

A Game of Words

Neil Girrard

Inevitably, when a translation work is undertaken, *something* from the original language, meaning and intent will be lost and *something* of the new language will be inserted. This is especially true when the original language (Koine Greek) is over two millennia old whereas the second language (English) can only boast of five or six centuries – even then those centuries are characterized by changes in the language and not stability. “Meseemeth” to “it seems to me” is an excellent example of the scope of change which has occurred in the English language.

It is therefore a miracle of no small proportion that the translators of the New King James Bible, for example, can say, “Readers may be assured that textual debate does not affect one in a thousand words of the Greek New Testament. Furthermore, no established doctrine is called in question by any doubts about the correct reading in this or that text.” With this solid base in the original language, one would assume that there would be no major discrepancies between the original and the translation.

But there *is* a pattern of miscommunication in the area of ecclesiology (the study of the governing of God’s people, an area of study which has no established doctrines upon which everyone agrees) that is incredible to behold because, though (especially nowadays) one can find someone to argue just about every aspect of the gospel, this pattern is unparalleled in any other segment of theology. For example, nearly every born-again Christian knows what faith, hope and love are (see 1 Cor. 13:13) – but virtually no two Christians can agree as to how the body of Christ should be organized and how it should conduct its affairs.

The scope – and apparent success – of the deception involved is far too great for it to be an accident or coincidence of human history. Apparently, the father of lies, Satan, has scored a major victory – not in corrupting the original text of the Scriptures (that would cause passages like 2 Tim. 3:16-17 to be a lie) – but in our translating and understanding of what was originally written. If God is all powerful and sovereign, how can this be?

The Body

Before we can understand Satan’s temporary victory in this area, we must discover God’s agenda and way of establishing His people. If God were not pursuing His objectives in a given way, Satan, the adversary, would not oppose that way. As we will see, Satan’s cleverly concealed but systematic assault is aimed at preventing the building up of the body of Christ.

This scheme has been so successful that it is necessary here to explain again exactly what the body of Christ is supposed to be. Let us briefly examine a passage about Christ and His people that has often been “hijacked” because of its secondary application to wives. Let us leave out the parts that speak to the secondary issues that we might better see the primary application.

“...Christ is Head of the ekklesia; and He is the Savior of the body. ...the ekklesia is subject to Christ... ...Christ also loved the ekklesia and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious ekklesia, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish. ...the Lord [nourishes and cherishes] the ekklesia. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. This is a great mystery...Christ and the ekklesia.” (Eph. 5:23-27, 29-30, 32)

What does a part of the human body do? Decide for itself what actions it will and won't do? No, that would not be the body – that would be the head. That so many people claiming to belong to Christ still do what is right in their own eyes (lawlessness) speaks of how great the deception is upon the followers of Christ. As we near the day of Christ's return, this lawlessness, the following of one's own agenda and not Christ's, will be the characteristic sign of the day – but those who persist in following only the dictates of the Head Christ Jesus will be saved. (Mt. 24:12-13)

How does a body grow and remain strong? When every part does what it was designed to do. What is sickness, disease and death? It is a failure of parts of the body to perform their designed functions. This is true of Christ's body also. Paul wrote, "...we should no longer be children...but...may grow up in all things into Him who is the Head – Christ – from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what *every* joint supplies, according to the effective working by which *every* part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love." (Eph. 4:14-16)

The Holy Spirit performs the same functions in the body of Christ as does the nervous system in the human body. He takes the things of Christ, the Head, and makes them known to us, the body. (see Jn. 16:13-15) He also takes the things of the body – our hurts, our sorrows, prayers, petitions, needs, etc. – and presents them to Christ, the Head. (see Rom. 8:26-27)

The unity of the Spirit (see Eph. 4:3) is something that we are to attain to but it is not something we must manufacture. The "nervous system" of Christ's body is already in place – we do not have to build the connection, the bridge, between ourselves and the Head. Praise God that this is true – for indeed, we could not accomplish this task. It is also true that we do not have to build the connection, the bridge, between one another. It is already in place. We need only take care what we try to send across that bridge. The things of the flesh – sin, selfishness, lawlessness, materialism, greed, religiosity, pride, strife, etc. – do not destroy the connection, the bridge. They only put up a barrier (at our end of the bridge) between ourselves and others and between ourselves and the Head because we are trying to send carnal things across a holy, righteous, spiritual bridge by means other than the Holy Spirit of God. It is the bonds of peace (see Eph. 4:3), that peculiar rest and calmness that truly belongs only to the Prince of Peace, that preserves our ability to share the things of the Spirit (which He takes from Christ and God – Jn. 16:13-15) with one another.

