

The Church Lie



And the Biblical Alternative

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Unless people are willing to turn on their minds and challenge their deepest held beliefs, they don't matter. Nothing will change.

Introduction

In life, at times, we come to a conclusion about something or someone famous and our response can even be considered a cliché: "You mean it's all a lie?" This does not concern one particular lie, it concerns a motif built on a foundation of lies and supported by lies. Such is the church.

The problem with things traditionally famous found wanting is the culture's investment; rich in lazy thinking, and bankrupt concerning critical thinking flavored with naive trust. Still, it is an investment nevertheless. Parishioners heavily invest in the lie to the point where they cannot bear the thought of leaving it. To do so leads to painful admissions. No one wants to believe they have been misled for so many years; no one wants to think they invested in a lie and wasted their time on a lie. This is usually an unspoken excuse or maybe better stated as a reason; people don't want to look foolish.

Another excuse is the "true things" told by the perpetrators. Since the perpetrator spoke the truth every now and then, the lies can now be deemed as "unfortunate," or "subordinate truth" that "men have disagreed about for hundreds of years." We must therefore, "Take from the shelf what is good and leave the bad on the shelf" and "All truth is God's truth."

Like most excuses, this is flawed reasoning because truth has a moral aspect to it. True facts can be, and often are used in the commission of an inequitable scheme. Therefore, the residual facts used, though true, don't add any virtue to the scheme. In the case of church, it can be argued that even true facts are scarce in the biggest fraud ever perpetrated on mankind. This is in contrast to Christ's true assembly that "uses the law lawfully."

Then there is the diversity excuse. This excuse for not rethinking church can be likened to a tree. All the branches are different, and none of the fruit thereof shares exact shape and size, but overall, they are the product of a basic root system. Church is the same tree, but the diversity of its branches and fruits supply an excuse for its evil; "Our church doesn't believe that." "That's what the Baptists

believe, we are Presbyterian." "Gee, that sounds like a cult, and of course, our church isn't a cult because it's a church." "Oh my, that sounds like a 'high controlling church,' not us." "I understand your concern, but all of our elders wouldn't agree with that position."

But what is said about the horrible testimonies of the church fathers? Well, "They were men of their time." This is the historical norm excuse. If this logic is equally applied historically, the Deluge was unjust. This excuse, in particular, reminds us of the genius we expect from Deity; the growth history of a tree at any specific point doesn't redefine what evil is nor excuse it. If the fruit is rotten, the tree was bad from the beginning and will be to the end. As Christ said, "A tree is known by its fruit."

And last in this list of excuses (which is by no means comprehensive), but not least is the authority excuse. We do not look past the pastor's expertise. To do so would question the competence that we trust so dearly and relieves us of responsibility to think for ourselves. As coined by author John Immel, "Thinking is hard."

Sure, glaring problems are so evident that we stumble on them from time to time, but since the pastor is not concerned with it—it must not be significant. We do not look beyond the authority of church because this authority, as we have come to believe, is an authority over our eternal wellbeing. We do not see past church because it is the only way to heaven regardless of any and every fault. Supposedly.

Neither will we look past our inability, or "total depravity" (the premise for authority to begin with) because though there seems to be severe problems with church, it must be our over-concern based on failure to understand. These reasons for not pondering the church's unsettling testimony are a fallacy.

However, there is an excuse that can't be added. this indictment against the church includes a complaint about every element of its existence; it is an indictment against the entire body of church thought and the evidence is not complicated nor hidden to any degree. The only thing that hides its elementary error is a failure to

think. The lies are not strong deceptions. The lies are elementary; they bear no elevated level of evil genius. There is no real excuse; it is a lack of love for truth and intellectual sloth.

These reasons are why Church is among the great deceptions of world history while having one of the more anemic propaganda machines. The secular world rightly assesses those of the church stripe as egregiously illogical and naive. Furthermore, church orthodoxy, when seen for what it is, befuddles one that it is even taken seriously as truth much less endowed with gargantuan infrastructure and holy folklore. Indeed, church orthodoxy is built upon utter nonsense that constantly contradicts the plain sense of Scripture and God-given common sense.

Nevertheless, apparently, something sounded good in the beginning while establishing a mental prism that people begin to see all reality through. We can read our Bible through such a lens and think it agrees with the church while that isn't what the Bible is saying at all. Most Christians confess that the Bible is hard for them to understand or they do not understand it at all. This is because church presuppositions contradict what the Bible is saying overall. Most Christians carry their Bible as a token statement while relying entirely on the pastor or elders for truth.

Regarding its propaganda, it points to its Western pedigree that is supposedly immune from mass deception. This is an arrogant mindset in the face of documented history. We need to look no further than Germany and its Nazi terror. Germany has always been the epicenter of Western intellect, but in no wise lacking in a history given to absurd mysticism and superstition. Yet, a major branch of the church, Protestantism, points to this pedigree as a credential beyond reproach.

The second notable bit of propaganda is the idea that church is the product of literal Bible interpretation. We often hear that "The Bible is our authority for truth." This is but one star of propaganda in the church universe that will be addressed thoroughly in this work. For now, suffice to say it is much more accurate that church academia, and its interpretation of the Bible is the real authority.

The last bit of propaganda we will discuss is the church's many straw man enemies that also serve as red herrings. Church scholars are rarely honest about the issues that supposedly separate them from "heretics." The favorite target is the dreaded "legalist" Pharisees, but as we will see, the church is an exact reflection of the religious institutions that Christ fustigated during His ministry on earth. Church likewise travels land and sea to make people twice the child of hell that it already is.

Church is a lie. Christians must come to grips with this reality for their good and the good of God's kingdom. If we want to make the most of the opportunity God has given us presently, if we're going to leave personal legacies before God that we will not regret, church must be dissected from our contribution to this life. Like a song with a sweet melody and evil lyrics, we must not endorse the evil ideology by humming the tune.

With all of this said, the real New Testament body of Christ will be articulated from the plain sense of Scripture along with its intended mode of operation. The church is NOT the body of Christ; the genuine article will be observed.

Moreover, the bankruptcy of the church is no excuse to coast with our lives in neutral until Christ returns. We must know the real New Testament body is meant to do things on earth beyond what we could ever imagine.

This work is for those who have always known something is wrong with church and want to do something about it. This work is for those who wish to redeem the time because the days are evil regardless of their former investment.

In the classic movie, "Ocean's 11," the ringleader of professional jewel thieves is in a testy conversation with his former wife. She called him a "thief and a liar." His defense follows according to the script: "I only lied about being a thief." In other words, this supposedly did not make his whole life a lie because he only told one lie while pretending to be something other than a thief.

Unfortunately, the church cannot even claim that level of virtue. It may say that it only lied about being God's authority on earth, but that also includes lying about representing the word of God, the truth of God, the family of God, the body of Christ, the kingdom of God, the light of God, a mediator for God, the elect of God, the gospel of God, and God's history.

It is all a lie. When we come to grips with that, we can employ the biblical alternative and once again experience true revival.

Because only truth sanctifies (John 17:17).

Paul M. Dohse and Andrew D. Young

Here is the prevailing challenge before us. The ideas that we have encountered are no accident. This is not happenstance. The source of all world evil can be located in evil ideas.

Chapter 1: The Church is Not the Body of Christ

"Therefore, the church is not the body of Christ because its means and prescription for becoming one with Christ are fictitious."

The church's acts and doctrine are distinct from the body of Christ. Yet, we often hear, "The church is the body of Christ."

