

No Good Thing

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It is a great day in the Lord when we finally learn the truth that Paul expressed so well: “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells.” (Rom. 7:18) Until we learn just how flawed, fallen, broken and unable to be good we really are, we will continue to put our self forward as Christ’s “representative,” “serving” Him in whatever religious manner appeals to our personality type, presenting our stinking, rotten, dead flesh as *the thing* to imitate and follow in order to be pleasing to God. Yes, it is a great day in the Lord when we finally recognize and discern our flesh for what it is – a putrid, rotting corpse chained to our existence and exerting itself in subtle, clever and concealed ways to keep itself on the throne of our life. When we truly recognize and discern the worthlessness of our flesh (Jn. 6:63), then can the Spirit of Christ present Christ, and not our self, from within ourselves and show that He alone is worthy to be imitated and followed.

What a tremendous liberty and advance for the kingdom of God is made when we finally realize that there is no substantive difference between ourselves and self-confident Peter who thought he could die for Jesus in his own strength (Jn. 13:37), or the rich young ruler who recognized his own personal bankruptcy but still could not relinquish his wealth to God (Mt. 19:20-22) or Judas Iscariot who betrayed his Master, the Son of God, into the hands of evil men in the hopes of forcing Jesus to become king of Israel and thus assure Judas of a “proper place” in His kingdom from which he could pocket as much side money as he might need for the rest of his days. (compare Lk. 22:3-4, 47-48, Mt. 27:3-5, Jn. 12:4-6) Using the Lord or anything about Him or the “Christian” way as a means to achieve subtle, deeply hidden agendas that bring glory, honor, comfort or privilege to ourselves is what our flesh does best, especially when assisted or dominated by demonic spirits. Yes, it is a great day in the Lord when we are no longer confused that practicing religion by the power of the flesh is not nearly the same thing as following and worshiping God in spirit and truth, finally coming to recognize that our carnal or fleshly mind cannot obey or please God but actually stands in enmity against Him. (Rom. 8:7-8)

The “Church”

The above insight is a precious milestone that marks significant progress toward spiritual maturity. Yet there are some who cannot see that what is true for the individual is also true for corporate bodies who gather under the name of Christ. If these were asked if they had ever observed (or committed!) any demonstrations or outbursts of fleshly activity, they probably could not recount all the numerous they’ve witnessed, experienced or committed. Add to this long list the more subtle expressions of the flesh which are not routinely recognized as such:

- the “pastor” speaking down to a subdued audience who are seated at his feet so as to be “fed” from his vastly superior storehouse of “spiritual” knowledge,
- dressing in expensive or provocative clothing in “honor” of coming together before the Lord, and
- owning luxurious cars which are driven after “worship” to fine restaurants to partake of grand, sumptuous meals and “fellowship” before going

home to one's luxurious home all while others in the crowd can't afford to even eat, etc.

An objective spiritual observer must conclude that carnal flesh constitutes a large part of what goes on at "church."

Those who refuse to recognize that there is no good thing at "church," or who see that statement as an extreme position that just doesn't encompass the whole picture, are similar to an individual who does not yet recognize that no good thing dwells in his own flesh. Any "pastor" or ex-"pastor" who doesn't believe God could ever use sinful men to such an extent as they have seen "pastors" and "church" staff used should ask themselves how perfected they were when God made use of them! Such a one has yet to relinquish his own perspective and opinions so as to be able to see and think in accordance with the mind of Christ on this point.

