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SPECIAL REPORT

WHAT IS 'THE CHURCH'? WITH WHOM DID GOD MAKE HIS NEW COVENANT?

by Albert James Dager

Since the second or third century, Christians have referred to themselves as “the Church.” We have become accustomed to the word “church,” without understanding how it came about or why.

The various English translations of Scripture use the word “church” for the Greek-Latin “*ecclesia*” or “*ekklesia*.” In truth, however, *ecclesia* is properly translated “called out ones.” The word “church” was adopted from the Latin *kyriakon* as the name of the developing hierarchical system which eventually became the Roman Catholic Church.

In reference to the name “Church,” the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* states:

The Greek word *ekklesia*, which came to mean church, was originally applied in the Classical period to an official assembly of citizens. In the Septuagint (Greek) translation of the Old Testament (3rd-2nd century BC), the term *ekklesia* is used for the general assembly of the Jewish people, especially when gathered for a religious purpose such as hearing the Law (e.g., Deuteronomy 9:10, 18:16). In the New Testament it is used of the entire body of believing Christians throughout the world (e.g., Matthew 16:18), of the believers in a particular area (e.g., Acts 5:11), and also of the congregation meeting in a particular house—the “house-church” (e.g., Romans 16:5).

The term “church” (Anglo-Saxon, *cirice*, *circe*; Modern German, *cirche*; Sw., *kyrka*) is the name employed in the Teutonic languages to translate *ekklesia*. But this is an error.

The origin of “church” is the Latin word *kyriakon* (Greek, *kuriakos*), “belonging to the Lord” (1 Cor. 11:20; Rev. 1:10). It does not mean the same as *ekklesia*. Even the *Latin Vulgate* uses the Latin *ecclesia*. (There are many similarities among Latin and Greek words.) Yet *ekklesia* (or *ecclesia*)

has been translated as if it were *kyriakon*, and meaning “The Lord’s congregation.”

Although *ekklesia* may mean the “called out ones” of Christ in total, or as individual assemblies of the called out ones, it has no connotation of a religious system. The *kyriakon*, or “church,” however, is a theological system which operates on a professional level. It is clergy-laity oriented. The rank-and-file are distinguished from the clergy who function as priests—the self-proclaimed oracles of God.

Outside the so-called “high” churches such as Roman Catholicism, Anglicanism, Lutheranism, and the various Orthodox churches of the East, most Christians would say that their pastors are not priests. But they make the clergy-laity distinction by referring to them as “Reverend,” “Bishop,” or some other hierarchical religious term.



Is this the institution founded by Jesus?

Some pastors wear clerical robes that speak as loudly as words: “I am clergy; you are laity.” Even the word “pastor” is suspect. Technically, the Greek word, *poimen*, and the Latin word, *pastores*, mean “shepherds.” But Latin being the official language of the apostate Roman Church, *pastores* referred to its papal priests. In truth, all churches are descended from the Roman Catholic Church either directly or

indirectly. We need not make an issue of this fact if some prefer the word “pastor.” It just helps to know.

In the true *ekklesia*, all members are equal before God, although there may be some gifted by God as apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers (Ephesians 4:11), who are to function in specific manners strictly from a motive of love. They may receive some honor or support for their service, but it is better for them to work with their own hands so that they not be a burden to others (1 Thessalonians 4:11). Professional clergy often preach only that which is popular or will ensure their financial security.

In later centuries *kyriakon* came to be used by the developing hierarchical establishment of the world system to refer to its congregations and to the Christian “synagogues” or meeting places called “churches,” “cathedrals,” “chapels,” “sanctuaries,” etc.

(The word “sanctuary,” which is used even in non-Catholic churches as a name for the room where the congregation meets, means a holy place, or the place where God dwells. It was used for the Holy of Holies in the Hebrew temple. Yet Scripture says that each believer in Jesus is the temple of God; He does not dwell in temples made by hands [Acts 17:24; 1 Corinthians 3:16]).