It is common knowledge that the word "church" is not a biblical word and is a word translators substituted for "ekklesia" which is interpreted as "called out assembly." There is no valid reason whatsoever for translators to use "church" for the Greek word "ekklesia." In fact, noting the history of the word "church," it doesn't exist during the apostolic era.¹ Fitting however, is that the word emphasizes a place where people under the authority of a master or lord assemble. The word emphasizes a place. Think, "temple." It is fair to say that the word is a contemporary projection of what we see regarding Old Testament era temple worship. It is a place where those under the authority of a master assemble to pay homage.

What was specifically intended by the New Testament authors in using the word, "ekklesia"?

It was a common Greek word referring to a process of direct Democracy. An ekklesia was a public assembly where those who had voting rights were called out from among the common people to decide public policy and the legislation of laws. Normally, these assemblies were restricted to males that were a minimum age or older, and the upper crust of society. Before the New Testament era, the word had no connection to Christianity. In Scripture the word is borrowed to denote the following idea: God's people called out from what is common for a purpose. When put together with certain Bible passages, ekklesia is the people of God called out from what is common and into God's kingdom.² This also closely coincides with the meaning of sanctification which is biblically defined as a process of separating from what is common or unholy.³

The ekklesia of God are His called people. The same word also refers to God's people meeting together. Ekklesia occurs 114 times in the New Testament. The word refers to the collective followers of God 103 times while only referring to a meeting 11 times.⁴ From among these eleven instances something important needs to be pointed out.

Ekklesia is God's people called out from among what is common; in this case, the commonality of the world, or the present world kingdom. Ekklesia also refers to a meeting of God's people in various places, and for the most part, these were meetings in private homes referred to as "households." A household is a family, or one's relatives; dwelling in the same house and sharing meals together is assumed. A house (oikia) is a dwelling place where we assume families dwell, and a household (oikiakos) is a family or relatives at large that we assume dwell together in various dwellings (oikia). "Oikos had a broader range than oikia. Oikos is the whole of person's possessions, his whole estate, whereas oikia is simply his residence and only occasionally includes its contents."⁵

The point we are heading toward is this: for all practical purposes, the ekklesia of God and the "household of God" are the same thing.

Galatians 6:10 - So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household [oikeios⁶] of faith.

Ephesians 2:19 - So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household [oikeios] of God,

In regard to Ephesians 2:19, the antonym for this whole series of words concerning "house" whether "master of the house" or "servant of a house" etc., etc., is "stranger." We are no longer strangers to God's household. God's ekklesia is also His household or literal relatives. In Acts 14:23 we find,

And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

"In every church" comes from kata ekklesia. Kata is in the distributive sense and that's why this verse should be translated "from ekklesia to ekklesia" as the same phrase is translated in Acts 5:42 and 20:20.

And every day, in the temple and from [kata] house [oikos] to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus.

"House" only appears in the Greek text once but is rightly translated "from house to house" because of kata or "kat."⁷ Acts 20:20 is another example:

how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house,

This is important to note because the word "church" denotes a place where one is subservient to a master or lord whereas ekklesia is a people belonging to God's household. The fact that God's people meet in private homes is a statement regarding that truth. In other words, meeting in private homes as a family is a gospel statement.

Romans 16:3 - Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, 4 who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but all the churches [households] of the Gentiles give thanks as well. 5 Greet also the church [ekklesia] in their house [oikos].

Colossians 4:15 - Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church [ekklesia] in her house [oikos].

Philemon 1:2 - and Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier, and the church [ekkleisia] in your house [oikos]:

Here is the crux: the ekklesia can be stated and interpreted interchangeably with God's household as a literal family. The two, for all practical purposes are synonymous. Therefore, it can not be stated enough that ekklesias functioning apart from an institutional authority is a gospel statement pointing to justification by new birth.

The ekklesia is also the body of Christ. Ephesians 5:23, Colossians 1:18 and 1:24 state this specifically. Throughout the New Testament, the illustration is that of a human body with Christ being the head. **Ekklesia is God's called out people from the world and into a body.** They are called **out of** and called **into**.⁸ They are called on to believe the gospel which results in the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The baptism of the Spirit was established in Christ—it is following Christ in spiritual death and resurrection. Though it is a mystery, it should be thought of in a literal sense; a literal death and resurrection takes place through the Spirit when one believes in Christ.

Romans 6:1 - What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? 2 By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? 3 Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

5 For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. 6 We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. 7 For one who has died has been set free from sin. 8 Now if we have died with Christ, we

believe that we will also live with him. 9 We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. 10 For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. 11 So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

12 Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. 13 Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. 14 For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

According to Scripture, believing in Christ results in being baptized INTO Christ by the Spirit and likewise Christ being IN believers as well. Therefore, our bodies are now the temple in which the Spirit and Christ dwell.

1Corinthians 6:19 - Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own,

Ephesians 3:14 - For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, 16 that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Ephesians 4:30 - And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

With all of this in mind, note that we receive the Spirit by faith:

Galatians 3:3 - Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?

Romans 10:17 - So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

This brings us back to the calling. Who are the called? It is everyone.

Luke 5:32 - I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.

There is also a sense in which those who are called also call upon the Lord:

Romans 10:10 - For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. 11 For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame." 12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. 13 For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

14 How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?

This now brings us to a summary of these points before we move on to a major church lie. The gospel is a call to all humanity to come out from the world and into God's household (family). When an individual hears the gospel and believes it, they call on the Lord leading to a miraculous and supernatural new birth. Though this is not experienced as a literal physical death and somehow returning

to our mother's womb, it is nevertheless a literal death and new birth in a spiritual sense. Therefore, a real change in the saved person's state of being takes place:

2Corinthians 5:17 - Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

The saved individual is called out from the world and into God's family which functions and exists as a body:

Ephesians 4:4 - There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

1Corinthians 12:12 - For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. 13 For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

14 For the body does not consist of one member but of many. 15 If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. 16 And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? 18 But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. 19 If all were a single member, where would the body be? 20 As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.

21 The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." 22 On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 23 and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, 24 which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, 25 that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. 26 If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

Obviously, in the scriptural accounts, the answered call takes place in a myriad of various places and circumstances. AND, at the moment any person calls on the Lord, the new birth takes place at that moment and said person is sealed by the Spirit until the day of redemption (the glorification of the body upon resurrection). In all likelihood, a sound gospel has been presented by a true manifestation of God's functioning family, and it would behoove the convert to join in with that new family accordingly. This should be a family-like culture endowed with the Father's characteristics.

How then, can it be, that church orthodoxy claims that being one with Christ and His body is **synonymous** with formal church membership which places an individual voluntarily under the authority of popes, pastors, and so-called elders? Though Catholicism has its own version of this and has never been shy about admitting it openly, the best example is Protestantism. Though confused Protestants deny this orthodoxy intellectually, most Protestant leaders are proffering it openly in our day while the fact remains that it is stated definitively in the founding documents of Protestantism.

The idea that water baptism initiates one into formal church membership and simultaneously makes one part of the spiritual body of Christ is official Protestant doctrine. Furthermore, this doctrine states that the onetime water baptism performed in church

for initiation into the spiritual body of Christ and church membership has ongoing cleansing effects as long as one remains in good standing with the church.

I. Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, not only for the solemn admission of the party baptized into the visible Church; but also to be unto him a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of his ingrafting into Christ, of regeneration, of remission of sins, and of his giving up unto God, through Jesus Christ, to walk in the newness of life. Which sacrament is, by Christ's own appointment, to be continued in His Church until the end of the world.

II. The outward element to be used in this sacrament is water, wherewith the party is to be baptized, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, by a minister of the Gospel, lawfully called thereunto.

