

Spectrums: “Church” or Ekklesia Neil Girrard

“Church” { ___ } Ekklesia
“Pastor/Overlord { ___ } Under-Shepherd
Building { ___ } People
Mixed Multitude { ___ } Saints
Come { ___ } Go
Lawlessness { ___ } Righteousness
Doctrines { ___ } Jesus
Deception { ___ } Truth
Death/Darkness { ___ } Life/Light
Division { ___ } Unity
Denomination { ___ } Kingdom of God
Blasphemy { ___ } Praise
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Many people, whether in or out of the “church,” have a tendency to oversimplify matters and think of the “church” as either merely “good” or “bad.” But even when we think of any individual, whether the worst kind of evil villain or the best kind of saint or hero, we can readily recognize that there are mixed strains of both good and bad in his or her life. Why then must we be forced to believe that any particular assembly, which is made up of many individuals, is either merely “good” or “bad” and not some mixture of both.

Further, many people are adamantly satisfied with their analysis of “good” or “bad” and

this is the *only* standard to which they will subject the “church” or assembly in question or under scrutiny. But there are at least twelve spectrums or ranges of varying degrees by which any assembly can be more accurately assessed and evaluated so as to better recognize to which opposing pole of the spectrum that assembly conforms. “Good” or “bad” simply does not even begin to address these spectrums or ranges and thus the assembly being evaluated conveniently avoids any necessity to actually change or improve or move toward the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. In many “churches,” the status quo leadership exploits this ignorance and any true seekers of God languish under this arrangement that so serves the agendas of the established clergy hierarchy. In other “churches,” however, the people themselves are content to remain blind and ignorant and the true seeker of God has no choice but to “come out from among them” (2 Cor. 6:17) and go “outside the camp” (Heb. 13:13) to truly meet the real Lord Jesus Christ who is the true Head over His ekklesia. (Eph. 1:22)

“Church” { ___ } Ekklesia

The first separation we need to make is conceptual. We need to recognize, though we must be much more specific, that there is a good kind and a bad kind of assembly practiced in the name of Christ and God. That is, there is a genuine assembly and a counterfeit of that assembly but there are, as has already been stated, at least twelve ways an assembly can be counterfeited and each one of those ways done so in varying degrees.

Because the English word “church” has meanings that differ sharply from the original Greek word used in the New Testament, it is very convenient to use *ekklesia* [1577] as the label for the genuine, original ideas as expressed in the New Testament and “church” as the label for the man-made or demonic contaminants that have attached themselves over the centuries to the genuine, original concept. Though this too can be oversimplified (indeed, there are house “churches” now who proclaim themselves as ekklesia but in reality are only “church” on a small scale), this at least gives us a vocabulary and an overarching view whereby we can begin to discuss the differences between “church” and ekklesia. And we can evaluate, on the basis of

each category we will examine below, whether the sum of all the parts makes any particular group more “church” or more ekklesia, more of a counterfeit than the genuine article.

The words themselves betray the vast differences between these two opposites. *ekklesia* refers to those *people* who have been called out (by way of their spiritual new birth from above – 1 Pet. 1:23, Jn. 3:3, 5, etc.) from the darkness of this world and given the responsibility to attend to the affairs and issues of the kingdom of God that arise in their locale or sphere of influence. “Church,” on the other hand, refers first to the *building* in which the “Christian religion” is practiced, second to the *clergy* who manage their version of the “Christian religion” and then, finally, to the rank and file *laity* who adhere to some particular form of “Christianity.” Since God does not dwell in buildings made by human hands (Acts 17:24) and since the over-under classifications of clergy-laity is prohibited (Mt. 23:8-9, Mk. 10:42-43, etc.) and condemned as Nicolaitanism ([3531] “conquer over the people,” exercising authority *delegated* to these rulers over the assembly that, in spite of their teachings, does *not* come from God – Rev. 2:6, 15), we can begin to see even here the stark contrast and vast differences between the original concept and the sinful abomination that has evolved (devolved is more accurate!) over the centuries. We will return to each of these elements as we progressively examine each spectrum that divides “church” from ekklesia.

“Pastor/Overlord {____}Under-Shepherd

Paul spoke to the elders of Ephesus and warned them, “From among yourselves men will rise up, speaking corrupted things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.” (Acts 20:30) This prophecy was precisely fulfilled in the 1st, 2nd and 3rd centuries as *bishops* arose from the ranks of the elders and drew followers away from Christ and after themselves, to their own practices and doctrines which they proclaimed to be the proper way to follow Christ. Though many acted from a well-meaning motive in an effort to preserve the visible “church” hierarchy and structure that, to them, represented “the faith” of Christ, the result was that believers “left their first love” (Rev. 2:4) and turned instead to rules and manuals and the approval of men (bishops installed after majority votes or appointed by the upper tiers of “church” hierarchy both effectively remove Christ as the true Head over the assembly) so as to uphold the bishop in his newly created office which, following Ignatius of Antioch (d. 110 A.D.), was taught to be an apostolically approved office that was the direct descendant of the original apostles.

Jesus said, “While men slept” the devil planted his sons, the tares, among the sons of the kingdom, the wheat. (Mt. 13:25, 38-39) By rising up, the bishops created an office wherein the tares could perpetuate their deceptions upon the sons of the kingdom. Trappings such as robes, platforms, pulpits and “church” buildings (none of which are found in the New Testament and all of which are patterned after the pagan and worldly Roman empire) completed the “church’s” disguise as a spiritual thing. That the “church” still retains its worldly patterns betrays (to those with eyes to see) that the “church” is truly something of this world. The bishop and his “theological” descendant, the “pastor” – especially those who are carnal or wicked – are the agents of the devil.

But even where the “pastor” has some real relationship with God, the deceptions of the counterfeit office still serve to deceive and oppress both the “pastor” and those who follow him. The symbology and subliminal message of placing his followers at his feet and routinely speaking down to them simply drowns out any truths spoken from the pulpit. Because the “pastor” stands in an office that distorts whatever relationships he might have with others, it is

difficult for him to simply be a real person and it is equally difficult for him to be a true shepherd, a job made exponentially more impossible as the numbers of his followers increases.

Linguistically, it is informative to recognize that “pastor” is a Latin word and, as such, could not possibly have any true place in the original Greek New Testament. “Pastor” is an insertion accomplished over the centuries – an insertion accomplished with great and deliberate skill. “Pastor” has roots (to the Greek god Pan) and meanings (CEO of a bureaucracy) that differ sharply from the original Greek “shepherd.”

There is only one place for the Chief Shepherd – the Lordship of Christ (Jn. 10:14) – and any “pastor” who stands over the assembly and acts as a lord over the people stands in the place reserved for Christ as the Chief Shepherd. Those “pastors” who recognize that they are not to be lords over the assembly yet continue to make unilateral decisions that affect those in the assembly are doubly deceived. The role of an under-shepherd is that of assisting the Chief Shepherd in maintaining *His* flock. The sheep must hear and follow the Chief Shepherd (Jn. 10:4, 27), not the under-shepherd. It is the first and essential priority for any under-shepherd to make sure each sheep hears, knows and follows the Chief Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ. “He must increase, but I must decrease” (Jn. 3:30) is every true under-shepherd’s “prime directive.”

The man who is called to be an under-shepherd but who steps into the office of “pastor” must agree with several deceptions and will always struggle with the two streams of power (God’s and Satan’s) that flows through his life. Any man who is not graced to care for sheep is not called to be an under-shepherd and most likely stepped into the office of “pastor” for hidden reasons of his own – i.e., lucrative career, being “beneficial” or significant in the lives of others, etc. Those who remain completely unable to recognize that there are any differences whatsoever between the modern “pastor” and the spiritually graced under-shepherd are exceedingly deceived and exceedingly dangerous. Beware!

