
The Invisible Church – “Ecclesia” in Scripture

As we consider the "ecclesia" (or "church") in Scripture, it is important to make a distinction between the "invisible church" and the "visible church."

The "invisible church" is the Body of Christ ... those who Believe in this present age, and who serve God's purpose as the "ecclesia" ... those "called-out" by God to display His grace during this age and the ages to come. The "invisible church" is one unified whole. Denominations do not matter. Memberships, creeds and articles of religion do not matter. Whether one "goes to church" or not, does not matter. Regardless of how the things that are visible may appear, those who Believe are a part of the "invisible church."

The "visible church" is what most people think of when they hear the word "church." It is the church we can see with our eyes ... that meets on Sundays in a building with a steeple ... with pews and sermons and choirs or worship teams. The "visible church" is comprised of those who are members of, or who are active in, a typical, traditional church. These churches may be affiliated with a denomination, or they may be independent. Most have a means to bring people into "membership" if certain conditions are met. Many recite creeds, or adhere to certain articles of religion that represent their specific beliefs.

Some within a "visible church" are actually a part of Christ's "invisible church," whether they recognize this to be the case or not. They are a part of the Body of Christ, and in God's eyes there are no denominational boundaries ... there is one Body.

Others within the "visible church" may not be a part of the "invisible church," as they are not Believers at all.

The point is that there is a distinction. When people talk about "church" today, they recognize only the organized, "visible church." They do **not** consider those outside their "visible church" to be a part of the church at all.

But in God's Word, when we read of the "ecclesia" or "called-out-ones" (commonly translated “church”), God is most certainly talking about His invisible church, His “ecclesia,” where there are no divisions, boundaries or denominations.

The primary goal of many churches today is to “reach the unchurched.” They will say their goal is simply to proclaim the gospel and to announce the salvation that results from the work of Christ. But from the things I have seen and heard in Christian circles, the goal is really to incorporate the "unchurched" into the life of a church.

But there are many different kinds of churches, proclaiming significantly different messages about such things as baptism, holy communion, worship, missions, salvation, heaven and hell, lifestyles and the use of money. They cannot all be correct ... so which ones are correct, and which are in error? How do we end the confusion being caused by so many well-meaning Christians who think that they are “reaching out” as they feel mandated by Scripture, but who are instead sowing seeds of confusion?

When most people think of “church,” the images they see come from the traditions of men, and not from the Word of God. What is worship? When should the church assemble? What should the church do when it does assemble? What things should the church be doing? Most will have an opinion on these questions, but the responses will vary greatly, and they will be based heavily on tradition.

Some will even go so far as to say theirs is a “New Testament Church,” claiming to be patterned after the church as found in Scripture, generally the book of Acts. But even here there are many different variations, due to different interpretations of Scripture.

Our purpose here will be to take a close look at the “church” as described in the Word of God. To avoid confusion, from this point on I will refer to the “invisible church” as the “ecclesia,” and the “visible church” as “the church.”

“ECCLESIA”

The Greek word that is translated “church” in most modern English Bible translations is “ecclesia.” A very simplistic view of Scripture will simply inventory every instance where the word “ecclesia” is found, thus forming a biblical picture of “the church.”

But there are problems with this approach, because it is clear that the word “ecclesia” does not always mean the same thing.

“Ecclesia” comes from the Greek:

“ek” = out

“klesia” = called

It simply means those individuals who are “called-out” from a larger group of individuals. As we will see, when “ecclesia” is used in Scripture it is not always talking about the same group of people. We cannot, therefore, simply look at every instance where “ecclesia” is used to build our definition for “the church.”

CASES WHERE “ECCLESIA” CANNOT MEAN “CHURCH”

If we look at Acts 19:32 we will see that the out-called group that is referred to as “ecclesia” is an unruly mob that has formed in Ephesus. Here the NIV and KJV use the translation “assembly” for “ecclesia,” recognizing that it cannot mean “church.”

Likewise in Acts 19:39 the out-called group that is referred to as “ecclesia” is a “legal assembly,” a convening of the proper group necessary to hear both sides of a dispute and make a lawful decision. Again the NIV and KJV use the translation “assembly” in this case.

