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THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH:
DISTORTED AND
DEFORMED

CHAPTER FOUR

PARRHSIA

Another facet of ecclesia in which many believers (as well as non-Christians) were striving for within their assemblies (ecclesia), was that of "**freedom of speech.**" Since the exercise of free speech was so important, "ecclesia" was often identified with another important Greek term, *p-a-r-r-h-s-i-a*.

ParrHsia (parresia) is a word that literally means "freedom of speech". It is translated "*waxed bold*" by the KJV in 1 Thess. 2:2 and Acts 13:46. Other versions render it "*speaking out boldly*". In Acts 9:27 and 29, it is rendered "*spoke boldly*". Also in Acts 26:26, it is translated "*spoke boldly*" or "*freely*."

One writer, speaking of the parresia concept in the New Testament, says that it was:

"The right of every citizen to stand up in the public assembly and express his honest opinion."

Its opposite was given the name "sycophancy" or shameless assent. Allowing someone to have their way without speaking up and supporting your view was viewed as a great fault.

Outside of the assembly (ecclesia) *"... parresia represented the expression of the speaker's opinion without regard for the feelings of others."*

Parresia was crucial in every good relationship and indeed, "*freedom of speech toward God*" is referred to several times in the New Testament, although the word is usually translated "confidence" in that context. (2 Cor. 10:2; Phil. 1:14; 1 John 3:21)

Another old writer said: *"It is better to have parresia even if not a soul shall understand what one is saying than to fall into step with popular opinions, to harvest the lush praise that falls from the favor of the multitude."*

This was the essence and character of the ecclesia in the New Testament. Parresia was set apart to represent the freedom of speech common to the believers and to every Greek citizen within their communities (ecclesia).

"There is no greater loss than to lose it (freedom of speech)."

It needs to be emphasized again that Jesus used the term ecclesia when describing what he intended to build rather than the Greek term "*synagogue*" which He was both familiar with and could have been expected to use.

"It is striking that Jesus' followers did not describe their meetings and the community represented by them as a "*synagogue*" for the word would have been natural for a group which sprang from Jewish roots."

Jesus' zeal for teaching the "*equal footing*" that He intended to be present within the scope of His community is seen in His choice of the Greek term ecclesia. Today however, there is no greater "*un-equal footing*" seen within the modern institutional churches than the repression of speech!

Authority, let alone, the privilege to speak within the "*institutional churches*" is granted solely by the "*church leadership*" and it is given only to those that will stay within the boundaries of their particular orthodoxy. This current practice is totally foreign to the essence and spirit of parresia and against the will of the Savior for his ecclesia. Speaking from a context of controversy and persecution, the Hebrew writer admonishes the brethren, "*Do not cast away your freedom of speech (parresia), which has a great reward.*" (Hebrews 10:35)

The principle found in the above verse teaches us to maintain our freedom of speech even in the face of persecution. Open discussion was highly prized in the New

Testament assembly as it had been in Greece. In fact, discussion (as in the Greek ecclesia) was used as the Christian method of learning.

The Greek word *dialegomai*, the common Greek word for "discuss," is the word used during Christian meetings.

The meaning of *dialegomai* in classical Greek is expressed by our lone word dialogue. It means to hold a conversation or to talk openly. Used by the philosophers, it came to mean conversation with teaching as its object: one debates and learns in so doing.

Unfortunately, as we've learned about other mistranslations, the true meaning of *dialegomai* is hidden by the KJV and as usual, other translations have followed suit. For example, a favorite text of modern "preachers" is found in Acts 20:7. The KJV renders it thus:

"And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached (dielegeto) unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight."

As you can see, by translating *dielegeto* (a derivative of *dialegomai*) "preach" rather than "held a discussion" it would certainly be easy to get the idea that this was a "speech" or "sermon" rather than a discussion.

Though the modern practice in all institutional churches of any stripe is that of "*giving sermons*" and "*preaching from the pulpit*," the word group for "giving a speech" or "give sermons" is never found within the New Testament ecclesia. Instead we have "discuss" or "start a discussion," or "dialogue", the true meaning of the Greek word.

But again, the translators gave an incorrect rendering. They inserted the word "preach" instead of *dialegomai*, "dialogue", confirming yet again their love affair with the medieval practices and traditions of power hungry and lust-filled men.

So now we have in the church institution the notion called "*the centrality of preaching*," taken from Acts 20, a situation where the Apostle Paul spoke for a long time. But many fail to notice, and others even refuse to acknowledge, that verse 7 specifically states that the purpose of their coming together was "to break bread" (fellowship) not to hear a sermon!

Remember, there were special circumstances surrounding this particular meeting, for it was the last time Paul would ever see them. If the apostle came to your assembly, wouldn't you want to prolong your time together in order to hear what he had to say? Even though the specific word used here is *dialegomai*, from which we derive our English word "dialogue," implying a give-and-take with the listeners, men still insist in twisting the Scriptures to gain their own ends. What Paul said certainly provided the substance of the gathering, but he did not talk non-stop for hours. There certainly would have been discussion and audience participation. Paul was concerned about what was

on the hearts of others too. This is just yet another despicable and disgusting trick of the translators, a trick which has been kept up and running through the centuries, right up to our modern day clergy, who are ever so eager and willing to stoke the fires and fan the flames to gain their own ends.

Do you still think that any of them are possessed with good intentions? Think long and hard about it while you search the musty halls of tradition to support a church institution concept.

Have we not blown up the ego of the "clergy" until they feel that they need not answer to anyone for what they teach, or fail to teach? What rules do we see (spoken or unspoken) inside an institutional church that the so-called "authorities" have established?

No one questions the public speaker from the same audience, but waits until after "church" when no one is around to hear the question, except the speaker. Many times the group leaves the "church" with a one-sided view of the lesson, again "proving" that what the speaker said is from God.

To question a pastor/elder today, or "call one on the carpet" for something he taught publicly is almost considered a mortal sin. The church institution has been taught by man that group obedience to the "church authorities" in all things is from God. What power engulfs mere men when the group believes this! They are taught that to question them is to question Almighty God. Does this sound unlikely? Then try questioning them on a tradition held and taught by them. Perhaps you can try questioning them in regards to the subject matter of this article?

My guess is that you will be pounced upon to a pulp! How sad, and yet how revealing.

Men who hesitate to submit their thought process and conclusions to fair public examination must have some good reason not to. Preachers who preach only to the choir will never know whether what they preach has enough substance to it to stand the heat of public examination. Men who would deny freedom of speech to any others must have deep roots of doubt about the truth of their own convictions or their own ability to present it and defend it publicly.

Yes, brethren. Free speech is the foundation of our religious freedom.

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