

A Church Beyond Imagination

from the Ekklesia Research Group

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Introduction

The material found in this series of teachings is compiled by the Ekklesia Research Group. Ekklesia Research Group is a name I have given to represent all of those brothers and sisters who have helped me to better understand what the ekklesia church is all about. This series of teachings is also a work in progress. By this I acknowledge that I have NOT arrived with the ultimate truth or revelation about the church that Christ is building. I do however state that this is a thorough and honest search for that church. This is not only based on my personal journey, and that of the fellowship that I am part of, but also a combination of a multitude of brothers and sisters all over the world who have been on this journey for many years.

Whatever truths I received from God, is by His grace and for that reason I hold to the principle that freely we received and so freely we give. Therefore none of the information and material or part thereof found in these teachings is to be used to make profit. Please feel free to copy and share this series with as many people as you feel led to do so, free of charge. The only financial contribution that may be asked is to recuperate personal expenses such as the media that is used to distribute this material on.

All the information is compiled for educational purposes and may be used only for this reason. This material is not meant to be followed as if it is the Bible. It is meant to be used only as a resource in your search for the church that Christ is building. You and the fellowship you associate with should take the time to wait upon the Lord to discern whether what is written or spoken in here is His will and do that which He has revealed that you should do. On the other hand, you should not have the attitude to just do what seems good in your own eyes. If what is written or spoken of in this series is proven to be correct and Scriptural, you need to be open to the Lord to do all the things He has commanded us to do.

Acts 17 verse 11. These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.

Finally, please take note that all Bible quotations are taken from the New King James Version unless specified otherwise.

Part 1: A Church without Tithing

1.1: An Agricultural Feast

I would like to start this series of teachings on “A Church Beyond Imagination” with the issue of tithing, as I believe that the manner in which the church deals with money tells us a lot about its core spiritual values. For instance Paul writes in:

1Titus 6 verse10 For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

Tithing might not be that important when it comes to real church life, but it has a huge and dramatic impact in understanding church life and our modern institutional church culture. The practice of tithing to the church is so intertwined with our church experience that most would never question its origin or its biblical validity. However would you take some time with me to consider some scriptures that you might not have looked at before?

A passage that deals with tithing quite thoroughly is found in:

Deuteronomy 14 verse 22 "You shall truly tithe all the increase of your grain that the field produces year by year. Verse 23 And you shall eat before the LORD your God (Let me repeat that), And you shall eat before the LORD your God, in the place where He chooses to make His name abide, the tithe of your grain and your new wine and your oil, of the firstborn of your herds and your flocks, that you may learn to fear the LORD your God always."

From this passage we understand that the Israelites:

- A: Gave their tithes to the church
- B: Gave their tithes to the pastor
- C: Ate their own tithes

Imagine that; the tithers ate their own tithes before the Lord! You may say: “Well, that is then; today you can’t eat your money.” Let us read further from verse 24 up to 26 and see what God commands the Israelites concerning money when it comes to tithing:

Deuteronomy 14 verse 24 But if the journey is too long for you, so that you are not able to carry the tithe, or if the place where the LORD your God chooses to put His name is too far from you, when the LORD your God has blessed you,

Verse 25 then you shall exchange it for money, take the money in your hand, and go to the place which the LORD your God chooses.

Verse 26 And you shall spend that money for whatever your heart desires; for oxen or sheep, for wine or similar drink, for whatever your heart desires; you shall eat there before the LORD your God, and you shall rejoice, you and your household.

- Q: So what did the Israelites do when they stayed too far from the place where they were commanded to eat their tithes?
- A: They exchanged their tithes for money so it would be easy to travel to the place where God commanded them. Once they arrived they were to buy whatever their hearts desired for food and drink and then FEAST before the Lord.

In other words, tithing was a FEAST to celebrate God’s blessings on Israel’s **agriculture**. It was not money that was given for church buildings, programmes and salaries. A question that you might be asking at this point is: were the Levites and the priests not supposed to live from the tithes? Well let us read further:

Deuteronomy 14 verse27 You shall not forsake the Levite who is within your gates, for he has no part nor inheritance with you.

*Verse 28 "At the end of every **third year** you shall bring out the tithe of your **produce of that year** and store it up within your gates.*

*Verse 29 And the Levite, because he has no portion nor inheritance with you, **and the stranger and the fatherless and the widow** who are within your gates, **may come and eat and be satisfied**, that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hand which you do.*

So from this passage; which of the tithes were not eaten by the tither, but were set aside to be given away? Was it their monthly tithes, perhaps annual tithes, or was it the tithes of the third year?

This passage of Scripture clearly shows us that the tithes of the first two years were eaten before the Lord by the tithers themselves. **It was only the third year's tithe that was given away.**

The third year's tithes were not only given to the Levites, but were distributed among the strangers, the orphans and the widows and only a portion of the third year's tithes went to the Levites. Can you believe it? Even though a major portion of the *third* year's tithe went to the Levites, some of the tithes also needed to go to the orphans, stranger and widows. In other words the tithes on the third year went to all who were not in a position to provide for themselves.

This same instructions is repeated in:

*Deuteronomy 26 verse12 "When you have finished laying aside all the **tithe of your increase** in the **third year**—the year of tithing—and have given it to **the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow**, so that they may **eat within your gates and be filled**,*

*verse13 then you shall say before the LORD your God: 'I have removed the holy tithe from my house, and also have given them to the **Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, according to all Your commandments which You have commanded me**; we have not transgressed Your commandments, nor have we forgotten them.*

The next question we need to look at is how did the Priests receive tithes? We read in:

Numbers 18 verse 25 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

*verse 26 "**Speak thus to the Levites, and say to them:** "When you take from the children of Israel the tithes which we have given you from them as your inheritance, then you shall offer up a heave offering of it to the LORD, **a tenth of the tithe**.*

verse 27 And your heave offering shall be reckoned to you as though it were the grain of the threshing floor and as the fullness of the winepress.

*verse 28 Thus you shall also offer a heave offering to the LORD from all your tithes which you receive from the children of Israel, and you shall give the LORD's heave offering from it **to Aaron the priest**.*

Who was then responsible to tithe to the Lord, for the priests to enjoy?

- A) The church members
- B) The Israelites
- C) The Levites

It was only the Levites and not the rest of Israel who were to give tithes to the priests. That meant that every three years when the Levites received a portion of the tithes from the rest of Israel, they would in turn give a tenth of the tithes they received to Aaron and his descendants — the priests of Israel.

To avoid any confusion let me briefly explain the difference between the Priests and the Levites. You might recall that God commanded, in Exodus chapter 13, that the firstfruit of all of Israel, whether it be agriculture or the firstborn sons of Israel, were to be dedicated to God. This they had to do because God delivered them from the Egyptians using the tenth plague by killing the firstborn from all of Egypt; of man and livestock. That meant that all the first-fruit whether it was agricultural or the first born sons were dedicated to the service and support at the temple of God.

Then, in Numbers chapter 3 verses 40-51, God commanded that instead of all the tribes of Israel having to give up

their firstborn sons to do service for God, one of the tribes of Israel, the Levites, would substitute for the firstborn sons of the rest of Israel. The Levites then, in place of the firstborn of all of Israel, had to serve God in the tabernacle and later on at the temple in Jerusalem.

Aaron, Moses' brother, who was also from the tribe of Levi, was chosen by God to be the first priest for Israel. So from that time on, Aaron's descendants would form the Levitical priesthood. The rest of the Levites were then in service to Aaron's descendants – the priests. For that reason, the Levitical tribe had to pay a tenth of the tithes they received from the other tribes in the third year, and give it to the priests of Israel.

This leads us to the next very important question: Who then, was responsible to bring tithes in to the storehouse of God, and for that matter, what was the storehouse of God? Jerusalem was the city where God had placed His name, as we read in 1 Kings 11 verse 36, and so it was there where Israel was to celebrate the feasts of tithing. It was also in Jerusalem where the house of God, or the temple of God, was built. The temple of God had storerooms all around the temple. These were called the storehouse. Understanding this let us read from:

*Nehemiah 10 verse 36 to bring the **firstborn** of our sons and our cattle, as it is written in the Law, and the **firstborn** of our herds and our flocks, to the house of our God, to the priests who minister in the house of our God; Verse 37 to bring the **firstfruits** of our dough, our offerings, the fruit from all kinds of trees, the new wine and oil, to the priests, to the storerooms of the house of our God; **and to bring the tithes of our land to the Levites**, for the Levites should receive the tithes **in all our farming communities**.*

Before we read on, can you see the difference to what needs to be done with the firstfruit compared to the tithes? Israel brought their firstfruit to the house of God, but **brought their tithes to the Levites**.

Now for a very important question: who were the tithers among the Israelites? **It was only the farming communities that tithed**. One needs to realize that tithing was an agricultural thing. There is NO reference in Scripture that business people, traders or common labourers had to tithe. Now keep in mind that Israel brought their tithes to the Levites as appose to the storehouse of God as they did with their first fruit as we read the following passage in:

*Nehemiah 10 verse 38 And the priest, the descendant of Aaron, shall be with the Levites when the Levites receive tithes; and **the Levites shall bring up a tenth of the tithes to the house of our God, to the rooms of the storehouse**.*

Here is the big question. Who is responsible to bring the tithes to the storehouse of God if it was not the Israelites? The Levites and not the rest of the Israelites tithed to the storehouse of God. The Israelites were only responsible to bring the firstfruit offering to the house of God.

This understanding to actual biblical tithing will form the bases for the next section that deals about the curse of tithing in the New Testament.

1.2: Tithing a curse

After the first section you might ask: so what is the big deal if we take some poetic license in interpreting Scripture concerning tithing? Well, the effect is more far-reaching than you might think. In this chapter we will see from Scripture the actual spiritual consequences of teaching and practicing tithing.

Let us first recap; in the previous section we learned that:

1. That tithing was an **agricultural feast**, which was only practiced by the farmers.
2. That the tithers ate their own tithes on the first and second years as a feast.
3. That only the thirds year's tithes were dedicated to be given and distributed to the Levites, orphans, strangers and the widows.
4. That Levites were responsible to give a tenth of the tithe they received from Israel and dedicated it to the Priests and the storehouse of God
5. That the Israelites only gave their firstfruits to the storehouse of God and not their tithes.

Now from this understanding let us look at a passage of Scripture that is so often used incorrectly to get Christians to tithe to a church institution. It is found in:

Malachi 3 verse 8 "Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, 'In what way have we robbed You?' **In tithes and offerings.**

Verse 9 **You are cursed with a curse,** For you have robbed Me, Even this whole nation.

Before we read on, let's interject something here. How many times has it been said to you that you have robbed God, when you do not pay tithes to the church? Yet ironically, by incorrect interpreting this passage many have placed themselves under a curse by tithing to the church. You might say "WHAT! How do we place ourselves under a curse when we give tithes to the church?" We will see just now, but let us first continue from:

Malachi 3 verse 10 Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, That there may be **food** in My house, And try Me now in this," Says the LORD of hosts, "If I will not open for you the windows of heaven And pour out for you *such blessing* That there will not be room enough to receive it.

Verse 11 "And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, So that he will not destroy **the fruit of your ground,** Nor shall the vine fail to bear **fruit for you in the field,**" Says the LORD of hosts;

Verse 12 And all nations will call you blessed, For you will be a delightful land," Says the LORD of hosts.

In forming a proper interpretation of this passage let me ask you a couple of questions:

Q: Does this passage in Malachi refer to money or FOOD when speaking of tithing?

A: Food of course, because it was to demonstrate God's blessing **agriculturally.**

Q: Who would have brought tithes to the storehouse of God from the Law of God?

A: The Levites placed a tenth of the tithes they received from Israel in the storehouse of God.

Q: What did the other tribes of Israel put in the storehouse of God?

A: They brought the firstfruit offerings and not their actual tithes to the storehouse of God.

Q: What was the purpose of the firstfruit offerings of Israel and the tithes of the Levites in the storehouse of God?

A: So that there might be FOOD in God's house.

Knowing this, how was God being robbed, as explained in Malachi 3:8? The passage does not deal with money, but agricultural produce. As food demonstrates God's provision agriculturally, Israel was robbing God of His HONOUR as the Provider of Israel. The more food there was in the storehouse of God, the more people could notice how God

had blessed His people.

Malachi chapter 3 does not speak about Christians giving a ten percent of their income to the church. By interpreting it that way would bring us under the curse of the Law. Let me explain this by reading what Paul writes in:

Galatians 3 verse 10 For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, "**CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO DOES NOT CONTINUE IN ALL THINGS WHICH ARE WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF THE LAW, TO DO THEM.**"

According to Paul, if we want to practice the Law, such as the law of tithing, but don't tithe according to *all* that is written in the Law, what will happen to us? It might be hard to accept but we will be cursed. Let me rephrase this, if we say we have to follow the law of God such as tithing, but don't tithe as God commands us to tithe we place ourselves under the curse of the Law.

In other words, if we bring tithes to the church where as God commanded that tithing is a feast in Jerusalem before God, we are cursed. If we say we should tithe, but do not give our tithes to the orphans, strangers, widows and Levites in the third year, then we are cursed. If we say we should tithe, but don't have Levites among us that would take a tenth of the tithes and place it in the temple in Jerusalem which does not exist anymore we place ourselves under a curse. I am not trying to be condescending, but only trying you to understand the seriousness of what Paul wrote to the Galatians. With every Law of God comes a curse if we don't fulfil it to the letter as it is written in:

Malachi 3 verse 9 **You are cursed with a curse, ...**

Paul continues with his instructions three verses further and writes in:

Galatians 3 verse 13 Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "**CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE**"),

Do you see that when we try to follow the law of tithing, it is kind of a slap in Christ's face —since He has redeemed us from the works of the law through His death on Calvary?

If it is true that we place ourselves under a curse when we tithe to the church, why do some people claim that God blessed them when they tithed? Well; if we have an honest look at the church in general we would see that there are more people in financial distress who tithe faithfully, than those who are supposedly financially blessed by their tithing. Yet there are equal numbers of saints who prosper financially who do not tithe. God lets the rain and the sun fall on the righteous as well as the unrighteous, as we read in:

Matthew 5 verse 45 that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

Secondly the curse we place ourselves under does not have to do with financial wealth, but with our spiritual standing with God. Just because one prospers financially, is no guarantee that one stands right with God. Yet spiritual blessing comes from God's grace and not because we keep up some twisted version of God's law. But we are cursed spiritually if we put ourselves under the Law from which Christ has redeemed us.

My intention is not to make you feel condemned. I myself also used to hold on to the unbiblical practice of tithing to the church. What is important now is that when we hear the truth we need to make the decision to repent from man-made traditions that makes God's Word of no effect. In one of Jesus confrontations with the hypocrisy of the Pharisees Jesus spoke these words against them:

Matthew 15 verse 3 He answered and said to them, "**Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition?**

Verse 4 For God commanded, saying, '**HONOR YOUR FATHER AND YOUR MOTHER**'; and, '**HE WHO CURSES**

FATHER OR MOTHER, LET HIM BE PUT TO DEATH.'

Verse 5 But you say, 'Whoever says to his father or mother, "Whatever profit you might have received from me is a gift to God"—

Verse 6 then he need not honor his father or mother.' Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition.

Verse 7 Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying:

Verse 8 'THESE PEOPLE DRAW NEAR TO ME WITH THEIR MOUTH, AND HONOR ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR FROM ME.

Verse 9 AND IN VAIN THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE COMMANDMENTS OF MEN.' "

How was God not honoured by what the Pharisees and Scribes taught? They taught that giving to a religious institution – supposedly to God – comes above taking care of one's family. This same corrupted value system that the Pharisees and Scribes taught is ruling the institutional church today. It is frequently taught in the institutional church, that we first have to give our tithe to the church, and only then give what we have spare to meet the needs of our family in Christ.

Ask yourself this: what is important to God: supporting a religious institution or looking after once family in the Lord? On what bases does God bless us and on what bases do we place ourselves under a curse? The answer to this will become even clearer as you continue this study of: "A Church without Tithing".

1.3: A Spiritual Principle

Even if one presents such clear Scripture evidence that tithing to the church is unbiblical, you will still find some pundits of tithing who would still scratch in the dust for some kind of justification for this cursed practice. They will claim that tithing is a spiritual principle that was practised outside the Law of Moses. Let us look at some of these arguments that are generally used. The first passage that they would use is:

Hebrews 7 verse 1 For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him,

Verse 2 to whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all, first being translated "king of righteousness," and then also king of Salem, meaning "king of peace,"

Verse 3 without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, remains a priest continually.

Verse 4 Now consider how great this man was, to whom even the patriarch Abraham gave a tenth of the spoils.

Verse 5 And indeed those who are of the sons of Levi, who receive the priesthood, have a commandment to receive tithes from the people according to the law, that is, from their brethren, though they have come from the loins of Abraham;

Verse 6 but he whose genealogy is not derived from them received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises.

Verse 7 Now beyond all contradiction the lesser is blessed by the better.

Verse 8 Here mortal men receive tithes, but there he receives them, of whom it is witnessed that he lives.

Verse 9 Even Levi, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, so to speak,

Verse 10 for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him.

Many use this passage to try and explain that Abraham gave tithes to Melchizedek *before* Moses gave the Law of tithing. Their argument is that tithing was practiced outside the Law of Moses, so it would mean that even if we are not under the law, we still have to pay tithes because tithing was practiced before the Law of Moses.

The problem with that argument is that there were other Old Testament practices such as blood offerings and the circumcision that were also practiced before the Law of Moses, by Abraham. If we say that it is not necessary to circumcise as Paul clearly teaches throughout many of his letters to the churches, then we definitely should not tithe either.

Furthermore when reading Genesis 14 we see that Abraham gave 10% of the spoil he got from freeing Lot and the rest of Sodom. He distributed the remainder of the spoils to his servants and gave the rest of Sodom's belongings back to them. He took none of the spoils for himself. We read in:

Genesis 14:18 Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was the priest of God Most High.

Verse 19 And he blessed him and said: "Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth;

*Verse 20 And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand." **And he gave him a tithe of all.***

Verse 21 Now the king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give me the persons, and take the goods for yourself."

Verse 22 But Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I have raised my hand to the LORD, God Most High, the Possessor of heaven and earth,

*Verse 23 that **I will take nothing, from a thread to a sandal strap, and that I will not take anything that is yours, lest you should say, 'I have made Abram rich'**—*

Verse 24 except only what the young men have eaten, and the portion of the men who went with me: Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre; let them take their portion."

Nowhere else in Scripture do we ever read that Abraham paid tithes from his actual earnings. Furthermore the author of Hebrews, was not trying to get us to start tithing, but was trying to demonstrate the superior covenant we have with Christ, of whom Melchizedek was only a shadow.

The second example for tithing outside the Law of Moses is when Jacob promises to give a tenth of what God would blessed Him with. We read about this in:

Genesis 28 verse 20 Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I am going, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on,
Verse 21 so that I come back to my father's house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God.
Verse 22 And this stone which I have set as a pillar shall be God's house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You."

After reading this passage, you will see that there is no indication that God instructed Jacob to tithe. Jacob, out of his own choice, made a promise to God to give a tenth, and only from that with which God had blessed him. Because of this promise God held Jacob to his promise by commanding his descendants, the Israelites, to practice the feast of tithing. What is important to note is that even this passage there is no indication or instruction for us to pay a tenth of our salary to a church institution.

The next attempt to justify tithing is the fact that Jesus spoke of tithing in the follow instances. We read in:
Matthew 23verse23 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.

The second passage refers to a similar account found in:

Luke 11verse 42 "But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass by justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.

The third passage of Scripture is where Jesus referred to a hypocritical prayer of a Pharisee:

Luke 18 verse 12b "... I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess..."

Once again after reading these passages we don't see any indication that Jesus instructs Christians to pay tithes to the church. What we do see is that Jesus spoke to the Pharisees who were farmers and gave a tenth of their agricultural increase. In all three examples Jesus was addressing them because they neglected to keep the more important instructions of the Law of Moses, while feeling justified by only practicing tithing. This is a very bad example for justifying the practice of tithing. As seen already that if we want to practice tithing while neglecting any of the Law of Moses we place ourselves under a curse, and from Jesus' point of view we are plain hypocrites.

When looking at the concept of tithing as a spiritual principle we need to understand something about spiritual principles. In order to make something a principle we need some evidence or comparisons in Scripture that gives some indication that it is a spiritual principle. So let us address this spiritual principle from a different perspective that you might have not seen before. We read in:

1 Peter 2 verse 5 **you also**, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, **a holy priesthood**, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

And

1Peter 2 verse 9 But you are a chosen generation, **a royal priesthood**, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light;

Peter does not call Christians: Israelites or even Levites, but actual royal and holy priests. Why is this of any significance? Well we saw that the priests in the Old Testament received tithes from the Levites, but never had to pay tithes. If in fact, priests were to receive tithes and not pay tithes from Scripture, should not that principle, if any, apply to us who are called royal priests? So if tithing was a spiritual principle, we should conclude that non-Christians are to pay Christians tithes every third year. In practice this is obviously not going to happen, but for argument's sake that is the only principle that one can draw from Scripture.

The bottom line is this that **you won't see any example from Scripture of Christians tithing in the New Testament**. Tithing to the church is a man-made tradition, formed on bad interpretation of Scriptures. The question that we are faced with is how on earth did this practice creep in to the church? Well there are a lot of circumstances that led to this, which we will explore more in-depth throughout this series of A Church Beyond Imagination. For now I would just like to highlight some instances in church history.

The first historical documents that give any mention of tithing to a church institution were by the third century leader, Cyprian of Carthage. Cyprian put forward the idea in around the year 250AD, that as the Levites were supported by the tithe, so also the Christian workers were to be supported by tithes. This is the first time that the concept of tithing as a spiritual principle got introduced to the church.

Now we need to know something about Cyprian. Cyprian was a very good narrator and a lawyer before his conversion to the Christian faith. Even though he was young in the faith, he became an elder in a short period of time because of his prestige and eloquence of speech. Due to his background as a lawyer and narrator, he believed that one needed to be paid for one's expertise. At this stage tithing was NOT a mainstream thought at all in the church.

Tithing only became a mainstream thought around 567 AD at the council of Tours, and, was again pushed forward on the agenda at the council of Mâcon in 585 AD. It was only in 787 AD under Pope Adrian 1 that tithing finally became an official church practice. Why then only? Well, the financial support from the Roman Empire to the institutional church was drying up, and, as with any institution of man, the church needed money to function. So with a bit of Scriptural gymnastics the practice of tithing to the church was born.

How the church became institutionalised will be dealt with at a later stage. For now just understand that the concept of tithing as a spiritual principle did not come from Scripture but from an institution of man that needed to be funded. In the next section we will explore what the Bible actually teaches concerning New Testament giving.

1.4: Biblical Giving

So how did Christians practice giving in the New Testament if it was not tithing? Let us start this section with a very well-known passage found in:

Acts 2 verse 44 Now all who believed were together, **and had all things in common,**

Verse 45 and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.

Verse 46 So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart,

Verse 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

Do you see today's church having favour with all people? Of course not! How will a church that comes across like a money making business, have any favour among the people? Yet, imagine what an effect we will have in our community if they see how we look after the needs of our brothers and sisters in the Lord. This would truly bring honour to God among the unbelievers.

What did it really mean for the Christians, in Acts chapter 2, "to have all things in common"? We will get to this in Part three of this series, but for now we can say that having all things in common is not about selling of all our possessions to give to the poor. Many of the saints did sell their possessions, but this was to meet the needs of the saints, and was only because they already "had all things in common". "Having all things in common" has to do with sharing lives, which is very foreign to the institutional church. The early church would meet the needs among their family in the Lord, even if it meant selling their luxuries and abundance to do that.

John the baptist puts it this way:

Luke 3 verse 11 He answered and said to them, "He who has two tunics, let him give to him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise."

Let us have a look how Paul deals with having all things in common in:

2 Corinthians 8 verse 12 For if there is first a willing mind, **it is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have.**

Verse 13 For we do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened;

Verse 14 but by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may supply their lack, that their abundance also may supply your lack—that there may be equality.

Verse 15 As it is written, "HE WHO GATHERED MUCH HAD NOTHING LEFT OVER, AND HE WHO GATHERED LITTLE HAD NO LACK."

Is there any indication that Paul is saying that we should give in faith; even if we battle financially? No, not at all. He specifically teaches that one gives "according to what one HAS and not according to what one does not have". Paul is not saying that one should be burdened because of the lack of others. What Paul was teaching was that the saints learn to meet each other's needs, with the things we have extra. It is especially those who actually do have extra that have the responsibility to give to those who have need. This is what it means to have all things in common.

Some would argue, that even if you don't have, you should still give, by quoting the following example:

Mark 12 verse 41 Now Jesus sat opposite the treasury and saw how the people put money into the treasury. And many who were rich put in much.

Verse 42 Then one poor widow came and threw in two mites, which make a quadrans.

Verse 43 So He called His disciples to Himself and said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury;

Verse 44 for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood."

If you look carefully you'll see that Jesus didn't really give a command to the poor to give all they have, for this would have contradicted Paul's teachings that only those who have should give. In this object lesson Jesus only illustrated that someone who give everything is giving more than someone who was giving out of their abundance. This was not meant as an instruction to all poor people to give to the church, but only as an illustrative lesson of spiritual economics.

Let us now read a little further on from Paul's letter to the Corinthian church:

2 Corinthians 9 verse 6 *But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.*

Verse 7 **So let each one give as he purposes in his heart**, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.

Giving should be done from the heart and not by religious obligation. Giving under religious obligation is an outward pretence and not an inward leading of the Holy Spirit. **The Holy Spirit does not lead people to give 10%. Giving by the Spirit is not focused on a particular amount but meeting a particular need.** After the Spirit has made us aware of specific needs that we should minister to, then **WE** – not the Holy Spirit, determine **in our own hearts** how much we should give. If some people determine in their heart to give 10% they should not blame the Holy Spirit for that. Let us repeat this again: **Giving by the Spirit is not focused on a particular amount but meeting a particular need.** This is however an alien concept for those who have never experienced the real life of church.

Let us read further from:

2 Corinthians 9 verse 10 *Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness,*

Verse 11 *while you are enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God.*

Verse 12 *For the administration of this service not only supplies **the needs of the saints**, but also is abounding through many thanksgivings to God,*

Verse 13 *while, through the proof of this ministry, they glorify God for the obedience of your confession to the gospel of Christ, and for your **liberal sharing** with them and all men*

Do we read anything in this passage about Paul collecting for a church organization? You will see all through the New Testament, when a collection was made, it was for the needs of the saints and not for an organization.

James 2 verse 14 *What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?*

Verse 15 *If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food,*

Verse 16 *and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?*

You might ask the question: Will this: "having all things in common" not motivate others to just sponge off the church? We suppose it might, especially if church is just something that one would attend like a religious club. However for those who live with all things in common Paul instructs the following in:

1 Timothy 5 verse 9 *Do not let a widow under sixty years old be taken into the number, and not unless she has been the wife of one man,*

Verse 10 *well reported for good works: if she has brought up children, if she has lodged strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has relieved the afflicted, if she has diligently followed every good work.*

Verse 11 *But refuse the younger widows; for when they have begun to grow wanton against Christ, they desire to marry,*

According to Paul; who are we to support among the saints? Those who do not have the capability or the means to

supply their own needs any longer, as long as they have proven themselves faithful to Christ by good works. From that context we read Paul's following instructions to the Corinthian church:

1 Corinthians 16 verse 1 Now concerning the **collection for the saints**, as we have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also:

Verse 2 On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when we come.

Verse 3 And when we come, whomever you approve by your letters we will send to bear your gift to Jerusalem.

As you can see, the collection was for the saints and not for a church organization. This instruction to the Corinthian church was in response to an actual church life event that we can read about in Acts:

Acts 11 verse 28 Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar.

Verse 29 Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea.

Verse 30 This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

So it is clear from Scripture that when needs arise, such as in a famine or, in modern terms, recession or where saints lose their jobs, we need to meet those needs. In whatever way you want to fill in the details, one thing is clear, and that is, you won't find anywhere in the Bible where Christians tithed or collected money for a church organization or an institution. From this point let us have a look at supporting church workers in the next and last section on a "Church without Tithing".

1.5: Supporting the ministry

If the church is not to pay tithes how are we to support the ministry? In this chapter we will be dealing with the biblical perspective of what is meant by living from the gospel. Paul writes in:

2 Thessalonians 3 verse 7 For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you;

*Verse 8 **nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge**, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you,*

*Verse 9 not because we do not have authority, but to **make ourselves an example** of how you should follow us.*

*Verse 10 For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: **If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.***

Verse 11 For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies.

Verse 12 Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread.

What did Paul try to teach us through his example? That we ought to work to support ourselves. What does Paul then say, should we do with people who do not want to work? We should not give them anything. The context of this instruction is Paul giving himself as an example of how to work as appose to just “living from the gospel”. This is important to understand as we deal with this topic: “living from the gospel”. Paul writes in:

1 Corinthians 9 verse 14 Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel.

There is a context of Paul’s words. He speaks of “ so the Lord has commanded...” Paul referees to Jesus words in: *Matthew 10 verse 7 And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.'*

Verse 8 Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.

Verse 9 Provide neither gold nor silver nor copper in your money belts,

Verse 10 nor bag for your journey, nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor staffs; for a worker is worthy of his food.

Verse 11 "Now whatever city or town you enter, inquire who in it is worthy, and stay there till you go out.

Verse 12 And when you go into a household, greet it.

Verse 13 If the household is worthy, let your peace come upon it. But if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you.

Verse 14 And whoever will not receive you nor hear your words, when you depart from that house or city, shake off the dust from your feet.

According to this passage, who are those who preach the gospel?

- A) Those who give sermons on a Sunday.
- B) Those who preach the gospel to the lost from one place to the other, such as apostles.

Well, the context is clear that this passage refers to apostles. Apostles are those who are sent out to preach the gospel and make disciples of the whole world. In other words they are what some people would see as church planters or missionaries. So these passages do not refer to pastors.

Let us read another passage that some believe justifies pastors making a living from the gospel. Paul instructs in: *1 Timothy 5 verse 17 Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine.*

Verse 18 For the Scripture says, "YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE AN OX WHILE IT TREADS OUT THE GRAIN," and, "THE LABORER IS WORTHY OF HIS WAGES."

Who is to be counted worthy of double honour for their labour according to Paul?

- A) The Pastor
- B) The Head Elder

C) Or the elders who labour well in preaching the gospel and teaching.

This passage refers to any elder and does not even mention the word pastor. Also, the actual phrase “they who labour in word and doctrine” is also translated as “they who preach and teach”. Preaching was to the unbelievers and teachings were to those who were still spiritually immature and needed spiritual milk as explained in:

Hebrews 5 verse 12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food.

Are you still one of those that needs to be taught while you should have been a teacher by now? Might it be that that thing you call church wants to keep you spiritually immature so that they have an audience Sunday after Sunday, making a living off the congregation?

Now, of course if you still need to have someone teaching you, Paul instructs this in:

Galatians 6 verse 6 Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches.

Nevertheless; sharing in all good things does not mean the same as giving pastors a salary. Sharing in all good things, follows the principle of having all things in common. It means that if you are still being taught by an elder how to listen to the voice of our Lord, then you need to share the good things you have with the one who teaches you. This might sound very strange to you, but it will make sense to you in the parts to follow where we deal with how the New Testament actually functioned.

When Paul was admonishing the elders in Acts 20 to “shepherd the flock well” he continued by saying to them in:

Acts 20 verse 33 we have **coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel.**

Verse 34 Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me.

Verse 35 we have shown you in every way, **by laboring like this,** that **you must support the weak.** And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' "

Does this passage give any indication that elders lived from the gospel? Is it not more plausible to conclude that elders were to do secular jobs like everyone else to support themselves, but may be rewarded for their efforts in preaching the gospel and helping the maturity of new Christians? The problem that we have today, is that we are reading the Scriptures with an unbiblical westernized mind-set that sees the traditional “ministry” as some kind of career one enters into. Yet from a biblical context the ministry was compared to a day labourer who brings in the harvest.

Luke 10 verse 1 After these things the Lord appointed seventy others also, and sent them two by two before His face into every city and place where He Himself was about to go.

Verse 2 Then He said to them, "The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few; therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.

Day labourers were hired by the land lord when it was time for the harvest that was brought in. They were then paid as the land lord willed; as seen by the parable told by Jesus in Matthew 20 from verse 1-15. When the harvest was completely brought in; the day labourers had to look for somewhere else to harvest the crops. There was not monthly salaried person when it came to harvesting. That is why we read Paul saying things like:

1 Corinthians 9 verse 11 If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things?

None of the passages in scripture indicated that “pastoring” a church was a career. Even the apostles did not do it as a career, but were called to bring in the harvest. Furthermore, the apostles had a trade they practiced alongside their calling to make disciples. Most of the apostles were fishermen. Paul, Priscilla, and Aquila were tent makers, and

Luke was a physician. While the apostles were busy preaching the gospel, discipling the converts and planting churches, the churches assisted them financially so that their needs would be met. When they were not busy making disciples and planting churches, they did secular work to supply their own needs through their own trade, of which Paul was a perfect example.

I would like conclude this part of the teaching by addressing the concept of peddling the word of God. Paul writes in:

2 Corinthians 2 verse 17 For we are not, as so many, **peddling the word of God**; but as of sincerity, but as from God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ.

What is “peddling the word of God”? It is selling our ministry to others. Meditate on what is peddling the word of God when you go to church, attend Christian guest speaker meetings or your local Christian book store again.

Some would remark that Jesus and his disciples had a money box as we read in:

John 13 verse 29 For some thought, because Judas had the money box, that Jesus had said to him, "Buy those things we need for the feast," or that he should give something to the poor.

What does it prove? Well, that people ministered to Jesus and His disciple’s needs. We read about this in:

Mark 15 verse 41 who also followed Him and **ministered** to Him when He was in Galilee, and many other women who came up with Him to Jerusalem.

There is no indication that Jesus and the apostles were ever paid for their ministries. One only read about their needs being met. There is a big difference of having one's needs met to that of being paid for the ministry. It does not matter how one looks at it but if we are honest with ourselves then we have to admit that being paid for “the ministry” is the same is peddling the word of God. Jesus said in:

Matthew 10 verse 8b *Freely you have received, freely give...*

There are probably still a lot of unanswered questions in your mind. You may be wondering “How on earth can the church as you know it, actually function if we are to follow what the Bible teaches about tithing and giving?” What type of servant of the church will still serve the church if he does not have the security of a salary? Those are very good questions. Are you ready for some radical answers to those questions? We will address these questions in the following parts of this series of teachings of “A Church Beyond Imagination”.

Part 2: A Church without Sermons

2.1: The Kingdom of God

After listening to Part 1 of “A Church Beyond Imagination”, you most probably asked yourself how the church model of today can sustain itself without tithing or collecting money to cover its general organizational expenses. Indeed, how can it? The answer is simply: it cannot and it should not, because today’s church model is not really a biblical church model.

Why is the church that we read from the Bible, look so radically different from today’s church? Is it merely the normal evolution of an organization, or could it be that today’s church actually moved away from God’s plan of what church supposed to have been? To answer this we first need to look at, what was Jesus’ mission on Earth in the first place. Christ’s mission is pretty evident through the Gospel that Christ preached. For instance we read in:

Matthew 4 verse 23 And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of **the kingdom**, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people.

We also read in:

Mark 1 verse 14 Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the **kingdom of God**,

Verse 15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the **kingdom of God** is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."

Matthew 10 verse 7 And as you go, preach, saying, "The **Kingdom of Heaven** is at hand."

The apostle also preached about the Kingdom of God as seen in:

Acts 8 verse 12 But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the **kingdom of God** and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized.

Acts 19 verse 8 And he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the **Kingdom of God**.

Acts 28 verse 23 So when they had appointed him a day, many came to him at his lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the **Kingdom of God**, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening.

The apostles also taught about the Kingdom through their letters to the churches as can be seen in:

Colossians 1 verse 13 He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the **Kingdom of the Son of His love**,

1 Thessalonians 2 verse 12 that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into **His own Kingdom** and glory.

2 Timothy 4 verse 18 And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for **His heavenly kingdom**. To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen!

2 Peter 1 verse 11 for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting **kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ**.

In actual fact there are over 140 verses in the New Testament alone that speak about the kingdom of God. When Jesus asked His disciples who people said He was; His disciples said that the people said He might have been one of the prophets of old, or John the baptizer who was raised from the dead. Then Jesus directed this question to them. Let us look at the conversation in:

Matthew 16 verse 15 He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"

*Verse 16 Simon Peter answered and said, "You are **the Christ**, the Son of the living God.*

Verse 17 Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.

*Verse 18 And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock **I will build My church ("ekklesia")**, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.*

*Verse 19 And I will give you the keys of the **kingdom of heaven**, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."*

The church is being built on the revelation of Jesus the Son of God being the "Christ". Yet what does it mean that Jesus is the Christ? Christ comes from the Greek word "Christos" which is the Hebrew equivalent for the "Messiah" which means "the Anointed One". In the Old Testament a person would be anointed to function as either priest or as king over Israel. Being called "The Anointed One" - "the Messiah" or "the Christ" refers to the prophetic expectations of the One that would be the King over Israel, who would establish God's kingdom on earth from the line of David. So the church being built on the revelation that Jesus is the Christ, means the church is built on the very revelation that Jesus is the King or Messiah of God's kingdom. The gospel of the kingdom is about the awaited One of God—the one who would rule and establish God's righteousness and judgment on earth.

We read about this in:

*Isaiah 9 verse 6 For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the **government** will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

*Verse 7 Of the increase **of His government** and peace There will be no end, Upon the **throne of David and over His kingdom**, To order it and establish it with **judgment and justice** From that time forward, **even forever**. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.*

The everlasting kingdom would come from the tribe of Judah - from the loins of David; as David declared in:

*1 Chronicles 28 verse 4 However the LORD God of Israel chose me above all the house of my father **to be king over Israel forever**, for **He has chosen Judah to be the ruler**. And of the house of Judah, the house of my father, and among the sons of my father, He was pleased with me to make me king over all Israel.*

What is amazing to see is that the proclamation of the kingdom of God started in the city of Jerusalem. This was in order to represent Christ's kingdom in that city of King David in the province of Judea. Jerusalem is the starting point from which the kingdom of Christ would advance to over the rest of the world, which we can read about in:

*Acts 1 verse 6 When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the **kingdom to Israel**?*

*Verse 7 And he said unto them, **It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power**.*

*Verse 8 But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in **Jerusalem**, and **in all Judea**, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.*

God's everlasting kingdom was furthermore prophesied in:

*Daniel 2 verse 44 And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; **it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms**, and it shall stand **forever**.*

Further on Daniel prophesies and writes in:

Daniel 7 verse 13 I was watching in the night visions, And behold, One like the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, And they brought Him near before Him.

*Verse 14 Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a **kingdom**, That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, Which shall not pass away, And His kingdom the one Which shall not be destroyed.*

This is then confirmed by John in:

Revelation 11 verse 15 Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and **of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!**"

Even Christ's birth speaks of the kingdom of God from the wise men's perspective in:

Matthew 2 verse 1 Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem,

Verse 2 saying, "**Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?** For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him."

In other words, Christianity was never meant to be a religion, but a kingdom. The kingdom was about Christ's rule. So what then does the gospel of the kingdom of God have to do with the church? Well, in fact, everything. We ask you to prayerfully consider seriously what is going to be taught from this point on, because we are going to unmask the last 1700 years of institutional church traditions. This is not something to approach light-heartedly, since the consequences of what one believes the church actually is, does have a tremendous influence on our effectiveness in God's kingdom.

2.2: Ekklesia

In this section we deal with the question how does the church meeting represent a kingdom as opposed to a religion? In answering this, we need to look at the actual biblical meaning of the word “church”. For now we can say that most Christians do understand that church does not mean a building but an actual assembly of believers. Yet church was not just any kind of assembly. To fully grasp the church of the Bible as a *kingdom* gathering, we would need to look at its Greek roots and also at the variety of assemblies with their emphasis in the New Testament.

Should you want to look at some of these Greek words for yourself, please make use of Greek dictionaries that explain the meanings of the words as they were understood in biblical times, like the Greek Lexicon or Vines or similar scholarly Greek dictionaries. The Strong’s dictionary, for instance, only translates words into their current English meaning and is not meant to be used to interpret the original meaning of the words of the text.

The first word that we are going to look at that describes an *assembly* is the word: *synagogue*. The word: *synagogue* comes from the Greek word “synago” which entails an assembling of people brought together from those who were scattered. After the temple of Solomon was destroyed and the Jews were scattered among the nations; the Jews came together in small groups where they continued to be taught by the Law of Moses and the instructions of the prophets. The synagogue gathering helped them to not forsake their heritage as a nation, even though they were scattered all over the world, without a temple. To the Jews, the synagogue was a kind of religious school, similar to a Sunday school or Bible classes. It was never seen by the Jews as a temple or place of worship at that time. We do want to remark that some modern Westernized Jews have incorporated some of the Westernized church practices in their gatherings, which were not present in bible times.

Keep in mind though that “synago” only meant bringing together scattered people or things. For that reason the word “synago” was sometimes used when it referred to bringing the church together. Yet the word “synago” never referred to the actual church gathering. In other words “synago” was never used to mean church, but only that the church was brought together or assembled as seen in:

Matthew 18 verse 20 For where two or three are gathered together (synago) in My name, I am there in the midst of them."

and again in:

Jam 2 verse 2 For if there should come into your assembly (synagögyn) a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes,

There are other Greek words that also refer to an assembly, but are not as commonly known. One of them is the Greek word “plethos” which refers to a *general gathering of people for no particular purpose* as such. It just referred to a common gathering of people for any type of gathering. An example of Scripture of this type of assembly is found in:

Acts 23 verse 7 And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees; and the assembly (plethos) was divided.

Another is the Greek word “soostrofay” literally meaning *a twisting together* generally referring to a crowd or a riot for instance as used in:

Acts 19 verse 40 For we are in danger of being called in question for today's uproar, there being no reason which we may give to account for this disorderly gathering (soostrofay).

The next Greek word is “panegurous”. This word is more interesting in that it was used to describe an assembly that was *spectator orientated* in nature. This word was used to describe the Greek Olympics gathering, or **religious gatherings**. It was used to indicate religious gatherings, because most of the people who gathered were spectators to

the ritual performances of the priests up front. Attendants might participate in prayer or bring something forward to sacrifice, but for the majority of the time they were spectators at a religious show. This word was used in a prophetic and spiritual sense of the church in:

Hebrews 12 verse 22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels,

Verse 23 to the general assembly (panegurous) and church (ekklesia) of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect,

You would think that looking at today's church, the word "church" came from this Greek word: "panegurous". For instance, if we go into most church gatherings today, we enter a spectator-oriented religious gathering, where we hardly participate except for maybe singing songs and giving money. Unfortunately, neither of these Greek words for gatherings was ever used to refer to mean the church or the church meeting in the Bible.

The actual Greek word for church is: "ekklesia". It is a combination of two words "ek" which means "out of" and the "klesia" which means "called". Literally, it can be translated as "called out" or "elect". Yet the word "ekklesia" meant much more than an assembly of the elected of Christ. The word "ekklesia" actually indicated **a judicial meeting**. Both the Greeks and the Romans used the Greek word "ekklesia" to refer to a meeting where people were called out to discuss and make decisions concerning the affairs of the state. The judicial meetings were attended for the sake of the stability of the state and the advancement of the **current kingdom**.

The "ekklesia" was the principal assembly of the democracy of ancient Athens during its Golden Age between 480–404 BC. In 594 BC, it was the popular assembly, open to all male citizens over the age of 19, meaning that all classes of citizens in Athens were able to participate. The "ekklesia" opened the doors for all citizens, regardless of class, to nominate and vote for magistrates - indirectly voting for the Areopagus, which was like a "high court of appeal". The "ekklesia" had the final decision on legislation, war and peace, military strategy, electing army generals and other officials and had the right to call magistrates to account after their year of office.

In the 5th century BC their numbers amounted to about 43,000 people. However, only those wealthy enough to spend much of their time away from home were able to participate, until Pericles' reforms in early 451-2 BC allowing payment for jurors. Originally these meetings were held once every month, but later on they met three or four times per month. The agenda for the "ekklesia" was generally established by the servants of the king, the popular council. Votes were taken by a show of hands. A quorum of 6,000 was sometimes required to do business.

Something interesting and quite humorous to note on the side-line, is that a gang of slaves, called Scythians, carrying ropes dipped in red ochre named "miltos", would travel through the city on the days the "ekklesia" was to meet, and would lash those citizens not in attendance with their ropes. With garments thus stained, shamed citizens could legally not carry out any business until they visited the meeting grounds of the "ekklesia".

So it is evident from Greek culture that the word "ekklesia" was never used by the Greeks to indicate a religious or informal gathering. This was true under the Roman Empire as well. This meaning of the "ekklesia" is clearly seen in an incident found in Acts 19. From verses 24 up to verse 31 we read of a silversmith name Demetrius who was greatly offended by the new beliefs Paul brought to Asia, which entailed turning away from idol worship towards faith in Christ. It had drastic financial implications for Demetrius and other silversmiths who made these idols for profit. Demetrius got a whole mob together at the theatre to make a decision about what they were going to do.

Let us read from Scripture what happened from this point on, from:

Acts 19 verse 32 Some therefore cried one thing and some another, for the **assembly – the Greek word – "ekklesia"** was confused, and most of them did not know why they had come together.

Verse 33 And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander motioned with his hand, and wanted to make his defence to the people.

Verse 34 But when they found out that he was a Jew, all with one voice cried out for about two hours, "Great is

Diana of the Ephesians!"

Verse 35 And when the city clerk had quieted the crowd, he said: "Men of Ephesus, what man is there who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is temple guardian of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Zeus?"

Verse 36 Therefore, since these things cannot be denied, you ought to be quiet and do nothing rashly.

Verse 37 For you have brought these men here who are neither robbers of temples nor blasphemers of your goddess.

*Verse 38 Therefore, if Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a case against anyone, the **courts** are open and there are proconsuls. Let them bring charges against one another.*

*Verse 39 But if you have any other inquiry to make, it shall be determined in the lawful **assembly** – again the Greek word **"ekklesia"**.*

Verse 40 For we are in danger of being called in question for today's uproar, there being no reason which we may give to account for this disorderly gathering. (the Greek word "soostrofay ")

*Verse 41 And when he had said these things, he dismissed the **assembly** – once again the Greek word **"ekklesia"**.*

Here we find the Greek word "ekklesia" being used three times to indicate the type of assembly the silversmith Demetrius called for. It is also why the city clerk questioned the lawfulness of this particular "ekklesia" gathering, as it became a "soostrofay", which as we saw earlier on, means "riot". Would you say that this "ekklesia" meeting was intended to be a judicial meeting or a religious meeting in this instance? It's quite obvious that it was a *judicial* meeting, because their intention was to decide what they were going to do with Paul and the influence he had on the idol worship industry of that city. It was only when they were shouting praises to their idol named Diana that the secretary came to bring **order** to the "ekklesia" gathering. If only we had such a city clerk to come and create order in many of our modern day churches... ok bad joke 😊.

2.3: Interactive Meeting

Does the Bible really indicate a “judicial meeting” when it refers to an “ekklesia” church gathering? The problem we have when reading Scripture is that we already have a pre-conceived idea about church, understanding it to be a religious gathering at a religious building; so we read that perspective into Scripture. Let me challenge you to take a step of faith now, by taking off the tinted glasses of man-made tradition and read the Scripture purely on what is actually written, and your eyes might open to a church you never knew was actually taught in Scripture.

