

Church Home

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One of the lingering ideas that remains in various circles - even in home fellowships - is that we need a “church home.” The basic idea is that the individual finds a particular assembly in which he feels comfortable (“at home”) and this group is then the focus of one’s loyalty and service to what is presumed to be the body of Christ. Unfortunately, this linguistic construct, “church home,” has no place in Scripture though it does have some elements of truth enmeshed in its deceptions. Those elements, however, are hard to bring into the light because they are buried under centuries of human tradition aided along by demonic deception.

The idea of a “church home” is usually stitched together somewhere with the “church” paradigm whose main ingredients are:

- a Nicolaitan (Rev. 2:6, 15) overlord (“pastor”) utilizing “delegated” authority he presumes he has received from Christ and God.
- eloquent rhetoric (“sermons”) that tickle and scratch ears with self-exalting knowledge but do nothing to bring the flesh and soul into subjection to the way and Spirit of Christ. (2 Tim. 4:3-4)
- a paganistic temple (“church”) that is euphemistically and deceptively called “the house of God” (though which god it really belongs to is a question never answered truthfully and one that is only rarely asked - Acts 17:24) and that diverts the vast majority of the group’s finances away from the orphans, widows and the least (poorest) of Christ’s brothers (Jas. 1:27, Mt. 25:40, 45) and invests it into a building that distorts the reality of God.
- gathering according to the likemindedness of the participants (denominationalism), a mindset achieved through the sins of dissension, sectarianism and heresy. (Gal. 5:20)

When any portion of the “church” paradigm is incorporated into one’s “church home,” the errors are compounded and spiritual maturity is effectively blockaded from the members. This is true even in a home “church” - few home fellowships indeed conform entirely to the pattern of local ekklesia as can be found in the New Testament.

Because the practice of assembly is so tainted with error and deception, it is indeed difficult to even speak plainly about the differences between a local ekklesia and a “church home.” Both use the same language to describe and defend their practices but one says, “We need to do *this*,” the other says, “We already do *that*” - and the subtle shift between *this* and *that* is missed entirely.

There are several main “building blocks” that go into “constructing” a local ekklesia. Yet even speaking in such terms about the local ekklesia is almost like tripping as one steps out of the gate. Our long familiarity with the methods of eloquent men who draw followers after themselves might make us believe that we can simply gather people together in one place, agree to some basic rules and, voila, we have a local ekklesia - just as men build a “local” “church.” No, *Christ* - as He said He would do - will build His ekklesia. (Mt. 16:18) Since all things are

held together by Him (Col. 1:17) and He is the Head of *all things* to His people (Eph. 1:22), *He* must build every local ekklesia Himself. Only those “master builders” who co-labor with Christ are building with gold, silver and precious stones. Those who handle the things of the Spirit with the abilities of the human soul are those who build with wood, hay and straw. Those who corrupt and defile the local ekklesia with the contaminants of the flesh or the deceptions of the demonic are those who God will, in the end, destroy. (see 1 Cor. 3:10-17)

In truth, the “building blocks” of the local ekklesia are not elements that we can simply compile and assemble to accomplish the goal of a “finished house.” No, these “building blocks” are simply measurements by which we can gauge whether the assembly is truly a Christ-built ekklesia or whether it has devolved and become yet another version of man-made “church.” And these elements are not independent of one another. To the extent that any of these elements are distorted or missing, to that extent our assembly has acquired something in addition to the work Christ is doing in building His ekklesia.

The main elements of the local ekklesia are:

- The true Headship of Christ,
- The intensely and exhaustively local nature of the assembly, and
- Unanimous participation and agreement in all of the group’s direction decisions.

