, have been placed in quotations marks because the common understanding of these words today is quite different than the meaning of the underlying Greek words in the first century. For example, a “church” is not a white building with a steeple on top, but the people of God.<sup>§1.1.1</sup> It is important to remember that the inspired New Testament was written in *Greek*, not English. For this reason, the readers are encouraged to consult whatever Greek reference materials they might have available.<sup>§B.1</sup>

One question then is if the Greek words really have these different nuances, then why aren’t the translators making more accurate translations today? They

are...or at least some of them are! In fact, every Greek mistranslation discussed in this book has been corrected in one or more versions of the Bible, but not necessarily all of them in any one version. Perhaps the more important question is, how did these errors come to exist in the first place? Ever since the fourth century, the pretense of Christendom has functioned almost entirely under an unbiblical institutional framework.<sup>SA.1</sup> And out of this mindset, books have been authored, songs have been written, and sermons have been preached. Likewise, it is important to remember that *every major version of the Bible was translated by those who subscribe to the institutional “church” mentality*. There is no conspiracy here; men have just been translating the Bible according to their theological framework, which happens to come from an institutional perspective. Suffice it to say, it is impossible to translate the Scriptures without any theological bias. Those who have grown up believing there are ecclesiastical positions of authority in the Church just correspondingly tend to translate the Bible that way.

### A.5.1 The King James Disposition

Many English translations of the Bible have a direct lineage or have been heavily influenced by the King James Version (KJV) also known as the Authorized Version (AV). King James I of England ordered this new translation to be undertaken in order to counter the popular Geneva Bible, which was viewed as a threat to the English throne at that time. Since there was no “separation of church and state” in England, obedience to God was considered equal with obedience to the King of England who was the head of the Anglican “church”. As a result, the KJV seems to bend over backwards to use authoritarian sounding words whenever possible. Consider this chart summarizing some of the authoritarian sounding words previously discussed:

KVJ Term	Different Underlying Greek Words
Authority	“ΑΥΘΕΝΤΕΩ” #831, “ΔΥΝΑCΤΗC” #1413, “ΕΞΟΥCΙΑ” #1849, “ΕΞΟΥCΙΑΖΩ” #1850, “ΕΠΙΤΑΓΗ” #2003, “ΙCΘΙ” #2468, “ΚΑΤΕΞΟΥCΙΑΖΩ” #2715, “ΥΠΟΛΑΜΒΑΝΩ” #5274
Rule	“ΑΡΧΗ” #746, “ΑΡΧΩ” #757, “ΒΡΑΒΕΥΩ” #1018, “ΗΓΕΟΜΑΙ” #2233, “ΚΑΝΩΝ” #2583, “ΠΟΙΜΑΙΝΩ” #4165, “ΠΡΟΙCΤΗΜΙ” #4291
Office	“ΔΙΑΚΟΝΕΩ” #1247, “ΔΙΑΚΟΝΙΑ” #1248, “ΕΠΙCΚΟΠΗ” #1984, “ΙΕΡΑΤΕΙΑ” #2405, “ΙΕΡΑΤΕΥΩ” #2407, “ΠΡΑΞΙC” #4234
Obey	“ΑΠΕΙΘΕΩ” #544, “ΠΕΙΘΑΡΧΗΕΩ” #3980, “ΠΕΙΘΩ” #3982, “ΥΠΑΚΟΗ” #5218, “ΥΠΑΚΟΥΩ” #5219, “ΥΠΗΚΟΟC” #5255
Commandment	“ΔΙΑCΤΕΛΛΟΜΑΙ” #1291, “ΔΙΑΤΑΓΜΑ” #1297, “ΕΝΤΑΛΛΜΑ” #1778, “ΕΝΤΕΛΛΟΜΑΙ” #1781, “ΕΝΤΟΛΗ” #1785, “ΕΠΙΤΑΓΗ” #2003, “ΚΕΛΕΥΩ” #2753, “ΠΑΡΑΓΓΕΛΙΑ” #3852, “ΠΑΡΑΓΓΕΛΛΩ” #3853