Let us start with Jesus' teaching concerning church in:

Matthew 18 verse 15 Moreover, if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother.

Verse 16 But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY WORD MAY BE ESTABLISHED.'

Verse 17 And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.

Verse 18 "Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

Verse 19 "Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven.

Verse 20 For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."

Is there any indication that Christ is referring to church as a worship service here? No, because it is clear that Christ is speaking of a type of council or judicial meeting where decisions are to be made concerning an unrepentant brother. Take note that here, Jesus is talking about the whole church putting someone out of the church, and there is no mention of this being the role of church leaders, as is practised in many traditional churches. The fact that the church may bind or loosen anything on earth with the result to having it bound or loosed in heaven is evidence that the church being spoken of refers to a judicial meeting concerning the kingdom of God. This is very much the same as the “ekklesia” of ancient Athens.

In fact, the correcting of brothers in a church meeting is not uncommon in Scripture at all! Paul writes in:

1 Corinthians 5 verse 4 In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Verse 5 deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

Is Paul talking about a worship service or a judicial meeting when he instructed the Corinthian church as a whole about what to do with an unrepentant brother? Keep in mind this was Paul's instruction to the whole church and not just to the leaders of the church.

Please don't misunderstand me here. I am not saying that church is a secular meeting. The biblical church is very clearly a spiritual meeting. Christ is in our midst, heading the meeting of royal priests. We are coming together to discuss and make decisions concerning the affairs of His kingdom. It is therefore a spiritual judicial meeting – very different from the “worship service” that we are accustomed to.

So far, does it seem to you that church should be an interactive meeting where everyone can participate, or does it still seem right to have the traditional three point monologue sermon? Well let us go on and explore the Scriptures even further.

The author of Hebrews writes in:

Hebrews 10 verse 24 And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works,

Verse 25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

This passage does not say that we are not to forsake the assembly so that we can listen to one man's opinion. We are to **exhort one another**.

Even when it comes to singing, we read in the Bible that it was done "to one another" in an "ekklesia" gathering. For instance we read in:

*Ephesians 5 verse 19 **speaking to one another** in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord,*

To whom are the songs directed to when we make melody in our heart to the Lord? The answer is - to **each another**. Paul's letter to the Colossians confirms this in:

*Colossians 3 verse 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you with all richness and wisdom, **teaching and admonishing one another** with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, and singing to God with thankfulness in your hearts.*

Again, what was the purpose of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, as we sing to God with thankfulness in our hearts? It was for the purpose of teaching and admonishing **one another**.

Remember the "ekklesia" gathering is a spiritual judicial gathering where the focus is on stirring **one another** to love and do good works. It is where we make decisions concerning the kingdom of God in our lives as the body of Christ. So it is of no surprise that psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs were sung to **one another** to teach and admonish **one another** to stir up love and do good works among each other. The songs spoken of here are not meant for a worship sessions where we need someone on stage to perform. Surely any person may sing songs of praise to God to encourage and teach the church as one would by teaching, prophecy or a word of knowledge.

Paul's letter to the Corinthian church is most probably the clearest indication of all believers taking part in the meeting. For instance we read in:

*1 Corinthians 14 verse 26 How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, **each of you** has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, and has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.*

According to Paul, when we come together, who is to contribute to the meeting?

- A) Only the one who has a theological diploma or degree?
- B) Those whom the Pastor allows.
- C) Each of us may contribute to the gathering according to what God gives.

We will need a lot of creative interpretation in order to make any sense of this passage it in the traditional church gathering? Let us read further from:

1 Corinthians 14 verse 29 Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge.

Verse 30 But if anything is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent.

Verse 31 For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged.

Verse 32 And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.

The word prophet in Greek "prophetes" refers to someone speaking a word from God. So according to this passage, who is to speak a word from God?

- A) The pastor
- B) Those who the church has appointed
- C) Two or three prophets – or spokespersons of God.

We read that two or three people may speak God's word. Who is then to judge whether these words spoken are from God?

- A) The pastor
- B) The elders
- C) The whole church

Can you picture a church meeting where everyone is involved in judging the word; where it is not only an appointed pastor that plays police? But wait; here is another question. What needs to happen if someone who sits by has something to add to what the first three prophesying are speaking about?

- A) He has to stay quiet because you are not to interrupt the pastor when he is speaking.
- B) You need to ask the pastors' permission to say something to the church.
- C) The first two or three need to keep quiet and give heed to the one who has something to add, for we all may prophesy one by one.

Let us repeat the passage in:

*1 Corinthians 14 verse 30 But if anything is revealed to another who sits by, **let the first keep silent.**
Verse 31 For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged.*

The Bible teaches us that the meeting is to be interactive, where there needs to be more than one person giving the "Word of God". In other words **the whole church may take part in the gathering.** This is only possible in a judicial "ekklesia" meeting. It is clear that this judicial "ekklesia" meeting is about much more than just dealing with unrepentant brothers or sisters. It is about the affairs of God's kingdom in our lives.

The closest comparison today to the biblical understanding of an "ekklesia" church is a city council. Picture having a city council, where every time they meet, they have a single appointed person who expounds on his interpretation of the council's policy, rules and procedures' manual. Now this appointed person might even give a brilliant motivational speech on the fact that they are the chosen council members of the city. However, the council meeting never gets to be about dealing with issues on hand such as which roads needs to be improved, what to do about the crime in the town, or what funds need to be allocated for schools. Even though the council members feel they were motivated and gained knowledge on the policy, rule and procedures manual, their meetings do not fulfil the reason why they were chosen to be the town council.

The council also may have meetings where everyone gets to have a say and even have a discussion on their views and interpretations concerning the policy, rules and procedures manual. The appointed person might insist that they follow his interpretational study notes. This meeting does not differ that much from a book club? The town council is still not fulfilling the reason why they were chosen to be members of the city council. In the same way the church meeting should not be a religious book club, nor a motivational gathering held from the appointed person's view of the Bible. The ekklesia is the elect of God who come together to discuss and make decisions concerning the affairs of God's Kingdom in their lives and the areas they effect. As the ekklesia, they have the authority to bind and loose on earth, that will then be bound and loosed in heaven.

2.4: Equipping the saints

If the “ekklesia” meeting is to be interactive; where then does the monologue sermon that we are so used to in the Sunday service fit in? The monologue sermon in an “ekklesia” meeting was unheard of in the first three hundred years of the church’s existence. Yet, with the church being institutionalised in 325AD by Constantine, and with the church being given religious buildings, the meetings became spectator orientated religious shows, run by ordained clergy. The sermon that we are used to in the institutional church was made popular by the man with the name of **John Chrysostom** in about 386 AD. He was nicknamed the man with the golden mouth, because of the Aristotelian art of rhetoric which he acquired before his conversion to Christianity.

Some would argue that the monologue rhetoric in church can be found back in Scripture. Their proof text is found in:

Acts 20 verse 7 Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and **continued his message until midnight.**

Keep in mind when reading this passage, that this passage was translated from Greek by those who had a traditional church background. You see, the phrase “spoke to them” in this passage is the Greek word “dialogomi”. It is where we get our English word “**dialogue**” from. To the Greeks it had a much stronger meaning that indicated “**heated discussion or debate**”. It is true that Paul did lead the discussion but it was a discussion none the less. The word “message” is from the well-known Greek word “logos” which indicates a “word” that depicts “reason or thought”.

The translators could not imagine that there could be discourse in the type of church meeting that they had become accustomed to. They therefore translated “debates and reasoning” as “speaking his message”. But think about it; Paul had to leave the next day and the church had a lot to sort out before he left. It is unreasonable to think that he addressed these issues through a sermon. As in all “ekklesia” judicial meetings, these issues were *discussed*. Logic also dictates to us it’s unlikely that a monologue sermon would last till midnight, but discussions can easily make hours pass quickly.

Discussion in a church meeting over certain issues was not as uncommon in an “ekklesia” judicial meeting as one would think. For instance we read in:

Acts 15 verse 1 And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."

Verse 2 Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas **had no small dissension and dispute with them,** they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question.

Do these accounts of discussions and even disputes resemble anything we are used to in our traditional church services of today? Imagine that there was actual dissension – interactive dialogue, because of wrong doctrine being taught. This is only possible in an “ekklesia” judicial meeting. This kind of church is really beyond our imagination.

Here is another interesting question to consider: If it was not possible that there were dialogues in a church meeting, why would Paul bother giving Timothy instructions concerning dialogues that end up in useless arguments as we read about in?:

2 Timothy 2 verse 14 Remind them of these things, charging them before the Lord not to **strive about words to no profit,** to the ruin of the hearers.

This whole aspect of disputes in the church needs to be explained further, but that we will get to at a later stage. The point that we are making here is that in a judicial “ekklesia” meeting there was open dialogue and not a monologue sermon from one member, while the rest of the congregation had to sit in pews looking at the backs of each other's

heads and just accept all that was being preached behind the pulpit. Even when Paul preached the gospel to those outside the church gathering he would reason with them as demonstrated in the following example:

Acts 19 verse 8 And he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, **reasoning and persuading** concerning the things of the kingdom of God.

Verse 9 But when some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from them and withdrew the disciples, **reasoning daily** in the school of Tyrannus.

Keep in mind that neither the synagogue nor the school of Tyrannus, was a Christian “ekklesia” meeting. These were only places where Paul went to preach the gospel to non-Christian Jews. Nevertheless, Paul’s way of preaching in these scenarios was not a monologue sermon. Instead he **reasoned** with those he proclaimed the gospel to.

This would lead us to the question of how the “ministry”, as some call it, would function in a judicial meeting. For instance, what do we do with Paul’s writing in:

Ephesians 4 verse 11 And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers,

Verse 12 for the **equipping of the saints for the work of ministry**, for the edifying of the body of Christ,

Let us look again at this passage. According to Paul, what is the purpose of the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers?

- A) They are there to preach to the saints week after week!
- B) They are there to run or manage the church!
- C) They are there to equip the saints so that saints may do the work of the ministry.

Read the passage carefully and you will see that it was actually intended that the **saints are to do the work of ministry**. The apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers are only there to show or **equip** the saints, give them the tools, so that they can **minister to one another**.

Do you think one can be equipped to minister purely by listening to a monologue sermon week after week? The answer is obviously NO. Equipping is to be compared to an apprenticeship. When an apprentice learns a trade, he learns by the teacher’s example and through questioning the teacher concerning the trade. Then, at a point the teacher would let the student practice the trade while he looks and assists where necessary. Finally, when the student seems to be able to function in the trade, the teacher would move on and only would come back when further assistance is needed by the student.

A perfect example of equipping the saints is Jesus with His disciples. Jesus might have preached to the crowds who were not in His circle of disciples, but He spent quality time equipping the twelve disciples. He discussed with them the issues of God’s kingdom. He shared His life with them, eating, and living with them. He taught them by example how to deal with everyday situations. He first showed them by example how to preach the kingdom of God and then gave them the opportunity to do it themselves. Then after three years he left them, with the Holy Spirit to empower them.

Look what Peter wrote to the elders in:

1 Peter 5 verse 2 Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly;

Verse 3 nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, **but being examples to the flock**;

Verse 4 and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.

How are shepherds to look after the flock? By being examples, not lording over them! Being a pastor is not about giving motivational speeches every week, but about equipping the saints in order for them to take over the work of ministry. Equipping can only be done through close relationship?

Let us now read the whole passage of Ephesians 4:11 again, but right up to verse 16.

Ephesians 4 verse 11 And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers,

Verse 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,

Verse 13 till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;

Verse 14 that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting,

Verse 15 but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—

Verse 16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

According to this passage of Scripture, in what way will the Body of Christ grow? When **every joint supplies**, according to the effective working by which **every part does its share** in edifying of itself in love! Equipping the saints is getting the saints to a place where they are joined together to supply and edify each other with the gift that God has given them. This is about being part of the Body of Christ and not a religious organization.

Are you able to minister to the church according to the grace that has been given to you by God? Why do you think might the reason be for your answer? Your answer most probably has to do with what is understood by equipping the church to minister. We read in:

Hebrews 5 verse 12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food.

Verse 13 For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe.

2.5: The Priesthood of All Believers

One of Luther's grievances against the institutional church of his time was that the church neglected the reality of the priesthood of all believers. Luther believed that all believers were called to minister to one another, yet the institutional church was designed to function as a religious gathering and therefore had no room for everyone to interactively participate as priests.

The expectation of the average church attendee on a Sunday morning is to get dressed, go to church, sit in pews, listen to motivational speaking, sing some songs that were planned beforehand, give money, and perhaps drink a cup of tea or shake the pastor's hand at the end of the service. Yet, this weekly religious practice called the worship service is one of the most detrimental practices to the church's spiritual growth. The "worship service", as it is known by many, is so intertwined with the mainstream church that it is almost impossible to think of church without it. It is how most Christians and the rest of the world defines Christianity. Yet this "worship service" seems to be the very thing that prevents us from functioning as the church that Christ is building.

Still, people will fight with every fibre of their being to try and sustain this "holy cow", even though it is nowhere to be found in Scripture. Not only is it not found in Scripture, but is in actual fact contrary to the description of church in Scripture. It is contrary to Scripture because it is based on the idea that Jesus came to establish a new religion, where, as we have seen, Jesus in fact came to establish a heavenly kingdom.

The "ekklesia" is about the elect coming together to deal with issues about God's kingdom in their lives and on earth. In this meeting it is not just one person giving his three point sermon, or a band; choir, or worship leader performing the pre-programmed songs. It is about saints that share their lives together serving one another as priest through the life and Spirit of God that was breath onto the church.

Peter writes in:

*1 Peter 2 verse 9 But you are a chosen generation, **a royal priesthood**, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light*

A "royal priesthood" means a priesthood that belongs to the king. Our priesthood functionality is kingdom oriented; yet as priests we are responsible to minister to one another about the affairs and praises of our King.

In a secular judicial meeting there are the board members with a chairman discussing the affairs of a company or a governmental state region. With the church, Christ, through His Spirit, is the chairman heading the "ekklesia" of God's kingdom on earth, and all the members contribute according to the ability Christ has given them.

Look what Peter writes further in:

1 Peter 4 verse 10 As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

Verse 11 If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Does Peter's instruction to minister to one another with the gifts we've received give any indication of a one man or band show on a stage? Absolutely not! Peter's reference is plural people doing the ministering to one another.

Paul writes the same thing in:

Romans 12 verse 6 Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith;

Verse 7 or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching;

Verse 8 he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

Is Paul talking about one person or more than one person doing the ministry to the church? There is an absolute focus on the plural in this passage, which makes sense in the context of the “ekklesia” being an interactive judicial kingdom meeting as opposed to a religious spectator-oriented meeting. In the “ekklesia” meeting everyone takes part according to the ability and function that Jesus has given them through the Holy Spirit. Jesus is the Head or chairman of this meeting. Why is this? Well, because He is the King of God’s kingdom.

This kingdom is at war with the kingdom of darkness. To fully grasp this, we need to have a look at the Hebrew equivalent of “ekklesia” which is “qahal”. The Hebrew word “qahal” has different types of emphasis. One of those references has to do with a nation being called together by a herald or crier for to go to war, for instance. If one thinks about it, the gospel of Christ is about; calling people together into God’s kingdom. We are at war with satan, but we have the confidence that the “ekklesia” that Christ is building, the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

When the Old Testament was translated into Greek, the Septuagint - the translators would translate “qahal” as “ekklesia” in Greek. For instance:

*Psalm 22 verse 22 I will declare Your name to My brethren; In the midst of the **assembly** (“qahal” – “ekklesia”) I will praise You.*

“Assembly” in this passage is the *Hebrew word: “qahal”* and as you can see was translated in Greek “*ekklesia*” in the Septuagint. Some theologians believe that the gospel according to Mathew is the only book that could have been written in Hebrew, where the rest of the New Testament was written in Greek. It is therefore assumed by some scholars that the Greek word “*ekklesia*” was originally the Hebrew equivalent: “*qahal*” when the gospel of Mathew was later translated into Greek from the following passage:

Matthew 16 verse 15 He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"

Verse 16 Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Verse 17 Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.

*Verse 18 And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock **I will build My church (ekklesia/qahal), and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.***

In certain occasions the word “qahal” meant an assembly gathered to plan or **execute campaigns of war**. From a Christian perspective, every saint is called to be a royal priest to function in a judicial meeting that would execute God’s kingdom against the kingdom of darkness. Jesus speaks further of this in:

*Matthew 16 verse 19 And I will give you the keys of the **kingdom of heaven**, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."*

Being called to be part of the “ekklesia” is not only our privilege but also our responsibility. God has made us “Christ’s church” the executive office of His kingdom on earth. Yet this goes much further than our meetings. The “ekklesia” kingdom meeting is a function of God’s kingdom in us. The form of our meetings is only a shell that contains the fellowship of our true life in Christ. The form might either have a positive or negative influence on how we function in God’s kingdom with Christ’s life in us, but it does not guarantee it.

Jesus said the following in:

Luke 17 verse 20 Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, "The kingdom of God does not come with observation;

*Luke 17 verse 21 nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' **For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you.**"*

The kingdom of God starts **within us**. Christ’s rule has to start within our hearts. If Christ rule is a day to day thing through what the Bible calls the Body of Christ. We will deal with the Body of Christ in the next part of this series of teachings.

We have now come to the end of part two. If this is all new to you, you might feel overwhelmed by all of this. For some it might feel like their whole world, that is all they have been accustomed to, has been pulled out from underneath them.

Keep in mind, though, that there is a reason why you have got your hands on this material. God wants to prepare us for the crucial times that lie ahead of us. He wants us to grow up and stop playing church. We don't have time to waste away any longer by being religiously entertained. We are the royal priests elected by God to function in the kingdom of His Son. Church can no longer be a place where we go to get blessed by the paid professionals. The church of God's kingdom is where we are to *be* the blessing as opposed to getting blessed all the time. Our faith needs to be exercised as opposed to us just being fed all the time and growing to be spiritual slobs.

You might have many unanswered questions at this point. We encourage you to continue this series of teaching on "A Church Beyond Imagination".

Part 3: The Body of Christ

3.1: Christ's Body

I can imagine that after Parts 1 and 2 of “A Church Beyond Imagination” some might say, “Well, there is no such thing as the perfect church, so why get hung up about a wrong teaching on tithing or the format of church?” There is even a common joke made that if the perfect church exists, then you should not join it, or else it wouldn't be perfect anymore. Remarks like these do give the impression that it would be an unrealistic ideology to find “the perfect church”, because of the inherent imperfection of the human beings that make up the church.

And yet, there is something wrong with this mind-set. If we say that there is no such a thing as the perfect church, what then does it say about the words of Christ found in Matthew, chapter 16 verse 18 that *He will build His church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it?* Is Christ not able to use rough, living stones like us and build a glorious and perfect church despite our imperfection?

Might it not be that the reason why many believe that there is no such a thing as “the perfect church” is because they think of “church” as an institution of man and not a spiritual entity of Christ? What if we tell you that the perfect church does exist, even though it is being built with imperfect living stones like you and me! This church where Christ is central is the church that, in the core of our being, we long to be a part of. This is the church that is beyond imagination!

Here is something to consider: Even with all the sincere church activities, programs, revival meetings and “spiritual experiences”, there still seems to be a spiritual emptiness ruling our institutional church today. More and more saints are wondering if what they are busy with is actually real, or just emotional hype. Why is that? Would you consider the possibility that what most people consider to be church, might not be the church that Christ is building? You might then ask: well where is this perfect church? Why have we never heard of it or seen it?

The good news is that you have always been part of that perfect church that Christ is building—since the day you were born of the Spirit of God in Christ Jesus. **The church that Christ builds is the actual people who are part of Christ's Body.** In other words, the perfect church is not something you can join, but something you are already part of through the Spirit of God dwelling in you. The question is therefore not where it is, but how to function.

In understanding the Body of Christ we can compare it to the makeup of a human being. Paul writes in:

1 Thessalonians 5 verse 23 *Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; **and may your whole spirit, soul, and body** be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

There are many who debate the issue as to whether people consist of three parts, namely: body, soul and spirit, or whether we are only two parts: body and spirit-soul, where it is theorised that the spirit-soul are actually two sides of the same essence. Whatever your persuasion is, one cannot ignore the fact that Scripture does speak of three elements of the person, whether the spirit-soul are just two sides of the same essence or whether they are two different elements of a person. For instance we read in:

Hebrews 4 verse 12 *For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the **division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow**, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*

For argument's sake, one can think of the soul as the personality or conscience of the person. The soul steers the body it dwells in through the organ called the brain. The soul also uses the brain to access the memory that helps the soul to make decisions. Some claim that the eyes of a person are the windows to the person's soul. One could say that the soul is the actual person that dwells in the body. The spirit on the other hand is that which gives a person life. In creating Adam we read God doing the following in:

Genesis 2 verse 7 And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and **breathed** into his nostrils the **breath of life**; and man became a living being.

The word “breath” in both Hebrew: “neshamah” and Greek: “pneuma”, actually means “spirit”. So God breathing into Adam gave man life or what we understand as “spirit”. When the spirit of man separates from the body, the person dies. The body in other words cannot live without the spirit or breath of God. Without the spirit of man the body has no soul and is just a lifeless corpse. Keep in mind how “life” entered Adam, when God breathed breath or “spirit” into him, as we deal with the revelation of Christ’s Body. We read in:

Ephesians 2 verse 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

Verse 14 For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation,

Verse 15 having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so **as to create in Himself one new man** from the two, thus making peace,

Verse 16 and that **He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross**, thereby putting to death the enmity.

We are most probably not going to grasp the great magnitude of what actually happened at the cross of Jesus Christ till we see Christ face to face. Yet Scripture does make certain things clear to us. One of the things is that the cross of Christ brought about reconciliation to the Father. What is important to note is how the cross brought reconciliation. Paul teaches that Christ created in Himself ONE NEW MAN. That means whether we are Jews or Gentiles we are reconciled to God in ONE BODY. This body is a totally new creation. Paul speaks of the new creation like this in:

2 Corinthians 5 verse 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

Verse 18 Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation,

Verse 19 that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

Those who are in Christ are a new creation. How are we in Christ? Well; as explained in the letter to the Ephesians through that NEW MAN in ONE BODY. God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself through Christ’s body. That is why Paul would write in:

Colossians 2 verse 9 For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead **bodily**;

Verse 10 and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.

What is Paul talking about when he says that Christ is the head of all principalities and powers? We read in:

Ephesians 1 verse 22 And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be **head over all things to the church**,

Verse 23 **which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all**.

God has put everything under Christ’s feet through the church, which is His body. The Greek word for “body” is “soma” which means both the instrument of life and the outer shell of a man. The church is therefore the “soma” or outer shell of Christ on earth. Through the Spirit we have become part of a new creation: one new body in Christ. In other words Christ embodies Himself through the church. Paul explains it like this in:

1 Corinthians 12 verse 12 For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ.

Verse 13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.

Every person that is born of the Spirit has been created in the Body of Christ as a “body-member”. See how Jesus identifies Himself as being persecuted when Paul was actually persecuting the church in:

*Acts 9 verse 4 Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, **why are you persecuting Me?**"*

Verse 5 And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" Then the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads."

We then read some time later on, after Paul’s conversion, where he speaks of his own suffering as actually adding to the affliction of Christ through His Body in:

*Colossians 1 verse 24 I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh **what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church,***

This is a marvellous revelation that Paul had concerning the church as the Body of Christ. Yet the only way for us to grasp this, is if we can understand that the Body of Christ is not a religious institution but an organic being indwelt by the Spirit of God. After Christ went to the Father, He sent down the Holy Spirit to be poured out on the church. In that very moment, the Body of Christ, that was created through the death and resurrection of Christ, received the breath of the Life of the Spirit of God, as Adam did when he was created.

The church is a dead corpse without the Holy Spirit. Through the life of the Holy Spirit the Soul of the church who is Christ controls the Body as the Head of the church. This means this NEW MAN, this new Creation, which is called the “Body of Christ,” is Body, Soul, and Spirit. Through the Holy Spirit – Christ the very Soul of the Church is present as Jesus promised in:

Matthew 18 verse 20 For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."

We need to understand that Christ does not enter the meeting when we welcome Him in prayer “in the name of Jesus”. As the Holy Spirit dwells within every one of us that is born of the Spirit of God, so, Christ dwells in our hearts. Therefore Christ is already in our midst because of the indwelling Holy Spirit. This means that we have, in a sense, brought Christ to the gathering by being members of the body of Christ. As we are Christ’s body so He is in our midst.

3.2: Body Life

Christianity is not an individualistic religion, but a new creation as the Body of Christ reconciled to the Father. That means that if we want to be joined to Christ who is the Head, we would need to be attached to other Christians as well who are part of the Body of Christ. Think of it this way; what will happen if a finger is amputated from a human body? Well, the reality is that the amputated finger will wither away because it is separated from the life source of the body. Is it then possible that a member can only be a member of the head without having any relation to the rest of the body? No; he or she will wither away spiritually. Let us have a better look at how Paul describes the body of Christ in:

1 Corinthians 12 verse 14 For in fact the body is not one member but many.

Verse 15 If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body?

Verse 16 And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body?

Verse 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the smelling?

Verse 18 But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased.

Verse 19 And if they were all one member, where would the body be?

Verse 20 But now indeed there are many members, yet one body.

Verse 21 And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you."

Verse 22 No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary.

Verse 23 And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable parts have greater modesty,

Verse 24 but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it,

Verse 25 that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another.

Verse 26 And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.

Verse 27 Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.

In order for us to have a genuine relationship/fellowship with Christ, we have to have fellowship with the whole Person of Christ, which is Body, Soul and Spirit. John writes concerning Jesus, the Word of life, the following in:

1John 1 verse 3 that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.

Is it not amazing that John would say that the reason they preached to them was that they may have fellowship with John and the other believers? It is as if John takes it as a matter of fact that fellowship with them is a natural consequence of their fellowship truly being with the Father and with the Son. Why would he depict that as the natural consequence? The answer is that John and the other disciples were the Body of Christ, and having fellowship with the Body is part of having fellowship with the Christ. For that reason, while we are in the Body of Christ we also have fellowship with the Father. So then, having fellowship with Christ means we are to form biblical fellowship with the saints living near us. Paul writes in:

Ephesians 4 verse 15 ...but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—

*Verse 16 from whom the **whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies**, according to the effective working by which **every part does its share, causes growth of the body** for the edifying of itself in love.*

This knitting and joining together goes much further than Bible study, prayer meetings and socializing. It is about sharing lives. For instance, would one think a husband and wife are in a good loving relationship with each other when they only see each other when they have meetings once or twice a week? It might happen occasionally that a husband and wife might not be with each other for a week or two, because one of them is off on some business trip, but if this happens frequently it could cause a serious strain on their marriage. The husband and wife may hold each other in their hearts while they are absent from each other physically. They might even say to each other that they are with each other in spirit. Yet should they only see each other once a week or even once a month, and then only as though they were in a meeting, that would not be considered a normal healthy relationship. The norm would be that the husband and wife be with each other daily and only rarely be apart from each other for a week or two.

From this perspective, how often should we have fellowship with Christ; once a month, or perhaps once a week? Most Christians would say that they speak with Christ every day, yet hardly have any contact with the members of Christ's body except for the Sunday worship service. Yet fellowshiping with Christ everyday should incorporate fellowshiping with the members of the Body EVERY DAY. We read in:

*Acts 2 verse 46 So continuing **daily** with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart,*

Reading this passage from an institutional mind-set one would think that the early church had daily meetings. However Scripture says only that they were together in the temple with one accord. We need to understand that the first converts in the church were Jews. As Jews they expressed their faith by going to the temple that was seen as "the house of the Lord". This was not a church service, but a testimony to their Jewish brethren who were not converted to Christ yet. Daily fellowship is not daily "meetings". More church meetings have nothing to do with biblical fellowship. One may schedule daily meetings with your spouse yet still be out of touch with what is happening in his or her life. Even in a traditional context, if one only has weekly meetings, without fellowship with the Body of Christ every day, the meetings will be just empty shells, empty of the true fellowship of Christ. The writer of Hebrews writes:

Hebrews 3 verse 12 Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God;

*Verse 13 but exhort one another **daily**, while it is called "TODAY," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.*

Verse 14 For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end

How many times a week are we to exhort one another? The reason that so many Christians are being deceived by sin is because they spend more time in front of that glowing idol that is called a television, than they do exhorting one another. Many Christians might see no problem watching TV every day, even for hours, but exhorting one another daily seems too radical. Saints of God, we need to re-evaluate our priorities in these last days.

Christians go from one so-called church institution to another because they don't want to connect with other saints. They want to have their private lives free from interference from others in the family of God. They would even go to a so-called church in another city, town, or suburb so they don't have to deal with Christians intruding into their personal space. How can we call this being the Body of Christ?

Is it not ironic that we find so many in the institutional church that go to weekly worship services, but their homes are dysfunctional, with no life of Christ in them? There are as many families that go through divorces and teen pregnancies in our church today as there are in the world. Christians are living with all kinds of addictions such as alcohol, drugs and pornography with no power to be set free. Surely this is not the church that Christ was talking about that He would build, where the gates of hell would not be able to prevail against it?

So what is the answer? The answer lies in “DAILY EXHORTATION so that we will not be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness”. We are to live as though we are an actual organic body that needs each member. Where no one can say to another I have no need of you. Discipleship does not happen through sermons and Bible study. That might produce encouragement and we might gain knowledge, but very little discipleship is accomplished through it. Jesus might have preached to the crowds, but those who lived with Him and shared **day to day living** and struggles with Him He called His disciples.

There are many Christians who are sincerely seeking to be part of the Body of Christ in true fellowship, but then are left frustrated, by the busy-ness of empty church programs and the pretence of Christian fellowship. Be encouraged to know that you are not strange nor are you alone. What you are feeling is the Holy Spirit, in you, aching to express the very life of Christ through the Body of Christ.

3.3: The family of God

The concept of the Body of Christ might still seem very strange to you, so let us have a look at another way Scripture explains the life in Christ. It is called being part of the family of God. At a certain time Jesus said the following to His disciples:

Mark 10 verse 17 Now as He was going out on the road, one came running, knelt before Him, and asked Him, "Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?"

Verse 18 So Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God.

Verse 19 You know the commandments: 'DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY,' 'DO NOT MURDER,' 'DO NOT STEAL,' 'DO NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS,' 'Do not defraud,' 'HONOR YOUR FATHER AND YOUR MOTHER.'"

Verse 20 And he answered and said to Him, "Teacher, all these things I have kept from my youth."

Verse 21 Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me."

Verse 22 But he was sad at this word, and went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

Verse 23 Then Jesus looked around and said to His disciples, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!"

Verse 24 And the disciples were astonished at His words. But Jesus answered again and said to them, "Children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God!"

Verse 25 It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

Verse 26 And they were greatly astonished, saying among themselves, "Who then can be saved?"

Verse 27 But Jesus looked at them and said, "With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible."

Verse 28 Then Peter began to say to Him, "See, we have left all and followed You."

Verse 29 So Jesus answered and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's,

Verse 30 who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time—houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions—and in the age to come, eternal life.

It is clear from Christ's words that He was not dealing with us only having to give up our riches. Jesus was dealing with everything that we might deem precious in our lives. So from Jesus' parable, what would indicate to us that we truly follow Him? Well, if we have truly forsaken all, we would as a direct result receive a hundredfold in the household of God. In other words, our true family becomes those who are also following Christ; our possessions are no longer just for us but for the needs of our family in Christ and theirs for us. In essence, we have traded in self and family when we became Christ's disciples. With the trade-in we have a new family of brothers, sister, mothers and fathers that share their lives DAILY. The question one is faced with is whether we truly could take Jesus' words that literally? Well it seems that the early church did, as seen in:

Acts 2 verse 41 Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.

Verse 42 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.

Verse 43 Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles.

Verse 44 Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common,

Verse 45 and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.

Verse 46 So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart,

Verse 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

What type of lifestyle must the early Christians have had that had such favour with all the people? Most times the term "out of fellowship" is used to refer to people who don't "go to church". However when looking at the word

“fellowship” from Scripture one realise that it has really little to do with “going to church.” The word fellowship comes from the Greek word “koinonia”, which has to do with sharing lives. It comes from the same word “koinos” used to describe how the believers “had all things in common”. The words “koinos” originates from Greek word “oikia” which means household, which has to do with a closely knitted family. In other words having fellowship is about the family or household of God sharing their lives with each other as though they are of the same household of brother and sisters.

Most Christians, whether they are pastors, elders, worship leaders, deacons, cell group leaders might attend their weekly church meetings but are as much “out of fellowship” as those who don’t attend church meetings. Biblical fellowship is not about attending church services, having Bible studies, or prayer meetings. Biblical fellowship is about sharing lives as a close family of brothers, sisters, mothers and fathers. This is a family that exhort each other DAILY whether they are going to the temple or sharing a meal at each other’s homes, whether they go and do shopping or play sport together; whether they share their joys or their sorrows with each other; whether they help each other with the care of their children or the struggles in their marriages, whether they help each other to face the struggles at work, or when someone lost his or her job, ... in order that they may not be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness. This is a family where mothers, fathers, teens and children share their lives together as one big family in order to be examples to each other, even correcting each other when they love the world more than loving the Lord. A family where they love and care for each other so much that they would feel safe to confess their sins to one another. This is a family where they place each other’s needs above their own riches, desires and comforts, because they love each other as Christ loves them. We read for instance:

1 Corinthians 10 verse 24 Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's well-being.

Paul writes again:

*Philippians 2 verse 3 Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind **let each esteem others better than himself.***

Verse 4 Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

Verse 5 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,

This is not accomplished by going to weekly Church meetings; but by sharing our lives day by day. This is only possible when we truly grow in loving each other in Christ as though we are truly brothers and sisters.

1 John 3 verse 16 By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

Verse 17 But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?

Verse 18 My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.

Loving brothers and sisters would share with their siblings who are in need. Mothers and fathers would take action in guiding their children who would make foolish decisions. Good parents would not leave their children to their own devices so as to be popular and accepted by their children. Good parents would teach their children that to love the world is to be an enemy of God. James writes in:

James 5 verse 19 Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back,

Verse 20 let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.

Most of us have never allowed this type of faith to take hold of our lives, where we allow mere brothers and sisters in the Lord to correct us when we fall back into loving the world and its passions. Now there are those of us, that don’t want their space, to be invaded, and who would quote Jesus' words in:

Luke 6 verse 42 Or how can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me remove the speck that is in your eye,' when you yourself do not see the plank that is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck that is in your brother's eye.

However, if you read carefully you will see that Jesus did not say that you should not help your brother to take the speck out of his eye. He said that before you do, you should first take the plank out your own eye so that **you would see clearly to remove the speck out of your brother's eye.** The issue was not that we should not take the speck out of someone's eye, but that we should see clearly before we do. A plank prevents us to see objectively. A mother or a father is someone who has overcome in certain areas of their lives and so are qualified to help others to overcome in those areas. It might be that, at another time, the other brother or sister might be the mother or father in a different aspect of life. Jesus is saying though, that we have no place in trying to help others overcome sin in areas of their lives where we have not yet overcome similar problems, or able to see objectively.

This type of Body or family life is not for people who just practice a religious or puffed up by knowledge version Christianity. John writes:

*1 John 4 verse 16 And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, **and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.***

Verse 17 Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world.

*Verse 18 There is no fear in love; **but perfect love casts out fear,** because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.*

Verse 19 We love Him because He first loved us.

Verse 20 If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?

*Verse 21 And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God **must love his brother also.***

What does John mean by hating ones brother? Hate simply means that we can't stand our brother. If we are not able to have a heart for our brothers and sisters in the Lord then we don't abide in the love of God. No amount of philosophising about the Love of God or priding ourselves on how we obey the Law of God, can substitute for loving each other as Christ loves us. Jesus did not talk about being mere distant relatives, such as uncles, nephews, great grandparents, but about being actual brothers, sisters, mothers and fathers. In this is the test of whether or not we belong to the household of God:

Luke 8 verse 20 And it was told Him by some, who said, "Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, desiring to see You."

*Verse 21 But He answered and said to them, "My mother and My brothers are these who hear the word of God **and do it.**"*

3.4: The Bread of Life

Jesus said some strange things in the three years He ministered to the people before His crucifixion. Yet often we found it is these strange and sometimes “illogical” things that can have the deepest impact on our lives. For instance, look at this passage, found in:

John 6 verse 50 This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die.

Verse 51 I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world."

Verse 52 The Jews therefore quarreled among themselves, saying, "How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?"

Verse 53 Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you.

Verse 54 Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.

Verse 55 For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed.

Verse 56 He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.

Verse 57 As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me.

Verse 58 This is the bread which came down from heaven—not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever."

Of all Jesus' statements, this may be one of the most peculiar to understand. These words have even caused one of the mainstream church denominations, which we won't name now, to hold onto very strange and superstitious beliefs. But what is Jesus actually saying here? His audience definitely did not understand His words and were quite offended by it. Then Jesus responded to their confusion with the following words further on in the passage:

John 6 verse 63 It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.

So what spiritual illustration was Jesus giving when He said we have to eat His flesh and drink His blood to have life? Near the time of Christ's death, Jesus ate the Passover meal with His disciples. Look what happened while Jesus had the Passover feast with His disciples, in:

Matthew 26 verse 26 And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is My body."

Verse 27 Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you.

Verse 28 For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.

So why would eating the bread and drinking the cup, help us to spiritually eat His body and drink His blood? How would this help us to partake of Christ's life? Well, Paul gives us some more insight into this, in:

1 Corinthians 10 verse 16 The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?

*Verse 17 For we, though many, **are one bread and one body**; for **we all partake of that one bread**.*

Paul explains that as the cup identifies with our union with Christ's death, so the bread identifies us with the union of Christ's Body, the church. In other words, the breaking of bread would declare that **our life is in that one body of believers**. So, through Christ, salvation is brought about in two ways, namely the shedding of His blood and secondly the breaking of His body. The Body and the Blood of Christ is the basis of communion in celebrating the Lord's Supper. It is on this basis that the Christians came together to break bread, as seen in:

Acts 20 verse 7 Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together **to break bread**, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight.

It is especially noticeable when the Body of Christ was first filled with the Holy Spirit, that they continued with the fellowship in the breaking of bread as seen in:

Acts 2 verse 42 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and **fellowship, in the breaking of bread**, and in prayers.

In reading this passage there is actually something very important that one needs to give attention to. The passage does not read: "... fellowship, AND the breaking of bread..."; but actually reads "... fellowship, IN the breaking of bread...". The New King James is one of the few translations that actually capture this idea. In the Westcott-Hort Greek text and McReynolds Tyndale Greek text one finds that the Greek word for "and" which is "kai" is absent between fellowship and the breaking of bread. The word "kai" is used between the apostle's doctrine and fellowship and between bread and prayers but not between fellowship and the breaking of bread. Grammatically, in biblical Greek, this absence of the word "kai" would render the meaning to be one function as opposed to two different functions. Therefore the text according to these Greek manuscripts should read as it is written in the New King James, that is, that they had fellowship **IN** the breaking of bread.

As said before the Greek word for fellowship: "koinonia" has to do with "sharing lives" which is derived from the Greek word "koinos" which is translated "having all things in common". It is from this understanding that the phrase "**Holy Communion**" is derived.

The breaking of bread was, however, practiced as a full meal that was shared with each other, as seen in:

Acts 2 verse 46 So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, **they ate their food** with gladness and simplicity of heart,

In Biblical times bread was generally the main source of nutrition as it contained most of the oils and minerals that the body needed and was therefore the main course of the meal. Bread was sometimes supplemented with herbs to soak the bread in, or bread was eaten with fish, and occasionally with other meats and vegetables. For this reason when people in Bible times would invite each other to have a meal with them they would simply say: "Come break bread". As one can expect; the quality of bread in Bible times cannot be compared to today's bread that lacks these valuable nutrients and minerals. This gives a whole new meaning to Jesus saying that He is the "Bread of Life".

Yet if the breaking of bread was a full meal, where does the practice of a ceremonial "nip and sip" come from as it is practised in the traditional church? To understand how it came about we need to look at some historical events that led to this. At the beginning of the second century many Christians that were converted were previous worshipers of the "sun-god". Heathen sun worshipers had the practice of praying before dawn to the "sun-god" to reappear. The new converts found it difficult to break the habit of praying before dawn for the sun to appear. Their whole life revolved around whether the sun would reappear or not, so this superstition kept them bound to this practice. So the elders of the church thought they would help these new converts by directing their focus away from the sun and towards Christ. The elders kept to the tradition of Morning Prayer before dawn about three times a week. This was easily justified from Scripture as Christ also used to pray in the early mornings. From this point on daily exhortation and spontaneous prayer gatherings started to give way to religious church meetings.

From that point on we started to see two distinct meetings namely the evening breaking of bread and the Morning Prayer meetings. This can be verified by some early historical documents for instance, from the younger Pliny, a Roman Governor of Bithynia in Asia Minor, around 111 to 113 AD, who, while observing the Christian practices, wrote that the Christians "...met regularly before dawn on a fixed day to chant verses alternately amongst themselves in honor of Christ, as if to a god." He continued to write: "After this ceremony it was their custom to disperse **and reassemble later** to **take food of an ordinary**, harmless kind"

Justin Martyr, who lived sometime in the middle of the second century spoke of the Lord's Supper as a meal of consisting of "*food dry and liquid*". He spoke of a communal meal, an evening meal, that was preceded by a service of lessons, admonition, and prayer. Florens Tertullianus, in the beginning of the third century, stressed the "charitable" function of this Supper.

Near the end of the second century some groups introduced the use of bread and wine or just plain water into the morning-prayer meetings to "partake" of, as they would call it, "the sacraments". The partaking of the bread and water or wine was not nearly as substantial as the evening agape feasts, due to the time constraints in the mornings. As a result, taking the sacraments easily became a more ritualistic, practice as opposed to a full meal. In some of his writings, Clement of Alexandria remarked on the inappropriateness of having water instead of wine in these morning gatherings.

In the middle of the third century, Cyprian distinguished between the two meetings that had developed predominantly on Sundays. First of all, the Sunday morning prayer meeting with the "sacraments" and secondly, the Sunday evening agape meal. A sad fact was that Cyprian went so far as to say that the morning meeting had greater value, because at this point more people attended the morning meeting than the evening communal meetings. It is evident that at the time of Cyprian the Christians were starting to drift away from the communal meal and the importance of having genuine fellowship. By the third century daily encouragement was almost completely replaced by religious "meetings".

So it was of no surprise that when Constantine, in about 325 AD, institutionalised the church, he adopted many practices from the heathen/Egyptian worship of the "sun-god", to try to make Christianity acceptable as a state religion to the masses and to his generals who still held to the pagan worship of the sun. One of the things he did as a compromise was naming the first day of the week Sunday in honour of the "sun-god". The events that led to placing the importance of certain days above others will be further explored in Part 5 of this series.

Due to the effort the institutional church made to reconcile the worship of the sun with the Christian faith, the sacrament of the bread and the wine, shortly after Constantine, took on the shape of the heathen practice of the Egyptians who believed they ate their god "Osiris" by eating a wafer administered by a priest. Osiris was the mythical god of "regeneration and rebirth". Osiris was also considered the god of the underworld that held the power of people's souls after they died, because he was seen as holding the power of death and rebirth in nature. The Egyptians interpreted the sun going down as if it was dying and coming up again at dawn as if it was being reborn. So it was in Osiris's hands as to whether the "sun- god" "Rah" would be reborn or not.

The sun-worshippers also believed that to insure their own eternal life after death they had to consume "Osiris" in the form of a round little wafer administered by the priest. For this reason we will still find the ritualistic sacramental little wafer or cracker followed by a small glass of grape juice administered by the priestly figure, called the clergy, up in the front of many institutional churches today.

3.5: Discerning the Body

In dealing with the issue of the communion as a full meal, we need to have a look at an important passage that many try to interpret in such a way as to justify an unbiblical snack ritual without fellowship. It is found in Paul's reprimand of the Corinthian church in:

1 Corinthians 11 verse 20 Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper.
Verse 21 For in eating, each one **takes his own supper ahead of others**; and one is hungry and another is drunk.
Verse 22 What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise you.

From this passage what was the initial reason why the Corinthian church was to come together, which they failed to do? They were to eat the Lord's Supper when they come together in one place. Why is it that Paul said that they were not eating the Lord's Supper? Well, each person was eating their own supper before the others arrived. In other words they just brought their own supper for themselves instead of the communal Supper of the Lord's that was meant to be shared. Remember the word "communal" comes from having all things in common.

So was Paul then suggesting by his reprimand that we should not eat an actual supper when eating the Lord's Supper? No, not at all; he was just saying that the food that was brought was meant to be shared, not like some who came and ate their own supper. The Lord's Supper is about the communion of the body. Communion with the body means sharing food with the body. That is why Paul speaks of the love feast in:

Jude 1 verse 12 These are spots in your love feasts, while they feast with you without fear, serving only themselves. They are clouds without water, carried about by the winds; late autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, pulled up by the roots;

The Greek word for "feast" in this passage is "deipnon". The Greek word "deipnon" is the same word for "supper" in reference to the Lord's Supper, depicting the chief meal of the day, taken towards evening or the end of the day. The word love in this passage is the Greek word "agape" and is also translated as "charity". The reason why they called it the "charity feast", was because saints shared their food with each other, even with those who had nothing to give. Can you imagine the Lord's Supper celebrated as a feast where the "agape" love is being shared among saints that function as a family?

The problem with the Corinthian church was that the more fortunate in the church brought their own supper and ate it before the less fortunate arrived. The less fortunate, who could have been day labourers, would have only arrived later as was the norm with day labourers at that time. The breaking of bread ought to have been a time to show charity to the less fortunate in the fellowship, demonstrating unity and love; instead the Corinthian church dishonoured the body of Christ through their individualistic attitude. The church was divided into social classes and therefore some were drunk and others were left hungry. That is why Paul wrote just earlier on in:

1 Corinthians 11 verse 17 Now in giving these instructions I do not praise you, since you come together not for the better but for the worse.
Verse 18 For first of all, when you come together as a church, **I hear that there are divisions among you**, and in part I believe it.
Verse 19 For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you.
Verse 20 Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper.

However if the Lord's Supper was to be a full meal, what would Paul have meant by writing in?

1 Corinthians 11 verse 34a But if anyone is hungry, **let him eat at home**, lest you come together for judgment...

Paul only suggested that those who got hungry and were not able to wait for the rest of the church to arrive for the communal supper, should first eat something at home. It was a purely practical suggestion from Paul how to keep unity in the breaking of bread and not a command from him that the Lord's Supper should be reduced to a snack. Think about it; the very notion that some were **left hungry** indicated that they ate the Lord's Supper as a substantial meal.

We read further in:

1 Corinthians 11 verse 23 For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread;

Verse 24 and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me."

Verse 25 In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."

When did Jesus take the cup and share with His disciples according to Paul? Jesus broke the bread while they were eating their Passover feast. After they had their SUPPER Jesus took the cup. Pure logic should dictate to us that we are to celebrate the Lord's Supper as a SUPPER and not as the Lord's snack. A supper is a full meal and **during the meal a loaf was broken among them** and **eaten with the rest of the meal**.

