

Through the Looking Glass

Neil Girrard

When one looks into binoculars or a telescope, one can focus clearly on objects a great distance away and identify them with much accuracy. This can be a very useful tool under the right conditions – but how different life would be if one actually needed binoculars or a telescope, a “looking glass” if you will, in order just to see and function in life. If we could imagine such an existence, it would be an apt parable for life in the kingdom of God where, unless one is born again and acquires spiritual eyes and ears, one cannot accurately see or understand what is occurring in the spiritual realms. (Jn. 3:3, Mk. 4:12, 1 Cor. 2:14) Of course, this is only a limited parable – one’s spiritual sight is an integral part of one’s life in Christ whereas a looking glass is simply an external technology. Though it is routinely practiced in “churches” around the world as if it could be done, one simply cannot take Christ off and put Him back on just because it’s time to go to “church.” This only proves the high level of deceptions that so many “church”-ites are under.

Now, in this environment that requires a looking glass in order to see and function, suppose that someone begins turning their looking glass around and then convinced everyone that, since they could still see to some extent (that is, although nearby objects seem distant and distant objects are too tiny to identify), this is the way things should be. If we could imagine this kind of an existence, we have come closer to understanding the “church” in contrast to the ekklesia in the kingdom of God. Because most people come to know and to know about Christ and God in the context of some “church,” those who remain in that context remain convinced that this myopic view is the way things should be.

Now suppose that someone who had lived all their life with the looking glass reversed were suddenly shown the right way to use the looking glass. What disorientation and confusion this person would experience as their senses adjusted to this much more accurate way to see. If we can imagine this transition, we have grasped onto a parable about the exodus, de-tox and wilderness period that occurs in the lives of almost all those who heed the call of God to “Come out and be separate” (in whatever form they perceive, grasp, hear, see or reach that conclusion – see 2 Cor. 6:17, 1 Cor. 5:10-11, Rev. 18:4) and leave the “church.”

Such a person, once he had gained something resembling equilibrium (it would seem that many do not and simply abandon both God and the “church” because they cannot recognize the much larger truths they saw in parts and pieces through their myopically reversed looking glass), would naturally have several questions: “How did this happen? Who did this? Why was this allowed to happen?”

The answers to these questions are all interwoven together but some simple concise answers can be given at least for those with eyes to see and ears to hear truth. As always, these answers must come from the words which God has left us so that we seek and *find* Him. Let us begin by restating the question in terms the Bible uses.

How did we turn the “looking glass” around and become satisfied with this as the way things should be? That is, how did the people who claimed to follow Christ abandon (or at least neglect and alter) the concept and practice of ekklesia and embrace the concept of “church”?

If we wish to adhere strictly to the usage of Biblical phrases, then we ought to immediately jettison the word “church” as a legitimate description of the people who belong to Christ. “Church” is an English word – not even used by the so-called “church fathers”! – that does not convey the same meaning as the Greek word, *ekklesia* [1577]. In spite of these facts, “church” is the word most often used to translate *ekklesia* in most English translations since the King James Version used it in 1611. William Tyndale, whose brilliant and gifted translations were used for some 90% of the King James Version, had used “congregation” as a more appropriate English word choice (which it is a better word choice although itself not a perfect choice either) but King James instructed his team of translators to keep “certain of the old words,” particularly “church.” This word choice haunts us to this day.

But if we can at least recognize that *ekklesia*, in whatever that ultimately means, represents God’s original intentions for His people under the New Covenant, and that “church,” in much of what that has come to mean, represents *man’s* subsequent adjustments, changes and substitutions to God’s original intentions, we can at least begin to think and talk about which is which. Indeed, it is very near the truth to say that Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of God but it was the “church” which came into being!