It is as we send and receive the things of the Spirit, Christ and God through this connection, across this bridge – which is the Spirit of God – the body of Christ is joined and knit together *by* this sending and receiving. The human digestive process is probably the clearest but not the only example of this. Enzymes break down the nutrients and energy flows through the body to all the functioning parts and strengthens them for their task.

This sending and receiving of the things of God by and through the Spirit of God is also referred to as "abiding in Christ." John, in speaking of our protection against the deception of antichrist, wrote, "But you have an anointing..." Literally an endowment, a gifting. "...from the Holy One..." A gifting has been poured out upon you like oil poured over your head and this has come from Christ Himself. "...and you all know it." (1 Jn. 2:20 - For this variance from the New King James, A.T. Robertson says, "the best manuscripts read *pantes* rather than *panta*, 'You all know it.' This anointing is open to all Christians, not just a select few." *Word Pictures in the New Testament, Vol. VI*, p. 216; *The Greek New Testament*, (4th ed.) also reads "pantes"; and the *Wuest New Testament* reads, "...all of you have the capacity to know [spiritual truth].")

John continues, “I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and that no lie is of the truth. ...the anointing...” Endowment, gifting. “...which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you...” Literally, “keep on teaching you.” (Robertson, Wuest) “...but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him.” (1 Jn. 2:21, 27)

When you truly receive the things of God through the Holy Spirit, you will learn to abide – remain, dwell – in Christ and the spirit of antichrist – no matter how widespread, prevalent and clever his schemes, tactics and success might be – will not be able to deceive you. You will not need *any* man – not an evangelist, a teacher, a pastor, an apostle, a prophet, a deacon, an elder, a bishop, a patriarch, a cardinal, a priest, nor a pope – to keep teaching you to “hear God for yourself and follow only Him.” If you continue to listen to *a man* - even when his message is correct as this message is (be warned that the vast majority of men or even women who hold these titles will not teach you this message or, at most, will give lip service to this message because it puts their lucrative career at risk. If you were to hear the Lord for yourself, they would be out of a job!) – if you continue to listen to a man, you are still listening to that man and you are not hearing Christ’s specific messages and commands to you for yourself. And once you have learned to abide in Christ – to hear Him for yourself and obey whatever He tells you and shows you – what more do you really need to learn?

Many Christian speakers today will dismiss this as the most direct route to anarchy and confusion – but this only confirms that these men do not know the power of God that restrains and constrains those who are truly abiding in Christ. It is also true that oppressive authority structures of men – “church” “pastors” (even “personal pastors”), popes, priests and the like – are equally and totally incapable of controlling anyone who refuses to abide in Christ. All these systems can do is produce a herd-like movement in the general direction most of the participants want to go. This is not the movement of the flock according to the commands of the Shepherd but according to the majority of the sheep. Disaster is imminent!

The game of words we are about to discuss all have one or both of these two specific intents:

- 1) To prevent members of Christ’s body from hearing and following only the Head – either by stifling the ability of the individual to have personal reception of the Spirit’s communications or by interposing some agent who obscures the communications between that body part and the Head (making a second head, as it were). And

- 2) to prevent members of the body of Christ from transacting with one another the transactions of the Spirit – again either by inhibiting the individual part’s ability to transact or installing some agent or filter who obscures or screens the communications between the body part and the Head or between the body part and other body parts. We’ll make that more clear as we get more specific.

This obscuring, filtering and misdirecting that occurs in the governing of God’s people is not accidental. It is a deliberate scheme of the enemy to inhibit our ability to hear and obey God and to prevent us from corporately being the awesome, fearful, unstoppable body of Christ which he loathes and fears.

The Heritage of God

Peter exhorts his fellow elders to “Shepherd the flock of God...serving as overseers...[not] as being lords over *those entrusted to you*.” The King James version reads, “...as being lords over *God’s heritage*...” (1 Pet. 5:2-3) None of these italicized words are actually in the Greek text. They represent an English approximation in translation, the translators’ best efforts to say what is in the original language. The Greek word here is “kleros” [2819] and it refers to the lot – the wooden die that was cast in games or in determining God’s will – or to the share that went to someone who won in such games. This verse tells us that the flock of God is His portion, His lot, His heritage entrusted to the care of the elders. This seems quite straightforward and easy to understand.