Building {____} People

As has already been mentioned, God does not dwell in buildings made by human hands. (Acts 17:24) Nonetheless, the people who claim to follow Christ have expended exponentially more on building “houses of God” than they have on attending to the needs of orphans, widows and poor people – thus proving that churchianity is an impure and defiled form of religion. (Jas. 1:27) Further, the “church” building demonstrates that the “church” is little more than a franchise with each variety having to adhere to the “doctrines” (teachings) and “theology” and practices handed down from denominational (corporate) headquarters. Thus the “church” building is the symbolic representation of each sect’s peculiar differences that keep it separate (and superior!) to all the other sects (denominations) while they all consider themselves superior – another proof that the “church” is antagonistic to and preventative of the kingdom of God. (Gal. 5:20-21, in a later section we will especially look at the Greek definitions of contentions, selfish ambitions, dissensions, and heresies and look at how these are what many modern “churches” and denominations are built upon.)

Historically, there were no specialized “church” buildings until the last part of the 2nd century. Their advent coincided with the rise of the bishops (who took the place of headship over the local assembly that had belonged to Christ) and with the use of “liturgies” (that replaced the leading of the Holy Spirit with a man-made, previously prescribed “order of worship,” that replaced spontaneous spiritual life with soulless religious experiences). The “church” building proliferated after Constantine – the half-pagan, half-“Christian” Roman emperor – allocated a lot

of money into building “Christian” temples, to paying “Christian” priests, thus making “Christianity” (the 3rd century version of it, at any rate) the official religion of the Roman empire.

Some look to the apostles’ use of the temple in Jerusalem to teach and preach (Acts 5:42, etc.) as a justification for “church” buildings. This practice is seen as indicating the “liberty that the people of Christ have in meeting under whatever circumstances serves the purpose of God. Indeed, we do have such liberty – but we are not at liberty to indulge our flesh (Gal. 5:13), building buildings that demonstrate our “superiority” over all other “Christian” sects, that divert resources from the needs of those whom God has clearly given priority to (see also Mt. 25:40, 45) and that provides a place where the people sit passively at the feet of their favorite ear-scratching spiritual guru. (2 Tim. 4:3-4) This is not liberty – it is carnality, something Paul says is *enmity* against God. (Rom. 8:7)

The house “church” has sprung up as the latest denomination because people do not recognize the extent to which the “church” deceptions go. Some leave the “church” because what they see at the organized, institutional, denominational “church” is clearly and irrevocably wrong and the status quo leadership stubbornly resists and refuses to change anything. But others leave because they can’t be the “pastor” or because they still believe that some peculiar “church” practice must be incorporated into regular “worship.” Thus many house “churches” are just that – “churches” established on deceptive doctrines, “theology” or practices but kept to a scale more consistent with the house “pastor’s” limited eloquence or charisma (drawing power) or the size of the house in which they meet.

It is true that the ekklesia will like adhere to the pattern of gospel workers *discoursing* in public places (like the temple at Jerusalem) and “in *every* house.” (Acts 5:42) But the ekklesia is built upon engaging *every* believer as a worker of the gospel. (Eph. 4:12) Ekklesia is about *each one* serving one another “as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.” (1 Pet. 4:10) It is about “*each one*” having a psalm, a teaching, a tongue, a revelation and an interpretation and *all* of these things being done for the edification of the body of Christ. (1 Cor. 14:26)

But the ekklesia is also about physically and realistically caring for one another, for orphans, for widows, for poor people – it is not just about getting together at someone’s house to *talk* about the kingdom of God. (1 Cor. 4:20, Jas. 2:26, etc.) Peter said that anyone who had received a speaking gift from the manifold grace of God should “speak as the oracles of God” but the one who had received a serving gift should “serve with the ability which God supplies.” (1 Pet. 4:11) Any assembly that does not place at least equal emphasis on knowing *and* doing is, at best, out of balance or, at worst, is a deception designed to keep the individuals from being true ekklesia. While it is true that the location or building in which an assembly meets is not conclusive proof that the assembly is “church” or ekklesia, the “church” building is almost certain to be a handicap that prevents the assembly from being true and pure ekklesia.

Mixed Multitude {____} Saints

If anyone aspect of the identity crisis between “church” or ekklesia is steeped in confusion, it would be the question of whether the assembly is supposed to be a school for sinners or a congregation of saints. In the parable of the wedding maids, Jesus said that while the Bridegroom was delayed in returning, “they *all* slumbered and slept.” (Mt. 25:5) This question arose in the 3rd and 4th centuries and the resolution that was reached demonstrated how much confusion there was surrounding this question. If one can picture sliding the treble control all the way down while sliding the bass control all the way up, leaving balanced sound (representative

of the whole truth of the matter) out of the question, this is an apt metaphor for what has occurred to perpetuate the “church”/ekklesia identity crisis.

The first layer of confusion (in a question that really need never have existed) is that of saints or sinners. The confusion entered in because “saints” came to mean extremely holy men or women whose relics (body parts, memorabilia, etc.) were superstitiously held to be sacred and even possessing of miraculous power. This fact alone should show us the extent to which men slept and confusion abounded!

Jesus clearly defined the gospel of the kingdom: “I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Mt. 9:13) and, “...unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of God.” (Mt. 5:20) Repentant sinners, through faith, receive the righteousness of Christ (Phlp. 3:9, etc.) and thus are counted to be saints, people *set apart* from sin, self and worldliness and *set apart* to God and His will and purposes.

That this confusion need never have existed is found in Paul’s addresses to the saints in the various cities (Rom. 1:7, 1 Cor. 1:2, 2 Cor. 1:1, etc.) and in his usage of the phrase “as in *all* the assemblies *of the saints*.” (1 Cor. 14:33) Ekklesia is, must be and always was an assembly of born again *saints*. But because the clergy had taken over “the work of the ministry” – something the *saints* were supposed to be equipped to do (Eph. 4:12) – the idea of saints fell even further and the “laity” became a mixed multitude coming into the “Christian” temple to passively listen to the speeches of the “men of God,” the clergy, those men who were the real “saints in the making,” and to participate in the rites and rituals over which the clergy officiated.

Further, the ekklesia, as it was at any one moment in time, was held to be the kingdom of God. The hierarchy of Romish bishops and priests was considered “the ekklesia” and apart from that outward visible structure there was no possibility of anyone even coming to salvation. One bishop, Cyprian (d. 258 A.D., even said, “No one can have God for his Father, who has not he church for his mother.” (Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church, Vol. II*, p. 173) The Romish sect had created a monopoly that is only partially found in the Scriptures. That is, salvation is found in *no other name* than the name of Christ (Acts 4:12) and there *is only one body* (Eph. 4:3, Rom. 12:4, etc.) but the Romish sect with its clergy was and is *not* the fullness of that one body! But in 411 A.D. when the Donatists (followers of a man named Donatus) clashed with the Catholics, led by Augustine, the issue was decided in favor of the Catholics. That particular game was rigged, however, because the judge who decided the contest was a friend of Augustine’s! The controversy is worth some consideration as it addresses the same issues that are still shrouded in confusion.

Augustine and the Catholics argued that a complete separation of sinners from saints is not possible before the final judgment. Two parables – the wheat and the tares and the dragnet (Mt. 13) – were the main battlegrounds. The Donatists, following what Jesus Himself had said, held that the field was the world. (Mt. 13:38) The Catholics, under the dual confusions that the Catholic sect was the ekklesia and that the ekklesia was the kingdom of God, thus responded that the subject of the whole parable was the kingdom. The Catholics emphasized the Lord’s warning not to uproot the tares before the final harvest – not recognizing that “the servants” being so warned were *the angels*. No man is even able to “uproot a tare” in the sense in which this parable speaks! The Donatists rightly charged Augustine with making two ekklesias. In reality, both sides were simply seeing the dual existence of the genuine and counterfeit ekklesias but neither side could recognize this, let alone adequately define which was which. In Augustine’s mind there was no such possibility and, to him, the ekklesia was already mixed with

the ungodly. He no longer recognized saints as simply repentant sinners and there already was no way, in the context of clergy hierarchy and “church” buildings, to separate the saints from the sinners. But all this circular reasoning and confusion held because, as was already mentioned, the judge was Augustine’s friend.