Paul's instruction referring to the breaking of bread as the Lord's Table is also an indication of a full meal as we read in:

*1 Corinthians 10 verse 21 You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the **Lord's table** and of the table of demons.*

Right through Scripture the reference to preparing a table always was in conjunction with a full meal or even a feast. Paul continues his instruction to the Corinthian church in:

*1 Corinthians 11 verse 27 Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an **unworthy manner** will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.*

Verse 28 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

*Verse 29 For he who eats and drinks in an **unworthy manner** eats and drinks judgment to himself, **not discerning the Lord's body**.*

In discerning the Lord's body, was Paul trying to get us to consider our sins, when we break bread? In actual fact that was not what Paul was talking about. Paul was talking of the **manner** in which they ate the Lord's Supper. The unworthy "manner" refers to the way they ate the Lord's Supper and not their spiritual standing with the Lord. The manner had to do with them being socially divisive by not discerning or considering the poor who were going hungry. When Paul spoke of "discerning the Lord's body" he was speaking of the church who is Christ's body. "Discerning the Lord's body" did not do with how well we perform before God, but whether we are in proper fellowship with the church, the body of Christ. Let us look at an example of Peter himself NOT discerning the body of Christ, by dividing the body according to race and culture, in:

Galatians 2 verse 11 Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed;

Verse 12 for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision.

Verse 13 And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy.

What was so offensive about Peter and the other Jews, who suddenly did not eat with the Gentiles when some Jews from James came to visit? Sharing a meal was the expression of fellowship, communion and unity. Peter with his

friends, not wanting to eat with the Gentiles, was acting in direct contrast to communion and unity. This is what Paul was getting at when he wrote this passage that we have quoted often:

Ephesians 2 verse 14 For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation,

Verse 15 having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace,

Verse 16 and that He might reconcile them **both to God in one body through the cross**, thereby putting to death the enmity.

In our westernised culture the main purpose of food is generally only for nourishment. With our rushed lives it is a normal practice to eat on the move; grabbing fast-food and eating take-aways. Even supper at home has become TV dinners with no fellowship or connecting with each other. Yet in Bible times eating together meant that they were in COMMUNION with each other. That is why when a brother and sister were unrepentant over certain practices in their lives, the church was taught not to even eat with such a person, as we read in:

1 Corinthians 5 verse 11 But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—**not even to eat with such a person.**

Some would ask whether the Lord's Supper was not supposed to be just a New Testament replacement of the Passover meal that was held yearly on the 14th of Nisan according to the Jewish calendar. The breaking of bread as a covenant meal has its basis in the Passover *Seder*, because the Passover lamb points to Christ, the Lamb of God, the unleavened bread points to us the unleavened body of Christ. However the Lord's Supper is not the Passover meal in itself and therefore practiced differently. We will deal with the Passover Lamb practice more thoroughly in part 6 "a Church without Festivals".

Let me conclude this third part of the series by saying that it is in the proper sharing of our lives in the breaking of bread as the body of Christ, that Jesus our Saviour is really made known to us:

Luke 24 verse 33 So they rose up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together,

Verse 34 saying, "The Lord is risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!"

Verse 35 And they told about the things that had happened on the road, **and how He was known to them in the breaking of bread.**

However not all of Christ's disciples are able to forsake their lives and eat Christ's flesh and drink His blood as required as we read in:

John 6 verse 66 From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more.

Part 4: A Church without Buildings

4.1: From Free-range to Commercial

There is still much to consider when one contemplates entering the realm of “body-life” in God’s kingdom. To do this we need to look at the different approach the “ekklesia” church has to practicing church compare to the institutional church. Someone once compared the difference between the institutional church and the biblical church to that of commercialised sheep farming and free-range sheep farming.

Commercialised sheep are generally cramped into a number of rows of cages in large expensive hangers. There is not a lot of space for the sheep to move and many times the sheep are forced to sleep, eat and relieve themselves in the same cramped-up space. The sheep are all fed the same formulated diet. The sheep are bred this way for profit and not for quality. The problem is that because of the way they are bred, there has to be strict control, because if a virus enters this environment, many sheep will catch it quickly and die easily because their immune systems are not able to develop and become resistant to viruses in this kind of environment.

Free-range sheep are free to grace the fields. They have time to be nourished by their mother and feed from the different pastures. With this kind of diet and exercise, the quality of their meat is much better than those of the commercialized sheep. For this reason, their immune systems are also much better and can resist viruses and disease much better.

Christ intended that the saints should be free-range sheep and not commercialized sheep. The institutionalized church has big buildings to breed in, where strict control is kept over the sheep, and where they have a very limited diet specially formulated for that denomination. The moment error creeps in, the members of the church who do not know how to discern the truth from error for the themselves, being totally dependent of whatever is told them behind the pulpit, are then contaminated by error when it is preached behind the pulpit and so many “sheep” are lost.

A second comparison is the difference between schools and families. Generally a school’s goal is to impart academic knowledge to the learners so that they might have the skills to build careers. The success of a school is generally measured by the numbers enrolled in the school and obviously the numbers of students who achieve academic excellence. The success of the school is sometimes also measured by the social class of its students, even though schools would not admit to this openly. The success and prestige of the school is portrayed by their elaborate and expensive buildings.

Now the biblical church is different to the institutional church that functions as a school, in that the biblical church functions as a family. Families are small organic units that have as their goal the development of character and the maturity of their members. Families do impart knowledge but do not have that as their core goal. The success of a family is not seen in numbers or the gain of intellectual knowledge, but on how the children behave, their character development and whether they will grow up to be responsible adults able to start their own healthy intact families.

A family is something you are part of, in contrast to a school that you attend. The same is true with church. Church is something you are part of and not something you go to. The moment you are born-again you are part of that family of saints called the church. You don’t have to attend a church to be part of it; you are part of it in the same way a child is born into a family. It is up to us how we function in this family called the church and house of God.

Some would say: Why make an issue about being part of Body life if the institutional church is getting people “saved”? Orphanages look after children by giving them a place to sleep, food, education, and trying to create a safe environment. This is all good, but should we then conclude that there is therefore no reason to get a family to adopt these children? Of course not, because a family gives children much more than an orphanage could ever give them. The only reason there are orphanages is because the families are not functioning the way they should.

So what went wrong that the church became institutionalised and commercialised? It has to do with something that

happened about 1700 years ago. Around 313 AD an emperor of Rome, named Constantine, declared tolerance towards the Christian faith that was under severe persecution from his predecessors. Constantine apparently became the first Christian emperor of Rome. Yet he got baptized and made a confession of his faith only on his death bed, in around 337 AD. By then he had already made many changes to the way Christians practice their faith.

Not knowing anything about the church that Christ builds, Constantine institutionalised Christianity to make it an official **state RELIGION**. This was necessary as he could not hold on to a faith that preaches another kingdom other than his empire.

One of the things he did, to make Christianity an accepted religion, was to build the first Christian places of worship. The design was based on a well-known Roman structure called a **basilica**. These basilicas became the headquarters of so-called bishops. Even though the distinction between the clergy and laity had been made earlier on, by Cyprian of Carthage, the “clergy system” now became official with the title “bishop” being given to those who were at the head of the basilicas. So, instead of denoting a service or function in the church, “bishop” became a title to mean a religious official. With this the clergy created their own kind of spectator oriented religious gathering.

Many of these basilicas were named after the first century apostles, for instance, St. Peter’s and St. Paul’s, and other respected saints. This practice was a custom borrowed from the pagans who named their temples after their pagan gods. By so doing, the basilicas were seen as houses of worship. It was at this point that the “ekklesia” body in a city became divided according to the basilicas they attended.

One could argue that when Constantine institutionalised Christianity and presented it with places of worship - a massive conversion to the so-called Christian religion took place. In today’s terms it could have even been seen as a revival. Yet, sadly, the Christian religion that the people converted to in the time of Constantine was for the most part not the Christian kingdom of the Bible. A lot of pagan rituals, especially that of sun worship, were incorporated in the Christian faith as we saw earlier on in *A Church Without Religion*.

What is remarkable to note is that before Constantine came into the picture, “ekklesia” meetings were predominantly held in homes for the first 300 years after Christ. Christianity was unique, among the religions of that time, in that it did not have a temple, or a holy place for worship. One needs to understand that for a “religion” not to have a place of worship was unheard of in that time and culture. Every religion of that time had to have some place of worship as a means to identify them from the other religions as well as having a focus point for converts.

Some would point out that there are one or two archaeological findings of church buildings of sorts that date between 100 and 300 years after Christ. Yet, in actual fact, all that the findings could present were houses with some decorative artefacts, where the inner walls had been broken out to host more people in a gathering. There was nothing in the findings that could substantiate an actual “place of worship”.

Another argument that is given as a reason for Christians having had no places of worship was that Christians had to meet underground because of persecution. The problem with this argument is that Christians were not persecuted everywhere in those 300 years. Also this does not seem to be the reasons that the church fathers gave. Let us read what some Church Fathers of that time had to say about religious buildings.

In the manuscript of *Martyrdom of the Holy Martyrs* around 160 AD we read: “*Rustieus, the perfect, said, ‘Where do you assemble?’ Justine Martyr replied, ‘Where each one chooses and is able. Do you imagine that we all meet in the very same place?’*”

Clement of Alexandria around 195 AD writes: “***The Word prohibiting all sacrifices and the building of temples, indicates that the Almighty is not contained in anything.***”

Mark Felix in *Octavius* around 2nd Century wrote:

"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?"

Mark Minucius Felix about 200 AD: " *We assemble together with the same quietness with which we live as individuals.*" A pagan antagonist commented "*They [the Christians] despise the temples as dead houses...* *They laugh at sacred things.*"

Tertullian (212 AD): "*for where there are three persons –even if they are laity – There is a church.*"

Origen (248 AD): "*We refuse to build lifeless temples* to the Giver of all life...[he continues further on]. *Of all the temples spoken of in the sense, the best and most excellent was the pure and holy body of our Savior Jesus Christ... he said to them, 'destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up again. This He said of the temple of the body...[he continues further on] When they reproach us for not deeming it necessary to worship the divine Being by raising lifeless temples, we set before them our temples.*" [This was in reference to their bodies].

You must understand that if the church then would have had temples like all the other religions they would not have been under content persecution by the Roman Empire. This very stand of not having a temple put their lives in danger. Why would the early Christians do this to themselves? What was the big deal of deliberately not building places of worship? The Church Fathers all agreed that their faith experience was far removed from religious buildings. They understood something about worshiping God that the institutional church seems to have forgotten.

4.2: The place of worship

So what did Clement mean by saying: “the Word prohibiting the building of temples and making sacrifices?” Let us start with a very well-known account in the Gospel of John, where Christ was having a profound conversation with a Samaritan woman by the well. Let us read from:

John 4 verse 19 The woman said to Him, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet.

Verse 20 Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship."

Verse 21 Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father.

Verse 22 You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews.

Verse 23 But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him.

Verse 24 God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

How many places of worship were mentioned in this conversation between Christ and the Samaritan women? First of all, we read that the Samaritans worshiped God on the Mountain. Secondly, the Jews worshiped God in Jerusalem. Thirdly, Christ introduced a new way of worship and that is worshiping God in Spirit and in truth with no reference to a particular place. This is in contrast to the Jews' and the Samaritans' way of worship.

What is interesting to note, is that when the Samaritan woman's sins were revealed by Christ, she changed the subject away from her sin to the issue of **where** to worship God. Isn't it just typical of how many of us will change the topic to worship God when we are confronted with our sin? For instance have you ever heard people tell you: “Well you can worship God your way, and I will worship God my way”? **Is it not ironic how our ways or places of worship are parallel to the way we justify our lifestyles?**

Consider this though: can we truly say it is worship, when it is about our personal taste in how we worship? Should worship not be about God as appose to about our preferences? If worship then is about God and not about us, should our worship not also be about how God wants to be worshiped more than how it makes us feel?

I can sense that some people might get uneasy with this statement and say: who am I to judge what is God's way of true worship? This is a good point as I have no authority to say what the right way of worshiping God is. Yet Christ has the authority to set the standard of worship, would you not agree?

So, let us get back to Christ's conversation with the Samaritan women. What is the difference between the new way of worship that Christ is introducing and the other two ways of worship? First of all, Christ's way of worship, as seen in the text, has nothing to do with being at a particular place of worship. It is a new dimension of worship. It is worship in the Spirit on the foundation of truth. Yet to understand the actual weight of this difference we need to look at the context of the conversation Jesus had with the Samaritan women. The context is found in the background to the cultures of the Samaritans and the Jews.

As you might know the Samaritans are an offshoot of Abraham's descendants. Mount Girizim according to the Samaritan traditions is where Abraham was willing to sacrifice his son Isaac in obedience to God. It is also the place where Abraham encountered Melchisedek after his victory in freeing Lot. So, for the Samaritans, this mountain is where they should worship God.

Yet, look at Jesus' response to the Samaritan woman in:

John 4 verse 22 You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews.

According to Jesus, before Him, where was the right place to worship God? It was **not** on the mountain where the

Samaritans worshiped, but it was where the Jews were worshiping in Jerusalem. Yet what was Jesus talking about here? Why was He saying that the Samaritans don't know what they were worshiping but the Jews do? What happened to this whole idea that Samaritans can worship God their way and Jews can worship God in their way?

The place of worship was very important to God. This place of worship was not some man-made Jewish tradition but a serious command from God. Look at God's commandments to Israel as they were going to enter the promise land, in:

Deuteronomy 12 verse 1 "These are the statutes and judgments which you shall be careful to observe in the land which the LORD God of your fathers is giving you to possess, all the days that you live on the earth.

*Verse 2 You shall utterly **destroy all the places** where the nations which you shall dispossess served their gods, on the high mountains and on the hills and under every green tree.*

Verse 3 And you shall destroy their altars, break their sacred pillars, and burn their wooden images with fire; you shall cut down the carved images of their gods and destroy their names from that place.

*Verse 4 **You shall not worship the LORD your God with such things.***

Let me ask a question from this passage: besides worshiping other gods, what else were the Jews not to duplicate from the heathen nations? **They were not to worship in the manner as well as in all the different places that the other nations worship.** This is interesting because the Samaritans worshiped God on a mountain similar to the heathen nations. Let us now read further from:

*Deuteronomy 12 verse 5 "**But you shall seek the place where the LORD your God chooses,** out of all your tribes, to put His name for His dwelling place; and there you shall go.*

Verse 6 There you shall take your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the heave offerings of your hand, your vowed offerings, your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks.

Verse 7 And there you shall eat before the LORD your God, and you shall rejoice in all to which you have put your hand, you and your households, in which the LORD your God has blessed you.

Allow me to interject another question from this passage: where would Israel have to worship God? At the place of God's choosing, where He would place His name and where He makes His dwelling place. This would be in Jerusalem, as we read in:

1 Kings 11 verse 36 And to his son I will give one tribe, that My servant David may always have a lamp before Me in Jerusalem, the city which I have chosen for Myself, to put My name there.

So let us continue to read from:

*Deuteronomy 12 verse 8 "**You shall not at all do as we are doing here today—every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes—***

Verse 9 for as yet you have not come to the rest and the inheritance which the LORD your God is giving you.

Verse 10 But when you cross over the Jordan and dwell in the land which the LORD your God is giving you to inherit, and He gives you rest from all your enemies round about, so that you dwell in safety,

*Verse 11 then **there will be the place where the LORD your God chooses to make His name abide.** There you shall bring all that I command you: your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the heave offerings of your hand, and all your choice offerings which you vow to the LORD.*

Verse 12 And you shall rejoice before the LORD your God, you and your sons and your daughters, your male and female servants, and the Levite who is within your gates, since he has no portion nor inheritance with you.

*Verse 13 **Take heed to yourself that you do not offer your burnt offerings in every place that you see;***

Verse 14 but in the place which the LORD chooses, in one of your tribes, there you shall offer your burnt offerings, and there you shall do all that I command you.

One more question concerning this passage. What was Israel not to do with their worship? They were not to worship God **according to what seems good in their own eyes.** This is called idolatry. Believe it or not, it is still idolatry to

worship God in a way that seems good in our own eyes. The temple that was built in Jerusalem was to demonstrate God's desire to dwell among His people. Yet the temple was also designed to demonstrate man being separated from God through their sins. It was a picture of our predicament of sin and God's salvation plan, and that we can only enter His presence on His terms.

Yet the temple in Jerusalem was only a shadow of things to come. The author of Hebrews writes in:

Hebrews 8 verse 5 who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, "SEE THAT YOU MAKE ALL THINGS ACCORDING TO THE PATTERN SHOWN YOU ON THE MOUNTAIN."

The church that Christ builds is NOT some copy of the Old Testament worship, but was the very substance of which the Old Testament worship was only a shadow. Let us read further on, this time from:

Hebrews 10 verse 1 For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect.

It is on this basis that the early church fathers refuse to build temples and places of worship. The early church fathers understood that worshiping God is not about worshiping Him in a way that seems good in our own eyes. In the next section we will explore what is meant by worshiping God in Spirit and in truth.

4.3: A Spiritual House

One of the main reasons that the institutional church teaches tithing is for the upkeep of religious buildings. Yet, as stated before, through Christ we have a different way to approaching God. We no longer need to worship Him in a temple built with cold stones as the Israelites did in the Old Testament. We read this in:

*Hebrews 10 verse 19 Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, Verse 20 by a **new and living way** which He consecrated for us, through the veil, **that is, His flesh**, Verse:21 and having a High Priest over the house of God, Verse 22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Verse 23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.*

So in this new covenant, how do we enter God's presence?

1. Through the sacrifices of animals.
2. Through praise and worship.
3. By going to a holy place of worship
4. Through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ in His flesh.

We enter God's presence through Jesus Christ in His flesh. Look what Stephen said to the Pharisees in:

Acts 7 verse 47 But Solomon built Him a house.

Verse 48 "However, the Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands, as the prophet says:

Verse 49 'HEAVEN IS MY THRONE, AND EARTH IS MY FOOTSTOOL. WHAT HOUSE WILL YOU BUILD FOR ME? SAYS THE LORD, OR WHAT IS THE PLACE OF MY REST?

Verse 50 HAS MY HAND NOT MADE ALL THESE THINGS?'

Paul said the same thing in:

Acts 17 verse 24 God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands.

Verse 25 Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things.

What then has changed concerning the place of worship or House of God, from the Old Testament to that of the New Testament, according to these passages? In the New Covenant God is **not** to be worshiped in so-called houses of God that are made by human hands. We can only worship God in a place that is made by divine hands so that we can worship God in Spirit and in truth.

Yet; does this mean that God has changed from the Old to the New Covenant? NO, not at all! You see, the Old Testament was only meant to be a shadow until the time came when man was to be reconciled to God through Christ. God wanted to be worshiped in only one way, of which the Old Testament would only be a shadow of that way. The New Testament way of worship, like the Old Testament of worship, still gives us only one way to worship God. In the Old Testament, God required that all who were under the law, were to worship Him only in Jerusalem, the starting point of His Kingdom on Earth. In the New Testament, God requires all who are purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ to worship Him in Spirit and truth, in a divinely made temple of God. What is the divinely made temple or house of God then?

Paul writes in.

*1 Timothy 3 verse 15 but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in **the house of God, which is the church of the living God**, the pillar and ground of the truth.*

Paul is referring to the house of God as the church. It is interesting to note that the origins of the English word for

church comes from the Old English language *cirice*, derived from West Germanic *kirika*, which in turn comes from the Greek *kuriakē*. The word “*kuriakē*”, is the possessive form of *kurios* which means: "lord", so the word “*kuriakē*” can literally be translated "of the Lord". Historians believe that this was most likely a shortening of *kuriakē oikia* which means “house of the Lord”.

Paul writes in:

Ephesians 2 verse 19 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,

Verse 20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone,

Verse 21 in whom the whole building, **being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.**

Verse 22 in whom you also are **being built together for a dwelling place of God** in the Spirit.

From this passage can we say that the divine house or dwelling of God is a physical place? No, the house or dwelling of God is the church which is the saints consecrated through the body of Christ. Does this than mean that the house of God could be individual Christians? No! Even though God does dwell in us personally, Paul was talking here about the saints of God who are built together to form a dwelling place of God.

Peter says it like this in:

1 Peter 2 verse 5 **you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house**, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

What term does Peter use to describe the saints, when it comes to the house of God? We are seen as living stones of this divinely built house of God.

In order to build the temple in the Old Testament the stones were ground together until they fitted each other nicely. This is what Peter was talking about here. We saints of God are ground together so that we fit together to make up this glorious living temple for God. This grounding together, so that we fit together, is a Daily sharing of lives and not just meetings.

The author of Hebrews writes it like this in:

Hebrews 3 verse 6 but Christ as a Son over His own house, **whose house we are** if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end.

So according to Scripture, the house of God which is being built by divine hands is actually the fellowship of the saints day to day. Each one of us is a living stone that makes up this divine house of God. The moment you got born-again by the Spirit of God you have become a living stone that is being built into the house of God.

The God of all creation, who through the ages demonstrated His longing to dwell among His people, has now made a way to deal with sin in order for Him to be among His people. He dwells among us more closely than was ever imagined. He dwells in the fellowship of the church. This church is not a building made by human hands where people need to go to, but it is built with living stones like you and me. Do you see how magnificent this is: that our holy and perfect God, Creator of all things dwells within us, the fellowship of the saints?

So who is the divine builder of this spiritual house of God which is the church of God?

Jesus said in:

Matthews 16 verse 18 ***And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.***

Here is something interesting to take note of. As most people know, Jesus grew up as a carpenter in the same trade as his earthly caregiver or father figure - Joseph. We don't think this was a coincidence. In actual fact the Greek word

for carpenter, “texton”, not only implies working with wood but also with stones and even possibly metal, in constructing buildings. The word “texton” actually means ‘builder’. In His earthly vessel Christ was a builder by trade, now through the Spirit He is building the most glorious, divine, spiritual, house of God – a house beyond imagination!

In the Old Testament there were strict instructions as to how the temple was to be built. The Jews were not allowed to stray from these instructions, as we can see in:

Hebrews 8 verse 5 who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, "SEE THAT YOU MAKE ALL THINGS ACCORDING TO THE PATTERN SHOWN YOU ON THE MOUNTAIN."

The Old Testament worship, commandments, and the tabernacle, as said before, was only a shadow of what was to come. Yet the reality of this shadow, is what Christ is building now. There is only one true House of God and it is not made by human hands. When people build their own places of worship by copying elements of Old Testament worship and blending this with their own ideas, or worse still, with pagan practices, it is idolatry, no matter how you look at it.

When man tries to build a house for God, he builds in vain. Only Christ has the legal right to build a house for God. As the Psalmist writes in:

Psalms 127 verse 1 Unless the LORD builds the house, They labor in vain who build it; Unless the LORD guards the city, The watchman stays awake in vain.

4.4: True Worship

So how ought we to worship in this spiritual house of God, built with living stones purchased by Christ with His blood? For that matter, what is the purpose of gifted worship leaders? You might not like the answer to this question, but please hear me out, because you will experience an aspect of worship that is beyond imagination. The reality is, there is no such thing as a worship leader in the Bible. In the Old Testament the Levites who were dedicated singers in the temple, were called, well, believe it or not, “singers” as we read in:

1 Chronicles 15 verse 16 Then David spoke to the leaders of the Levites to appoint their brethren to be the singers accompanied by instruments of music, stringed instruments, harps, and cymbals, by raising the voice with resounding joy.

If there are no worship leaders, what then is the purpose of singing if not to worship God? Well, as we said in Part 2 of this series of teachings, singing was for the purpose of edifying each other, as with any other act of service such as prophecy, or teachings, as we can read from:

Ephesians 5 verse 19 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord,

And

Colossians 3 verse 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you with all richness and wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, and singing to God with thankfulness in your hearts.

According to these passages, what was the purpose of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs as we sing to God with thankfulness in our hearts? It was for the purpose of teaching and admonishing one another. The New Testament never speaks of worshiping God through singing. We may praise God through singing, but that is not the actual worship of God in Spirit and truth that Christ was talking about. Looking at the Old Testament we read that Israel did praise God with songs, but it was also not considered to be the actual worship of God. For instance Amos writes what worship was not in:

Amos 5 verse 21 "I hate, I despise your feast days, **And I do not savor your sacred assemblies.**

Verse 22 Though you offer Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them, Nor will I regard your fattened peace offerings.

Verse 23 **Take away from Me the noise of your songs, For I will not hear the melody of your stringed instruments.**

Verse 24 But let justice run down like water, And righteousness like a mighty stream.

Israel would demonstrate worship with their offerings of sacrifices. They then praised God with their songs. Yet neither the demonstration of worship through offerings of sacrifice, nor through songs of praise was worship to God without a life of righteousness and justice. Jesus said in:

John 4 verse 23 **But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him.**

Verse 24 **God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."**

What is worshiping God in Spirit and in truth? Worship literally meant lying prostrated on the ground. It was a sign of laying down one's life. The Old Testament people would sacrifice animals for their sins but they would also bring offerings and sacrifices with which to worship God. The offering that was sacrificed was a symbol of laying down their lives and all that was dear to them. That is why when the Jews went to the temple to worship it was always with something to offer up as sacrifice. True worship, whether in the Old Testament or the New Testament, always has to do with sacrifice. Yet God is not interested in just sacrificing whatever and however we like. Sacrifice that

does not come from a heart of adoration means you are actually serving yourself and not God. This is evident by Samuel's rebuke in:

1 Samuel 15 verse 22 So Samuel said: "Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, As in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams.

Verse 23 For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, And stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He also has rejected you from being king."

Obedience is the heart of worship. So how is this serving with adoration and sacrifice played out in the New Testament? Look what Paul writes about giving sacrifices in the New Testament in:

Romans 12 verse 1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you **present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.**

Which of these is our act of service or worship to God in the New Testament?

1. To sing beautiful and emotional songs
2. To present our bodies as holy vessels of service to God

Let us repeat Peter's words in:

1 Peter 2 verse 5 you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, ***to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.***

What type of sacrifices do we give unto God in the New Testament? As seen from Scripture we ought to give spiritual sacrifices. Spiritual sacrifices of worship start when we present our bodies as a living sacrifice to God. It is when we live a life pleasing to God. Spiritual worship is when we let our lives be led by the Spirit of God day by day. It is where we do not follow the dictates of our flesh, but sacrifice our bodies to the dictates of the Spirit. It is where our hearts are truthfully surrendered to God's will above our own. There is no reason for a place of worship for those who worship God in Spirit and truth.

So, if one could have something like a worship leader, it won't be someone who sings and plays music eloquently on a stage, but it would be someone who **daily** demonstrates, by example, how to lay down their life for Christ. Paul writes in:

1 Corinthians 6 verse 19 Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, ***and you are not your own?***

Verse 20 For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

Now that we don't belong to ourselves but to Christ, so our worship ought not to be about how it makes us feel but how it accomplishes Christ's will. The New Testament teaches that we need to lay down our lives for God's purpose, which of course is a sacrifice. It is where we say: Not my will, but Your will be done, Lord God.

Idolatry means worshiping other gods. What according to God is the same as witchcraft and idolatry? **Rebellion and stubbornness!** When we insist that we can worship God our own way as opposed to God's way then it is the same as rebellion and stubbornness. We repeat, true worship is obedience to God. By laying down our will for Christ's will we are then truly worshiping Him.

Now, do you think that these man-made religious buildings, called places of worship or churches, are something that Christ would want? You might say; your church building is not a place of worship and only a place where the saints gather. So you might think that in this case God is neither for nor against religious buildings as long as you don't make an idol of it. That is a good point, but one need to evaluate the legitimacy of this ideology with the reality of what is happening in church today. Ask the traditional church goer what is worshiping God in Spirit and in truth. Then we need to evaluate how much money is spent on the "church building" in comparison to how much is spend

on looking after the saints that have genuine needs. We should also evaluate whether the church buildings give people a sense of unity with other Christians or a sense of divisions?

When Constantine made Christianity an official state religion in 325AD and gave it religious buildings the church was divided under the control of various elders. Since then, the church has been divided with walls of cold stone: religious buildings. Each religious building has a man or organization that will do everything to keep control of their assets and their little kingdom of followers. We read in:

Isaiah 66 verse 1 Thus says the LORD: "Heaven is My throne, And earth is My footstool. Where is the house that you will build Me? And where is the place of My rest?"

Verse 2 For all those things My hand has made, And all those things exist," Says the LORD. "But on this one will I look: On him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, And who trembles at My word.

Please don't misunderstand me. I am not saying that the saints that go to places of worship are not sincere in their worshiping of God. Anyone born of the Spirit of God and who is obeying God, to the extent that they understand God's will, is worshiping God in Spirit and in truth. What I am saying is that the worship service in itself is not the true worship that Jesus is talking about. Many saints of God are true worshipers of God, but then ignorantly go to religious buildings that divide the church that Christ is building. This creates an individualistic religion as opposed to a true household of God.

Paul writes in:

1 Timothy 3 verse 15 but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.

According to Paul, what is the pillar and ground of truth? The pillar and ground of truth is not found in a denomination or in someone's flavour of Christianity. The pillar and ground of truth is the house of God, which is the church of the living God. That is why we need to know how we ought to conduct ourselves in the house of God. The cold stone walls of religious buildings have made us participate in a religion without having to truly function as living stones daily connected in each other's lives.

4.5: Where we meet

When Constantine made Christianity an official state religion, the Christians lost their privilege of being the royal priests in God's kingdom. The church gathering was reduced to Christians sitting in pews listening to the opinion of one man standing behind the pulpit. The church became a religious gathering one attends instead of a family that minister to ONE ANOTHER. So where would a family come together and minister to one another if it is not in places of worship? Well, let us have look in Scripture:

Acts 8 verse 3 As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, **entering every house**, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison.

What did Paul have to enter to drag the Christians off to prison? He had to enter every house.

Acts 16 verse 40 So they went out of the prison and **entered the house of Lydia**; and when they had seen the brethren, they encouraged them and departed.

So where did the apostles see the brethren when they came out of prison? They saw the brethren in the house of Lydia.

Romans 16 verse 5 Likewise greet **the church that is in their house**. Greet my beloved Epaphroditus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia to Christ.

Where is the church held that Pauls asked them to greet? In the house of Priscilla and Aquila

1 Corinthians 16 verse 19 The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Priscilla greet you heartily in the Lord, **with the church that is in their house**.

Once again where is the church that Aquila and Priscilla are part of? The church is in their house.

Colossians 4 verse 15 Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea, and Nymphas and **the church that is in his house**.

Where is the church of the brethren in Laodicea, and Nymphas? The church is in his house.

Philemon 1 verse 2 to the beloved Apphia, Archippus our fellow soldier, **and to the church in your house**:

Where is the church to which this letter is addressed to? Once again in their house.

Do any of these passages refer to a religious building when referring to the church? No, they only speak of the church in people's homes. The church functioned as a family and not as a religious organization. As a family the church held their meetings in homes.

Yet there are those who try to justify the need to have a place of worship by quoting the following passages:

Acts 2 verse 46 So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart,

Acts 3 verse 1 Now Peter and John went up together to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour.

Acts 5 verse 19 But at night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, Verse 20 "Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life."

Using these passages to justify a place of worship is not very good application or interpretation of Scriptures. Let us ask some basic questions to illustrate this. For instance; which Christians are talked about in Acts 2 who were in one accord in the temple? It was the Jewish Christians. Were they having a “ekklesia” meeting? Nothing in this passage indicates an “ekklesia” meeting. What we do read though, was that they had daily fellowship in each other’s homes.

Again of what nationality were the apostles in Acts 3; when they went to the temple to pray? They were Jews by nationality. Again we see that the apostles went to pray in the temple, without any indication of an “ekklesia” meeting.

To whom did the apostles preach in Acts 5 at the temple? The apostles preached to the unconverted Jews. Even this passage does not talk of an “ekklesia” meeting.

Not one of these passages ever talks of Christians having their own places of worship. Remember as Jews, the Jewish Christians went to the temple, to be a testimony to the other Jews who would go to the temple in accordance with the Old Testament Law. The temple did not belong to the Christians but belonged to the Jews. Christians; whether Jews or Gentiles never owned their own places of worship. In other words **the Jewish Christians as Jews would go to the temple to practise the Jewish religion according to the law of God, but as Christians they went from home to home to establish Christ’s kingdom through daily exhortation and predominantly weekly “ekklesia” meetings.**

Why would the Jewish Christians then still go to the temple? This is how Paul puts it in:

1 Corinthians 9 verse 19 For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more;

Verse 20 and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law;

Verse 21 to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law;

Verse 22 to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.

As Jews, the apostles had a responsibility toward the Jewish nation to bring the gospel to them first. What better way than to do it from the central place of the Jewish religion. For the same reason Paul would preach to the gentiles at places where he would have the greatest effect, as we can see in:

Acts 17 verse 16 Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols.

Verse 17 Therefore he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with the Gentile worshipers, and in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be there.

We also read in:

Acts 19 verse 8 And he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God.

Verse 9 But when some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from them and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus.

In these examples, does it mention anything about the “ekklesia” church or are these examples of Paul preaching to unconverted Jews? An “ekklesia” meeting was a judicial meeting for Christians. Paul was preaching the kingdom of God to unconverted Jews in the synagogue and the school of Tyrannus. As seen, Paul also preached in the market places as Peter did at the temple. None of these places give any indication that the Christians ever had their own places of worship.

The fact of the matter is that we will never read in the Bible of churches, whether of Jews or Gentiles, gathering money for a building fund or talking about a church building project? Why is this? Well it was NOT because the church was persecuted and therefore had to meet underground as some would advocated. The real reason was; the church of the Bible understood that they were the temple of God and that their gatherings were to be interactive and not a worship service.

It is interesting to note is that one of the reasons the church was persecuted in the first place by the Romans was because Christians claimed a different kingdom. If Christianity only claimed a new religion it would not have been a problem for the Roman government, as they could just as well be added to all the other religions under the Roman Empire. Yet the very nature of the “ekklesia” being a kingdom meeting of the Christians under the authority of another King, named Jesus Christ, created unrest among the Roman Empire citizens.

It therefore stands to reason that for Constantine to make Christianity an accepted “**religion**” it had to change Christian practice from “ekklesia” kingdom meetings to a religious meeting. So the meetings moved from homes to places of worship. Through Constantine Christians lost their true identity of being royal priests in God’s kingdom on Earth, and suffered being divided by the cold walls of religion. Yet Christ is calling us to become the household - the family of God.

Ephesians 2 verse 19 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and **members of the household of God.**

5. A Church without Days

5.1: The Origins of Sunday

Have you ever asked yourself why the majority of Christians place so much emphasis on Sunday worship? There are those that also say that we should rather worship on a Saturday, God's "true Sabbath." We have already seen in Part 4 "A Church without Buildings" that true worshippers don't worship in a particular place, but worship God in the Spirit through a life of sacrificing the dictates of the flesh. Yet many don't understand worshipping in the Spirit because they are driven by a carnally minded religion that needs dedicated buildings and dedicated days to do their outward appearance of worship. So let us deal with where Sunday worship and then where Sabbath worship comes from, with the hope that some of you will get the revelation of Christ as all, in all, and through all.

There is Scriptural evidence that the early Christians often held their "ekklesia" meetings on the first day of the week, which we know as Sunday. We read for, instance in:

Acts 20 verse 7 Now on the **first day of the week**, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight.

Be aware, though, that this passage only described an incident and not a commandment to come together on the first day of the week. On another occasion we read Paul instructing the Corinthian church to do the following, in:

1 Corinthians 16 verse 1 Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also:

Verse 2 **On the first day of the week** let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper; that there be no collections when I come.

Keep in mind that Paul's instruction was only for a particular situation and period, as this offering was meant to relieve the Christians in Jerusalem who were suffering under a terrible famine. However this instruction does give us some insight as to when they gathered. Because Paul asked the church to lay something aside on the first day of the week, it is very likely that their meetings were on the first day of the week, which we know as Sunday.

We do however have the following instruction that was not bound to a particular situation or period:

Hebrews 10 verse 24 And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works,

Verse 25 not forsaking **the assembling of ourselves together**, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another; and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

The phrase here: "assembling together" is the Greek word: "episunagoge". This Greek word is only used in this way in one other passage, found in:

2 Thessalonians 2 verse 1 Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and **our gathering together** to Him, we ask you,

Verse 2 not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come.

The Greek word "episunagoge" comes from the Greek word "sunagoge" which we explained in part two, to mean "bring together that which is scattered". The Greek "episunagoge" goes one step further than "sunagoge" in that it means: bringing to gather **at an appointed time**. So Paul's use of the word "episunagoge", in Thessalonians, indicates that there comes an appointed time when we will be brought together to meet Jesus in the air. So the word "episunagoge" used in Hebrews, indicates an instruction that the early Christians were not to neglect their "appointed times of meeting together", especially when we see that the day of Jesus' return draws near. If there was ever a time in which that passage is relevant then it is the days we live in now. From this passage we see that there were properly appointed times for the "ekklesias" to come together.

The question is: when was that appointed time? Well, the context gives us some more insight. The author of Hebrews writes that they were not to neglect their appointed gatherings, especially when they saw the **Day of the Lord** approaching. Let us repeat:

1 Thessalonians 5 verse 2 For you yourselves know perfectly that **the day of the Lord** so comes as a thief in the night.

The Christians between 100-200 AD believed that Jesus would return on a Sunday. They concluded that the “Lord’s day” had to be Sunday as it is the day Jesus was resurrected. Furthermore, the apostle John recorded that he received his revelation from Christ Jesus on the Lord’s Day:

Revelation 1 verse 9 I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.

Verse 10 I was in the Spirit **on the Lord’s Day**, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet...

The early Christians placed such a high importance on the fact that Jesus was resurrected on the first day of the week, that they believed that Jesus would return on the first day of the week. Therefore “the day of the Lord” came to be understood, as the day when Jesus’ disciples would meet Him in the air - on the day He was resurrected. Here are some points the early church fathers made:

The Letter of Barnabas (of Alexandria) around AD 74: “We keep the **eighth day** [which was then also seen as Sunday] with joyfulness, the day also on which Jesus rose again from the dead.”

Ignatius of Antioch (Letter to the Magnesians [A.D. 110]: “[T]hose who were brought up in the ancient order of things [i.e. Jews] have come to the possession of a new hope, no longer observing the Sabbath, but living in the observance of the **Lord’s Day**, on which also our life has sprung up again by him and by his death...Let every friend of Christ keep the **Lord’s Day** as a festival, the resurrection-day, the queen and chief of all the days of the week.”

Justin Martyr (Dialogue with Trypho the Jew 18, 21 and First Apology 67. [A.D. 155]): “[W]e too would observe the fleshly circumcision, and the Sabbaths, and in short all the feasts, if we did not know for what reason they were enjoined [on] you—namely, on account of your transgressions and the hardness of your heart. . . . [H]ow is it, Trypho, that we would not observe those rites which do not harm us—I speak of fleshly circumcision and Sabbaths and feasts? . . . God enjoined you to keep the Sabbath, and imposed on you other precepts for a sign, as I have already said, on account of your unrighteousness and that of your fathersBut this **day (first day) is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because** it is the first day on which God, having wrought a change in the darkness and matter, made the world; and Jesus Christ our Savior on the same day rose from the dead.”

Tertullian (An Answer to the Jews [A.D. 203]): “[L]et him who contends that the Sabbath is still to be observed as a balm of salvation, and circumcision on the **eighth day** . . . teach us that, for the time past, righteous men kept the Sabbath or practiced circumcision, and were thus rendered ‘friends of God.’ For if circumcision purges a man, since God made Adam uncircumcised, why did he not circumcise him, even after his sinning, if circumcision purges? . . . Therefore, since God originated Adam uncircumcised and unobservant of the Sabbath, consequently his offspring also, Abel, offering him sacrifices, uncircumcised and unobservant of the Sabbath, was by him [God] commended [Gen. 4:1–7, Heb. 11:4]. . . . Noah also, uncircumcised—yes, and unobservant of the Sabbath—God freed from the deluge. For Enoch too, most righteous man, uncircumcised and unobservant of the Sabbath, he translated from this world, who did not first taste death in order that, being a candidate for eternal life, he might show us that we also may, without the burden of the law of Moses, please God.”

The Didascalia around 225 A.D.: “The apostles further appointed: **On the first day of the week** let there be service, and the reading of the holy scriptures, and the oblation, because on the first day of the week [i.e., Sunday] our Lord rose from the place of the dead, and on the first day of the week he arose upon the world, and on the first day of the week he ascended up to heaven, and on the first day of the week he will appear at last with the angels of heaven.”

The early Christian fathers' reasons why the Christians came together on the first day of the week might differ. Some reasons might NOT even be that perfectly correct according to Scripture. However, it was still clear that Christians came together on the first day of the week for their “ekklesia” gatherings long before Constantine institutionalised the first day of the week as a type of Christian Sabbath. It is therefore NOT Constantine that ordained Christians to come together on the first day of the week, BUT it was he that made the first day of the week a day of worship or a substitute Sabbath.

During the first three centuries AD, Christians held to the Jewish seven day week, whereas the Romans held to the Etruscan 8 day market week known as the “Nundinal” cycle. In the next section we will also see that the ancient Egyptians, from whom the worship of the sun originated, held to a 10 day week. Before Constantine came into the picture, the Jewish Christians did not have names for the days of their seven day week. They would simply say, “day one of the Sabbath,” meaning the first day of the week; or “day two of the Sabbath,” meaning the second day of the week, until the last day of the week which they called “the Sabbath,” which meant “the seventh day, or rest day”.

Constantine changed the official Roman eight day market week to the Jewish / Christian seven day week in 321 AD. Yet, to create harmony in his kingdom, he did not completely forsake the heathen religion and therefore adopted the naming convention of the “heptagram.” The “heptagram” is a seven-pointed star symbol that was used to name days of the week according to the positioning of the planets in the solar system. So Sunday, named after the sun-god, meant the day of the sun. Monday was named after the moon. Tuesday, was called the day of Mars; Wednesday, was the day of Mercury; Thursday, the day of Jupiter; Friday, the day of Venus and Saturday, the day of Saturn.

Naming the first day of the week - Sunday was an attempt to bridge the gap between the sun-worshippers who met to worship the sun before dawn and the Christians that met on the first day of the week. Constantine instituted Sunday as the official so-called Sabbath for the Christians, thus replacing the Jewish Sabbath that was held on a Saturday. The Sunday morning meeting became the official meeting as the whole church would meet at the Basilica, or official “place of worship”, as we have already seen in the previous chapters. By then, the Sunday evening “ekklesia” meeting was seen only as a charity meal for the less fortunate Christians. Christianity was not seen as a kingdom any more but as a religion and therefore had no need for “ekklesia” judicial meetings that were held at the members' homes.

Some people claim that Christians should forsake the Sunday gathering as it comes from the heathen sun-worship and should rather come together on Saturday to honour God’s Sabbath. This belief is based on some wrong assumptions. First of all, the sun worshippers had no particular day of worship, but rather worshiped every morning to resurrect the sun to life. They did, however, have an annual festival of light at the time when they believed that the sun reigned victorious over the darkness on the 25th of December. I will get into that in part 6: “A church without Festivals”.

Also, as we saw in the Church Fathers' documents, the church came together on Sundays long before Constantine institutionalised it; which proves that Constantine is not the one who instituted Sunday gatherings. What Constantine did do, was to name the first day of the week: “Sunday” to placate his generals that worshipped the sun. In the next section we will have a look at the origin of the Sabbath-worship.

5.2: It Started in Egypt

Because Constantine tried to claim that Sunday was a “Christians' Sabbath”, it brought a lot of confusion to the church for many centuries. Any person that reads the Scriptures honestly can clearly read that Sunday, or the first day of the week, was never meant to be the Sabbath, or even a replacement of the Sabbath. The first day of the week was only an indicator of Jesus’ resurrection and nothing more. The early Christians often had their meetings on Sunday, perhaps because some expected that Jesus would return on the Sunday. Others might have had a more practical reason for having their “ekklesia” on Sunday, and that was so that they could attend the Jewish Synagogue meetings on Saturday to witness to their countrymen concerning the Messiah. However should we as non-Jews keep the Sabbath? Paul writes the following in:

Galatians 4 verse 8 But then, indeed, when you did not know God, you served those which by nature are not gods.
Verse 9 But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, **how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage?**
Verse 10 **You observe days and months and seasons and years.**
Verse 11 I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain.

What is Paul getting at here? Simply put, Paul was literally saying that to try to follow things like observing certain days and seasons brings us back into bondage under the “beggarly elements” of the world. To understand what Paul meant by “weak and beggarly elements” we need to have a look at the circumstances under which Israel received the law and commandments from God. The term, “beggarly elements”, used by Paul was contextually in reference to the law and the way in which people follow the dictates of the world instead of the dictates of the Spirit. The law was given to Israel soon after they were delivered from the slavery of the Egyptians. The Egyptian slavery epitomizes us following the dictates of the natural principles of the world.

The Egyptian culture in the time of the Pharaoh was completely built around the influences the elements of nature had on the lives of the people of the Nile River. The influences of the elements were so closely linked to their whole cultural system that all of the natural forces were deified as gods. The seasons, the sun, the Nile River, the clouds, and the crops were all deified by the Egyptians because of the impact these had on their lives.

The annual seasons, agriculture, the Nile River, the sun and the moon all became part of the ancient Egyptian religious belief system. The ancient Egyptians also believed that they had as much influence on the gods as the gods had on them. They believed they had to maintain the gods as the gods maintained them. One almost gets the idea that they had to look after their gods so that the gods could look after them.

The way they did this was through religious ceremonies in dedicated temples. These temples were, in a sense, to make sure their gods were present with them as they did their ceremonies. Yet, to ensure the stability of their society there was only one who could interact with their gods and that was the Pharaoh. The Pharaoh was in a sense a personified god to them and was even seen as the son of their sun-god named “Ra.” Huge amounts of state resources were therefore dedicated to the Pharaoh in order for him to make sure that the gods were pleased so that the seasons would follow their natural path in order for the crops to give their annual yield. The Pharaoh would bring these balances through different types of religious ceremonies. Even though the Pharaoh was the only one who could keep these balances with the gods; he was able to appoint priests to assist him in these tasks in all the temples through a magical imparting of his “divine” ability.

This deification of nature was prevalent in most cultures, as Paul explains:

Romans 1 verse 20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse,
Verse 21 because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.
Verse 22 Professing to be wise, they became fools,
Verse 23 and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and

four-footed animals and creeping things.

Verse 24 Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves,

Verse 25 who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

Paul asked the Galatians why they would want to return to the weak and beggarly elements, and put themselves in bondage to it again. Israel was in bondage to the Egyptians who observed the elements of the world as though they were gods. Yet God delivered the Israelites using ten plagues. God did not choose just any plagues. These plagues were specifically chosen against the gods of Egypt as we read in:

*Exodus 12 verse 12 'For I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; **and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD.***

What do these plagues have to do with the gods of Egypt that kept Israel in slavery? Well, first of all, the plague of “water turned to blood” was against the god “Hapi” which was the Egyptian god of the Nile. The plague of frogs coming from the Nile River was against the Egyptian goddess of fertility, water, and renewal named “Heket”. The plague of lice from the dust of the earth was against the Egyptian god of the earth named “Geb”. The plague of swarms of flies was against the Egyptian god of creation, movement of the sun, and rebirth. This god was named “Khepri” and had the head of a fly.

The plague of the death of cattle and livestock was against the Egyptian goddess of love and protection named “Hathor” who was sometimes portrayed by the head of a cow. The plague of ashes that turned to boils and sores was against the Egyptian goddess of medicine and peace named “Isis”. The plague of hail raining down in the form of fire was against the Egyptian goddess of the sky named “Nut”. The plague of locusts sent from the sky was against the Egyptian god of storms and disorder named “Seth”. The three days of complete darkness was against the sun god, “Ra”.

