

Ekklesia or the Kingdom of God

Neil Gizzard

It is widely accepted that Jesus, being a Galilean Jew, probably did not speak Greek. How then do we account for the obvious fact that “ekklesia,” a decidedly Greek word and concept, is found in Jesus’ statements? Particularly, “I will build My ekklesia...” (Mt. 16:18) and “And if [the sinning brother] refuses to hear [the witnesses], tell it to the ekklesia. But if he refuses even to hear the ekklesia...” (Mt. 18:17) One theory is that Matthew, writing about 30 years after the crucifixion of Christ, inserted the words because of the by then wide usage of the word “ekklesia” as the descriptive term for Christian gatherings and functions. Some scholars even propose (or insist!) that Jesus would not have used “ekklesia” but rather the Hebrew or Aramaic word for “temple” – and this view indeed has merit but cannot be conclusively proven. Indeed, Jesus, though a Galilean, could have been familiar enough with the term and concept of “ekklesia” to use it in His teachings, which, as especially the kingdom parables demonstrate, on occasion were very “non-Jewish” in nature.

Yet we must also note that the above *three* usages of the word “ekklesia” are the sum total of Jesus’ teachings on the subject. One critic of New Testament Christianity has even said, “Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom of God, but it was the Church [Greek, *ekklesia*] that came.” Alfred Edersheim, an astute Messianic Jewish scholar, wrote,

...we must dismiss the notion that the expression [“Kingdom,” “Kingdom of heaven,” “Kingdom of God”] refers to the Church, whether visible (according to the Roman Catholic view) or invisible (according to certain Protestant writers). It is difficult to conceive, how the identity of the Kingdom of God with the Church could have originated. Such parables as those about the Sower and about the Net (Mt. 13:3-9, 47-48), and such admonitions as those of Christ to His disciples in Mt. 19:12, 6:33, and 6:10, are utterly inconsistent with it. “The Kingdom of God,” or Kingly Rule of God, is an *objective fact*. The visible Church can only be the *subjective* attempt at its outward realization, of which the invisible Church is the true counterpart.” (*The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, Vol. I, p. 269, emphasis in original)

The parable of the sower depicts the message of the kingdom (Mt. 13:19) going out to four kinds of hearers: those who hear the message but do not understand (Mt. 13:19), those who receive the message but fall away because of tribulation or persecution (Mt. 13:21), those who hear the message but the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke out the message and the hearer is unfruitful (Mt. 13:22), and those who hear and understand and obediently bear abundant fruit. (Mt. 13:23)

The parable of the net compares the kingdom of God to a fishing net that, when cast into the sea (the whole world), gathers some of every kind of sea creature. At the end of the age, the angels will “separate the wicked from among the just.” (Mt. 13:47-49, also see Mt. 13:41-43)

Jesus’ instruction on celibacy – “Let he who is able to accept it, accept it.” (Mt. 19:12) – is completely contradictory to the notion of enforced celibacy on any priesthood just as Peter’s statement that we are *all* “a royal priesthood” (1 Pet. 2:9) destroys the notion of any exalted or separate caste of priests (clergy, whether practiced openly or furtively as in many Protestant, Evangelical and “non-denominational” “churches.”)

Jesus' instruction about material wealth and possessions – “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness [what is right in His eyes], and all these things [that your heavenly Father knows you need] shall be added to you.” (Mt. 6:32-33) – is the remedy for those who find the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of wealth choking out the truth of God's kingdom.

Jesus' instruction on basic prayer – “Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” (Mt. 6:10) – strikes away the role of headship usurped by the “pastor” (descendants of the 1st and 2nd century “bishops” that arose from the ranks of the elders speaking a “gospel” corrupted by Nicolaitan “delegated” authority and other errors to draw away followers after themselves –Acts 20:30) and returns the Headship of the ekklesia, the body of people, back to Christ. (Eph. 1:22, Col. 1:18)