This word, however, will migrate into the Latin language as “clericus.” In just two centuries of religious thought, it will acquire the additional meanings associated with “sacerdos” (“sacred” or “holy”) and will have all the hierarchical implications of the English word “clergy,” which means “a group ordained to perform pastoral or sacerdotal functions in a Christian church.” (*Webster’s Dictionary*, 9th ed.) That word, “sacerdotal,” means “of or relating to priests or a priesthood; emphasizing the powers of priests as essential mediators between God and man.” (*Webster’s*) One need only to remember Paul’s words to Timothy, “...there is one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus...” (1 Tim. 2:5), to see there has been a monstrous addition to our understanding of God’s instructions.

How is this incredible transition from “God’s heritage or portion” to “lords over the flock” even possible? To find that answer, we must turn to the “teachings of the Nicolaitans” (Rev. 2:15), the writings of some of the “church fathers,” especially those who held to “high church” notions.

Philip Schaff, a well-respected church historian of the late 19th century, records:

After the gradual abatement of the extraordinary spiritual elevation of the apostolic age, which anticipated in its way the ideal condition of the church, the distinction of a regular class of teachers from the laity became more fixed and prominent. This appears first in Ignatius [of Antioch] who, in high episcopalian spirit, considers the clergy the necessary medium of access for the people of God. “Whoever is within the sanctuary (or altar) is pure; but he who is outside of the sanctuary is not pure; that is, he who does anything without bishop and presbytery and deacon, is not pure in conscience.” (*Epistle to the Trallians*, c. 7) Yet he nowhere represents the ministry as a sacerdotal office.” (Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Vol. II, pp. 125-126)

Schaff may be speaking with prophetic insight when he speaks of Ignatius’ “high episcopalian *spirit*”! Ignatius has in mind the protection of the outward, visible unity of the church of his time (not the unity of the Spirit – Eph. 4:3) and he has failed to heed the command of the Lord Jesus Christ not to lord over His followers. (Mt. 20:25-26) He has carelessly laid the ground floor (see 1 Cor. 3:10) for a system that severely inhibits the work of the Holy Spirit in the priesthood of *every* believer. Ignatius is the first, but by no means the only or the last, of the Nicolaitan overlords.

Schaff continues:

Clement of Rome, in writing to the congregation at Corinth, draws a significant and fruitful parallel between the Christian presiding office and the Levitical priesthood, and uses the expression “layman” (*laikos anthropos*) as antithetic to high-priests, priests and Levites. “Unto the high-priest his proper services have been entrusted, and to the priests their proper office is appointed, and upon the Levites their proper ordinances.” (*Epistle to the Corinthians*, c. 40) This parallel contains the germ of the whole system of sacerdotalism. But it is at best only an argument by *analogy*. (Schaff, *History*, Vol. II, p. 126)

Perhaps Clement of Rome would have benefited from Shakespeare’s “A rose by any other name is still a rose.” (*Romeo and Juliet*) Or perhaps he would have been more careful or precise with his words if he had known to what purpose they would later be used. But his comparison of Christian leadership to the Levitical priesthood represents nothing less than a departure from grace and a return to law. (see Gal. 5:4) It also diverts the whole of the people of Christ away from their priest after the order of Melchizedek. (see Heb. 7:11) Any system which changes God’s prescribed methods for His people is simply another gospel and the perpetuators of that gospel are eternally accursed. (see Gal. 1:8-9; Jas. 3:1) But there are still *more* Nicolaitan overlords (“church fathers”) to hear from.

Schaff continues:

Tertullian was the first who expressly and directly asserts sacerdotal claims on behalf of the Christian ministry, and calls it “*sacerdotium*,” although he also strongly affirms the universal priesthood of all believers. (Schaff, *History*, Vol. II, p. 126)

The Latin word “*sacerdos*” is where we derive the English word “sacred.” What Tertullian is saying is that all the people are sacred but that somehow the Christian ministers are more sacred. One is reminded of a cartoon in which King Arthur, seated in a large throne at his famous Round Table, says to his knights, “This Round Table is to signify that we are all equal. This throne and crown of mine is to signify that I am a smack more equal than thou.”

The idea of someone being more “sacred” or more “holy” than someone else is contradictory to the very meaning of the term. To be sacred or holy simply means “to be set apart for God’s use.” You are either “on” or “off” – there are no degrees or shades of variation in this term “set apart.” Anyone who is only *partially* set apart for God’s use is compromised in their faith and truly is only polluting the gospel of God.

Being set apart is like being pregnant – you either are or you are not. The woman in her ninth month of pregnancy is no more pregnant than is the woman who conceived only moments ago – the former is simply further along the path and her condition is more visibly apparent. So too with Christian leaders. The elders and overseers are simply further along the path and their condition of spiritual maturity and godliness must be more pronounced and visibly apparent – or, quite simply, they are not elders and overseers even if they continue to claim possession of the title or office. To consider them as “more sacred” or “more holy,” though, is the same level of ignorance as considering a woman in labor as “more pregnant” than the woman in her first trimester. It is ludicrous and oxymoronic.