Let us examine those interactive elements a little more closely. Perhaps the first attribute of the Spirit we will need most to move into conformity with this pattern is patience. Unlike building a “church,” which requires the efforts and ingenuity and talents of men, “building” a local ekklesia requires waiting upon the Lord, seeking His direction and using the “tools” He gives us to quietly and patiently serve the others in our local area. Whereas building a “church” can nowadays be a matter of market research and door-to-door (or internet) canvassing, Christ’s method of building a local ekklesia, in some cases, may require a lone intercessor to labor, seemingly fruitlessly for years in loneliness, frustration and isolation or, in other instances, a martyr to lay down his or her life from which will spring a group willing to follow in those footsteps so as to find true and eternal life. “Building” Christ’s ekklesia simply cannot be codified or institutionalized and anyone who insists solely upon a pattern (rather than the Head) or who strives or hurries to initiate change in the gathering’s practices is operating outside of God’s will.

Though “churches” can be planted wherever men can attract followers to themselves, local ekklesias seeking to be purged of the leaven of men - especially in this time when all of the kingdom of God is leavened with the leaven of hypocrisy and human traditions (see Mt. 13:33) - can only be formed by believers who have endured at least something of the spiritual wilderness that surrounds the counterfeit “church.” (see Rev. 17:1-4) and who have come up out of the wilderness leaning heavily and solely upon the Beloved. (Song 8:5) Church history is replete with a nearly exhaustive compilation of the various errors one can make in attempting to follow Christ. At each and every turn, there is the potential to stumble or make a wrong turn - and this is all the more likely as the number of participants in a gathering increases.

Directly after the Holy Spirit was poured out on all flesh (Acts 2:17), we find that the followers of Christ operated in “one accord.” (Acts 2:46, etc.) This unanimity or oneness is

what has been missing from the practice of following Christ ever since the 1st and 2nd centuries (when second heads - called "bishops" - were installed over the people of Christ) and is the main reason the world does not know that Christ truly came from God. (Jn. 17:21-23) In the context of the local ekklesia - that group which is to be the visible manifestation of the mystery of the kingdom of Christ and God - every decision that sets the course of the group must be made unanimously.

Why is this necessary? Jesus said, "You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you." (Mk. 10:42-43) When a decision is made by a Nicolaitan overlord ("pastor"), board of "elders" or even a simple majority, those who disagree with that decision must submit to the ruling or leave. When the issue is truly implemented at the specific command of the Lord, that is one thing. But when the issue is truly a work of the flesh or a human tradition, then false "delegated" authority is then exercised over those in disagreement *in spite of* Jesus' command that "It shall not be so among you." When a decision *is* reached unanimously - achieved through seeking the mind and heart of Christ on each matter - *no one* is lorded over.

The most common objection to this unanimity is that it is impractical - nothing will ever get done. In one sense, this is true and will always be true. The "end product" of ekklesia is a gathering of people who are never finished (until they are dead) in their pursuit of becoming more conformed to the likeness of Christ. Ekklesia is an "activity" that is never finished! Yet the very "impracticality" of unanimity is one of its strongest safeguards. When one man advocates for change in his own local ekklesia, he faces the task of convincing *all* that he is speaking forth the mind and heart of Christ. And if he abandons the local ekklesia in search of followers after his own private interpretations, then he - as is true of all "local" "church" "pastors" who draw men after themselves or their sect's peculiar doctrines - is simply one who causes divisions and offenses who is to be avoided. (Rom. 16:17) Those who insist that unanimity is too impractical have their faith in something other than Christ as the Head of the gathering and fail to see the need for severely restraining change in the practice of corporately following Christ. While it is true that any group can devolve into a "This is the way we've always done it" traditionalism, when unanimously seeking the heart and mind of Christ *is* the way we do every thing, this danger is not likely to occur.

The gathering of saints must be intensely and exhaustively local or else it is not a pure expression of ekklesia. This does not mean that a group of like-minded saints seeking the heart and mind of Christ should just disband and cease meeting with one another just because they are not yet intensely and exhaustively local. Rather, this very lack of intensity and exhaustiveness should remain all the more prominent before this group as they seek the Lord's will as to how to overcome this lack.