What is truly in view here is that ekklesia is and can only be “saints only” and “church” meetings are a counterfeit. Because the saints no longer go and make disciples of all nations by discoursing with them the realities of God’s kingdom in their lives (Mt. 28:19) but instead invite them into the “church” building to become a mixed multitude, the ekklesia, which alone has the responsibility to attend to the affairs and issues of Christ’s kingdom of light, does not, indeed *cannot*, further the kingdom of God. Saints are no longer saints (in the original New Testament sense) and modern “Christians” are merely unregenerate sinners (in the original New Testament sense) who think themselves “saved” and in need of nothing (certainly not repentance or diligence or works of righteousness – see Rev. 3:17) Thus the “church” is the place to find hypocrites and self-righteous judges who, because they believe themselves to be “under grace,” see nothing wrong with sitting at the feet of their preferred spiritual guru and doing nothing to serve the orphans, widows and the poor while they pursue all the worldly passions of the ungodly. (2 Tim. 4:3-4, Jas. 1:27)

The idea that the ekklesia is supposed to tolerate sin and wickedness in the people of Christ is a fallacy. Paul, in a chapter devoted to the subject (1 Cor. 5), concludes with, “What business is it of mine to judge those outside the ekklesia? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. ‘Expel the wicked man from among you.’” (1 Cor. 5:12-13) Such expulsion *requires* the unanimity of the whole assembly (Mt. 18:17) – a unity that is almost entirely negated by the lack of spiritual maturity that is evidenced (and produced!) by routine passive listening at the feet of a man (Heb. 5:13) and by being trained to follow that man rather than the Spirit of truth. (see Jn. 16:13)

Perhaps the most common error is to oversimplify the various kinds of meetings that involve the ekklesia. Paul wrote, “We speak wisdom among those who are mature...” (1 Cor. 2:6) This kind of discussion *cannot* take place in a mixed multitude! Further, any mixed multitude setting is supposed to be where the ekklesia of saints, in ones and twos, goes out to *discourse* with unbelievers “reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God (Acts 19:8, etc.) and making “disciples of all the nations.” (Mt. 28:19) There is nothing particularly wrong with the ekklesia being involved in meetings with mixed multitudes. The error comes in when the mixed multitude is mistakenly taken to be the ekklesia, when wicked men and unbelievers are allowed to participate in spiritual matters and when resources are diverted from kingdom priorities to accomplish things that permits or even encourages carnality or confusion. To avoid confusing the mixed multitude with the ekklesia, we must *know* one another. This simple safeguard is not available where an ambitious and eloquent Diotrephes (3 Jn. 9) has gained a large number of followers who are required to sit quietly and passively at his feet. Wisdom that comes from the pulpit of such a man will not be divine wisdom but rather earthly, sensual or even demonic “wisdom.” (Jas. 3:14-15) True, divine wisdom from God (Jas. 3:17) will not be dispensed to a mixed multitude since that is merely giving what is holy and valuable to (spiritually speaking) “dogs” and “pigs.” (see Mt. 7:6) Any true seeker of God and Christ will be required to step away from the mixed multitude to glean pure wisdom. This fact alone explains the recurrent risings of “come outers” throughout church history.

Come {____} Go

Jesus clearly proclaimed the gospel of the kingdom: “Repent! The kingdom of God is here.” (Mt. 4:17) The message is clear – turn from what you have done with your life and *go* before the holy God who is the King of light, life and love. James amplified this message when he wrote, “*Draw near* to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double minded.” (Jas. 4:8) And to the disciples who had witnessed His death and resurrection, Jesus said, “*Go*, therefore and make disciples of all the nations...” (Mt. 28:19) or as Mark records it, “*Go* into all the world and preach the good news [of the kingdom of God] to all...” (Mk. 16:15) The end result of this going forth was for the disciples to “teach [those who become followers of Christ] to obey all things that I have commanded you.” (Mt. 28:20) Since obedience is the hallmark of being under a king, it is not off the mark to say that we are to go and teach people to obey King Jesus.

The message of the “church,” however, whether overtly spoken or subliminally conveyed, is, “Come! Hear our man speak and see what we do. If you like what you see, hear and experience, you may come back as often or as little as you like and participate as much or as little as you like.” God is not even any real part of the equation! And even in “churches” that do offer some form of introduction to Christ and God, the lawlessness – doing what is right in one’s own eyes because one has no king (see Jdgs. 21:25) – of doing whatever one likes *for* God (since, after all, He is so helpless and impotent that we must do His works *for* Him) negates most of any real relationship one might have with the God of the Bible who still expects us to practice righteousness, holiness *and* love. (1 Jn. 3:10, Heb. 2:14, etc.)

God’s true servants are still told, “*Go* out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here [to My house] the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind... *Go* out into the highways and hedges and persuade them to come in, that My house [wherein will be held the wedding supper of the Son] may be filled.” (Lk. 14:21, 23) God’s house is *not* the “church” building – God “does not dwell in temples made with hands.” (Acts 7:48) God’s house, like “the house of David” is all the children of David, is all those people who have “been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever.” (1 Pet. 1:23) Anyone who trades the implanted word that saves the soul (Jas. 1:21) for a “church” membership card and supposes that he is both relieved from all requirements to *go* and still entitled to an eternity in heavenly bliss is triply deceived.

Lawlessness {____} Righteousness

As was already touched upon, the idea of lawlessness is most readily conceptualized in the description of the Israelites in the time of the judges. “In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.” (Jdgs. 21:25) In philosophical circles this is called relativism and it is a spiritually dangerous mindset. The Greek word rendered “lawlessness” (misrendered “iniquity” in KJV and other older versions) is *anomia* [458] and literally means “no law” or “without law.” Because the follower of Christ has been set free from the Old Covenant legal requirements (Col. 2:14, etc.), lawlessness is best defined as the absence of any external, objective standards for behavior and conduct.

We must be sure to note carefully that the one who does things he knows to be sinful or wrong is *not* the one the New Testament calls lawless. Such a one is simply evil or wicked. The one who is lawless does what he believes to be *right* and *good* – not because God says it is right and good but because he, the man, the individual, thinks of it as right and good. This is the fruit of the forbidden tree, the independent knowledge of good and evil. (see Gen. 3:22, etc.) The

man's action, because it originates in the man's independent (from God) flesh and not from the heart of God, is still carnal, an act of *enmity* against God. (Rom. 8:7) All of a man's actions, apart from the leading and grace (power) of God, are still as filthy rags in the sight of God. (Isa. 64:6) The man's actions may appear right, good and beneficial to the world (and the "church" is in reality only a part of the world disguised to appear as something spiritual) but the world (and by extension, the "church") is incapable of making truly righteous (right in God's eyes) judgments and the man's actions are truly, in God's eyes, only carnal, sinful, wicked and abominable. The truth still stands that righteousness (what is right in God's eyes) and lawlessness (men doing what is right in their own eye) have nothing in common. (2 Cor. 6:14)

Because the "church" is based on traditions and "theologies" gleaned and followed apart from the Holy Spirit, lawlessness stands as its foundation and chief pillar. Lawlessness is epitomized in the so-called "seeker friendly" abominations but it is not absent from any kind of "church." Wherever one is free or called upon to do whatever one wishes to do *for* God (as contrasted with co-laboring *with* Christ and God – 1 Cor. 3:9, 15:10, Jn. 15:5), the assembly is built, in whole or in part, upon the lawless notions of mere men.