Finally, the tenth plague of the death of the first born was against the Pharaoh himself who was seen as the son of the gods, the ultimate power of Egypt. In this very act God cut down the Pharaoh’s firstborn who would take the role of a deity to continue Israel’s slavery. The God of Israel was shown to be more powerful than all the gods of Egypt that supposedly influenced the elements of nature.

God went one step further in delivering Israel from the elements of the world. He gave Israel the “Law”. What is interesting was that ten of the commandments were written on stone. So what makes the Ten Commandments so unique that they were written on tablets of stone? In ancient Egypt the art of writing was called “hieroglyphics,” which the Egyptians did on stones and walls. This was perceived as some kind of magic by the peasants, since not many people understood the art of writing. The Egyptians would even call the hieroglyphs “the words of the gods.”

Not all the writings were done on stones or walls by the Egyptians. There were also religious books written, including one called “The Book of the Dead.” The Book of the Dead, which also contained magical spells and protective charms, was buried with the corpse or painted on the coffin to act as a sort of instruction manual for the afterlife. The Egyptians believed that upon death they would come before 42 judges to answer 42 questions concerning the life that they had lived before death. They believed that the reason older people had a heavier heart (the actual organ) had to do with their conscience. They believed that one’s heart was supposed to be lighter than a feather if one was to escape the god of the underworld.

The way the person who had passed over to the realm of the dead would answer those 42 questions would determine how they would spend their existence in the realm of the dead. Some of those 42 questions had to do with whether they had defrauded or stolen from another, deceived or lied to someone, taken their fellow man’s spouse for themselves, desired their fellow man’s goods, or taken their fellow man’s life unjustly. They were also required to know the names of the 42 gods and to not revile the god of the dead.

Some liberal theologian's take this as proof that Israel received their moral compass, as found in the Law of Moses, from the Egyptians. Yet Scripture clearly teaches us that the moral compass of God's law was actually placed in the hearts of all the nations by God Himself, as we can read in:

Romans 2 verse 14 for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves,

*Verse 15 who show the work of the **law written in their hearts**, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them)*

Verse 16 in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.

God wanted Israel to understand that righteousness goes much further than giving the right answers in the afterlife. God was not to be worshipped by images made by hands, nor does He share deity or worship with any other gods. Yahweh was the One who had delivered them from the slavery of the Egyptians and the Egyptian gods and only He deserves all praise and worship. God is the one who keeps the forces of nature in order as He is the Creator of all of creation.

I pray that at this point you will grasp this important point that is to follow. The ancient Egyptian calendar had a year that consisted of 360 days and was divided into 12 months of 30 days each, plus five extra days at the end of the year. The months were divided into three weeks of ten days each. The Egyptian year was divided into three seasons: "akhet" which referred to the flooding of the river banks and fertilization of the grounds, "peret" which referred to the growth period that led into the winter time and then "shemu" which was during summer and harvest time.

The only thing that Israel knew was that a year consisted of three seasons; each month consisted of three weeks, each week consisted of 10 days during which they worked without rest. The Egyptians believed that every star represents a god and that the star that rises at the beginning of a particular ten day week is considered to be the god or ruler of that ten day week. That meant that Egypt had 36 solar gods and the additional five days at the end of the year were dedicated to the gods: Osiris, Isis, Horus, Seth and Nephthys.

Israel was in slavery to a system of working every single day of a ten day week dedicated to 36 solar "gods". The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob delivered Israel from Pharaoh and the gods of Egypt and brought them out of slavery to the elements. So, by commanding them to keep the Sabbath, God wanted to teach Israel to trust Him as the One Who had created all the elements of the world in six days. That is why we read in:

*Deuteronomy 5 verse 15 **And remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt**, and the LORD your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; **therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.***

We see from this text in Deuteronomy that the reason why God commanded Israel to keep the Sabbath was because He had delivered them from the bondage of the Egyptians. God did not command them to keep the Sabbath because He had made the world in seven days. He commanded them to keep the Sabbath to remind them that it was He that controls the elements of the world and not the Egyptian solar "gods", because He had created it all in six days.

5.3: Observing the Sabbath

In the previous section we saw that the Ten Commandments did the same thing as the ten plagues and that was that they delivered Israel from the Egyptian gods that were seen as the powers of the elements of the world. We repeat:

Deuteronomy 5 verse 15 And remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; **therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.**

We also read in:

Exodus 31 verse 16 Therefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant.

Verse 17 It is a **sign between Me and the children of Israel forever**; for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed.' "

The way God wanted Israel to understand His “rest”, was for them to understand that it was not the gods of the Egyptians that determined the forces of nature, the seasons, the rising of the sun, or the light of the moon at night. God taught them that it was He who had created all of these things in six days and then rested on the seventh day. The Sabbath was therefore to teach and remind Israel that Yahweh keeps all things in balance because He created it all, and so in all things they could trust Him instead of the Egyptian gods. Israel practised the Sabbath but was never able to enter into God’s rest because of their lack of faith and trust.

Hebrews 3 verse 16 For who, having heard, rebelled? Indeed, was it not all who came out of Egypt, led by Moses? ...

Hebrews 4 verse 3 For we who have believed do enter that rest, as He has said: "SO I SWORE IN MY WRATH, 'THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST,' " although the works were finished from the foundation of the world.

Verse 4 For He has spoken in a certain place of the seventh day in this way: "AND GOD RESTED ON THE SEVENTH DAY FROM ALL HIS WORKS";

Verse 5 and again in this place: "THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST."

Verse 6 Since therefore it remains that some must enter it, and those to whom it was first preached did not enter because of disobedience,

Verse 7 again He designates a certain day, saying in David, "TODAY," after such a long time, as it has been said: "TODAY, IF YOU WILL HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS."

Verse 8 For if Joshua had given them rest, then He would not afterward have **spoken of another day.**

Verse 9 There remains therefore a rest for the people of God.

Verse 10 For he **who has entered His rest** has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His.

Verse 11 Let us therefore be **diligent to enter that rest,** lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience.

What is the author of Hebrews saying? He was not speaking of “another day” in a literal sense. He was speaking of entering into Christ Jesus as their rest day. We will get to this shortly. What is interesting to note, for now, is that one won’t find any Scripture that speaks of Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob receiving the command to keep the Sabbath or even recording that they kept the Sabbath. In fact, not even Adam received the command to rest on the seventh day. Some might quote the following as evidence that Adam was also commanded to keep the Sabbath:

Genesis 2 verse 2 And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done.

Verse 3 Then **God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it,** because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.

However, the fact that God sanctified the seventh day does not mean that He also commanded Adam to rest on that day. Many orthodox theologians accept that Moses wrote the book of Genesis by inspiration of God’s Spirit. In His

writings of the creation in Genesis, Moses wanted Israel to understand that the elements of this world had not come about through the power of the Egyptian gods. Remember, the Egyptians believed that their gods were revealed by the forces of nature and the times of the seasons. By Moses recording that God had sanctified the seventh day, he helped Israel to understand that Yahweh is the Creator of all things. Every observance of days, months, seasons and years that was given to Israel, which we read about in Moses' writings, was in order to deliver Israelites' minds from the hold that the Egyptian gods had had over them. Israel could not just observe these seasons and days in any way they felt like doing it. For instance, concerning the Sabbath, we read:

Exodus 35 verse 2 Work shall be done for six days, but the seventh day shall be a holy day for you, a Sabbath of rest to the LORD. Whoever does any work on it **shall be put to death.**

Verse 3 You shall **kindle no fire throughout your dwellings** on the Sabbath day."

Deuteronomy 5 verse 14 but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your ox, nor your donkey, nor any of your cattle, **nor your stranger who is within your gates,** that your male servant and your female servant **may rest as well as you.**

Nehemiah 10 verse 31 if the peoples of the land brought wares or any grain to sell on the Sabbath day, **we would not buy it from them on the Sabbath,** or on a holy day; and we would forego the seventh year's produce and the exacting of every debt.

Should we claim that we need to keep the laws of the Sabbath, then, according to Moses' Law, we ought to abstain from cooking food and boiling water on the Sabbath. We should not even watch TV or switching on the lights, as that would cause the broadcasting and power companies to work for us on the Sabbath, which is clearly prohibited from Scripture. If we are to keep the Sabbath, it must not be our own twisted version of the Sabbath; it must be according to God's instructions to the letter. Yet, despite these facts, there are still those who would claim we must worship God on the Sabbath, because Jesus and the apostles "worshipped" on a Sabbath in the synagogue, according to this interpretation of the following verses:

Acts 13 verse 14 But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the **Sabbath** ("sabbaton") day and sat down.

Luke 4 verse 16 So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the **Sabbath** ("sabbaton") day, and stood up to read.

Acts 18 verse 4 And he reasoned in the synagogue **every Sabbath,** and persuaded both Jews **and Greeks.**

To use these passages as proof texts to worship on a Sabbath is really bad exegesis, or a deliberate deception. First of all, Jews went to the temple to worship, and not the Synagogue. Worship at the temple was done any day of the week and not just on a Sabbath. The Synagogue was more like a Bible school than a place of worship. Secondly, the reason why we read that Jesus and Paul went to the synagogue on a Sabbath, was to preach and teach the gospel to those who had not yet heard or understood the gospel. There were also Greeks that went to the synagogues, as seen in Acts chapter 18. These Greeks were called "God fearers". "God fearers" were Gentiles who had converted to Judaism. They were NOT Christians; not until Paul convinced them of Christ. It was not uncommon for Paul to preach the gospel to both Jews and Gentiles in synagogues. However a synagogue meeting was not a Christian "ekklesia" church gathering.

We need to clarify the Greek word for Sabbath: "sabbaton". The word "sabbaton" in Greek referred to either the "seventh day" called the Sabbath or a "seven day period" meaning a **week**. For instance, when the Greek word "sabbaton" is used in the following passage, it means a "week":

Acts 20 verse 7 Now on the first day of the **week** ("sabbaton"), when the disciples came together to break bread,

Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight.

Here we see that Paul came to their “ekklesia” meeting on the first of the *sabbaton*, which means the first day of the week. This distinction is even clearer in the following example where the Greek word “sabbaton” is used to mean both “Sabbath day” and “week” in one sentence:

Matthew 28 verse 1 Now after the **Sabbath** (“sabbaton”), as the first day of the **week** (“sabbaton”) began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb.

So, one sees that there is no substantial proof that the early Christians kept the Sabbath. Paul even wrote in:
Col 2:16 So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a **festival or a new moon or sabbaths**,
Col 2:17 which are a **shadow of things** to come, **but the substance is of Christ**.

It has been argued by some that Paul was actually saying that we should not let people judge us, when we practice the festivals, new moons and Sabbaths as given by Moses. However, if one reads further one realises that Paul is saying the exact opposite:

Col 2:20 Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations—

Col 2:21 "Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,"

Col 2:22 which all concern things which perish with the using—**according to the commandments and doctrines of men?**

Col 2:23 These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.

Please understand that Paul is not saying that the commandments of Moses are the commandments and doctrines of men. He is explaining the futility of man’s teachings that righteousness can be gained through the observance of Moses’ law, which does not deliver us from the indulgence of the flesh. He writes:

1Ti 1:5 Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith,

1Ti 1:6 from which some, having strayed, have turned aside to idle talk,

1Ti 1:7 desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say nor the things which they affirm.

1Ti 1:8 But we know that the law is good if one uses it lawfully,

1Ti 1:9 knowing this: that the **law is not made for a righteous person**, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers,

The Law is just the shadow of the reality. Christ did not come to point us to the **shadow that is two-dementedly, flat on the ground**. The shadows are there to point us to Christ who has many dimensions, standing with His feet on the two dimensional shadows. Paul reiterated the counsel he gave to Timothy when he wrote the following to the Galatian church:

Gal 3:24 Therefore the **law was our tutor to bring us to Christ**, that we might be justified by faith.

Gal 3:25 But after faith has come, **we are no longer under a tutor**.

Gal 3:26 For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

Gal 3:27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

Gal 3:28 There is **neither Jew nor Greek**, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Gal 3:29 And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

5.4: The Law

In the previous section we saw that the Law of God is to point us to Christ, and not, like some claim, that Christ came to bring us back to the Law of Moses. Yet, those who would like us to return to some kind of “Hebrew roots”, claim that when Paul wrote to the Galatian church concerning the “Law”, he was not referring to the Law of Moses, but to the Talmud. The Talmud is the collection of the scholarly discussions and expounding of the Mosaic Law, and was regarded by the Pharisees as equal in status to God’s Law itself. The first five books of the Bible are called the “Torah” in Hebrew and the “Pentateuch” in Greek, which is believed to be written by Moses:

Exodus 24:12 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Come up to Me on the mountain and be there; and I will give you tablets of stone, and the law and commandments which I have written, that you may teach them."

The Hebrew words for “law” and “commandments” in this passage is “torah” and “mitzvot”, which means “direction, teachings, instruction, or laws”. During the time of Jesus and the apostles the Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the Old Testament, used the Greek word “nomos” for “torah” and the Greek word “entole” for “mitzvot”, which can be translated: “that which is assigned, customs, injunctions, charge, or precepts”.

The Septuagint text was very popular in the time of Jesus and the apostles because of the common use of Greek at that time. Throughout the Mediterranean world there was a large Jewish population who could only speak Greek or who were not fluent in Hebrew because of the strong influence of Greek as the commercial language of that time. It can be compared to English as the lingua franca of today. Many of the apostolic quotations of the Old Testament would have been from the Septuagint text instead of from the Hebrew text as becomes apparent when one compares the language structure and nuances of the quotations used in the gospels and apostolic letters. The word “law” that Paul used right through the letter to the Galatians is the same Greek word used in the Septuagint text: “nomos”, the Greek equivalent of “torah”. Paul has this to say concerning the Law:

Gal 2:21 I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain."

It is therefore very unlikely that Paul had the Talmud – “traditions” in mind when he used the word “nomos” as Jesus and the apostles always made a distinction between the “Law” and the “traditions”.

Mat 15:1 Then the scribes and Pharisees who were from Jerusalem came to Jesus, saying,

Mat 15:2 "Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread."

Mat 15:3 He answered and said to them, "Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition?"

If Paul meant the Talmud instead of the Law given through Moses, he would have used the Greek word “paradosis” – traditions, instead of “nomos” like he did in the beginning of the letter:

Gal 1:14 And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions (paradosis) of my fathers.

It is made blatantly clear that Paul meant the Mosaic Law when he spoke of the “law” and not the traditions with the following explanation:

Gal 3:10 For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, "**CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO DOES NOT CONTINUE IN ALL THINGS WHICH ARE WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF THE LAW, TO DO THEM.**"

Gal 3:11 But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for "**THE JUST SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.**"

Gal 3:12 Yet the law is not of faith, but "**THE MAN WHO DOES THEM SHALL LIVE BY THEM.**"

Gal 3:13 Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE"),

Gal 3:14 that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

As we can see, Paul is quoting the Torah and not the Talmud here:

Deuteronomy 21:23 his body shall not remain overnight on the tree, but you shall surely bury him that day, so that you do not defile the land which the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance; for he who is hanged is accursed of God.

Deuteronomy 27:26 'Cursed is the one who does not confirm all the words of this law.' "And all the people shall say, 'Amen!' "

Paul continues in:

*Gal 3:17 And this I say, that the **law, which was four hundred and thirty years later**, cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ, that it should make the promise of no effect.*

*Gal 3:18 **For if the inheritance is of the law, it is no longer of promise**; but God gave it to Abraham by promise.*

Again, the “law” that Paul is talking of is that law that was received by Moses four hundred and thirty years after Abraham. There were no Jewish traditions – or “Talmud” as yet because Moses had only just received the Torah. However, if Paul was saying that there is no need for Christians to follow the Law given to Moses, why does it seem that he subjected himself to the Law in the following instance?

Act 21:23 Therefore do what we tell you: We have four men who have taken a vow.

*Act 21:24 Take them and be purified with them, and pay their expenses so that they may shave their heads, and that all may know that those things of which they were informed concerning you are nothing, but that you yourself also walk orderly and **keep the law**.*

Well it becomes clear, when we read just one verse further:

*Act 21:25 But concerning the Gentiles who believe, we have written and decided that they should **observe no such thing**, except that they should keep themselves from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality."*

Again we read in a similar scenario, just earlier on, in:

Act 16:1 Then he came to Derbe and Lystra. And behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a certain Jewish woman who believed, but his father was Greek.

Act 16:2 He was well spoken of by the brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium.

*Act 16:3 Paul wanted to have him go on with him. And he took him and **circumcised him** because of the Jews who were in that region, for they all knew that his father was Greek.*

Once again, when we read one verse further, we see that as they ministered to the other cities, they informed them of the **decrees** that had been made by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem:

*Act 16:4 And as they went through the cities, they delivered to them the decrees to keep, which were determined by the apostles and **elders at Jerusalem**.*

What were these decrees that had been made in Jerusalem? We read about this in an earlier chapter:

*Act 15:23 They wrote this letter by them: The apostles, the elders, and the brethren, To the brethren who are of the **Gentiles** in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia: Greetings.*

*Act 15:24 Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, "You must be **circumcised** and **keep the law**"—to **whom we gave no such commandment**—*

This is confirmed by what Peter preached in:

Act 13:38 Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins;

*Act 13:39 and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which **you could not be justified by the law of Moses.***

So why does it seem that Paul's actions contradict his teachings concerning the Law? Well, it makes sense if you understand that Paul placed the importance of reaching people with the gospel above his own freedom concerning the Law. He writes in his first letter to the Corinthian church:

*1Co 9:19 For though I am **free** from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more;*

*1Co 9:20 and **to the Jews I became as a Jew**, that I might win Jews; to those who are **under the law, as under the law**, that I might win those who are under the law;*

1Co 9:21 to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law;

1Co 9:22 to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.

1Co 9:23 Now this I do for the gospel's sake, that I may be partaker of it with you.

It is without doubt that Paul is speaking of the Law of Moses when he speaks of the "law." Yet Paul did not consider himself without any law, as those who preach a false "grace" that leads to "lawlessness". There is a Law that all Christians need to obey. However, that Law is NOT the Law given to Moses, but the Law of Christ. However, some would then ask, is Paul not contradicting Jesus' words written in?

Mat 5:17 "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.

Mat 5:18 For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.

Mat 5:19 Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

No Paul is not contradicting Jesus' words; for if you read further, Jesus continued by raising the laws given to Moses to a higher level of righteousness by saying the following:

Mat 5:20 For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

Mat 5:21 "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'YOU SHALL NOT MURDER, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.'

Mat 5:22 But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire.

Neither Jesus nor Paul is discarding the Law given to Moses, but wants to lead us to a higher level of righteousness that can only be found in the Law of the Spirit in Christ. God's kingdom and His righteousness go further than trying to observe the law of the letter. This higher level of righteousness can only be obtained by walking in the Law of the Spirit. To understand the difference we need to look at the subject of circumcision, in the section that follows.

5.5: Circumcision

Jesus had this very interesting conversation with the Pharisees and the rest of the Jews in the Gospel of John:

Joh 7:19 Did not Moses give you the law, yet none of you keeps the law? Why do you seek to kill Me?"

Joh 7:20 The people answered and said, "You have a demon. Who is seeking to kill You?"

Joh 7:21 Jesus answered and said to them, "I did one work, and you all marvel.

Joh 7:22 Moses therefore gave you circumcision (not that it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and you circumcise a man on the Sabbath.

In this text, Jesus first comments on the fact that none of them keeps the Law of Moses. Then Jesus remarks on the fact that Moses gave them circumcision, but then He corrects that notion and remarks that circumcision is actually from the fathers. The "fathers" refers to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, whom God first required to be circumcised. What was the purpose of circumcision? We read this account in Genesis:

Gen 17:9 And God said to Abraham: "As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations.

Gen 17:10 This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised;

Gen 17:11 and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you.

Gen 17:12 He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised, every male child in your generations, he who is born in your house or bought with money from any foreigner who is not your descendant.

Gen 17:13 He who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money must be circumcised, and My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant.

Gen 17:14 And the uncircumcised male child, who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant."

Circumcision was the sign of the covenant between God and Abraham and his descendants. Everyone who wanted to be part of that covenant needed to be circumcised. So, as Moses brought Israel out of the slavery of Egypt, he also brought them back to the covenant of Abraham. We can read about this in:

Lev 12:1 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

Lev 12:2 "Speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'If a woman has conceived, and borne a male child, then she shall be unclean seven days; as in the days of her customary impurity she shall be unclean.

Lev 12:3 And on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised.

Stephen the Evangelist confirmed that the circumcision was a sign of that covenant:

Act 7:8 Then He gave him the covenant of circumcision; and so Abraham begot Isaac and circumcised him on the eighth day; and Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot the twelve patriarchs.

We must understand that it was impossible to share in any inheritance of Israel without being circumcised. One cannot separate circumcisions from the Law of Moses. If one desired to become an Israelite and practice the Law of Moses the first step was to be circumcised. For instance, we read that everyone who wished to observe the feasts prescribed by the Law, had to be circumcised in:

Exo 12:48 And when a stranger dwells with you and wants to keep the Passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as a native of the land. For no uncircumcised person shall eat it.

So what is the controversy then? Well, Paul puts it like this:

Gal 5:1 Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.

Gal 5:2 Indeed I, Paul, say to you that **if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing.**

Gal 5:3 And I testify again to every man who **becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law.**

Gal 5:4 You have become **estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law;** you have fallen from grace.

Why would Paul have such strong words against those who would get themselves circumcised? What I am now about to explain is of the utmost importance. If one does not get this, nothing about the covenant of Abraham will make sense and you will get stuck trying to follow some twisted version of God's Law given to Moses. Are you ready for this? There are **two covenants**. There is a covenant with God according to the **flesh**; and a covenant with God according to the **Spirit** through faith. Both of these covenants were revealed through Abraham. Look how Paul explains it:

Rom 4:11 And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also,

Rom 4:12 and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the **faith** which our father Abraham had while still **uncircumcised**.

Col 2:11 In Him you were also circumcised with the **circumcision made without hands**, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ,

Col 2:12 buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

Rom 2:28 For he is not a Jew who is one **outwardly**, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the **flesh**;

Rom 2:29 but he is a **Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit**, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.

Php 3:3 For **we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit**, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the **flesh**,

I repeat, the two covenants are as follows: a covenant shown by physical circumcision in one's **flesh** and a covenant shown spiritual circumcision of the heart, in the **Spirit**. Those who desire to follow God's Law as given to Moses have to be circumcised in the **flesh** and live by the **letter** of that Law. Those who are circumcised in the heart through faith in Jesus Christ show this as they live according to the Law of the Spirit.

2Co 3:5 Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God,

2Co 3:6 who also made us sufficient as ministers of the **new covenant**, not of the **letter** but of the **Spirit**; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

2Co 3:7 But if the ministry of death, written and **engraved on stones**, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the **face of Moses** because of the glory of his countenance, which glory was passing away,

2Co 3:8 how will the ministry of the **Spirit** not be more glorious?

The author of Hebrews puts it like this:

Heb 7:15 And it is yet far more evident if, in the likeness of Melchizedek, there arises another priest

Heb 7:16 who has come, **not according to the law of a fleshly commandment**, but according to the **power of an endless life**.

You see that those who follow the law of the Spirit actually fulfil the requirement of God's Law, rather than those who try to follow the law of fleshly commandments of the letter.

Rom 8:2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.

Rom 8:3 For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh,

*Rom 8:4 that **the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.***

Rom 8:5 For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.

Rom 8:6 For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.

Rom 8:7 Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.

*Rom 8:8 So then, those who are in the **flesh cannot please God.***

Rom 8:9 But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.

So the Sabbath that we need to follow is not the observance of a particular day, but an entering into the true Sabbath, Christ Jesus. Israel did not trust God, and even though they kept the Sabbath religiously, they never entered into God's rest through faith. Let me quote again:

*Hebrews 4 verse 10 For he **who has entered His rest** has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His.*

*Verse 11 Let us therefore be **diligent to enter that rest**, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience.*

Like Israel, so all of humanity is under the slavery of the elements of this world. The command to Israel to keep the Sabbath was to teach us all that we find rest in trusting God the Creator alone for our provision, rather than the elements of this world. Jesus said, as recorded in the Gospel of Mark:

Mark 2 verse 27 And He said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.

Verse 28 Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath."

We are all under the oppression of the spiritual Egypt that keeps us in bondage so that we cannot rest. Why? Well, simply put, we don't trust or believe in God to take care of us. Those who have entered into Christ in the Spirit have truly entered into God's rest. Many Christians claim that one needs to rest on a Saturday or even a Sunday, and yet they never actually enter into God's rest. They will hold on to religious rest days but never come to rest, stressed out with the cares of the world, not able to trust God, the Creator of all things, to be in control and taking care of them.

*Matthew 11 verse 28 Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, **and I will give you rest.***

Christ did not come to show us a better way to keep the Law of Moses. The Law was there to prepare us for Christ. Our covenant in Christ is according to the Spirit and not according to the flesh. It is a circumcision of the heart not according to the flesh. It is the Law of the Spirit written in our hearts not the letter of the law written on stone, scrolls or books. So we don't disregard the Law of Moses, but God's Law is fulfilled through Christ in us as we walk in the Holy Spirit.

That means living in Christ it is not about observing days, seasons, or rules about touching and eating, or about other observance but about knowing Christ as our Sabbath, our bread of life, our observance, our place of worship, our sanctification. So in the next section, part 6 "A Church Without Festivals" we will go deeper into this covenant of the Spirit and how Christ accomplished it for us through His death, burial and resurrection.

Part 6: A Church without Festivals

6.1: Festivals and Seasons

In this part of the series, we shall have a brief look at some typical, supposedly Christian feasts such as Christmas and Easter and see what relevance they should have for Christians. We shall also have a more in-depth look at some Jewish feasts that some Christians practice, such as the Passover, and through that tackle the question of when Christ was actually crucified. Lastly, we shall deal with the covenant that the church has entered into with our Father, through Christ, through the breaking of bread.

In Part 5, we saw that those who have truly entered into Christ's rest have no need to observe days because Christ is our Sabbath that we observe by abiding in Him. Also one has to admit that there are no real instructions from Scripture to have "ekklesia" gatherings on a Sunday. We do so purely as a reminder to ourselves that Jesus was raised from the dead, as He was resurrected according to the Gospels, on the first day of the week. One thing is certain and that is, that Sunday was never meant to replace the Sabbath that was given to Israel. If one wants to observe a Sabbath, according to the flesh, then it needs to be from Friday evening to Saturday sundown. However if one has entered into Christ, as our Sabbath, then we have finished from our works as God has finished from His works through Christ our Lord.

We repeat Paul's instruction to the Galatian church:

Galatians 4 verse 8 But then, indeed, when you did not know God, you served those which by nature are not gods.

Verse 9 But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, **how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage?**

Verse 10 **You observe days and months and seasons and years.**

Verse 11 I am afraid for you, lest I have laboured for you in vain.

As we saw in Part 5, Paul was dealing with those Christians in the Galatian church that was influenced by some Jews who was trying to get them to practice the Jewish days, months, seasons and years. But Paul also talks about the fact that the Galatians used to be in bondage to those beggarly elements when they worshiped idols. The fact is that when we observe supposedly Christian festivals and days religiously, we do the exact same thing as the Galatian church.

One such religious day/festival that most Christians like to observe is Christmas. As many might know Christmas actually comes from the sun worship that originated in Egypt. In Egypt the 24th of December was the longest night of the year. From the 25th of December onwards the days become longer and the nights become shorter. The sun-worshippers called this "the feast of lights" as light would gain dominance over the night from the 25th of December onwards.

The Christians adopted this feast around 354 AD sometime after the church had become institutionalized. It was one of many attempts of the institutional church to reach out to the heathen sun-worshippers, by adopting their heathen practices. The church proclaimed that Jesus is the true light of the world that conquered the darkness, and so it came to be accepted that Jesus was born on the 25th of December.

In reality, many theologians estimate that Jesus was actually born in about the middle of March, as this was the spring season when the shepherds would have seen the angels proclaiming the birth of the Christ.

Luk 2:6 So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered.

Luk 2:7 And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

Luk 2:8 Now there were in the same **country shepherds** living out in the fields, **keeping watch over their flock by night.**

Luk 2:9 And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid.

Luk 2:10 Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people.

Luk 2:11 For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

Luk 2:12 And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger."

According to many theologians it was unlikely that shepherds would be out in the field at night during the winter month of December in Israel. There are arguments against this view as well, but for those who have entered into God's rest, the date of Christ's birth has no importance, neither would there be any spiritual value in celebrating it.

Another traditional Christian religious day is Easter Sunday. Easter Sunday is a feast that is held to commemorate the resurrection of Christ. It actually consists of: Good Friday, Holy Saturday and then the Easter Sunday.

Easter usually closely coincides with the Jewish Passover, which is traditionally celebrated after the first astronomical full moon between 22nd of March and the 25th of April. The Jewish Passover begins on the 15th day of the month of Nisan according to the Jewish calendar, which typically falls in between March and April. The preparation started on the day before, that is, on the 14th of Nisan when they slaughtered the Passover Lamb and continues for an additional 7 days afterwards. In accordance with the Hebrew Bible, Nisan is the first month of the year, which the Bible also called Abib. Passover is a spring festival, which begins on the night of the 14th day of Nisan when it is full moon after the vernal equinox. We will look at Passover more thoroughly in the next few chapters and see in what way it synchronizes with Jesus' death and resurrection.

For now though, I need to state that the Easter that many Christians celebrate actually has more heathen roots to it than Jewish roots. Easter was a Babylonian feast to honour life after death. The Babylonians honoured their god, Tammuz, who was apparently brought back from the underworld by his mother and wife, Ishtar (this is where the name Easter comes from). Easter was generally celebrated with festive and decorated eggs to symbolize the cycle of death and rebirth. Once again the Christians adopted the celebration of Easter to be a supposed Christian feast to celebrate Christ who died and was raised again to give us life; in order to get the heathens to convert to Christianity.

Many Christians also celebrate Ascension Day, when the ascension of Christ into heaven is celebrated 40 days after His resurrection. Then there is Pentecost which is about 50 days after the resurrection of Christ, also called the feast of weeks, which is when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the church. There are many more Christian days that Christians celebrate as public holidays, especially in the West; many of which can be found in Catholicism, Greek orthodoxy, and even in Protestant and Evangelical churches. Then of course, we have the Jewish feasts that some Christians feel the need to celebrate.

Why do Christians feel the need to celebrate all these days? I am not saying that all celebrations of special days are necessarily wrong. However there is something that we must be made aware of, and that is, what have these things to do with righteousness? Even from the Old Testament prophets, for example Isaiah, declared that God despised the Jews' celebration of days and feasts without righteousness:

*Isaiah 1 verse 13 Bring no more futile sacrifices; Incense is an abomination to Me. The New Moons, **the Sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies**— **I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting.***

*Verse 14 Your New Moons and **your appointed feasts My soul hates**; They are a trouble to Me, I am weary of bearing them.*

Those who would like to celebrate religious days, even if they have Jewish origins, must remember that God is looking for something that goes far beyond the observance of Sabbaths, assemblies, sacred meetings and appointed feasts. What God seeks is righteousness that cannot be found anywhere outside of Christ. Let me repeat what Paul writes in:

Colossians 2 verse 16 So let no one judge you in food or in drink, **or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths,**
Verse 17 **which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.**

Verse 18 Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind,

Verse 19 and not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God.

Verse 20 Therefore, **if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world,** why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations—

Those who are dead to the basic principles of the world do not live as though they need to give honour to days, seasons, and years, but should live as though they are seated in heaven with Christ, above the basic principles of the world. Paul puts it like this:

Ephesians 2 verse 4 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, Eph 2:5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),

Verse 6 **and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,**

Verse 7 that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

Paul reiterates this point a chapter later, in his letter to the Colossian church:

Colossians 3:1 If then you were **raised with Christ,** seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.

Verse 2 Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.

Verse 3 For you **died,** and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

However, to live in faith as though we are dead to the principles of this world does not mean that we should not be considerate to those who are weak in the faith. Our faith, should teach us to be patient with those who do not have this type of faith. For that reason Paul explains that those who are spiritually mature should be patient with those who have yet not come to this revelation.

Romans 14 verse 1 Receive one who is **weak in the faith, but not to dispute over doubtful things.**

Verse 2 For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables.

Verse 3 Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him.

Verse 4 Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.

Verse 5 **One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind.**

Verse 6 He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks.

6.2: Unleavened Bread

Of late, many Christians have come under an influential teaching which persuades us to return to “our Hebrew roots”. In other words, the teaching is that we need to return to the “true” Mosaic Law received from God, according to this movement's interpretation of the Law. This teaching is based on how Jesus fulfilled many of the Jewish feasts, through His death and resurrection. For instance, according to this belief, Jesus would have entered Jerusalem on the 10th of the first month called Abib, also known as Nisan, according to the Jewish calendar. Christ would then have been crucified on the 14th, which was when the Passover lamb was killed, and be raised the first day after the Sabbath, symbolising the first-fruit offering. According to them, all this would have happened in a period of 72 hours, or three complete days and three complete nights, correlating with the time that Jonas was in the belly of the great fish.

This teaching does leave an impression on one, especially as it so neatly matches the times concerning Jesus' last week, death and resurrection which are apparently given in the gospel of John. However, may I ask you to go through all the passages with me again, to see if Jesus' death and resurrection did actually occur in this time frame, as some claim?

Let us first build a foundation in understanding where the Passover Feast comes from. As Moses was preparing Israel to leave the bondage of the Egyptians, God gave them the following instructions:

Exodus 12:3 “Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying: On the **tenth of this month** every man shall take for himself a lamb, according to the house of his father, a lamb for a household...”

Verse 4 And if the household is too small for the lamb, let him and his neighbour next to his house take it according to the number of the persons; according to each man's need you shall make your count for the lamb.

Verse 5 “Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats.

Verse 6 “Now you shall keep it until the **fourteenth day of the same month**. Then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at twilight.

Verse 7 “And they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses where they eat it.

Verse 8 “Then they shall eat the **flesh on that night**: roasted in fire, with **unleavened bread** and with bitter herbs they shall eat it.

Verse 9 “Do not eat it raw, nor boiled at all with water, but roasted in fire – its head with its legs and its entrails.

Verse 10 “ You shall let **none of it remain until morning**, and what remains of it until morning you **shall burn with fire**.

This passage explains how the feast of the Passover was instituted. It commemorates and celebrates the time when God delivered the children of Israel from Egypt. God's angel would kill all of the first born throughout the land of Egypt, as the last of His judgements against the “gods” of Egypt, including the Pharaoh. God's angel would **pass-over** those homes whose door posts were seared with the blood of the designated lambs. This passage explains that the Passover starts on the 14th of the first month, when they would kill the Passover lamb at twilight. The Hebrew word for twilight, “ereb”, has more than one meaning. For instance, it could mean “between the nights” or “the dusk of day”. The twilight that is spoken of here, is when the sun went down as we see in:

Deuteronomy 16 verse 6 “but at the place where the Lord your God chooses to make His name abide, there you shall sacrifice the Passover at **twilight, at the going down of the sun**, at the time you came out of Egypt.”

It is interesting to note that when God created all things, He did all of His work at evening before the start of the morning:

Genesis 1 verse 3 “Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light

verse 4 “And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness.

verse 5 “God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. So the **evening and the morning were the first day**.”

Here is a question: Did the first day end with the evening and morning, or did the evening and morning bring in the start of the first day? Were light and darkness created on the first day, or were light and darkness created before the day started with the first day? Well, let us look at the words used to record that God finished creating everything on the sixth day:

Genesis 1 verse 31 “Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good. So the **evening and the morning were the sixth day**.”

When one reads the whole account of the creation in Genesis chapter 1, one realises that God did His works of creation on the evenings of each day. At dawn, the daylight glorified God’s work as “good”. It has therefore become Jewish custom that a day starts when the sun has set, approximately after 6pm; and that the same day ends with the next sunset. Today, the western world has adopted the Roman/Greek time frame, according to which a day ends at midnight.

This would have been a simple conversion, if it was not for some other complications. God also declared that light would be called “day” and darkness would be called “night”. Because of this, when Scripture speaks of a particular “day” it could either mean when evening has started or when the sun has risen. To make matters more complicated, when Scripture refers to the “evening” of the day, it could mean either the previous evening, which ushered in the day, or that evening that indicates the end of the day. This means that such a passage has to be considered carefully regarding which “evening” is referred to without jumping to any conclusion too hastily. First of all, we should carefully consider the context to make sure it won’t contradict any other occurrence that speaks of the same time frame. Let me illustrate this by looking at the passages that speak of when the Passover should be commemorated by Israel. Moses received the following instructions from God concerning the Passover:

Leviticus 23:5 “On the **fourteenth day of the first month at twilight** is the **Lord’s Passover**.”

Verses 6 “And on the **fifteenth day of the same month** is the **feast of unleavened bread** to the Lord; **seven days** you must **eat unleavened bread**.”

Verse 7 “On **the first day** you shall have a holy **convocation**; you shall do no customary work on it.”

Verse 8 “But you shall offer an **offering made by fire** to the Lord for **seven days**. The **seventh day** shall be a holy **convocation**; you shall do no customary work on it.”

It is explained like this in:

Exodus 12 verse 18 “In the first month, on the **fourteenth day** of the month at **evening**, you shall **eat unleavened bread**, until the **twenty-first day of the month** that **evening**.”

Verse 19 “For **seven days** not leaven shall be found in your houses, since whoever eats what is leavened, that same person shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he is a stranger or a native of the land.”

Immediately we see the predicament. Which day or evening is being referred to here when dealing with the 14th, 15th and 21st of the first month? When does the “the first day” actually start? Exodus chapter 12 verse 18 stipulates that no unleavened bread should be eaten from the evening of 14th of the month up to the evening of the 21st of the month. This gives us 8 days, not 7 days. Yet verse 19 speaks of seven days. Reading it from Leviticus, the feast of unleavened bread starts from the 15th. However, unleavened bread is also clearly eaten on the evening of the 14th, with the Passover lamb. It becomes clear that the evening of the 14th of Nisan is the actual start of the next day – the 15th - when we read:

Exodus 12 Verse 6 “Now you shall keep it until the **fourteenth day of the same month**. Then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall **kill it at twilight**.”

Verse 7 “And they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses where they eat it.”

Verse 8 “Then they shall eat the **flesh on that night**: roasted in fire, with **unleavened bread** and with bitter herbs they shall eat it.

We can therefore conclude that the Passover Lamb was killed just as the sun sets on the 14th, and eaten with unleavened bread that evening. This is the evening that started the new day of the 15th. The feast of unleavened bread however is only counted from the 15th to the 21st, which makes the feast of unleavened bread seven days. Yet when we include the Passover, the feast would be a total of 8 days. This fact is very important to remember when we look at when Christ was crucified. There is absolutely NO indication anywhere from Scripture that unleavened bread was eaten on the evening of the 13th. I will repeat this again. Unleavened bread was counted from the 15th of Nisan, but was eaten from the evening of the 14th with the Passover Lamb, which was actually the start of the 15th, but definitely not the 13th of Nisan.

Okay, so far so good, all seems to be kosher. The first-fruit offering had to be the day after the Sabbath – the first day of the week, which we know as Sunday. We read about this in:

Lev 23:9 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

Lev 23:10 "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the **firstfruits** of your harvest to the priest.

Lev 23:11 He shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, to be accepted on your behalf; on the **day after the Sabbath** the priest shall wave it.

Lev 23:12 And you shall offer on that day, when you wave the sheaf, a male lamb of the first year, without blemish, as a burnt offering to the LORD.

Lev 23:13 Its grain offering shall be two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil, an offering made by fire to the LORD, for a sweet aroma; and its drink offering shall be of wine, one-fourth of a hin.

Lev 23:14 You shall eat neither bread nor parched grain nor fresh grain until the same day that you have brought an offering to your God; it shall be a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings.

Some Christians would claim that Jesus was raised on Saturday evening, which they consider to be the start of the first day of the week, thus symbolizing the first-fruit offering. Their claim is based on the notion that Jesus would have needed to be in the grave a full 72 hour 3 day period, to fulfil the sign of Jonah who was in the fish for three days and three nights. We will get into the validity of this claim in the following sections. Now, with this foundation laid, let us look into the actual historical account according to the four gospels concerning Jesus' last meal and His death in the next two sections.

6.3 The Passover Lamb

In the previous section we saw that the Passover Lamb was chosen and dedicated on the 10th of Nisan and then slaughtered at twilight as sun sets on the 14th of Nisan. The Passover lamb was then eaten that evening with unleavened bread which is the start of the new day, the 15th of Nisan. We also saw that the feast of unleavened bread is counted from the 15th of Nisan. Both events of the Passover Lamb and the week of Unleavened bread were called the Passover as seen in:

Luke 22 verse 1 “Now the **Feast of Unleavened Bread** drew near, which is **called Passover.**”

The question is, was Jesus actually crucified on the 14th of Nisan as some claimed? According to symbolism one would think that Jesus should have been crucified on the 14th if He is the Passover that was sacrificed for us:

1 Corinthians 5 verse 7 Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed **Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.**

Now if Jesus was crucified on the 14th of Nisan, it would have meant that He would have eaten His last supper with His disciples the night before which would be the night of the 13th of Nisan or which can be understood as the start of 14th of Nisan. Now keep in mind that the actual Passover meal was eaten on the evening of the 14th which is the start of 15th as has been established in previous section. Yet according to the gospels it does NOT seem to have happened that way as seen by the following passages in:

Mathew 26 verse 17 “Now on the **first** day of the Feast **of Unleavened Bread** the disciples came to Jesus, saying to Him, ‘Where do you want us to prepare for you to eat the **Passover?**”

Mark 14 verse 12 “Now on the **first day** of **Unleavened Bread**, when they **killed the Passover lamb**, His disciples said to Him, ‘Where do You want us to go and prepare, that You may eat the Passover?’”

Luke 22 verse 7 “Then came the **Day of Unleavened Bread**, when the **Passover must be killed.**
Verse 8 “And He sent Peter and John, saying, ‘Go and prepare the Passover for us, that we may eat.’”

Matthew, Mark and Luke agree that Jesus ate the last supper with His disciples on the Feast of Unleavened Bread which is the Passover. Admittedly Matthew does not use the word “day” or the word “feast” in the original text, but it is implied in accordance with Mark and Luke. The gospel of John does create a point of debate, which we will deal with later on. For now, we can see there is no doubt that according to Matthew, Mark and Luke’s account, Jesus ate the last supper on the evening of the 14th, which is the start of the 15th of Nisan. We read further in:

Luke 22:14 When the hour had come, He sat down, and the twelve apostles with Him.

Verse 15 Then He said to them, “With fervent desire I have desired to eat this **Passover** with you before I suffer;

Verse 16 for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.”

Verse 17 Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, “Take this and divide it among yourselves;

Verse 18 for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.”

Verse 19 And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.”

Verse 20 Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you.

Verse 21 But behold, the hand of My betrayer is with Me on the table.

Jesus institutes what is called the Lord’s Supper on Passover. We will get into the Lord’s Supper as a covenant meal in the last chapter. For now, we must just keep in mind that the Passover was on the evening of the 14th, which was the start of the 15th of Nisan. We established in the previous section that there is no evidence from Scripture that the

feast of unleavened bread was ever celebrated on the 13th of Nisan as some would like us to believe. Now, if Jesus ate the Passover, celebrating the feast of unleavened bread with His disciples, it would mean that Jesus could not have been crucified on the 14th of Nisan. If this is the case, let us look at those passages that are used to try to persuade us that Jesus was crucified on the 14th of Nisan, instead of the following day, the 15th of Nisan. The first such passage we shall look at is:

John 13 verse 1 “Now **before the Feast of the Passover**, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end”
Verse 2 “And **supper being ended**, the devil having already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simons’s son, to betray Him,”

If we take this passage at face value, it seems that verse one is indicating that the supper, which is mentioned in verse two, is before the Passover feast. Yet if one reads carefully, one actually sees that verse one is indicating only that Jesus already knew before the Passover that His time to be crucified was near. Verse two is a new occurrence, which takes us to the time of the actual supper where we read that about thought to betray Jesus had already been placed into Judas’ heart by satan. Verse two does not let us know whether the supper was the Passover or not. In other words, John 13 verse 2 could just as well have been speaking of the Passover meal. This interpretation would agree with what Matthew, Mark and Luke wrote.

The next two passages of debate are found in:

John 18:28 Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas to the Praetorium, and it was early morning. But they themselves did not go into the Praetorium, lest they should be defiled, but that they **might eat the Passover**.

John 19:14 “ Now it was the **Preparation Day of the Passover**, and about the sixth hour. And he said the Jews, “Behold your King”
Verse 15 “But they cried out, “Away with Him, away with Him! Crucify Him! Pilate said to them, ‘Shall I crucify your King?’ ...” The chief priest answered, ‘We have no king but Caesar!’”

These passages clearly speak of the events after the previous evening, when Jesus had His last supper with His disciples. This is the morning when the Jewish leaders handed over Jesus to Pilate for prosecution. In chapter 18 we read that the Jewish leaders are still planning to eat the Passover and chapter 19 it is called “the Preparation Day of the Passover”. These two passages do seem to indicate that it is still the 14th of Nisan when the Passover Lamb would have been slaughtered. What is creating this apparent contradiction is how these passages was translated into English. First of all, the word “Day” in “Preparation Day” in chapters 19, is not used in the original text. The actual text should only read “the Preparation of the Passover”. Keep in mind that the feast of the unleavened bread was also understood as the Feast of Passover during the time of Christ, as we already seen in:

Luke 22 verse 1 “Now the **Feast of Unleavened Bread** drew near, which is **called Passover**.”

Some would argue and say, that **IF** John was speaking of the 15th of Nisan instead of the 14th of Nisan, which I am implying, what “preparation” would need to have been made on the 15th of Nisan; as the Passover Lamb would have already been killed and eaten the previous evening? Well, my response to this is, if you might recall, that on each day during these seven day feast, a burnt offering needed to be prepared. We read about this in:

Num 28:17 And on the **fifteenth day of this month is the feast**; unleavened bread shall be eaten for **seven days**.
Num 28:18 On the first day you shall have a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work.
Num 28:19 And you shall **present an offering made by fire as a burnt offering to the LORD**: two young bulls, one ram, and seven lambs in their first year. Be sure they are without blemish.

We read further in:

Num 28:23 You shall offer these besides the **burnt offering of the morning**, which is for a regular burnt offering.
Num 28:24 In this manner you shall offer the **food of the offering made by fire daily for seven days**, as a sweet aroma to the LORD; it shall be **offered besides** the **regular burnt offering and its drink offering**.

Furthermore, on each day of those seven days, they had to clean their homes to make sure there was no leaven to be found when they ate unleavened bread.

Exodus 12 verse 19 “For seven days **no leaven shall be found in your houses**, since whoever eats what is leavened, that same person shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he is a stranger or a native of the land.”

That means the preparation of the Passover is something that was done on each of those seven days of Passover. This would mean that this “preparation of the Passover”, or the eating of the Passover, refers not just to the 14th of Nisan, but also to the period from the 15th to the 21st of Nisan.

Let us move on to the next point and that is, on which day was the 15th of Nisan when Jesus was crucified? We read that Jesus was buried in a tomb during the “preparation of the Sabbath” in:

Mar 15:42 Now when **evening had come**, because it was the **Preparation Day, that is, the day before the Sabbath**,

Mar 15:43 Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent council member, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, coming and taking courage, went in to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.