In Acts 7:38 the word “ecclesia” is used when referring to a gathering in Moses’ day, many years before “the church” of today was initiated by God. Here also the NIV chooses the translation “assembly,” although the KJV uses “church.”

We see from these passages that “ecclesia” is simply an “out-called” group, but it is not always the same group. It is sometimes a group of people called-out by God (Acts 7:38), sometimes a legal assembly (Acts 19:39) and sometimes an unruly mob (Acts 19:32).

MIXING TOGETHER THINGS THAT ARE DIFFERENT

So ... the modern English translators have been forced to use a word other than “church” when translating “ecclesia” in these passages. But in most other cases, since they believe the word “church” will fit, the word “church” is used. But this is not just a translation ... it is an interpretation. It is saying to the reader, “In all other instances where the word “ecclesia” is found, it means the same thing, and we will use the word church.” But is this correct?

Since we have seen that “ecclesia” clearly refers to different groups of “out-called” people in some passages, can we automatically assume that wherever “ecclesia” seems to talk about people God has chosen for Himself to accomplish His purposes, it is always the same group of people, in every age?

“ON THIS ROCK I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH”

Most Bible teachers point to Matthew 16:18 as Jesus’ promise to form “the church.”

“... on this rock will I be building My ecclesia, and the gates of the unseen shall not be prevailing against it. I will be giving you the keys of the kingdom of the heavens ...”

Many churches use this passage as the beginning of an “apostolic succession” they claim is to be carried on today. Since Jesus spoke these words to Peter, Peter is seen as the first in a long line of succession of church leaders. But let’s think this thru!

Jesus is saying, “I shall be building My called-out ones.” But up until this time in Jesus’ ministry, to qualify as a “called-out” one you must be Jewish. Jesus’ ministry went exclusively to the Jews. Furthermore, the message being proclaimed by Jesus was, “Repent, the kingdom is near.” He is referring to the Jewish kingdom that existed in David’s day, and which will one day be restored unto Israel.

And as a part of Jesus’ word to Peter in Matthew 16:18, He says: “I will be giving you the keys of the kingdom of the heavens.”

A thorough study of Matthew will show us that Jesus was proclaiming the kingdom of the heavens which was **to come upon the earth**. Had the Jews received this message, and had they received their king, the kingdom would have come upon the earth. But they rejected the kingdom, and they crucified their king. Jesus knew this was coming, and as He spoke to Peter He was preparing Peter to proclaim the same kingdom, to come upon the earth, after the crucifixion and resurrection.

This is exactly what Peter and the other apostles did, as we read the first half of Acts. Read closely and you will see that the ministry of the Twelve apostles in Acts is going **to the Jews**, just as was the case during Jesus' ministry.

So we ask ourselves ... what was the ecclesia (the out-called) that Jesus was talking about in Matthew 16:18, and what was the ecclesia (the out-called) that was being gathered throughout most of Acts? The ecclesia here was comprised of:

1. Jewish believers in Jesus Christ, called out from the "sheep of Israel"
2. Their expectation: The restored kingdom to come upon the earth
3. The message to this group: "Repent, and Christ Jesus will return, and all will be restored (Acts 3:19ff)

Those of us who are Gentiles have no place in this ecclesia! Furthermore, when the kingdom proclamation was continually rejected by the Jews, and then finally rejected in Acts 28:

1. The out-called are now a different group ... Jews & Gentiles alike
2. The expectation: The heavenly realm, not upon the earth
3. The message is no longer the kingdom, but: "In Christ, God was conciliating the world to Himself, not reckoning their offenses to them ... We are, then, ambassadors for Christ, as God entreating through us. We are beseeching for Christ's sake, 'Be conciliated to God!'" (2 Corinthians 5:19-21)

PAUL'S WRITINGS

Paul was God's chosen instrument to gather the ecclesia, or "out-called" of Gentiles. Prior to Paul's calling, the Twelve apostles were going only to the lost sheep of Israel. Paul points out in Galatians 2:7

"... I have been entrusted with the evangel of the Uncircumcision, according as Peter of the Circumcision ..."