Doctrines {____} Jesus

Here we approach a distinction that may only become apparent in the fruit that is produced. Jesus said, "If you abide in My word [teachings, sayings, instructions], you are My disciples indeed." (Jn. 8:31) There is certainly a necessary and legitimate place for teachings, but because we can lawlessly and soulishly latch onto facts – this is what the New Testament calls "private interpretations" (see 2 Pet. 1:20-21) – and believe them to be truth, in reality, these facts become for us mere knowledge that puffs up its owner. (1 Cor. 8:1) Someone who knows all the "right" (in their own eyes, that is) doctrines usually displays their superior and over-abundant knowledge with spiritual pride and arrogance, most often expressing their knowledge with rude sarcasm and utter disdain for their "stupid" opponent, stupid if for no other reason than having dared to oppose such a great and vast storehouse of knowledge. One who lives the truth will be gentle and humble, seeking the eternal well-being of the one who opposes him and God's truth. (2 Tim. 2:24-26) Paul wrote, "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine [see Tit. 2:1 and following], but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables." (2 Tim. 4:3-4) The "church," with its "pastor" pulpiteers, and the television (especially the internet), with its talking head preachers, teachers, "apostles," "prophets," "evangelists" and spiritual gurus of every flavor and stripe, is the fulfillment of this prophesy. But the prophesy gives a second aspect that is equally precise.

Jesus said, "The Spirit of truth...will guide you into all truth." (Jn. 16:13) Because men have lawlessly latched on to concepts gleaned from the pages of the Bible, they imagine themselves to be recipients of God's salvation and, after completing a course of study whereby they earn some men's approval, they believe themselves entitled to teach others their lawlessly obtained doctrines. These men have obtained "truth" (some of it may actually be correct, at least, as far as carnal knowledge of spiritual matters can be) apart from the guiding work of the Spirit of truth (they have turned their ears away from the truth) and they have concocted doctrines (fables) that scratch the ears of those routinely and passively absorbing their deceptions at their feet. A more demonically orchestrated setting would be difficult to imagine.

These fables are intricately drawn from Scriptures (taken out of context and mis-applied or carnally understood, of course) and refuting them is a scholarly effort that *requires* spiritual

enlightenment from the Spirit of truth. At the risk of derailing this whole discussion (yes, many are in complete subjugation to their doctrines and have no ability to live their lives in the liberty that truth brings – Jn. 8:32), I will list some of these fables that replace or distort Christ or His Spirit and I will leave the “noble Berean” (Acts 17:11) to diligently present him or herself to the Spirit of truth, the Holy Spirit of God, to be led out of all false beliefs and into the light of truth.

- *The Bible is the inerrant Word of God.* No. The Person of the Lord Jesus Christ is the inerrant Word of God. (Heb. 4:12-13, note the use of “*He*”; Jn. 1:1, etc.) The Bible, especially the New Testament, is God’s “Kingdom Manifesto,” God’s public statement as to His views, aims and agendas.

- *The “church” is God’s family.* No. The “church” is an abomination – whether Catholic mother or denominational daughter. (Rev. 17:5) The people still ensnared in “church” deceptions must one day come out or they will share in their mother’s judgments. (Rev. 18:4) Those who have already come out must take care that all “church” contaminants are removed from their lives. (2 Cor. 7:1)

- *The “pastor” (or “apostle” or “prophet” or “pope” or whatever title) is the man of God for the hour.* No. *Every* man who receives Christ is a priest and king before God. (Rev. 1:6) We *all* have an anointing from the Spirit of truth and don’t need a “man of God for the hour” to tell us “the signs of the times.” (1 Jn. 2:27, Mt. 16:3) We *all* - who have been made to drink of the *one* Spirit of truth and holiness (1 Cor. 12:13) – have had (*past tense!*) God’s laws written in our minds and on our hearts and by this we know we have become God’s child. (Heb. 8:10) The genuine teacher from God is not trying to put information in to a student – he is trying to draw forth from the younger disciple of Christ fruits of obedience worthy of his repentance that cultivate the life of the implanted Word of God. (Mt. 3:8, Jas. 1:21)

- *No one who makes a profession of faith in Christ can ever lose his or her salvation.* No. There is perhaps no more subtle snare set for the people of Christ than the doctrine of “eternal security.” It is not that there is no truth whatsoever in the teachings but that deception is involved, perhaps the most subtle version being that one is deceived into putting his or her trust in the *doctrine* and not in the Savior. Deception abounds on both sides of the “theological” formula of “once saved, always saved.” Some equate salvation with saying a “sinner’s prayer” (which is not found anywhere in the New Testament), with attending “church” the remainder of one’s days (another concept not found anywhere in the New Testament) or with receiving “absolution” from a priest. But such things don’t even begin to describe the spiritual new birth (1 Pet. 1:23, Jn. 3:3, 5, etc.) and actually make a lie of the unique mediatorial role of Christ. (1 Tim. 2:5) To “prove” that one is “always saved,” inordinate weight is placed upon Christ’s promise that “no one is able to snatch [Christ’s sheep] out of [Christ’s or the Father’s] hand.” (Jn. 10:28-29) – but missed is the fact that those who are truly Christ’s sheep must *hear His voice and follow Him!* (Jn. 10:27) Overlooked is the fact that the Spirit of God explicitly foretold the *departure* (one

cannot depart from something one was never in) of many from the faith. (1 Tim. 4:1, 2 Pet. 2:2, etc.) Those who are truly His sheep do not need a *doctrine* of eternal security because they are secure in the nearness and Headship of their Savior who personally and intimately guides them upward and away from all sin and lawlessness. (Phlp. 3:14) Those who do not hear and follow the Shepherd are the ones who need an independent *doctrine* to falsely comfort them in their lawlessness and sin.

Any “doctrine” (teaching) that replaces any portion of our life in Christ with carnal or merely soulless knowledge, any “it” that we follow instead of following *Him*, is the work of the demonic – no matter how much truth is present in the doctrine. The Spirit of truth guides us into *all* truth – not into partial truths. Nor does He lead us into knowledge that causes us to be independent from the Head Christ Jesus. The fruit of whether a man or an assembly is relying on Christ or upon lawless “doctrines” will become apparent over time to anyone who has spiritual eyes to see and spiritual ears to hear. Jesus promises, “You will know [the cleverly disguised false prophets who come in My name] by their fruits.” (Mt. 7:16) This too is a promise we must rely on – even if it means exiting our favorite “church,” forsaking our preferred ear-scratching spiritual guru and especially forsaking our own tendency to cling to lawless (worthless) doctrines that have no significance whatsoever apart from our genuine spiritual unity with Christ and God through and by His Holy Spirit.

Deception {____} Truth

Jesus said to the Jews who were murderously envious of Him, “You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.” (Jn. 8:44) Of Himself, Jesus said, “I am the way, *the truth*, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” (Jn. 14:6) As we approach this spectrum, we must recognize that ultimately, as is ultimately true of all of these ranges, the choice is between following Jesus or the deceiver Satan.

Satan, as the master of deception, has put forth a plethora of deceptions too numerous to list. Perhaps his most effective deception is that there really is no devil – a lie Jesus obviously didn’t buy into (Mt. 4:10, Jn. 14:30, etc.) and a lie disproven by the presence in this world of murderous evil, especially against the innocent and undeserving. The devil’s second most effective lie is that, well, maybe there is a devil somewhere, but he’s just an idiot or a buffoon or a toothless old tiger who was defanged at the cross, and he certainly cannot harm anyone in any way. Certainly, as Jesus promised, Satan cannot forcibly snatch anyone away from the hand of Christ or God. (Jn. 10:28-29) But he is quite able to *deceive* - to place before the follower of Christ an enticing, corrupted version of some spiritual concept that is based on truth but polluted with a small bit of deception, perhaps even in just the way the truth is applied or by confusing the believer to hold the truth in some fleshly or carnal way. Such a deception is his first step in progressively gaining more influence and ultimately control over the life of a deceived believer.

