

The Question of Church?

Jesus said, “*I will build My Church and the gates (strategies) of Hades will not prevail against it*” Matt.16:18b.

Introduction

Is our concept of just what, or who is the Church correct? You may not have asked this question before, or perhaps you may already consider that you have a satisfactory answer. Wherever you are coming from, I hope to convey what I believe is, perhaps, one of the biggest dilemma’s we as the Church face at this time of writing. This paper hopes **to understand the correct concept of the Church.**

Many Christians have looked to the New Testament for a model of what the Church should be like and have desired to replicate it. Many sincere attempts to do just this can be observed throughout Church history. However, a common understanding amongst believers in this regard is difficult to find, if not impossible! This suggests that we are still in need of some answers. This also seems to suggest that some of our present concepts about the Church must be flawed. This section is therefore written to question what might be our wrong understandings and present some answers.

If we are to function correctly as the Church and if we are to withstand Satan’s attempts to corrupt us from the correct way of being Church, then we need to understand what is wrong.

Historical Background

Without being certain as to how the Church operated at the very beginning of Church history, two thousand years ago, we do know that it soon began to have difficulties. Even in its infancy, the Church was already beginning to go wrong. We read that the **spirit of antichrist** went out from among those first believers. John wrote, “Even now many antichrists have arisen ... they went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out in order that it might be shown that they are not all of us,” (1John 2:18&19). Paul warns the elders of the Church at Ephesus that “savage wolves would come in among them, not sparing the flock; and from among their own selves men *would* arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them,” (Acts 20:28-30). Within four hundred years what we think of as the Church had mainly degenerated into a form of religion, become nominal and tied to the State, and with an organisation and structure mirrored by any other organisation found in the world. This change imposed a worldly pattern of ‘church government’ upon the Church that still prevails to this day. Although the true Church must still have been operating, it was mainly hidden out of the sight of men for eleven or twelve centuries.

So it was to be nearly twelve hundred years later the Church is seen to be significantly breaking free from the chains of wrong ‘church government’, commencing a struggle which is still ongoing but which will be won before the Lord returns. Recovering truth and freedom, however, has been very slow, as each step has been opposed by the spirit of antichrist and religion. **To be unaware of this opposition can make us vulnerable.** Not to expect the spirit of antichrist to continue to attack the true Church is also naive.

As we look back and observe the Church breaking free from the spirit of antichrist, we see the recovery of basic truths, each coming at great cost to the believers of the day. We can read of the seeming rediscovery of 'justification by faith' through a move of God which centred around Martin Luther, but we can also observe that the old hierarchical church structure, with archbishops, bishops, priests - clergy and laity - still remained in what was to become another 'system of man' - the Lutheran Church. It was in Scotland that a battle against episcopacy (government of the Church by bishops) was fought, as a Presbyterian, church government by elders, rather than the non scriptural priesthood of the Roman and Anglican Church, came into being. Although this was a move towards correct church government other errors continued.

In this fight for that freedom - for which Christ set us free - we see, during the 1600's, the Church recovering the requirement to be 'led and taught by the Holy Spirit' in what was to bring forth 'Quakerism'. This was a giant step forward as **correct church government can only be achieved as we are led individually and corporately by the Holy Spirit**. And in this move of God we can read of the challenge that was brought to all the denominations, a challenge that is again being brought forth.

In the 1700's, the recovering of an understanding of 'holiness and sanctification' came through another move of God but which, sadly, brought forth another system of man - 'Methodism'. In the 1800's we see the recovery of the reality of 'the priesthood of all believers' which went part way to the removal of a clergy-laity divide within the Body of Christ, but which still created another denomination - the 'Brethren'.

At the beginning of the last century the 'baptism in the Holy Spirit' was once more recovered to the wider Church but 'Pentecostalism' resulted. 'Healing and deliverance' became the emphasis in the mid twentieth century in a move of God that became known as 'The Latter Rain Movement' and was immediately followed by what was to be called, "The Charismatic Ecumenical Renewal" in the mid 1950's. This 'move of God' was different in that it took place within the existing denominations, a very significant difference to all the other moves of God that took root outside the denominations. Thus, in the last fifty years or so something very different has occurred.

Whilst the Church seemed to recover truth during these 'moves of God', when Jesus was once more for a brief period allowed to be the Head of part of His Church, each move forward soon came to a halt as men took His leadership from Him once more. Until the Charismatic Ecumenical Renewal another denomination was birthed out of each recovered truth but with the 'Charismatic Ecumenical Renewal' it seemed that God was going to renew the existing dead structures of men they had built over the centuries and make them His. Even today many consider that this is where the Lord is at work, putting His new wine into the old wineskins made by man of brick and stone. It is, of course, impossible! Sadly the ecumenism that was birthed by the Charismatic Renewal is still very much alive and well today!