What exactly is meant by intensely and exhaustively local? To answer that, we need to jettison the "local" "church" mentality that builds specialized temples wherein the purported professional elite "men of God" dispense their version of the "word of God" according to their own peculiar light and personality traits. Directly after the Holy Spirit was poured out upon men, we find that even as the apostles (those who had personally witnessed the resurrection and experienced the initial outpouring of the Spirit) taught crowds in the temple, they also went to *every* house. (Acts 5:42) Though some "churches" retain a mockery of this practice in their "home visitation" programs, this is an essential central element in understanding local ekklesia.

The Spirit of God - the Spirit that brings true peace, real love and genuine liberty to do

that which is right and good to one another - is needed in every home and in every neighborhood among men. The focal point of ekklesia is *every* home. At some point in time, the home of every believer should become a place of gathering for the saints of that neighborhood. Thus, rather than building a larger building that inherently excludes more people from being able to genuinely love and serve one another, when a gathering grows too large for the home they meet in, it is simply time to separate into two (or more) other homes. Ideally, one should be able to *walk* to one's local ekklesia gatherings! And those who utilize the apostles' teachings in the temple as a basis for the abominational mega-"church" should remember what God allowed to happen to that building in 70 a.d.!

But not only should an ekklesia seek to be ever more intensely local, it should seek to be exhaustively local. That is, *everyone* who names the name of Christ belongs to that local gathering. The denominational exclusiveness (dissension, sects and heresy - Gal. 5:20) that is so routinely practiced today is indeed a great hurdle to overcome. A group that faces the very real and very likely challenge of knowing that genuine members of Christ's body refuse to participate in the local ekklesia because they are still ensnared in "church" deceptions can only seek the Head as to how to remedy that predicament. And He is quite able to get people's attention in such a situation! But what has been lacking is the belief that sectarian denominationalism is sin and therefore there has been little or no genuine expression of local ekklesia to draw men to. Christ does not care which kind of "church" men attend as they are *all* simply tests of whether one's loyalty is to one's "church" or to Christ. "Church" is simply one form of the strong delusion that God sends upon men who prefer unrighteousness. (2 Ths. 2:11-12) Ekklesia, on the other hand, is exclusively for those determined to obey only Him. (Jn. 14:23)

The Headship of Christ is uncontested - He is the Head who is to have the preeminence in *all* things to His people. (Col. 1:18) It is incontrovertibly documented throughout church history that when the bishops took over center stage, Christ stepped aside and allowed them to exercise all manner of error and folly in His name. This was done to allow the wheat and the tares to mature alongside one another. (Mt. 13:30) As the so-called "church age" draws to a close, however, God is no longer overlooking such idolatrous ignorance and instead, is commanding all men inundated with the "church" deceptions to choose whether they will be a tare or a wheat. Wheat will humbly and quietly repent of their participations in the deceptions - tares will arrogantly and proudly defend their private interpretations, peculiar doctrines (teachings) and paganistic, unScriptural practices. Let he who has ears hear!

In the context of a local ekklesia, the Headship of Christ will be demonstrated by patiently waiting on the group to achieve unanimity. True leaders of a true ekklesia will insist, persist and endure against taking action until *all* participants are in agreement that the Lord is moving the group in that particular direction at this particular time. All questions of practice must be subjected to unanimity - baptism, Lord's supper, tongues, etc. - even though that standard may apply only to that ekklesia in that season! New members, new ideas, "new" revelations, new experiences are always welcome as "proposals" but only when the entire group is in agreement is action to be taken. This is the ekklesia's safeguard that virtually assures that Christ will be the actual Head - and not just the titular or nominal figurehead - over the group. No group of mere men can achieve routine unanimity without divine enablement!