If you look up the definitions of these Greek words in any reference book, the differences in meaning become quite apparent. Because of their authoritarian bias, the KJV contains several misleading passages such as “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves” (Heb. 13:17). As previously discussed, “obey” is more accurately translated “be persuaded”,<sup>§5.1.2.1</sup> “rule over” is more accurately translated “lead”,<sup>§5.2.2.2</sup> and “submit” is more accurately translated “yield”.<sup>§6.1.3.1</sup> When these Greek words are systematically studied in context, it becomes clear that the concepts of commands, obedience and submission all operate in the context of spiritual authority in the Church, not institutional positions of men.<sup>§5.1.2</sup>

The KJV translators’ bias is not just shown where they stretched words to imply authoritarian positions, but they also *inserted* words into the Bible where there was no Greek word at all (Rev. 22:18)! These are not italicized words that were added for clarification or readability, but non-italicized words that the translators passed off as part of the text, even though they do not appear in *any* Greek manuscript. The word “office”, for example, was inserted into three verses (1Tim. 3:1,10,13) as if to indicate that “deacons” and “bishops” were institutional positions in the Church.<sup>§5.2.1</sup> *Notice that there is no underlying Greek word for “office” present in these verses in any Greek manuscript!* This word “office” was simply inserted so that the terms “deacon” and “bishop” would be associated with the corresponding institutional offices in the Anglican “church”. In other verses (Heb. 13:7,17,24), the KJV inserted the word “over” giving the false impression that “church” officials have positions of authority to rule *over* others instead of getting *under* people and serving them.<sup>§6.1.2.1</sup> Here again, the word “over” was inserted into the text without the Greek preposition “ΥΠΕΡ” #5228 or any other corresponding Greek word. Thus, it isn’t necessary to wrangle over the meanings of Greek words to expose the KJV’s bias, when the non-existent authoritarian words they inserted can simply be pointed out instead! These added words are completely unnecessary for any scholarly translation of the Greek, and they clearly expose the bias of those who were *translating for the British monarchy*. Should that be a surprise?

The inspired Greek that the apostles wrote must always take precedence over the 17th century English that institutional “church” members translated. The KJV did not really invent this authoritarian viewpoint; it was merely handed down to them through the institutional culture started by the Roman Catholic “church”.<sup>§7.2.4</sup> The translators were not intentionally being deceptive; they were merely translating through the colored glasses of their institutional background. The purpose here is not to unduly disparage the KJV, because it remains highly accurate overall compared to many of the modern Bible translations. But the readers just need to be aware of its translational bias. Accordingly, many groups such as the Pilgrims and Puritans rejected the KJV and continued to use the Geneva Bible instead. Further detailed analysis of the claim that “The King James Version is the only authoritative Word of God for all English speaking peoples” is beyond the scope of this book.

## A.5.2 The King James Tradition

Some might be thinking, “So what? I don’t use the KJV.” Indeed, you may not read the King James Bible, but you are probably reading a Bible that follows the *King James tradition*. How’s that? While the KJV is no longer used in most institutional “churches”, reliance on the KJV terminology, patterns, and concepts continues to dominate most modern translations to this day. For example, because of its historical entrenchment, modern translators tend to translate the Lord’s Prayer (Matt. 6:9-13, Luke 11:2-4) with the same general rhythm and flow to match the tenor of the KJV because so many have already memorized it that way.

In the same way, some modern translations continue to use the same terminology familiar to institutional “churches”. For example, does your modern Bible still refer to a “deacon”, “elder”, or “bishop”? These words still appear in some modern Bible translations, not because they are contemporary English words, but because these were the names of the Anglican “church” positions used by the KJV. Modern translations that continue to use these Anglican terms are not translating them to the *best English equivalents today*, but are merely continuing the KJV tradition. Do they think that everyone still belongs to the Anglican denomination? For example, what is a “deacon”? Apart from the religious context of an institutional “church”, no one would know what a “deacon” was, because the word is otherwise meaningless in society. But this is not representative of the Greek! Everyone in the first century knew that a “ΔΙΑΚΟΝΟΣ” #1249 was simply a “servant”.<sup>§6.1.4.3</sup> Although modern translations correctly *translate* the Greek word as “servant” in every other verse, some continue to use the *transliterated* term “deacon” in the same five verses where the KJV wanted people to think of it as an institutional office (Phil. 1:1, 1Tim. 3:8,10,12-13). You can see how inconsistent if not downright dishonest it is to translate this way.