As we consider this recovery of truth over the centuries by the Church it has appeared that **the area of correct 'church government' has been the hardest ground to reclaim** and even to this day we have not seen the true Church fully break free from the spirit of antichrist. The battle is ongoing but will be won. This will be the last truth to be recovered before the Lord returns, for the true Church must come under the correct Headship of the Lord Jesus Christ. Then we will see the true Church being what she should be, embracing all truth; fully embracing Truth Himself. The true Church will then walk in all those truths recovered by our forefathers in the centuries that have passed. The true Church will at last be without spot and wrinkle.

That it could not have happened before now is due to the fact that the true Church has had to wait until the end of the age when the tares would be removed from among the wheat, the sons of the Kingdom.

So it is that we have seen the Church fragmented into numerous denominations, each hanging on to their own emphasis on truth, including their particular understanding of church government. One may have wondered whether this situation could ever change but if we are to grow up to full maturity the answer must be, “Yes.” The true church must be united in its form of church government and beliefs.

So returning to our original question it will become clear that we are effected very much by our concepts about what or who is the Church. Though our wrong concepts of the Church seem difficult to overcome, overcome them we must. So let us examine our concepts of the Church.

Is the Church the Building?

Perhaps the most obviously wrong concept of Church is that of misconstruing that the church is the **building** in which Christians gather rather than it being the saints themselves. Such has been the deception the enemy has created for many the word ‘church’ still conveys the idea of a building built with bricks and stone rather than the people. Over the centuries this word has come to describe any building in which Christians meet. Buildings are treated like temples, holy in their own right, places where God dwells, concepts that should really apply to the believer individually and believers corporately.

What or Who is the Church?

In Scripture, the word ‘church’ is applied to Christians, to describe the believers themselves, the people and not the building. The word ‘church’ in Greek is ‘ekklesia’, which is constructed from the word ‘ek’, meaning ‘from’ or ‘out of’, and the word ‘kaleo’, meaning ‘to call’. The ‘ekklesia’ are therefore the ‘ones called out’, or ‘called out ones’. This refers to the fact that the church has been called out of the world. The true church is comprised of all believers who have been born again of the Spirit of God.

Once we rightly understand that it is the believers who are the church it helps us understand that **we do not go to church because we are the Church! We don’t go to church but the Church gathers** on any particular occasion. Amazingly this is not how we would usually think.

However, although the ‘Church’ is the people, Scripture does use the word in a variety of ways.

The Word ‘Church’ as used in Scripture

The word ‘church’ appears over 80 times in Scripture, all in the New Testament, and it appears to be used in four different ways :-

1. It is used once to refer to Israel, when speaking about Moses in Acts 7:38: “This is the one [Moses] who was in the church in the wilderness...” Modern translators handle this distinction by translating ‘ekklesia’ in this context by the word ‘congregation’.
2. It is also used in ‘Acts’ of the gatherings of the non-Christian Ephesians: “But if you require anything beyond this it shall be settled in the lawful assembly [ekklesia]”, (Acts19:39), and “after saying this he dismissed the assembly [ekklesia], (Acts19:41). In this instance the translators handle the distinction by translating ‘ekklesia’ by the word ‘assembly’.

3. & 4. The word 'church' is used elsewhere in the New Testament to describe the corporate expression of Christians, although in slightly different ways..

The Church Universal - The Body of Christ

One context in which the word 'church' is used is to describe the entire church, the church - universal. This includes all believers, those born again of the Spirit of God, even those who have gone to be with the Lord, "the general assembly and Church of the first born who are enrolled in heaven", (Heb.12:23).

In the following examples, the word 'church' obviously refers to the universal Church because the context clearly indicates that the Church in general is being referred to and not some local body of believers: "I [Paul] used to persecute the Church of God" (Gal.1:13); "gave Him [Jesus] as Head over all things to the Church, which is His body..", (Eph.1:22); "just as Christ also loved the Church", (Eph.5:25).

The Universal Church we see is described in Scripture as "the Body of Christ", a description used by Paul to help us understand how we are to function. Paul writes, "He [Jesus] is also Head of the Body, the Church", and "His Body, which is the Church", (Col.1:18&24), using this description. (NB. Some use the allegory of the 'Body' of Christ to suggest we each have a certain position but it is only used in Scripture to describe how we each having different but complementary functions, not a fixed position or place. We are lively stones.)

It is imperative that believers realise 'they' are the Church. We become members of it by 'new birth' and as such no man, or group of men, can cast us out of the Church, for our membership is assured to us by the shed blood of Jesus. This is in contrast to the memberships introduced into denominational ways of thinking that would suggest otherwise. In this I distinguish between membership that cannot be broken and fellowship which on occasions can. We can stop having fellowship with a brother or sister due to sin, as Paul instructs us, but this does not effect their membership of the Church, the Body of Christ. (cf.1Cor.5:2).

The Local Church

The word 'church' is also used to describe the local body of believers, the local Church. In Scripture this is sometimes described as being in a town, or a persons home. Paul wrote to the "the Church of the *Thessalonians*", (1Thess.1:1 and 2Thess.1:1), and "the Church of God which is at *Corinth*", (1Cor.1:1). He also asked to have his letter "read in the Church of the *Laodiceans*", (Col.4:16), and sent his greetings to "the Church which is in *Nympha's* house", (Col.4:15), and to "the Church in *Philemon's* house", (Phm.2).