~The Westminster Confession of Faith chapter XXXVIII

Protestants are quick to point out, in order to circumvent alarm, that water baptism is merely a public confession, but several elements of its confession make that claim contradictory. First, water baptism is referred to as a "sacrament." We must ask; "What is a sacrament?" The very definition of a sacrament follows: it is an outward demonstration/initiation of something that is actually taking place in the spiritual realm.⁹ The smoking gun is Protestantism's "means of grace."¹⁰ When something is a "means," it refers to what is used specifically to bring something about. We then ask what is meant by "grace"?

Grace, in Christian theology, the spontaneous, unmerited gift of the divine favour in the salvation of sinners, and the divine influence operating in man for

his regeneration and sanctification. The English term is the usual translation for the Greek *charis*, which occurs in the New Testament about 150 times (two-thirds of these in writings attributed to Paul). Although the word must sometimes be translated in other ways, the fundamental meaning in the New Testament and in subsequent theological usage is that contained in the Letter of Paul to Titus: "For the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men" (2:11).¹¹

Water baptism is not the primary point here, but what one of the foremost standards of Protestantism, the Westminster Confession of Faith, states about church membership: it ingrafts us into Christ, and the means of being ingrafted into the body of Christ can only take place in the church where sacraments occur and **MUST** be performed by a "lawfully" "called" minister of the gospel.

As aforementioned in the Introduction, church attempts to be accountable to no teaching through diversity. Church claims that different branches and variant sizes and colors of the same fruit are not necessarily from the same kind of tree. Hence, in this case, Protestants will quickly point to the London Baptist Confession not agreeing with the Westminster Confession on every point. In truth, the two agree on all the major roots and are the same kind of tree; it is a church tree. This point is best examined by considering a statement from the largest Protestant denomination in our day:

VI. The Church

A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is an autonomous local congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel; observing the two ordinances of Christ, governed by His laws, exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by His Word, and seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth. Each congregation operates under the Lord-

ship of Christ through democratic processes. In such a congregation each member is responsible and accountable to Christ as Lord. Its scriptural officers are pastors and deacons. While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture.

The New Testament speaks also of the church as the Body of Christ which includes all of the redeemed of all the ages, believers from every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation.

~The 2000 Baptist Faith and Message; Southern Baptist Convention

This document would represent the most relevant statement of faith for contemporary purposes while staying true to so-called "historical precedent." Still, we see the same Protestant roots; church is a membership ("covenant") in an institution comprised of "officers" and "governed," supposedly, by God's law. Lastly, it states this institution governed by officers over those who have entered into a written membership covenant IS the body of Christ. Also, strongly implied are the ideas that fellowship in the gospel, gifts, privileges, ordinances, and rights are only found in church membership.

In contrast, the Bible never speaks of bodyship being a formal membership in an institution, pastors or deacons being an office, or the ekklesia being "governed" by laws of any kind. Additionally, New Testament accounts of new birth are never restricted to a place or formal meetings of any sort overseen by institutional officers. Regarding the point of salvation ingrafting one into Christ through the baptism of the Spirit, Christ stated: "The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."¹² In other words, there is no formal activity that coincides with salvation in a certain place or overseen (or seen period) by anyone. The individual calls on the Lord wherever he may be and in

the midst of whatever one might be doing and God does the rest apart from any human activity.

The church is NOT the body of Christ, it is not His family, nor is it the gospel because its prescription for becoming one with Christ is inconsistent with the truth.

Therefore, the church is not the body of Christ because its means and prescription for becoming one with Christ are fictitious.¹³ Receiving Christ is by faith alone and can take place anywhere and at any time. It is certainly not ratified by water baptism under church authority, and is not an institutional affair but a literal family of God affair.

¹ <https://www.etymonline.com/word/Church>

² <http://briansbits.com/ekklesia.php>

³ <https://paulspassingthoughts.com/?s=andy+young+sanctification>

⁴ <http://briansbits.com/ekklesia.php>

⁵ Spiros Zodhiates: The Complete Word Study Dictionary; AMG Publishers, 1992; p. 1029

⁶ Belonging to a certain household. One belonging to a certain house, id ref. 5

⁷ <http://briansbits.com/ekklesia.php>

⁸ <http://briansbits.com/ekklesia.php>

⁹ <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/sacrament?s=t> | <https://www.britannica.com/topic/sacrament>

¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Means_of_grace

¹¹ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/grace-religion>

¹² John 3:8 ESV

¹³ Paul Dohse interviewed an influential Lutheran leader and asked him, “When does the Spirit actually enter a believer to seal him or her?” Answer: “During water baptism.” This belief is not particular to the Lutheran Church and is common to many Protestant denominations; it is orthodoxy.

Chapter 2: The Church is Not the Gospel

“Consequently, the church denies the new birth in three ways: it denies that the believer is permanently saved and forgiven of all sin that condemns. It denies that the believer's state of being is changed from sinner to saint, and it denies that the believer is no longer under law and now able to use God's law to love God and others.”

In chapter one, we looked at what the biblical new birth is. It is an informal (though supernatural) family-oriented event initiated by one hearing the gospel and believing it. The baptism of the Spirit then takes place apart from any human agency. The Spirit waits for no human formality or authority when He baptizes. In contrast, according to church orthodoxy, whatever the stripe, formally identifying with church membership makes one part of the body of Christ. In fact, the foremost fathers of the Protestant church not only believed this, they believed water baptism by church authorities baptizes one into the body of Christ. Though the documented examples are myriad, we will here enter John Calvin's position into the record:

Baptism is the initiatory sign by which we are admitted to the fellowship of the Church, that being ingrafted into Christ we may be accounted children of God (CI 4.15.1) Hence those who have thought that baptism is nothing else than the badge and mark by which we profess our religion before men, in the same way as soldiers attest their profession by bearing the insignia of their commander, having not attended to what was the principal thing in baptism; and this is, that we are to receive it in connection with the promise, “He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved.”¹

Nor is it to be supposed that baptism is bestowed only with reference to the past, so that, in regard to

new lapses into which we fall after baptism, we must seek new remedies of expiation in other so-called sacraments, just as if the power of baptism had become obsolete. To this error, in ancient times, it was owing that some refused to be initiated by baptism until their life was in extreme danger, and they were drawing their last breath, that they might thus obtain pardon for all the past. Against this preposterous precaution ancient bishops frequently inveigh in their writings. We ought to consider that at whatever time we are baptised, we are washed and purified once for the whole of life. Wherefore, as often as we fall, we must recall the remembrance of our baptism, and thus fortify our minds, so as to feel certain and secure of the remission of sins. For though, when once administered, it seems to have passed, it is not abolished by subsequent sins.²

When a person believes unto salvation, the Spirit baptizes said person into the body of Christ at that moment via His spiritual baptism, and wherever the belief takes place, and this is final and irrevocable. A person cannot be unborn. Furthermore, intuitively, humanity knows that salvation is an abandonment from who they were to a completely new personhood. This is why people resist the gospel; they are more comfortable with the life and person they know. As the saying goes; "Better the devil you know than the devil you don't know." If you have to choose between a familiar but unpleasant situation and an unfamiliar situation, choose the familiar one because the unfamiliar situation may turn out to be worse. No matter how bad our life is, we will often live with it rather than overcoming the fear of the unknown, especially a radical unknown.

In addition, people often do not want to give up their sinful desires. This doesn't necessarily mean people believe they will have to put forth an effort to overcome a particular temptation after salvation, again, intuitively, they know its possible that the desire will be taken from them via the death of the former person. Separat-

tion from the sinful activity is not the whole issue; they don't want to lose the desire in many cases.