As you recall, when the sun sets the day ends and the new day starts according to the Hebrew clock. That would mean that if Mark was referring to Friday evening he would have said: as the Sabbath begins”, instead of writing “the preparation day, the day before the Sabbath”. Thursday evening on the other hand is the start of the preparation day before the Sabbath and continues till the sun sets on Friday, which ushers in the start of the Sabbath. We also read in:

Luk 23:53 Then he took it down, wrapped it in linen, and laid it in a tomb that was hewn out of the rock, where no one had ever lain before.

Luk 23:54 **That day was the Preparation, and the Sabbath drew near.**

Luke does not mention whether it was the evening or not, but if he spoke of the same time frame as Mark, one can assume he also spoke of the Thursday evening, the start of the preparation of the Sabbath. Even John confirms this in:

Joh 19:31 Therefore, because it was the **Preparation Day, that the bodies should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day)**, the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away.

One needs to stress the point that the words: “**for that Sabbath was a high day...**” does not refer to the day that the Passover is killed like some claim. Studying Leviticus chapter 23, we see that the Sabbath or in Hebrew “shabbat” or “shabbaton” is only used for the 7th day Sabbath, the Day of Atonement, the “day of Trumpets”, the first day of the “feast of Tabernacles” and the eight day feast. However the day of “Pentecost” and the first and seventh day of the “Feast of Unleavened bread” are only referred to as **holy convocation**, and NOT as a “Sabbath”.

Leviticus 23 Verse 7 “On the first day you shall have a **holy convocation**; you shall do no customary work on it.

Verse 8 “But you shall offer an offering made by fire to the Lord for seven days. The seventh day shall be a **holy convocation**; you shall do no **customary work** on it.

6.4 The First Fruit.

In the previous sections we saw that Jesus could not have been crucified on the 14th of Nisan – the Wednesday, because He ate the Passover meal with His disciples that evening. Jesus was crucified the following day on the 15th of Nisan – the Thursday, on the first day of unleavened bread. That evening after Jesus was crucified, was the start of the preparation day of the Sabbath, therefore Jesus was taken off from the cross and buried in the tomb.

So let us have a look at some other issues of the debate. Some would claim that we are not able to understand the apostle's writings from a Greek mind-set as they were written for a Hebrew mind-set and culture. That the Apostles wrote for those of a Jewish mind-set is only half true. The apostles also wrote many things for a Greek mind-set as well. Take the gospel of John as an example. Those who have apparently returned to their Israeli roots explain many of John's emphasis on who Jesus is, in the light of a Jewish mind-set. The question is did John actually write according to a Jewish mind-set as they claim? I would disagree with this, as there are many nuances and ideas in John's gospel, such as Jesus being the "logos" or Word of God, which can only, truly, be grasped from Greek philosophy. I don't have the space to get into it now, but let me prove without a doubt that John wrote his gospel for a Greek/Roman mentality and not a Jewish mentality with the following example. We read in:

John 19 verse 14 "Now it was the Preparation Day of the Passover, and about the **sixth hour**. And he said the Jews, "Behold your King"

Verse 15 "But they cried out, "Away with Him, away with Him! Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" Pilate said to them, 'Shall I crucify your King?' The chief priests answered, 'We have no king but Caesar!'"

John explains that Jesus was being prosecuted about the sixth hour. In contrast we read in:

Mark 15 verse 25 "Now it was the **third hour**, and they crucified Him.

Sometime later, while Jesus was on the cross, darkness came over the land. Look at what time Mark writes it was at that point in:

Mark 15 verse 33 "Now when the **sixth hour** had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the **ninth hour**"

Matthew and Luke agree with Mark's time frame, which seems to have a six hour difference to John's account. Why is there this discrepancy? It all has to do to with which mind-set Matthew, Mark, Luke and John wrote their accounts for. Matthew, Mark and Luke are called the synoptic gospels because they record many of the same events or stories of Jesus' life and ministry, and even in the same sequence. The gospel John, on the other hand, has a total different take in explaining who Jesus is. This should not be a surprise, as Matthew, Mark and Luke were written around 50-60 AD, whereas the gospel of John was written between 90-100 AD. The synoptic gospels predominantly dealt with a Jewish mind-set and culture. Even Luke wrote from a Jewish perspective, even though it is very likely written to a Gentile being addressed to Theophilus, which was a typical Roman name at the time.

John on the other hand, was trying to get those who were under a Greek/Roman minds-set and culture to understand who Jesus is. So he used a Greek/Roman time system and not the Jewish time system that Matthew, Mark and Luke used. According to the Hebrew reckoning of time, Jesus would have been prosecuted on the 1st hour of the day as the sun rose, which is about 6am - our time. In a Roman/Greek time frame 6am just means the "the sixth hour", exactly how John has written it. The "third hour" that Mark describes, was the third hour after the sun rose, which is around 9am when Jesus was crucified. The utter darkness, that Mark, Matthew and Luke wrote about, as occurring around the 6th to the 9th hour, refers to how long the sun had been up, which was from about 12 to 3pm, according to Greek/Roman time. If one understands that John wrote using a Greek/Roman mind-set, then one realises that there is no contradiction between his time references and that of the synoptic gospels' timing.

The next point of debate is whether the three days and three nights that Jesus referred to concerning His death and resurrection, was an actual 72 hour time period? We read in:

*Matthew 12 verse 40 For as Jonah was **three days and three nights** in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be **three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.***

As said before, some Christians claim that Jesus was crucified on Wednesday on the 14th of Nisan and was raised on the Saturday at sun-set, thus totalling a full three days and three nights – a complete 72 hours. The problem with this is that it would mean that Jesus was raised on the 4th day, not so? As you recall, Saturday sun-set, is the end of the Sabbath day and the start of the first day of the week. This calculates that Jesus would have been raised on the start of the 4th day. Jesus, however, repeatedly said that He would be raised on the third day; and not the fourth day. For instance, we read the following in:

Mat 17:22 Now while they were staying in Galilee, Jesus said to them, "The Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men,

*Mat 17:23 and they will kill Him, and the **third day** He will be raised up." And they were exceedingly sorrowful.*

*Mar 9:31 For He taught His disciples and said to them, "The Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill Him. And after He is killed, He will rise the **third day.**"*

Luk 24:6 He is not here, but is risen! Remember how He spoke to you when He was still in Galilee,

*Luk 24:7 saying, 'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the **third day** rise again.' "*

The most important evidence is when Jesus met two disciples on the road on the first day of the week. They did not recognise Him, so they were trying to explain to Jesus, whom they thought was a stranger, about all that has happened to the Christ. Look what the two disciples said concerning on which day they met the Lord in:

*Luk 24:21 But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, **today is the third day** since **these things happened.***

*Luk 24:22 Yes, and certain women of our company, **who arrived at the tomb early**, astonished us.*

Luk 24:23 When they did not find His body, they came saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said He was alive.

This is already Sunday, as we see by the fact that the women discovered that morning that Jesus was risen. The disciple said "**today** is the **third day** since these things happened". So, from their witness, Sunday was the third day and not Saturday. So the question we are left with, is whether "three days and three nights" actually means 72 hours or not? From a Jewish perspective three nights and three days only means that there are three times of night and three times of day light, that's all. There is no indication of a complete 72 hours period in Scripture. As we have already seen, Jesus died around 3pm the Thursday. He rose from the dead on the third day – the Sunday morning, while it was still dark, which is gives us three days and three nights.

*Joh 20:1 Now the first day of the week Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early, **while it was still dark**, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb.*

Another point of debatable is found in:

*Mat 27:62 On the **next day**, which **followed the Day of Preparation**, the chief priests and Pharisees gathered together to Pilate,*

*Mat 27:63 saying, "Sir, we remember, while He was still alive, how that deceiver said, '**After three days I will rise.**'*

*Mat 27:64 Therefore command that the tomb be made secure **until the third day**, lest His disciples come by night and steal Him away, and say to the people, 'He has risen from the dead.' So the last deception will be worse than the first."*

Mat 27:65 Pilate said to them, "You have a guard; go your way, make it as secure as you know how."

The debate is about the phrase "... followed the Day of Preparation..." Some would claim that this "preparation is the Preparation of the Passover and not the preparation of the Sabbath. However none of the other gospels supports this view. It is more conceivable that the "next day, which followed the "Day of Preparation", would be Friday evening when the Pharisees came to Pilate just as the Sabbath would start. The Pharisees hypocrisy would not have had a problem that a Roman guard would stand guard during the Sabbath.

This leaves us with the question that if Jesus symbolises the Passover Lamb, why did He not follow the exact time line of when the Passover Lamb was killed? Why was He not crucified on the 14th of Nisan? Well, Jesus' death symbolises more than the Passover Lamb. For instance we read in:

*Num 33:3 They departed from Rameses in the first month, **on the fifteenth day of the first month**; on the day **after the Passover** the children of Israel went out with boldness in the **sight of all the Egyptians**.*

*Num 33:4 For the Egyptians were burying all their **firstborn**, whom the LORD had killed among them. **Also on their gods the LORD had executed judgments**.*

Jesus demonstrated through His death that He brought freedom from the spirit of the Egyptian slavery that is over the lives of all mankind. The first fruit offering that were to be celebrated on the first day after the Sabbath following the Passover each year, represents the first born both from human and livestock that were killed to bring Israel's freedom. The point of symbolism or typology in Scripture, is never to honour the types themselves, in the case of specific days and seasons, but to honour the One that the meaning of those days and season was pointing to - Jesus Christ. Jesus was not there to glorify those days, or bring us back to those days. The same point can be made regarding whether Jesus actually entered Jerusalem on the 10th of Nisan, as some would like us to believe, in order to line up the events of that momentous week with the feasts prescribed by when the Passover lamb was designated. We read in:

*Joh 12:1 Then, **six days before the Passover**, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was who had been dead, whom He had raised from the dead.*

Further on we read what happened "the next day", which would be **five days** before the Passover:

*Joh 12:12 **The next day** a great multitude that had come to the **feast**, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem,*

Joh 12:13 took branches of palm trees and went out to meet Him, and cried out: "Hosanna! 'BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!' The King of Israel!"

Joh 12:14 Then Jesus, when He had found a young donkey, sat on it; as it is written:

Joh 12:15 "FEAR NOT, DAUGHTER OF ZION; BEHOLD, YOUR KING IS COMING, SITTING ON A DONKEY'S COLT."

Think of this, if Jesus was coming into Jerusalem on the 10th of Nisan, as it is claimed in order to coincide with the Passover Lamb, it would mean that the Jews travelled and cut palm branches down on the Sabbath. Remember the 14th was on a Wednesday which makes the 10th to be the Saturday and Sabbath. The Jews would not have done this on a Sabbath. However, when reading John chapter 12 verse 1 and then verse 12, we see that Jesus entered Jerusalem **five days** before the feast of the Passover. Now, if the Passover started on the Wednesday, it would mean that Jesus came into Jerusalem on the Friday the 9th of Nisan (five days before the Passover), and not the Saturday the 10th of Nisan.

Once again, we see that Jesus did not try presenting Himself as the Passover Lamb through the actual literal days and feasts. Why not? I repeat: He did not come to glorify days and seasons.

6.5. The Covenant of Breaking Bread

In Part 3 “A Church without Religion” we saw that the early Christians celebrated the breaking of bread, almost every day, but later on, predominately on the first day of the week. As said before, the breaking of bread was not the same thing as the Passover meal. Jesus did establish the breaking of bread practice on the evening of the 14th of Nisan when He ate the Passover meal with His disciples, but it was only the bread and the wine that was used to depict the new covenant and not the bitter herbs, and the Passover Lamb. Why is that? The Passover meal reminded Israel of how God delivered them from under the slavery of the Egyptians, which foreshadowed what Jesus would come to do for us. In contrast though, the breaking of bread demonstrates us, being one body in Christ and the cup demonstrated the new covenant made in Christ’s blood:

1 Corinthians 10 verse 16 *The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?*

Verse 17 *For we, though many, **are one bread and one body**; for **we all partake of that one bread**.*

Matthew 26 verse 26 *And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, "Take, eat; **this is My body**."*

Verse 27 *Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, **all of you**."*

Verse 28 *For this is **My blood of the new covenant**, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.*

There is however something that was not mentioned in Part 3, and that is that the breaking of bread has its origins as a covenant meal way back when Melchizedek met Abraham:

Gen 14:18 *Then Melchizedek king of Salem **brought out bread and wine**; he was the priest of God Most High.*

Gen 14:19 *And he blessed him and said: "Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth;*

Gen 14:20 *And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand." And he gave him a tithe of all.*

The author of Hebrews depicts Jesus according to the order of Melchizedek.

Heb 5:9 *And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him,*

Heb 5:10 *called by God as High Priest "ACCORDING TO THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK,"*

The author of Hebrews writes further on:

Heb 7:1 *For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, ...*

To understand what differentiates the breaking of bread from the Passover, we must look at another issue of debate and that has to do with the new covenant that Jesus spoke of in Matthew chapter 26. We ended in Part 5 explaining the difference between the covenant of the Spirit and the covenant of the flesh. However there are those who would like us believe that Scripture does not speak of a “new” covenant but a “renewed” covenant. So let us look into this in more detail. We read in:

Heb 8:8 *Because finding fault with them, He says: "BEHOLD, THE DAYS ARE COMING, SAYS THE LORD, WHEN I WILL MAKE A **NEW** COVENANT WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AND WITH THE HOUSE OF JUDAH—*

The author of Hebrews continues in:

Heb 8:13 *In that He says, "A **NEW** COVENANT," He has made the **first obsolete**. Now what is becoming obsolete and **growing old is ready to vanish away**.*

This is definitely not a renewed covenant but a covenant that has replaced the previous covenant. The author of Hebrews continues in:

Heb 12:22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels,

Heb 12:23 to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect,

*Heb 12:24 to Jesus the Mediator of the **new** covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.*

In chapter, 8 and chapter 12 the author of Hebrews uses two different Greek words for “new”. In chapter 12 he uses the Greek word “neos”, which indicates something “recent”; whereas in chapter 8 he uses the Greek word “kainos” which refers to something “fresh”. The difference in the use of these words is clearly seen in the gospel of Mark, when Jesus used the following analogy:

*Mar 2:22 And no one puts **new** (“neos” – recent) wine into old wineskins; or else the new wine bursts the wineskins, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But new wine must be put into **new** (“kainos” – fresh) wineskins.”*

So it is clear from the Greek use of the words “new covenant” cannot be interpreted as a “renewed covenant”. So where does this idea: “renewed covenant” come from? Well, Hebrews 8 is a quotation from the following passage:

*Jer 31:31 "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a **new covenant** with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—*

*Jer 31:32 **not according to the covenant** that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to **lead them out of the land of Egypt**, My covenant which they broke, **though I was a husband to them**, says the LORD.*

Jer 31:33 But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

The Hebrew word use here for new in “new covenant” is: “chadash”. The word “chadash” is often translated as “renewed”. However the word “chadash” is also translated: “recent” or “fresh” in the following examples:

*Lev 23:16 Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath; then you shall offer a **new** grain offering to the LORD.*

Again in:

*Exo 1:8 Now there arose a **new** king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph.*

In both cases it is impossible to interpret “chadash” to mean “renewed grain” or a “renewed king”. It can only be understood as “new”, “recent” or “fresh”. Also, Jeremiah 31 verse 32 makes it clear that this covenant will **NOT** be according to the covenant made with them **through Moses**. This new covenant is not about laws and regulations that were written on tablets or books given to Moses. This new covenant is about God’s laws and regulations written in our hearts through the Spirit. This is the Law of the Spirit that we looked at in the previous Part 5 “A Church without Days”.

2Co 3:5 Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God,

*2Co 3:6 who also made us sufficient as ministers of the **new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.***

*2Co 3:7 But if the ministry of death, written and **engraved on stones**, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance, which glory was passing away,*

*2Co 3:8 how will the ministry **of the Spirit** not be more glorious?*

*2Co 3:9 For if the **ministry of condemnation** had glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory.*

2Co 3:10 For even what was made glorious had no glory in this respect, because of the glory that excels.

2Co 3:11 For if what is passing away was glorious, what remains is much more glorious.

We are dealing with two different covenants with two different types of descendants of Abraham; an Israel according to the Spirit and an Israel according to the flesh. The Israel according to the spirit has a covenant through the circumcision of the heart, which brings us under the law of the Spirit. The Israel according to the flesh is a covenant through the circumcision of the flesh, which brings people under the law of the Letter.

For that matter it is important to understand that we are dealing with two different covenants, or else the relationship between Jesus and our Father would resemble that of Babylonian / Egyptian idol worship. Let me explain, using the mythology of Osiris, Nimrod and Tammuz (probably same mythology but with different names from different nations), who married their own mothers. We saw in Jeremiah 31 verse 32, that God our Father revealed Himself to be the Husband of Israel according to the flesh. Now look how Paul places the relation between Christ and the church in:

Eph 5:31 "FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH."

*Eph 5:32 This is a great mystery, but **I speak concerning Christ and the church.***

The church cannot be the same as the physical Israel, as that would mean that the Son marries his own mother who is the physical Israel. We see this in:

*Rev 12:1 Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of **twelve stars.***

*Rev 12:2 Then **being with child**, she cried out in labor and in pain to give birth...*

Rev 12:5 She bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was caught up to God and His throne.

It is very clear from John's revelation that the physical Israel is depicted as the mother of Jesus that Paul spoke of in Ephesians. If this covenant was only a renewed covenant then it would mean that the church is the physical Israel and would mean that Christ is marrying his mother, the wife of his father. Jesus would not marry the wife of His Father, as that is against God's command and resembles that of Egyptian / Babylonian worship.

Jesus is going to get married to a Spiritual Israel not an Israel according to the flesh. On these bases we break the bread in drink of the cup till that day when we do so with the Groom of the church:

Mat 22:1 And Jesus answered and spoke to them again by parables and said:

*Mat 22:2 "The **kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son,***

Mat 26:26 And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is My body."

Mat 26:27 Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you.

Mat 26:28 For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.

*Mat 26:29 But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink **it new with you in My Father's kingdom.**"*

Part 7: A Church without Lords

7.1: A Kingdom

One can see from the first six teachings in the series: “A Church Beyond Imagination”, that we need a radical paradigm shift in our perspective of what church actually is. We repeat; the church that Christ is building has nothing to do with being a religion but everything to do with His kingdom. So if it is so simple, why is it that it seems so difficult for the church to return to the biblical way of Church?

Let us ask you something that we think will answer that question and will lay the platform for this part of the series. Have you ever heard the question: “Who is your covering?” It is a spiritual way of asking you to name the church institution to which you are accountable to. It comes from a particular ideology that one needs to belong to some institution in order for one to be spiritually protected. Yet this is in fact a façade, because in reality; belonging to an institution does not place us under any real covering. Be honest, how many Christians are really accountable to anyone, even though they function within the church program?

Many Christians only belong to some kind of church institute while it serves their need to be religiously entertained, or to be recognized for the so-called ministry they do. If that purpose is not accomplished in a particular church institution, they would simply move on to another institution that fits their blend of Christianity. How is this being accountable to anyone?

Before we look in-depth into this issue of church covering and the role of the so-called leaders of the church, we would like to look at a situation that occurred in Old Testament times to help us understand something that is going on in church practice today. Paul writes concerning the Old Testament Scriptures, in:

Romans 15 verse 4 For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.

The Old Testament serve as examples for us to illustrate what happens when people deviate from God’s plan and what happens when people follow God’s plan. So, even though Judaism was a state religion and Christianity is supposed to be a spiritual kingdom, there are instances when Christians can learn from the Old Testament. Let us carefully read the following passage in 1 Samuel to discern God's will concerning how His people are to be led:

1 Samuel 8 verse 6 But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, "Give us a king to judge us." So Samuel prayed to the LORD.

Verse 7 And the LORD said to Samuel, "Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them.

Verse 8 According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt, even to this day—with which they have forsaken Me and served other gods—so they are doing to you also.

Verse 9 Now therefore, heed their voice. However, you shall solemnly forewarn them, and show them the behavior of the king who will reign over them."

Verse 10 So Samuel told all the words of the LORD to the people who asked him for a king.

Right up to the time of Samuel, God always sent men to be judges over Israel to deal with issues as they arose. Because of this, everyone in Israel was aware it was God that was their King and their Ruler. The judges God sent were only instruments of God and servants of the people. They hardly ever acted as lords over the nation. Yet Israel in the time of Samuel wanted a king that could govern them as a nation. So let us now continue to read from:

1 Samuel 8 verse 11 And he said, "This will be the behavior of the king who will reign over you: He will take your sons and appoint them for his own chariots and to be his horsemen, and some will run before his chariots.

Verse 12 He will appoint captains over his thousands and captains over his fifties, will set some to plow his ground and reap his harvest, and some to make his weapons of war and equipment for his chariots.

Verse 13 He will take your daughters to be perfumers, cooks, and bakers.

Verse 14 And he will take the best of your fields, your vineyards, and your olive groves, and give them to his servants.

Verse 15 He will take a tenth of your grain and your vintage, and give it to his officers and servants.

Verse 16 And he will take your male servants, your female servants, your finest young men, and your donkeys, and put them to his work.

Verse 17 He will take a tenth of your sheep. And you will be his servants.

Verse 18 And you will cry out in that day because of your king whom you have chosen for yourselves, and the LORD will not hear you in that day."

What was God's warning to Israel in desiring a man to be king over them? The king would require the people to serve his purpose in his kingdom. Secondly, he would demand the people's best resources and then even tax them 10 percent of their income. Is there not an eerie familiarity in this warning when we consider what so-called pastors require from the church today? Despite this warning from God, what was Israel's response?

1 Samuel 8 verse 19 Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, "No, but we will have a king over us,

Verse 20 that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles."

Israel wanted to be like the other nations who had a king of flesh and blood in charge over them when they fought their enemies. In other words, they were willing to pay to have a man, rather than God, to look after them as a nation.

So what has this got to do with church? To answer this we need to have a look at some historical church events again. When the apostle John, the last of the 12, died around 100 AD, the desire of the church grew more and more to be like the religions that were run by men whom they could see, rather than being content to be a kingdom under an invisible King and Saviour. In the beginning of the second century, elders such as Ignatius of Antioch, Clement of Rome and Tertullian, introduced the hierarchy structure in the church. The terminology of "clergy" and "laity" came about to separate the church into two groups: those who were in charge and those who were to follow. As time went on, the overseers of the church started to claim more and more authority over the church.

Then something drastic happened, to the delight of those who hunger for control and power. As we have looked into before, around 300 AD, Constantine supposedly became the first Christian Roman Emperor. Constantine wanted Christianity to become an official state religion, and so devised a way for Christianity to become institutionalized. But in order for Christianity to be institutionalized, it had to develop an institutional infrastructure, such as a unified doctrine of beliefs.

So, around 325 AD Constantine called the famous council of Nicea to try to establish doctrinal unity especially over the deity of Christ. By institutionalizing Christianity, Constantine could give state benefits in the form of official religious buildings and subsidies for the clergy, who would have some kind of priestly function and authority, as was practiced by the heathen religions.

Even though many Christians today hail this council meeting as the greatest doctrinal breakthrough, it inevitably became our greatest spiritual downfall. You see, after the counsel of Nicea, doctrine was not taught and understood anymore through the revelation of the Spirit but accomplished by brute force; dictated by an institution. So here the church, that was supposed to be governed by another dimension in the Spirit, was now brought down to this world of man-made rule. From this point on, servants of the church were not called by the Spirit of God, but were appointed by an institution.

Man took control over the church that was institutionalised. The saints who allowed it to happen became spiritually dull and carnal and wanted someone they could see to govern them more than Christ whom they could not see. Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers in the New Testament were to serve a similar role to the Judges, Prophets and elders of the Old Testament. Their role was only to lead God's people under the rulership of their God.

Yet there came a time when those who were to serve the church took on themselves the role of kings and Levitical priests over the church. Those functioning as elders took the name “bishops” as a title, in order to be exalted as lords of the church. Today we might call them pastors but they have the same role and power over the church as was given them in the time of Constantine.

Just think about what a so-called pastor requires in human resources to accomplish his so-called God given vision for the church. Is it not eerie how pastors, like Israel’s kings, claim 10% of people’s income and human resources to sustain their man-made kingdoms that they call the church? Yet many Christians will rather pay to have a man govern the church than have an invisible Saviour be the Head of the church.

Let us for a moment just return to Israel’s history to consider some other lessons written there for the church today. It was not too long after Israel appointed kings to rule over them instead of God Himself, that they encountered their spiritual downfall. Israel’s first king, King Saul, was ruled by pride and jealousy, which caused rebellion towards God. Israel’s second king, King David, even though the best king they ever had, caused the murder of one of his best servants in order to have his wife. The third king, King Solomon was so overtaken by the wisdom and lust of this world, that he fell prey to idolatry.

By the fourth king, King Rehoboam, things really got bad. Through poor management decisions such as increased taxation, Israel was split into two kingdoms. The new king of the north, King Jeroboam, made two idols and with them two more places of worship other than Jerusalem. He did this so that the people in his kingdom would not go to the southern kingdom to worship God in Jerusalem and so doing keep control of his kingdom. This account can be read in 1 Kings chapter 12.

Now guess what happened after Constantine institutionalised Christianity and appointed elders to be bishops over the places of worship for the church? By the third council in 431 AD, the Council of Ephesus, and the fourth council, the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD, the church got divided into three denominations, namely: The Assyrian Church of the East; the Oriental Orthodoxy; and of course the Roman Catholic Church. The power struggle led to the creation of more places of worship and so idol worship entered the church gradually over the years. Even with the rise of the Protestant church in the 16th century the “institution of man's control” continued to prevail and so more and more denominations came about with more and more places of worship.

7.2: Head of the church

Let us ask the questions that we guess you are thinking about: If there is supposed to be **no** institution, who will run the church? Surely we need some kind of leader? How can a church function without a leader of some sort? Israel had the same philosophy when they desired a man to be king over them as opposed to having God over them as king. Look what Paul writes in:

Ephesians 1 verse 22 And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, Verse 23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

Who is the Head of the church? Christ Himself of course. Why do we even want mere men to be the head of the church if Christ is in our midst? Some would say, well they do have Christ as their head but one still need leaders to be in charge. Does the Bible really teach that leaders need to be in charge over the church? Peter writes in:

1 Peter 5 verse 1 The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed:

Verse 2 Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly;

*Verse 3 **nor as being lords over those entrusted to you**, but being examples to the flock;*

Verse 4 and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.

Elders are to serve by example and lead the flock to the actual Shepherd, Jesus Christ. Elders don't lord over the flock. Lording over the church means to run, control or have positional authority over the church. Peter teaches us that Christ is Lord over the church and so only Christ is to run and have authority over the church. Peter's teaching is based on what Jesus taught in:

Matthew 20 verse 25 But Jesus called them to Himself and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them.

Verse 26 Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant.

Verse 27 And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—

Verse 28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

The words of Christ are repeated this way in:

Luke 22 verse 24 Now there was also a dispute among them, as to which of them should be considered the greatest.

Verse 25 And He said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called 'benefactors.'

Verse 26 But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves.

Verse 27 For who is greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as the One who serves.

In God's kingdom those who want to lead is supposed to be the church's servant. A servant is actually a slave which is the complete opposite of someone who would run or control the church. The next thing Jesus speaks of is a benefactor. A benefactor is one who benefits from those who he or she is in charge over, whether he/she is benefiting financially or reaching his or her career goals. None of these things are appropriate for those who want to serve the church.

Another aspect of lording or exercising positional authority over others is when one makes decisions on behalf of others or takes charge over others. Let me read to you an example of an elder who was lording and taking positional authority over the church in:

3 John 1 verse 9 I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not

receive us.

Verse 10 Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church.

Verse 11 Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God.

What evil did John talk about that Diotrephes did? Diotrephes took pre-eminence in the church. He decided whom he would welcome and whom he would not welcome in the church. Does your pastor exercise pre-eminence in the church, for instance deciding who is and who is not allowed to minister in the church, or who is and is not welcome in the church?

Some of you might object to this line of questioning, and respond that the apostles exercised authority. It is true that they exercised authority, but the question is: What kind of authority did they actually exercise? Paul writes in:

1 Corinthians 4 verse 19 But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord wills, and I will know, not the word of those who are puffed up, but the power.

Verse 20 For the kingdom of God is not in word but in power.

Later Paul writes the following in:

2 Corinthians 10 verse 8 For even if I should boast somewhat more about our authority, which the Lord gave us for edification and not for your destruction, I shall not be ashamed—

Is Paul's authority exercised from a position he received from a man-made institution? No, the authority he received was from Christ and it is seen by the demonstration of the power of the Holy Spirit. Authority that is demonstrated by the power of the Holy Spirit is quite different from institutional authority. We see an example of this in:

Acts 5 verse 1 But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession.

Verse 2 And he kept back part of the proceeds, his wife also being aware of it, and brought a certain part and laid it at the apostles' feet.

Verse 3 But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself?"

Verse 4 While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God."

Verse 5 Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last. So great fear came upon all those who heard these things.

Verse 6 And the young men arose and wrapped him up, carried him out, and buried him.

Verse 7 Now it was about three hours later when his wife came in, not knowing what had happened.

Verse 8 And Peter answered her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much?" She said, "Yes, for so much."

Verse 9 Then Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out."

Verse 10 Then immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. And the young men came in and found her dead, and carrying her out, buried her by her husband.

In this example do we see Peter using institutional authority? For instance, did Peter slay Ananias and his wife with his own hands? No, he just spoke the word that the Holy Spirit gave him to speak. It was God who judged Ananias and his wife. Did Peter receive this kind of authority because he had some theological degree or was appointed by some denominational institution? Of course not, Christ appointed him and this was confirmed by the demonstration of the Holy Spirit.

We read further in:

Acts 5 verse 13 Yet none of the rest dared join them, but the people esteemed them highly.

With this kind of authority men just don't dare appoint themselves, they wait upon the Lord to appoint them. So what is the difference between institutional authority and authority that is from the Lord? Paul writes in:

1 Corinthians 2 verse 4 And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power,

Verse 5 that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

And then in:

2 Corinthians 10 verse 18 For not he who commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends.

Institutional authority in many cases is based on human wisdom, whereas authority from God is through the demonstration of the Spirit of God. When we talk about the power of God, we are not referring to the foolish behaviour that is linked to the New-Age spiritual performances that are occurring in many so-called churches. Authority that is from God is neither demonstrated as a performance on a stage nor in words of men's wisdom but in the acts of God confirming His instruction. Let us illustrate this with the following fictional analogy:

A king sends out a messenger – one of his SERVANTS – to go to one of his Generals that are on the battlefield with an instruction. The instruction had to do with strengthening the left flank that is in a vulnerable area of the battle. In this scenario the General has positional authority, and the messenger or servant has command authority. In other words the servant does not have positional authority over the General. If the servant even tried to claim to have a position over the General, he would be in danger of being executed for his arrogance. Yet the General will heed to the servants commands from the king, because it comes from the king and not because of some kind of position that the messenger has. The apostles as well as all other ministers given to the church, have command authority like the SERVANT and not positional authority like the General.

Take the time to meditate on the differences before dealing with the next section.

7.3: Biblical authority

There are some Scriptures that are often used by the institutional church to justify institutional authority. One of the most often used is found in:

Hebrews 13 verse 17 Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.

Surely when you read words like ‘rule over you’ you should sense that this is in contradiction with Jesus’ instruction in Matthew 20 versus 25-28 and Luke 22 verse 25, that we are to serve and not to rule over each other. Obviously there is no contradiction in Scripture, so it can only be an incorrect translation of Scriptures. So let us have a look at the original text.

The Greek word for a ruler to show governmental or institutional authority, such as used in Romans 13, is the Greek word “arxontes”. On the other hand the author of Hebrews does not use this Greek word to depict institutional authority but uses the Greek word “hygoumenois” which, according to the Greek-Lexicon, means to ‘guide’. It carries the idea of influencing others to follow a recommended course of action, for instance, in the way a guide helps tourists through unfamiliar territory of the country. A tour guide does not rule over the tourists but guides them with good instructions.

The Greek word for ‘obey’ in Hebrews 13:17 is: “peithesthe”, and literally means ‘to submit to reason’. This is the same word used in Acts 27:21, when Paul told the captain of the ship that they ought to have ‘taken heed’ of his warnings not to sail to Crete. It is obvious that Paul had no positional authority over the prison guards and the captain as he was their prisoner. The word “peithesthe”, in other words, gives the idea that we are to submit to the persuasive reasoning of the one who gives instructions and has nothing to do with positional authority. So we are to take heed of the instructions of those who are looking after our spiritual well-being, like we would with a tour-guide in dangerous and unfamiliar terrain and not because he has a “position” over us.

The next word in this passage which we need to look at, is the word ‘submissive’, which is translated from the Greek word “hupeikete”, which literally means ‘to yield’. Think about it; should we yield to a man-made institutional authority or rather yield to the instructions a fellow servant gives from the Lord? Common sense dictates to us that we do not yield to a man but to God. In other words we yield to the instructions of a servant only if the instructions are from the Lord and not because the person is appointed by some man-made institution.

When Peter wrote that we are to submit to elders, he continued to write that in actual fact we all need to submit to one another, in:

1 Peter 5 verse 5 Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for "GOD RESISTS THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE."

Paul writes the same in:

Ephesians 5 verse 21 submitting to one another in the fear of God.

So, in actual fact, we all need to submit to one another as we all belong to the body of Christ. There is no reference of Scripture that we are to submit to an institution. Here is an important challenge to those who are seen as shepherds or pastors of the church. Are you able to submit to the brothers and sisters in the fellowship you are part of? Or do you think that as a pastor you are above the counsel of the church fellowship?

Another passage that is often misquoted to show institutional authority is where Paul instructs Titus in the following: *Titus 2 verse 15 Speak these things, and exhort, and rebuke **with all authority**. Let no one despise you.*

With what kind of authority is Paul talking about to Titus? Authority that is from the word of God or from an institutional position Titus received? Well, “these things” that Titus was to speak, referred to what Paul had received

from God, with the authority it carried coming from God. So the authority is from the word of God and not in some kind of institutional position conferred on Titus.

Then there are passages like:

*1 Timothy 5 verse 17 Let the elders that **rule** well be counted worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in the word and in teaching.*

Here the word “rule” is the Greek word “*proistemi*” which literally means those who stand before, which meant those who lead or attend to things. So the passage actually means: “Let the elders that **attend** to things well be counted worthy...” Man is power hungry and is more interested in building their own kingdoms in the form of their ministering career as opposed to building the kingdom of God. Listen to what the Lord spoke through the prophet Ezekiel to the shepherds and the sheep of Israel in:

Ezekiel 34 verse 1 And the word of the LORD came to me, saying,

Verse 2 "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD to the shepherds: "Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks?"

Verse 3 You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool; you slaughter the fatlings, but you do not feed the flock.

Verse 4 The weak you have not strengthened, nor have you healed those who were sick, nor bound up the broken, nor brought back what was driven away, nor sought what was lost; but with force and cruelty you have ruled them.

Verse 5 So they were scattered because there was no shepherd; and they became food for all the beasts of the field when they were scattered.

Verse 6 My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and on every high hill; yes, My flock was scattered over the whole face of the earth, and no one was seeking or searching for them."

Verse 7 "Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD:

Verse 8 "As I live," says the Lord GOD, "surely because My flock became a prey, and My flock became food for every beast of the field, because there was no shepherd, nor did My shepherds search for My flock, but the shepherds fed themselves and did not feed My flock"—

Verse 9 therefore, O shepherds, hear the word of the LORD!

Verse 10 Thus says the Lord GOD: "Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require My flock at their hand; I will cause them to cease feeding the sheep, and the shepherds shall feed themselves no more; for I will deliver My flock from their mouths, that they may no longer be food for them."

What was wrong with the shepherds of Israel? They were more interested in their own financial gain than in the well-being of those whom they were to shepherd. What was God’s warning to the shepherds of Israel? That He would take away the flock from them and that they would not be able to make their living from them anymore.

Do you not think it is possible that God will deal with the church today in the same way? Well, as we draw closer to Christ’s return, Ezekiel’s prophecy is going to become a reality in the church as it was in Israel.

The obsession by pastors in the church for positional authority has also led us to an unbiblical use of titles. Jesus instructed the following in:

Matthew 23 verse 8 But you, do not be called 'Rabbi'; for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren.

Verse 9 Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven.

Verse 10 And do not be called teachers; for One is your Teacher, the Christ.

Verse 11 But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant.

Verse 12 And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

Having titles is the opposite of being a servant. Even the title of “deacon” has a sense of irony. The word “deacon” comes from the Greek word “*diakanos*” and literally means “servant” or “slave”. It was never meant to be used as an institutional office. Let us challenge you to do something quite eye-opening. Find all the passages that talk about so-called deacons and change the word *deacon* to *servant* or *slave*. Then read those passages again with those

changes and you will be amazed how this change brings a clearer understanding of those passages. We will do one passage for you:

1 Timothy 3 verse 8 Likewise SERVANTS must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money,

Verse 9 holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience.

Verse 10 But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as SLAVES, being found blameless.

Verse 11 Likewise, their wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things.

Verse 12 Let SERVANTS be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well.

Verse 13 For those who have served well as SLAVES obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.

What are these servants or slaves that the Bible is talking about? Servants are any group of people that are selected by the church to administer a certain task, such as distributing funds to the needs of the saints or to provide ministries to the church. These servants ministered as evangelists, teachers, prophets, and even apostles. All of them are deacons or correctly translated: servants. In some passages the word deacon is even translated “minister” such as:

Colossians 4 verse 7 Tychicus, a beloved brother, faithful minister (diakanos), and fellow servant (sundoulos) in the Lord, will tell you all the news about me.

By using the phrase “fellow servant”, Paul is identifying with Tychicus who is the same as he is; a servant in the Lord. Here the words “fellow servant” is the Greek word “sundoulos” which means a co-slave. Imagine being a slave in ministering to the church?

7.4: Pastors

This leads us to the well-known title of “pastor”. Would you be surprised to know that the word “pastor” as a noun is only found ONCE in the New Testament, and that is in this often quoted passage in:

Ephesians 4 verse 11 *And he gave some to be apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, **pastors** and teachers;*

Nowhere else in the whole of the New Testament do we ever read about: “pastors”. You would think there would be a lot more said about pastors in the New Testament when we see how much value we place on them in our modern institutional church. There are two other passages though that do talk about who were to pastor or shepherd the church, where the word pastor or shepherd is used as a verb. The one we have read often before which is:

1 Peter 5 verse 1 *The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed:*

Verse 2 **Shepherd/or Pastor** *the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly;*

Again, in Acts 20, we read that Paul addressed the elders and gave them some instructions before he departed from them for the last time. We are reading from:

Acts 20 verse 28 *Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers (bishops), **to shepherd (pastor)** the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.*

So who was responsible to shepherd the flock? Right through the New Testament we only read of elders who are to oversee and shepherd or pastor the church. If you recall from Part One of this series, in explaining tithing and offerings, we quoted from:

1 Timothy 5 verse 17 *Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in the word and in teaching.*

Once again; who is to receive a double honour for their labour?

1. The Pastor
2. The Head Elder
3. The elders who labour well in preaching the gospel and teaching.

It refers to elders and not pastors. Why do you think that is? Well, it is obvious that the elders were the “pastors”. “Elders”, “shepherds” and “pastors” are descriptive designations and are used interchangeably.

Here is something else to think about by the following two passages that deal with appointing elders in the church. The first is found in:

Titus 1 verse 5 *For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you—*

Did Paul instruct Timothy to appoint pastors or elders in the church? The only thing that Paul found was lacking was to appoint elders and not pastors in every city. We read in:

Acts 14 verse 21 *And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch,*

Verse 22 *strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God."*

Verse 23 *So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.*

In your opinion, why do we read of elders that were appointed and never about pastors being appointed? We read about evangelists, prophets, teachers and apostles, in the rest of the New Testament, especially in the book of Acts, but we do not read about pastors, why is that? Every serious Bible scholar will tell you that there were no separate offices of elders, overseers and pastors, as is practiced in the institutional church today. The elders were the pastors and overseers of the church. The institutional church that is run by a pastor who has a board of elders underneath him and a board of deacons underneath them is completely unscriptural.

Even the word overseer, which is sometimes translated “bishop”, was only used to indicate a function of the elders. There were no “bishops” as a title of an office overseeing the church as is practiced in some institutional churches today. The plain truth is that elders did both the pastoring and overseeing or “bishops” of the church.

Today’s over-emphasis on pastors has led to one man leading the show, while building his own little kingdom. The church of Christ was never built or run by just one person or the selected few. When Paul was addressing divisions in the church, Paul wrote the following to the Corinthian church in:

1 Corinthians 3 verse 6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.

Verse 7 So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase.

Verse 8 Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor.

Verse 9 For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building.

According to Paul, is the church only ministered to by one type of minister? No, it is necessary that there are different types of servants with different abilities that God uses for the well-being of the whole church. Do you think it is a well-balanced church with just one pastor being responsible for the entire ministry of the church? Do you think there might be something spiritually wrong with the church if so-called ministers from different fellowships cannot work together in serving Christ’s church in that city or town?

We read about not just one but five gifts given to equip the church so its members can minister to one another.

Ephesians 4 verse 11 And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers,

Verse 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,

Is Paul referring to functions in the church or titles? Let us read the same text, but this time we will read it to you with a more literal wording, as the original Ephesian church would have understood it in their native Greek tongue:

“...And He gave some to be “commissioners of Christ”, and some to be “God’s spokesmen”, and some to be “messengers of the gospel”, and some to be “shepherds” and “instructors”...”

The word apostle comes from the Greek word “apostolos” which literally means a “sent one”, which refers to a delegate, commissioner or an ambassador. The first generation apostles were sent out by Christ himself to make disciples of the whole world. The second generation apostles have the same mission but are sent out by the body of Christ, which is the church. Disciples are made as churches are planted. When a church was planted, the apostles would move on to plant churches somewhere else.

The term “prophet” comes from the Greek word “prophaytace” which literally means one who speaks forth. It is someone who would speak the words of God or who spoke under the inspiration of God. Prophets would go from church to church and redirect the church to Christ if the church had strayed away from the truth. They would also give words of encouragement from the Lord to the churches that were suffering.

The term “evangelist” comes from the Greek word “euangelistace” which literally meant a messenger. Evangelists would preach the gospel of the Kingdom to people. They would assist the apostles to grow the churches numerically

by proclaiming the gospel further afield, which helped the apostles to take more time to make disciples thereby establishing churches. They would also function as messengers between the churches where necessary.

The “pastors”, or in Greek “poimen”, literally means shepherds. They would come only later on in the picture. Elders, as we have seen already, were the pastors or shepherds of the church. Elders were recognized and appointed only after some time when a city-church grew to a couple of fellowships.

Who then appointed the elders/overseers/pastors over the church?

1. The denomination
2. The church institution
3. The Holy Spirit

Well let us read in:

*Acts 20 verse 28 Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, **among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers**, to shepherd/or pastor the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.*

It is the Holy Spirit that makes some disciples to be elders of the church. When the Holy Spirit has made some to be elders in order to shepherd and oversee the church, the church would recognize these men and the apostles would then be able to appoint or give them official recognition.

The responsibilities of the elders were to correct wrong teachings and to teach the church to discern error. The elders therefore also had to function as teachers in the church. Yet the gift of teaching was not necessarily exclusively owned by the pastors, as many in the church could have the gift of teaching.

The word “teacher” is the Greek word, “didaskalos” which literally meant “instructor”. As you might recall from part two, concerning the “ekklesia” church, the meetings of the “ekklesia were interactive. This meant that teachings were also interactive. Some might sense the need to teach in a particular meeting about a particular topic. Yet the teaching was not a monologue preaching. It was and should be interactive, so that questions may be asked freely; and the topic discussed. Healthy debates were welcomed as long as they did not end in fruitless arguments.

The church that Christ builds has to have all of these ministries to function correctly. The church does not need all of them at the same time, but all of these gifts would be evident at times in a healthy church. No one person would have all of these giftings. Where there is only one pastor running the show it would eventually quench the gifts in the church and create a passive and unbalanced church with a very unhealthy spiritual diet.

7.5: Run by brethren

Can you imagine a church that is not run by any one person? Something else that goes beyond our imagination is the fact that most Bible scholars agree that most of the churches that we read about in the Bible functioned without elders for between 3 to 7 years in their infancy. Why was it that the church of *Lystra, Iconium, Antioch, and Crete*, had no elders for such a long period of time? Why did Paul only after a couple of years have passed that he would go back to every city or send Titus to every city to appoint elders?

Here is a hint. Paul writes to Timothy concerning the requirements of an overseer in:

1 Timothy 3 verse 6 not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil. Verse 7 Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

Christians have to be Christians for a while, for them not to be a novice anymore, and to have had time to build up a good testimony. So it is obvious that the churches needed to function for a while so that those who were called to be elders would first be closely observed to see whether they were able to oversee the church.

Paul writes in:

1 Corinthians 11 verse 19 For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you.

Then in:

2 Corinthians 10 verse 18 For not he who commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends.

And again in:

1 Timothy 3 verse 10 But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons/servants, being found blameless.

Who are to serve the church as elders?

1. They who have a Bible college degree and is a good public speaker
2. They who have been approved by the Spirit, and tested by the brothers, especially when there are factions among the brothers.

If you look at who qualifies today to be elders or pastors in the institutional church and who qualified to be elders or pastors in Bible times you will see a big difference in the required qualifications. The problem we have then is who is to run the church for the time that is needed for people to be first approved? Would you be surprised to learn that the church was never run by apostles and elders in the first place? Now I know this might be hard for you to accept and the reason is because the institutional church in general does not have the faith to be led by Christ Himself. It sounds too mystical. Furthermore, how is the church supposed to have faith that Christ is able to run the church without a human mediator if the church has never seen it happen before?

Elders, apostles and prophets were to instruct and guide the church in the ways of the Lord, as with the judges, prophets and elders of the Old Testament. Their ultimate goal is to disciple the church to be able to hear the voice of the Lord for themselves. They are not to make decisions for or on behalf of the church. The church as a body has to discern the voice of the Lord and as a body make decisions. The church fellowship makes decisions as a whole under the leading of the Holy Spirit and not under the dictates of one person or of a few elect.

The church which is a spiritual entity is not supposed to have human government. That which is built in the Spirit has to be governed by the Spirit. Human government over spiritual matters makes followers vulnerable to sectarian influences and leaders. Sectarian influences over the institutional church today are spreading like wild fire as the followers have no ability to discern. Instead they are being trained to hear a man on a stage as opposed to hearing the voice of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We are not talking about a democracy either. The church is not a democracy but an autocracy, as Jesus is the Lord and King of the church. So it is not about voting, but about the body of Christ sensing the Spirit's leading into the will of our King and Saviour, Jesus the Christ. This is quite evident in Scripture, for instance, in Acts, Chapter 6 where the apostles knew that they needed help to distribute the food among those who are in need.

Acts 6 verse 3 Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business;

How were those who were to help, appointed to serve? It was the brothers who were to seek out seven men among themselves, and the apostle only gave instructions as to what kind of men these ought to be. Here is a clear example of how the Holy Spirit led the church, in:

*Acts 13 verse 2 As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, **the Holy Spirit said**, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."*

Verse 3 Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away.

Verse 4 So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus.

In Acts 15 we read of a furious dispute between Paul and men who came from Judea. Who decided what needed to happen to resolve this dispute?