The word 'church' can also be used to describe the local body of believers without reference to the locality, the context making this clear. When Paul spoke of Gaius being host to himself "and the whole Church", (Rom.16:23), he was obviously speaking of all believers who met in Gaius's house. When giving instructions to Timothy to "let not the Church be burdened", (1Tim.5:16), Paul was speaking of the local Church. Those "the Holy Spirit has made ... overseers to shepherd the Church of God", (Acts20:28), is a reference to the local elders of the local Church at Ephesus, Paul speaking on

the occasion when he was at Miletus and had called to himself the elders of the Church of Ephesus (Acts20:17). On another occasion Paul and Barnabas “met with the Church” at Antioch, (Acts11:26), and after their journeys, “when they arrived and gathered the Church together”, (Acts14:27), they once more spoke to this local Church.

The Local Church when all are gathered together

Many scriptures refer to those occasions when the (whole) Church in any locality gathers: “One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself; but one who prophesies edifies the Church”, (1Cor.14:4); “greater is one who prophesies than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the Church may receive edification”, (1Cor.14:5); “I teach everywhere, in every Church” (1Cor.4:17); “when you come together in Church”, (Acts14:27). In these examples we see the word, ‘church’, used of the local believers all gathered in one place.

When we observe how the word ‘church’ is used to refer to the gathered local body of saints it appears that it is often used to refer to the assembled local group itself - the assembly rather than the people individually. In its use in this way, the word ‘church’ is once even used to refer to true believers being put out of the church or assembly!: “[Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them] puts them [the true brethren] out of the church”, (3John10). So it seems that the word ‘church’ is used in this instance to mean the ‘assembly’ itself - the gathering of the believers who can be described as the church in that place. Without realising it, therefore, we can think of those who belong to the assembly rather than those Christians who live in a particular town as constituting the Church. In this way the assembly has become an entity in itself and we forget that it is the people who are the assembly.

The Error of thinking the Church is only the Assembly

In handling the concept of the whole Church coming together, therefore, it is the concept of assembly that has become a widespread definition of the local Church. So it is when believers meet other believers that they are always asking them, “Which Church do you belong to?” Without even realising it most Christians have lost the concept that the local Church refers to the believers themselves, whether they are gathered together or not. Just as with the concept of ‘church’ meaning a building many believers only mean an ‘assembly’ when they are speaking of the local Church - some named organisation or group. Because the concept of ‘going to Church’ is so strong they lose, or minimise, the reality that ‘the Church gathers’. **It is essential we realise that local believers are referred to in Scripture as the ‘Church’ even when they are NOT assembled.** We need to recover in our thinking that *we* are the Church. It is not some building or named group.

The Local Church when it is not gathered together

There are many scriptures that refer to the local believers as the Church when they are not gathered together. An example of this is when Luke writes that “great fear came upon the whole Church” at Jerusalem, (Acts5:11), and tells of the great persecution which “arose against the Church in Jerusalem”, (Acts8:1); the time when “Saul began ravaging the Church”, (Acts8:3).

More than one Church

So it is we have to realise that the local Church is the corporate assembly as well as being the saints individually. With this meaning of 'assembly' we see the plural form of the word 'church' in the New Testament - the word 'churches'. Though the 'assembly' is an entity on its own we must not overlook in our thinking the fact that the believers are the Church and also belong to the Church universal. We need to remember that the saints are the Church who assemble - eg. "When they had arrived and gathered the Church together", (Acts14:27) - as well as making up the 'assembly' which is also referred to as the Church - eg. "...as in all the Churches of the saints," (Acts14:33). This can be very confusing; a confusion that Satan has used to great effect. This might appear to be a moot point to many but is in fact critical as we begin to consider the Lord setting us free from the chains that have bound us, His true Church.

So the use of the word 'churches' (plural) to refer to the local Church when they are gathered reinforces the concept of the 'Assembly' itself being the only definition of 'church' and not the members themselves, as in the examples: "...as in all the churches of the saints. Let women keep silence in the churches..." (1Cor.14:33&34). We have to remember the plural form of the word 'church' is also used to refer to the corporate local expression of believers whether they are gathered together or not: eg. "the Churches in Judea", (Gal.1:22); "The Churches in Asia", (1Cor.16:19); "The Churches of the Gentiles", (Rom.16:4); "so the Churches were being strengthened", (Acts16:5); "For in what respect were you treated as inferior to the rest of the Churches?" (2Cor.12:13); "We speak proudly of you among the Churches", (2Thess.1:4).

In each of these examples it is the believers who are being referred to. Somehow we have to handle these differing and sometimes confusing concepts.