Since all believers bring any number of deceptions into their new life in Christ, there are many bases upon which the devil and the demonic, who are able to do much more subtle things than merely cause epileptic fits in their victims, can work further oppressions and deceptions. The goal, where a believer is not likely to be drawn into overt sin, is to lure the believer to practice negligence regarding his salvation and so drift away from obedience to Christ and return

himself to the wrath of God that is justly upon the sons of disobedience. (Heb. 2:1-3, Eph. 5:5-6) It is in this way of ignorant but willful disobedience that a believer can fall from grace by returning to law (Gal. 5:4), that a believer can fall from the faith and follow demonic deception (1 Tim. 4:1), that a believer can draw back from living by the faith God gives and return to destruction (Heb. 10:38-39, Eph. 2:8-9), that a believer can wander from the truth and cause his soul to die if he does not return to the truth. (Jas. 5:19-20) Exactly at what point a believer becomes apostate (departed from the faith) and is irretrievable is a place only God knows for each individual – but that such a “point of no return” exists is found in the warnings of the writer of Hebrews. (Heb. 6:4-8) Since these warnings are plainly written in the passages of Scripture, it has been the work of the deceiver to raise up lawless “theologians” who concoct “theologies” that deprive these warnings of their power to warn and preserve the spiritual new life by promising such things as “once saved, always saved.”

Thus evaluating whether an assembly traffics in deception or truth is not just a question of fact vs. fiction. It is a question of from which spirit was the knowledge and teaching obtained. Paul warned the Corinthians, “If [someone] who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive *a different spirit* [other than the Holy Spirit] which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you may well put up with it.” (2 Cor. 11:4) Assemblies that place value on the instructions and words of the Bible are not all that vulnerable to a man who comes preaching a vastly different Jesus or a different gospel – though even this barrier is crumbling at many “churches” – but they are very often dominated by a different *spirit*, most often the divisive, condemning spirit of death and darkness that labors incessantly to prevent the ekklesia from attaining to the liberty that accompanies light and truth. (Mt. 16:18)

Those individuals and, by extension, assemblies who are always learning but never able to come to the knowledge of the truth (2 Tim. 3:7) are, because they have no real love for the truth, those whom God gives over to strong delusion so that they will believe that the “Jesus,” “gospel” or spirit in which they traffic is the truth. (2 Ths. 2:11-12) “Churches” abound with “pastors” proclaiming their “truth” (which at times departs *radically* from the teachings and instructions found written plainly in the Bible), thus fulfilling what Jesus said would be the primary sign of His return and the end of the age: “Take heed that no one deceives you.” (Mt. 24:4)

Since the pulpit (which cannot be found anywhere in the New Testament) is used as a blockade and stranglehold on who gets to say what to the people, the devil and the demonic have labored long and hard to install deceived men in the office of bishop or “pastor.” Thus men who should be spiritually mature, even after years of sitting at the feet of such a deceived teacher (especially where the Bible is taught “line upon line, precept upon precept” – see Isa. 28:13), are still mere babes and infants, unable to rightly divide nor aptly apply the truths found in the Scriptures. The “men” of the assembly can only dispense the doctrines of their “church” or “pastor,” at best, and often become arrogant, spiteful or rude whenever confronted with Scripture or wisdom that contradicts those doctrines. This is perhaps the clearest evidence that the spirit of deception rules over that assembly. Where the Spirit of truth reigns, there will be genuine “righteousness, peace and joy” (Rom. 14:17) and those whose wisdom truly comes from God (and not from human tradition or philosophy or from demonic deceit will speak and live what “is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.” But “where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing will be there.” (Jas. 3:15-17) Herein lies an essential difference between ekklesia and “church”

and an assembly is an extreme abomination if we must finally admit that there is much truth on the “ministry” side but much deception on the “business” side, thus making the whole thing deceptive “church” in one of its worst forms.

Death/Darkness {____} Life/Light

Jesus asked His disciples, “Who do you say that I am?” Peter answers, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” (Mt. 16:15-16) This question is the “door” of the gospel, the good news of God’s redemptive plan for mankind. How we answer this question is the crux of our involvement in God’s plan because God has structured redemption so that “[we] may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing [we] may have live in His name.” (Jn. 20:31) We must never forget, however, that coming up with “the right answer,” that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, is a matter of divine revelation and even of faith that God gives so that no man, no flesh, has any reason for boasting. (Eph. 2:8-9, 1 Cor. 1:29)

Jesus said to Peter, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter (“Rock,” Greek masculine *petros* [4074]), and on this rock (Greek feminine *petra* [4073]) I will build My ekklesia, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.” (Mt. 16:17-18) This passage has been so over-relied upon to justify so many “church” notions (and while some sects of the counterfeit “church” may be built upon the man called Peter, Christ’s ekklesia is built on the revelation that *He* is the Son of God!) that we must look very carefully into what is being said here or we will neither rightly divide the word of truth nor rightly settle it into the whole counsel of God.

Let us first recall some of the other things Jesus said of Himself:

- “I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.” (Jn. 8:12)
- “I am the door [for the sheep]. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.” (Jn. 10:9)
- “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” (Jn. 14:6)

With these assertions in view, we need to contrast what Paul said. “The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. (2 Cor. 3:6) This is said, not (as some suppose and even teach) in the context of the Old Covenant but rather in the context of the New Covenant. Paul is pointing out that God, by His Spirit, made him sufficient as a servant of the New Covenant but he did not administer or apply the New Covenant as “the letter” (as of the law) but as the very life and light of God. Thus Paul could say to the Thessalonians, “When you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.” (1 Ths. 2:13)

Jesus promised that the gates of Hades (the underworld realm of death and darkness) would not prevail against His ekklesia. That is, the prison gates of death and darkness could not contain or restrain the children of the kingdom of light. (see also Col. 1:13) But Paul, speaking to the most spiritually mature ekklesia represented in the New Testament, instructs, “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light... And have no

fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness...” (Eph. 5:8, 11) If there was no way in which a follower of Christ could return into darkness or there was no danger involved in doing so (as the eternal security doctrines espouse), Paul would have to be spiritually and intellectually dense to give this instruction! The strategy of the devil and the demonic, then, is to deceive a follower of Christ to step out of His light and back into darkness, the first step in abandoning the road that leads to life and returning to the broad path that ends in destruction and death. (Mt. 7:13-14)

These rather vague, philosophical terms, however, are not very precise tools by which we can easily and readily evaluate an assembly’s status as either “church” or ekklesia – even if we recognize them well in our hearts and spirits. Whether an assembly produces light or darkness, life or death, especially in the spiritual sense, is very open to arguability. But the presence of life-quenching, “letter” sermons, of stifling meetings that accomplish nothing (except to display some man or group’s power or superiority), the holding to rules, regulations, by-laws, dogmas, creeds, doctrines and “theology” – all these and more point toward the assembly being merely some man’s “church” and not Christ’s ekklesia, that which *He* builds by His Spirit in ways that give abundant life (and not religion!) to His true followers. In or outside of a “church” building, the group that truly “plugs in” to Christ will have light and life – any group that fails to “plug in” to Him will produce and be bound up in death and darkness. The group that does truly “plug in” to Him is then faced with the need to utilize His grace (power) to purify themselves of any and all other “church” contaminants that keep them from attaining to the fullness of God’s purposes and intentions for that assembly.

Division {____} Unity

When Paul spoke of those who would rise up from the ranks of the elders (Acts 20:30), he spoke (in prophetic foreknowledge) of what would be the first heresy (Greek *hairesis* [139], sectarian division – note that the meaning of departure from received Scriptural “truth” is a post-New Testament, Catholic addition to the meaning of the word!) – but it was a heresy (division) that went largely unnoticed. There was a perceived need for unity and solidarity and little or no remembrance that Christ had forbidden lordship over the assembly of brothers, even for the followers’ supposed benefit. (Lk. 22:25-26) The bishop provided a visible representation of the invisible God and if anyone seriously opposed the uprising of the bishops, it is lost to history. It truly does appear that “men slept” (Mt. 13:25) while the counterfeit office of bishop was created and installed.