How can knowledge of the new birth be intuitive? The Bible states that the works of God's law are written on the hearts (a biblical idiom for the mind³) of every individual born into the world:

Romans 2:12 - For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. 13 For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified. 14 For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. 15 They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them 16 on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.

Not only do men have this inborn testimony, but an outside testimony as well:

Romans 1:18 - For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. 19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 20 For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. 21 For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for

images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

Again, for the most part, people in general know that salvation involves a radical life transformation effected by God. The Bible is clear: this happens at the very moment that one hears God's call with faith and in return calls upon the Lord for salvation. This is not a mere intellectual assent, but a calling upon God to take one's life and replace it with a new one. The Spirit does not wait till the individual submits to the authority of men and their version of Spirit baptism; the notion is absurd. This in turn begs the question, "For what purpose does the saved person need formal religion?" Plainly, he or she does not need formal religion. What they need is God's family which functions pretty much like any other family versus an authoritative institution. Through ignorance the saved individual may not recognize the importance of interaction with God's family, but this doesn't circumvent the reality of it.

Relevance to chapter one follows: baptism into a body rather than church membership because a body only has one head. And that one head, which is Christ, as the Bible makes clear, is the ONLY mediator between God and mankind.⁴ The point is excruciatingly simple and should completely discredit church in and of itself. Clearly, church represents itself as an additional mediator other than Christ. There is even a formal name for it; supposedly, pastors, or priests, are God's "under-shepherds." Since Christ is referred to as a shepherd in the Bible, and pastors are told to shepherd, supposedly, this must mean salvific authority by God's proxy. It's an absurd leap of logic. In essence, the idea that the Spirit only baptizes through the waters of the institutional church is the church's claim that it is God's salvific authority on earth. Problem is, on that wise as well, Christ made it clear that ALL authority has been given to Him alone and for the express purpose of using the ekklesia to call humanity to repentance, not salvific oversight.⁵

Nevertheless, church orthodoxy will again claim the diversity loophole. "Well, our church doesn't believe the Spirit baptizes into

the body of Christ when one joins a church signified by water baptism." Not only can this excuse be referred to as insignificant confusion that doesn't affect a true function of the church through time, there are many other evidences that make all churches complicit in being additional mediators other than Christ.

One of many is the church's abject redefinition of the biblical new birth. Again, the simplicity of the charge hides in broad daylight. We hear much more than often, "We are all just sinners saved by grace." In the Bible, a "sinner" is the formal nomenclature for the unregenerate. Though many church attendees do not mean to say they remain unregenerate as "saved" persons; in fact, this is formal church orthodoxy. A cursory observation of church orthodoxy makes any citations on this point a statement of the obvious, but nevertheless,

“ . . . forgiveness of sins is not a matter of a passing work or action, but comes from baptism which is of perpetual duration, until we arise from the dead” (Luther’s Works: American ed.; Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press; St. Louis: Concordia, 1955, vol. 34, p. 163).

“ . . . Forgiveness of sins is not a matter of a passing work or action, but of perpetual duration. For the forgiveness of sins begins in baptism and remains with us all the way to death, until we arise from the dead, and leads us into life eternal. So we live continually under the remission of sins. Christ is truly and constantly the liberator from our sins, is called our Savior, and saves us by taking away our sins. If, however, he saves us always and continually, then we are constantly sinners” (Ibid, p.164).

“On no condition is sin a passing phase, but we are justified daily by the unmerited forgiveness of sins and by the justification of God’s mercy. Sin remains, then, perpetually in this life, until the hour of the last

judgment comes and then at last we shall be made perfectly righteous” (Ibid, p.167).

“For the forgiveness of sins is a continuing divine work, until we die. Sin does not cease. Accordingly, Christ saves us perpetually” (Ibid., p.190).

“Daily we sin, daily we are continually justified, just as a doctor is forced to heal sickness day by day until it is cured” (Ibid., p.191).

In these citations from Martin Luther, we see that "Christians" are not once and for all time forgiven of condemning sin, but that forgiveness for sin that would condemn one to hell must be ongoing, and this forgiveness can only be found in the institutional church. Water baptism, as earlier noted in the John Calvin citations, and designated lawfully to the church according to the Westminster Confession, has an ongoing purification effect as long as one remains faithful to the institutional church.

Hence, the church denies a new birth that forgives condemning sin once and for all time. Faithfulness to the salvific authority of the church results in "daily justification."

Nor by remission of sins does the Lord only once for all elect and admit us into the Church, but by the same means he preserves and defends us in it. For what would it avail us to receive a pardon of which we were afterwards to have no use? That the mercy of the Lord would be vain and delusive if only granted once, all the godly can bear witness; for there is none who is not conscious, during his whole life, of many infirmities which stand in need of divine mercy. And truly it is not without cause that the Lord promises this gift specially to his own household, nor in vain that he orders the same message of reconciliation to be daily delivered to them (The Calvin Institutes: 4.1.21).

To impart this blessing to us, the keys have been given to the Church (Mt. 16:19; 18:18). For when Christ gave the command to the apostles, and conferred the power of forgiving sins, he not merely intended that they should loose the sins of those who should be converted from impiety to the faith of Christ; but, moreover, that they should perpetually perform this office among believers (The Calvin Institutes: 4.1.22).

Secondly, This benefit is so peculiar to the Church, that we cannot enjoy it unless we continue in the communion of the Church. Thirdly, It is dispensed to us by the ministers and pastors of the Church, either in the preaching of the Gospel or the administration of the Sacraments, and herein is especially manifested the power of the keys, which the Lord has bestowed on the company of the faithful. Accordingly, let each of us consider it to be his duty to seek forgiveness of sins only where the Lord has placed it. Of the public reconciliation which relates to discipline, we shall speak at the proper place (Ibid).

Secondly, the church denies that the new birth actually changes the saved person's state of being. Regardless of what the scriptures say, all things are not new, and the so-called saved person is NOT a new creature. Church scholars and notable leaders from the past and present state this continually in no uncertain terms. Perhaps the most notable citation is from the father of Protestantism, Martin Luther:

God does not save those who are only imaginary sinners. Be a sinner, and let your sins be strong (sin boldly), but let your trust in Christ be stronger, and rejoice in Christ who is the victor over sin, death, and the world.

Some contemporary church leaders state it in the same kind of stunning pronouncements. The hugely popular Pastor Matt Chan-

bler stated the following at a large church conference in 2009: "I'm still a wicked sinner in need of the mercy of Christ, in need of the blood of Christ, in need of the cross of Christ...is the gospel presentation on Sunday morning for those who are regenerate or unregenerate? I think the answer to that is 'yes.'" On page 187 of G.C. Berkouwer's work, "Faith and Sanctification," he quotes another famous Protestant to make the following point: "The regenerate man is no whit different in substance from what he was before his regeneration."

Thirdly, in redefining the new birth, the church denies how the new birth changes the believer's relationship to the law. The new birth changes the believer's state of being from one who is condemned to hell by the law, and enslaved to the law, to one who is no longer under the law's condemnation or its enslavement. According to the Bible, the law's ability to condemn enables sin to provoke people to sin through sinful desires. The law which is good, is used by sin to increase sin in the unregenerate. The law can only bring death to those who are under it. Once a person is born again, the old self dies with Christ and is no longer under the law's condemnation. Christ died to end the law, and "where there is no law, there is no sin."⁶ This isn't a mere legal loophole, when the believer is resurrected with Christ through the baptism of the Spirit, he or she now loves the word of God because they are a changed person. Once indifferent to God's law, the believer is now free to use its wisdom for aggressive love towards God and others without any fear of condemnation. Yet, because the believer who now has a transformed mind is still in a mortal body where sin still resides, this weakness prevents perfect love. In essence, the believer no longer sins, but rather fails to love perfectly. His or her sins, if you want to call them such, is family sin, but not sin which can condemn the believer to hell. These truths can be confirmed by a study of Romans chapters 5-8.