Since the ecclesia that Paul is addressing (Gentiles and Jews) was different from the ecclesia that Peter is addressing (Jews only), we must pay close attention when we study to look for differences. We cannot mix together things that are different, or we will only cause confusion.

In the final chapter of "The Church Epistles" by E. W. Bullinger (1905), as Bullinger references the Parable of the Tower in Luke 14:28-30, we read:

"To Israel it proclaimed the Lord Jesus as the King, by His apostles as the heralds

of His authority and power; but now to the Gentiles, afar off, the ministers of the Gospel are ambassadors of Christ, desiring His enemies to be reconciled to God.

Those, therefore, who in any sense lay claim to the figment of “Apostolic Succession,” and those also who, while they reject it, yet ignorantly assume the continuation of the apostolic ministry (after the authority, and power, and sign-gifts have alike ceased), are trying to build this Tower, but are unable to finish it ... Far worse, this building results in another tower of Babel – for confusion is the meaning of its name, and confusion is what we see everywhere around us.”

The great lesson for us lies in the fact that the apostasy of Christendom began in the departure from the teaching committed to Paul concerning “The Mystery,” or the great Secret concerning the Church of God as the Body of Christ.”

Those churches today that continue the ministry and the message of the Twelve apostles, the “Circumcision Evangel,” are proclaiming a message that is no longer valid today, and that does not pertain to the out-called of Gentiles & Jews that are now called to be the ecclesia, the Body of Christ.

It takes a careful study of God’s Word to “correctly divide” things that are different within Scripture, instead of mixing them together and creating confusion.

“Endeavor to present yourself to God, qualified, an unashamed worker, correctly partitioning the word of truth.” (2 Timothy 2:15)

The ecclesia today should be patterned after Paul’s ministry, for he was chosen as the apostle to the Gentiles, and to bear the evangel of the Uncircumcized. But most traditional churches today are patterned more after Peter’s ministry.

Now Peter was a great man, and he was one of the Twelve chosen by Jesus ... but he was chosen for the purpose of proclaiming the “kingdom evangel” to the sheep of Israel. How can we appropriately proclaim this kingdom which is to come upon the earth, when the kingdom belongs to Israel? How can the kingdom be “restored,” as the prophets have prophesied, to a group of people who never had the kingdom to start with? Even in Revelation, when Christ returns, we see God in the final ages restoring the kingdom to Israel, and dealing with the nations thru Israel.

Many today are confusing things by substituting “the church” in place of Israel, claiming the future kingdom to come upon the earth as their own. But we have no right to do so. We are attempting to steal things that do not belong to us, and instead of preaching the correct gospel we are creating confusion as we mix the “kingdom evangel” with the “evangel of grace” that was given to Paul and intended for the Body of Christ.

There is great danger in mixing together the “Circumcision Evangel” of Peter with the “Uncircumcision Evangel” of Paul. Both evangels came from God, but they are appropriate to different groups of people in different times. We live in a day when God has temporarily set aside Israel, and the “kingdom evangel” is not appropriate for this time. God is not now dealing with Israel as He had in the past, and as He will

again in the future. We live in a day when God is dealing with mankind in a different way ... where there are no barriers between Jew and Gentile ... where the coming kingdom is not being proclaimed but instead conciliation and peace with God ... where we are not born again as the nation of Israel was called to be, but we are entirely new creations.

We create confusion when we preach the message Peter preached, or when we look to Peter to discern the purpose of the ecclesia in this present day. We must look instead to Paul, whose message and model are for the current day while Israel is temporarily set aside, as Christ is gathering His Body to display the fullness of the grace of God.

CONSIDERING THE “FORM” OF THE ECCLESIA IN GOD’S WORD

Where and when does the church meet? What does the church do when it meets?

As we consider the many different churches in America today, we observe:

1. Most gather at least weekly, on “the sabbath” (some say this is Sunday, some Saturday)
2. Most have their own church building
3. Many teach that tithing is commanded
4. Great emphasis is placed on “going to church”

All of this is quite Jewish in form.

When God chose Israel as His people (His “called-out ones”) He commanded them to keep the sabbath. This was a part of the law they were under ... it is not a part of the grace that we are under. Paul wrote to the ecclesia at Rome:

“One, indeed, is deciding for one day rather than another day, yet one is deciding for every day. Let each one be fully assured in his own mind.” (Romans 14:5).

