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THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH: DISTORTED AND DEFORMED

CHAPTER III

"C-H-U-R-C-H"... "C-H-U-R-C-H"... AND MORE "C-H-U-R-C-H"

So far we have looked at only a fraction of the history that so many Christians are unaware of. There is so much about this issue that could be said. Does it bother anyone (considering the resources of information, concerning history and the original writings of Scripture we have available at our very fingertips) that we are still to this day using a term (i.e. church) not actually found in Scripture; a term that has been "translated" from a Greek word that is not even used once in all of Scripture?

I can hear some die-hard detractors saying: *"Does all of this really matter?"*

They will say,.....*"that was then and this is now."*

"You can't expect the church to be perfect with imperfect people."

"Why do you hate the people in the institutional church?"

"Your' re making a mountain out of a mole hill."

"Of course we know that 'church' is not a building."

"We know that it refers to a congregation, or an assembly, or whatever. We know that! And this is what we try to teach to our people."

"You are the one who is distorting and deforming the issue! It's been done this way for centuries. It must be right."

Oh really? Obviously, you have not been listening (reading) very well, have you?

Again, let me repeat.....it is very important for us to understand that the Holy Spirit, working through the Biblical writers, did not supply them with the word "**church**."

This is an historical fact and can easily be checked out.

The Holy Spirit chose the word ecclesia to describe the people who have been *called out of a world of sin* and who are the *"assembly of God."* Simply put, ecclesia means a called out "gathering" or "community." Ecclesia, by stark contrast, bears no connotation whatsoever to an earthy building, temple, shrine, institution or anything of the sort!

Does all of this really matter? The fact is, it only matters if you are interested in Biblical Christianity. It only matters if doing things the way Jesus intended is important to you.

No, I don't expect the so-called "*church*" to be composed of perfect people; I just expect it to be biblical. And no, I don't hate the people in the ecclesiastical system. I hate the system that has ensnared them; that has placed them behind bars; sometimes through no fault of their own.

This is a matter of one thing and one thing only. These are the words and commands of Scripture!

The prevailing view today goes totally against the teaching of the Spirit and the NT. The Holy Spirit gave particular words and particular ways of doing things. A "congregation," an "assembly," a "community," is either based on these words and ways or on something else. And if it is based on something else, then it equates to but one thing: the words and traditions of mere men!

And if that is the case, then such so-called institutions simply cannot be said to be "biblical." They are unbiblical; indeed, anti-biblical, going totally contrary to the teaching of Scripture!

Until we all realize that the Scriptures which God has given are not optional; that they are not to be tampered with; then you are doomed to defeat. The pain and misery of

good people trying to make their Christianity work in a system that won't let them be what Jesus called them to be will continue. And it needs to stop.

Why do we build a material building and hang out a sign that announces to the whole world that this is a Baptist Church, or a Catholic, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Reformed, or Mormon Church? Why? Surely we say that we know that such a building is NOT the Lord's ecclesia. We say we believe that the Church is people, but we aren't willing to let go of the idea as well as the practice, that "church" is also the place we attend each week!

But, "ACCORDING TO WHAT?" There is no other "church" in the Bible than the people of God. There is never a place; there is never a building called by this name. Why do we insist it exists and that it is an absolute requirement that it exists? When will the leaders have the faith, courage and will to correct their practice and their speech that promotes so much error and misunderstanding? My prediction: THEY WILL NEVER DO SO!

Remember that one of the major reasons that churches exist today is that the works of men may be seen and carried out. As someone so aptly said,

*"It is difficult to get a man to understand something
when his livelihood and salary depends upon his NOT understanding it."*

Is it no wonder that when you read the New Testament, you will find absolutely nothing that resembles the so-called "*church*" of today?

You will find NO Christian religious church buildings to house passive pew potatoes; NO church budgets; NO salaried clergy; NO clergy period. You will find NO religious furniture pointing all the "*laity*" in the direction of the "*clergy*," putting on his one-man show, paid to perform week in and week out; NO "*church leaders*" meetings held apart from the rest of the congregation, where decisions are handed down to the rest of the brethren who don't know what's really going on. You will find NO solemn, dark communion services where the communicants sip little shot glasses of grape juice, and eat soda crackers; NO big tongue up front on an elevated platform wagging for a bunch of little ears in an audience.