Thus, *ekklesia* has been usurped to mean the churches whose leaders rule the spiritual lives of their congregants through a clergy-laity system. Originally this was done to preserve the establishment of the Roman papal system. Later it was carried over to the Protestant religions at the time of the Reformation. Today the word “church” is commonly used to denote the Body of Christ, which is an error. That error was propagated by the English translators of the “New Testament,” who knew that the word “church” would cement in the minds of their congregants the legitimacy of their hierarchical establishments. So, too, the words, “bishop,” “pastor,” “preach,” and other terms did not originate in the Greek Scriptures but in the apostate Roman Catholic religious system.

This is not a matter of semantics. Those English words were included as a means to keep the people subservient to the hierarchical systems that produced their Bibles.

Yet we can thank God for using the apostate establishments to preserve the Scriptures for us. Had it not been for their power-grabbing nature, much of what we have in ancient manuscripts would have been lost to us today. They made possible the King James Bible and all subsequent translations in many languages for the aver-

age person. The truth is available to us if we but study the Scriptures diligently. While translations have their flaws—some more so than others—the Gospel can be found in most of them.

Because of the confusion wrought by the early apostasy, today virtually all churches hold that “the Church” was either a new creation by Jesus to replace Israel, or was created in addition to Israel as a separate entity. Both positions are based on the erroneous assumption that “the Church” was necessary to be the oracle of God because of Israel’s unfaithfulness. The truth is that all the promises of God in both the “Old” and “New Testament” are only to Israel, and all believers in Jesus are heirs to those promises regardless of their national heritage, because we are grafted into Israel through faith in the Messiah (Romans 11).

Old And New Reconciled

It is supposed that the “New Testament” replaced the “Old Testament” for those who follow Jesus. The word rendered “testament” is *diatheke*, which means “contract.” There has been a problem created by those who compiled the Scriptures, particularly those within the Roman Catholic Church. Confusion exists in what is meant by the “Old Testament” and the “New Testament” as they relate to the Old Covenant and the New Covenant.

There is no such division of Scripture as an “Old Testament” and a “New Testament,” except as invented by the apostate early “Church.” Nor is there any such thing as different testaments. There is only God’s Word given through His prophets who wrote prior to the coming of Israel’s Messiah, and to His apostles and prophets who wrote after the coming of Israel’s Messiah. There is one Testimony which is made up of all the prophetic writings, and it was given to Israel—the Testimony of Yeshua, HaMashiach (Jesus the Christ), which spoke of Him before He came (pre-messianic Scriptures), and related His life and teachings after He came (post-messianic Scriptures).

“The Church” separated these into two categories called “Old Testament” and “New Testament,” then said that these are two different covenants for two different people.

While “testament” means “covenant,” it was erroneous for them to separate the prophetic writings given before Messiah came, from the prophetic writings given after Messiah came, and call them the “Old Testament” and the “New Testament.” This implied that all of the pre-messianic writings comprised the whole of what was done away with when Messiah instituted His New Covenant in His blood. The only parts of those pre-messianic writings that were

done away were the Mosaic laws given to Israel. But it is not true of God’s original covenant with Abraham, or of any other writings.

The pre-messianic Scriptures recorded many covenants with different people: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and others, including non-Israelites such as Hagar and her son Ishmael (Genesis 17:20). So the so-called “Old Testament” is really the record of many covenants between God and men. All of those covenants were specific to those people. The Old Covenant given through Moses, and the New Covenant in Jesus were made specifically with the nation of Israel. The Old Covenant with all of Israel was sealed by keeping the Law by faith. The New Covenant with the house of Israel and Judah (because only Judah was left in the Land when Messiah came) was sealed with the blood of Messiah.

All who come to Jesus by faith enter into the covenant He made with Abraham. The Old Covenant with Israel through Moses has been done away with and replaced by the New Covenant in Jesus’ blood. Therefore, the only parts of the pre-messianic writings that do not apply to today’s Israel of Faith are those that specifically related to Israel’s sacrifices for sin and the ceremonial laws that pointed to the future coming of Messiah. Once Messiah fulfilled those laws they no longer had to be adhered to by faithful Israel. The wall of separation was torn down and the Gentiles were invited to enter into the New Covenant with Israel.

To ignore the Abrahamic covenant is an error that has hindered the spiritual growth of Christians for centuries. The New Covenant did not replace the Abrahamic Covenant; it supplemented it. More properly, it fulfilled it. And it pertained to Israel, not to “the Church.”