We may choose to set aside a specific day, or not ... but the ecclesia today is not **required** to keep the “sabbath” as was Israel.

On the sabbath, Israel congregated at the place designated for this purpose ... the Tabernacle, the Temple, or the synagogue. In the early part of Acts, when the apostles took the evangel of the kingdom to the Jews, we see the ecclesia continuing to go to the synagogues. But in Paul’s writings, when the evangel of grace is going to Gentile and Jew alike, we most often hear of the ecclesia meeting in homes. No separate building is mentioned that would parallel the synagogue of the Jews.

Tithing was a part of the Jewish law; to support the system of priests and the Temple. But today we are not under the law. Instead, as Paul writes:

“Each according as he has proposed in his heart, not sorrowfully, nor of compulsion, for the gleeful giver is loved by God.” (2 Corinthians 9:7)

As we give gleefully, our giving need not be to support a church, as some might have us believe, and our gleeful giving may not always be tax deductible. Each of us is convicted individually, as God lays it upon our heart, as to how and where we give in furthering the work entrusted by God to His ecclesia.

And nowhere in Paul's writings do we see a mandate to be **GOING** to church. Instead the Scriptures show us what it means to **BE** the ecclesia, living our lives wherever we may be as Christ's Ambassadors.

If we want to consider the Scriptural model given to us for the ecclesia, we cannot simply blend together the various forms from different eras or administrations. To mix together the Jewish ecclesia from the Old Testament or during the time the kingdom was being heralded to the Jews, with the ecclesia being out-called as Paul proclaimed the evangel of grace, will create confusion; just as mixing together the law and grace creates confusion.

Does all of this mean that "The Church" of the 21st century is to be condemned for observing forms not specifically given in Scripture? As we read Paul's writings, we observe an ecclesia with some form and organization, but which is largely informal. But Paul would also say:

"I became to the Jews as a Jew, that I should be gaining Jews; to those under law as under law ... To all have I become all, that I should undoubtedly be savings some."
(1 Corinthians 9:20-23)

Paul would not condemn the various forms used by the church today. But he would condemn those churches that:

1. Insist that the forms and church organization being observed are the only correct ways being prescribed by God
2. Create disunity with other Believers due to adherence to certain forms or organization
3. Create stumbling blocks for others due to adherence to certain forms or organization
4. Create disunity by insisting upon certain outward rituals or observances as the only correct way to worship or serve God
5. Proclaim an incorrect message, mixing together things that are different in God's Word (as did the Judaizers who contended with Paul)

The various forms employed by churches today are not necessarily wrong, if they are used to further the purpose God has for the ecclesia. As Paul would become all things to all people toward the end that some might be saved thru his ministry ... so also the ecclesia today can use many different forms to reach many different kinds of people, toward the end that some might be saved thru the ministry.

The problem is when forms become non-negotiable and points of dissention. When those not participating in some specific church are criticized, condemned or judged, there is no difference from what the

Pharisees once did in Jesus' day when the traditions of men were held equally as high, if not higher, than the Word of God.

I like what Thomas Talbot has to say about the churches of today in his book, "The Inescapable Love of God."

"I am inclined, then, to draw a relatively sharp distinction between the Christian faith, on the one hand, and the organized Christian church, on the other, and I am quite prepared to see the latter as, more often than not, an enemy of the former. Not that the organized Christian church is any worse than other human institutions; on the whole, it is just no better." (page 33)

THE GENTILE ECCLESIA

Let us now look at the ecclesia that existed as Paul proclaimed the evangel of grace to Gentile and Jew alike.

"Ecclesia" when used in the singular, and when not further defined, will refer to the single, universal ecclesia worldwide.

"Ecclesias" in the plural denotes the various individual gatherings of the ecclesia.