A Process of Devolving

The people of Christ transformed from *ekklesia* to “church” because it “fell from its first love.” (Rev. 2:4) The first love of every Christian individual and corporate body should be love for Christ Himself. Individually this begins with the new birth (Jn. 3:3, 5) and, in a perfect world where no deception enters in and no stumbling blocks ever cause men to stumble, would progress smoothly through Peter’s steps to spiritual maturity:

“His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust – for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith goodness, to goodness knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (2 Pet. 1:3-8)

This, in a nutshell, is the path every genuine believer’s growth toward spiritual maturity should be taking. Yet in our much less than perfect world and especially in the “church,” deception has entered in and stumbling blocks abound. There is no Scriptural truth – speaking here of the rightly divided word of truth that nestles perfectly into the whole counsel of God – that does not have one or more distortions, deception or contradiction competing for our belief in them. It is in this light that Jesus warned, “Take heed that no one deceives you” (Mt. 24:4), that Paul prophesies, “The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders” (2 Ths. 2:9), and Peter counsels, “Be sober, be vigilant (watchful); because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.” (1 Pet. 5:8) The person whose faith is caught up in believing distortions, deceptions and contradictions of the rightly divided, whole counsel of God is one who has been

taken captive by the devil so as to be his tool and weapon to accomplish his enmity against God's kingdom. (see 2 Tim. 2:26) The devil's most effective stratagem to date is "church" though it is by no means his only one.

In the external history, as men began to neglect their first love (living in Christ with Him as personal King and corporate Head over all things) they began to instead embrace rules and laws and philosophies and doctrines and "theology," much of which contains a great deal of truth. But whatever truth is contained in these things was divorced from the Head because from the ranks of the elders, bishops rose up, preaching an impure form of the gospel and drew followers after themselves – precisely as Paul had prophesied they would. (Acts 20:30) Books were written, purportedly but fictitiously by the apostles ("...no lie is of the truth." – 1 Jn. 2:21) that laid down instructions, directives, interpolations, commandments, canons and by-laws – in short, the first "church" manuals. A crisis of persecutions then arose and produced a great number of those who could not endure the tortures inflicted upon them and they bowed to the Roman emperor as God – these were called "the lapsed" because, it was held, their faith had lapsed under torture and this was held to be a most serious sin. The subsequent treatment of and the question of restoring the lapsed triggered at least six major schisms in the third and fourth centuries, issued in the outward, external rituals of penance (which cannot be found anywhere in the Bible) and established the bishop and the "church" as those who had the power to forgive sins and restore fallen sinners and fixed the outward, visible authority structure of the "church" as the way things should be. The looking glasses were now securely fixed in their reversed position and would remain virtually untouched for over a thousand years.

The Reformation of the sixteenth century did much to show that the myopic view of the "church" was in error but it did little or nothing that effectively turned the looking glass back around. Catholic priests became Lutheran "pastors" but were still priests for all that. Augustine's predestination became Calvin's predestination and stayed basically the same. The "church" retained its power structure patterned after the Roman empire and kept its buildings that were based on the Roman basilica or judgment hall. Many truths came to light in the Reformation and many souls entered into a deeper relation with Christ but the overall nature of the "church" and its hierarchy of clergy exalted over the laity remained concealed, unchallenged and unchanged. This incomplete work (see Rev. 3:2) still plagues the people of Christ to this day.

For most people who claim to be followers of Christ, the looking glass remains fixed in the reversed position and seeing accurately what is in the mind of Christ is, quite simply, beyond their abilities. No amount of instruction, teaching, reproof, rebuke or even demonstration of power will convince them their myopic view is incorrect. Only the grace of God that leads men to repentance and surrender to God will cause them to submit to having the looking glass turned around. Then begins the exodus, de-tox and wilderness periods which are so very different and so much more uncomfortable and even painful than "church" and, quite frankly, many return to "church" or concoct their own version of it, often in their own living room. Those who know the "church" to be in error but who resurrect their own version of it in their own homes are quite often those who now call it "ekkleisia."