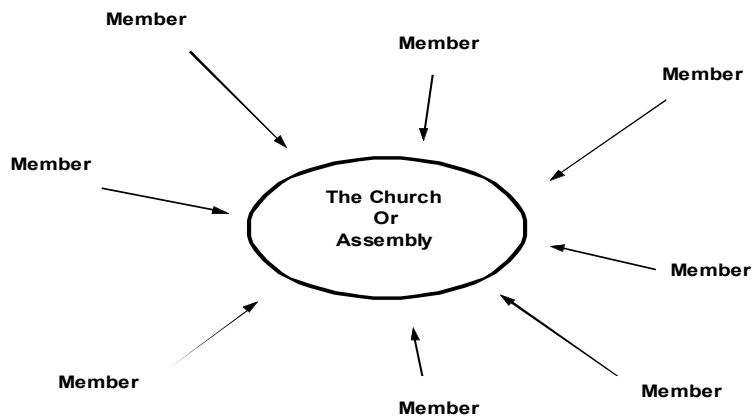
Because it is so easy for us to become confused about the way we think of the Church, Satan has been able to lead us into the error of ignoring the fact we are the Church. This has been a major problem for nearly 2000 years. It is essential we do not belittle this effect. But maybe we can simplify things.

Differing Concepts of Church

From what has been discussed so far it can be seen that Scripture uses the words 'church' and 'churches' in the following ways :-

1. The 'group description' for the universal Church, which is the Body of Christ.
2. The 'group description' for local believers, whether they are gathered or not.
3. The local assembled group, or Assembly.
4. An Assembly, even one not comprised of Christians.

To assist in our handling of these differing concepts it might be useful to use diagrams - a picture telling the story of many words.



Concept of the Local Church when gathered together - Fig.1

In Fig.1 we see the concept of the ‘Assembly’ being the Church with all the members in a locality gathering and forming an assembly of the whole Church. The spirit of antichrist has, of course, brought division within the Body of Christ as we have split into different groups, the problem being greatly exacerbated as we have given names to *our* ‘Assemblies’. Rather than describing ourselves as the Church at ‘Anytown’ we describe our faction. This use of a noun to name the Church **rather than an adjective** to describe the Church is one of the most subtle ploys that Christians fall for over and over again! Once we name ourselves we become a denomination, which is the meaning of the word to ‘denominate’. **We should have no name over us other than ‘Jesus’**. We should not become a faction, dividing ourselves off from our brethren by *our* names. We can describe ourselves as the Church at Philemon’s house, which is a description, but we must not say we are Philemon’s Church, which is a name, **for we are Jesus’ Church**.

The very fact that we, the Church, become named groups - and therefore denominations - is a sin we need to repent of. We have created factions just as the early church began to do when dividing themselves into being of Paul or Apollos or even of Christ, and we accept it. **The only name over us must be Jesus**. We are His Church. And there is only one!

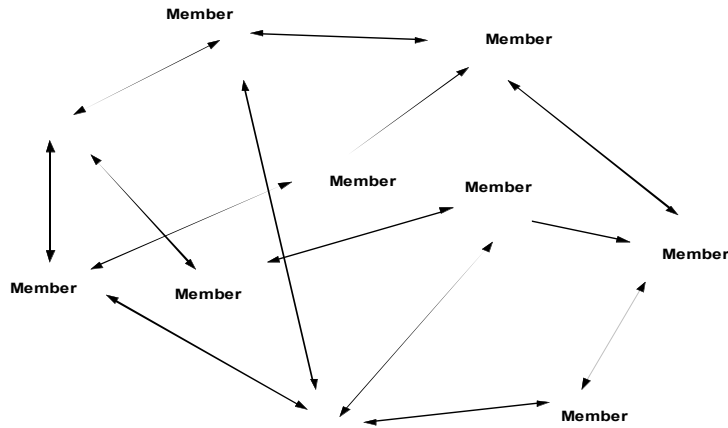
But I am of Christ

Aware that some believers realise it is wrong to name ourselves, Satan can fool us by having us think of ourselves as being ‘of Christ’. When we do this, however, but think of ourselves as separate from our fellow believers, we are still naming ourselves. We are just as much a faction and a denomination – albeit an ‘of Christ denomination’. We have still separated ourselves from our brethren.

The Church when they are not gathered

In Fig.2 that follows we see the concept of the local Church when it is not gathered, the local Church as consisting of the members themselves, as opposed to the gathered assembly of the saints.

In both Fig.1 and Fig.2 we see different ways of describing the local Church at different times.



Concept of the Local Church when not gathered - Fig.2

In our next picture, Fig.3, we see where we, the Church, have been led astray from what the New Testament teaches us. In the following diagram we are going to see how Satan has completely changed the make up of the local Church by introducing hierarchies to bring the Church into error and bondage