He came thru Syria & Cilicia, establishing the ecclesias (Acts 15:41)
The ecclesias of the nations (Romans 16:4)
All the ecclesias of Christ are greeting you (Romans 16:16)
All the ecclesias of the saints (1 Corinthians 14:33)

Sometimes a specific part of the ecclesia is referred to:

The ecclesia in Cenchrea (Romans 16:1)
The ecclesia of God which is in Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:2 and 2 Corinthians 1:1)
The Laodicean ecclesia (Colossians 4:16)
The ecclesia in Ephesus (Revelation 2:1)

An ecclesia was sometimes related to a particular household, implying that the ecclesia met in that household.

The ecclesia of Prisca & Aquila's house (Romans 16:5 and 1 Corinthians 16:19)
Nympha and the ecclesia at her home (Colossians 4:15)
The ecclesia of Archippus' house (Philemon 2)

There could be multiple ecclesias within the same region.

The ecclesias of Galatia (1 Corinthians 16:1)
The ecclesias of Macedonia (2 Corinthians 8:1)

The ecclesias of God which are in Christ Jesus in Judea (1 Thessalonians 2:14)

THE ORGANIZATION OF THE ECCLESIAS

Churches today place great emphasis on structure and position. We see priests, bishops, elders, deacons, superintendents, ordination rituals and varying levels of structure and bureaucracy. But most of these things stem from the traditions of men. Churches may believe these things come directly from Scripture, but the many differing forms employed show us very clearly that there is great difference of opinion as to how Scripture is to be interpreted in these areas.

The ecclesia we see in Scripture has some organization, but it is highly informal and non-bureaucratic. There is no formal "ordination" of clergy members ... just a simple recognition of God's graces upon one who is selected by the ecclesia to lead.

"Now, selecting elders for them according to the ecclesia, praying with fastings, they committed them to the Lord in Whom they had believed." (Acts 14:23)

And while there are leaders within the ecclesia, there is nothing like the levels of authority and institutional bureaucracy we find within "the church" today.

The individual gatherings of the ecclesia had one or more designated "elder." We also see these ecclesias selecting, praying or laying hands on those commissioned to undertake a specific mission.

In 2 Corinthians 8:18 the ecclesias collectively "selected" a brother to travel with Paul.

CHRIST IS THE HEAD

As to the structure within the ecclesia, first and foremost ...

"Christ is the head of the ecclesia, and the ecclesia is subject to Christ" (Ephesians 5:23-24).

THE BODY OF CHRIST

Paul describes the ecclesia as the "body of Christ" (1 Corinthians 12:27), with individual members of the body chosen and gifted to play a particular role.

ELDERS

"Elders" (presbuteron) were chosen as leaders within the ecclesia (Acts 14:23). This term is used in Scripture to refer to one who is older in age or position. This is not a term unique to the ecclesia, as there were also elders within the Jewish leadership (Mark 14:43).

When Paul travelled he might call together just the elders of the ecclesia (Acts 20:17), as the representatives or leaders of the larger group.

We get a glimpse of the role of the elders in Acts 20:28 when Paul refers to them as “supervisors” (episkopos) who are to be “shepherding” the ecclesia of God.

In 1 Peter 5:1-4 we see Peter considering himself alongside the other elders within the ecclesia. He also helps to bring definition to the position of elder. We recognize that Peter represents the Jewish ecclesia, being called together in response to the Circumcision evangel, but the **form** and **organization** appear to be very similar to the ecclesias gathered by Paul.

"The elders, then, among you I am entreating (who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ...),

"Shepherd the flocklet of God among you, supervising, not of compulsion, but voluntarily, according to God; nor yet avariciously, but eagerly; nor yet as lording it over the allotments, but becoming models for the flocklet, and, when the Chief Shepherd is manifested, you shall be requited with an unfading wreath of glory."

As a leader within the ecclesia, an elder is to shepherd, lead and serve as a model; and is not to exercise power or lord his authority over the ecclesia.

"EPISKOPOS" ... SUPERVISOR

The Greek "episkopos" is often translated "bishop" and is typically a different rank within the hierarchy of "the church." But Scripture does not lend credence to the creation of this hierarchy. Instead we see a very simple structure, with the ecclesia being led by "elders" who have been called by God to lead, to shepherd, to supervise, to care for, and to serve as a model for the ecclesia.

It does not appear in Scripture that "episkopos" (supervisor) is a different position from that of "elder." Making this distinction, and adding to the bureaucratic structure of the church, is a tradition of men, and not a distinction made in Scripture.