Are you shocked by all this? Well, what saith the Scriptures?

When Jesus told His apostles at His “Last Supper,” “This is my blood of the new testament [covenant], which is shed for many,” He fulfilled a prophecy given through the prophet Jeremiah that spoke of a new covenant God would make with **Israel and Judah:**

“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—

“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.

“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. (Jeremiah 31:31-33)

This prophecy pertained to Jesus at His first coming. It is specific not only to the nation of Israel, but to the tribe of Judah. That specificity means it cannot be construed to mean it is for something called “the Church,” which replaced, or was created in addition to, Israel. This is affirmed in the post-messianic Scriptures, especially in the writing to the Hebrew believers in Christ. Speaking of Jesus as the perfect High Priest of Israel, the writer says:

But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises.

For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second.

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—

“not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they did not continue in My covenant, and I disregarded them, says the Lord.

“For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

“None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them.

“For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.”

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. (Hebrews 8:6-13)

The Old Covenant spoken of here was that which God made with Israel through Moses and the giving of the Mosaic laws. That covenant provided for animal sacrifices which could not fully remove the sins of

the people. These were types that pointed to Christ. The New Covenant is a more perfect one based upon the shed blood of Jesus. **Both the Old Covenant and New Covenant are said to be made with “the house of Israel.”** Thus, the imperfect was replaced by the perfect for the benefit of Israel. There is no mention of “the Church.”

God’s covenant with Abraham through Israel still stands; only the aspects of the covenant given through Moses and pertaining to sacrifices for sin, and those meant to keep Israel separate from the nations are done away with.

While the Mosaic laws pertaining to the sacrifices and other things necessary to demonstrate righteousness before God were done away with, it remains that God’s covenant with Abraham, operating through Israel, carries through to the disciples of Jesus. This is part of the Gospel: we are joint heirs with Christ as promised to the father of our faith, Abraham. This is affirmed in the post-messianic Scriptures:

just as Abraham “believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.”

Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham.

And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, “In you all the nations shall be blessed.”

So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham.

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.”

But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for “the just shall live by faith.”

Yet the law is not of faith, but “the man who does them shall live by them.”

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”),

that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

Brethren, I speak in the manner of men: Though it is only a man’s covenant, yet if it is confirmed, no one annuls or adds to it.

Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, “And to seeds,” as of many, but as of one, “And to your Seed,” who is Christ. (Galatians 3:6-16)

Thus, we enter not into the Mosaic Covenant, but into the Abrahamic Covenant. The Mosaic Covenant the only part of Scripture that is the “Old Covenant,” was interspersed to keep Israel separate from the nations until Messiah came. Through faith in the Messiah, Jesus, believers from out of the nations are melded with the faithful of Israel so that out of the two God has made one people for Himself (Ephesians 2:15). God’s covenant in Abraham’s faith was not annulled by the covenant of law later given through Moses to Israel:

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.

For if the inheritance is of the law, it is no longer of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise. (Galatians 3:17-18)

To whom was the promise of a better covenant given? Israel. Yet all who come to Christ by faith, whether born naturally to Israel or to the other nations, are heirs of the Abrahamic Covenant administered through Israel by faith:

For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

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.

And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise. (Galatians 3:26-29)

God proclaimed the Gospel to Abraham before it was fulfilled—that through Abraham all nations would be blessed (Galatians 3:8). Isaiah, speaking prophetically to the Messiah, said He would be a light to the Gentiles:

“Indeed He says, ‘It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, that You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.’” (Isaiah 49:6)

Simeon, seeing the Lord as a child in the temple iterated Isaiah:

“For my eyes have seen Your salvation

Which You have prepared before the face of all peoples,

A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel.” (Luke 2:30-32)

Jesus is a light to the nations as the Messiah of Israel. He came to break down the wall of separation between Israel and the other nations:

Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh-- who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands--

that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

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

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

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,

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

And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near.

For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.

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

having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone. (Ephesians 2:11-20)

The Gentiles, without Christ, are alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and are strangers from the covenant of promise. In Christ they are bonded to the commonwealth of Israel and partake of the covenants between God and Israel. This is a mystery that was hidden throughout the centuries:

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,

of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God,

the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints.