Edersheim is precisely correct – the kingdom of God is not the same thing as the ekklesia. Nor is the ekklesia, Christ's people called out of the darkness of this world to attend to the affairs of His kingdom of light (Col. 1:13), the same thing as the “church,” that woman “dressed in purple and scarlet...having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication. ...drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus” whom Scripture calls “the mother of prostitutes and of the abominations of the earth.” (Rev. 17:4-6) This multi-faceted description (the fullness of which is beyond the scope of this writing) embraces the Roman Catholic “church” as the producer and originator of prostitutes (religion-for-profit sects and denominations) and of abominations (idolatrous practices of “worship.”) It also includes “the apostasy,” that great falling away from the faith that occurs before the return of Christ. (Mt. 24:10, 2 Ths. 2:3) The people of Christ need to see most clearly the distinctions between the false “church” and the true ekklesia – but we also need to see more clearly the differences between the ekklesia and the kingdom of God. That Edersheim finds it “difficult to conceive” how the confusion between the kingdom and the ekklesia could have originated is only yet more evidence that “while men slept” the enemy sowed his tares among the wheat. (Mt. 13:25, also see Mt. 25:5)

Edersheim is also precisely correct that “the kingly rule of God is an *objective fact*” whereas “the visible Church” (which is now almost fully corrupted by elements of the apostasy, the falling away from the faith) “can only be the *subjective* attempt at its outward realization” and “the invisible [Ekklesia] is the true counterpart.” (ibid.) When we place the Lordship, Kingship and Headship of our own lives squarely, completely and only upon Christ, only then can we begin to become His ekklesia, His people entrusted with the affairs of His kingdom. Until we embrace Him as King, Lord and Absolute Monarch, we can only practice lawlessness, what is right in our own eyes (see Jdgs. 21:25), and we will reap our due rewards. (Mt. 7:21-23)

The kingdom of God is eternal and encompasses all who have and will receive God's eternal salvation. Though it is “heresy” to say so in “church” circles, one who has never heard of Christ is as likely to be received by God as are those who are well “churched” – perhaps more likely because the one who groped blindly after a nebulous God of truth and goodness has not rejected nearly as much truth as has the passive “church”-ite who has engorged himself on Bible knowledge but done nothing to actively obey the Lord of life and love. (see Rom. 2:6-11)

The ekklesia is the subjective expression of the kingdom of God in a particular place and a particular time. It is subject to influences from both the eternal kingdom of God as well as the false “church.” It is in the usual “church” paradigm – at its baldest, a Nicolaitan bishop presides over and speaks down to a passive, virtually captive audience of deeply conditioned slaves who routinely seat themselves at his feet as he regurgitates for them words he assures them come from God – that the ekklesia is most influenced by human tradition and demonic ideas.

The invisible ekklesia (those non-institutionalized members of Christ's body who, whether individually or corporately, go quietly about the business and affairs of their King) is the true counterpart of the kingdom of God. The visible "church" (excepting those deceived members of God's elect still ensnared in the institutions and organizations of men) is the counterpart of the kingdom of Satan.

Jesus' instruction still stands: "Seek *first* the kingdom of God and what is right in His eyes." (Mt. 6:33) Those who place the ekklesia first (before the kingdom of God) can only devolve into some form of "church" because they deny Christ His right to rule and reign over His people. (see Jude 4, 2 Pet. 2:1) Those who prefer their own form of "church" over both the ekklesia and the kingdom of God are those who will come under strong delusion sent by God so that they will take their rightful place among those who perish. (2 Ths. 2:11-12)

In the parable of the net, Jesus said, "The kingdom of God is like a net..." (Mt. 13:47) that is used to catch men's souls. (Mt. 4:19) The "church" often presents itself as a theocracy that most resembles the organization charts of a modern corporation and thus betrays its origins and roots in this world and in the mind of Satan. The ekklesia is found wherever "two or three are gathered in My name" – "in My name" signifying that the Kingship of Christ is embraced and pursued. (Mt. 18:20) As one pursues the Kingship of Christ over all aspects of one's life, these differences and distinctions become clearer, even standing in stark contrast and opposition to one another. As one shakes off the confusion and spiritual befuddlement that attends "going to church," one can begin to see God's glorious purpose manifested in His people, the ekklesia – a people uniquely His own zealous to shine forth His love and goodness in a darkened and perverse age. (see Tit. 2:14, 1 Pet. 2:9-10) The ekklesia is given the glorious privilege of presenting God's kingdom of light to a lost and dying world in the hopes that many more will be turned from darkness to light. That the "church" has done so much to obscure and minimize this main mission of God's people speaks loudly to how effective and pervasive the devil's schemes really are.

Let he who has ears hear.

Neil Girrard
Paidion Books
P.O. Box 327
Capitan, NM 88316

Website – www.paidionbooks.org

Email – paidion@paidionbooks.org

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