No, despite what any detractors deceive themselves (and others) into saying, the church building model, accompanied by its institutional system of leaders **lording it over others**, is alive and well.

What do many Christians today talk about? "*Placing membership in*" and "*belonging to*," some kind of an organization! Expressions like "*being in the church*," "*going to church*," "*getting ready for church*," "*having church*," "*wearing church clothes*," "*giving to*

the church," and *"being faithful to the church,"* demonstrate the effect that such absurdities has had on our understanding, or lack of it, concerning the ecclesia.

It is indeed treated and looked upon purely as an institution or social organization with its various social functions. We cannot deny it; our speech and our actions betrays us.

All the talk about *"the church on the corner," "cleaning the church," "painting the church,"* etc. Will anyone deny this? And again, it's not enough to say, "We know better," or "You know what I mean." People are deceived. They are being deceived not only by the god of this world but also by the *"church leaders"* in whom many trust.

Look at more of the confusion and deception that the word and concept of *"church"* causes. Who are you trying to fool?

Just what, for example, does the word "church" refer to in the following statements?

- "He left the **church** years ago." - "It's my month to lock up the **church.**" - "The First Baptist **Church**, Inc. was formed in 1971."

- "After **church** let's eat at Applebee's." - "The Bible speaks very clearly about the necessity of **church** membership."

- "Mary is always late for **church.**" - "Do you want to join the Smith's and the Wagner's in starting a new **church?**"

- "That is a conservative **church.**" - "He who refuses to have the **church** as his mother, most likely does not have God as his Father."

- "We are building an addition to our **church.**" - "You are expected to attend all of the stated meetings of the **church** unless providentially hindered."

- "Some of the members filed a lawsuit against the Emmanuel Bible **Church.**" - "Take your hat off and don't talk loudly. Remember, you are in **church.**"

- "One cannot be a faithful Christian without being a member of a faithful **church.**" - "Our **church** recently had a split and another **church** started as a result."

- "How many attended **church** today?" - "Worship will begin at our **church** at 9:30." - "We would love for you to consider applying for membership at our **church.**"

- "Our **church** recently installed a new Minister of Visitation." - "If you are looking for a **church** home, we invite you to consider our **church.**"

- "Let's meet at the **church** to discuss plans for our **church** softball team." - "Were you in **church** today?"

- "Prayer meeting is on Wednesdays @ 7:00pm at the **church**." - "Trinity **Church** was defeated 10 to 1 by the First Baptist **Church**."

- "I recently ordered some more **church** literature for the classes." - "God intends for every believer to contribute to the mission of the **church**."

- "If you are a visitor and live in our city, we hope you will consider making our **church** your **church** home."

- "Devotion to your **church** is the same as devotion to Jesus Christ." - "You should make conscience of giving one-tenth of your income to the work of the **church**."

Carefully check back through these statements and see how ridiculous and untrue are the words of both "*clergy and laity*" alike when they say: "*Oh, we believe and know that the church is people and not a building!*"

I am sure that the devil heartily approves of such a concept that has brought so much confusion, bitterness, and enmity among men. When we look to God's Word for instructions on how to operate a so-called "*church*" and then find out that there are no such instructions, what do you do? I'll tell you what people do. Some people are so sure that God wants them to have a church that they force ideas into Scriptures that were never intended. It is no wonder everything is distorted and deformed.

As said earlier, one will be hard pressed to find the structure of a typical modern church in the New Testament, but then again, that is the point. These structures, images, concepts, doctrines, are not in the Bible, but when we have been programmed to accept all these things as Christianity, our minds cannot see what is plainly written. We see through all these filters and so see "through the glass darkly." As a result, we see a very dark "God." And when "God" becomes dark, mysterious, hard to figure out and easy to cross, we need someone to speak to Him for us lest we be consumed by His wrath. We then become like Israel who said to Moses, "*You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die.*" (Exodus 20:19)

Perhaps the greatest evil ever perpetuated upon the people of God is the institutional church; a human organization that makes all the decisions for you and controls all of your religious activities, yea, even your life! This is the most wretched deception of all.