An Incorrect Concept of the Assembled Church - Fig.3

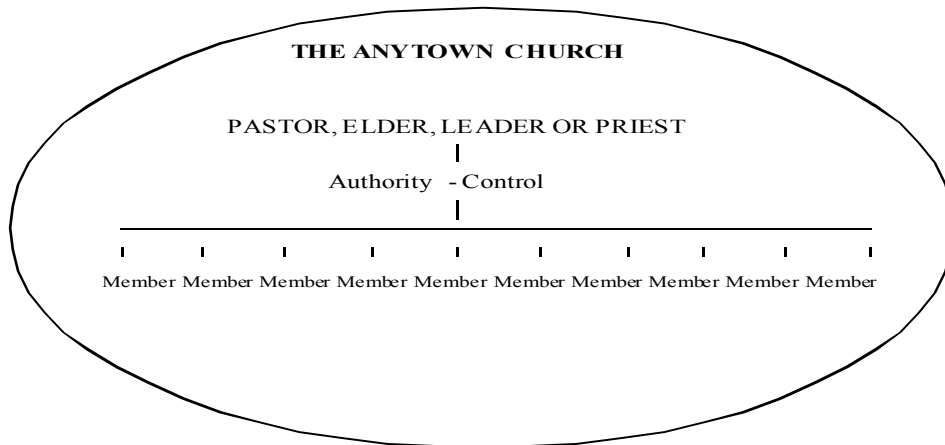


Fig. 3 describes the majority of named Church groups and would not be considered as an incorrect concept of the local Church or Assembly by most Christians. Once we only consider an 'Assembly' as being the only description of the local Church, an entity on its own which overshadows the fact that all the believers in any particular town are part of one local Church, something very important has changed. In this diagram, by the Assembly coming under a hierarchical leadership - that of being controlled by a Pastor, 'controlling Elders' or other Leader, the Assembly has begun to build a dividing wall between itself and other Assemblies.

If one does not consider a particular man as ones 'Pastor', one excludes oneself from this man's flock. The Assembly becomes 'his' flock and not Jesus's. Likewise, if one does not submit to the 'rule' of a particular elder or Pastor one excludes oneself from 'his' flock. The fact that there might be a plurality of elders does not change this situation if they exercise authoritarian control by way of position, and most do. "The introduction of an intermediary - a 'man' we place between ourselves and our true Head, Jesus - prevents Jesus from being our One and only Master, our effective Head". In some denominational Churches we might see them being headed up by a man called a 'priest' or 'vicar' [a word meaning 'in place of' Christ], despite Scripture clearly teaching us that all true believers are 'priests' unto their God. In reality, there is no difference between these denominational Churches and any Charismatic or Pentecostal group that embraces this error, they have all left the correct form that we find in scripture. In reality, this form of Assembly has more than one head! This error is one of the factors that has created a dividing wall between the true Church and which some may not even be aware of. It needs to be cast down!

(The reader might object to the word 'control' being used but if we give any position to a brother into what should be the equal brotherhood of the Church but by introducing a higher authority they must exercise some element of control. We might describe ourselves as 'servant leaders' but this still does not alter the fact we are 'over' others, not 'underneath' as a true servant would be. We might suggest this is a relationship of love but there will always be some degree of control.)

Dividing Walls

The local Church when they are gathered should not have any boundary or dividing wall, separation or division between its members and any other believer, even if they do not meet with them. These dividing walls are invisible in the natural realm but no less real. These dividing walls are spiritual in nature. Believers outside this boundary can sense it, even if they are unaware of what it is they discern. Unfortunately, if one is within the wall, one is possibly oblivious to its existence.

I well remember my very first contact with the Church, the local Body of Christ. Those who made up the centre of this group, and around which all our activities revolved, always seemed to be separated from the rest of us despite their often sacrificial love which they showed to us. This barrier was spiritually tangible yet these lovely believers seemed unaware of it. It was some years later that I began to understand just why this barrier existed, when I learnt that these central believers had made a covenant with one another - a written form of commitment to one another. By doing so, for the most sincere of reasons, they had unintentionally created a dividing wall over which no other local believers could climb. All man made 'memberships' create this division and excludes those not submitting to this division.

As believers who have been born again of the Spirit of God it is essential we add nothing to the relationship we already have, one with the other, by virtue of already being one in Christ. We are already brethren, members of the same Body, commanded by our Head to love one another just as He loved us - unconditionally! By making additional commitments to one another, such as membership and pledges, we cannot improve on that which has already been accomplished by Jesus. **All believers are already one.** All we have to do is act as though we are one - because we are - and maintain a unity of the Spirit. We need to repent of our lack of love not introduce 'pledges' and 'commitments' that are not right. We need to repent because Jesus said, "Let your statement be, 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no'; and anything beyond these is [of] evil" (Matt.5:37).

There are, however, other errors we undertake which actually separate us from our brothers and

sisters. Rather than improving our relationship with other members of the Body, they actually hinder it, yet the spirit of antichrist has somehow tricked us into thinking they help our Christian walk. These errors act like chains that bind us and keep us from freedom in Christ. If we are ever to break free of these chains, or prevent ourselves from becoming bound by them, we need to identify them.