Church orthodoxy denies this biblical construct. Unless one stays faithful to the supposed salvific authority of the church, they have no covering for the "law of sin and death" that true believers have died to. In other words, church keeps "Christians" under law instead

of under grace. According to church, "under grace" is a covering for condemning sin via church membership, and not an ending of sin.

Consequently, the church denies the new birth in three ways: it denies that the believer is permanently saved and forgiven of all sin that condemns. It denies that the believer's state of being is changed from sinner to saint, and it denies that the believer is no longer under law and now able to use God's law to love God and others. Moreover, according to the Bible, those under the law are provoked to more sin by the law. Therefore, as those under law going to church weekly to hear the law sin will be compounded. One can refer to news headlines on an ongoing basis to bolster this point.

This is why church is not the gospel, and when it gets right down to it, church membership is a denial of the new birth. Additionally, it denies Christ as the sole mediator and authority between mankind and God.

¹ The John Calvin Institutes of the Christian Religion 4.15.1

² The John Calvin Institutes of the Christian Religion 4.15.3

³ Thinking takes place in the heart according to Matthew 9:4.

⁴ 1Timothy 2:5

⁵ Matthew 28:18

⁶ Romans 3:19, 20, 4:15, 5:13, 7:6,8, 10:4, 1Timothy 1:9, Galatians 2:19, Colossians 2:14

The content of philosophy is broken down into these four primary areas of study: metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and politics. People often say to me, "John, does that mean to be a good Christian, we have to understand all these words?" No. But here's the thing. I have to ask this question...How is it working out for us? How are the bromides working? We just need Jesus? How many times have we said that? How many times have we invited people to church? We know better. We know we don't have anything to offer. That's why we're terrified. We're terrified that we are not successfully engaging the world at large, and we are not. We retreat to the four walls of the church because we're terrified that some worldly ideas are going to sneak up and...drag us all to hell.

Chapter 3: The Church is Not the Assembly of Christ

"Hence, the historical connection between church and the New Testament as its beginning is a lie that contributes to church being one big lie, all of it. Church history is just that, church history, but it is not ekklesia history. Other than the New Testament, ekklesia history is very obscure, and there is a reason for that."

The fact that the 1st century church was made up of home fellowships is not obscure history. Not only that, the home fellowship model continued for at least 200 years after the Pentecost that marked the birth of the ekklesia. Was this the intended model designed for the Great Commission? And how did the institutional church become the predominate model? Is a particular model efficacious to the success of the Great Commission?

The church as we know it today is predicated on particular elements. Those elements are public structures, orthodoxy, polity, and horizontal authority. The home fellowship model is predicated on smaller groups meeting in private homes, vertical authority, horizontal fellowship, gifts, and leadership. These are important distinctions in context of the discussion.

Furthermore, even though the terms are used interchangeably in the Bible, deacon and elder should be associated with the home fellowship model while pastor and bishop should be associated with the institutional church. "Bishop" is the term that goes part and parcel with the birth of the institutional church. "Pastor" is the term that replaced bishop over time in evangelical circles. As noted prior, the etymological use of the word "church" coincides with the birth of the institutional church. "Ekklesia" will be associated with the home fellowship model. The reasons for these distinctions will become evident as we progress.

In considering the gravity of the issue, an honest discussion will entail philosophy. The philosophical presuppositions in regard to mankind drove the tension early in church history, and it drives it now. This involves an honest discussion of individualism versus

collectivism. Attitudes concerning the ekklesia (home fellowship model) versus the church (institution) reveal misconceptions that run deep in the Western psyche. Yes, for the most part, the thought of home fellowships immediately raises the ire of “cult.” As we will see, cults are the natural outflow of the church and her very elements. For instance, cults are void of leadership, but heavily predicated on authority. Authority is the heart of the cult, not leadership. Individualism is based on the competence of the individual. Collectivism is based on the incompetence of the individual and calls for authority over the gifted. In addition, because man is supposedly incompetent and inherently selfish, every individual’s life purpose is what they can contribute to the group, or society. The individual’s worth is the sum total of what he/she can contribute to the group. Though God has wired us to enjoy life, in collectivism, joy is reduced to an experience that flows from the complete eradication of self. Self-esteem becomes the root of all evil, and the only truthful evaluation of self must be utter worthlessness. Collectivism is joyful wormhood.

This redefines *gift* as an attribute primarily owned by those who have the ability to orchestrate collectivism. The concept of gift is given tacit acknowledgment in regard to the unenlightened masses but emphasized strongly in regard to those who can prevent societal chaos resulting from an unfettered populous. Though most are unaware of it, presidential elections are already predetermined by the philosophy of the populous. The philosophy sold to the people at any given time will determine the outcome. This boils down to what people believe about the competence of mankind. If the people believe that individualism will lead to chaos, they will clamor about to be taken care of by a police state. Likewise, in the church, the result of gift being primarily defined as that possessed by those who prevent chaos will yield the same result. Hence, as we shall see, a strong emphasis on individual gifts is antithetical to the church. The primary goal of the church becomes the prevention of chaos.

What was the mindset of the 1st century ekklesia? First, smaller groups meeting in homes necessarily keeps the individual in focus. It is clear that the ekklesia had confidence in the individual. If every

believer is truly indwelt by the Holy Spirit, such confidence should not surprise us. There was no horizontal authority, only the vertical authority of Christ who said ALL authority had been given to Him (Matthew 28:18). He is also the ONE head of the body.

This defines a mainstay of ekklesia: leadership sets the example and persuades in regard to an authority above themselves while at the same status level as the group. The apostle Paul appealed to the group and said, “Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ” (1Cor 11:1 NET). This calls for the individual to judge the apostle according to his/her own interpretation of Scripture, and assumes the motive is to follow Christ correctly. In fact, the Bereans were called “honorable” for doing just that when they judged Paul’s teachings according to their own searching of the Scriptures (Acts 17:17). In regard to horizontal authority, we have a very interesting event recorded in Scripture:

Mark 9:38 – John said to him, “Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.”
39 But Jesus said, “Do not stop him, for no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. 40 For the one who is not against us is for us. 41 For truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will by no means lose his reward.

The ekklesia calls for submission to the Chief Shepherd only. Agreement or disagreement on what that is to varying degrees is a matter of fellowship. If the disagreement is too strong, break fellowship: “Can two walk together, except they be agreed?” (Amos 3:3 KJV). This is just one more strength of the ekklesia: depending on the nature of the disagreement, separations can contribute to the spread of the gospel. We have an example of this regarding the relationship between Barnabas and Paul. In Acts 15 we find they separated because of a contention between them that was too great. Paul didn’t pull apostolic rank on Barnabas, they separated, and undoubtedly, their efforts were doubled.

Also, ekklesias do not limit growth in numbers. In the New Testament, we find there were many home assemblies in a given geography. When a letter was written to, for example, “the church [ekkllesia] of God that is in Corinth,” that was a letter written to all of the assemblies in that city. The letters were distributed in many different ways including designated messengers. The fact that the letters were sent to designated geographies suggests a cooperation and network between the assemblies. Obviously, the issues were the same as the letters addressed all of the assemblies in that geography; usually a city.