It should also be noticed that the priestly class of clergy and the priesthood of every believer cannot truly coexist. That is, they cannot both be God’s plan for His people and, these

plans being in opposition to one another, they cannot work together to accomplish God's purposes of building up His body. If there is a priestly class, then the priestly functions every believer are to perform are abdicated by the one class and usurped by the other. This is precisely what we see as laymen now *expect* the clergy class, the professional "church" staff who are paid by the layman's "tithes and offerings," to attend to "the work of the ministry." This abdication and usurpation stands as a direct blockade to the people of Christ being ever able to perform their own priestly responsibilities. That one cannot find the priestly class in the pages of the New Testament – but actually finds it rendered obsolete and even condemned – should tell us instantly which plan belongs to God and which does not.

Now we turn to the last of the original Nicolaitan overlords who have led the people of Christ astray. Schaff continues:

Cyprian (died 258) goes still further and applies all the privileges, duties and responsibilities of the Aaronic priesthood to the officers of the Christian church, and constantly calls them *sacerdotes* and *sacerdotium*. He may therefore be called the proper father of the sacerdotal conception of the Christian ministry as a mediating agency between God and the people. During the third century it became customary to apply the term "priest" directly and exclusively to the Christian ministers, especially the bishops.

{Note: *Sacerdos*, also *summus sacerdos* (Tertullian, *On Baptism* 7), and once *pontifex maximus* (*On Modesty* 1, with ironical reference, it seems, to the Roman bishop); *ordo sacerdotalis* (*Exhortations*, c. 7); *hierus* [Greek – "priest"] and sometimes *arch-hierus* [Greek – "high-priest"] (*Apostolic Constitutions* II. 34,35,36,57; III. 9; vi. 15,18 etc.). Hippolytus calls his office an *arch-hierateia* [Greek – "high-priesthood"] and *didaskalia* [Greek – "teacher"] (*Refutation of All Heresies* I. Prooemium). Cyprian generally applies the term *sacerdos* to the bishop, and calls his colleagues *consacerdotes*.}

In the same manner the whole ministry, and it alone, was called "clergy," with a double reference to its presidency and its peculiar relation to God. {Note: *Klaros*, *cleerus*, *tadzis*, *ordo*, *ordo sacerdotalis* (Tertullian, *Exhortations* cast. 7), *ordo ecclesiasticus* or *ecclesiae* (*On Monogamy*. 11; *On Idolatry*. 7); *klarikoi*, *clerici*. The first instance perhaps of the use of *clerus* in the sense of clergy is in Tertullian, *On Monogamy*, c. 12: "Unde enim episcopi et clerus?" ["For whence is it that the bishops and clergy come?"] "Extollimur et inflamur adversus clerum." ["...when we are extolling and inflating ourselves in opposition to the clergy..."] Jerome (*To Nepotian*) explains this exclusive application of *clerus* to ministers, "vel quia de sorte sunt Domini, vel quia ipse sors, id est, pars clericorum est." ["the clergy are so called either because they are the lot of the Lord, or else because the Lord Himself is their lot and portion."]}

It was distinguished by this name [clergy] from the Christian people or "laity." (*Laos*, *Laikoi*, *plebs*. In Tertullian, Cyprian and in the Apostolic Constitutions the term "layman" occurs very often. Cyprian speaks (250) of a

“conference held with bishops, presbyters, deacons, confessors, and also with laymen who stood firm” (in persecution), *Epistle 30, From the Roman Clergy*)

Thus the term “clergy,” which first signified the lot by which office was assigned (Acts 1:17, 25), then the office itself, then the persons holding that office, was transferred from the Christians generally to the ministers exclusively. (Schaff, *History, Vol. II*, pp. 126-127)

We see here the exact progression given by Jesus in His letters to the seven ekklesias in *The Revelation*. In the time of the first ekklesia, as typified by the ekklesia of Ephesus, there was the *practice* of the Nicolaitans. (Rev. 2:6) In the time of the third ekklesia, as typified by the ekklesia of Pergamos, there was the *doctrine* or *teaching* of the Nicolaitans. (Rev. 2:15) What was a practical error in Ignatius and Clement of Rome became a tradition and doctrine in Tertullian and Cyprian (not to mention a lethal dogma in the time of the popes!) The people of Christ have never fully recovered from this linguistic disaster which dovetails perfectly into the next linguistic and spiritual deception which has been perpetrated on the people of Christ.