Many people convince their minds that this nicely ordered routine equals "spirituality" and now, this makes them feel righteous before God. In this state they are easily pacified, distracted from biblical reality, controlled by their leaders and easily manipulated by heretical teachings.

So the charade continues despite the fact that in the New Testament, there is *"no requirement (pattern) from God"* whatsoever that the disciples *"form or constitute themselves into an organic institutional body called the local church."*

Where is that requirement? Where is that pattern? Where is the record or teaching which proves that disciples were divided into independent, autonomous organizations that we call *"the local church"* corporation? There is no Scriptural proof for such! People have to assume it and then assert such to be true.

We have assumed that what we have today is exactly what they had then. After all, we boldly claim that we follow the pattern! We follow God's word! Therefore, we are the true church! Since we are a "pattern people," it must follow that what we have today must certainly be what they had then! It must be what the Lord set up!

This is our way of reasoning in justifying everything we want to do in our day; from the *"professional windbag preacher"* to *"the local church corporation."* For our "idols" we will find justification - in our own mind. We want something we can see and someone to represent us... something physical. Whether we are building a building to reach the sky as the tower of Babel or an edifice to hold our pastor's meetings on Sunday... we want our own building and God will allow us to see and believe what our hearts are set upon. (Ezekiel 14)

In Acts 7:48, Stephen angered the Pharisees by saying that God *"dwells not in temples made with hands"* (Acts 7:48). Such a statement and change would abolish everyone from the gatekeeper to the high priest who served the old system of the temple. What Stephen's statement said back then would be just as offensive to our spending of billions of dollars of God's money on "church buildings" today.

What he said then is just as offensive today as it was to those Pharisees: God does not dwell in "Churches" or any other building. Our focus is not to be distracted on the material but on the temple of the Holy Spirit. That departure of emphasis has permitted the enemy to come in our midst and pick us off one at a time.

Dear reader, the Truth is at stake here, and perhaps for some, your life is at stake too. What is being said here is either the Truth or it is dangerous error! If you think it is the latter, then prove (test) it for yourself by God's word. Search for the justification for the *"church institution"* in the Scripture. Look for the authorization for such in all of its parts and pieces. See if you can find a *"church member"* referred to in Scripture. Seek the instruction from the Lord for having a building or sanctuary as the place of worship.

Search for the Lord's authorization for a church organization to hire a *"Professional Minister"* (a church employee) at a high salary and excellent "compensation package" to be the Chief Pastor and manager of the corporate Church.

Rest assured though that if you run to your "pastor" or to the "eldership," what do you think that they will tell you? You know what answer they will give. It will be the same one the Pope would give, if he was willing to give any at all.

Unfortunately, for many in positions of church leadership, they feel that they have invested too much money, time, and education in doing it wrong, to now turn and walk away to do it right. It's easier to justify or ignore your conscience in regards to the Truth of the matter. After all, what will they do with all these buildings?

Remember that without a building, the so-called clergy would lose their power over the people. Without a building, the clergy system would fall. This whole system of clergy/laity with its dominance of "*power and authority over the people*," head-quartered in a building called an institutional church was totally foreign to the vocabulary and the life of the disciples of Jesus.

But, "*it's too late now to change, isn't it?*"

It all depends on how serious your love and commitment is to Christ and His Word.

Ecclesia ! What Has Happened?

The fact of the matter still remains that in the time of the apostles, they did not have institutions, organizations, or corporate structures known as "churches" such as abound in our day. The saints did not "belong to a church" for no such thing existed in that day. They belonged only to Jesus Christ who redeemed and "purchased" them with His own blood.

MEN, in their wisdom, build churches and every one of them, regardless of the brand or kind, are the creations of men! If YOU are a member of some church, whatever the brand or kind, you are a member of something in which Jesus has no part nor lot in!