Apparently, the assembly at Corinth had expanded its influence by the time Paul wrote his second letter to them:

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the church of God that is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in the whole of Achaia:

The broader geographical area of Achaia is included in the second letter. The “whole of” in regard to Achaia assumes multiple assemblies and this assumption should be foisted upon the city of Corinth as well; the ekklesia of Christ expressed in several different assemblies and hopefully expressing the one mind of Christ that is key to unity.

1 Corinthians 1:10 – I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.

1 Corinthians 2:16 – For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.

Philippians 2:2 – complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.

Philippians 2:5 – Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:

Assembly leadership appeals to the one mind in Christ as the only authority, that is, if you want to call the truth of Scripture an authority to begin with; even Christ used persuasion and did not apply His authority to compel followers by force. Hence, assembly leaders have no authority. Fellowship is determined by whether or not leadership has persuaded the assembly. This determines unity as well. Those who can agree on what Christ has commanded can walk together and minister together in single mindedness. This brings us back to a consideration of the following: can large groups of individuals agree based on the idea of individual competence? In general, is the individual capable of being reasonable? Does unity have to be dictated, or can individuals be unified? The New Testament ekklesia answers this question with a resounding, “yes”:

Acts 6:1 – Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. 2 And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. 3 Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. 4 But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” 5 And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. 6 These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them. 7 And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

Notice it is the word of God that increased, and the “obedience to the faith” and not men. There is only one verse in the New Testament that seems to call for an obedience to church leaders:

Hebrews 13:17 – Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

The word “obey” (peitho) in this verse is defined as follows: "to convince by argument." The idea is to be persuaded. That is how the same Greek word is translated by the same version (ESV) in Matt 27:20.

Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus.

A similar form of the word can mean “refuse to be persuaded” as in 1Peter 3:1, but on no wise does Heb 13:17 teach that we are to submit to an authority when it contradicts our understanding of truth. This again goes hand in hand with the idea that the individual lacks competence in understanding truth.

The assembly model also lends understanding in regard to many passages like Mathew 18:15-20. This passage contains instructions for being reconciled to an individual who has offended you; it is for conflict resolution within the assembly. Trying to apply these instructions within an institutional construct creates many, many problems. However, the passage makes perfect sense when seen from the assembly prism. This holds true for much of the New Testament. Fitting the institutional church into New Testament instruction is often like fitting a square peg in a round hole.

The church does not nurture the Great Commission or discipleship. Invariably, a collectivist environment will not emphasize individual gifts which are the body parts of Christ’s assembly. Read 1Corinthians 12:14-26. Paul’s context in 1Corinthians 12:14-26 is spiritual gifts (see 12:1). To say that the institutional church under emphasizes individual gifts is an understatement, and the results

speak for themselves; it is a body that does not work well. Many who do not have the gift of teaching merely buy an authoritative position in the church through institutional academics (seminary degrees). This is where they learn orthodoxy and polity and regurgitate these traditions of men in the local church.

After the birth of the ekklesia; seemingly, Christians just start meeting without any planning or protocol. They just start, as the youthful say, "doing church" (Acts 2:41-47). Acts 10 and 11 will give you a good perspective on how Jewish the church was—the Gentiles were recognized as part of the same body with much controversy and ado. Once you understand this, it is assumed that New Testament believers simply followed the form of worship that they were already accustomed to. Let's not forget; for many Jews, the birth of Christ's assembly was a major event, but not a conversion for them. Many were already born again before the cross (see John 3). So, what you see in New Testament assemblies was pretty much what was going on in the Jewish synagogues prior to Pentecost.

Therefore, it is no surprise to see the apostolic church ministering at the temple, in synagogues, and in homes. It was a natural transition, and a reflection of what had been happening at Jewish synagogues.

The synagogue is a concept that began sometime prior to the exodus. An Old Testament word search of "elder" makes it abundantly clear that elders led groups of people within Israel. During the exodus, the tabernacle was the primary focus for ritual, and God's people were divided into small groups of learning overseen by elders. Again, a simple word search and observance of how the word is used in the Old Testament makes this abundantly clear. Though these small groups served many critical functions, the primary focus was that of learning. Traditionally, the synagogue is known as Bet Midrash (house of study), Bet Tefillah (house of prayer), and Bet Knesset (house of assembly).¹ Today, many synagogues have floor plans that accommodate these major ideas; a room for assembly, a room for prayer, and a room for study.

This is a longstanding tradition, and consequently, we see the same pattern in the book of Acts. Certainly, the concept of synagogue was institutionalized, and the first century was no exception. The first century synagogue, numbering around 400 in Jerusalem alone, was a combination of politically well-connected and highly structured centers and less formal home assemblies that were strictly that of the laity.² Along with being well connected with state politics, many of the institutionalized synagogues integrated Greek and Roman paganism into Judaism.³ Due to the traditional Jewish mentality in regard to synagogues; i.e., the term “small sanctuary” was used interchangeably between the assembly and the family,⁴ the assemblies were unaffected by these unfortunate integrations if they chose to be, and many were.

Note: Christ’s assembly grows from 120 to 3000 in one day according to Acts 2:41, and in the following verse we read, “And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” Where to put all of these people and what to do with them was of no issue, they merely returned to their existing assemblies, primarily in homes, and continued in the synagogue tradition. Acts 2:46 makes it clear that they met at the temple and had fellowship meals in their homes which would have also included teaching, prayer, the remembrance, and a departure with the singing of a hymn. The so-called last supper would have been very indicative of what went on during these assembly/synagogue meetings.

But also remember, the Jews that made up the apostolic assembly were VERY aware that the temple was temporary. In fact, after the destruction of the temple in 70 AD, Following the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in the year 70 C.E.,

the rabbis decided the home would be the mikdash m’at—”small sanctuary”—a holy place responsible for fostering the family’s spiritual life.⁵

In addition, Christ’s ministry probably produced many solid synagogues prior to Pentecost.

This model continued predominately for the next 200 years, and there is no reason to think that Christ prescribed any alternatives. In fact, this is probably the strongest argument: while it is clear that assemblies were in homes, nowhere is there any indication in the New Testament that this was a transitional model or inferior to an institution.

The assembly model was the norm for at least 200 years and probably closer to 300 years. It works the same way regardless of geographical socioeconomic conditions or political situations: eg., persecution. It would be no surprise that God designed a model that will work well and efficiently under any circumstance. And obviously, an assembly model saves a vast amount of money on infrastructure. Even though the assembly does not seem to be the norm in Western culture, the intended model never ceased to exist. Christ said he would build His assembly and the gates of hell would not prevail against it, and this is of course true. The assembly model flourishes in China and Africa and is making a huge comeback in the West where the institutional church has taken its toll. Some say that home fellowships in America have increased from roughly 2,500 to 30,000 in less than ten years while 1,600 people a day leave the institutional church. The word “movement” is being used more and more.

But how did we get from the assembly to the church? This can be tracked historically and begins with the passing of Peter and Paul who were the most formidable of the apostles. Peter was the “rock” of the church, and Paul wrote 13 of the 27 books that make up the New Testament canon. The passing of these two apostles, one the apostle to Jews and the other the apostle to the Gentiles, created a leadership vacuum.