The second heresy (sectarian division) within the “church” revolved around a man named Montanus in the 2nd century (about 150 A.D.) Montanus and two “prophetesses,” Prisca and Maximilla, who both left their husbands to “minister” with Montanus, went hyper-spiritual. “Tongues,” trances, fits of ecstasy and bogus prophetic “words” characterized this movement which became especially popular in Asia Minor and North Africa – not much different from other hyper-charismatic sects and cults of today and in church history. But because Montanus, and those who spoke and wrote in defense of his ideas and practices (such as Tertullian – d. c. 220 A.D.), called into question the growing moral looseness of the Catholic bishops and even challenged the selection of various bishops to be the lords over the assemblies, of course, the bishops had to denounce (and excommunicate!) him as a schismatic. Montanus was indeed operating under spirits that differed from the Holy Spirit of God but, much less noticeably, so too were the Nicolaitan bishops and what suffered most because of Montanus’ errors was the very right idea that one needed to also be a spiritual being in order to follow Christ. This, as was the uprising of the bishops, was a very successful demonic stratagem. Church history has been in a

downward spiral ever since with only a few bright and shining moments where people threw off layers of darkness, deception and death. But no movement to date has ever recaptured all that the ekklesia was intended by God to be (except perhaps by the Chinese house church movement under the Communists of the 1950s and 60s which was largely uninfluenced by European and American denominational “Christianity”) and the spiritual landscape is now cluttered with thousands of sects, subsects, divisions, dissensions, contentions, rivalries, heresies, denominations and cults. There is no visible reason that the world should believe that Jesus is the Messiah sent by God. (Jn. 17:21)

Because the “church” is centered upon doctrines and practices – and not upon the actual and interactive Headship of Christ – the “church” is fractured and divided. The individual or small assembly who would follow the leading of the Spirit of Christ in all things most often has no choice but to leave the “church,” with its Nicolaitan overlord-“pastor,” carnal mixed multitudes, lawless “theologians,” deceptive doctrines, etc. and then must trek across “the wilderness,” with its emptiness and reduction of all things to what is truly important in life, in order to find and experience Christ’s abundant life. (Jn. 10:10) It is not these individuals and small assemblies who genuinely pursue Christ who are divisive but rather it is the “church” that is “rogue” – (note well that there *are* those individuals and small assemblies who are aware of the “church’s” errors but who are not aware of their own!) But because the “church” so vastly outnumbers these individuals and small assemblies, of course, the majority must be right. Even the world recognizes that the appeal to the majority is a logical fallacy.

To the spiritually mature Ephesians Paul wrote, “I...beseech you to have a walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all humility and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unanimity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” (Eph. 4:1-3) The Greek word (rendered “unity” in many translations) is *henotes* [1775] and is more accurately rendered *unanimity* - unanimous agreement, one accord. (Acts 15:22, etc.) This unanimity must be recognized as coming from, as a source, the one Holy Spirit of God. Paul wrote, “By one Spirit we were *all* baptized into one body...and have *all* been made to drink one Spirit.” (1 Cor. 12:13) The unity of the Spirit that we are to *preserve* - not manufacture or work up (Eph. 4:3) – is to first be certain that we are drawing our ideas and beliefs from the mind of Christ through the work of the Spirit of truth. (1 Cor. 2:16, Jn. 16:13) When we are gathered together with those we know to be genuine ekklesia, the *unanimous* (one mind, one accord) confirmation of all the saints *is* the evidence Jesus said would cause the world to have to acknowledge that He came from the Father. (Jn. 17:22-23) Thus because *all* those who truly learn from and follow the Spirit of truth hear and know the voice of the Lord (Jn. 10:27, 1 Jn. 2:27, etc.), we can rely on the unanimity (one mind, one judgment – 1 Cor. 1:10) of the Spirit, as preserved by those who are truly saints as the means to weed out the rogues who seek to build their own kingdoms, to defrock and unseat any Diotrephes (3 Jn. 9) or Hymenaeus (1 Tim. 1:20) who would use his living room couch or the “church” pulpit, platform or some counterfeit office to keep themselves in the preeminence, that place reserved for Christ alone, and to protect ourselves from the tyranny of the majority. If there is no unanimous confirmation that some particular resolution to the question at hand is the way the Spirit would have the assembly go, we *can* afford to be patient and wait until we have such unanimity. Patience is still a fruit of God’s Spirit in our lives! (Gal. 5:22) But let us also be certain that we understand that the unanimity of the Spirit can *never* be attained to in the context of a mixed multitude, even among those who claim to, but do not in actuality, live in obedience to Christ and God.

Because the “church” and all those who have not been trained to spiritually and righteously discern and to rightly reject those who claim to be a follower of Christ who yet continue to live in sin (1 Cor. 5:10-11, Eph. 5:5, Gal. 6:1, etc.), the only strategy available to them is tolerance. Every wicked thing, even those things the Bible clearly calls abomination, is accepted, tolerated and even incorporated into “ministry”! Thus whatever “unity” that is produced at “church” is a deception, certainly not the unity of the Spirit of truth, holiness and righteousness. The “unity” that is produced is a quiet tolerance of one another’s sins or the unity of following the same favorite teacher or of following the same preferred doctrines or “theology” – but it is not the unity of the Spirit of God wherein His grace (power) is dispensed through those whom He has gifted (Eph. 4:11, etc.) so that sin is overcome and the works of the devil, especially deception, are destroyed. (1 Jn. 3:8)

To determine whether an assembly is practicing unity or divisiveness first requires that we be able to see with spiritual eyes and, second, that we recognize that divisiveness refers to anything that separates anyone from *Christ* or from anyone else who is truly “plugged in” to Him. Thus “church” is the most divisive organization and is *not* the standard by which we decide whether a person or group is divisive. Most people who are loyal to their own “church” have great difficulty or even find it impossible to recognize any differences between their “church” and the true ekklesia. These blind followers of blind leaders are already in the ditch (Mt. 15:14) and only the mercy and grace (power) of God can rescue them from their plight.

Denomination { ____ } Kingdom of God

Few are able to see how denominational affiliation competes with or even negates one’s connection with and participation in the kingdom of God. This is because we fail to recognize the sins upon which a denomination is formed and the sins which denominationalism perpetuates. Many people see the “good things” which have come from the denominations (universities, hospitals, schools, etc.) – and it is true that love covers a multitude of sins (1 Pet. 4:8), assuming that love had something to do with the building of these things – but the believer and, by extension, the assembly is under standing orders to “cleanse ourselves from *all* filthiness of the flesh and spirit” (2 Cor. 7:1) and everyone who hopes to be made like Christ “purifies himself, just as He is pure.” (1 Jn. 3:3) It still remains true that only a little leaven leavens the whole lump. (Gal. 5:9) As we seek to discover what true ekklesia is, we must see that denominational affiliation stands as an impediment from gaining the kingdom of God.

The sins upon which a denomination is formed are:

- *Contentions.* The Greek word is *eris* [2054] and it refers to “contentions, strife, wrangling.” It is the idea of being argumentative, often for no better reason than just to be “right” or at least more “right” than others (in one’s own eyes, of course.)

- *Selfish ambitions.* The Greek word here is *eritheia* [2052] and it means “electioneering or intriguing for office, courting distinction, desiring to put one’s self forward, a partisan and factious spirit which does not disdain low arts, partisanship, factiousness.” It is also interesting that this word was used by Aristotle before the New Testament was written to refer to self-seeking pursuit of political office by unfair means. Our modern equivalent is “the ends justifies the means,” especially when the end is a selfish, self-centered or self-aggrandizing

goal like being the man seen and heard by all at the front and head of the “church.” (Mt. 6:5, 3 Jn. 9) Whether to gain the office or to keep others out, the motive – and sin! – remains the same. Deception then takes center stage when the “pastor” is unaware that his desire for preeminence is explained away as “serving the body” or “feeding the flock.”