Acts 15 verse 1 And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."

Verse 2 Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question.

*Verse 3 **So, being sent on their way by the church**, they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria, describing the conversion of the Gentiles; and they caused great joy to all the brethren.*

Well, again it was the whole church, and not some church board that sent Paul and Barnabas and certain others to resolve the matter in Jerusalem.

What did the church do next when they could not come to an agreement about the disputes over certain wrong teachings? They asked that some would go to Jerusalem where the dispute originated and sort it out there. We need to understand that in biblical times there was no head organization in Jerusalem. Jerusalem was the origin of this particular dispute. So it had to be resolved in the Jerusalem "ekklesia".

When the dispute was resolved among the elders in Jerusalem who decided which leading men in Jerusalem would go back with Paul and Barnabas to Antioch to report back the consensus they had reached in the Spirit?

*Acts 15 verse 22 Then it pleased the apostles and elders, **with the whole church**, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, namely, Judas who was also named Barsabas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren.*

Again, it was not just the apostles and elders but the whole church that was involved in decision making. What was the reason given in Acts 16 why Paul took Timothy with him to do the work of an apostle? Well we read in:

*Acts 16 verse 2 He was well spoken of **by the brethren** who were at Lystra and Iconium.*

Who gave a letter of recommendation for Apollos? We read the answer to this question in:

*Acts 18 verse 27 And when he desired to cross to Achaia, **the brethren wrote**, exhorting the disciples to receive him; and when he arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace;*

In both cases we see that it was either by the witness of the brothers or their letters of recommendation by the brethren. It does not talk of an institution or some church board. Is this not interesting?

When it comes to church discipline, according to Jesus in Matthew 18 versus 15-17, who decides whether an unrepentant brother should be put out of church?

Matthew 18 verse 17 And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.

Pastors or elders are not even mentioned by Christ. The whole church is to be involved to help the person see reason, but if the person is still unrepentant it would be the whole church who would separate the unrepentant brother from the church fellowship. It was never just up to one person or a so-called church board to decide these things.

Now, talking about church discipline; whom did Paul instruct in 1 Corinthians, chapter 5 to deliver the unrepentant brother to Satan for the destruction of the flesh? Believe it or not, Paul addressed the whole fellowship without making mention of any leaders of any kind, as we see in:

*1 Corinthians 5 verse 4 In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ,
Verse 5 deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.*

The elders' leadership was only needed when false doctrines being taught or if some false brothers caused division. They were then called into the particular fellowship of the city church or town to instruct in proper doctrine and to help make judgments concerning those who were causing division or error. But if the church followed the leading of the Holy Spirit there was no need for any intervention of the elders. When the fellowships followed the leading of the Holy Spirit the elders who were present at the time would participate as anyone else would. If the church functions fine, visitors to the fellowship would not even know who the elders were. All they would see is a family of believers all subjected to their Shepherd, Lord and King: Jesus Christ.

Part 8: A Church without Divisions

8.1: Church divided

Why are there divisions in the church with various places of worship even in the same city or town? The diplomatic among us would say that it is God's way to cater for our differences. That could have been true if church was about us and the way we want to serve God. Church, as we saw in Part Two, is about God's kingdom in Christ Jesus. Church is not for our entertainment or the way we would like to serve God and for that reason you will find no Scriptural basis or justification for the church to be divided as we see it is at present.

Some would say division came about through doctrinal differences and different interpretations of Scripture. We would like to propose that division is more a product of people who wanted to build their own little kingdoms than it is about doctrinal differences. Doctrine is only the catalyst used to divide the saints from each other to gain control.

In dealing with this issue of church unity, there are those that would just brush this issue aside by saying that we are one in spirit, which does not mean that we have to be one in practice. Well let us have a look at what Scripture teaches concerning the unity of the body of Christ. Jesus said in:

John 10 verse 16 And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd.

There are a number of things which the Scriptures teach us with regard to discerning whether we are hearing the voice of Christ in our hearts or whether we are hearing the voices of deceiving spirits. In this passage, using the analogy of sheep, Jesus has given us a very important key to such discernment namely: When Jesus speaks, the sheep gather together. They might be grazing at different places in the field, but the moment the shepherd calls, they all come together. When Jesus speaks, Christians instinctively enjoy coming together and sharing their lives. When wolves or deceiving spirits speak, the sheep scatter. Each sheep does its own thing, because without the voice of the shepherd, they are at a place of self-preservation.

When different flocks of sheep hear the voice of Jesus, they become one flock. When wolves or deceiving spirits speak, the flock divides and scatters. Here we need only think of a church split, different types of denominations, or the inability of different fellowships to come together.

When a sheep has wandered away, the shepherd will go and look for it, and when the lost sheep has been found by the shepherd, it will be brought back to the flock. This is how we know that a lost sheep has been found: when it is back with the flock. A sheep that is not with the flock is still lost, no matter how spiritual the sheep thinks it is. A wolf or a deceiving spirit will always try and keep the sheep isolated from the flock as this way, it makes for easy prey.

The bottom line is this: when sheep hear the voice of the shepherd, their natural state is to be together with the flock, but when the sheep listen to wolves, their condition becomes that of isolation, division and dispersion.

Matthew 7:15 "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves."

Pastors talk about **their** church and **their** flock that they claim Christ has given them. They compete with one another and then accuse one another of stealing each other's flock. How can we steal sheep from one another when there is only **one** flock which belongs to Christ? Do you see how unbiblical it is when shepherds use terminologies like "church hopping"?

The Corinthian church was quite divided among favourite personalities and flavours of teachings. Notice how Paul deals with the matter, in:

1 Corinthians 1 verse 10 Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.

Verse 11 For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you.

Verse 12 Now I say this, that each of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ."

Verse 13 Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

Looking at today's church, would Paul, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, approve when we say: "I am Baptist" or, "I am Full Gospel" or, "I am New Covenant" or, "I am a Seventh Day Adventist" or, "I am AFM" or, "I am AOG" or, "I am Dutch Reformed" or, "I am Methodist" or, "I am Grace Church", etc, etc, etc... You can be assured He won't, because Christ does not approve of His body being divided into denominations.

In part six we examined the biblical practice of leaders being servants of the church. The institutional, unbiblical practice of leaders being in charge of a church is one of the main reasons that there are divisions in the church. Human government over something that can only be governed by the Spirit of the Lord, will end up in division.

Paul writes further over this issue of division, in:

1 Corinthians 3 verse 1 And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ.

Verse 2 I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able;

Verse 3 for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and **divisions** among you, **are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?**

Verse 4 For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not carnal?

Verse 5 Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one?

Do you think that churches that are divided into denominations are a sign of being spiritual or carnal? To call this carnal, will be putting it mildly! We can colour it in any way we like to, by saying that this is just different expressions of the church that Christ is building, but in reality we are deceiving ourselves. We actually don't want to admit to the carnality of the institutional church.

Paul writes in:

Ephesians 4 verse 1 I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called,

Verse 2 with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love,

Verse 3 **endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.**

Verse 4 **There is one body** and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling;

Verse 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism;

Verse 6 one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

What is the fundamental truth of Christ's body? That it is **one body**. It seems that the Christians are the only people on earth that don't understand what it means to be ONE.

Jesus prayed in:

John 17 verse 20 "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word;

Verse 21 **that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.**

Verse 22 And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one:

Verse 23 I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.

What does Jesus pray that our union with each other should resemble? Our union should resemble that of Him and His Father. There is no closer union than Christ has with the Father. This kind of union is not some kind of figurative or token union, but a union of life. It is the very DNA of our being ONE Body – the body of Christ. The closest to that type of oneness on earth is that of a husband and wife. Anyone would agree that it would be absurd to think that the marital union is only figurative or symbolic and does not need to be lived or practiced. Yet this is what we are doing with the church. According to Christ's prayer our oneness is proof to the world that God has sent Jesus Christ.

John 17 verse 23 I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.

We cannot stress this point enough how unbiblical it is for the church to be divided into denominations. The very word denomination represents division. Let me explain; the word denomination is derived from the word denominate, which means to name by type. Denomination is also derived from the word denominator which is the technical term used to mean dividing into fractions. Denomination, in a sense, is to divide Christianity into different types and to differentiate by names. In other words denomination is to: "**divide by name**".

So, can we really believe that denominations are biblical, or something that Christ would be involved with? Everyone knows in the centre of their heart where Christ rules, that the church that Christ builds has nothing to do with our denominations. Yet very few are willing to face this fact, because of what it would mean to actually do something about it. They would shrug it away as something of no importance. If our "expression" of church causes the church to function as disconnected members, then our "expression" of church serves only us and not the kingdom of God.

Paul writes to the Corinthian church, in:

1 Corinthians 1 verse 9 God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Verse 10 Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.

8.2: One body

We saw in part two that the “ekklesia” meetings were interactive kingdom meetings and not religious spectator meetings. Yet how does this work when there are millions of Christians that are part of the body of Christ? In this chapter we will deal with the principle of a city church and how fellowships function as one body.

First of all, let us have a further look at the functionality of an “ekklesia” in the setting of a city. The “ekklesia” did not only refer to a particular gathering but to a body of believers as seen in part three of this series. The “ekklesia” is the elect of all the saints administering responsibility of the kingdom of God on earth as royal priests. In other words, the meaning of “ekklesia” not only dictates to how we meet in a gathering but how we are to operate as a body of believers.

Let us start by looking at the secular Roman-Greek “ekklesia” meetings in biblical times. We see that their judicial meetings developed in local areas where they had to administer the affairs of the empire. These meetings had as their purpose to uphold order, ensure stability and the advancement of the particular government under which it functioned. As such, every city or town had its own “ekklesia” judicial body which made decisions for that city or town in accordance with the government of the day. Very similar to a city council of today.

This was also true with the Christian “ekklesia”. The “ekklesia” in the body of Christ was not divided according to denominations but according to the city or town it was situated in. As you will see shortly, the only reason there was more than one church was because of geographical distances and border lines between cities and towns. For that reason, churches were identified by their city or town and not according to some denomination.

Let us read some Scriptures that demonstrate this. We read in:

Acts 8 verse 1 And Saul was consenting to his death. And in that day there was a great persecution on **the church at Jerusalem**, and all were scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.

How many churches are spoken of in the city of Jerusalem? Only one church! Another example we can read about is in:

1 Corinthians 1 verse 2 to **the church of God which is in Corinth**, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called out with all those in every place who call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours.

How many churches is Paul addressing in the city of Corinth? Again only **the** church of Corinth. We also read in: *1 Thessalonians 1 verse 1* Paul and Silvanus and Timothy to **the church of the Thessalonians**, in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Again; to how many churches is Paul writing in the city of Thessalonica? Just to one church, the church of the Thessalonians. Now note the difference in the following passage, in:

Revelation 1 verse 11 saying, I am the Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last. Also, What you see, write in a book and send it **to the seven churches** which are **in Asia**: to Ephesus, and to Smyrna, and to Pergamos, and to Thyatira, and to Sardis, and to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea.

How many churches is John writing to in each of the seven cities of Asia? John is addressing seven churches. How is that possible? Keep in mind that Asia is not a city, but a region. It was an ancient Roman province containing these seven cities. John was writing to each city in Asia and so he was addressing only a “single” church in each of these seven cities.

See if you can point out something interesting in the following well known passage of Scripture:

Titus 1 verse 5 For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in **every city** as I commanded you—

Why would Paul ask Titus to appoint elders in every city as opposed to appointing elders in every church? Because every city or town consisted of only one church! In biblical time elders oversaw a city, and not an institution.

The following passage may lead to some confusion:

Acts 14 verse 21 And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to **Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch**,

Verse 22 strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God."

Verse 23 So when they had **appointed elders in every church**, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

In verse 23 we read that elders were appointed in every church; but looking at verse 21 we see that the reason was because Paul went to three different cities, namely: Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch. So it is logical that each of these cities had its own city-church. So it is obvious that Paul appointed elders in every one of these three churches each based in one of these three cities.

We read in:

Act 20 verse 17 From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church.

Did Paul call for the elders of all the churches of Ephesus or did he call for the elders of THE church of Ephesus? As you see that the city of Ephesus only had one church which was overseen by the elders of that city church.

This brings us to an important aspect of the ministry of elders. In biblical times, the Jews, Romans, as well as the Greeks were accustomed to appointing elders to oversee a particular city or town. They were responsible to make judgments where the community of that city was not able to sort out the problems for itself.

This is even evident in the Old Testament. For instance we read of elders of a city needing to deal with a murderer, in:

Deuteronomy 19 verse 12 then the **elders of his city** shall send and bring him from there, and deliver him over to the hand of the avenger of blood, that he may die.

Again we see the elders of a city getting involved concerning a rebellious child, in:

Deuteronomy 21 verse 19 then his father and his mother shall take hold of him and bring him out to the **elders of his city**, to the gate of his city.

So we need to understand that to the Christians in biblical times, elders over a city and elders over a church were synonymous. It was foreign for the Christians at that time to have different churches in a particular city, town, or suburb. The elders did not each have their own church in a city or town. They worked together to shepherd and serve that one "ekklesia" church in a particular city.

When we read about provinces in the Bible we see something completely different. For instance, we read in:

Galatians 1 verse 2 and all the brethren who are with me, To the **churches** of Galatia:

He says the same in:

Galatians 1 verse 22 And I was unknown by face to the **churches** of Judea which were in Christ.

So why does Paul speak in the plural form "churches" in these passages? Very simply put, Galatia and Judea were not cities, but provinces, the same as we saw with Asia earlier on. In other words there is only one church in a city or town, but because there are multiple cities and towns in a province there would be multiple churches in a province. So there are multiple churches in provinces or countries, but only one church in each city, town or in

modern terms, suburb. This would lead to a couple of questions. For instance, how on earth do we get all the Christians in a city or town or suburb together to participate in a judicial interactive meeting?

We saw in parts three and four that the church came together in each other's homes and functioned in pockets of fellowships. We read in:

Acts 2 verse 41 Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about **three thousand souls were added** to them.

Verse 42 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.

Verse 43 Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles.

Verse 44 Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common,

Verse 45 and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.

Verse 46 So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and **breaking bread from house to house**, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart,

Verse 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

We see here in Acts chapter 2 that there were many home fellowships in Jerusalem yet we see that Jerusalem was spoken of as only one church in:

Acts 8 verse 1 And Saul was consenting to his death. And in that day there was a great persecution on **the church at Jerusalem**, and all were scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.

The question that many people would ask is: If a home gathering is seen as a fellowship of the church of a city, why would Paul talk of *the church* that meets in someone's home, such as in:

Romans 16 verse 5 Likewise greet **the church that is in their house**. Greet my beloved Epaenetus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia to Christ.

If we read this with our modern understanding of church, we would assume that the whole church is gathering in this home. Yet the language that Paul uses here does not necessary talk of "a" church in someone's home. Let me illustrate this with following illustration: Should I say that there are South Africans in Durban and there are South Africans in Johannesburg, I am not implying there are two different countries each in their own city, am I? The same is true when Paul spoke of the church meeting in someone's home. He is not referring to "a" particular church but those members of "**the**" church that were meeting in someone's home.

The "one" church in each city, or town contained fellowships that would come together in each other's homes to break bread from house to house, and to pray together while holding to the apostles' teachings. These fellowships were the building blocks of the Christian life and church in each city, or town.

8.3: Breaking from denominations

In this chapter we will deal with the effect of breaking from denominations, while looking at practical guidelines for biblical unity.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, there might have been a church in each city consisting of several assemblies, but all these churches in the provinces still functioned as one body. God's Kingdom is not divided and therefore the churches were not to function as separate entities. Paul writes in:

Ephesians 4 verse 1 I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called,

Verse 2 with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love,

Verse 3 **endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit** in the bond of peace.

Verse 4 **There is one body** and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling;

Verse 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism;

Verse 6 one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

According to Paul, are the churches formed into:

1. Different denominations?
2. Different organizations?
3. One body?

Each city had one church and all these churches in the different cities formed one body. The body of Christ was not divided into denominations or places of worship. However, it was spread across various geographic areas, and tended to cluster in particular cities or towns. In Acts 15 the church in Jerusalem had to make a decision concerning Jewish practices that were being taught to the gentile churches by brothers who travelled from Jerusalem to other cities. So the ekklesia of the city of Jerusalem had an influence on the ekklesia in another city because they functioned as one body under Christ. However we need to realise that even though one church in a city had an influence on other churches in other cities, no one church was above another. They influenced each other because they were one and not because the one was in charge of the other.

Those who function under a man-made denomination cannot see the church ever functioning as one body because their scope of reference is that of a religious institution and not a heavenly Kingdom. Nevertheless the fact remains that IF Christ is truly the Head of His body then the church would function as one body. This unity is not going to happen through organization and the good planning of man. Biblical unity is a matter of fact and is therefore organic and not organised.

Practical and biblical unity can only happen when we as Christians stop trying to build our own religious clubs and start functioning in obedience to our King and Lord: Jesus Christ, who is building His church. We should simply be living stones in the hands of our King.

The big question we are faced with, is what we do with this monster we call denominations? Well, look what Paul says about it in:

Romans 16 verse 17 Now I urge you, brethren, **note those who cause divisions** and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, **and avoid them.**

Verse 18 For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but **their own belly**, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple.

From whom is Paul instructing us to separate ourselves? He is referring to those who divide the church, because they don't serve Christ or submit to His doctrine but submit to their own belly! "Belly" does not only refer to

gluttony but means to covet things that satisfy the flesh such as wealth and control. You see; church denominations came about by people who want to control ignorant saints. With this comes deceiving them out of their money, to sustain that control.

Division goes against the teachings of Christ. However is separating oneself from an institution not in itself division? Well, it depends what one is separating oneself from. Separating oneself from that which causes division actually creates unity. We are not to separate ourselves from the saints of the body of Christ. We are to seek fellowship with all of the saints, no matter their denominational baggage. What we are to separate ourselves from is our association with institutional denominations that divide the body of Christ. If we separate ourselves from that which divides us, then all who are led by the Spirit would automatically function as one body.

Any doctrine, no matter with what smooth words and flattering speech it presents itself, if it divides the body of Christ into denominations, is not the doctrine of Christ. Each denomination is propagating a particular teaching to justify dividing the body of Christ. Yet the body of Christ is not formed by the doctrines and precepts of man, but by the regenerating work of the Spirit of God. One is not part of the body of Christ because one holds to certain views and interpretation, but because one is born of the Spirit of God through one's faith in Christ. Please don't get me wrong. I am not saying that everyone who calls himself a Christian is part of the body of Christ. What I am saying is that people are born again through the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit and not through a particular doctrine.

Look at the words of Jesus in:

Matthew 7 verse 15 "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.

Verse 16 You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles?

Verse 17 Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit.

Verse 18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit.

Verse 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

Verse 20 Therefore by their fruits you will know them.

From Jesus' words, do we discern whether someone is born of the Spirit of God by whether they hold to our institutional man-made doctrines or by the fruit of Christ that is manifested through them? Their fruit is what the Lord says will enable us to discern who is or is not His, rather than people's knowledge or understanding. We are born spiritually into one family through the Spirit of God and not by our intellectual comprehension of doctrine. Some would disagree with this by saying that Buddhists also seems to have fruit of "peace", and some atheists have the fruit of joy. If this is the case, then Jesus must be wrong that the peace that He gives is not the same that the world gives. The fact is the fruit that Jesus is talking about here is the fruit of abiding in HIM. Jesus IS our fruit. Neither Buddhists nor atheists can give us the fruit of Christ. If Christ is not our peace and our joy, then it is not the fruit of Christ.

Why is fruit the determining factor? Spiritual fruit cannot be produced by ourselves; it is the work of Christ in us. Jesus said in:

John 15 verse 1 "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.

Verse 2 Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.

Verse 3 You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.

Verse 4 Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.

Verse 5 "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

Verse 6 If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.

Did Jesus say that we will bear fruit by holding on to denominational doctrines or by abiding in Him? Abiding in Christ and learning to hear His voice as our Shepherd should be the focus of the church and not the doctrine of a particular denomination. According to Jesus, who will cut away those who do not bear fruit? God will, of course, not some man-made institution. Unity is not based on which direction the branches points to, or on what height of the vine they are abiding. Unity is only based that we are abiding on the same vine. Christ the Son of God our Lord, King and Saviour is our unity. Our personal pet doctrines can never be the bases of our unity.

The real issue that is dividing the body of Christ is not really the different views and doctrine, but carnal leaders desiring to control the church and carnal saints wanting men to shepherd them rather than Christ. So they place their pet doctrines and man-made religion above the unity of the Spirit and the love of the saints. When leaders focus more on equipping the saints for the work of ministry as opposed to teaching them their flavour of doctrine, then the church will function as one body. This is clearly taught by Paul in:

Ephesians 4 verse 11 *And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers,*

Verse 12 **for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,**

Verse 13 **till we all come to the unity of the faith** *and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the* **fullness of Christ;**

Verse 14 *that we should no longer be children, **tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting,***

Verse 15 *but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into **Him who is the head—Christ—***

Verse 16 *from whom the whole body, joined and knit together **by what every joint supplies,** according to the effective working by which every part does its share, **causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.***

As we see from Paul's writing, a church leader's main purpose is NOT to teach doctrine, but to **equip** the saints **for the work of ministry**. When the whole church CAN minister to one another through the Holy Spirit then they will automatically no longer be tossed to and fro from every wind of doctrine by the craftiness of deceitful teachers.

Most saints cannot minister to one another through the Holy Spirit so they don't know how to discern. Saints only know how to recite the doctrines they were taught from a man standing behind the pulpit. So the saints are divided into their denominations and according to whatever new fad is on the market. The reason for this, is because the leaders take it upon themselves to do all the ministering and the church becomes spectators to motivational speaking and religious shows.

Yet, when the saints have learned to **minister** to one another and every part of Christ's body does its share to cause growth in the body in love, under the headship of Jesus Christ, then the saints will really grow into the fullness of Christ till we ALL come to the **unity** of the faith.

8.4: Ecumenicalism

In this chapter we will look at the unbiblical premises of ecumenicalism, and understand the importance of having different views in the church in the context of church history.

Everyone that is born of the Spirit of God through Christ is part of the body of Christ. Which church then should we belong to? The answer is not a particular church. We already belong to the only church and that is the church that Christ is building. **We cannot join that church; we can only be born into that church through the Spirit of God.** It is not an institution but an organic body; a new creation in Christ. In practice this means that we don't join, or start a church. **We are to behave like the church.** This happens when we are obedient to our King by functioning as royal priests.

As we said before; it is our obligation to seek fellowship with all the saints of God whatever their institutional background, because we are one body. Yet we are to separate ourselves from institutions that divide the body of Christ into denominations. In other words we are to separate ourselves from the institution, but NOT from our family in Christ that is still mesmerised by the institution. We are to seek fellowship with saints that want to fellowship with us, even if they still belong to an institution.

Whichever city, town, or suburb we stay in; we are part of that church; made up of all the believers of that city, town, or suburb. We are obligated to find fellowship with the saints in that city, town or suburb. If, after some time, we can't find saints who would like to fellowship with us, then we are to pray and move to wherever God leads us where we can find a town, city or suburb that has saints who are willing to form this kind of fellowship with us. We should never cut ourselves off from other saints, even though they don't see eye to eye with us. We are part of the same body of Christ, even though we might see things differently.

Some might object to this and say that this sounds like ecumenicalism. In response I would say ecumenicalism is a man-made institutional unity. It is an effort to try to create unity by compromising the truth about Christ. This type of ideology is based on the idea that we should offend no one's beliefs. This false type of unity would even try to eliminate the fact of the gospel of God's Kingdom in Christ Jesus for the sake of unity. This is a very dangerous ideology and hence is not a unity formed by the Spirit of God. Jesus clearly said in:

John 14 verse 6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

Jesus did not only come to give us life, He gave Himself who is life. We can search for the "life more abundantly" in Christianity, but if we don't search for it in the person of Christ, then the abundant life is just diluted flesh-driven gratification of our personal desires.

Jesus did not only come to give us teachings or doctrine about what is true. Jesus is our doctrine ... our truth. If we try and follow Jesus' teachings without understanding that His teachings are about Him, we end up being tossed to and fro from every wind of doctrine. Some claim that Jesus taught us how to keep the Law of God. Others would say Jesus taught us about the grace and love of God. Even though Jesus had much to say about God's Law and God's Grace, His teaching was about Himself - the Son of God. Jesus is the Law and Grace of God. Jesus is our truth and our doctrine.

Jesus did not only come to show us the way to God, but presents Himself as the way to God. The reason why the modern understanding of church is so far removed from the early Christians' understanding of church that we read about in Scripture, is the inability to understand that Christ is the way to God. You see, the church is not a religious thing you attend weekly, but is actually the very Body of Christ that we are to belong to. This is not just a mental association to an idea of church, but something that one is supposed to be an active part of.

The man-made unity is just another way for man to be in charge of a man-made church, but on a bigger scale. The people behind ecumenicalism are actually just merging religious businesses in order to make more money and gain more control. The unity of the Spirit is not organised by man, but is led by the Spirit as we subject ourselves to the person of Jesus Christ.

In that case, how do we deal with saints who have different views and interpretations of Scripture than ourselves? Paul writes in:

Ephesians 3 verse 9 and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God **who created all things through Jesus Christ**;

Verse 10 to the intent that now the **manifold wisdom of God** might be **made known by the church** to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places,

Verse 11 according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished **in Christ Jesus our Lord**.

The manifold wisdom of God is not found in our personal revelation nor is it found in an institution or organization. The manifold wisdom is made known by the church according to the eternal purpose which God accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. Paul also explains it like this in:

1 Timothy 3 verse 15 but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, **which is the church** of the living God, **the pillar and ground of the truth**.

The church of the living God is the pillar and ground of the truth. How is that possible? Well we read in:

Colossians 1 verse 18 And **He** is the **head of the body, the church**, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things **He may have the preeminence**.

Christ who is the way, the truth and the life, is the head of the church, which is His body. So it is through the members of the body that the manifold wisdom of God is revealed. The body of Christ helps us to see things as they really are, as opposed to our own personal perspective of things.

To illustrate the limited perspective an individual has, a group of scientists did an experiment a couple of years ago to see what influence a person's visual perception has on his or her experience of the environment. To do this they placed individuals in separate rooms where everything inside these rooms were coloured green, such as their clothes, the walls, roof, floor, table, cupboards, plates, cups – everything was green. After a while the individual's brain interpreted the colour green as grey. Then, when they let these individuals out of their green environment, their brains interpreted all other colours as red, which is perceived as the opposite of green. It was only after getting used to the multi-coloured world, that their brains switched back to the reality of a world full of colours.

In the same way, we have a very limited perception of reality and truth, whether we are Christians or not. People who live their lives as individuals, isolated from others, are limited to their own perceptions of life, which would lead to a distorted one coloured worldview. This distorted worldview perceives all other views as opposing rather than complementing, or correcting their own. As individual Christians we also have a very limited sensitivity to the leading of God's Spirit. God has designed His church so that through all the different members, God's manifold wisdom in Christ Jesus would be revealed. Through the church we are confronted with God's multi-coloured spectrum of His wisdom through the differences in people, in order for us to change to be like the image of Christ Jesus. That is why we should not divide the churches based on particular doctrines but rather get Christians to talk and share each other's different perceptions and let the Holy Spirit guide them to the truth as they learn to love each other.

Does this not seem too idealistic? The reason that people would look at this as too idealistic is that we base our union on our doctrine. For the first 300 years the church functioned as one body in a way that we are not able to even imagine today. How was it possible? Their union was not based on doctrine but on the Spirit of God through the complete work of Christ.

As we mentioned before, in part six of this series of teachings, around 300 AD Constantine supposedly became the first Christian Roman Emperor. Constantine wanted Christianity to become an official state religion, and so devised a way for Christianity to become institutionalized. But in order to institutionalize Christianity, it had to develop an institutional infrastructure such as a unified doctrine of beliefs.

So around 325 AD Constantine called for the famous council of Nicea to try to establish doctrinal unity especially with regard to the deity of Christ. By institutionalising Christianity, Constantine could give state benefits in the form of official religious buildings and subsidies to the clergy who would have some kind of priestly function and authority as practiced by the other heathen religions.

Even though many Christians today hail this council meeting as the greatest doctrinal breakthrough, it actually became our greatest spiritual downfall. You see after the council of Nicea, doctrine was not taught and understood anymore through the revelation of the Spirit but accomplished by brute force dictated by an institution. So here the church that was supposed to be governed by another dimension in the Spirit, was now brought down to this world of man-made rule.

Constantine invited about 1800 elders from the east and the west. They estimated that about 250 – 300 actually attended. These \pm 300 elders were authorised to dictate church doctrines of faith over all issues under the Roman Empire of which Constantine was Emperor. Constantine would then enforce these by law. Anyone that would not follow the doctrines laid out under the Nicene creed had to go underground again. Yet not even this unification of doctrinal beliefs by a man-made institution held for very long. We saw that by the third council in 431 AD, the council of Ephesus, and the fourth council, the council of Chalcedon in 451 AD, the church got divided into three denominations; namely: The Assyrian Church of the East; the Oriental Orthodoxy; and of course the Roman Catholic Church. The power struggle led to the creation of more places of worship and consequently idol worship entered the church gradually over the years.

We are not questioning whether the doctrines set by the 300 elders were correct or not, what we are questioning is the way the doctrines became institutionalised. Doctrine had become the focal point of church. Right doctrine became more important than the living Jesus Christ in the midst of the congregation. This is still very evident in today's church. Today we have pastors and other church leaders, that divorce their spouses, have rebellious children, and even help themselves from the church treasury, yet nothing of consequence is said or done about it. Yet if the same leaders dare not follow their institutional doctrines then they will get excommunicated. This is in direct contrast to Scripture. It has become very clear that doctrine has become more important than character or spiritual fruit in the institutional churches. The reason for this is that "doctrine" has become the catalyst to control people and in so doing to divide people.

8.5: Doctrine or Character

In this last section we will see that character or spiritual fruit should come before doctrine and that teaching doctrine is without value if there is not a foundation established for loving each other with Christ's love.

Every one of us would have experienced in the course of our lives, how we once were so sure about a certain doctrine only to discover later on in our lives that we were wrong. Yet we are still arrogant enough to think that our interpretation of certain Scriptures is worth dividing the church.

This was not the case before the church became institutionalised. Holding to correct doctrine was brought about by the conviction and correction of the Holy Spirit through loving relationships as each part of the body did its share. Am I then trying to say that doctrine is not important? NO, this is not what I am saying. The apostles put a lot of emphasis on right and wrong doctrines and right and wrong traditions. They would confront wrong doctrine head on as we see in:

Acts 15 verse 1 And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."

Verse 2 Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had **no small dissension and dispute with them**, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question.

Paul and Barnabas did not compromise the truth, yet they did not go out and start a new church either. They chose to resolve the issue at Jerusalem where this wrong teaching originated. They never divided the church into two different denominations, such as those who are under grace and those who were under the law. Look for instance what Paul writes to the Roman church, in:

Romans 14 verse 1 Receive one who is weak in the faith, but **not to disputes over doubtful things**.

Verse 2 For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats *only* vegetables.

Verse 3 Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him.

Verse 4 Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.

Verse 5 One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind.

Verse 6 He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks.

Verse 7 **For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself.**

Verse 8 For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.

Loving one another was more important than different interpretations of doctrine. This was clearly demonstrated in Paul's writings further on, from:

Romans 14 verse 15 Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died.

Loving one another is to be the focus point and not proving our opinions. We read in:

Philippians 2 verse 3 Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind **let each esteem others better than himself.**

Verse 4 Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

Verse 5 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,

Paul also writes in:

Romans 12 verse 10 Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another;

If our focus is in loving each other more than it is to prove that we are right, then Jesus, who is the truth, will lead us into all truth. Loving people with the love of Christ is what creates an environment for people's hearts to change. Our stubborn holding to doctrine, rather than caring for each other, will only divide us and drive us apart. Peter writes in:

1 Peter 4 verse 8 And above all things have fervent love for one another, for "LOVE WILL COVER A MULTITUDE OF SINS."

Paul writes in:

1 Corinthians 8 verse 1 Now concerning things offered to idols: We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies.

Verse 2 And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know.

Paul writes again in:

1 Corinthians 13 verse 2 And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

He writes further:

1 Corinthians 13 verse 8 Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away.

Should we then just permit all things for the sake of love? Of course not, but our focus should be rather addressing bad fruit that could have originated from bad doctrine. We read, in:

1 Corinthians 5 verse 7 Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.

Verse 8 Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

Verse 9 I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people.

Verse 10 Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world.

Verse 11 But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person.

Verse 12 For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside?

Verse 13 But those who are outside God judges. Therefore "PUT AWAY FROM YOURSELVES THE EVIL PERSON."

It is clear from Scripture that where someone who calls themselves a Christian, but then demonstrates bad fruit by their carnal conduct, action was taken in order for that brother or sister to come to repentance. In this particular situation it seems that the brother did repent, as seen in:

2 Corinthians 2 verse 6 This punishment which was inflicted by the majority is sufficient for such a man,

Verse 7 so that, on the contrary, you ought rather to forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow.

Verse 8 Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love to him.

Today, we judge the unbelievers who practice immoral behaviour, which is only for God to judge, but then when it

happens in our own fellowship, especially with so-called leaders we turn a blind eye. Yet when it comes to people who would teach things against the teachings of our denomination, we throw them out. This is contrary to clear teaching from Scripture. The only time we are to put someone out of fellowship, when it comes to teaching falsehood, is when bad fruit is evident. Peter gives example of this in:

*2 Peter 2 verse 1 But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, **even denying the Lord** who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction.*

Verse 2 And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed.

*Verse 3 **By covetousness** they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber.*

Peter then continues concerning their bad fruit in:

2 Peter 2 verse 12 But these, like natural brute beasts made to be caught and destroyed, speak evil of the things they do not understand, and will utterly perish in their own corruption,

Verse 13 and will receive the wages of unrighteousness, as those who count it pleasure to carouse in the daytime.

*They are spots and blemishes, carousing in their own deceptions **while they feast with you,***

*Verse 14 **having eyes full of adultery and that cannot cease from sin, enticing unstable souls. They have a heart trained in covetous practices,** and are accursed children.*

He further warns in:

*2 Peter 2 verse 18 For when they speak great swelling words of emptiness, **they allure through the lusts of the flesh,** through lewdness, the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error.*

Verse 19 While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage.

The things we should make judgment on and take action towards are bad fruit or an un-repentant character. We are to love and care for people who might not understand Scripture like we do. We have to consider the possibility that we could be wrong as well and therefore not be dogmatic over issues outside the life and headship of Christ. I am not saying that we should compromise the truth, but rather that we should be patient for the Holy Spirit to reveal the same truth to all of us.

When people first feel they are loved and accepted, they are more likely to be open to receiving the truth. Generally people will just close up to strangers that seem to force their opinion on them. Truth has to be revealed by the Holy Spirit as opposed to be forced on someone. **Godly love softens the heart to receive godly truth.**

Part 9: A Church without Man

9.1: Christ and the church

The woven relationship between Christ and man through the church is so magnificent and beyond the realm of our senses that one is left with the inadequacy of words to give meaning. Yet the Holy Spirit is able to bring revelation to mere human words. Therefore I would desperately ask you to find understanding above my weak attempts to describe the church beyond imagination. If you just look at my words you will only be left with questions and doubt without understanding the accomplishment of Christ on Calvary.

The following topics I am dealing with are quite sensitive among even those who already are practicing the “ekklesia” church. So, for that reason, do not take my teachings as your complete guide to function in a biblical church. Never ever force or manipulate people to practice the things I am dealing with in this part of the series. Also do not even attempt to implement these views without first having a revelation from the Holy Spirit and reaching a consensus in your fellowship over these issues. This could take longer than you would like, but so be it. It should be Christ who builds His church and not our feeble understanding of what church is.

The way we conduct our meetings is the visual representation of our relationship with Christ. Visual representation can be a very powerful catalyst in our belief system, our emotions, and our implementation of truth. We can see it, for instance, in the bread we break representing Christ’s body and the cup we drink representing Christ’s blood. These representations even go deeper as we saw in part three. In this teaching we are going to look at another and very important visual representation that has to do with Christ and the church.

To understand the relationship between Christ and the church and how it influences our meetings and our day to day lives, we need to look at some very interesting truths found in the mystery of the Gospel. One of the great mysteries of life is: Why were we created? Atheists, obviously, do not have an answer for this question. Yet there seems to be a great variety of answers to this question, even from those in the Christian faith. Many of the answers that Christians give to this question can be traced back to the focus and priority Christians have in their lives. With some colourful interpretation of Scripture you will find a justification for your answer.

With all the answers that Christians give to the question “Why were we created”, would you allow us to point to some key passages in Scripture that you might never have noticed? You will see that these passages give us a perspective of why we were created that is not man-centred but more Christ-centred. Paul writes in:

*Colossians 1 verse 16 For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him **and for Him**.*

According to this passage, through whom are all things made? All things were made through Jesus Christ. Fair enough, but if all things were made through Christ; then for **whom** were all things made? All things were not only created through Christ but were actually created **FOR** Christ. Christ is not only the source of all things - Christ is also the reason and goal of all things. The purpose of every single thing that is created is therefore Christ. Whatever the will of God may be, it has its destiny and purpose in Christ.

The author of Hebrews writes it like this in

*Hebrews 2 verse 10 For it was fitting for Him, **for whom are all things** and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.*

Paul writes further in:

Colossians 1 verse 17 And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.

*Verse 18 And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things **He may have the pre-eminence**.*

All things have their purpose in Christ, so would you say that the church has its purpose in “us” or in Christ? Think about it; Christ is the head of the church, and through the church Christ may have pre-eminence over all. So the purpose of the church is not us, but Christ having pre-eminence over all.

Paul demonstrates this pre-eminence through a visual representation of Christ and the church in the following analogy found in:

Ephesians 5 verse 23 For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body.

Verse 24 Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.

Verse 25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her,

Verse 26 that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word,

Verse 27 that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

Verse 28 So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself.

Verse 29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church.

Verse 30 For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones.

In a nutshell, what is the relationship with Christ and the church compared to according to Paul? To that of a husband and wife.

Now look how Paul unfolds this visual representation further in:

Ephesians 5 verse 31 "FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH."

Verse 32 This is a great mystery, **but I speak concerning Christ and the church.**

What is the great mystery that Paul is referring to concerning Christ and the church? Well, the fact that a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife to become one with her. This mystery has its very basis in Christ and the church.

What was Paul getting at? Well Paul was referring to a prophetic word, in:

Genesis 2 verse 18 And the LORD God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him."

Verse 19 Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them. And whatever Adam called each living creature, that was its name.

Verse 20 So Adam gave names to all cattle, to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field. **But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him.**

Verse 21 And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place.

Verse 22 Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man.

Verse 23 And Adam said: "**This is now bone of my bones And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man.**"

Verse 24 **Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.**

Here is an interesting question to consider about this passage of Genesis 2. When God declared it was not good for man to be alone, what did God do first?

1. God formed a woman.
2. God first looked to see what Adam would call the animals.

Is it not interesting that God would first see what Adam would call the animals when He confirmed that it was not good for man to be alone? What did Adam realise when he gave all the animals names? Well that among all the animals there was no helper for him that was comparable to him. What is the significance of this, you might wonder? Well, by studying Jewish tradition you will learn that animals symbolises nations and their religious belief systems.

Are you starting to see where this is leading to yet? So how was Eve formed? Adam was put into a deep sleep and a rib was taken from his side. Woman was now bone of man's bone and flesh of man's flesh. Woman was of man's essence.

How does this relate to Christ and the church? Think about it. From all the nations and religions that exist, none are compatible to be a companion for God's Son. They are all man-made institutions. In other words, they were mere animals in comparison to Christ. None of them are of Christ's kind or of Christ's essence.

Christ had to die; also referred to as a deep sleep; to purchase the bride with His blood. It is as if something was taken out of Christ as the soldier pierced His side. Blood and water spilled out of the side of Christ and so did something of His essence. Christ left God the Father, and Israel that is referred to as a harlot mother, to be joined to a bride that is spirit of His Spirit and essence of His essence.

The church that came from out of Christ is not some man-made institution or religion. The church is something spiritual and something eternal. It is something that has Christ's likeness and essence. The church is something that belongs only to Christ. It is something that will only subject herself to Christ.

9.2: The bride of Christ.

The nature of a religion is comparable to that of an animal. It lives by the animal instincts of self-preservation and self-rule. Even though religion is based on worshiping a god or following a guru it is centred on man and how the religion benefits him. The bride of Christ is to be Christ-centred. As woman was made for man so the church was made for Christ. Church practice should therefore be a representation of being Christ-centred and not man-centred. The snake, the most cunning of all animals, is at war against the second Adam who is Christ and the second Eve called the church.

One of the most controversial subjects, when it comes to church practice, is the role women play in the church gathering. Ironically, it is this controversial subject of the woman's role in the church, that really exposes the religious, beastly, carnal human nature, that infiltrated the church.

Paul gives the following instruction to Timothy when it came to church order:

1 Timothy 2 verse 11 Let a woman **learn in silence** with **all submission**.

Verse 12 And I **do not permit a woman to teach** or to **have authority over a man**, but to **be in silence**.

Verse 13 For Adam was formed first, then Eve.

Verse 14 And **Adam was not deceived**, but the **woman being deceived**, fell into transgression.

The word authority in this passage is the Greek word "authentein". This word is only used this way, in the whole of the New Testament. The Vines Dictionary explains that the word comes from two words. Firstly, the word "autos" which means 'self', and secondly, a lost noun "hentes", which could be translated as either 'working' or 'having dominion'. The word "authentein" therefore brings forth the idea of having dominion or working with one's own efforts. It is as if Paul was saying that if a woman would teach in church, it would be like establishing her own work or authority. In a way, if a woman teaches the men in the "ekklesia" gathering gives the idea that the church is teaching Christ.

But what is Paul getting at here, and what has that got to do with Eve being deceived as opposed to Adam that rebelled? Satan deceived Eve whereas Adam willingly, with full understanding, subjected himself to the women's will and ate of the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil. For this very reason God set the following consequences in motion:

Genesis 3 verse 16 To the woman He said: "I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; In pain you shall bring forth children; **Your desire shall be for your husband, And he shall rule over you.**"

Verse 17 Then to Adam He said, "Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat of it': "Cursed is the ground for your sake; In toil you shall eat of it All the days of your life.

Verse 18 Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, And you shall eat the herb of the field.

Verse 19 In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread Till you return to the ground, For out of it you were taken; For dust you are, And to dust you shall return."

Some would ask, but has Christ not delivered us from the curse that was bestowed on Adam and Even? Well, Christian women still have pain in childbearing and men still have to work to eat. Then we should conclude that Christ's deliverance did not deal with the physical consequences of this passage. Therefore, there is no reason to believe that woman's desire for her husband has suddenly disappeared and that man would not rule her.

So, let us look at the meaning of the words: "her desire shall be for her husband"? Any person with a little bit of common sense will say that there are as many husbands that desire their wives as wives that desire their husbands. On the flipside there are wives and husbands that have no desire for their spouses as well. Surely we need to question our understanding of the meaning of the words: "her desire shall be for her husband".

When we look at another verse, one chapter further on, it gives more light as to what was meant with the words “desire for”. We read from:

Genesis 4 verse 6 So the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen?
Verse 7 If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. **And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it.**"

What was sin’s desire for Cain? Sin's desire was to control Cain, but God commanded him to rule over it. In the same way the desire of women spoken of earlier, was to control man, but in the same way man should rule over her. Adam sinned because he subjected himself to woman’s will as opposed to obeying God. So now, he will rule her as Cain had to rule sin.

Part of women’s natural instinct is to feel safe and secure, especially when she is deceived; she then tries to take control of the environment that influences her security. For that reason a woman desires to control men, in order for her to feel safe. So the epic battle is for women to try and control her husband while her husband will rule over her. Through sin, woman manipulates and drains her husband, by her constant desire to control him. Through sin, man misuses his responsibility to rule and protect his wife with love and starts abusing her.

Strangely, there are some comparisons in the relationship between a husband and wife to that of Christ and the church. Christ for His part, loves, cares, protects and has given His life for the church, yet the church still battles to subject themselves to Christ. They still want to control Christ by their programs, and their personal agendas. The Church is constantly giving their own opinions and dictates to Christ as to what He should do, and are unable to learn in silence from Him.

We read in the previous section:

Ephesians 5 verse 22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.
Verse 23 For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body.
Verse 24 Therefore, **just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.**

When the church comes together for an “ekklesia” meeting, the husbands are symbolically representing Christ and the wives are symbolically representing the church. Paul addresses this when he explains why women are to learn in silence and are not permitted to teach men in:

1 Timothy 2 verse 13 For Adam was formed first, then Eve.

Paul makes it even clearer in:

1 Corinthians 11 verse 8 For man is not from woman, but woman from man.
Verse 9 **Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man.**

Man was not created for woman, but woman for man, so in the same analogy Christ’s existence is not for the church, but the church's existence is for Christ. As Christ is the head of the church so is the husband the head of the wife. If this is the case, why would Paul seemingly be so chauvinistic, when he clearly teaches in:

Galatians 3 verse 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither **male nor female**; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.
Verse 29 And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Paul was NOT contradicting himself, but was dealing with two different things concerning our walk in Christ. In the letter to the Galatians Paul was talking about our inheritance of being ONE in Christ. The promise is about being justified before God. All of us have obtained Christ’s justification whether we are slaves or free in this world, whether we are male or female, whether we are Jew or Greek. Yet our justification in Christ does not nullify our role

and calling, in the manner that we function in the church of Christ. Even though we are justified in Christ, the husband still has to love his wife, and the wife still has to subject herself to her husband.

Paul continues his instruction to Timothy and writes:

1 Timothy 2 verse 15 Nevertheless she **will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control.**

In the time when Paul wrote about the role of women in the church, one of the most popular religions was the worshiping of Diane. Diane; also known as the queen of the heavens, was also seen as the goddess of fertility. In those days women literally had a 50/50 chance of survival during childbearing, so Diane had a great following of pregnant women and their husbands. At Ephesus in Ionia (Turkey), her temple became one of the Seven Wonders of the World.

Greek Mythology describes how Diane requested from her father, Jupiter, to give her six wishes. Two of Diane's requests indicated her spirit of independence and of claiming gender equality. These two requests were that she would have eternal virginity and that she would have a silver bow and arrow for hunting like her twin brother, Apollo. It was this spirit of independence and claiming of gender equality that stirred many women followers to question their role in a society that was generally dictated by men. One can assume that this spirit of independence and gender equality influenced the women in the church as well, in Paul's time.

So it should be clear why Paul would emphasize that women would be saved in childbearing if they continued in faith, love, holiness and self-control. Paul was NOT talking about women's spiritual salvation here, as spiritual salvation has nothing to do with bearing children. The word "saved" here is the Greek word "sozo". The word literally meant "to be delivered from danger. Paul was addressing the fears of women who adhered to Diane to be delivered from the high mortality rate and dangers of childbearing. In other words Paul was teaching women to rather trust in Christ, through love and self-control, in order to be saved in childbearing, as opposed to trusting in the "goddess" Diane.

Diane was the symbol of independence and gender equality. This is the opposite of what the church is to be. The church is to be very dependent on Christ and submissive, learning with a quiet and peaceful spirit.

9.3: Learn in silence.