Identifying Chains that bring bondage

The dividing walls which create barriers between the Body of Christ and therefore create separation can be made up of one or more important things. They include :-

1. Having a name other than the Name of Jesus to define the Church assembly, i.e. denominating itself.....
2. Having a 'leader' over the Church in addition to, or in place of Jesus, i.e. Pastor, Elders, Priest, even though Jesus said, "Call no man leader." (Matt.23:10)
3. Having a hierarchical structure of leadership, an authority structure. The submission or subjection a wife should give to her husband, or we are to give one to another, as well as to those who are leading any Church activity, is NOT one of being subjected to THEIR authority, but only submitting 'in the Lord', which is very different.
4. Requiring a submission to the authority of those above in the structure.....
5. Having a membership or commitment to be able to 'belong' to the church we already belong to.....
6. An agreement to certain traditions or beliefs rather than our common birth in the Spirit.....
7. Payment of money in the form of tithes to uphold this wrong structure and leadership.....
8. Because of the meetings taking place in a fixed building, which usually requires money to pay the rent or mortgage in addition to the wages for the hired leaders - hirelings! This is not in itself wrong but once a name is put over the door it is!

As already stated, this dividing wall, which is spiritual in nature, may not be perceived by those within its bounds, but it is definitely perceived by those outside. Likewise, in any hierarchical structure, authority requiring submission and imposing control may not be perceived by those who are above others in the 'chain of command', but this is definitely perceived by those below. So we see that there is a big difference between Fig.1 and Fig.3.

So it is we can now consider just how the local Church should look with a correct Church government as found in Scripture.

Correct Church Government

We are to operate with **No Name over us but Jesus'** and everything we do as the Church should be done only in Jesus Name and as directed by Him. As Head of His Body we need to ensure we bear His Name only, hear His voice and do the Fathers will as each member separately, and the Church corporately, are led by the Holy Spirit.

We are to be **an equal brotherhood** because Jesus said, "Do not be called Rabbi, for One is your Teacher, **and you are all brothers**, and do not call anyone on earth your father for One is your heavenly Father. And do not be called leaders for One is your Leader, even Christ; but the greatest among you shall be your servant," (Matt.23:8-11). (NB. The King James Version of the Bible

translates ‘Teacher’ as ‘Master’ and also translates ‘Leader’ as ‘Master’, so that our continual talk of ‘leaders’ and ‘leadership’ goes unchecked. In Greek the verb ‘to lead’ is often translated incorrectly by the noun, ‘chief’.)

The organisations and structures that we find in the world are not wrong but these should never be mirrored in the Church if we are to comply with Jesus’ command. The Church must not be organized on worldly lines. The Church is an organism not an organisation.

Satan has used many tactics to ensure we ignore this vital teaching of the Lord. We find many translations of the scriptures that make subtle changes to the meaning of the original Greek to alter this command of the Lord and we need to be aware of this. Verbs have been changed to nouns, functions have become positions and functions have become offices. Through just slight changes in the wording of scripture a huge change in outlook has been created. The Authorised King James version of the bible is guilty of this as are many others and correct church government cannot be understood without checking with the original Greek text.

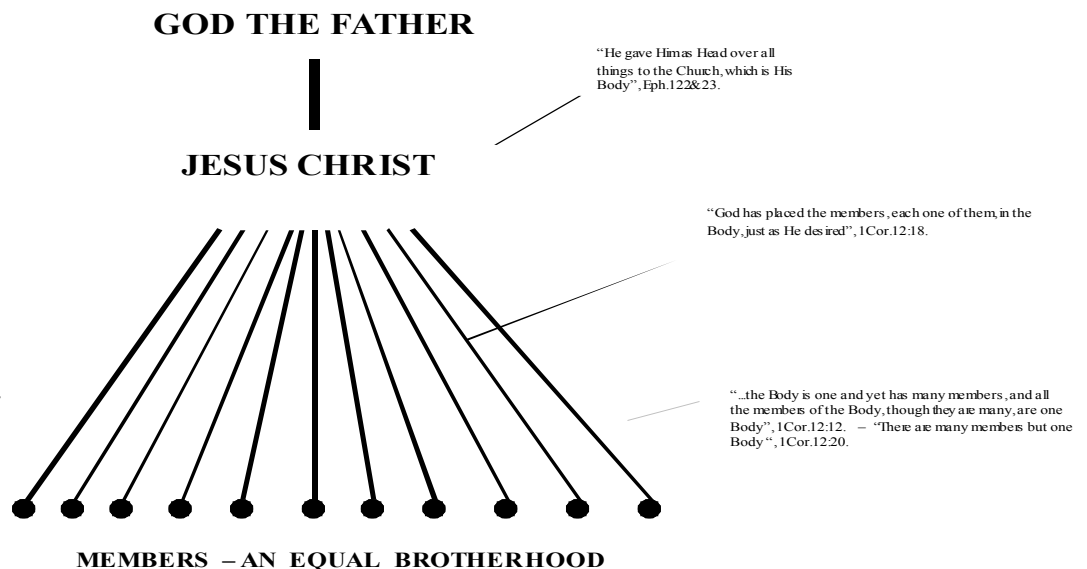
If we acknowledge any ‘man’ as our ‘leader’ contrary to Jesus’ command we begin to build a hierarchical structure which automatically imposes an authority structure which Jesus told us we must not have: Jesus said, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who have **authority** over them are called ‘benefactors’. **But not so with you**, but let him who is the greater among you become as the younger, and the one leading as the servant, (Luke 22:25&26). Those who presently maintain this error need to repent and come out from it.