Elders, Bishops, Pastors and Priests

Paul, in his apostolic letters to Timothy and Titus, gives a wonderfully detailed description of elders and bishops. (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5-9) The Greek word for elder is “presbuteros” [4245] and the Greek word for bishop (or overseer) is “episcopos” [1985]. These are simply older, wiser, seasoned men of the faith appointed to watch over the flock, the people of Christ, in their area. In the New Testament, these words have no other meaning.

By the time the word “presbuteros” becomes an English word, however, it is “priest” (a simple, harmless enough contraction in itself) but it has acquired the additional meaning of “one authorized to perform the sacred rites of a religion especially as a mediatory agent between man and God; specifically [a] clergyman ranking below a bishop and above a deacon.” (*Webster’s*) Actually, this *is* roughly the meaning associated with the Old Testament priests of the Temple. In the Greek, there was the “Temple” (“hieron” [2411]) and there were the “Temple guys” (“hiereus” [2409]) – and it really was that simple and straightforward. But with the exaltation of the elder (“presbuteros”) into the clergy class, the additional meaning of mediator was included. Completely overlooked are the New Testament references that refer to *all* the people of Christ as priests (see Rev. 1:6; 1 Pet. 2:5, 9) and the reference to Christ as *the only* mediator. (1 Tim. 2:5)

A further wrinkle is added when the people of the 1st and 2nd centuries accepted the practices and teachings of the Nicolaitan overlords. This widespread practice of exalting the bishop (“episkopos” [1985]) over the other elders – a practice which has no basis in the New Testament Scriptures but is found first in the writings of Ignatius of Antioch – was in full acceptance by all the larger cities by the end of the 2nd century. Preaching, for example, “was at first free to every member who had the gift of public speaking, but was gradually confined as an exclusive privilege of the clergy, and especially the bishop.” (Schaff, *History, Vol. II*, p. 225)

Further confusion is added when, because elders are commanded to “shepherd the flock,” (1 Pet. 5:2), the words “elder” (“presbuteros”) and “shepherd” (“poimen” [4166]) are held to be synonymous. This is not so. It is “elder” (“presbuteros”) and “bishop” or “overseer” (“episkopos”) which are essentially the same thing.

In writing to Titus, Paul writes, “I left you in Crete, that you should...appoint elders (presbuteros)...” (Tit. 1:5) He then writes, “For a bishop (episkopas) must be...” (Tit. 1:7) Same context, same people, same “office,” same function – same thing.

In writing to Timothy, Paul writes, “Let the elders who rule well...” (literally, “well-ruling elders” – “kalos proestotes presbuteroi”). (1 Tim. 5:17) Previously he had written, “A bishop (episkopas) then must be...one who rules his own house well...” (“kalos proistamenon” – same verb only in different person) “...(for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the ekklesia of God?)” (1 Tim. 3:2, 4-5) Same requirements, same Greek construction, same “office” – same thing.

In writing to the Philippians, Paul wrote, “To all the saints...with the bishops (episkopas plural)...” (Phlp. 1:1) This is the same ekklesia that was started after Paul’s vision to come to Macedonia. He did not originally appoint elders (presbuteros) in Philippi as was his custom (see Acts 14:23) because there were only women meeting at the place of prayer (Acts 16:13) and the Philippian jailer was only a recent convert. (Acts 16:34, compare 1 Tim. 3:6) By the time Paul writes his epistle to them, the ekklesia has matured and has elders (bishops) and deacons. Same “office,” same function, same role – same thing.

In speaking to the elders (presbuteros) of Ephesus (Acts 20:17), Paul said, “The Holy Spirit has made you overseers (episkopas)...” (Acts 20:28) Same men, same function, same “office” – same thing.

Paul had absolutely no conception of any distinction between “episkopas” and “presbuteros” – other than one is an adjective and the other is a noun! One describes what he is, the other what he does. But they were essentially one and the same thing in Paul’s mind. The shepherd (poimen) is the gifting (Eph. 4:11) that primarily expresses the love of Christ for His sheep. Equating “shepherd” with “overseer/bishop” and “elder” is contradicted by Peter’s statement that Jesus is “the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls.” (1 Pet. 2:25) Since God knows that “overseer” and “elder” is essentially the same thing, Peter, writing under the inspiration of the Spirit of God, who is also the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, would not say something as idiotic as “I have an apple and an apple in my lunch box” - which is the level Peter’s statement must be placed on if we say that “elder/bishop” is the same thing as “shepherd.” That there are similar functions between the elder and the shepherd cannot be denied. But to say they are exactly one and the same thing is contradicted by Scripture.