Once one recognizes the truth that no good thing dwells in one's flesh as an individual, it is not tremendously difficult to apply that truth to our corporate gatherings. It is certainly easy to see this truth when applied to "churches" that openly practice abominable sin yet still claim to follow God and experience His presence or when this truth is applied to "churches" where the flesh is strutted about on center stage and in nearly every aisle and row of seats. It may be harder to recognize in smaller, humbler settings but once one knows the basic elements of the "church" paradigm ("pastor," pulpit, pew, building, building funds, passive audience, "tithes and offerings," power plays, membership, etc.), the flesh is not all that difficult to recognize. And all of that flesh is enmity against God. (Rom. 8:7)

Yet it is precisely here that we can glimpse the love and graciousness of God. In spite of the "mixed multitude" (those who tend to lure the people of God back into sin or bondage – Num. 11:4), in spite of all the fleshly, carnal enmity against God, He graciously has shown up and rewarded all those who sincerely sought Him (Heb. 11:6), no matter how submerged or polluted that sincere desire was underneath the deceptions of the "church" paradigm that is rampantly and routinely taught and subliminally, at times, even demonically confirmed to them.

Yes, it is a great day in the Lord when we can recognize that there was and is no good thing at "church" - *except God* who can be found anywhere at any time by anyone who obediently draws near to Him. (Jas. 4:8) Then we can begin to recognize the fleshly acts of men for what they are – *and forsake them!*

Looking Ahead

When we have come to see the occurrences of goodness that we experienced even in the darkest pits of carnal churchianity as simply and only visitations of the presence and graciousness and lovingkindness *of God*, we can then see something of God's purpose in giving us these experiences, again, however tainted these may or may not have been by our own fleshly remainders or the fleshly influence or input of others.

We experienced association and perhaps even friendship but we called it "love" – but looking back now we can see the hidden agenda because now we are no longer "loved" because we no longer attend that "church." We experienced camaraderie but we called it "fellowship" – but, looking back, we can now see that we were comrades only so long as we worked in harness to further some need of the "church" building or staff. That "church" can no longer have "fellowship" (not even association or camaraderie!) with us because our goals now differ so sharply from theirs. Yet, through it all, Christ has been faithfully drawing us ever closer to Himself and practically forcing us to grow up into something at least resembling spiritual

maturity. And now we know and can see true agape love for ourselves and now we know and see true koinonia fellowship for what it is and we no longer content to settle for association and camaraderie.

Nor were we ever supposed to! The “church” can make programs out of association and camaraderie and the “pastoral” staff can maintain control over those things. But true agape love and true koinonia fellowship practiced under the Headship of Christ (and not the “pastor”) would be entirely unthinkable and most disruptive to the “church” routine and business agendas that becalms the souls of its victims into careless negligence that may yet cause them to drift away and forfeit their inheritance in Christ. (Heb. 2:1, 12:16-17, etc.) But this maturity, liberty and passion for God and others is *precisely* what the foretastes of the goodness of God were supposed to whet our appetites for – and in many of us it did just that! Thus, while the “church” trafficked in the stuff of association and camaraderie, we grew dissatisfied with “church” as our hunger for God grew (just like it was supposed to do!) and eventually something occurred to bring us into disillusionment. We no longer believed the illusion and deception that flesh was spirit. Whether we literally or consciously heard and intellectually understood the call to “Come out and be separate” (2 Cor. 6:17, Rev. 18:4) or not, we simply knew we had to go. And out the door we went!

Ekklesia and the Wilderness

In case you, the reader, don’t know why “church” is being used in quotes in this article, it’s because the English word “church” doesn’t represent the same thing as the Greek word which is often translated as “church.” How can that be? Well, the best two explanations are: 1) King James exercised undue influence on his translators to keep “certain old words” in his new Bible back in 1611, and 2) over the centuries, these “certain old words” acquired even more layers of meaning than what they started out with, so much so that, today, one can be astonished at the differences between the meanings of the original Greek word and the modern English word.