To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. (Colossians 1:24-27)

So sacred is the truth that God has made of two people one in Israel for His glory, that Paul condemns those who would try to erect again the wall torn down through Christ's sacrifice:

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

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.

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

But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before them all, "If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews?"

"We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles,

knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified." (Galatians 2:11-16)

From the very beginning, Satan tried to undo what Christ had done. He tried to drive a wedge between Israel and the Gentiles, devising false teachings that treated the two as something distinct.

Roman Catholicism proved his perfect foil to accomplish this. Using the military power of Rome, that religious system—a hybrid Christian-pagan hierarchical "church"—imposed upon kings and their subjects the belief that the Kingdom of God had come through the Roman pontiff as the Vicar of Christ on earth. Its leaders claimed

that Israel was no longer the inheritor of God's promises; "the Church" was.

Thus, "the Church" drove further the wedge between the two through persecution and a bloody pogrom that still reeks today.

Although God has managed to preserve individuals—even among the leaders—in the religious systems, the fact remains that those systems are all illegitimate usurpers of the promises made to the Israel of Faith. They do not proclaim the full Gospel, but claim rewards and promises distinct from those of the Israel of Faith. So doing, they cut off their hearers from blessings.

It pains me to say this. I know wonderful men who are pastors of the churches I am indicting. I would not question their love for the Lord. They also are victims of the deception, having been trained in particular theological systems. I know I am wounding them by my words here. All I can say is I'm sorry. But as I understood these things I felt the same as when the true nature of the Roman Catholic Church—which I loved—was revealed to me thirty-seven years ago. I gave up what I loved for Him whom I loved more.

To be sure, we are not saved by this knowledge. We are saved by grace. We are saved by our faith in the Messiah of God. And we must regard as saved by grace our true brethren in Christ who are still in the churches, content under the tutelage of even the most errant pastors. We must likewise regard as saved those pastors who labor out of a motive of love for God's flock. We cannot be puffed up, as knowledge often does to people. Our eyes may be opened now, but they were closed for too long before. Let us have grace toward those who do not see these truths at this time. Some may resist until the end—until they are cast out of the synagogues called churches today. Some pastors will be cast out by their congregations when they begin to really minister the truth as well.

Were Jesus' words for "the Church"?

So successful has Satan been in erecting again the wall of separation through the churches that there are some who even say that Jesus' words were not meant for "the Church," but only for Israel under the Old Covenant.

They assume that, since the Lord related His teachings to the Law, they were meant only for Israel. And since the Law was done away with, they do not apply to "the Church." They assume that Israel was saved by keeping the Law while "the Church" is saved merely by affirmation of faith in Jesus. They have misconstrued the meaning of grace, lacking understanding of

how grace came to Israel through the Law. Thus, they have established an inadequate gospel as a means to salvation.

Let us be clear about this very important truth: there is nothing man can do to earn his salvation. Salvation comes by grace through faith, and that is a gift from God (Ephesians 2:4-10). But God's faith is available to all who seek truth with an honest heart:

O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall show forth Your praise.

For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; you do not delight in burnt offering.

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart—these, O God, You will not despise. (Psalms 51:15-17)

Many focus on the idea that man's heart is utterly corrupt, and that no semblance of goodness can be found in it. And it is true that there are several Scriptures that attest to the deceitfulness of man's heart. Yet man, bearing the image of God, does have an innate goodness, even if that goodness of itself cannot save him. Even Jesus acknowledged the possibility of a good heart when explaining the parable of the sower:

"But the ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience." (Luke 8:15)

So whom do we believe? Jesus or some theological system? I suppose we should correct the Lord.

We are saved by God's grace, not by our own works. But our response to God's grace reveals the condition of our hearts. We are not robots to be forced against our wills into the Kingdom of God. We have the ability to choose Christ or reject Him. Otherwise there would be no such thing as love on our part toward our heavenly Father and Jesus. Love is an act of one's will. And God desires that we love Him with all our hearts, souls, strength and minds.