So we can draw a diagram to show this correct concept of the Church’s equal brotherhood.

THE LOCAL CHURCH ACCORDING TO SCRIPTURE - Fig.4

CHARACTERISTICS

- * JESUS AS HEAD
- * FELLOWSHIP OF LOVE
- * NO HIERARCHY
- * NO LEADERS – ONLY SOME LEADING
- * ALL FOLLOWING JESUS
- * EVERYONE A DISCIPLE OF JESUS
- * ALLED BY THE SPIRIT
- * LISTENING TO WHAT GOD SAYS
- * LOOKING TO THE ‘WORD’
- * CORPORATELY SEEKING GOD
- * EACH MEMBER A SERVANT
- * PREFERRING ONE ANOTHER

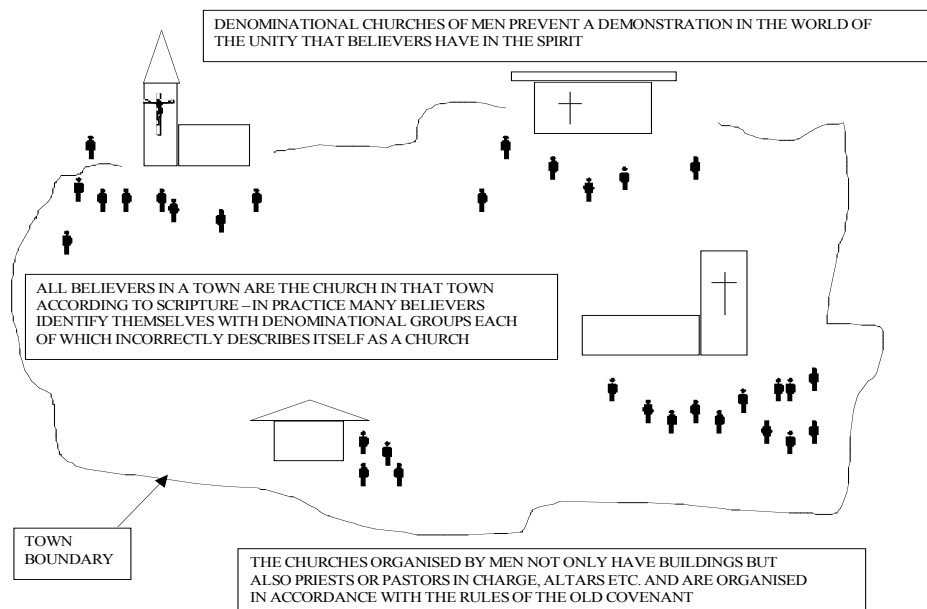


Unfortunately the ideal we now consider in Fig. 4 seems to evade us because our fellow brethren are still trapped within the denominational walls that separate one part of the Body from another. In an attempt to overcome this some have tried to consider the dividing walls are not there or of no significance. It seems that those who take this stance believe that to ignore the barriers is the same as them not being there. This has resulted in ecumenism.

The Error of Ecumenism

In identifying that every believer is part of the Body, even if they are in a denominational Church, some have thought that it is acceptable to have everyone believe just what they wish. In the name of 'love' they have forfeited 'Truth'. This cannot be right.

The level of compromise has been such that even non-believers have been accepted as equal brethren, and even worse, those of different 'faiths'. The following diagram shows us the effect of the denominations upon the local believers who make up the Body of Christ in any town or locality.



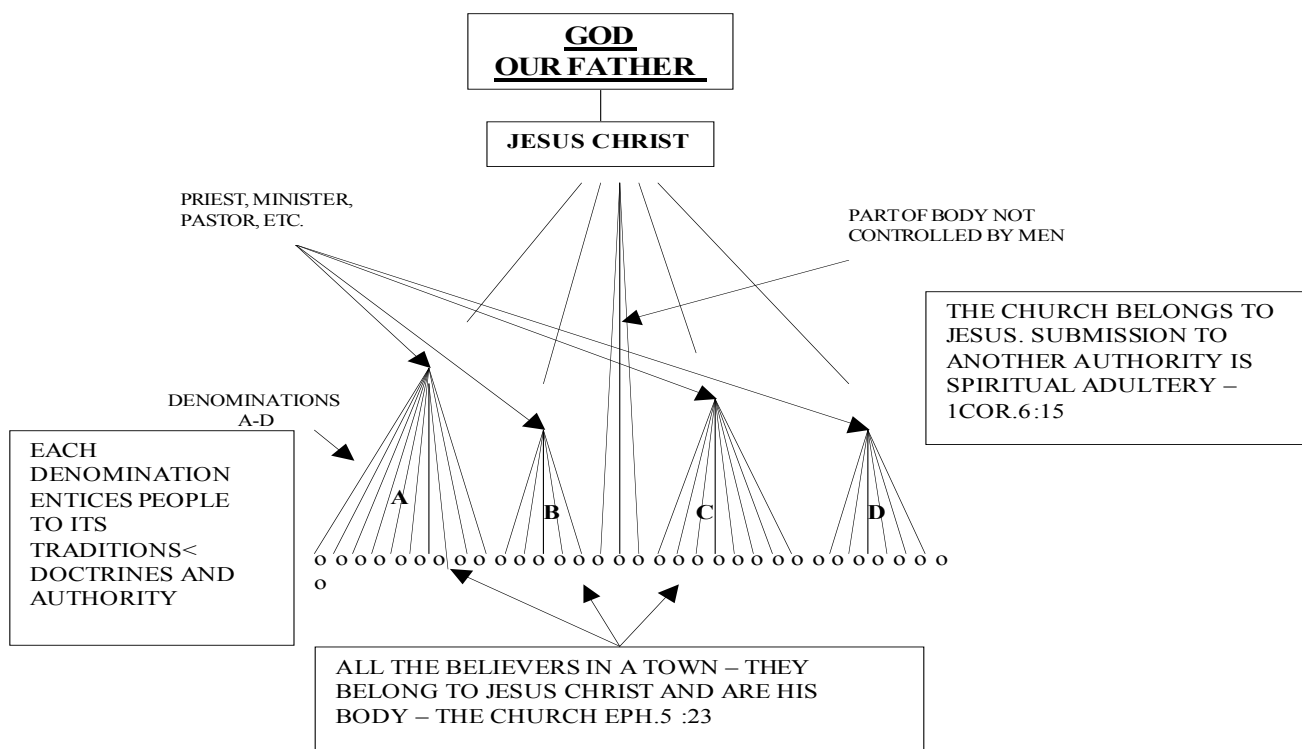
THE SAD REALITY OF THE BODY OF CHRIST - Fig5