The modern English word “church” refers to the building wherein the “Christian religion” is practiced and no matter how hard people try to say “The people are the real church,” they betray the other meanings of “church” every time they talk about “going to church.” “Church”-ites will even talk about the building as “the house of God,” never making the connection that He doesn’t live in buildings constructed by men. (Acts 7:48)

The original Greek word *ekklesia* [1577] refers to the people who have been called out of this world’s darkness, translated or transferred into Christ’s kingdom of light (Col. 1:13) and given the responsibility to attend to the needs, business and affairs of His kingdom. The word has no connotations whatsoever of buildings or priesthoods and there are other Greek words that, in their real meanings, strike at the major roots of modern “church” practices such as Nicolaitan “overlord” (“pastor” or “bishop” – Rev. 2:6, 15) and heresy, dissension or sect (“denomination” – Greek *haireisis* [139], *dichostasia* [1370] and *eritheia* [2052], respectively – Gal. 5:20) Then there is the complete absence of many of churchianity’s primary features – the pulpit, the pew, the three-point sermon, the “church” door (unless you recognize the truth about Laodicea’s door! – Rev. 3:20), to name but a few.

When John is shown the great prostitute that is also called Mystery Babylon he is greatly amazed at this creature who mimics the role of the bride of Christ yet is such a travesty and horror of blasphemy and wickedness. (Rev. 17:1-5) This woman was found “in the wilderness.” (v. 3) Those who recognize the dominance of this Mystery Babylon over the “church,” again

whether intellectually or not, and who physically exit the “church” doors are then required to spiritually make their exodus trek through this wilderness where the great prostitute has taken them during their time in churchianity. Those who fail to endure and persevere through this wilderness and follow the Lamb wherever He leads them so as to stand with Him on Mount Zion as a genuine expression of Christ’s ekklesia (see Rev. 14:1-5) are those who gravitate back into some more subtle form of “church.”

Paul prophesied that “the Day [of Christ’s return and reign] will not come unless the falling away comes first...” (2 Ths. 2:3) Jesus prophesied the same when He said, “And then many will be offended [stumbled], will betray one another, and will hate one another.” (Mt. 24:10) Jesus also warned that many will come in His name claiming to be the one anointed to speak the words of God (“pastor,” “apostle,” etc.) and will deceive *many*. (Mt. 24:5) Peter prophesied that false teachers would stealthily introduce dangerous, destructive divisions (heresies [139], “denominations”) that remove the actual Headship of Christ, that many will follow the false teachers and the real way of truth would be blasphemed. (2 Pet. 2:1-2) Paul prophesied that these teachers would be heaped up, soothing and stimulating the ears of their listeners with fables – stories and deceptions. (2 Tim. 4:3-4)

Finally Making Sense

From all these various insights we may draw some valid conclusions:

- Our experiences in churchianity, our exodus and wilderness trek are all part of God’s overall purpose – to purify for Himself a people zealous to do only His will. (Tit. 2:14)
- The emergence of a counterfeit “church” that is the expression of Mystery Babylon in the end times is the “great falling away.” Much of this emerging “church,” however, has been in view for centuries.
- There will be a remnant trained to maturity and purified from the contaminants of Babylon who will faithfully follow the Lamb wherever He leads them.
- The deceptiveness of “church” is a long-term, deeply-laid scheme of the devil designed to divert people from the path that leads to life.
- God is still able to preserve and save those who are truly His (2 Pet. 2:9) and the gates of Hell, the imprisoning devices of death and darkness, cannot prevail against those who are truly His ekklesia. (Mt. 16:18)

Thus, many things that seemed random or disconnected can now be seen to finally “make sense.” And we can now see that it is not enough to say “I know there is no good thing in *my* flesh.” We must press on to a point where we can say “I know there is no good thing in *our* flesh.” To fail to do so is to yet stand in the way of God’s will for us as a corporate body just as surely we stood in the way of God’s will for us as individuals, still thinking there were good things in us that we brought to His table.

We must come to this recognition or else we will not be able to become His true and faithful ekklesia able to follow Him wherever He leads. Nor will we experience the culmination of all those heavenly foretastes we have experienced at “church,” in the wilderness and even in our sporadic incidents among genuine ekklesia. We must stop seeing each new phase of our spiritual journey as the ultimate destination and simply press on toward *wherever* the Lord would lead us into.

Let he who has ears hear.

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