It is important to know that God's grace as the only means of salvation did not apply only to "New Testament" believers, but also to "Old Testament" Israel. Israel was never saved by keeping the Law; God's grace has always been at the heart of His dealing with men even from the creation of Adam. The moral law was given as an expression of God's grace to show man what God required of him in order to be in fellowship with God. It was never meant as a way to be saved.

True faith involves a desire to obey God's moral law, which must be kept by faith in what it teaches us: that God has

made us His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works in which God had ordained us to walk. One cannot break God's commands and claim to love God.

Jesus said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15).

"But," some say, "Jesus never spoke to the Church, He spoke only to Israel." Yet what did He say immediately following these words?

"If you love Me, keep My commandments.

"And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—

"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.

"I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.

"A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will live also.

"At that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.

"He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him." (John 14:15-21)

"The Church" wants to claim the Holy Spirit, but it does not want to assume the responsibilities required to receive that blessing. To whom has the Comforter—the Holy Spirit—been sent? To Israel, or to "the Church"? We cannot have it both ways.

Actually, it is correct to say that the Holy Spirit is sent to Israel, and that the Lord's words were only for Israel. For we are all Israel by faith if we have been baptized into the New Covenant which was promised to Israel. Thus, all of the "New Testament" writings are for the Israel of Faith, not for the apostate religious system that came to be known as "the Church."

Does "The Church" Even Exist?

The truth is that there is no such thing as "the Church" in God's economy. All of the churches that exist today are descended from the original apostate system, no matter how far from the original they may have progressed. As long as they think of themselves as something other than a company of people within the Abrahamic covenant and as distinct from Israel, they are in error. This does not mean that all individuals in those churches are not saved, or do not love God. It merely means that

they have not been taught properly who they are in Christ. God did not create a new entity to replace Israel; nor did He establish a new creation in addition to Israel. There is only the Israel of Faith.

Before the Covenantalists or the Dispensationalists pick up their stones, I ask that they please hear me out.

All who would be saved, whether Jew or Gentile, are of one and the same company through faith in the promise to Abraham:

Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, "And to seeds," as of many, but as of one, "And to your Seed," who is Christ.

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.

For if the inheritance is of the law, it is no longer of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise.

What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator.

Now a mediator does not mediate for one only, but God is one.

Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not! For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law.

But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed.

Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.

For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

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.

And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. (Galatians 3:16-29)

Now, when I say that there is only Israel I do not mean that "the Church" has replaced Israel. I mean that all believers, whether born to natural Israelite stock, or from other nations, grow together on the same tree—Israel.

For if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, so are the branches.

And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree,

do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you.

You will say then, "Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in."

Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear.

For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either.

Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off.

And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again.

For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, who are natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?

For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.

And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob;

For this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins." (Romans 11:16-27)

Read this Scripture carefully. You will see that there are not two trees, but one. God did not create a new tree called "the Church," but grafted into the one tree, Israel (not natural Israel, but faithful Israel),

all who have faith in Jesus Christ and obey His commandments by faith.

We are not members of something called “the Church.” We are members of Israel by faith.

The concept of “replacement theology” is a terrible deception. It boasts against the natural branches. It states that God has completely finished with Israel with the coming of Christ, and that He has replaced Israel with something called “the Church,” which word is not found in the original Greek Scriptures. As we have seen, the Greek word mistranslated “church” is *ekklesia*, which means “called out ones.” Israel was called out from among the nations to present the Gospel to the world. This is why Paul calls the faithful of Israel the elect of grace (Romans 11:5). This is a term we often hear applied to the so-called “Church,” but it initially applied to the believing remnant of Israel. If Paul referred to Israel as the elect of grace at a time when “the Church” was supposed to be in operation, why has the concept been discarded?

Satan’s hatred for God’s people caused him to devise a religious system that would confuse those who would come to Christ and obscure their understanding of the great promises that are theirs if they will be faithful.

When Jesus came, He said He would build His *ekklesia* on the faith exhibited by Peter when he stated that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matthew 16:15-20). Jesus was not going to build something new called “the Church.” He was again calling out Israel, this time to be built on the New Covenant in His blood.

Peter understood the Lord’s ministry within the context of the Messianic prophecies given to Israel of old. He represented the apostles as the foundation of that calling out.