Ecumenism is an attempt to create unity but it is not a unity of the Spirit but a man made union that is of the spirit of antichrist and not of the Lord. In the name of toleration truth is sacrificed and rather than each member being led by the Spirit believers are taught to follow men. Nothing is done about the placing of a man or men above them in a hierarchical order, between them and their true Head, the Lord Jesus Christ, so Christ is removed from His true place as Lord and men become those who wield authority and require submission. Those who oppose them they accuse of rebellion. Often by fear they rule those who know no better.

In practice some try to continue to attend denominational meetings without bowing their knee to those men in authority in such institutions whilst still trying to acknowledge the leadership of the Lord. This

has to lead to a compromise of their place of freedom under Jesus' sole Headship. And amongst these organisations are nominal believers not born of the Spirit and also false brethren. Thus the Church is a mixture, true believers amongst the Harlot, tares among the wheat. But this time when the Lord in His grace has overlooked the sin of spiritual adultery due to our blindness and ignorance has come to an end. The call to 'come out of her my people' is now being sounded again with clarity for the Harlot will be judged before the Lord's return and the Bride of Christ will be found without spot or wrinkle on His return.

THE EFFECT OF DENOMINATIONS - Fig.6



A Battle Each Step of the Way

We need to be aware that it is the spirit of antichrist, the spirit of religion, which has prevented the true Church being what she should be. In an attempt to overcome this problem some have only considered those to be brethren, and part of what they call the 'true' Church, to be those who have left the denominational groups. Unfortunately these believers soon build another denomination because they consider their fellow believers who are still bound by denominational beliefs as not being part of the 'true' Church when in fact they are. We must not deny any true believers birthright and the diagram above, Fig.6, cannot be ignored, for it sadly shows what in reality is the state of the local Church.

The True Church

So we have come to a time in Church history when the Lord is addressing the mixture that has seen

the Bride and the Harlot mixed together for 2000 years. This separation, I believe, began in 1992 as we saw deceptions increasing amongst all that we call 'Church' and the Lord beginning to bring some out of the organisations of men with a realization of that which had bound them. But now the Spirit of God is bringing forth a trumpet sound that **the mixture of Pentecost is over**. Ahead we will see a separation of true and false, a great falling away, that will culminate with Jesus' last call to those still found in the Harlot, that the book of Revelation describes as Mystery Babylon. The Lord will give one last call to "Come out of her My people that you might not participate in her sins and that you may not receive of her plagues," (Rev.18:4) for the beast will soon arise that "will hate the Harlot and will make her desolate and naked and will eat her flesh and will burn her up with fire. For God has put it in their hearts to execute His purpose by having a common purpose.... For this reason in one day her plagues will come, pestilence and mourning and famine, and she will be burned up with fire, for the Lord God who judges her is strong." (Rev. 17:16 &17 and Rev.18:8)

Jesus described this same judgment when He told the parables of the Tares among the Wheat and the Dragnet, describing the enemy sowing bad seed among the good and bad fish being found among the good fish. Jesus explained this would be the state of the Kingdom until the harvest which is the end of the age when the sons of the evil one would be taken from among the sons of the Kingdom and gathered into bundles to be burnt. (Matt.13:24-30, 36-43 and 47-50)

When this separation is complete "then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of their Father" (Matt.13:43) and "those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever, (Dan.12:3). This is the coming glory of the Bride, the true Church at the end of the age.

May those with ears to hear, hear what the Spirit is now saying to the churches.

.....