Today, millions of people around the world actually think that they are just like those early disciples. Just because they make the effort to get out of bed, get the family ready, and arrive at a "*church building*" with a nice warm pew every Saturday or Sunday morning, many are convinced that they have performed their duty that they think God requires of them; especially the oft misinterpreted verse: "*...forsake not the assembling of yourselves together...*"

Yes, they "*go to church*" each week and spend a maximum of about two to four hours together. They stand when they are told to stand. They sit when they are told to sit. They speak when they are told to speak. Someone leads them in prayer. Someone leads them in music. They hear some announcements. Someone passes a collection plate so they can "*offer to the Lord their tithes and offerings.*" Someone teaches them in a class. Then they hear a one hour monologue from someone standing behind a wooden soapbox. Occasionally, they eat the Lord's Supper; one little bread crumb and

a shot glass of grape juice. They call it "*partaking of the Supper*," which has now become a ceremony, separate from anything else they do. Occasionally, they might schedule some other "fellowship," but in reality, they share little in common. But yet...BUT YET, they are convinced that they are "*the church*."

All of these elements of "*the service*" deceive people to think that they are fulfilling the Lord's desires by cramming all of these things into a church service each week. People instinctively get themselves into a mode that "*if I just do this faithfully every week, it covers all the bases; God is pleased; I'm doing my duty; I am assembling as the Bible says, and I'm growing spiritually.*"

This is now the "church service" or the "church meeting." And to top it off, the "*church authorities*" have now made this a mandatory meeting where not only is attendance strictly recorded but where also the peculiar doctrines held by the church are now repeated numerous times over and over again, week in and week out; year in and year out, until your brain is numb with boredom and you are thoroughly convinced that there can be no other truth. To now miss one of these meetings is a grave sin and indicates that you may be "apostate". You have now begun to lose the ability to think for yourself.

It is so easy to fall into the trap of thinking our righteousness is based on and maintained by works and things like church attendance. That is why organized and institutionalized Christianity is so dangerously deceptive. The same was true in the first century. The Apostle Paul was stunned that these believers who had experienced such great freedom and joy in Christ, were now turning back to religious practices. They still believed in Jesus. They still wanted to follow God, but they had allowed themselves to move away from the simplicity of their devotion to Christ and were replacing it, little by little, with religious observation.

Writing to the Galatians, Paul expressed surprise and shock that Christians gave up the "*grace of Christ*" to return "*to the weak and beggarly rudiments... to be in bondage over again*" (Gal. 1:6; 4:9). What were they doing to bring on these critical comments by the apostle? They were allowing religious leaders to dictate their man-made rules and regulations that they said had to be obeyed in order for them to be right with God. They were told that they had to be circumcised, to remember to keep certain days holy, to make various sacrifices to God and man, etc., etc. Paul said that if they gave in to these requirements, they would lose their blessings. "*Christ will profit you nothing.*" (5:2).

Men may claim to be led and moved by the Spirit of God, but in reality are simply led and moved with human motivation, human greed and scare tactics. The Holy Spirit could be withdrawn completely from the earth, and most "*church services*" would continue without knowing anything had happened!

God has never, ever placed the Master role on the Pope of Rome. Neither did He place that role and responsibility upon any other man nor any group or body of men, even if

they do claim that the *Eldership* has such authority and control. It is another big lie, like the claim of the Pope. Jesus Christ is the One and only Master and Lord.

In spite of this, *church members*, as well as all *churched people*, are constantly being told by their "*church leaders*" that you ought to be devoted to your local church to the same degree that you are devoted to the Lord Himself; that the local church is a "**blood bought institution**" implying that our Savior shed His blood on the cruel cross to buy an institution.....something other than people. Can you imagine this?

And speaking of buying and selling, what does an institution; what does an organization; what does a corporation require in order to operate effectively? Why, none other than paid professionals! So now, arriving on the scene is the *paid Pastor, the paid Preacher, the paid Elder, the full-time professional paid clergy!*

Never mind what Jesus said: that all that came before Him, and many who have come after are the same as thieves and robbers. Never mind what the apostle Paul and others had to say.