Remember Hebrews 8:8-13, where we saw that the New Covenant in Christ’s blood is the fulfillment of Jeremiah’s prophecy to Israel; that prophecy did not speak of a different company called “the Church,” which was to come later.

Are you still unconvinced? Do you still believe that “the Church” is the Bride of Christ, distinct from Israel? What if you were to learn that “the Church” is not the Bride of Christ according to God’s Word?

Again, what saith the Scriptures?

Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, “Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb’s wife.”

And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain,

and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God,

having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal.

Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel:

three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west.

Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

And he who talked with me had a gold reed to measure the city, its gates, and its wall.

The city is laid out as a square; its length is as great as its breadth. And he measured the city with the reed: twelve thousand furlongs. Its length, breadth, and height are equal.

Then he measured its wall: one hundred and forty-four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of an angel.

The construction of its wall was of jasper; and the city was pure gold, like clear glass.

The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all kinds of precious stones: the first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald,

the fifth sardonyx, the sixth sardius, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst.

The twelve gates were twelve pearls: each individual gate was of one pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass. (Revelation 21:9-21)

The City of God, the New Jerusalem, is revealed as the Bride of the Lamb (Jesus Christ), in which all the saints will have a part. Contrary to popular opinion, “the Church” is not the Bride of Christ. Just as Gentile disciples of Jesus are grafted into the Israel of Faith, so they will be part of the Bride of Christ along with the faithful of natural Israel who lived before and after Christ Jesus came to the earth.

Of course, the physical City—the material of which it is made—is not the Bride

of Christ; it is the inhabitants of the City, faithful Israel, that is the Bride of Christ, called in this life, the Body of Christ.

There is no corporate Body of Christ called “the Church.” The corporate Body of Christ is the Israel of Faith; it always has been, and it always will be the Israel of Faith. The Lord has only one Bride. He is not a bigamist—certainly not a polygamist!

Now, let us stop here to put to rest the myth of “St. Peter” guarding the “Pearly Gates.” *The names of the twelve tribes of Israel are on the gates*; the names of the twelve apostles, all Israelites, are on the foundations. There is no mention of “the Church” as the Bride of Christ. We see no representation of the pope or any other religious leaders of what came to be called “the Church” in later centuries.

Christ did not come just to save us for Heaven, but that through Him we might have an eternal inheritance with Abraham. This inheritance is of the future earth, not of Heaven. We will enter into it in our resurrected physical bodies, not as disembodied spirits.

Many Christians have the erroneous idea that after death they will go to Heaven to live an ethereal existence, doing nothing much but whiling away the time in fellowship with God, the angels and other saints. But there is much more to our inheritance.

We have been adopted into the family of God through faith in Jesus Christ. Thus, we are joint heirs of the Kingdom of God if we continue in the faith and do not faint because of tribulation or temptation.

Our faithfulness will be rewarded with eternal life in fruitful service to our Creator whose love for us is demonstrated in His sacrifice for our sins.

COUNTING THE COST

The Gospel requires that we count the cost of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. We are not invited to “accept Jesus” and let it go at that. There is a price to be paid:

Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them,

“If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.

“And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.

“For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it—

“lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him,

“saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’

“Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand?”

“Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace.

“So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.

“Salt is good; but if the salt has lost its flavor, how shall it be seasoned?”

“It is neither fit for the land nor for the dunghill, but men throw it out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!” (Luke 14:25-35)

While we are not to literally hate anyone, the Lord was making a point: we cannot love anyone—not even our own lives—more than we love Him, or we are not worthy to be His disciples. Loving Him may cost us our families, our friends, our homes, our jobs, our very lives. It may even cost fellowship in the “church.” If we are not willing to give up these things we are not worthy of Him; He says we *cannot be His disciples*.

Jesus is not interested in the lukewarm who claim faith in Him but do not live according to His commandments (Revelation 3:16). All who come to Him in truth are disciples, meaning those who discipline their lives according to their Lord’s will, and bear fruit:

“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.

“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.

“You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.

“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.

“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.

“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.

“If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.

“By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.

“As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love.

“If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love.

“These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.

“This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

“Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.