Also left behind was no shortage of theologians, many of them products of the apostles and their disciples. The most prominent ones are known as the *church fathers*. For example, one church father, Polycarp, was a disciple of the apostle John. These men were very influential leaders of that day and had different ideas regarding **apostolic succession**. Some believed that the apostles laid the foundation of Christ’s assembly and set it in motion without the

need for further apostolic oversight. Others believed that the church was doomed to chaos without doctrinal oversight. However, though the apostles certainly possessed some categories of authority, they made themselves accountable to the general populous of Christians according to Scripture as we have previously noted.

A movement developed that was strongly supported by many of the church fathers; specifically, that the church at Rome should have oversight over all the assemblies, and the church at Rome should be overseen by a single bishop. The first bishop to be named was Linus. It was taught that Linus represented the succession of the apostles. According to one of the church fathers, Irenaeus:

The blessed apostles, then, having founded and built up the Church, committed into the hands of Linus the office of the episcopate (Irenaeus: *Against Heresies* 3:3.3).

Irenaeus also identified Linus as the same who was an associate of Paul mentioned in 2Timothy 4:21. Irenaeus is one of the earliest church fathers known as the Apostolic Church Fathers and was an associate of Polycarp. And yes, Linus represents the beginning of the Catholic Church and its succession of first, authoritative bishops, and then followed by the popes. Irenaeus is indicative of many of the church fathers who ascribed to apostolic succession,⁶ but the focus is on him because he is the earliest church father and most vocal about it:

Wherefore we must obey the priests of the Church who have succession from the Apostles, as we have shown, who, together with succession in the episcopate, have received the certain mark of truth according to the will of the Father; all others, however, are to be suspected, who separated themselves from the principal succession (Irenaeus: *Adversus Haereses*; Book IV, Chapter 26).

Since, however, it would be very tedious, in such a volume as this, to reckon up the successions of all the Churches, we do put to confusion all those who, in whatever manner, whether by an evil self-pleasing, by vainglory, or by blindness and perverse opinion, assemble in unauthorized meetings; [we do this, I say,] by indicating that tradition derived from the apostles, of the very great, the very ancient, and universally known Church founded and organized at Rome by the two most glorious apostles, Peter and Paul; as also [by pointing out] the faith preached to men, which comes down to our time by means of the successions of the bishops. For it is a matter of necessity that every Church should agree with this Church, on account of its pre-eminent authority, that is, the faithful everywhere, inasmuch as the apostolical tradition has been preserved continuously by those [faithful men] who exist everywhere (Irenaeus: *Adversus Haereses*; Book III, Chapter 3).

The primary nemesis of the apostolic church was Gnosticism, and the Gnostics claimed secret oral knowledge that came directly from Christ. The debate concerning authentic canonicity during that time made an argument for the most reliable oral tradition valid. This fed the movement for the church at Rome, and its presiding bishop, to have authority over all the assemblies. The church fathers argued that it was obvious that the likes of Linus and Polycarp possessed the most reliable oral tradition (*The Horizon History of Christianity*: American Heritage Publishing 1964; p. 73).

However, for the most part regarding reality, it was a more “reliable” form of Gnosticism as the church fathers themselves were heavily influenced by Gnostic principles (Ibid pp. 70, 71).⁷

Scripturally, we have the clear mentality of the two primary apostles who knew their departure was near. For Paul, it was a final exhortation to the Ephesian elders, warning them that after his departure wolves would come in among the eldership and attempt

to ravage the flock (Acts 20:17-32). From this passage, it can be argued that Paul is commending the assembly elders to the care of God's flock through the word and not any kind of authority. Indeed, the apostles were already working side by side with the elders on matters of doctrine (Acts 15:1-4). For Peter, it was a final exhortation to the saints as a whole to remind them of important sanctification principles that would give them assurance of salvation (2Peter 1:1-15). This is followed by instruction, to all of the saints, in regard to false teachers. If there is any succession, it is to the congregation of the saints and their elders.

Nevertheless, at this juncture in church history, the tension begins between elder leadership and bishop authority. The church at Rome may have been chosen for this authority because it was the epicenter of the world at that time. In the beginning, its "authority" had to be sold through the intimidation of the church fathers. Gnostic influence fueled the collectivist mentality and the need for orthodoxy. Orthodoxy is the parental explanation to the child. It is the gnosis repackaged in a form that can be followed, albeit not necessarily understood by the great unwashed masses. It is the creeds, confessions, and catechisms. These place the bishop between the parishioner and the word of God. These make the bishop the authority. These make the understandable word of God the gnosis. The first example of such creeds is the Didache dating back to early post apostolic times.

As the intimidation grew, many assemblies and their elders capitulated to bishop authority. Instead of a plurality of elders among the assemblies fulfilling their leadership gift, it became one bishop, one church, one city. These bishops usurped the positions of the assembly elders and were subservient to the bishop of Rome.⁸ However, many other assemblies still retained deep convictions in regard to the apostle's doctrine and Scripture. Under the bishopric, Clement of Rome, a church father himself, this tension came to a head. Apparently, the church at Corinth which by then comprised a vast network of assemblies had responded well to Paul's rebukes and instruction. It is also apparent that Clement was taking it upon himself to appoint bishops to the assemblies based on assumed

authority propagated by most of the church fathers. Corinth responded by expelling the bishops from their assemblies. This is the subject Clement addresses in the letter of 1Clement:

1Clem 44:1 – And our Apostles knew through our Lord Jesus Christ that there would be strife over the name of the bishop’s office.

1Clem 44:2 – For this cause therefore, having received complete foreknowledge, they appointed the aforesaid persons, and afterwards they provided a continuance, that if these should fall asleep, other approved men should succeed to their ministration. Those therefore who were appointed by them, or afterward by other men of repute with the consent of the whole Church, and have ministered unblamably to the flock of Christ in lowliness of mind, peacefully and with all modesty, and for long time have borne a good report with all these men we consider to be unjustly thrust out from their ministration.

The suggestion that these bishops ministered “peacefully” while they were in Corinth couldn’t be exactly right for in other places Clement addresses doctrinal issues (40:2-41:1). 40:2 suggests that the bishops might have been hindering the informality of their meetings: "Now the offerings and ministrations He commanded to be performed with care, and not to be done rashly or in disorder, but at fixed times and seasons." The bishops were expelled via the suggestion of a few in Corinth. Undoubtedly, these were men highly respected by the assemblies before the bishops arrived—probably assembly elders:

1Clem 47:6 – It is shameful, dearly beloved, yes, utterly shameful and unworthy of your conduct in Christ, that it should be reported that the very steadfast and ancient Church of the Corinthians, for the sake of one or two persons, maketh sedition against its presbyters.

It is also possible that these elders didn't take Rome's authority seriously:

1Clem 39:1 – Senseless and stupid and foolish and ignorant men jeer and mock at us, desiring that they themselves should be exalted in their imaginations.

Clement accuses these men, again, probably elders, of being jealous of bishop authority:

1Clem 57:2 – Learn to submit yourselves, laying aside the arrogant and proud stubbornness of your tongue. For it is better for you to be found little in the flock of Christ and to have your name on God's roll, than to be had in exceeding honor and yet be cast out from the hope of Him.

Clement also threatens them with excommunication:

1Clem 57:1 – Ye therefore that laid the foundation of the sedition, submit yourselves unto the presbyters and receive chastisement unto repentance, bending the knees of your heart.

1Clem 57:2 – Learn to submit yourselves, laying aside the arrogant and proud stubbornness of your tongue. For it is better for you to be found little in the flock of Christ and to have your name on God's roll, than to be had in exceeding honor and yet be cast out from the hope of Him.