Paul wrote, "Now the Lord is the Spirit - and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." (2 Cor. 3:17) Incorporated into the nature of true ekklesia - though it is anathema (accursed!) in every "church" system (organized or otherwise) - is the freedom each participant

has to simply go visit anywhere else as the Lord leads. It is true that such visits must not interfere with or replace one's responsibilities to the local ekklesia - perhaps this is where local ekklesia most resembles a "church home" but even this is mostly a superficial similarity. But this liberty balances with the corporate support we spiritually receive from one another as we go wherever our lives take us. This corporate unity and loyalty to the local ekklesia results in strength that comes from strong individuals pooling all their resources together in obedience to the Lord. Individuals alone can never be the corporate body of Christ just as individual members truly and rightly joined spiritually to others can never be alone. This is the mystery, the paradox, of the real body of Christ in its local expression.

Another factor that probably needs purified the most from centuries of "church" tradition is leadership. This is one of the oldest sins - allowing one man to step into the place of Christ's Headship and control the direction and actions of the group. Historically this man was called a "bishop," currently he is most often called a "pastor" but the Nicolaitan overlord can operate under any title or even without one. The key element is that the man believes himself to have a greater authority delegated especially to him, authority that is greater than what anyone else has. This style of leadership is not based on heavenly wisdom but on worldly and demonic teaching.

Perhaps the clearest picture of how leaders are to lead is found in herding sheep - thus the New Testament's primary usage of "shepherd" for this role. The shepherd wanting to move his sheep does not walk in front of them as that will just cause him to be ran over, trampled or left walking alone. Rather, he walks behind the sheep (stepping over the sheep droppings and watching for strays and stragglers). The sheep follow their internal instincts for food, water and safety - a picture of the internal leading of the Holy Spirit. The shepherd who tries to get the sheep to follow him only gets quickly hurt or frustrated and only confuses or irritates the sheep. And this *is* precisely what happens with the "pastor" who tries to hand feed a few blades of grass to the flock from the pulpit - he gets his hand bitten every time! One has to wonder why he keeps expecting better results next week!

Perhaps what is lacking most of all is the recognition of all that Christ is building when He builds a local ekklesia. Paul wrote, "Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit." (Eph. 2:19-22)

Though for centuries men have been content to build "church" buildings and to gather like-minded sects (denominations), ignorantly thinking this to be the kingdom of God among men, what Christ builds goes far beyond the counterfeit "church" of men and demons and even far beyond each local ekklesia. Let us pull out the various names Paul uses to describe "the whole building" that is being constructed. In coming to know and follow Christ, we have become

- fellow citizens in the kingdom of God,
- sons and daughters in the household of God,
- a holy temple in the Lord (elsewhere we are said to all be priests as well - 1 Pet. 2:5,

Rev. 1:6)

- a habitation (dwelling place or house) of God's Spirit.

These four "faces" - quite similar in some ways to the four-faced vision of Christ and God given to Ezekiel (Ezek. 1:10) - are "the whole building" that is being built. The ekklesia (which is also called His body - Eph. 1:22-23) encompasses these four aspects. So when Christ builds His ekklesia, He is also simultaneously building His kingdom, His household, His temple, His house and His body. Is it any wonder that *He* must build it? Is it any wonder that men, groping about blindly in their carnal and soulish attempts to do the work of God *for* Him (as if He needed their help and expertise!), have only constructed a counterfeit that is more often manipulated by demonic forces than it is used by the Holy Spirit of God?

As the "church" age draws to a close and Christ is setting the stage for His soon return when He will take the kingdoms of this world unto Himself, rewarding His servants and saints and destroying those who destroyed the earth (Rev. 11:15-18), the message of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world. (Mt. 24:14) Any grouping of men that fails to accurately convey the gospel of the kingdom through their words and practices is not true ekklesia. The ekklesia, in their unified, humble submission to Christ in their own neighborhood, will be the local expression of the mystery of the kingdom of God. (Mk. 4:11) The "church," with its commuter-club sectarianism that draws men after whatever practice or "theology" that is right in their own eyes, will continue to be the expression of the harlot spirit of idolatry, the great falling away from the faith, the apostasy. (Mt. 24:10, 2 Ths. 2:3) The choice is ours to find a "church home" that suits our tastes and makes us comfortable or to repent and obediently follow Christ so as to be built up into His true local ekklesia.

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