“You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.” (John 15:1-14)

Do not be deceived by a limited “gospel” based on what is called God’s “unconditional love,” which implies we may live as we choose, even in sin. God’s love was unconditional in that He sent His Son to die for the sins of the world without the world having any hand in it, or asking for it. While we were yet sinners Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). We cannot earn His gift of salvation. But there are conditions to entering into that salvation, to remaining in the love of God, and to inheriting the Kingdom of God. If this were not true, why did Jesus say these things? And why do the post-messianic Scriptures stress what is necessary for us to do to inherit eternal life if there is nothing we can do about it? This is not “works” salvation; it is the Word of God.

God created us with our own wills. There is a great error that says man is incapable of responding to the Gospel—that he cannot even choose Christ; he is chosen by Christ. The Scripture used to “prove” this is a portion of John 15:16 wherein Jesus says, “You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you.” But what does the whole verse say?

“You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.” (John 15:16)

This statement of Jesus is a continuation of the verses cited immediately above, where we are told to bear fruit or risk being cut off and burned with the dead branches just as happened to unfaithful Israel. This is what Paul meant when he said, “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Romans 8:1).

There is a cost to salvation: denying ourselves, picking up our cross and following (obeying) Jesus. If we do not do these things we cannot be His disciples. If we are not His disciples we cannot inherit the Kingdom of Heaven.

As far as our wills are concerned, God has not made us robots. He wants men who will love Him from their hearts. And while the unregenerate heart is dead, the proclaiming of the Gospel brings conviction by the Holy Spirit which, in turn, causes those whose hearts long for truth and righteousness to respond with repentance and obedience. Otherwise there would be no such love available for God from among His creation.

The question for those who say they had nothing to do in responding to the Gospel is, “Do you love God?” If they say yes, then we ask, “How do you know?”

Indeed, how can anyone know if they love God if they deny that they are capable of loving God even under the conviction of the Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit does not cause us to love God. Nor does He cause us to do what is right or to refrain from sin. He merely convicts us of sin and encourages us to respond in righteousness. Otherwise, why would He allow us to sin? We would never sin again. Yet we do sin. And anyone who says he does not sin calls God a liar (1 John 1:10). In view of our ability to choose to sin or not to sin it becomes obvious that we do have free will.

If we will manifest the Kingdom of God during our short span of life on the earth, we must obey Christ. That means we must obey His Scriptures. And how can we do so if we do not know them apart from what men have told us they mean? Each of us must study to show ourselves approved, workmen that need not be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth (2 Timothy 2:15).

Test by the Word of God even these words I write. But do not test them by the writings of other men. There are many clever manipulators of Scripture who can make them say what they want them to say. Do not trust me or any man; trust the Holy Spirit to give you understanding in these matters as you test them by the Scriptures.

SHOULD YOU LEAVE YOUR CHURCH?

When Jesus' disciples gathered for fellowship they met in their homes. They were the "called-out ones"—called out from not only the nations, but from unfaithful Israel. They recognized that the Body of Christ is a family. Family meetings were for only the family members unless non-believers were specifically invited in so that they could be witnessed to. The believers did not take a census of their community and ask what the people wanted to hear, what "needs" they wanted met, or what programs would fit those "needs." There was no psychological counseling or mysticism.

However, the believers did continue for a while to go to the synagogues in order to witness to the Jews as a company. They did so up to the point that they were cast out of the synagogues.

Today, the Israel of Faith has been in captivity to pastoral Christianity for the past 1700 years, just as it was in captivity to rabbinic Judaism for centuries before Messiah came. In many ways pastoral Christianity is much the same as rabbinic Judaism. A remnant of rabbis followed their Messiah when He came. Most rejected Him. A remnant of pastors strive to remain faithful to the Lord. Most do not. And most in both companies have made the Scriptures of no effect in the lives of God's Israel through their traditions. If there are two distinct companies *they are Judaism and Christianity*, not faithful Israel. Many of today's Christian leaders do not realize the degree to which worldly tradition has taken over their belief systems.

The churches are fraught with anecdotes and psychobabble in place of God's Word; programs in place of discipleship; entertainment in place of worship. But should we be surprised that they are sliding into apostasy, considering that they originated in apostasy?

What is written in these pages is not a "new revelation" in the sense of extra-biblical "knowledge." It is just understanding of truths already contained in Scripture.