Clement sent a delegation to Corinth to present the letter and wait on a reply. 63:3 could imply the second step of "church discipline":

1Clem 63:2 – For ye will give us great joy and gladness, if ye render obedience unto the things written by us through the Holy Spirit, and root out the unrighteous anger of your jealousy, according to the entreaty which we have made for peace and concord in this letter.

1Clem 63:3 – And we have also sent faithful and prudent men that have walked among us from youth unto old age unblamably, who shall also be witnesses between you and us.

1Clem 63:4 – And this we have done that ye might know that we have had, and still have, every solicitude that ye should be speedily at peace.

1Clem 65:1 – Now send ye back speedily unto us our messengers Claudius Ephebus and Valerius Bito, together with Fortunatus also, in peace and with joy, to the end that they may the more quickly report the peace and concord which is prayed for and earnestly desired by us, that we also may the more speedily rejoice over your good order.

Though many assemblies were half pregnant with bishop authority, they would draw the line on certain convictions. This held true for more than 100 years after Clement's letter to the Corinthians. In 193 AD, there is another major standoff between the ekklesia and the church. This time, it involves Victor of Rome and the Asian assemblies. One is astounded to learn through the history of this controversy that the assemblies observed the Passover for what could have been 300 years after Pentecost.

Rome's church polity could only be enforced through academic and social caste intimidation. As they sought to appease the Roman government (which was already a state religion) more and more, this meant more and more integration of Rome's paganism into Christian nomenclature. Therefore, Victor insisted that the Asian assemblies replace Passover with Easter:

Internal dissensions during this era affected the Church at Rome. The dispute over the celebration of Easter grew more acute. The Christians at Rome, who had come from the province of Asia, were accustomed to observe Easter on the 14th day of Nisan, whatever day of the week that date might

happen to fall on, just as they had done at home. This difference inevitably led to trouble when it appeared in the Christian community of Rome. Pope Victor decided, therefore, to bring about unity in the observance of the Easter festival and to persuade the Quartodecimans to join in the general practice of the Church.

He wrote, therefore, to Bishop Polycrates of Ephesus and induced the latter to call together the bishops of the province of Asia in order to discuss the matter with them. This was done; but in the letter sent by Polycrates to Pope Victor he declared that he firmly held to the Quartodeciman custom observed by so many celebrated and holy bishops of that region. Victor called a meeting of Italian bishops at Rome, which is the earliest Roman synod known. He also wrote to the leading bishops of the various districts, urging them to call together the bishops of their sections of the country and to take counsel with them on the question of the Easter festival.

Letters came from all sides: from the synod in Palestine, at which Theophilus of Caesarea and Narcissus of Jerusalem presided; from the synod of Pontus over which Palmas as the oldest presided; from the communities in Gaul whose bishop of Irenaeus of Lyons; from the bishops of the Kingdom of Osrhoene; also from individual bishops, as Bakchylus of Corinth. These letters all unanimously reported that Easter was observed on Sunday... Victor, who acted throughout the entire matter as the head of Catholic Christendom, now called upon the bishops of the province of Asia to abandon their custom and to accept the universally prevailing practice of always celebrating Easter on Sunday. In case they would not do this he declared they would be excluded from the fellowship of the Church (The Catholic Encyclopedia).

It can be assumed that there were many assemblies that separated themselves from all the drama and lived separately from Rome and the church fathers. Perhaps they had already been excommunicated at some point. But the following is clear: all assemblies ruled by bishops who refused to exchange the observance of Passover with Easter (a pagan festival) were excommunicated:

Further, Irenaeus states that St. Polycarp, who like the other Asiatics, kept Easter on the fourteenth day of the moon, whatever day of the week that might be, following therein the tradition which he claimed to have derived from St. John the Apostle, came to Rome c. 150 about this very question, but could not be persuaded by Pope Anicetus to relinquish his Quartodeciman observance. Nevertheless he was not debarred from communion with the Roman Church, and St. Irenæus, while condemning the Quartodeciman practice, nevertheless reproaches Pope Victor (c. 189-99) with having excommunicated the Asiatics too precipitately and with not having followed the moderation of his predecessors (The Catholic Encyclopedia).

Eventually, the church at Rome succeeded in being fused with the state during the reign of Constantine. At that point, orthodoxy was enforced by the point of a sword. This is how the institutional church came about, and the Protestantism that came from it is no less institutional.

Like its Roman mother, it came forth from the womb seeking authority in its polity and orthodoxy.⁹ This is the difference between the ekklesia and church: the priesthood of believers versus bishops; gifts versus authority.

Hence, the historical connection between the church and the New Testament as its beginning is a lie that contributes to church being one big lie, all of it. Church history is just that, church history, but it is not ekklesia history. Other than the New Testament, ekklesia

history is very obscure, and there is a reason for that. In 2Thessalonians 2:3 we read,

Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy [falling away] comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction (NASB).

It is at least possible that the takeover of the ekklesia by the church made all but complete when Constantine came to power in the 4th century is that falling away (apostasia). But at any rate, there is little doubt that the church hijacked the identity of ekklesia. Is this the insurrection from within that the apostle Paul warned the Ephesian elders of? More than likely.

¹ George Robinson: *Essential Judaism*; Pocket Books 2000, p. 46.

² Louis H. Feldman and Meyer Reinhold: *Jewish Life and Thought Among Greeks and Romans*; Augsburg Fortress 1996, p. 68

³ Louis H. Feldman and Meyer Reinhold: *Jewish Life and Thought Among Greeks and Romans*; Augsburg Fortress 1996, p. 73.

⁴ Louis H. Feldman and Meyer Reinhold: *Jewish Life and Thought Among Greeks and Romans*; Augsburg Fortress 1996, p. 68.

⁵ *Jewish Home & Community*: My Jewish Learning.com; Online source | <http://goo.gl/N6Udu6>

⁶ Polycarp was a bishop and not an assembly elder. A maxim of another church father, Ignatius was, “Do nothing without the bishop” (*The Horizon History of Christianity*: American Heritage Publishing 1964; p. 74). Tertullian (c. 155 – c. 255) “Though he fought against Gnosticism, he also exalted the authority of the church beyond that allowed by Scripture. He taught that the church’s authority comes through apostolic succession” (Pastor David Cloud: *The Church Fathers, A Door to Rome*; Way of Life .org, Nov/14/12).

⁷ Clement of Alexandria (c. 150 – c. 230) “From 190 to 202, Clement headed the heretical school of Alexandria, Egypt, founded by Pantaenus, which intermingled the Greek philosophy of Plato with Christianity” (Pastor David Cloud: *The Church Fathers, A Door to Rome*; Way of Life .org, Nov/14/12).

⁸ Charles M. Jacobs: *The Story of the Church*; The Muhlenberg Press 1947, pp. 19, 20. | *The Horizon History of Christianity*: American Heritage Publishing 1964; p. 74.

⁹ William Marshall D. D.: *The Principles of the Westminster Confession of Faith Standards Persecuting*; William Oliphant & Co. Edinburgh 1873. “The Protestant Reformers in leaving Rome did not leave all Romanism behind them. In particular, they brought with them the prosecuting principles of Rome, and worked them freely and vigorously in support of the Reformed faith. They changed the Pope but not the popedom... Rightfully and nobly did the Protestant Reformers claim religious liberty for themselves; but they resolutely refused to concede it to others.”

“Do not let yourself believe that faith is a license for irrationality.”

Chapter 4: The Church is Not God's People

“While being fond of saying, ‘The church is the people, not the building,’ the following is the reality...We have been taught to feel holier when we are in ‘the house of God’ and have inherited a pathological dependency upon an edifice to carry out our worship to God.”