I thought we believed that the gospel is God's free gift? How do you think the Lord sees the events of today where we have the paid professionals; the "*pastors*," the "*teaching elders*" turning around and selling the gift so freely given them - a gift that cost the life of God's Son to acquire? All of these "*church leaders*" have taken what was freely given them, slapped a price tag on it, and sell it week after week..... for a pay check!

These people are nothing but hireling's (to use Jesus' own words) pure and simple! The Apostle Peter condemned one who tried to buy it (Acts 8:18-24); how much more those who sell it week after week!

The Apostle Paul, in epistle after epistle, condemned over and over again, the one who is making a living off of the gospel. And again, just like with the issue of "c-h-u-r-c-h," I can already hear some of my die-hard "*institutional church people*" saying, "*Oh no! Not our 'pastor.'*"

Our 'pastor' isn't in it for the money! Our 'pastor' is so humble; he's so godly; he just looooves the Lord!"

Wherein, I again reply, "Oh really?"

Let's try this experiment. Here is the hireling's test. If he can pass it, you may know that he is not a hireling.

Stop paying him. That's right. Stop paying your "pastor." Let him "*care for the sheep*" at no expense to the sheep. Don't receive a wage. Avoid the appearance of being a hireling. Do it for nothing!

Not only that, let him serve **at his own expense!**

Do this for three and a half years and he will have passed the hireling's test. He will be walking in the footsteps of Greatness; the footsteps of the One that came to serve, and lay down His life for His sheep.

See how long he remains being unpaid like the Apostle Paul!!

See how much he "*looooooves the Lord*" when he isn't getting paid to "love the Lord!"

Tell him he can still minister the word week after week, but also, he will have to get a real job like the Apostle Paul did, "working night and day."

I guarantee you, him, along with 99% of all other so-called "pastors" will be out of there, searching for a new pulpit to fill. It's that weekly paycheck that he loves, and if the church won't pay him, he'll pack his bags and sell himself off to some other church that will! Guaranteed !!!

Rest assured, every single so-called "*man in the ministry*" today lives according to this principle: "No Pay, No Play."

Yes, that's right. There are no exceptions. Every single "person in the ministry" receiving an income from preaching the gospel is a thief; a robber; and a hireling!

The Apostle Paul, over and over again, condemns those who have turned "the ministry of the word" into a full-time paid job. He condemns those that have made a living out of it. He condemns those that have turned the gospel into "*a means of GAIN*". In short, he condemns EVERY SINGLE PAID pastor/elder THAT EXISTS TODAY. (See, [Should Pastor's Be Cared For?](#))

Why haven't you heard this before? Why hasn't this teaching of the Apostle Paul been "broadcast" widely and proclaimed from pulpits across this land? Why is it that the "*institutional church*" along with the "*church leadership*" has consistently avoided teaching and preaching on verses like these?

Well, to even ask such questions is to answer such questions. The reason why the "church" and its "*leadership*" keep quiet on this issue is because **they themselves are the target of Paul's wrath.**

They are the ones guilty of having turned "*the ministry of the word,*" i.e. preaching, into a full-time job.

For them to preach this from their pulpits would be the end of their livelihood. They have been forced to choose between God, and mammon – and guess what? They've

chosen mammon. They have been faced with the choice of picking what they love more - their salaries, or the truth; and truth has lost out.

The very people who are in the best position to inform their congregations of the truth of this matter, turn out to be the same people who have a "vested interest" in keeping quiet.

Indeed, the wolves have been placed in charge of the hen house, and are doing their best to keep the hens ignorant of the slaughter of truth going on. These people are only motivated by private ambition, greed, and a lust for power and authority. The money is good. They love the recognition. They love the feeling of power and control. They love the sheep pen, but they do not love the sheep.

Jude warned, *"These are hidden rocky reefs in your love feasts when they feast with you, shepherds who without fear feed themselves; clouds without water, carried along by winds; autumn leaves without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots"*(Jude 1:12). They are hirelings, self-proclaimed shepherds feeding themselves. They flee when the sacrifice becomes too great, or most assuredly, when the money runs out!

Give your so-called pastor the hireling's test, and see for yourself!

This whole arrangement; this whole man-made cacophony of an institutional church system run by a self-serving hierarchical team of spiritual monsters is a great deception and a horrible error!