I have to acknowledge that the roles of women and men have led to a lot of abuse in the church, in both directions. Without respect and love from both sides, any theology will end up in abuse, manipulation and disrespect. Husbands are to love their wives like Christ loves the church, and women are to be subject to their husbands as the church is to be subject to Christ. That is their role to demonstrate the relationship between Christ and the church. It has nothing to do with gender equality or being chauvinistic. It has to do with the purpose of our existence which is Christ in all, above all and through all.

The reality is that when women understand who they are in Christ, and that they are safe and secure in Him, they have no need to find relevance in having to participate like the men do. Their significance is in who they are in Christ, and not in what they do for Christ. Their role in church does not determine their standing with the Lord. Their function in church is about who they are, more than in what they do.

Let us repeat Paul's words in:

1 Timothy 2 verse 12 And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence.

The word 'silence' in this passage is the Greek word "hysuxiai", which according to the Greek-English Lexicon has a focus upon an attitude. For example, in Acts 22:2, when Paul addressed them in Hebrew, the people became even '*quieter*;' from the Greek word "hysuxiai". This means that the women were not necessarily dead quiet, but it rather denoted an attitude of being still, such as NOT entering into a debate with the one who is teaching.

The role of gender was not only an issue in the church, but in the whole Roman and Greek world in the time of the apostles. Historians also confirm that the Roman-Greek "ekklesia" was a meeting where the men discussed and made the decisions concerning the affairs of state. The women's influences in those meetings were through their husbands or the other men in their immediate family. This is seen also in Paul's instruction in:

1 Corinthians 14 verse 33 For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.

Verse 34 Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says.

Verse 35 And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church.

Verse 36 Or did the word of God come originally from you? Or was it you only that it reached?

Verse 37 If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord.

Some would say that this command was only a cultural aspect and was only given to the Corinthian church, because the women spoke too much. When looking deeper into this passage one relishes that this was NOT the case. In the New King James we see the sentence in verse 33 ends with the words:

'...but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.'

Then starts with a new sentence in verse 34:

'Let your women keep silent in the churches...'

This is one of the most badly translated passages in most English translations, and was not done very honestly. In the original text these supposedly two sentences were actually one sentence and should read:

'As in all churches the women should be quiet...'

This fact can be verified by McReynolds Tyndale Greek English New Testament.

This is clearly not a mere cultural instruction to the Corinthian church, but a practice in all the churches. Nevertheless Paul does write in:

1 Corinthians 14 verse 26 How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.

Why would Paul say that when we come together each of us would have something to contribute, if women are not allowed to speak? There are a couple of things to consider here though. One could say that Paul was addressing the brethren and not the sisters in the church. Yet the fact is that “brethren” in some instances in Scripture not only means the brothers, but also includes sisters. Yet if we say that verse 26 refers to both men and women participating in the gathering, then one would conclude that Paul was contradicting himself in verse 34 that women were not allowed to speak in the gathering.

Before we look at this further, let us first deal with a couple of other passages of Scripture. A little bit earlier on Paul writes the following to the Corinthian Church:

1 Corinthians 11 verse 5 But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonours her head, for that is one and the same as if her head were shaved.

In Paul’s instruction to the Corinthian Church concerning the manner as to how women were to prophecy and pray, we see that Paul does acknowledge women prophesying and praying. The question here then is whether Paul is talking of a church gathering or not? Paul writes further in:

1 Corinthians 11 verse 15 But if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her; for her hair is given to her for a covering.

Verse 16 But if anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God.

Verse 17 **Now in giving these instructions** I do not praise you, **since you come together not for the better but for the worse.**

Verse 18 For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it.

We read here that the context of Paul’s **instructions** are with reference to “when the church comes together.” So it seems that women prophesied and prayed in the meetings. The fact that it is God’s will that women should prophecy is confirmed in:

Acts 2 verse 17 'AND IT SHALL COME TO PASS IN THE LAST DAYS, SAYS GOD, THAT I WILL POUR OUT OF MY SPIRIT ON ALL FLESH; YOUR SONS AND YOUR DAUGHTERS SHALL PROPHECY, YOUR YOUNG MEN SHALL SEE VISIONS, YOUR OLD MEN SHALL DREAM DREAMS.

Verse 18 AND ON MY MENSERVANTS AND ON MY MAIDSERVANTS I WILL POUR OUT MY SPIRIT IN THOSE DAYS; AND THEY SHALL PROPHECY.

This was Peter’s message as he quoted the book of Joel when the Spirit was poured out upon the disciples that were gathered together in prayer as the Lord had commanded them. Prophecy is not only intended for men but for women as well. Prophecy means speaking on God’s behalf under the influence or inspiration of the Holy Spirit. So it should not be any surprise that women would prophecy in the “ekklesia” meetings also. We read in:

Acts 21 verse 8 On the next day we who were Paul’s companions departed and came to Caesarea, and entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him.

Verse 9 Now this man had **four virgin daughters who prophesied.**

We even read in:

Revelations 2 verse 20 Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, **who calls herself a prophetess,** to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols.

This might not be a very good example of a prophetess, but it does show us an accepted practice in the church of the New Testament. Jezebel was reprimanded not because she prophesied, but for seducing the servants of God in committing sexual immorality. So the sin was not in that she prophesied, but her seduction and deception.

So what are we to understand: women are not allowed to speak, but are allowed to prophecy in the meeting? But how are they to prophecy without speaking? It is possible, if one understands that prophesying is not man speaking but God speaking through His vessel. So when women prophecy it is NOT women speaking, but God speaking through a vessel of His choosing. When women pray they are not praying as themselves but as the church to God.

The Greek word for silent that Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 14: 34 is: “sigao” and means “to keep one's peace”. The Greek word “to talk” in the same passage is: “laleo” which in certain occasions is used to mean “to speak out about”. In this context Paul was teaching how prophecy should be used in the gathering, and that the church ought to judge the prophecies. From my understanding, Paul was instructing the women to keep their “peace” concerning the prophecy and not to verbalize their judgment or “speak out” in the meeting concerning it.

Women are to learn in peace and are not to teach in the “ekklesia” gathering. Women giving their own views, questioning the men that are teaching or vocalizing their judgment on prophecies, actually depict a church not willing to be subjected to the covering and headship of Christ. Yet when woman prophecies she is the vessel of God speaking the oracles of God and not man’s opinions.

There does seem to be instances that women do teach men. For instance we read in:

Acts 18 verse 24 Now a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus.

Verse 25 This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord, though he knew only the baptism of John.

Verse 26 So he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, **they** took him aside and **explained to him the way of God more accurately.**

Aquila and Priscilla were a husband and wife team in spreading the gospel, and taught the way of the Lord more accurately to Apollos. Priscilla, the wife of Aquila, was therefore also teaching Apollos. How is this possible, when Paul instructed Timothy that women are not to teach men? Well simply put, this was not a church gathering. Preaching the gospel and teaching new converts were done outside the “ekklesia” gathering, so it was not unusual for women to do this as well. Remember day to day sharing of lives and preaching the Gospel are not the same things as the “ekklesia” gathering. We even read where Paul made mention of women helping him in spreading the gospel in:

Philippians 4 verse 3 And I urge you also, true companion, help **these women who labored with me in the gospel,** with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the Book of Life.

9.4: Covering.

So, let us summarise. There is a difference in the way women minister in the “ekklesia” gathering to that of women spreading the gospel, outside the “ekklesia” gathering. Outside the “ekklesia” gathering there is no symbolic representation necessary, so there is no difference in man and woman ministry. However in the marriage and the “ekklesia” gathering represents the mystery of Christ and the church. The gathering has to demonstrate Jesus Christ being the head and covering of His bride the church. As we said before, men and women are there representing the relationship of Christ and the church. The way the men and women participate in the meeting is therefore a direct representation of how the church relates to Christ.

We repeat Paul’s words in:

Ephesians 5 verse 23 For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body.

With this in mind, let us look at Paul’s instruction concerning head covering from:

1 Corinthians 11 verse 2 Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things and keep the traditions just as I delivered them to you.

Before we read on, we can see Paul is setting the basis for the instructions that are to follow. First Paul praises the Corinthians for following the traditions as he delivered them to them. This in itself demonstrates that there is nothing wrong with tradition as long it does not contradict or hinder us from obeying the word of God. Better yet, we should follow the traditions when they are inspired by the Holy Spirit as set forth from the apostles. In another instance, Paul writes:

2 Thessalonians 2 verse 15 Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle.

Then Paul goes so far as to say in:

2 Thessalonians 3 verse 6 But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us.

On that basis Paul wants us to understand head covering, as he continues:

1 Corinthians 11 verse 3 But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.

There is a clear order that Paul is setting out. What is interesting to note is that the head of the church is not “a man” but Christ. The only covering of the church is not an institution or organization, but Christ. He is the only head and covering of the church. With this, Paul teaches us that as God is the head of Christ, and Christ is the head of the church, so is man the head of woman. So from this point Paul continues.

1 Corinthians 11 verse 4 Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonors his head.

Verse 5 But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, for that is one and the same as if her head were shaved.

Verse 6 For if a woman is not covered, let her also be shorn. But if it is shameful for a woman to be shorn or shaved, let her be covered.

Verse 7 For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man.

Verse 8 For man is not from woman, but woman from man.

Verse 9 Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man.

Verse 10 For this reason the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels.

Up to this point it seems clear that Paul is teaching that women should have her head covered when she prays and prophecies. There are a couple of misconceptions that I will need to clear up before we continue. Many ancient religions, and Judaism, practiced the veiling of women. It is a core practice of the Islamic faith today. Yet many of those practices are based on the belief that it is essential to cover-up the women's beauty in order to prevent the men from falling for their allure, or from being distracted from worship.

This same belief has infiltrated the institutional church, almost from the conception of the institutional church. So one would still find some churches today where women have to wear some kind of hat right through the so-called worship service. Yet was Paul trying to keep the men from being distracted by the women's allure?

First of all, Paul was not dealing with a worship service, but a judicial "ekklesia" gathering. There is nothing written here that women should have their heads covered during the whole meeting, as practiced in some traditional churches today. Paul only speaks of the authority a woman would wear when she would prophecy or pray. The word "symbol" in this passage is not found in the Greek text. It literally reads that "...she has to wear authority on her head...". The "symbol" is implied by the translators as the covering would "**indicate**" authority.

Secondly, Paul's instruction is not only culturally bound as some people claim. Paul did address the issue of heathen temple prostitutes that would have shaved their hair in those days, yet this only deals with the shame of women shaving their hair. That is why as we read in verse 5, it would have been a shameful thing in the Corinthian church for women to have had their heads shaved. Paul was saying that it was the women who do not want to be shamed with a shaven head, that need to have their heads covered should they pray or prophecy.

However temple prostitution was not the reason that Paul gave why women should wear a covering when she prophesied or prayed in the ekklesia meeting. In verse 10, Paul writes that a woman should have a "symbol" of authority on her head because of the angels. What has the covering that indicates authority got to do with the angels? As you know the "ekklesia" gatherings are kingdom gatherings and deal with God's kingdom, so it should be of no surprise that angels will be present. For that reason, the angels who are the protectors of the throne of God, are witnesses to how we represent Christ's glory here on earth in our judicial "ekklesia" gatherings.

Man is not to be glorified, but Christ is to be glorified. Let me say again, church has to do with Christ and not us. As man is to demonstrate Christ's glory, he should not cover his head, but because woman demonstrates man's glory she should cover her head.

2 Corinthians 10 verse 17 But "HE WHO GLORIES, LET HIM GLORY IN THE LORD."

Now let us continue with Paul's teaching to a place where it gets a bit tricky:

1 Corinthians 11 verse 11 Nevertheless, neither is man independent of woman, nor woman independent of man, in the Lord.

Verse 12 For as woman came from man, even so man also comes through woman; but all things are from God.

Verse 13 Judge among yourselves. Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?

Verse 14 Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him?

Verse 15 But if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her; for her hair is given to her for a covering.

Verse 16 But if anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God.

Verse 17 Now in giving these instructions I do not praise you, since you come together not for the better but for the worse.

From verse 11 Paul is clarifying the point that woman is created for man, but that man is not independent of woman since he is born of her and neither is woman independent of man as his seed is where life originates. Yet all things actually originate from God. So Paul's argument here is of being dependent on one another and of God.

Then Paul moves on by stating that long hair is woman's glory in the same way as long hair would dishonour a man.

The issue comes from the fact that Paul is saying that the woman's hair is given to her as a covering. This does seem to throw a spanner in the works. Yet, looking at the Greek words that Paul uses, one does get some clarification.

When Paul talks of women needing to cover her head in verse 6, he uses the Greek word "*katakalypto*", which literally means: "to cover up" or "to cover oneself" as one would with a veil. In contrast, when Paul speaks of woman's hair been given to her as a covering in verse 15, he uses the Greek word "*peribolaion*", which literally means: "something thrown around" like one would with a mantle. The picture of a "mantle" has to do with **displaying** of glory and not a **covering up** of glory. In other words, Paul is just reaffirming the fact that should women pray and prophecy in a gathering she should cover her "glory" – her hair, as a sign that she is under authority. A woman's hair is her glory like a wealthy man would wear a mantle to display his glory. The hair is not the covering of her head, but a mantle of glory that she would need to cover when she prays or prophecy in the meeting.

The head covering demonstrates an important spiritual aspect of the church. The head covering demonstrates the church being subjected to Christ's headship. This is the church that does not glorify in man, but glorifies in Christ. For man's glory is covered by woman wearing a head covering and Christ's glory is shown, by man having his head uncovered.

Some people state that Paul's instruction is not just for the meeting but should be practiced in all situations. As we saw earlier on, Paul writes in:

1 Corinthians 11 verse 17 **Now in giving these instructions** *I do not praise you, since you come together not for the better but for the worse.*

Verse 17 is in reference to both the issue of head covering spoken of before this verse and the issue of the Lord's Supper that follows. "These instructions" as Paul writes has to do with "...since you come together...".

In conclusion, should one want to take Paul's instructions literally, one could actually put another spanner in the works. If long hair is woman's glory, what happens if a woman cuts her hair short, would she still need a head covering? Keep in mind that in today's culture it is not shameful for a woman to have her hair cut short as it does not represent temple prostitution as it did to the Corinthian church. For Paul writes in:

1 Corinthians 11 verse 6 *For if a woman is not covered, let her also be shorn. But if it is shameful for a woman to be shorn or shaved, let her be covered.*

The answer to that I will leave for you to receive from the Lord.

9.5: Being led by the Holy Spirit

The head covering goes much further than just having a symbol on a women's head when she prays or prophesies. It talks of the church's attitude of being under Christ. We are so used to a man-centred church that concentrates on man's needs as opposed to being Christ-centred in dealing with God's kingdom and His glory in and through Christ.

The whole issue of how women participate has to do with how the bride of Christ, the church, learns to be quiet before the Lord. There is nothing wrong with sharing views and discussing issues, and teaching from Scripture. Yet above all of these things, the church needs to listen what the Lord has to say. The Lord wants to speak through the prophets and prophetesses. That will only happen, when the church learns to become quiet before the Holy Spirit in order to hear the voice of the Lord.

If the Holy Spirit chooses to use women vessels, then we should not hinder this, but it should be done according to the order that is set forth in Scripture. The order is as follows:

- 1) Women are not to teach in the "ekklesia" gathering, but are allowed to teach outside the gathering.
- 2) Women are not to discuss issues or debate and ask questions in the "ekklesia" gathering, but should do this at home.
- 3) Women should not verbalize her judgment of prophecy in the "ekklesia" gathering, but has the rest of the week to bring her concerns to the men.
- 4) Nevertheless, a woman is encouraged to speak up when she has a word or vision from the Lord, but she should cover her glory in doing that.
- 5) Women are encouraged to pray, as long it is not about herself, but for the benefit of the church, as she covers her glory.

This practice will lead the whole church, men and women, to understand what it is to be under the headship of Christ. It will also cut down in useless babbling about unimportant issues and the affairs of this world. This will help the church to focus on what the Lord has to say concerning the affairs of His kingdom.

An "ekklesia" church gathering cannot keep on having Bible studies, debating theology, talking over what they have discovered on Google, or being dragged around by every fad of doctrine that is out there, thinking the bride is fulfilling her purpose. We need to hear what the Spirit has to say to the church.

Spiritual gifts have been replaced by well-oiled church programs, emotion-driven secular music with the name Jesus in it, and motivational speakers. Others that try to generate spiritual gifts through their own efforts, eat (demonstrate) their fruit of carnal behaviour and demonic manifestations. Why is this? What has happened to cause the church to end up like this, where even those who want to practice "ekklesia" gatherings, battle to function under the leading of the Holy Spirit?

Before we get to answer this question, let us look at how the early church was led by the Holy Spirit. In one occasion we saw that when the apostles were ministering to the Lord in prayer, the Holy Spirit talked to them concerning Barnabas and Saul. We read in:

*Acts 13 verse 2 As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, **the Holy Spirit said**, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."*

Verse 3 Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away.

Verse 4 So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus.

On another occasion there was a theological disagreement, and after long deliberation the church sensed the leading of the Holy Spirit on how to settle the issue, as we read in:

Acts 15 verse 23 They wrote this letter by them: The apostles, the elders, and the brethren, To the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia: Greetings.

Verse 24 Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, "You must be circumcised and keep the law"—to whom we gave no such commandment—

Verse 25 it seemed good to us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul,

Verse 26 men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Verse 27 We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who will also report the same things by word of mouth.

Verse 28 **For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things:**

Verse 29 that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.

The church could not function without the leading of the Holy Spirit. If we are to function as the body of Christ, Him being the Head, we need the nervous system of the Holy Spirit in every fibre of the church's being. Paul writes the following, in:

1 Corinthians 14 verse 1 Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but **especially that you may prophesy.**

And again in:

1 Corinthians 14 verse 5 **I wish you all spoke with tongues, but even more that you prophesied;** for he who prophesies is greater than he who speaks with tongues, unless indeed he interprets, that the church may receive edification.

Then he repeats this again in:

1 Corinthians 14 verse 39 Therefore, brethren, **desire earnestly to prophesy,** and do not forbid to speak with tongues.

Every one of the above passages clarifies Paul's heart that the Corinthian church would practice spiritual gifts, especially that of prophecy. There is an interesting account in the Old Testament where the Holy Spirit came upon the seventy elders of Israel in the time of Moses, and where Joshua was concerned about two elders who prophesied while not being with Moses and the other elders. Look how Moses responded to Joshua's concern, in:

Numbers 11 verse 28 So Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' assistant, one of his choice men, answered and said, "Moses my lord, forbid them!"

Verse 29 Then Moses said to him, "Are you zealous for my sake? **Oh, that all the LORD's people were prophets and that the LORD would put His Spirit upon them!**"

Wow, imagine that! Moses, just like Paul for the church, desired that all of Israel would prophecy. Surely we can see God's heart in this? God wants to speak to His people. When Paul starts to explain spiritual gifts to the Corinthian church, Paul writes the following interesting statement in:

1 Corinthians 12 verse 1 Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant:

Verse 2 You know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols, however you were led.

Is it not amazing that Paul would speak of being led away by dumb idols? How would dumb idols, in other words, idols that don't speak, lead people away? The fact is that this very "**silence**" leads people to trust in their own imagination, which inevitably leads people into error. The living God speaks to His people. Christ is risen and is in our midst, and wants to interact with His body through the Holy Spirit.

We read in interesting account in:

Amos 8:11 "Behold, the days are coming," says the Lord GOD, "That I will send a famine on the land, Not a famine of bread, Nor a thirst for water, But of hearing the words of the LORD.

Verse 12 They shall wander from sea to sea, And from north to east; They shall run to and fro, seeking the word of the LORD, But shall not find it.

When God was silent towards Israel it indicated God's judgment on them for not listening to Him in the first place. It was in this silence of God that Israel was led into even further darkness as they followed dumb idols. If there is silence between Christ and the Church what do you think it indicates? Let us rephrase that question. What do you think is happening when Christ is not speaking to His church?

God wants to speak to His church. The less man speaks, but listens to what the Spirit has to say, the more you will actually find Christ has something to say to His church. How do we get to that place? First of all, the church was in constant prayer as we read in:

Acts 4 verse 31 And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.

Secondly, the church needs to learn to be quiet before the Lord. The women in the church determine this by the way they participate. They need to learn in silence, and only speak if they sense it is the Lord speaking or a vision or revelation from the Lord. In actual fact, it should be the desire of the whole church, men and women, to be used in the spiritual gifts. There is much to be said when it comes to spiritual gifts. We will deal with this topic further in the next session, called "a church without programs."

I just would like to end off by stressing the point I started with in the first chapter, that this teaching should not be used to divide the "ekklesia" church. It is good to discuss topics like this, in order to bring understanding, but when discussing them, try to really hear each other out with respect as equal members of the body of Christ. This teaching should not be forced on any parts of the body of Christ either. This teaching should only be practiced according to the revelation of the Holy Spirit to the bride of Christ. Be patient and loving towards each other as the Spirit deals with you as a body over these issues. Christ is the one building His church, so let Him do it.

Part 10: A Church without Programs

10.1: Pentecost

The “ekklesia” church is the elect of Christ who come together to discuss and make decisions concerning the Kingdom of God. Surely, if we are to make decisions concerning God’s kingdom in our lives we should expect that the King would have a say? That is why Jesus said in:

Matthew 18 verse 20 For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."

In what way do we see Christ in our midst? In the book of Acts we see one of the most important events that happened after Christ’s salvation work on Calvary. The event came about on the Jewish feast of weeks called Pentecost. It was about 50 days after Passover at the beginning of the wheat harvest. We read in:

Acts 2 verse 1 When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.

Verse 2 And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting.

Verse 3 Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them.

Verse 4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

When the Jews, who were nearby, heard the commotion of the disciples being filled with the Holy Spirit, they came to investigate. This was Peter’s response to their investigation:

Acts 2 verse 16 But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

*Verse 17 'AND IT SHALL COME TO PASS IN THE LAST DAYS, SAYS GOD, THAT I WILL POUR OUT OF MY SPIRIT **ON ALL FLESH**; YOUR SONS AND YOUR DAUGHTERS **SHALL PROPHECY**, YOUR YOUNG MEN SHALL SEE VISIONS, YOUR OLD MEN SHALL DREAM DREAMS.*

*Verse 18 AND **ON MY MENSERVANTS AND ON MY MAIDSERVANTS** I WILL POUR OUT MY SPIRIT IN THOSE DAYS; AND THEY SHALL PROPHECY.*

The church of Christ only really started to function when the Holy Spirit came upon them. Yet somehow it is this manifestation of the Holy Spirit that has caused a lot of confusion in the church during the past years. Why is that? The answer is quite simple. It is because of human control over something that is only to be controlled by our King and Saviour Jesus Christ. When man tries to take control over the church, you will either find carnal behaviours and demonic manifestation, or the quenching of spiritual gifts such as using programs to avoid spiritual gifts.

Yet how did things go so wrong? When looking at church history you will see that the same spiritual gifts that we read about in the Bible were still evident through the first three centuries of the church, as we can read in some extracts of the church father's documents and letters:

Justin Martyr in 150AD remarked that - “*the prophetic gifts remain with us, even to their present time...*” He continues “*...it was possible to see amongst us women and men who possess gifts of the Spirit of God*”.

Irenaeus wrote around 180AD: “*In like manner 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*”

Tertullian, an anti-heretical apologist, around 207 AD wrote: “*Let Marcion then (show), as gifts of his god, some prophets, (who don’t speak in a human sense, but with the Spirit of God, such as have both predicted things to come, and have made manifest the secrets of the heart; let him (also) produce a psalm, a vision, a prayer -- only let it be by the Spirit, (as) in an ecstasy, that is, in a rapture, whenever an interpretation of tongues has occurred to him; let him show to me also, that any woman of boastful tongue in his community has ever prophesied from amongst*

those specially holy sisters of his. Now all these signs (of spiritual gifts) are forthcoming from my side without any difficulty, and they agree, too, with the rules, and the (allowance), and the instructions of the Creator; therefore without doubt the Christ, and the Spirit, and the apostle, belong severally to my God. Here, then, is my frank (affirmation) for anyone who cares to require it

Novatian, who lived between 200 and 258 AD, wrote: *“This is He who places prophets in the Church, instructs teachers, directs tongues, gives powers and healings, does wonderful works, often discrimination of spirits, affords powers of government, suggests counsels, and orders and arranges whatever other gifts there are of charismata; and thus make the Lord’s Church everywhere, and in all, perfected and completed.*

Then something happened that changed all of this around 300AD. As you would recall; Constantine the emperor of Rome institutionalized the church. The church suddenly had places of worship, and people were placed in charge over the institutional church. These people found they had a platform to give their priestly performance where the rest of the church became spectators. What do you think happened to the spiritual gifts? Well, just look at the attitude of those who were placed in charge of this institution of man they called church.

Eusebius wrote in around 339AD concerning someone who had spiritual manifestations: *“He became possessed of a spirit, and suddenly began to rave in a kind of ecstatic trance, and to babble in a jargon, prophesying in a manner contrary to the custom of the Church which had been handed down by tradition from the earliest times.*

Chrysostom who lived around 344-407 AD and as you would recall who gave us the art of “rhetoric” or better known as “the sermon”, wrote: *“This whole phenomenon [of speaking in tongues] is very obscure, but the obscurity is produced by our ignorance of the facts referred to and by their (termination), being such then as 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 hath produced us again another question: namely, why did they then happen, and now do so no more.*

That is a good question that Chrysostom asked. Why did it happen before and not anymore in his time? He just could not see it was his very institution and the religious performance of a one man show that were quenching the spiritual gifts.

Augustine of Hippo, around 354 and 430AD wrote: *“In the earliest times, "the Holy Ghost fell upon them that believed: and they spoke with tongues", which they had not learned, "as the Spirit gave them utterance". These were signs adapted to the time. For there behooved to be that betokening of the Holy Spirit in all tongues, to show that the Gospel of God was to run through all tongues over the whole earth. That thing was done for a betokening, and it passed away. In the laying on of hands now, that persons may receive the Holy Ghost, do we look that they should speak with tongues? Or when he laid the hand on infants, did each one of you look to see whether they would speak with tongues, and, when he saw that they did not speak with tongues, was any of you so strong-minded as to say, These have not received the Holy Ghost; for, had they received, they would speak with tongues as was the case in those times? If then the witness of the presence of the Holy Ghost be not given through these miracles, by what is it given, by what does one get to know that he has received the Holy Ghost? Let him question his own heart. If he love his brother, the Spirit of God dwelleth in him.*

Right up to our present day many in the institutional church still hold to this very philosophy of Augustine of Hippo that the manifestation of the Spirit does not happen as it happened in the Bible anymore. He; like many today; believed that the indication that one has received the gift of the Holy Spirit is by the way one would love another. In the next section of this series of teaching we will look at the Scriptural validity of this belief.

It is evident from these manuscripts of the early church fathers that the manifestations of the spiritual gifts were quenched by the institutionalization of the church around 312AD. There were instances during the church ages after 312AD that spiritual gifts such as prophecy and tongues continued to manifest in the church. These manifestations were generally ridiculed by many in the organized church. The other problem was that these manifestations of the spiritual gifts quickly became carnal expressions that led to gross errors. This holds true right up to our present day.

So; many believe that the spiritual gifts stopped after the time of the apostles as it seems so from the church fathers' documents after Constantine. The reasoning they give is that the canon of Scriptures was completed and they use the following Scripture as a proof text:

1 Corinthians 13 verse 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part.

Verse 10 **But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.**

Verse 11 When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

Verse 12 For now we see in a mirror, dimly, **but then face to face.** Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.

Their reasoning tries to explain that the perfect has come when the canon of Scripture was completed. Yet this is clearly out of context. This passage does not refer to the canon of Scriptures at all. Verse 12 in referring to “the perfect”, has to do with us: “seeing face to face”. The only time when we will know just as we also are known is when we see Christ face to face as John explains in:

1 John 3 verse 2 Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, **for we shall see Him as He is.**

The perfect that comes is Christ not the canon of Scripture. Right up till today we still only know in part. This is evident by the fact of how fragmented the church has become. When we see Christ face to face then we will know all things as He knows us. Then that which helps us in our ignorance like the spiritual gifts will not be necessary anymore.

Some would then say, but why is it then that that which is supposed to help us in our ignorance seems to cause just more confusion? Well simply; the gifts of the Spirit were not intended to be put on a stage for religious entertainment. More than likely this show will end up with people enforcing their agendas and manipulations for some counterfeit spiritual manifestations. Spiritual gifts are intended for the members of the body of Christ to be empowered to minister to **one another** and to spread the gospel.

10.2: Tongues and Prophecy

Even though there are a number of spiritual gifts taught in 1 Corinthians chapter 12 we see that when the saints were filled with the Spirit in the book of Acts this was manifested generally in two ways. That is, with prophecy and with tongues. We also see that Paul spent a whole chapter in 1 Corinthians chapter 14 dealing with prophecy and tongues. Why was that? What significance does prophecy and the speaking in tongues have that is not shared by the other spiritual gifts? Well, in answering this question, let us first look at how these two spiritual gifts functioned in the “ekklesia”, reading from:

*1 Corinthians 14 verse 1 Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but **especially that you may prophesy.***

So according to Paul what should we pursue and what should we desire? First of all, we need to pursue love, for that is the basis of ministering to one another, and then we should desire spiritual gifts. We should not only accept spiritual gifts in our meetings, but actually desire them, especially prophecy. Why prophecy? Well, Paul continues in:

*1 Corinthians 14 verse 2 For he who speaks in a tongue **does not speak to men but to God,** for no one understands him; however, **in the spirit he speaks mysteries.***

Verse 3 But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men.

Verse 4 He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church.

So why does prophecy seem so important? Prophecy: “*edifies, exhorts and comforts men*”. But there is something more. Prophecy literally means speaking by inspiration of God. In other words, a prophet is a spokesperson for God. In contrast, when someone would speak in tongues, according to Paul, that person: “*does not speak to men but to God*”, because no one understands the person who speaks in tongues. The person is speaking “mysteries in the spirit” as Paul puts it.

Yet Paul’s explanation of tongues brings a little confusion. If tongues are for personal edification, why would the Jews hear God being honoured each in their own language when the Spirit came upon the disciples for the first time, as we read in?

Acts 2 verse 4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Verse 5 And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven.

Verse 6 And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language.

Verse 7 Then they were all amazed and marveled, saying to one another, “Look, are not all these who speak Galileans?”

*Verse 8 **And how is it that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born?***

Verse 9 Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,

Verse 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes,

*Verse 11 Cretans and Arabs—**we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God.**”*

Verse 12 So they were all amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “Whatever could this mean?”

Before we delve into this matter let us first explore a theory that was made popular by a so-called bishop named Thomas Aquinas in 1265AD. When writing about the gift of tongues found in the New Testament, he explained it to be an ability to speak every language, given for the purposes of “missionary work”. He explained that Christ did not have this gift because his mission was to the Jews. He writes: “*nor does each one of the faithful now speak save in one tongue*”; for “*no one speaks in the tongues of all nations, because the Church herself already speaks the languages of all nations*”.

This view is still held in some form by many today. There are those today who have a variant of this belief by suggesting that the speaking of tongues could still happen but only for the purpose of mission work. Yet this view contradicts Paul who specifically wrote in:

1 Corinthians 14 verse 2 For he who speaks in a **tongue does not speak to men but to God**, for no one understands him; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries.

And again we read in

1 Corinthians 14 verse 4 He who speaks in a tongue **edifies himself**, but he who prophesies edifies the church.

Tongues were not meant as a way to preach the gospel, but for personal edification. So how do we explain Acts chapter 2, where the Jews heard God being glorified in their own native tongue? Well Paul explains in:

1 Corinthians 14 verse 5 I wish you all spoke with tongues, but even more that you prophesied; for he who prophesies is greater than he who speaks with tongues, **unless indeed he interprets, that the church may receive edification.**

We need to understand that the word: “tongues” actually just means: “languages”. By the outpouring of the Spirit the disciples spoke in different languages. Should the person hear God being glorified in a tongue that he or she understands, they will also be edified. Yet it is clear that if you do not understand the tongue then you would not be edified as Paul explains in:

1 Corinthians 14 verse 6 But now, brethren, if I come to you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you unless I speak to you either by revelation, by knowledge, by prophesying, or by teaching?

Verse 7 Even things without life, whether flute or harp, when they make a sound, unless they make a distinction in the sounds, how will it be known what is piped or played?

Verse 8 For if the trumpet makes an uncertain sound, who will prepare for battle?

Verse 9 So likewise you, unless you utter by the tongue words easy to understand, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air.

Verse 10 There are, it may be, so many kinds of languages in the world, and none of them is without significance.

Verse 11 Therefore, if I do not know the meaning of the language, I shall be a foreigner to him who speaks, and he who speaks will be a foreigner to me.

Verse 12 Even so you, since you are zealous for spiritual gifts, let it be for the edification of the church that you seek to excel.

Verse 13 Therefore let him who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret.

Coming back to the instance where the Jews heard God being glorified each in their own tongue one sees that they did not repent at that point. They might have been curious and some even mocked the phenomenon, but many of the Jews only converted when Paul actually preached the gospel afterwards in their common language. There is no evidence or examples found in Scripture to suggest that tongues was a gift to use to do mission work or to preach the gospel with.

In that case if the gift of tongues is not for mission work, how does it edify the person that is speaking in tongues? Paul continues by writing in:

1 Corinthians 14 verse 14 For if I pray in a tongue, **my spirit prays**, but my **understanding is unfruitful**.

According to Paul what happens when we pray in tongues? Our spirit prays, but our understanding is unfruitful when we pray in tongues. That means we won't have any comprehension of what we say when we pray in the Spirit. How does not understanding what we speak edify us? Paul writes something interesting in:

Romans 8 verse 26 Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as

we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

Verse 27 Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

It is as though Paul is suggesting that relying on the Spirit to give us words to pray beyond our understanding gives us an opportunity for our spirit to pray in the Spirit far above a natural understanding. It is in the practice of being led by the Spirit in faith beyond our mere understanding. Paul continues to explain in:

1 Corinthians 14 verse 15 What is the conclusion then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding.

Verse 16 Otherwise, if you bless with the spirit, how will he who occupies the place of the uninformed say "Amen" at your giving of thanks, since he does not understand what you say?

Verse 17 For you indeed give thanks well, but the other is not edified.

Have you noticed the difference Paul makes between praying in the spirit and praying with the understanding? Paul teaches that, should we pray in the Spirit then we, and most probably those who hear us would NOT be able to understand what we say, because we would pray or sing in other languages. That is the reason why Paul wrote that we can't just pray and sing with the Spirit but that we also need to pray and sing with the understanding.

Paul then continues to explain in:

1 Corinthians 14 verse 18 I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you all;

Verse 19 yet in the church I would rather speak five words with my understanding, that I may teach others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue.

Verse 20 Brethren, do not be children in understanding; however, in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature.

According to Paul what is more important in the gathering, speaking with the understanding or speaking with tongues? Speaking with the understanding is of greater importance in the church meeting. Even with this remark by Paul, it is clear that speaking in tongues or other languages is not meant to edify others except if there is an interpretation of those languages. So once again, we see no indication that this was a gift meant for mission work.

I will repeat that tongues are for personal edification unless the utterance is interpreted, so that the church would understand what is being said. It is for personal edification because the person who speaks in tongues is learning to follow the leading of the Spirit in prayer in his or her own spirit, without having to lean on his or her own understanding.

10.3: A Sign

Tongues were not only for personal edification. Tongues, as well as prophecy, were given to be “signs”. It is these “signs” that distinguish them from the other spiritual gifts. Paul writes further in:

1 Corinthians 14 verse 21 In the law it is written: "WITH MEN OF OTHER TONGUES AND OTHER LIPS I WILL SPEAK TO THIS PEOPLE; AND YET, FOR ALL THAT, THEY WILL NOT HEAR ME," says the Lord.

Verse 22 Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophesying is not for unbelievers but for those who believe.

What is Paul referring to here? Well Paul was quoting from the book of Isaiah in:

Isaiah 28 verse 11 For with stammering lips and another tongue He will speak to this people,

Verse 12 To whom He said, "This is the rest with which You may cause the weary to rest," And, "This is the refreshing"; Yet they would not hear.

Verse 13 But the word of the LORD was to them, "Precept upon precept, precept upon precept, Line upon line, line upon line, Here a little, there a little," That they might go and fall backward, and be broken And snared and caught.

So in what way are tongues a sign for those that do not follow God’s precepts? As we see from Scripture, things were not going well between God and Israel. Right from the time of Moses, God gave the Law and the Prophets to guide Israel. Yet Israel steered away from God’s Law and they turned their backs on the warnings of God’s Prophets. They were not willing to hear God speaking to them. So God foretold through Isaiah that He would speak to them in another tongue and stammering lips. That which would have been rest and refreshing for them has become the “sign” that they would not hear God. When God judged Israel he opened His Kingdom to all nations and languages and so the manifestation of tongues became a sign of God’s judgment to those who reject Him: first for the Jews and then for the Gentiles. So tongues became the indication of God’s judgment on those who **do not** obey God’s Word. Prophecy on the other hand shows us that God is among His people, that the gap between us and God is dissolved. Paul explains this further in:

1 Corinthians 14 verse 23 Therefore if the whole church comes together in one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those who are uninformed or unbelievers, will they not say that you are out of your mind?

Verse 24 But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all, he is convicted by all.

Verse 25 And thus the secrets of his heart are revealed; and so, falling down on his face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you.

Is Paul not contradicting what he has just taught: that Prophecy is a sign for believers and tongues as sign for unbelievers? Not really; look carefully what Paul is saying. An unbeliever might be aware of God’s presence with the believers; but prophecy is the sign for the believers that God is with them. As we read that even the unbelievers acknowledge that God is with the believers, as their hearts were exposed by the prophecy. So the acknowledgement of the unbelievers that God is there is a sign to the believers. Yet how are tongues then a sign to unbelievers if they mock this strange phenomenon? Well Paul just explained two verses before in:

1 Corinthians 14 verse 21 In the law it is written: "WITH MEN OF OTHER TONGUES AND OTHER LIPS I WILL SPEAK TO THIS PEOPLE; AND YET, FOR ALL THAT, THEY WILL NOT HEAR ME," says the Lord.

The sign is that they will not hear God even if God speaks to them in other languages. This is exactly what happened in:

Acts 2 verse 12 So they were all amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "Whatever could this mean?"

Verse 13 "...Others mocking said, "They are full of new wine."

Even the Jews who were witnesses recognised that tongues might be a “sign” as they asked themselves what “*could this all mean?*” The verse afterwards shows us that they were mocking the speaking of tongues. Paul even speaks of this kind of mocking in:

1 Corinthians 14 verse 23 "...will they not say that you are out of your mind?"

Yet how is this mocking of unbelievers a sign to them if they don't recognise the sign? Well you see, biblical signs do not have to be understood by those that they are intended for, especially the signs that indicate God's judgment. For example, we read about the sign of the rainbow in:

Genesis 9 verse 13 *I set My rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be for the sign of the covenant between Me and the earth.*

The sign of the rainbow is still a sign between God and earth even though you will be hard pressed today to find unbelievers recognising this to be a sign from God to the earth. Another example is when the Scribes and the Pharisees asked for a sign from Christ, Jesus answered them as we read in:

Matthew 12 verse 39 *But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.*

The Pharisees and Scribes never understood that the sign of Jonah had to do with Jesus's death and resurrection. Yet that was still a sign for their generation who did not understand that Jesus was the Christ. That is one of God's mysteries in the way He judges the unrighteous. Tongues are a sign of God's judgment on the unrighteousness. It is a judgment from God that originated in Gen 11 verses 1-9 when God judged the people of the earth by dividing them through confusing their languages as they were building the tower of Babel.

Prophecy and tongues have another "sign" and that has to do with being filled with the Holy Spirit. Many believe that we are filled automatically with the Holy Spirit when we believe in Christ Jesus. Yet does the Scripture teach this? The first time the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit we read in:

Acts 2 verse 1 *When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.*

Verse 2 *And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting.*

Verse 3 *Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them.*

Verse 4 *And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.*

What happened to them when they were all filled with the Holy Spirit? They began to speak in tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. Let us read another account when the Spirit came upon people:

Acts 8 verse 14 *Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them,*

Verse 15 *who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit.*

Verse 16 *For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.*

Verse 17 *Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.*

Did the people receive the Holy Spirit when they accepted the gospel that Philip preached and were baptised? No they only received the Holy Spirit when the apostles laid their hands on them some time afterwards. After this we read a very interesting occurrence:

Acts 8 verse 18 *And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money,*

Verse 19 *saying, "Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit."*

Verse 20 *But Peter said to him, "Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money!"*

Simon, who used to practice sorcery before his conversion to Christ, thought he could purchase the ability to impart

the gift of the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands. What is interesting about this occurrence is the fact that there must have been some kind of manifestation such as prophecy or speaking in tongues that would have made Simon want this kind of experience that he would pay for it. Now let us read:

Acts 10 verse 44 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word.

Verse 45 And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also.

Verse 46 **For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God.** Then Peter answered,

Verse 47 "Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized **who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?**"

What happened while Peter was preaching the gospel to the Gentiles for the first time? The Holy Spirit fell upon those who heard the word. How did those believers of the circumcision, who accompanied Peter, know that the Gentiles also received the Holy Spirit just as they did? They heard them speak with tongues and magnify God just as they did when the Spirit came upon them. Can we say that receiving the Holy Spirit is a result of being baptised? No because these Gentiles were baptised only after they had received the Holy Spirit.

Let us look into one more incident from:

Acts 19 verse 1 And it happened, while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus. And finding some disciples

Verse 2 he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" So they said to him, "We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit."

Verse 3 And he said to them, "Into what then were you baptized?" So they said, "Into John's baptism."

Verse 4 Then Paul said, "John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus."

Verse 5 When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Verse 6 **And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied.**

Verse 7 Now the men were about twelve in all.

Is it true that all disciples have received the Holy Spirit? No; because Paul would not have asked those disciples whether they had received the Holy Spirit when they believed, if receiving the Holy Spirit happens automatically when one believes in Jesus Christ for salvation. Could it not be possible that these were not actual disciples yet? The fact that the Scripture calls these men 'disciples' means that these people *were* actually disciples. Also, the question of Paul as to whether they had received the gift when they believed, indicates that it is not necessarily that believers receive the gift of the Spirit when they believe. Did these disciples receive the Holy Spirit when they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus? No, they received the Holy Spirit only afterwards, when Paul laid his hands on them. What happened to the disciples when they received the Holy Spirit? They prophesied and spoke in different tongues. So prophecy and tongues was a sign that the disciples had received the Holy Spirit. In the next section we will look at how one receives the gift of the Holy Spirit.

10.4: Receiving the Holy Spirit

So what can we conclude from the book of Acts concerning being filled with the Holy Spirit? Firstly, when the disciples did receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, the gift manifested either through prophecy or tongues or both as they magnified God. Secondly, the disciples did not necessarily receive the Holy Spirit at the time of their conversion and baptism. This shows that just because one has become a Christian does not mean that one has receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Yet this is hard to accept for Christians who have never had this kind of encounter with the Holy Spirit. For them they have received the Holy Spirit as a matter of fact through their faith. This is based on the following passage of Scripture:

John 20 verse 20 When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.

Verse 21 So Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you."

Verse 22 And when He had said this, **He breathed on them**, and said to them, "**Receive the Holy Spirit.**"

Verse 23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

The question is, did the disciples actually receive the Holy Spirit when Jesus breathed on them? If they did receive the Holy Spirit, why would Jesus say that He first needed to depart, reading from?:

John 16 verse 7 Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; **for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you.**

Earlier on Jesus also said:

John 7 verse 38 He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."

John 7 verse 39 But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; **for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.**

Jesus had not departed from them nor was He glorified at the point when He "breathed" on them. In that case what did Christ mean by saying: "receive the Holy Spirit" when He "breathed" on them? This is what is called an "imperative speech". In other words Christ was giving them a command, but in a prophetic sense. Christ was enacting something which would need to happen in the near future with them and with the enacting commanding them to receive the Holy Spirit. That is why Jesus, just before He ascended to heaven said the following to the disciples in:

Acts 1 verse 4 And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, "which," He said, "you have heard from Me;

Verse 5 for John truly baptized with water, **but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."**

This leads us to the important question: how are we to be baptized in the Holy Spirit? We read the following passage in:

Acts 2 verse 38 Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; **and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.**

Verse 39 For the **promise** is to you and to your children, **and to all who are afar off**, as many as the **Lord our God will call."**

We know that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is a promise from the Lord and it happens after we have repented and believed in Christ Jesus. So if we want to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit what should we do then? Well, we don't have to always wait for some kind apostle to lay His hands on us, as we already saw through the examples in Acts. Jesus said the following in:

Luke 11 verse 11 If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a

fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish?

Verse 12 Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion?

Verse 13 If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!"

What does Jesus say we should not be fearful for when we ask the Father for the Holy Spirit? We should not fear that we would receive something evil when we ask for the Holy Spirit. God is a good Father and won't give us a demon, like some claim, when we ask for the Holy Spirit. Yet what do we do with the fact that there are so-called Christians that go around prophesying and speaking in tongues, yet show no spiritual fruit? Well, even in the Old Testament there are examples of those who prophesied who we would not consider righteous people. For instance, when King Saul was in rebellion toward God, he sent messengers to get hold of David so he could kill him, as David was God's choice for the new King of Israel. Look what happened next in:

1 Samuel 19 verse 20 Then Saul sent messengers to take David. And when they saw the group of prophets prophesying, and Samuel standing as leader over them, the Spirit of God came upon the messengers of Saul, and they also prophesied.

Verse 21 And when Saul was told, he sent other messengers, and they prophesied likewise. Then Saul sent messengers again the third time, and they prophesied also.

We have to admit that this is not a very good environment for God's Spirit to come upon people. Yet this just demonstrates that God does what He wants irrespective of our spiritual performance. Either way it is clear that prophecy was the evidence that the Spirit came upon people. Even before Saul became king and rebelled later on as king, Samuel said to him:

1 Samuel 10 verse 6 Then the Spirit of the LORD will come upon you, and you will prophesy with them and be turned into another man.

Verse 7 And let it be, when these signs come to you, that you do as the occasion demands; for God is with you.

We see from Samuel's words that the Spirit would come upon Saul for the first time and then he would prophesy and would even be turned into another man. He would receive boldness just like the disciples did in the New Testament. Here is an interesting question from this passage: what does Samuel call this manifestation of prophecy? Samuel calls it "these signs", so that he will know that God is with him. Is that not interesting? Look what happened to Saul.

1 Samuel 10 verse 10 When they came there to the hill, there was a group of prophets to meet him; then the Spirit of God came upon him, and he prophesied among them.

Verse 11 And it happened, when all who knew him formerly saw that he indeed prophesied among the prophets, that the people said to one another, "What is this that has come upon the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets?"

What is amazing is that even though the Spirit came upon Saul, and he was changed to another man he still fell away and rebelled against God later on in his life. This proves that just because someone has received the Holy Spirit does not make him or her invulnerable of falling into carnal behaviour such as jealousy, pride, and rebellion against God. One needs to realise that the gift of the Spirit is not the same thing as the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

Let us look at some examples of the Holy Spirit working:

John 16 verse 7 Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you.