Because we have inherited two millennia of confusion and distortion – all of which contains a vertical element absent from the teachings of the New Testament, an exaltation of one class of believers and the holding down of another – it is virtually impossible to understand the teachings of the New Testament in regards to these “offices” (even that word is not completely applicable but is as close as the English language comes) – let alone practice them in purity. As Jesus taught His disciples,

“The kingdom of heaven...” The realm of God’s people.

“...is like leaven...” The element of hypocrisy, most often religious hypocrisy.

“...which a woman...” The spirit of Mystery, Religion, Babylon – false religion.

“...took and hid in three measures of meal...” The teachings and practices associated with Christ, the Bread of Life. (Whether you divide the main branches of historical Christianity as Catholicism, Orthodoxy and Protestantism or

Catholicism/Orthodoxy, Protestantism and Evangelicalism is immaterial. There are three main branches of Christianity in church history though one can always find scholars to dispute over fine lines of distinction.)

“...until it was *all* leavened.” (Mt. 13:33 - emphasis added; top)

Today, men who resemble true elders (men recognized as possessing character qualities as listed by Paul and even appointed by apostles as did Paul – Acts 14:23) still seem unable to separate themselves from the vertical element that exalts them over the rest of the body of Christ. Such are in grave danger of disqualifying themselves from their eldership as an elder (presbuteros, episkopos) *must be* one who has always held fast the word of God (Tit. 1:9) - that word implanted in the soul and spirit by the Spirit of truth, that word which is Christ Himself. One who lets go of the implanted word of Christ to take up the traditions of men is simply *not* one who has held fast the word of Christ and God.

The result of anyone, even genuinely mature men, holding onto this vertical element is a “glass ceiling” that prevents equality among all members of Christ’s body and holds the “lower class” in their “appropriately” lower status – actually, it’s just another version of the spirit of antichrist’s religious system of “church” that prevents the people of Christ from ever reaching the fullness of their calling in Christ. The simple task of elders is to assist everyone within their sphere of care to abide in Christ – no more, no less, whether that means teaching the young and misguided to abide or helping those who already know how to abide to genuinely abide during the rougher times of life. Those converts and even mis-taught disciples who truly learn to abide in Christ will quickly outgrow the need for instruction and direction from the elders (as they will receive this directly from the Holy Spirit and it will be, assuming the elders themselves are truly listening to the Holy Spirit, in harmony with any instructions and directions the elders might give) – though no one truly outgrows the need to be loved (both by the elders and by all). Thus the *whole* assembly will be enabled to act, as did the assemblies of the first ekklesia, in *one accord*. (Acts 5:12; 15:25; etc.) Not a monarchy (the “church” “pastor” or “personal” “pastor” system), not aristocracy (rule by elders or committee), not a democracy (majority rule, so-called “orthodoxy”) but a true theocracy where the Spirit rules in every man’s heart and this is evidenced by unanimous agreement by all members assembled. That this seems impossible to our rational, religion-soaked minds only points out the fact that many people *claim* to follow Christ but do not truly *abide* in Him – instead they practice their own style of religious lawlessness, doing what seems right in their own opinions, all in the name of Christ.

Divine Citizens

No discussion of the word games perpetrated on modern believers is complete without recognizing the difference between “ekklesia,” the “called out citizens of Christ’s kingdom of light,” and “church,” the “house of some lord.” The deception involved in this linguistic tangle most resembles the shell game where a pea is placed under one of three shells and the operator of the game shuffles the shells so fast (and often cheats with sleight of hand) so that the player is guaranteed to lose track of where the pea is and thus guaranteed to lose the game (and whatever money has been wagered on his ability to track the pea).

To unravel this mess, let’s begin by tracing the English word, “church,” back to its origins. We find that it derives from the Greek word, “kuriakon” [2960], a word that refers to the possession, any possession, of a lord (Greek – kurios [2962]), *any* lord. The word “kuriakon” is used only two times in the Greek New Testament but the English word “church” is not used in

either of those two places. (see 1 Cor. 11:20; Rev. 1:10 - "...the Lord's..." That's "kuriakon," the Greek word that evolved into the English word "church." That's all! That's it!)