Certainly others must have seen these truths. Perhaps some in the messianic congregations have seen them, although most do not consider biblical Christianity a continuation of biblical Judaism. (Actually, there is no such thing as "biblical Christianity" or "biblical Judaism." There is only the Faith once delivered to the saints.) Many messianic congregations meld rabbinic Judaism with Christianity and are re-erecting the wall of separation. They believe that God has two ways of dealing with His people: one way for naturally born Israelites,

another way for those grafted into Israel by faith in Messiah Jesus. They want us to believe that they are our mentors because of their natural heritage. Yet what they offer is not the true Faith alone, but a Christianized form of rabbinic Judaism, some even insisting on the keeping of the Law, at least for those born as natural Israelites.

It is permissible to put themselves under the Law in order to win those under the Law as Paul did (1 Corinthians 9:19-23). But that is the extent of having any legitimate thing to do with the Law. As one in Christ, let us keep the Covenant in His blood as one people.

Many who read this will be alarmed. It's as if the very foundation for all they have believed since coming to Christ has been taken out from under them. That is how I felt when the truth about Roman Catholicism was revealed to me. At that time I determined to leave that place of comfort—of beloved priests and comfortable ritual. I knew that I could not remain there and be faithful to the Lord because of the truth I had attained.

Now the question is certainly in the minds of some whether or not they should leave their churches and all the comfort they provide. They love those with whom they fellowship. They know that salvation is in Jesus, not in the church they attend. They love their pastors, and rightly so. They should not forget the true servants of God who have labored in the churches these past centuries—some still today. But they also know that the church system is part of the world's religious establishment, its various elements at worst controlled by Satan; at best influenced by him.

Each must make up his own mind what to do, provided his church is not overtly apostate. However, for those with knowledge the purpose for attending should shift from what they can receive from the churches to what they have to offer to the churches in the way of sharing the truth. We should treat the churches as the Lord's disciples treated the synagogues. Recognize that few in them hold a genuine faith in the Lord, but demonstrate the love of Christ to all.

However, we should not be naïve to think that we will be welcomed. Jesus told His disciples that He was sending them out as sheep among wolves (Matthew 10:16-17). He warned that they would be cast out of the synagogues and would even be killed by those who think they are doing God a service (John 16:2).

It is difficult to face the prospect of giving up one's church. The churches provide a sense of community; they give an air of security; they are lovely places. And there are many sweet brethren in them. But the cost of following Christ is to be willing to

give up one's own life for Him. Yet I am not suggesting my brethren do anything more than I have done. I know the pain that arises with separation from those we love.

Frankly, you need not leave your church; just bring the hard truth and most likely you will be escorted out.

You can be sure most of the churches will say we are apostate, reprobate—that we hate Christians and Christianity; they will warn others that we are a cult, and that they should stay away from us. They will insist that we show them our "credentials," just as Israel's religious leaders demanded of the Lord and His disciples their credentials. The myriad theologians of the Christian religions all have credentials and they cannot agree on what is the truth. But they will accept one another, especially in their rejection of us, because they possess the same religious spirit. They have a large investment in the religious system and they won't like to see it threatened.

What they will not do is weigh by the Scriptures what we have to say, at least not without scouring commentaries and theological theses that support their presuppositions.

Even so, let us sanctify the Lord God in our hearts, and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asks us a reason of the hope that is in us with meekness and fear, having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of us, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse our good conversation in Christ (1 Peter 3:15-16).

CONCLUSION

I'm as undone about these truths regarding the churches as I was about the truth regarding Roman Catholicism when I received Jesus in 1964!

I thought then that I had been liberated from error—that I had gone totally from darkness to light. It was staggering. Now I see that I was only slightly removed from the greater darkness, but still in the great apostasy that began in the first century.

This has opened an entirely new understanding of God's Word. All the theological systems based on belief in "the Church" are out the window. Let the Covenantalists, the Dispensationalists, the Calvinists, the Arminians, and all the other "ists" and "ians" duke it out. They are vapors. We cannot truly understand the Gospel writings unless we first grasp this great truth: that the New Covenant was made with Israel and Judah, not with the Gentile "churches." ❖

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