- *Dissensions.* The Greek word here is *dichostasia* [1370]. It is a compound word from *dicho* (“twice or again”) and *stasia* (“stasis or condition of standing”). In English versions of the New Testament, it is rendered “dissensions” or “divisions” but in the Greek it presents a much larger and more precise picture. *Stasia*, and especially the English word that derives from it, “stasis,” is a term associated with fluids, particularly bodily fluids like blood and waste products. When a fluid is measured, a “cross section” or sample is taken and the measurements applied to the whole, even though not every “cross section” or sample would be exactly identical. *Stasia* and “stasis” are also associated with the idea of a person or thing being completely stopped, suspended in time, having come to a condition of everything standing perfectly still.

When a leader in the body of Christ sets forth his understanding of what God is doing and that understanding is then used as the basis for gathering followers to that leader, *stasia* has occurred. A sample of the bodily fluids of the body of Christ have been captured and the findings are then applied to the whole, often with a margin of error that becomes evident when we compare another sample, another *stasia*. A picture, a snapshot, of the way the body of Christ was at the moment in time has been taken and now men worship that picture as if it were God Himself. That is *stasia* and this is the method by which “theological” doctrines and denominational creeds have been formed. The doctrines and creeds may contain a great deal of truth, but they are merely a photograph of a living being – much is lost in the transaction. It is, in truth, much like the superstitions of some of the American “Indians” who feared that their spirit would be lost to them if their likeness was captured in the white man’s picture box. The Spirit of God is simply not available to those who worship only a photograph of God’s past movements among men.

Dichostasia goes one step further. It speaks of “twice standing.” In slang English, we would call this the “double standard” whereby the ones teaching a certain code of behavior are exempt from having to actually live it out – in this case, they cry out against the sin of divisiveness, applying it to anyone who disagrees with their teachings, when all the while their whole position is only that of a *stasia*, a lifeless photograph of God’s past movements among men, a thing of their own creation, a “nehushtan,” a thing of brass that has outlived its usage by God and become an artifact of religious and superstitious veneration and worship that competes against the true worship of God. (2 Ki. 18:4) *Dichostasia*, as a sin, happens when those who have formed and grasped, to one degree or another, a *stasia* of the body of Christ (that momentary snapshot in time of what God was doing), and do not allow anyone else to present their own snapshots. And, of course, those who don’t agree with the leaders’ understanding of “the truth” are expected to leave and go form yet another denomination based around that second

snapshot of *their* own making. **But so long as you form yet another denomination but don't call into question the underlying fallacy of taking such snapshots in the first place, false religion has absorbed and assimilated you and you pose no threat to the spirit of antichrist who is raising up its own sons so that the true sons of the kingdom might never reach maturity.**

Let me restate this with deliberation and clarity. *Stasia* is the taking of a snapshot in time of the body of Christ, a “theological” understanding of the body of Christ at a particular moment in time. *Dichostasia* is the separating of the people of Christ according to the dictates of a *stasia*, that snapshot in time of the body of Christ. Thus you could have a Catholic *stasia*, a Baptist *stasia*, a Lutheran *stasia*, a Methodist *stasia*, an Episcopalian *stasia*, a Presbyterian *stasia*, a Charismatic *stasia*, a Pentecostal *stasia*, an Evangelical *stasia*, an Ecumenical choice of *stasias*, a non-denominational *stasia* or even a kingdom of God *stasia* (if your ideas of the kingdom are in error or incomplete). But each of these are incomplete pictures of the body of Christ because they are lifeless pictures frozen in time. The body of Christ is *not* frozen in time. It is not even *of* time! It is an eternal entity which has its existence throughout time. When we first create a *stasia*, a denominational or doctrinal understanding of Christ and His body in the context of a certain culture or time, we have only attempted to put God in a box, to limit His abilities so as to make Him fit within our own understanding. It is no wonder, then, that the “church” of the end times has only a *form* of godliness but no power. (2 Tim. 3:5) The “church” is fragmented by multitudes of these *stasias* - and each *stasia* is only a graven image to what Christ was doing in times past that really has little or no connection with what the Spirit of God is doing in our own time.

Dichostasia happens when we take our particular *stasia* of the body of Christ and force others to leave our circles of influence so that they can seek God according to their own light – whether that light be true revelation and insight from God's Spirit of truth or from just their own *stasia*. When someone is forced to leave our circle of fellowship because there exists differences of beliefs or opinions about the Lord Jesus Christ or about what is the truth, the sin of division, *dichostasia*, has occurred. As long as the person(s) we have forced to leave goes off and forms yet another *stasia*, the spirit of antichrist, who seeks to place any person or thing in any rightful place of Christ or His Spirit, has scored yet another victory and the religious “church” spirit will not oppose this new movement too greatly – only enough to “verify” (at least in the minds of the adherents) that this new division, this new *Dichostasia*, this new *sin*, is indeed only a “new work of God.” Unnoticed is the dual streams wherein some truly seek God and experience newfound liberty in Christ while others succumb to greater deception and are the seeds which, over time, quench the work of the Spirit. But let anyone refuse to buy into or begin to expose the error of the practice of even taking snapshots in time of the body of Christ and rather insist that the Holy Spirit rule freely and completely in his or her life, and the religious “church” spirit will go to great lengths to silence, maybe even crucify, anyone who dares to enter into the true liberty of God's Spirit. (2 Cor. 3:17, Jn. 8:32)

Paul instructed the Romans to “note those who cause divisions (*dichostasias*) and offenses (stumbling blocks), contrary to the teaching which you learned, and *avoid* them.” (Rom. 16:17) To the Corinthians he said, “Where there are envy, strife and divisions (*dichostasias*) among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?” (1 Cor. 3:3) Carnality is enmity against God. (Rom. 8:7) *Dichostasia* is a word that takes direct aim at the evil heart of denominationalism.

- *Heresies*. The Greek word here is *hairesis* [139] and it has several meanings. It can refer to “the act of taking or capturing,” as in storming a city or winning someone’s heart, mind or support. It can refer to “choosing, choice or that which is chosen.” It can refer to “a body of men following their own tenets” (a sect or part like the Sadducees, Pharisees or even “Christians”). Or it can refer to “dissensions arising from diversity of opinions and aims.” It is the direct opposite to the concept of the body of Christ which is based in unity and oneness even in its diversity. *Hairesis* is dividedness and multiplicity.

It is to be noted that these four cornerstones of denominational churchianity come from Paul’s list of “the works of the flesh” and “that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.” (Gal. 5:20-21) How anyone can knowingly practice these things and suppose themselves still entitled to an inheritance in God’s kingdom requires a “theological” spin of no small proportions but many “pastors” and “church” committees act contrary, whether in ignorance or rebellion, to this truth and will discover their error at least on the last day. (Lk. 12:47-48, Mt. 7:22-23)

The kingdom of God, on the other hand, is that realm wherein Christ is carefully and interactively obeyed. His is not a realm of laws and letters (2 Cor. 3:6) but of life (Jn. 10:10) and love. (Jn. 15:12) It is the realm of the true Jesus, the original good news of the His kingdom of light accomplished in and through His Spirit of righteousness, truth and holiness. (2 Cor. 11:4, Rom. 14:17, Jn. 15:26, 16:13, Heb. 12:14, etc.) His laws and ways are written in our hearts (by Him!) and we do not need anyone to teach us (from the outside) to know God. (Heb. 8:10-11) What we will need is one another, the rest of the body of Christ, to stir us up to love and good works (Heb. 10:24), that is, obedience to the good works “God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” (Eph. 2:10)

The question of denomination or kingdom, then, is a question of loyalty. Are we loyal to the King, His truths, His ways, His commands? Or are we loyal to the organizations, doctrines, creeds, “theologies,” hierarchies, by-laws and edicts of mere men? The apostles were right when they said, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you [the religious rulers] more than to God, you judge... We ought to obey God rather than men.” (Acts 4:19, 5:29) But few, if any truly have understood the lengths to which Satan would be able to go in causing men, using the very name of Christ and God, to actively disobey God and display their true loyalty to their real father, the devil.