So why does the English word "church" appear 114 times in the English New Testament? Because by 1611, when the King James Bible was produced, the English word had acquired the meaning of "the house of the Lord (Jesus Christ) where the priests of the Lord taught the word and practiced the way of the Lord." The idea of a physical house for the Lord is clearly refuted in the New Testament (see Acts 7:48-49) and the people of Christ are clearly referred to as God's house. (see 1 Pet. 2:5) We have already discussed the unScriptural fallacy of the existence of a priestly class so any teaching of the word or practice of the way of the Lord by that class must *necessarily* be tainted and skewed to one degree or another. This word "church" is so filled with deception that it is best to go back to the Greek word used those 114 times in the Greek New Testament: "ekklesia."

But, if the above Scriptures referenced are not sufficient proof that we, the people of Christ, are meant to be God's house and that there is no place for a physical "house of God," consider also that there were *three* other Greek words available to the New Testament writers that would have conveyed a much closer idea to that of the English "church." The first we have already seen, "hieron" [2411], "temple." "Hieron," the "temple," with its priests, "hierus" [2409] ("temple guys"), is much closer to the notion of "a building belonging to (the house of) the Lord where the priests of the Lord administer the practice and teaching of the ways of the Lord." The second Greek word available to the New Testament writers was "naos" [3485] and it too referred to a temple or shrine and was much more compatible with our modern notion of "church." The third Greek word available to the New Testament writers was "oikos" [3264] and it referred to the house, the building (estate) or household (family structure) of someone. This is the word Peter used when he said that we were "being built up a spiritual house." (1 Pet. 2:5) There was even a fourth word, the Greek word "sunagoge" [4864] (English - "synagogue") which many Messianic Jewish believers use today instead of "church." (James, the leader of the circumcision, alone uses "sunagoge" - once in relation to believers' gatherings, giving evidence that the earliest Jewish believers still attended synagogues - a practice that was rejected and abandoned. Even James' usage is only an example of not being partial to the rich at the expense of the poor and nothing resembling an instruction on how to gather. No other New Testament writer ever uses "sunagoge" in connection with the assembly of believers implying that this word carried ideas with it that were not compatible with what they intended to convey.) The New Testament writers did not use "hieron" nor "naos" nor "oikos" nor even "sunagoge" - they used "ekklesia."

Why? "Ekklesia" is a word the New Testament writers commandeered in the same way they commandeered "agape" [26] (English - "love"). They gave to the Greek word "agape," "love," a new meaning of "divine, self-sacrificing love" that it had never had before. "Ekklesia" refers to the people of a city who had the right and responsibility to participate in the governing and maintaining of that city. They would be "called out" (the Greek roots of the word "ekklesia") from their routine to assemble together to discuss and decide the needs and directives for their city. Even under a monarchy where the king issued edicts and directives, the citizens were expected to implement those directives of the king as was appropriate for their city. The New Testament writers elevated this concept as we, the people of Christ, have been called out of the world of darkness, translated into citizens of the kingdom of light, and are now to join together with our fellow citizens to attend to the needs and directions of Christ's kingdom. That so many have brought so much darkness into their roles as ekklesia, and especially as leaders in

the ekklesia, speaks largely of the vast success the spirit of antichrist has had in deceiving the people of Christ.

This deception of “church” is so vast that it will be the vehicle for the apostasy, the great falling away from the faith. (see Mt. 24:10; 2 Ths. 2:3) The schemes of the devil have never prevailed against the ultimate destination and purpose of Christ’s ekklesia, His *corporate* body, His people. But Satan’s schemes have prevented many, even most, *individual* believers from practicing the fullness of spiritual liberty from the darkness available in Christ. His sheep still hear His voice (Jn. 10:27) – even when muffled and distorted by “church” walls and doors. But there is coming a time – if that time is not here already – when we must forsake every trace of false religion and truly be completely unleavened in Christ. (see 1 Cor. 5:7; 2 Cor. 6:17-7:1)

How and Why

Let us return to our first question. If God is all powerful, how did Satan score such a huge victory of deception over the people of God? The answer is found in the parable of the wheat and the tares. In that parable, Jesus said, “...while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat.” (Mt. 13:25)

Philip Schaff records:

The “apostolic” or rather post-apostolic “fathers” were the first church teachers after the apostles, who had enjoyed in part personal intercourse with them, and thus form the connecting link between them and the apologists of the second century. This class consists of Barnabas, Clement of Rome, Ignatius, Polycarp, and in a broader sense, Hermas, Papias, and the unknown authors of the Epistle to Dognetus, and of the *Didache*. (Schaff, *History*, Vol. II, p. 635)