A similar problem arises with the use of the word “elder”. Because of the KJV’s influence, the word “elder” is commonly used to refer to a position of authority in an institutional “church”. The underlying Greek word “ΠΡΕΣΒΥΤΕΡΟΣ” #4245, however, simply refers to an older person as used in the phrase, “Children should mind their elders.” While many modern translations now translate this term as “older men” in most verses, some of them still revert back to the traditional word “elder” in the same places that the KJV used them as institutional positions of authority. For example, notice how awkwardly some translators bounce between the terms “older men” and “elders” within the same chapter as they struggle to preserve the KJV tradition of institutional offices. They translate the word “ΠΡΕΣΒΥΤΕΡΟΣ” as “older men” (1Tim. 5:1-2, 1Pet. 5:5) but then translate the same word as “elder” (1Tim. 5:17, 1Pet. 5:1) only a few verses apart in order to preserve the KJV’s notion that it is a position of authority. Such modern translations are *inconsistent* in their translations only because they are trying to preserve the vestiges of institutional positions.

Even when modern translations have been updated to use de-Anglicanized terminology, some of them still use the terms to refer to institutional positions of authority. Some modern translations, for example, now translate the Greek word “ΕΠΙΣΚΟΠΟΣ” #1985 as “overseer” instead of the Anglican term of “bishop”.



(They must have finally realized that apart from the Anglican tradition, the average reader might think that a “bishop” was a chess piece.) ☺ So here they have finally decided to use a modern term, and yet some of them still translate the overall sentence in a way to refer to an imaginary institutional position of authority. Thus, it doesn’t always matter if a translation uses modern terms if they continue to use them to match the same unbiblical precedent of offices used by the KJV. There are many more examples of this that could be cited, but again this is not because there was a conspiracy among translators, *it is simply because they themselves view Christianity through the prism of an unbiblical institutional environment.* These Greek words themselves do not demand that they be translated from an institutional perspective; the translators just view them this way because their own religious perspective has been shaped in an institutional “church”. The historical and comprehensive context of the Scriptures, however, clearly says otherwise!

# Appendix B:

## Additional Resources

This appendix has been reluctantly added to provide at least a few resources to those who are seeking some additional information. There is a hesitation in providing this section at all because the truths contained in Scripture are not dependent on how many people have obeyed them in the past or are obeying them today. The danger is that some would evaluate truth based on “Who else is already doing this?” and would even latch on to one of these men or groups as their source of truth. It is truly unfortunate that much of Churchianity tends to operate in this fashion. But the truth does not depend on men’s endorsement, and to determine the truth based on popular opinion is indeed a grave mistake. This book does not make any specific claims about any particular group that claims to fellowship as the Church. The point is not to focus attention on any particular group of people, but to focus on Jesus.

### B.1 Bibliography

There is probably no good way to provide a list of resources without omitting something or potentially hurting someone’s feelings. The following resources do not even begin to scratch the surface of what is available, but is only intended to provide some minimal direction for those who wish to study this area further. This limited selection is far from being comprehensive as much is being written on this rapidly expanding topic.

Atkerson, Steve, Ed. *Ekklesia: To the Roots of Biblical Church Life*. Atlanta, Georgia: New Testament Restoration Foundation, February 1, 2003. ISBN 0-972908-20-X.

Bauer, Walter. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, Edited and revised by Frederick William Danker, 3rd Ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000. ISBN 0-226039-33-1. (This lexicon known as BDAG is currently considered to be the definitive standard for Greek New Testament word studies.)

Bercot, David W., Ed. *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*. Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., March 1999. ISBN 1-56563-357-1.

Kershaw, Peter. *The Modern Church, Divine Institution or Counterfeit?* (This booklet discusses the unbiblical nature of incorporated “churches” which are regulated by the government.)