There are no words too strong to demonstrate this deception and shift. In fact, the words that come to mind are: abomination, heresy, and blasphemy. There is no other way to explain the devastation and damage of distorting and deforming Christ and His body.

This anti-scriptural buffoonery has deceived millions of unknowing, often unthinking people into actually believing that there really is an institutional church in the Bible.

Men have usurped the authority of Christ as Head and have built around denominational titles and names separating His body into corporations and institutions of men. We no longer gather around the name of Jesus, but the name of a building or a pastor or a board of elders. We have literally robbed Christ of his rightful place and therefore His glory in His body has departed. Because of this we are not, and have never been equipped to build a Glorious body without wrinkle and spot! We have replaced the ministry of the Holy Spirit with the works of men. We have replaced first love (a true love and obedience toward Jesus) with the works of men.

What is being done might look good and professional, but it is not God. *These things indeed, though they have an appearance of wisdom in self-devised religious*

observance and lowliness of mind and ill-treatment of body are not of any value against the indulgence of the flesh. Col. 2:23

This dastardly system only serves to further dividing the body and isolating the laity.

An Ecclesia Indeed

The Holy Spirit was ever present and worked with those early believers; those first disciples. They had a supernatural foundation (Jesus) and a supernatural builder (Jesus and the Holy Spirit). The early believers came out of the kingdom of this world and became a part of the kingdom of God. They understood the kingdom concept taught by Jesus. They were Jews who understood a kingdom and a king.

To the Jews, they were now a part of a new kingdom and Jesus was their king. Israel with its kings and high priest was a thing of the past. Their building was now made of living stones and Jesus was building them together. In Scripture, believers were likened to a body, a temple, a house, a bride, etc. Jesus was the foundation of His building and He was the Head of His body and the Husband to His bride. The early believers had no clergy and laity. As believers they were "called out" indeed of the world into the kingdom of God. They were truly the called out ones.

It has all been so simple. It began with Jesus. Then, His disciples. They believed in Jesus. They followed Jesus. They lived like Jesus. His Spirit permeated them. They told everyone they met how knowing Jesus had changed them from the inside out.

They spent as much time together as possible. Every day, they congregated from one home to another. They shared stories about what had happened to each of them. They prayed together. They helped each other to become stronger, by teaching and encouraging each other. They ate a full meal together, pausing during each meal to remember Jesus by eating unleavened bread and drinking wine, as he had shown them. When one had a need, the others supplied it out of what they had. When needed, they even sold what they had to help others.

They shared all things in common. They were a community of believers.

And blessed be God that Christ has never stopped building His true ecclesia, nor has He needed man to restore His works. No "*organization*" or "*institution*" rests upon Him. Nothing is substituted for His ecclesia. He is our only foundation, our Savior, our all.

The ecclesia of Christ describes the most beautiful relationship known to man. The word was chosen by the Savior and man certainly cannot express it better. When Jesus said "*I will build my ecclesia*", He was not talking about an institution or a corporation or a bunch of local bodies. What He promised to build was His assembly, His group, His gathering, or His people. It is a collective term that applies to all those who make Christ first and serve Him with their life.

In Acts 15 at what is called the Jerusalem Council, James said: "*Simon has declared how God at first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for his name.*" (V.14). This is the meaning of ecclesia.

1 Peter 2:9-10 says "*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; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.*"

That is the meaning of ecclesia! Notice all of the descriptive terms used in this passage, each one emphasizing a different facet of this ecclesia. How can we fail to understand?

Jesus came to this earth to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). Was He talking about a lost institution? No, He came to save man who was and is lost in sin. "*For the son of man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them.*" (Luke 9:56).

Doesn't that tell us something about the ecclesia? The ecclesia refers to those who are being saved, that is, people.

We are a blood bought PEOPLE, not a blood bought institution!

In the same manner we might consider the redeemed which is another term that is interchangeable with the ecclesia. It is not a synonym but a term referring to the same group. Redeem means to buy back. What was bought back? You and I! People! Institutions don't sin and institutions are not accountable to God. People are lost in sin and people are accountable to God.