Blasphemy {____} Praise

Peter wrote, “There will be false teachers among you, who will stealthily bring in destructive heresies (Greek *hairesis* [139] – sectarian divisions, *denominations!*), even denying

the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And *many* will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed.” (2 Pet. 2:1-2) When we read this prophecy with an understanding of the original words, the picture aligns chillingly well with the fractured landscape of churchianity. Many people follow the false teachers of the denominations. “But they still claim Jesus – they don’t deny Him!” some will reply (as if that alone negated the whole of the prophecy!) But the idea here is not a denial of Christ as the Son of God (see 2 Jn. 7, etc.) but rather a denial of His Lordship, His Absolute Monarchy. When Peter says, “Lord” (as is also true when Jude gives a similar prophecy – Jude 4), he uses the rare word *despotes* [1203], a word that emphasizes the absolute authority of the lord or master. In English, we have derived the word “despot,” which still includes the sense of an autocrat with unlimited, absolute power and authority. It is the *Headship*, the *Lordship* of Christ that Peter (and Jude) foretold the denial of. And this is precisely what the “church” does. The “church” is a precise fulfillment of this prophecy.

In contrast, Paul wrote, “We who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.” (Eph. 1:12) Herein lies an important distinction: the acts of the “church” results in the way of truth being spoken evil of – the acts of the ekklesia result in His glory being praised.

To evaluate whether an assembly causes God to be blasphemed or praised requires that we are able to make righteous judgments and not just judge according to appearances. (Jn. 7:24) We cannot look at the “church” buildings, universities, hospital, schools, homeless shelters, orphanages and whatever other “good” that has been done without looking at what has been left undone. (compare Mt. 25:40 with 45) In the same time frame that the “church” has spent literally *billions* of dollars on buildings, literally *millions* of people have died of starvation without every once hearing of the good news of Christ, not even the “church’s” version! In that same time frame, men scrabbled for preeminence over the most affluent congregations while again *billions* of people lived and died without ever once hearing of the good news of Christ (in spite of the “church’s” self-imposed mission to get every to come to their “church” to get “saved”!) or ever seeing in person a living disciple of Christ. While all the financial resources of the “church” are poured into real estate and clergy retirement schemes, the people – instead of doing “the work of the ministry” (Eph. 4:12) – sit passively at the feet of their preferred ear-scratching spiritual guru. (2 Tim. 4:3-4) Is it any wonder many people have come to see both Christ and His gospel as completely irrelevant?

Though the ekklesia has neither the numbers nor the resources of the “church” (having been robbed of both by the schemes of the devil and of men), we can still make an impact on this world. Those who are clothed in the true righteousness of Christ can still shine like the sun in the kingdom of our Father. (Mt. 13:43) Those who hold fast the word of life can still become blameless, innocent and faultless children of God in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation and shine like bright lights in a dark world. (Phlp. 2:15-16) Even one voice speaking the word of the Lord in due season can be a source of instruction, enlightenment and edification for many. Those who truly belong to the Lord (and there will always be His “remnant”) hear His voice (Jn. 10:27) Those who refuse to listen to His voice are not His sheep (in spite of all they might claim) and cannot be reached by our voices, no matter how “synchronized” with the voice of Christ ours might be. Our responsibility is to speak His words at His time in the power (grace) of His Spirit and to live our lives in obedience to His commands. How people react o our words and example is *not* our responsibility – it is theirs.

Apostasy {____} Bride

Jesus said, “And then many will be offended (Greek *skandalizo* [4624], tripped up, made to stumble and fall into sin, apostasy), will betray one another, and will hate one another.” (Mt. 24:10) Paul wrote, “Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day [of Christ] will not come unless the falling away (Greek *apostasia* [646], defection from the state of truth, a forsaking) comes first...” (2 Ths. 2:3) Paul also wrote, “Now the Spirit explicitly says that in latter times some will depart (Greek *aphistemi* [868], remove oneself, act in revolt, desert) from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons.” (1 Tim. 4:1) When John was taken into the wilderness and shown the great prostitute, the counterfeit of the bride who usurps her role and place as the body of Christ, he “marveled with great amazement.” (Rev. 17:6) Perhaps what amazed him was the fact that the “woman” was so far out in the wilderness and removed from all vestiges of life – or perhaps he was amazed that this counterfeit had been allowed to consume the lives of so many saints and martyrs in the very name of Christ.

In contrast, when the true bride of Christ is seen in heaven, “a great multitude” gives testimony that “His wife *has made herself ready.*” To her it was given to dress herself “in fine linen, clean and bright” – fine linen here signifying “the righteous acts of the saints.” (Rev. 19:6-8) These have obeyed Paul’s instruction and *cleansed themselves* from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit and perfected holiness in the fear of God. (2 Cor. 7:1) Because these have hoped to be made like Jesus in His resurrection, they have purified themselves just as He is pure. (1 Jn. 3:3) These have diligently added to their faith all the Christ-like attributes their time on earth allowed them to attain to. (2 Pet. 1:5-7) These, by the grace (power) of God given to them, labored and accomplished the work the Lord had given them to do. (1 Cor. 15:10, Eph. 2:10) She presents herself – as any loving bride would who respects and adores her husband – without “spot or wrinkle or any such thing.” (Eph. 5:27)

The descriptions of “prostitute” and “bride,” however – apart from a divine revelation regarding any particular group – are not much more precise than that of “church” and ekklesia. They do, though, provide a glimpse into the differing mindset of the two. The “church” offers a counterfeit experience for the pleasure of the one purchasing the experience – preaching either a works “gospel” (so as to somehow earn your eternal salvation, an impossible feat – Eph. 2:8-9) or a do-nothing “gospel” (to ensure that you don’t even experience salvation – Lk. 6:49) but rarely insists that you wash your own robes in the blood of Jesus Christ. (Rev. 7:13-14) The ekklesia exhorts to and examples love and good works. (Heb. 10:24) The “church,” in all the ways described throughout this writing diverts the believer from even having the mindset of purifying oneself, some even call it “false doctrine.” The ekklesia points the believer to Him who instills the love, reverence and awe that causes the believer to willingly, lovingly, even adoringly follow Him wherever He leads – even to places we would not of ourselves desire to go (Jn. 21:18), even unto death. (Rev. 12:11)

The assembly that focuses only on fundraising tactics, “church” membership or even on such important things as charity and social justice, has lost its Focal Point. The assembly that is truly focused on the real Jesus will not leave any truly important thing undone – He will see to it. The assembly that leaves any important things undone, especially the need to press onward and upward to the high calling of God in Christ Jesus (Phlp. 3:14), only displays that the elements of “church” are present in their midst.

Wrap Up

There really is no way to wrap all this up into a convenient package. Each element of “church” that is present in our assembly needs purged from our midst. Nor is it to be supposed that, as comprehensive as this discussion has been, that it is necessarily exhaustive. There are surely more “church” deceptions, additions and counterfeits that could be discussed.

One exercise that could be used to evaluate an assembly is to choose a numerical scale (3, 5 or 10 are probably the easiest numbers to use) and, on each spectrum, rate the assembly as objectively as one can. If one has chosen to use the number 10, then on each spectrum (with -10 being the most “church” and 10 being the most ekklesia), assign the number you think best describes where the assembly under scrutiny stands in that spectrum. Add the numbers from all twelve spectrums and divide by 12. A high positive number indicates that you believe the assembly is more ekklesia and a low negative number indicates that you believe the assembly is more “church.” Such a number, by itself, proves nothing but gives an overall assessment that is somewhat superior to “good” or “bad.” Combine this number with purging out the old leaven (1 Cor. 5:7) and pressing on to the new creation *we* are supposed to be, and we will see glorious results indeed!

And don’t listen to the nagging little voice accusing you of judging – it *is* our responsibility to judge those who claim to be in the ekklesia. (1 Cor. 5:12) How much more then ought we be taking stock of the quality of the assembly itself, examining our selves and our assembly to determine whether we are even in the faith, lest we indeed are completely disqualified (2 Cor. 13:5), lest Jesus Himself remove the assembly’s lampstand from its place (Rev. 2:5), lest we find on that last day that we were never even a lampstand!

Let he who has ears hear.

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