Nee, Watchman. *The Church and the Work*. 3 vols. New York, New York: Christian Fellowship Publishers, Inc., 1982. ISBN 0-935008-58-6. (Some of

- Nee's teachings were addressed to the Church in his area and should be taken as advice, but most of the content is excellent and still applies universally.)
- Nee, Watchman. *The Normal Christian Church Life*. Uhrichsville, Ohio: Barbour Publishing Inc., July 1, 2000. ISBN 1-577489-15-2.
- Peters, Mike. *Meetings in His Kingdom*. Kingdom Publishing, 1990. ISBN 0-9627202-0-8.
- Rutz, James H. *The Open Church*. Beaumont, Texas: The Seedowers, 1992. ISBN 0-940232-50-2. (Largely focuses on empowering the "laity" to solve the clergy/laity problem but seems content to implement it under an institutional "church" structure. Has a good bibliography at the end.)
- Simson, Wolfgang, *Houses that Change the World*, Brooklyn, New York: Authentic Media, 2004. ISBN 1-85078-356-X.
- Strauch, Alexander. *Biblical Eldership*. Littleton, Colorado: Lewis and Roth Publishers, 1997. ISBN 0-936083-15-8. (Discusses the shared leadership of "elders" as opposed to a single "pastor" system, but still approaches the issue from an institutional perspective.)
- Strongs, James. *Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*. Iowa Falls, Iowa: Riverside Book and Bible House, nd. (Although Strong's numbers are cited in this book for convenience, Bauer's work cited above is recommended for any serious Greek studies.)
- The Day of Small Beginnings*. Kingdom Publishing, 1996. ISBN 0-9627202-1-6. (A fictional novel based on reality that illustrates the distinctions between various types of Church models.)
- Viola, Frank A. *Pagan Christianity: The Origins of Our Modern Church Practices*. Brandon, Florida: Present Testimony Ministry, May 2003. ISBN 0-966665-73-2.
- Viola, Frank A. *Rethinking the Wineskin: The Practice of the New Testament Church*, 3rd Ed. Brandon, Florida: Present Testimony Ministry, August 2001. ISBN 0-966665-70-8.
- Viola, Frank A. *Who is Your Covering?: A Fresh Look at Leadership, Authority, and Accountability*, 3rd Ed. Brandon, Florida: Present Testimony Ministry, January 2001. ISBN 0-966665-71-6.

## B.2 Internet Resources

There are a myriad of websites related to this topic that are available on the Internet. A few of the books and articles listed above can also be found online at various websites. Below are a few of the more prolific authors on this topic at this time and some of the websites where some of their materials can be found:

- <http://jesuslifetogether.com> (Mike Peters)
- <http://www.awildernessvoice.com> (Michael Clark)
- <http://frankviola.org> (Frank Viola)
- <http://www.ntrf.org> (Steve Atkerson)
- <http://www.hccentral.com/directory> (House Church Central)

<http://www.home-church.org> (Hal Miller)

<http://www.house-church.org> (Beresford Job)

<http://housechurch.org> (House Church Network)

These links are by no means exhaustive, but again are intended to provide at least some direction for the curious. Many of these links will undoubtedly become outdated over time, but the same resources may still be found elsewhere on the Internet by doing a search. One could spend months weeding through all of the links from a search on “house church” or “home church”. Some have found the testimonies of those who have left the institutional “church” system to be particularly valuable such as *A Pastors Plea for Biblical Fidelity* by Steve Atkerson and *Frank Viola’s Testimony* by Frank Viola.

## B.3 Disclaimer

Let the reader beware! *The inclusion of these resources should in no way be considered endorsements of their content or the people who wrote them.* In fact, some of the content of these materials is dubious, but yet still provides some valuable insights into specific areas. Again, the reader is encouraged to “eat the meat and spit out the bones”. Discernment is especially in order today as there are now a rapidly growing number of books, magazines, and articles being produced on this topic as related to the “home church” movement.<sup>§2.2.1.2</sup> While such resources may contain many valid truths about the Church, the reader should be cautioned that some of them are still couched in an institutional “house church” framework. The Church is not a “house church” movement, and those who fellowship as the Church would not necessarily want to be associated with many of these “house church” organizations. Meeting in a “house church” does not necessarily mean that someone understands the Church at all, in either theory or in practice. Beyond this, there are still other questions to consider: Is this the Lord’s way of finding other Christians?<sup>§3.3.2.1</sup> Do you assume that you will find “better” Christians in the “house church” movement?<sup>§3.3.2.2</sup> Is it valid for Christians to have smaller organizational identities instead of simply operating as the Church?<sup>§2.2.1.4</sup> Again there is absolutely no endorsement of any of these resources implied here. Visit any of them at your own risk.