Notice here the *exceedingly* few voices (a half dozen or so) for this time period in stark contrast to the vast numbers of Christians who turned the world upside down in that same time frame. We can also contrast this half dozen post-apostolic writers with the seven writers of the New Testament (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, James and Peter) because these seven wrote out of their own personal encounter with Christ and/or one of His twelve apostles during or just after Christ’s brief, three-year ministry which culminated in His crucifixion. In contrast, the post-apostolic period (estimates of the time span surrounding these half-dozen or so writers range from a duration of 20 years to 100 years) is of a much greater scope. Even before the apostles had died, the gospel was already sweeping the known world (even a reading of the participants at the day of Pentecost – Acts 2:5, 9-11 - and of the scope of the addressees in Peter’s first letter – 1 Pet. 1:1 - points to that fact.) This important time of transition in the history of the people of Christ is virtually shrouded in the mists of time. Even though millions of people were brought to Christ in that time period, all we have are the writings of a mere handful of men to gauge the whole of a world-wide phenomenon of perhaps as many as three generations.

Schaff continues:

Of the outward life of these men, their extraction, education, and occupation before conversion, hardly anything is known. The distressed condition of that age was very unfavorable to authorship; and more than this, the spirit of the primitive church regarded the new life in Christ as the only true life,

the only one worthy of being recorded. Even of the lives of the apostles themselves before their call we have only a few hints. But the pious story of the martyrdom of several of these fathers, as their entrance into perfect life, has been copiously written. They were good men rather than great men, and excelled more in zeal and devotion to Christ than in literary attainments. They were faithful and practical workers, and hence of more use to the church in those days than profound thinkers or great scholars could have been. (Schaff, *History*, Vol. II, p. 635)

Given the scope of deception that has all its seeds in the writings of the “church fathers,” perhaps a few good thinkers – spiritually attuned and not soulishly or intellectually attuned – would have been more beneficial than the people of that day realized. Had there been someone who had been alert to where these things would lead the people of Christ and had their words been recorded and venerated as were the words of the “church fathers,” who knows how different church history would be.

As the first ekklesias turned from their first love – the simple abiding in Christ – and began embracing religious, intellectual, even philosophical Christian “law” and morality, the stage was set for the enemy to begin placing his ideas and his men corrupted with his ideas into positions of leadership, positions which do not exist in a pure reading of the New Testament. While men slept, the tares were sown as men turned from a pure, spiritual life with Christ and embraced soulish, moral codes of “Christian” ethics closely related to the teachings of Christ but not always empowered by the Holy Spirit (as is also evidenced by the diminishing presence of the miracles of the Spirit). And none could discern that the reduction of miraculous events meant that God was trying to get their attention about something.

Was God asleep? No. Men were. In the same parable of the wheat and the tares, Jesus said that the servants (representing the angels) came to the landowner (who represents Christ Himself) and asked, “Do you want us then to go and gather them up?” Then the landowner (Christ) replied, “No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them.” (Mt. 13:28-29) God has allowed a veil to be upon the eyes of His people while the spirit of antichrist builds up his “church” empire as one more world system to be placed under the control of the man of lawlessness who rules the world in the last days. But now is the time for the bride’s eyes to be opened to the truth so she can be freed from all remaining traces of darkness.

The schemes of hell still do not prevail against Christ’s true ekklesia. (see Mt. 16:18) As Satan prepares to bring forth his final world empire (see Rev. 13:1-18) and tries “to change the set times and laws” (Dan. 7:25 - trying, as it were, to “throw the game into overtime” so that somehow he might yet triumph over God), the true ekklesia will be purged of all that is false because they will be handed over to the man of sin for three and a half years (see also Rev. 13:7) and it is not to be expected that he will treat the saints with kindness and gentleness. Only the truly faithful followers of Christ will be able to overcome Satan in this time. “And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.” (Rev. 12:11) The rest of the world will willfully join in Satan’s deceptions and refuse to repent of their many sins against God. (see Rev. 9:20-21; 16:9, 11)

The game of words perpetrated against us is a game of lethal proportions. The call of the Lord at this time is:

“Awake from your slumber. Gird yourself with My armor of light. Shake off every trace of darkness from your hearts and your lives. I am returning soon for an ekklesia that is pure and chaste, without spot or wrinkle. Be ready for My return or be lost. I have no desire those whose hearts are divided in their loyalties between Me and the world. You are either for Me or against Me. Choose you this day whose you will be: Mine or the world’s. There are not many days remaining in which you may make this choice. There is soon coming a day when hearts will be hardened, fates will be sealed and destinies lived out – all choices will have already been made. Choose now while you still have light to see. The darkness is coming and great is that darkness. And greater still is the darkness that awaits those who once knew Me but carelessly lost sight of Who I AM.”

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
This article - <http://paidionbooks.org/girrard/church/gameword.html>