Verse 8 And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment:

Does the world receive the Holy Spirit when He comes to convict it of sin, righteousness and judgment? Well Jesus said earlier in:

John 14 verse 16 And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you

forever—

*Verse 17 the Spirit of truth, **whom the world cannot receive**, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.*

So the Spirit does work in the world by convicting them of sin, righteousness and judgment, but on the other hand the world cannot receive the Holy Spirit. In the same way there are disciples of Christ that have not received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, yet sense the conviction of the Holy Spirit in their lives, and bear Spiritual fruit, as we read in:

Galatians 5 verse 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, Verse 23 gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

It might not be a good analogy, but consider that one can drink water to quench one's thirst, and one can also bath in water to wash oneself. These are two different experiences of the same water, and so it is with the Holy Spirit. First of all, the Holy Spirit convicts all of us every day in our hearts as to how we should live under the Lordship of Christ; which produces the fruit of the Spirit. On the other hand, the Holy Spirit also wants to fill us with His presence; which produces the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Does this mean one should be able to speak in tongues or prophesy if one was baptized in the Holy Spirit? We read in the Old Testament where the Spirit came upon the elders of Israel, in order for them to function in the task that God called them in:

*Numbers 11 verse 25 Then the LORD came down in the cloud, and spoke to him, and took of the Spirit that was upon him, and placed the same upon the seventy elders; and it happened, when the Spirit rested upon them, that they prophesied, **although they never did so again**.*

What happened when the Spirit came upon the 70 elders of Israel in the time of Moses? They prophesied but only for that particular time. This means that because one suddenly starts to prophesy or starts to speak in tongues when one is baptized with the Holy Spirit it does not necessary mean one would be able to prophesy or speak in tongues for the rest of one's life.

Even Paul explains in:

1 Corinthians 12 verse 29 Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Verse 30 Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?

What was Paul saying here? Well, Paul was asking these questions to illustrate the different parts of the body of Christ. He was teaching that as each member of the body is different from another, so will the giftings of the Holy Spirit also be different for each member. The answer to Paul's questions was intended to be: "no", in that not all are prophets or teachers and neither do all have gifts of healing or speaking with tongues. It is very possible that some spoke in tongues or prophesied when they were baptised in the Holy Spirit but afterwards only practised the gift of discernment or healing.

10.5: Practising spiritual gifts

Of all the Spiritual gifts, prophecy and tongues were different in that they were a “sign”, as said before. They are a vehicle God uses to speak to us, either through our understanding or in the Spirit. That is why they were the main expressions of the Spirit when the people were first filled with the Spirit.

Paul writes further in:

1 Corinthians 14 verse 26 How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, and has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.

Verse 27 If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be two or at the most three, each in turn, and let one interpret.

Verse 28 But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God.

The reason for practising spiritual gifts in the church, is for the edification of all and not just for oneself. This was part of an “ekklesia” gathering. In this passage Paul stipulates that two or at the most three may speak to the fellowship in different types of languages but then someone HAS TO interpret the languages. What should happen if there is no interpretation? Well those who speak in tongues should not address their tongues to the fellowship but speak to themselves and to God. As we saw already tongues are for personal edification as they pray in the spirit. Tongues are a way where the Spirit magnifies God and all of His deeds through a person in different languages.

Acts 2 verse 11 Cretans and Arabs – we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God.”

Then Paul continues on the practice of prophecy in:

1 Corinthians 14 verse 29 Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge.

So what is Paul saying regarding how the gift of prophecy is to be practiced in the meetings? First of all, there should only be two or three persons speaking the oracles of God at a time in the meeting, while the others in the gathering should judge what they say. That means judging whether what the prophets are saying is really from God or not, and secondly, deciding what the saints in the “ekklesia” gathering are going to do about it. How much judging of prophecy happens in the institutional churches today? I am afraid very little if any.

Paul writes in:

1 Thessalonians 5 verse 19 Do not quench the Spirit.

Verse 20 Do not despise prophecies.

Verse 21 Test all things; hold fast what is good.

There seems to be a grey area concerning quenching the Spirit and testing the Spirit in the church today. Some are quenching the Spirit thinking it is testing the Spirit and others are allowing carnal and even demonic manifestations for fear that they might quench the Holy Spirit. Why is that? Well, as we said before; when we are used to spectator oriented, program led church meetings, you will find these two unbiblical opposing extremes.

Let us first deal with the carnal behaviour that comes about through these stage-performances style of church meetings. Spiritual gifts were not intended to be a performance. They were intended to be, the ability of Christ’s body to function as a body led by the head, Jesus Christ. The spiritual gifts are for the purpose of ministering to the church’s spiritual and physical well-being, so that the body of Christ would grow to maturity.

Stage performances in churches are more focused on the individual’s needs than on the body of Christ. It focuses on feelings and appearances and not necessarily the well-being of the “body of believers”. A popular example is the so called “drunk in the Spirit” manifestations. People who are into “getting drunk in the Spirit” generally quote:

Acts 2 verse 13 Others mocking said, "They are full of new wine."

Yet it is clear from the context that the phrase, "...full of new wine" was meant as a mockery and not an indication of what happens to those who are filled with the Holy Spirit. Just think about it; was there any indication that the behaviour of the disciples resembled those who are drunk? No, the mocking referred to the phenomenon of speaking in other languages. It was the mockery of unbelievers and not a description of being filled with the Holy Spirit by the apostles.

What then is the indication that these manifestations were as a result of the Spirit of God and not just carnal behaviour? Paul writes in:

*1 Corinthians 1 verse 29 that **no flesh should glory in His presence.***

Verse 30 But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption—

*Verse 31 that, as it is written, "**HE WHO GLORIES, LET HIM GLORY IN THE LORD.**"*

Jesus said in:

John 16 verse 13 However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.

*Verse 14 **He will glorify Me**, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you.*

The first indicating factor is that NO **flesh** should receive glory in God's presence. In a performance based church the focus is on fleshly manifestations and has only entertainment value for those who are looking for the miraculous. These are carnal manifestations and even though they might be done under the name of Christ they do not glorify Christ. The Holy Spirit seeks to glorify Christ and not Himself, or provide some kind of drunken experience.

Quenching the Spirit and despising prophecies goes hand in hand. When we are more interested in motivational speaking, eloquent narrating, dealing with personal needs, sharing the latest theological fad, or dissecting Bible verses than what God has to say, then we are quenching the Spirit.

What are we saying; that Scripture does not play that big a role? Of course we are not saying that. Scripture is of utmost importance. Yet Scripture must be used for what it is intended for, and not as a replacement for the Holy Spirit. The Bible was not meant to be used as a fortune cookie, by finding a quick Scripture as a replacement for an actual "Word of Prophecy" from God. The Bible is not some enchantment book with magical powers. It is the historical account of saints and unrighteous people, instructions, words of wisdom, words of praise to God and Words from God, written by men who were inspired by the Holy Spirit in order to help us to test what is and what is not from God.

Paul continues to write in:

1 Corinthians 14 verse 29 Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge.

Verse 30 But if anything is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent.

*Verse 31 **For you can all prophesy one by one**, that all may learn and all may be encouraged.*

Verse 32 And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.

In an "ekklesia" gathering there might be two or even three prophets that might bring a specific "Word" from the Lord. As the others judge this "Word" someone else may bring forth an additional "Word". In that case Paul says that the first need to give an opportunity for this additional "Word"; as all may prophesy one by one and be encouraged and learn what the Spirit has to say.

The passages that follow from verse 33 deal with women speaking in church. We have already looked at this in part 8. Paul wraps up his teaching on spiritual gifts with the following words in:

1 Corinthians 14 verse 39 Therefore, brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak with tongues.

Verse 40 Let all things be done decently and in order.

An ekklesia church is not just about discussing the latest fad of doctrine, sharing feelings, or chatting about whatever comes to mind. It is about Christ conducting a meeting with His elect about His kingdom. For that very reason we should earnestly desire to prophesy, so we can hear what our King and Saviour has to say to us. We should also not prevent the speaking of tongues if the Spirit wishes to, according to the order that Paul has laid out for us.

We pray that as you express the church that Christ is building that you will submit to Christ in all things, as He desires to interact with the body, His bride, the house of God. We remind you that none of these teachings should be enforced on others, but by grace and patience, study these topics together with the family of God, until the Holy Spirit brings you to a consensus about how to go further as a fellowship on this journey.

Part 11: A Church without Guessing

11.1. Perspective of Church

This is the last part of the series of teachings named “A church beyond Imagination”. You most probably agreed with many of my views on church, but you most likely also do not see everything in the same light as me either. That is perfectly all right, as I might not have everything correct. Yet this does not mean that we are to settle with things that we know are not correct.

Many Christians seem to have the attitude that when they disagree with one another that “they will agree to disagree”. That is an unfruitful attitude, because it prevents us from growing. We should rather have the attitude that we might not see things the same way at this point, but as we are open to the Holy Spirit to use the different parts of the body to teach us. Each view brings different perspective on an issue, that when we bring it together may give us revelation on those issues, that we would not receive by just looking at an issue just from one perspective. Having patience with each other the Holy Spirit will bring us to the unity of the faith. However the unity of the Holy Spirit will be hindered if we are not patient with each other and try and force our views on each other. We should allow the Spirit to teach us through each other even in our disagreements. James writes:

James 1 verse 19 So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath;
Verse 20 for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

We have to understand that we don't know all things, but we are to make every effort to know and understand what the Lord wants us to understand. Paul writes in:

Ephesians 5 verse 15 See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise,
Verse 16 redeeming the time, because the days are evil.
Verse 17 Therefore do not be unwise, **but understand what the will of the Lord is.**

The more we show ourselves faithful with the things that God reveals to us, the more God will bless us with His marvellous treasures in Christ Jesus. The question then is: What has this got to do with how we do church? Paul writes:

Ephesians 3 verse 10 to the intent that now the **manifold wisdom of God** might be **made known by the church** to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places,
Verse 11 according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord

God's eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus, is, that the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church. Imagine that the manifold wisdom of God is being made known by the church. Paul even goes so far to say in:

1 Timothy 3 verse 15 but if I am delayed, I write so that **you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church** of the living God, **the pillar and ground of the truth.**

The church is the pillar and ground of truth. That is a very powerful statement and not something we can just brush over. We ought to know how we are to conduct ourselves in the church, the home of God. The Spirit of truth reveals truth through the church. We therefore cannot afford to be blasé about how we do church.

Looking at our modern types of church we can roughly identify three types according to dominant trends in the evangelical church today. First we have the institutional church, secondly we have the emerging church, and thirdly we have what we call the ekklesia church. These types are based on three totally different philosophies. The question is: Does it matter to our King and Saviour how we do church? Before we answer this, let us first look at the main differences between these three church philosophies in order to qualify the question and the answer.

The institutional church has a very religious and traditional emphasis to it. It has a place of worship, worship services and a hierarchy structure with a clear distinction between the clergy and the laity with a great emphasis on the authority of the clergy. The institutional church runs by programs. The undeniable truth about the institutional church is that it is built on money as it is unable to function without it.

The emerging church is sometimes also called the “out of church movement”. It is based on individual experiences and revelations. It has no division of clergy and laity but does have strong motivational speakers as leaders. The emerging church has no formal structure or programs, but functions by sharing knowledge, experiences or so-called liberating truths.

The ekklesia church is sometimes called the “home church”. It has no place of worship, or religious meetings, but differs from the emerging church in that it does have official meetings. Yet the meetings are judicial in form and are not program or clergy-led. It is very much relationship-based, and is unable to function without close brotherly love.

All three of these types claim that they are Christ-centred. It may be true that a lot about Christ is spoken in all three of these types, but these claims are not necessarily an indication of them being Christ-centred. Being Christ-centred is to be focused on what matters to Christ and His kingdom. The very life of Christ is not expressed by ideas, or revelations, or strategies, or programs, or charismatic personalities. The life of Christ is about being part of His Body, the household (family) of God. The household of God is the body of believers called the Body of Christ whose purpose is to seek and establish the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is not what God does for us, but about Christ being the centre of our lives and the Ruler of our hearts. Being Christ-centred places the focus away from man and places it on Christ.

The institutional church, in general, centres its message around the needs of people and how God is **obligated** to meet those needs through Christ, as long as the church performs in faith by giving to the institution. The emerging church is also centred on the needs of people and God’s **desire** to meet it in the love of Christ. The ekklesia church is centred on the kingdom of God and Christ’s heart, which is His bride - the church.

The summaries of these three types might be generalizations, but they are not unfounded if you hear the kind of vocabulary that is used most of the time from the supposed leaders in these three types of church. Making statements though does not prove anything, nor does it help us answer the question of whether it matters to God what type of church we should practice. What is interesting to note is that the philosophies behind these three types are greatly influenced by the way their adherents read the Bible, how they interpret the Bible and what value the Bible has in their “Christian” experience. Before we look at a biblical perspective of the Bible let us just briefly give an overview of the way the adherents of each of these three types view the Bible.

From the institutional church’s perspective the Bible is called the “Word of God”. Yet this does not guarantee that they necessarily mean that their practices line up with what they name the “Word of God”. The institutional church has a lot of inconsistencies in how they approach the Bible. They pick and choose Scriptures that suit their world-view. They find texts to verify their ideas and then obligate their followers to agree with them by telling them that this is what “the Word of God” says. Yet when it comes to passages that contradict their world-view they spiritualize, sweep it under cultural context, and manipulate the Scriptures till the passages become completely unrecognizable. If that still does not get the desired result they simply ignore them, stating that there are more important issues to consider. This just demonstrates the inconsistency between what they say and what they practice when it comes to viewing the Bible as the “Word of God”.

The emerging church has a very simplified approach to the Bible. For them, the Bible is not the “Word of God”. They do see its value in gaining knowledge and understanding, but consider that it is not necessary to line up one's world-view accordingly. To them the Holy Spirit is sent to us to “teach us all things”. Even though those in the emerging church would not admit to this, following the Spirit is merely doing what feels right to them. They don’t see any need to adjust their view according to Scripture. For them to follow any Scripture by obligation is seen as “Law” which they view in the same way that Paul describes the Law of Moses in the following passage:

2 Corinthians 3 verse 6 who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; **for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.**

The ekklesia church way of approaching the Bible, could easily be confused with the other two approaches. That is why we need the following four chapters to clarify some of the points that I am briefly going to make now. Many who are part of the ekklesia church do not necessarily see the Bible as the “Word of God”, yet have a greater respect for it in obeying and following the instructions of Scripture than the adherents of the institutional church do. The reason is that they see all of Scripture in the Bible as inspired by the Holy Spirit. This might seem contradictory, but they don’t necessarily understand the term “inspired by the Holy Spirit” to mean the same thing as the “Word of God”. On the other hand, they do understand context, and have a logical and consistent approach to the cultural and historical contexts of different passages of Scripture when they interpret text.

Understanding Scripture is therefore of the utmost importance in answering the question as to whether it matters to God how we do church and how we should actually do church. The way we approach Scripture has a great influence on whether we are able to discern Bible teachers' and church leaders' motives. This discernment will protect Christians from wandering fruitlessly in the darkness of man’s opinions and doctrinal fads.

Acts 17 verse 11 These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, **and searched the Scriptures daily** to find out whether these things were so.

11.2. Word of God

In this section we would like to tackle the subject of whether the Bible is actually the “Word of God” as it is accepted by most in the mainstream evangelical institutional church. What is interesting to note though is that you will not find ONE passage of Scripture that actually states that the Bible or “Scripture” is the “Word of God”. Nevertheless there does seem to be some Scriptures that imply this. So let us have a look at one of the passages that many claim does state that Scripture is the “Word of God”. It is found in:

*2 Timothy 3 verse 16 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,
Verse 17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

The phrase “inspiration of God” is translated from the Greek word “theopneustos” which literally means “God breathed”. “God breathed” is used in the Bible to mean God gives life or empowers something or someone. Yet one does not find a Scripture reference that would validate that “God breathed” would also mean “God’s Word”. That is why “God breathed” is correctly translated to mean “inspired of God” and not “the Word of God”.

To get our minds around this we would need to give a proper definition for: “the Word of God”. All the references from Scripture with the phrase: “Word of God” are of instances where God actually spoke something, either through a vision, or an angel or a prophet, for example, in:

*Genesis 15 verse 1 After these things the **word of the LORD came to Abram** in a vision, saying, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward."*

*2 Kings 9 verse 36 Therefore they came back and told him. And he said, "**This is the word of the LORD**, which He spoke by His servant Elijah the Tishbite, saying, 'On the plot of ground at Jezreel dogs shall eat the flesh of Jezebel;*

Here is a passage that does reveal something very interesting that would distinguish between Scripture and the Word of God in:

*1 Samuel 3 verse 1 Now the boy Samuel ministered to the LORD before Eli. **And the word of the LORD was rare in those days**; there was no widespread revelation.*

From this passage we see that while the priests had the written Scriptures of Moses, the “word of the Lord” was rare. This is a clear indication to us that the “word of the Lord” does not mean the same thing as Scripture to the priests and the prophets in the Old Testament. There are many strange and even obscure events in Scripture like for instance the apostles having a disagreement. We cannot say that these instances were things that God spoke. They were merely things that happened which the Holy Spirit unctioned the writers to record for our benefit.

Even Paul makes the distinction between what he wrote by inspiration of the Holy Spirit and the “word of God” in the following instances:

*1 Corinthians 7 verse 12 But to the **rest I, not the Lord, say**: If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her.*

And again in:

*1 Corinthians 7 verse 25 Now concerning virgins: **I have no commandment from the Lord**; yet I give judgment as one whom the Lord in His mercy has made trustworthy.*

There are things written in Scripture that are the words of God, such as when the prophets spoke in the Old Testament where we would read the phrase: “the word of the Lord came” In that instance God inspired the prophets to record His words. I have to emphasise, that the “word of God” means: “spoken by God”; whereas: “God breathed” means “inspired by” or “life from God”. The phrase “life from God” simply means that which God has breathed “life” into Scripture.

Scriptures therefore, as Paul taught Timothy, are used to teach doctrine, to test doctrine, to correct behaviour and are used to teach us about righteousness. Scripture is there to test whether what people claim is from God, is truly from God, as the Spirit will not contradict Himself. This means that when the saints prophesy, they should not go against what is written in Scripture; for Scripture is inspired by the same Spirit that has given them a “word” of prophecy.

Paul gives this instruction:

1 Thessalonians 5 verse 19 Do not quench the Spirit.

Verse 20 Do not despise prophecies.

Verse 21 Test all things; hold fast what is good.

John confirms this in:

1 John 4 verse 1 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

Yet does testing a word of prophecy with Scripture not confirm that Scripture is the “Word of God”? Let us explore a passage that does seem to imply this in:

Hebrews 4 verse 12 For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

When looking at the context though, we read that the author of Hebrews was speaking of entering God’s rest. To make his point he quotes a prophetic word from Psalm 95, as he wrote in:

Hebrews 4 verse 7 again He designates a certain day, saying in David, "TODAY," after such a long time, as it has been said: "TODAY, IF YOU WILL HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS."

The word of God in this context has to do with God speaking through the prophet. The word of God is living and powerful. When God speaks to us it is like a two-edged sword, dividing that which is soulish from that which is spiritual. Paul illustrates something about this when he taught about the gift of prophecy in:

1 Corinthians 14 verse 24 But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all, he is convicted by all.

Verse 25 And thus the secrets of his heart are revealed; and so, falling down on his face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you.

Reading a passage of Scripture to the church does not mean that the reader is giving a word of prophecy which would be the word of God for those hearing it. All Scripture is inspired by the Holy Spirit, but not everything that is in Scripture is the word of God. The word of God that is recorded in Scripture are those words that God has spoken either through an angel or through a prophet for a specific audience for a specific reason. A recorded event in Scripture is not the word of God even though the Spirit inspired the writers to record those events for us.

This leads us to investigate the difference between the Greek words, “logos” and “rhema”, that are translated as “word” in English. Some Bible teachers give a simple explanation by suggesting that “logos” means the “written word” and “rhema” means the “spoken word”. However, that distinction is not made in Scripture. A more consistent distinction is that “rhema” is more a distinct revelation or word to a particular situation or person whereas “logos” is the complete mind or thought of God’s will behind the revelation. An example of God’s “logos” would be that “one should not commit adultery”; whereas God’s “rhema” would be to a particular person who is in an adulterous relationship. God might say to this person that if he does not repent of this adulterous relationship he will lose his family, his job and get fatally ill.

During the Roman Empire the Greeks understood “rhema” to mean a general discussion of a subject, where as

“logos” was seen as the expression of precise ideas and concepts. The apostle John reveals a new dynamic to this distinction by calling Jesus the Word or “logos” of God.

John 1 verse 1 In the beginning was the Word (logos), and the Word (logos) was with God, and the Word (logos) was God.

Verse 2 He was in the beginning with God.

Verse 3 All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.

In this personification of Jesus as the Word of God the true meaning of “logos” is captured by the following words:

John 1 verse 18 No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.

The “logos” who is the complete mind and thought of God was in the bosom of the Father, and He declares to us who the Father really is. Jesus is the Word, the “logos” of God. We can only know the Father through His expressed Word in the person of Jesus Christ. Scripture only tells us about God, but Jesus lets us know God intimately. Without Christ, the Logos of God, Scripture is a dead religious book.

John 5 verse 39 You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me.

Verse 40 But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.

With Christ, Scripture is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, instruction in righteousness that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

11.3. Church Foundation

This brings us back to how we do church. Does it matter to God how we do church and for that matter who determines how we do church? Paul writes in:

Ephesians 2 verse 19 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,

Verse 20 **having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone,**

Verse 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord,

Verse 22 in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

Paul makes a rather strong statement when it comes to the church being built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. Our English word, apostle, comes from the Greek word “apostolos” literally meaning “sent out”. Apostles are the delegates of a king whose task is to establish his kingdom wherever they have been sent. For instance, look at Jesus' command when he sent out the apostles in:

Matthew 28 verse 18 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.

Verse 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

Verse 20 **teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you;** and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.

When the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples and the church was born we read the following in:

Acts 2 verse 41 Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.

Verse 42 And **they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine** and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.

The Greek word for doctrine is “didaché” and means ‘teaching’. The church continued in the apostle’s teachings as Christ commanded. What is interesting to note is that the church did not only follow the apostle’s teachings but also their traditions as we can read from the following passages:

2 Thessalonians 2 verse 15 Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the **traditions** which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle.

2 Thessalonians 3 verse 6 But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the **tradition** which he received from us.

Paul went so far as to say in:

2 Thessalonians 3 verse 14 And if anyone **does not obey our word in this epistle,** note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed.

Verse 15 Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.

Paul placed great importance on the apostolic writings. He even went so far as to say that whoever does not obey the apostles' letters should be isolated from the church in order to put them to shame. Paul also praises those in the church that followed the traditions that they delivered to them, in:

1 Corinthians 11 verse 2 Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things and **keep the traditions just as I delivered them to you.**

The Greek word for 'tradition' is: "paradosis", which means 'a handing down of values and practices'. From a plain reading of Scripture it is clear that we are to follow the apostles' values and church practices. Some would then say: but did the apostles not also teach us to not follow traditions in:

Colossians 2 verse 8 Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the **tradition of men**, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.

Peter even writes in:

1 Peter 1 verse 18 knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers,
Verse 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.

Jesus goes so far as to say in:

Matthew 15 verse 3 He answered and said to them, "Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition?"
Verse 4 For God commanded, saying, 'HONOR YOUR FATHER AND YOUR MOTHER'; and, 'HE WHO CURSES FATHER OR MOTHER, LET HIM BE PUT TO DEATH.'
Verse 5 But you say, 'Whoever says to his father or mother, "Whatever profit you might have received from me is a gift to God"—
Verse 6 then he need not honor his father or mother.' Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition.

Yet as you read these passages from Christ, Paul, and Peter, one sees that they were talking about man-made traditions. The apostles' traditions were not man-made, but were inspired by the Holy Spirit. Unfortunately the institutional church would rather follow man-made traditions as opposed to the apostles' traditions as they are laid out in Scripture.

That explains the foundation of the apostles, but where do the prophets come in? We read in:

Revelations 19 verse 10 And I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "See that you do not do that! I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! **For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.**"

The prophetic words of Scripture centre on the testimony of Jesus. Jesus revealed this fact to two of His disciples in:
Luke 24 verse 25 Then He said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!"

Verse 26 Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?"

Verse 27 And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.

Peter said the following in:

Acts 10 verse 42 And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead.

Verse 43 To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins."

Peter also wrote in:

2 Peter 1 verse 19 And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts;

Verse 20 knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation,

Verse 21 for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

The spirit behind the prophetic words in Scripture is “Jesus Christ”. The church is built on the revelation of Jesus being the anointed King as prophesied about in the Old Testament. As we meditate on the prophetic Scriptures about Christ, God’s mystery that was hidden at times past will be illuminated in our hearts. Paul writes in:

Ephesians 3 verse 1 For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles—

Verse 2 if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you,

Verse 3 how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already,

*Verse 4 **by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ**),*

*Verse 5 which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been **revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets:***

*Verse 6 that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, **of the same body**, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel,*

Verse 7 of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power.

In practice, the church is to be built on the words of the prophets as recorded in the Old Testament Scripture, speaking of the Messiah and of God’s plan to establish His kingdom. It is also built on the teachings of the apostles, as recorded in the New Testament Scripture that instruct us how to function in this kingdom of Christ in and through the church.

11.4. Validating Scripture

Some would ask: why would we hold to the Bible only as authoritative if there are also other writings from that time out there? To validate the importance of the Old Testament should be simple as Christ often used the Old Testament Scriptures to validate Himself, which in turn validates the Old Testament Scriptures. One example of this is Christ's conversation with two of His disciples after He was raised from the dead in:

Luke 24 verse 27 And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.

What then about the New Testament? Matthew, John, and Peter were three of the twelve disciples who Jesus validated in:

Matthew 28 verse 18 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.

Verse 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

Verse 20 **teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you;** and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.

These apostles, who Christ personally commissioned, were eyewitnesses of Christ's glory as John explains in:

1 John 1 verse 1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which **we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life—**

Verse 2 the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us—

Verse 3 that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.

Verse 4 And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.

Peter explained it like this in:

2 Peter 1 verse 16 For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, **but were eyewitnesses of His majesty.**

Verse 17 For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

Verse 18 And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.

This placed the twelve apostles apart from the other apostles that were sent out by the church. The apostles who were sent out by the church are sometimes called second-generation apostles. We call them "missionaries" today. As you would recall "apostle" literally just means: "sent out". An example of a second-generation apostle that was sent out by the church is Barnabas, in:

Acts 11 verse 22 Then news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they **sent out Barnabas** to go as far as Antioch.

Verse 23 When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord.

Yet the second generation apostles did not have exactly the same calling as the first twelve that were commissioned by Christ in Person. We read something of the twelve apostles that form the foundation of the city in a prophetic sense in:

Revelations 21 verse 14 Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of **the twelve apostles of the Lamb.**

There is a lot of symbolism found in Scripture concerning the number twelve, however what is important to note in

this context, is the fact that there were twelve chosen by Christ that form the foundation of the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem. We can deduce that this has something to do with the foundation of the church. As you recall; church as translated from the Greek “ekklesia” and has to do with the elect from a town or city to make decisions concerning the affairs of the kingdom. The twelve forms the foundation of the heavenly capital city of God’s kingdom.

This leaves us with James, Mark, Luke and Paul who were the writers of the rest of the New Testament. James is a bit trickier. There were three Disciples of Christ named James; of which one was called the son of Zebedee. He was martyred in about 44 C.E, which makes him an unlikely candidate to have written the letter. Theologians doubt that the other apostle James, the son of Alphaeus, was the writer, because he was not spoken of often in Scripture. Yet whether this would be a good reason why he would not be the writer, I am not so sure of. The third apostle, James, was the James that has been identified as Jesus’ brother and who had a great influence on the church of Jerusalem. However, because there is no consensus among theologians as to which James wrote the letter of James; I would not like to make a definite statement about which one wrote the letter.

Mark and Luke were not part of the twelve, but they also did not write doctrine to the church either. They merely wrote a biography of the events of Jesus’ life, His teachings and the events around the apostles during the infancy of the church. Mark and Luke were both close companions of Paul. Paul is somewhat different to any of the other apostles. More than half of the apostolic traditions and teachings that we have from, Scripture come from Paul’s writings. The issue with Paul is that he was not part of the original twelve. If he was not part of the original twelve why should we then build church theology and practices on what Paul had to say?

As you would recall Judas, who was one of the twelve, was deceived by Satan and betrayed Jesus, and so he was disqualified from being part of the twelve. The question is then who would have replaced Judas as one of the twelve? Before the Holy Spirit was given to the church, the apostles took it in their own hands in remedying this problem. We read in:

Acts 1 verse 15 And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples (altogether the number of names was about a hundred and twenty), and said,

Verse 16 "Men and brethren, this Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke before by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus;

*Verse 17 for **he was numbered with us** and obtained a part in this ministry..."*

Acts 1 verse 20 "... For it is written in the Book of Psalms: 'LET HIS DWELLING PLACE BE DESOLATE, AND LET NO ONE LIVE IN IT'; and, 'LET ANOTHER TAKE HIS OFFICE.'

Verse 21 "Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us,

Verse 22 beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection."

Verse 23 And they proposed two: Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias.

Verse 24 And they prayed and said, "You, O Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which of these two You have chosen

Verse 25 to take part in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place."

Verse 26 And they cast their lots, and the lot fell on Matthias. And he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

At this point the church had not received the gift of the Holy Spirit nor is there any proof that it was Jesus we appointed Matthias as the twelve. You will recall that Jesus commanded them in:

*Luke 24 verse 49 Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; **but tarry** in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high."*

Jesus did not ask them to appoint a replacement for Judas, but to wait for the Holy Spirit. At most we can only say that Matthias was appointed to an apostle by the church, but he was not commissioned by Christ personally.

Therefore it would be a mistake to count him with the twelve. However, if Christ did not mean to replace Judas with Matthias then who was to replace Judas? There is something very marvellous in the way God worked this all out. As Satan stole Judas away from the twelve, by divine intervention Christ stole one of Satan's disciples to replace Judas. His name was Saul. We read about this in:

Acts 9 verse 1 Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest
Verse 2 and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

Verse 3 As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven.

Verse 4 Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "*Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?*"

Verse 5 And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" Then the Lord said, "*I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.*"

Verse 6 So he, trembling and astonished, said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" Then the Lord said to him, "*Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.*"

Saul whose name changed to Paul is shown here to be an eyewitness of Christ's glory and in this moment was commissioned by Christ Himself to be His apostle. Paul qualifies his apostleship as one who was born out of due time in:

1 Corinthians 15 verse 7 After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles.

Verse 8 Then last of all He was seen by me also, *as by one born out of due time.*

Verse 9 For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

Verse 10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.

From Scripture it does seem apparent that Paul was the twelfth apostle chosen by Christ to replace Judas. Peter even validated Paul's place by acknowledging Paul's letters as part of the rest of Scripture in:

2 Peter 3 verse 15 and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you,

Verse 16 as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do *also the rest of the Scriptures.*

Peter's words, "...also the rest of the Scriptures", indicate to us that Peter considered Paul's letters as "Scriptures" in comparison with the other writings inspired by God. The church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Jesus as the chief cornerstone. In practice the church is to be built on the prophetic Scripture of the Old Testament about Christ and the New Testament instructions of the apostles concerning Christ's. That foundation is about the church being subjected to the resurrected Christ who is King. A church that claims to be subjected to Christ will be build according to the instruction found in Scripture.

11.5: The letter that kills

Scripture both from the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament apostles with Christ being the chief cornerstone, is what the church is being built on. We repeat Paul's words to Timothy in:

2 Timothy 3 verse 16 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,

Verse 17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

What does Paul mean that ALL Scripture is profitable? In answering this question let us first look at a much debated passage found in:

2 Corinthians 3 verse 6 who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; **for the letter kills**, but the Spirit gives life.

What is the "letter" that Paul is talking of here? Let us get some context to Paul's words by reading from:

2 Corinthians 3 verse 5 Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God,

Verse 6 who also made us sufficient as ministers of the **new covenant**, not of the letter but of the Spirit; **for the letter kills**, but the Spirit gives life.

Verse 7 But if the ministry of death, written and **engraved on stones**, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the **face of Moses** because of the glory of his countenance, which glory was passing away,

Verse 8 how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious?

In this passage we see that Paul is dealing with the Law of Moses that was written on stone and not the prophetic words about Christ when he stated "the letter kills". To try to obtain righteousness by following religious laws will kill us. We cannot obtain righteousness by our religious performances. Only Christ in us is able to be the righteousness that God requires. It is not through a religion but through a personal relationship with the righteous One in us - Christ Jesus.

Scripture is therefore not meant to be followed to obtain righteousness. Righteousness is only through the person of Christ and not our own effort. There is no exception to this. From this standpoint we need to understand what place Scripture has in our lives. Scripture is used for instruction in how to walk in Christ who is our righteousness.

1 Corinthians 1 verse 30 But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and **righteousness** and sanctification and redemption—

For that reason scripture is given so we may know how to function as the body and church of Christ. Just because we are learning to be led by the Spirit, does not mean we all are following the Holy Spirit as we should. Scripture is there to show us when we are not being led by the Holy Spirit. If the church does not follow the Scriptures as laid out by the apostles then we can be sure the church is not being led by the Holy Spirit.

1 Corinthians 4 verse 6 Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes, **that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written**, that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other.

On the other hand, if the church claims any Old Testament covenant regulations or promises outside the scope of Christ we can be sure that the church is not being led by the Holy Spirit either. I have to add that the opposite is not necessarily true. Just because we follow the apostles' traditions to the letter, does not mean we are being led by the Holy Spirit as well. The church of the Bible is not just a church that follows the Bible correctly from the outside. The church of the Bible will have a deep longing and experience for the intimacy of Christ in their midst. Jesus said the following in:

John 10 verse 27 **My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.**

It is a sad fact, but many Christians interpret Scripture according to what they like it to say, more than what Scripture actually does teach. I have found that even genuine brothers who have a very good grasp of exegesis and hermeneutical principles will compromise on those principles, should the Scriptures in question not align with their world view. For the sake of interest, exegesis deals with the context, culture, and purpose during the time when a passage of Scripture was written, whereas hermeneutics deals with whether or how that Scripture applies to us. So how can we get around this human flaw in compromising with interpretation to suit our worldview? Peter wrote in:

*2 Peter 1 verse 20 knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any **private interpretation**.*

Peter wrote this at a time where to guide them they generally had only the prophecy of the Old Testament Scriptures concerning Christ. Today we also have the apostolic Scriptures, whereas then they had the apostles with them. Yet what Peter wrote still stays the same and that is that no Scripture is for private interpretation. So what does this mean in practice? Let us get back to Jesus being our Shepherd. When Christ speaks to His Sheep He makes them one flock.

*John 10 verse 16 And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and **they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd.***

The proper way of interpreting Scripture is through the Body of Christ and not through our own private interpretation. That is why Paul wrote (and we repeat):

*Ephesians 3 verse 10 to the intent that now **the manifold wisdom of God** might be **made known by the church** to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places,*

Verse 11 according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord,

Also in:

*1 Timothy 3 verse 15 but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is **the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.***

The manifold wisdom of God is made known through the church which is the pillar and ground of the truth. It is when the church comes together and interprets together that the truth of Scripture is being revealed through the church. This means interpretation has to stand the scrutiny of others in the family of God, for instance, in the ekklesia gathering. Proper interpretation and understanding of Scripture forms the foundation from which we discern what the Spirit is saying to His church.

We should not become lazy or ignorant in our responsibility. There are tremendous dangers in thinking that we need some ‘gurus’ to help us understand Scripture, rather than corporately discerning what the Bible teaches. That is why Paul also wrote in:

Ephesians 2 verse 19 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,

Verse 20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone,

Verse 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord,

Verse 22 in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

Again we repeat Paul writing in:

Ephesians 4 verse 11 And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers,

Verse 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,

Verse 13 till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the

measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;

Verse 14 that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting,

Verse 15 but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—

Verse 16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

As has been said a numerous times before in previous parts of this series of teachings, Paul did not say that apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers do all the ministering. The apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers are to equip the saints in order for the rest of the church to do the ministering. When the whole church does the ministering, then the church will not be tossed to and fro, carried about with every wind of doctrine as we so often see in the institutional and emerging churches. In these two types of church forms the saints are used to following “gurus” and so do not know how to discern together as a church.

In conclusion; the church cannot function without Scripture. It is true that the early church did not have the Bible that we have now, but they did have the Old Testament prophetic Scriptures and the actual twelve apostles that the church is built on. It is also true that many Christians in those days were not able to read, but there were always people in their midst that would read to the illiterate, as Paul instructs in:

1 Timothy 4 verse 13 Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.

And again in:

1 Thessalonians 5 verse 27 I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read to all the holy brethren.

Even though the Bible is not the “Word of God” per se, we cannot afford to ignore the instructions of Scripture. God preserved the Scripture through the blood of many saints so that the church can be grounded on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. We cannot afford to do church the way we like. The church has to be according to the apostles’ traditions. Yet saying this, we have to understand that Scripture is empty without the living presence of Christ in our midst, as Christ alone is the Chief cornerstone of the church.

Questions and Answers

What follows are a collection of questions that people have asked us, that I haven't dealt with in the series of teachings. I hope that the answers to these questions will be able to bring further light as to how the Ekklesia church functions.

Q. What does a typical ekklesia meeting look like in your personal gathering?

Our group has agreed to come together every Sunday evening around 17h30. When everybody has arrived and has put their eats on the communal table, which is the dining room table or something similar, one of us, whoever wants to, would get the attention of the rest and then lead us in a prayer for the meal, praising Jesus for what He has done for us. When it seems that everyone has prayed that wanted to pray, we would start dishing up from the table. The men would generally allow the women to go first to serve themselves and the children. This follows the western definition of being a gentleman.

The meal becomes the catalyst to connect and fellowship with one another. Someone would take the loaf on the table, break from it and then pass it on until everyone has broken off a piece of it. The bread is eaten with the meal. When most of us have finished the meal, someone would take the jug of grape juice and start going around, pouring the juice in everyone's glass. During this time everyone would quiet down, because this is the time that we have agreed to wait upon the Lord. We would pray, sing songs, or keep quiet waiting upon the Lord. Someone might bring a word of prophecy, or share a vision. This could lead to a discussion of the prophecies or visions in order to make a judgment as to whether they were from the Lord or not. There might be teaching or reading of Scriptures. The teaching would be in a discussion or interactive form as opposed to a monologue sermon. In other words, the rest of the church may ask questions and contribute to the teaching. During the discussion, depending on the circumstances, this time may lead to more prayer and psalms or songs.

We try to finish by 20h00. However we keep it flexible. If the Spirit's work with us has been completed, we would finish by 19h00. It has happened that on some occasions we have finished much later than 20h00, as we felt that the Spirit was still dealing with us over some things about the Father's Kingdom. After the meeting some of us either give others a lift home, while others stay a little bit longer for some socializing and coffee. If personal counselling is needed we try to leave it for after the meeting or during the week where possible.

Q. Do you meet in just one person's home?

No, we meet at the homes of the members who invite us during the week beforehand. But we generally meet at the homes with the largest living rooms and which are more central to where most of the members live.

Q. Who provides the loaf and grape juice or wine?

We have come to agree that the home that we gather at would provide the wine/grape juice and bread, unless someone else would like to bring some or both of these at that time.

Q. Do you have weekly Bible studies and prayer meetings?

No, we don't have weekly Bible studies or prayer meetings. We pray and look at the Bible when we visit each other or as the need arises, during the week. Remember that the church that Christ builds is a church of members that share their lives DAILY and exhorting each other DAILY so that they may not be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. Sometimes there might be occasions that someone might call for a specific prayer meeting for specific reasons, or arrange for a Bible study to look at a specific topic, but we don't have them religiously. We rather have those things as a natural cause of our daily fellowship.

Q. Do you have children's Sunday Schools?

No, we don't have children's Sunday Schools. We feel that parents have the responsibility to teach their own children the ways of the Lord. They would take part in the gathering as the rest of us, but we don't compel any of the children to take part. We would allow them to play on the floor quietly or in another room, should they wish, but we welcome them in our gatherings. We believe that even though they don't always understand what we are talking about, the example of their parents taking up responsibility as priests in the ekklesia speaks volumes. The example is of much more worth to them than the topics we deal with. There might be an occasion where someone might have something for the children, but that is not a weekly habit. The real school is the day to day fellowship that we have with each other.

We are open to children's or youth outreaches on other days of the week. In this case, those members who feel they have a burden and a gift in reaching out to them, would do this as the Lord leads them. The fellowship treats this as they would any other outreach ministry. They would bless the people who would participate in this venture with prayer and encouragement, or with needed funds, as everyone sees fit.

Q. What happens if there are newcomers or visitors?

We do adapt our meeting slightly accordingly. The fellowship would be sensitive not to deal with topics that would not be appropriate for those that are visitors, or newcomers. This would be similar to the way a family would when they have guests for dinner.

Q. How do you facilitate a wedding?

We don't host, or facilitate weddings, or conduct ceremonies, or marry couples. We are of the opinion that the fathers of the married couples are responsible to conduct any type of ceremony the couple chooses. This might not be always possible, so in that case the married couple can conduct or have their wedding facilitate just as they wish. We don't see the need to have a wedding in a religious building. A wedding ceremony is only so that people can witness that a couple are now joined together. The real marriage happens on the marriage bed, when they become one.

Q. How do you conduct funerals?

We do not conduct funerals. The family of the deceased can hold a memorial, where people can bring encouragement and help to share the pain of their loss. A funeral, in a sense, is not for those who have died, but for those who are left behind in order for them to get an opportunity to find closure. If the person that has passed away is a brother or sister in the Lord, it could also turn to a time of rejoicing.

Q. What do you do when you guys can't come to consensus over on a doctrinal issue or practices?

We would not enforce a practice on which we cannot reach consensus, but we won't just brush it under the carpet either. We would give it time, till we all could come together to address it and see if we have come to new insight, or sense whether the Lord has brought us to consensus. One practice that we haven't come to consensus on in our meetings is about whether a woman should be quiet or have a head covering when she would prophesy or pray. At the moment some have concluded that those who feel convicted to follow these practices should do so, while the others would not be enforced to do so. However, when the time is right we would deal with this topic again to see if the Lord has given some of us new insight into that topic.

We believe that love for one another will give us the patience to be able to give each other the time needed for the Lord to deal with each other, till we come to the unity of the faith in that regard.

We don't have an attitude that we will "agree to disagree" because that will prevent us growing in knowledge and faith. We rather have the attitude that we are all still growing in knowledge and faith and that we have not all reached the same place of understanding in Christ. So, rather than enforcing doctrine or practices, we wait for the Holy Spirit

to deal with our hearts till we are all at the same place.

Newcomers however, feel obliged to follow the practices that we have put in place. While they are welcome to question and discuss these they would continue joining in our practices until or unless the Holy Spirit persuades us otherwise. Our basis for making a judgment on these matters is Jesus Christ in us, who is our truth, and who gives us the grace to love one another as He loves us.

Q. What do you do with discipline issues in your group?

We follow Jesus' instructions that should someone do what is offensive to another; the offended party should deal with that person privately. Should there be no resolution with the offended party, he or she should return to discuss the matter with the member who has caused offense, bringing two more members to see if there can be a resolution and whether the offended party actually has a basis to be offended. If the offended party has a basis to be offended and the offender is not willing to repent, the matter would be brought to the whole church fellowship. If it is still not resolved in front of the whole ekklesia gathering, and the offender is not willing to stop the offence, then that person would be excommunicated till he or she comes to their senses.

Q. When does a gathering get too big to have a proper ekklesia meeting and what happens then?

Each group is different to other groups, due to the personalities that make up the group dynamic. There is no number that can be used. If some groups reach fifteen adults the group may feel it has become too big, yet others may be still comfortable with as many as thirty adults. What determines the size of the group is obviously the size of the living room they gather in and whether all the members feel that they can contribute should the Spirit lead them to. The other thing that is very important is that the group must still all feel they are part of a family and not just a club that they attend.

When the group reaches a size where it is not comfortable to have a proper ekklesia meeting and people start feeling disconnected, then we would start praying for the Spirit to send some of us out to start a new family-fellowship. We would wait for a couple of weeks until a couple of families feel in their heart that they feel the leading of the Spirit in this endeavour. We would then have a special meeting to send out these families, to bless them and wait on the Spirit to give words of prophecies and encouragement. We would not break contact, but stay connected and perhaps even have a special gathering all together once every three months or so, or have families that would visit each other's groups.

We generally feel it is more practical to group together people who live in the same close geographical area, so that daily fellowship is more feasible.

Q. When and how are leaders appointed?

We would only appoint elders the moment we feel the need for it, and only after a couple of years have passed so that those who have a shepherd's heart have become evident to all. Elders are only really needed when there are doctrinal disputes that threaten to bring division into the mutual fellowship of the church. If a couple of fellowships have formed in our town, elders could also keep the groups connected.

Q. How do you implement the great commission?

We don't see that the great commission was given for the whole church to fulfil. The great commission is an apostolic commission and not a church commission. The church's commission is a Kingdom commission, whereas the apostles were and are commissioned to make disciples of the whole world for Christ. The word apostle comes from the Greek word "apostolos" which means one who is sent out or commissioned to go out by King Jesus.

Not all in the church are called to go out and reach the lost. For the Scripture is clear to us that only SOME are called

to do one thing and others are called to do something else, but we all are called to love each other as the Lord loves us. Nevertheless everyone in God's family is responsible to give a reason for the hope that is in them should they be asked to give one by unbelievers. Furthermore the church should pray for the Lord to send out workers in the field to bring in the harvest as the Lord has commanded.

Q. How do you go about baptizing people who are converted?

We believe that baptism is for people that have come to have faith in Christ. For that reason we don't practise infant baptism. Infant baptism, came about through a belief that baptism causes regeneration of the spirit. Some early church fathers came to believe that unless someone was baptized they would not go to heaven, so in case a child died prematurely they would baptize them in order to secure a place in heaven for them.

However there are no such Scriptural references. The only Scriptural justification that sometimes is used is that the Jews would circumcise the male infants. As baptism and male circumcision has nothing in common it cannot be used as a justification. It is clear that baptism was an outward declaration of an inward faith. For that reason, only those who had faith in Christ and who are willing to follow him would get baptized.

We also do full submersion in a pool. The reason for that is that the word baptism in Greek "baptisma" actually means immersion, submersion and emergence from the Greek word "bapto" which means to dip. Generally the person who brought a person to Christ would also be the person who would baptize the convert. If the person came to the Lord not by any one person per se, then it would generally be one of the elders of the church, or one of the people in the fellowship that others would recognize as an elder.

Q. Do you relate to other churches?

Yes, most of us in our group try to keep contact with brothers and sisters in the Lord from other church denominations whether they are in an institutional church or not. We would visit them in their church gatherings, and work at building a relationship of trust with them, to build bridges in the hope that we could learn from each other.

We also keep in contact with other ekklesia churches in the world, learning from and encouraging them. At this point we have not found churches in our suburb that practice the ekklesia church that we could network with, so we are waiting on the Lord to multiply us as He sees fit.

Q. Don't you have big worship gatherings?

We don't see any need to have such gatherings, but we are not necessarily against them either. Our hesitation is what they would become. We know of some networks of home churches that would rent a hall for a month or more to have traditional church services on a Sunday morning as a way to reach out to the religious people in the community. The reason is that in our westernized culture people feel more comfortable in this kind of setting to weigh up their decision in a non-threatening environment.

I hope that these answers to the questions gave some more light to the practical side of the Ekklesia church. Feel free to mail us any other questions that you don't think we have dealt with and we try and address them in our next updated transcript. May God bless you as you journey towards this church beyond imagination.

You are blessed in Jesus the Christ.

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