Who are the ecclesia? Those people who realized they were in sin and were helpless to do anything to save themselves; who heard the story of Jesus and His redeeming blood and have responded with love and obedience born of that love; who put Him first in their life; who, because of their mutual love for Christ, have a love and concern for one another to the point that it is an identifying characteristic that "*ye may know them*"; who follow the lead of and imitate the life of the older and more experienced of their number, as they lead with love and an exemplary life.

Simply, they are God's people, the followers of Christ. He is their High Priest and nothing or no one stands between them and their Savior. They are not "*devoted*" to nor serve institutions, organizations, or men who love to label themselves as "*duly authorized*," but they serve their God and their fellow man through love.

It is an Ecclesia whose existence does not depend on forms, services, ceremonies, clergy, churches, pulpits, pews, vestments, organs, endowments, money, kings, governments, or any act of favor whatsoever from the hand of man. It has lived on and

continued when all these things have been taken from it. It has often been driven into the wilderness, or into dens and caves of the earth, by those who ought to have been its friends. Its existence depends on nothing but the presence of Christ and His Spirit; and they being ever with it. This Ecclesia cannot die.

This is the only Ecclesia of which no one member can perish. Once enrolled in the lists of this Ecclesia, sinners are safe for eternity: They are never cast away. Not one bone of Christ's mystical body shall ever be broken. Not one lamb of Christ's flock shall ever be plucked out of His hand.

This is the Ecclesia which does the work of Christ upon earth. Its members are a little flock, and few in number, compared with the children of the world. One or two here, and two or three there; a few in this community and a few more in the next.

These are they who shake the universe; these are they who change the fortunes of kingdoms by their prayers; these are they who are the active workers for spreading the knowledge of pure religion and undefiled; these are the life-blood of a country, the shield, the defense, the stay, and the support of any nation in which they are passing through.

Why would anyone want to clutter that picture with institutions or organizations?

Community:

Probably the best description of ecclesia would be a called out "community." This is because a community can exist without reference to organization of any formal kind and without reference to meetings at set times and places. It refers simply to people who live in a common area or who are united by a common bond or in a common purpose. This is parallel to the Christian meaning of ecclesia: the people who live in Christ, who are united by their faith in the gospel of Christ and in relationships of Christian love. The community of God in Christ is a community of faith working through love. All distinctions of the flesh, whether racial, ethnic, sexual, economic, political or religious, disappear in the Christian community.

But what do we have today? In this day, "*church*" and community are different.

Church is a building. But a community is a body of people.

A church is a place you visit occasionally. A community is something you are.

A church has an *installation service* and selects and appoints men to be "*elders*" and "*deacons*." A community already has their old men ensconced; living amongst the people as fathers with their families.

A church is used only on special occasions of religious significance. A community is people whose religion lives with them every day in all occasions of life.

A church follows the patterns and ways of the world in putting men into "*offices*" or "*positions*" or "*places*" of authority over others. A community follows the patterns and ways of Jesus in His instructions: "NOT SO SHALL IT BE AMONG YOU!"

A church is created to be special. It is created to appeal to the senses. It is created to attract some sort of divine atmosphere of reverence, with stained glass, attractive pews and religious music. A community lives in the din and discord of the world.

A church is served by a clergyman who says prayers, performs duties, presides over our religious gatherings, calls on the ill and bereaved, gives sermons and accompanies our children on summer outings.

A community is served by a leader who lives with his people as counselor, friend, and comforter. He abides in them, and is a steady source of strength and peace.

A church is made of lifeless stone and wood. A community is made of living, active believers in Christ.

A church is constructed by men to serve their purposes. A community is established by Christ to do His will.

A church is known by its facility, doctrine, and pastors ability to preach or lead. A community is known by its love.

A church building must be maintained against deterioration by the labor of men. A community is sustained and renewed by the power of the Holy Spirit in the midst of the body.

A church is sustained by the monetary support of its attendees. A community is sustained by the living Christ who will never leave or forsake them.

A church will eventually crumble to ruin. The Body of Christ, the community, will be lifted up to Him forever.

Ken Cascio

Webmaster @ wickedshepherds.com

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