This is the de-evolution process by which we have come to the point where we are at now. There are a growing number of people who have submitted to having their looking glass turned around, they have endured long periods of disorientation and readjustment as they have regained a measure of equilibrium and yet they still are looking for the focal point that would make all the Scriptures make sense. This focal point of all the Scriptures, one which is given lip

service to at “church” but which contains surprising depths when one begins to practice it, is the King-ness of the Christ. It is precisely because Christ has never (or perhaps only very shortly or perhaps even better stated, only partially) been the literal and true King of all people who claim to be His that church history is the dismal, discouraging, disturbing subject that it is. The “church,” in its blind zeal to preserve its demonically-inspired hierarchy, has too much invested in its real estate and the preeminence of its professional staff to ever change so there is simply not much hope for further reformation. Nor does Christ intend to reform the prostitute – she has been given time and opportunity and encouragement and prompting to repent and believe but she has refused to do so and will be judged appropriately in due time. (Rev. 2:21, 18:5) There is no other way to enter the kingdom of God and Christ than to repent, believe and obey (Mk. 1:14, Jn. 6:29, Heb. 5:9) and “As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord [Master, King], so walk in Him.” (Col. 2:6) There is no remedy left for the idolatrous “church” – those who wish to survive need to “Come out and be separate.”

But for the ekklesia, the people who have been called out (the literal meaning of the Greek word) of this world’s darkness so as to be citizens of Christ’s kingdom of light, there are some guiding principles we must return to. First and foremost we need to submit to the Lordship and Headship of Christ, personally and individually as well as corporately and completely. We do not need to worry about the overall structure of the ekklesia or the kingdom of Christ which *He* is building - *He* is more than able to attend to those kinds of details. (Mt. 16:18) If we can remember that the kingdom of Christ and God is that realm where Christ is obeyed, then we can pray for that realm to be manifested in our midst. (Mt. 6:10) When we find other believers committed to realizing, in real time, in real ways, the Lordship of Christ Jesus, then we can begin to pray together and perhaps even walk together in the unity of His Spirit by refusing to do anything that impacts the others without gaining their approval and agreement. The people of Christ have suffered the worst departures from the will of God because the “church” insisted on following the will of clergy-leaders or of its richest “tithers” or of the voting majority. The desires and wishes of the true Head, the Lord Jesus Christ, will be confirmed in unanimous agreement (one accord) of *all* those who are involved in or impacted by any given question of direction or practice.

The “church,” because it *is* the portion of the world in which the tares are allowed to reach maturity (see Mt. 13:38), has always rejected the idea that “the church” was to be only a society of saints. Yet that is precisely what the ekklesia was always supposed to be, understanding “saints” in its original meaning of “those people set apart for God” and not in the corrupted popular notion of “perfected, sinless people,” a kind of person who does not, has not and never will exist on this planet! When we understand that the ekklesia does not include much of that which gathers in “church” buildings every week, the Headship of Christ confirmed by the unanimity of agreement upon a much more localized and focused question of specific issues, becomes much more envisionable because our looking glass has been turned around. The juggernauts that historically split the “church” become ridiculously simple – allow the Head to lead those truly impacted by any decision to come together in unanimous agreement as to what His will in the matter is. In this way it will be the responsibility of the King to preserve that which He is building and we do not have to strive and anxiously fight, ultimately dividing, defiling and even destroying the body of Christ, for our notion of how things should be. And in this way, we will clearly demonstrate that God truly is in our midst. (Jn. 17:23)

This *is* the gospel of the kingdom – the kingdom does not come with observation but is within you or in your midst (Lk. 17:20-21) When we begin to obey the King, we will find that

we are a part of His kingdom and we will truly and progressively be involved in His genuine ekklesia – He will see to that! The first step to embarking on this grand adventure is to submit to having our looking glass turned around, endure the time of re-orientation (however short or long that may be) and begin anew to see things as He says they should be. And we must refuse to agree with or follow along with those who still look the wrong way through their looking glass and we must follow only after the Lamb wherever He leads us. (Rev. 14:4)

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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