Paul described certain qualifications for those who would supervise within the ecclesia:

“If anyone is not aware how to provide over his own household, how will he care for the ecclesia of God.” (1 Timothy 3:2ff)

So we see that at least a part of the role of a “supervisor” or “elder” would be to “care for” (or shepherd) the ecclesia.

Titus 1:7 tells us

"The supervisor must be unimpeachable as an administrator of God..."

"Administrator" is often translated "steward," or one who cares for things belonging to another. In this case it is left to the leaders within the ecclesia to care for the interests of God.

"DIAKONOS" -- DEACONS

The Greek "diakonos" is generally translated "deacon," and speaks of one who is in a servant capacity. In Paul's introduction to his Philippian letter (1:1) he appears to differentiate between those who are elders and those who are servants (diakonos).

But "diakonos" seems to speak more of a function than of an official position within the ecclesia.

"There are apportionments of services..." (diakonion) -- 1 Corinthians 12:5

"Martha is serving..." (diakonian) -- Luke 10:40

And when the Hellenists complained that they were not getting their daily dispensation, the apostles chose seven men to serve (diakonein) -- Acts 6:2

SUMMARY OF THE ORGANIZATION WITHIN THE ECCLESIA

So while we see organization and leadership within the ecclesias, we make the following observations as we compare what we see in Scripture with "The Church" of today.

- a. Not a large bureaucratic institution, but quite simple in structure
- b. Informality
- c. Meeting in homes, as opposed to specially designated buildings
- d. No denominations
- e. No creeds or membership

Let us take a look at some other issues relating to church organization.

MEMBERSHIP

There is nothing in Scripture that speaks of "membership" in a church. An individual is automatically a part of the ecclesia when, through faith, he believes. He is not thereafter required to do, or to sign, anything to become a member. Some may point to baptism as a required Biblical initiation, but water Baptism was a part of the Jewish "kingdom administration." As the kingdom was continually rejected, and as Paul began going directly to the Gentiles proclaiming his evangel of grace, water baptism faded. Paul proclaimed in 1 Corinthians 1:17

"Christ does not commission me to be baptizing, but to be bringing the evangel..."

Physical circumcision was a requirement of the Jewish law, but this later gave way to spiritual circumcision. Likewise water baptism served its purpose, but was later superseded by a much more important baptism ... the baptism of the spirit.

CREEDS & ORTHODOXY

Some today place great emphasis upon Creeds, Articles of Religion and orthodoxy, but it must be remembered that these are simply the opinions of men as to the meaning of God's Word. Decisions were made by men as to the correct position in various matters, but whether these decisions were correct or not is another matter.

Many believe that orthodoxy protects against heresy, but this is only true if orthodoxy is 100% correct on all points. But if errors were made when men established what is today the orthodox position, then orthodoxy, with its Creeds and Articles of Religion, will simply preserve error.

It is important to remember that orthodoxy is not truth as opposed to error. It is simply the majority opinion held by "the church."

MONEY

The tithe was a requirement of the Jewish law, but being freed from the law Paul encouraged giving that was not of compulsion (2 Corinthians 9:7). The Believer was encouraged to be a gleeful giver.

In Acts 2:41 we read that the ecclesia, which was then entirely Jewish, had all things in common, and even disposed of their properties and divided the proceeds if there were needs. But the ecclesia Paul addressed were spread about, with many miles between. Still Paul advocated a sharing of finances when a need existed within the ecclesia, and he facilitated a collection when deemed appropriate.

GOING TO CHURCH

As we noted earlier, those within "the church" organization stress great importance on **GOING** to church or being a part of the life of their organization. An oft-quoted passage in making this point is Hebrews 10:25

"And we may be considering one another to incite to love and ideal acts, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves, according as the custom of some is, but entreating, and so much rather as you are observing the day drawing near."

There is without question great benefit in meeting together with others in the ecclesia. There are models throughout Scripture of the ecclesia meeting together. But we are not under the law that requires us to meet at a specific place or at specific times. Those of the Jewish ecclesia, early in the book of Acts, continued to go to the synagogues as they were accustomed to doing, and to proclaim Christ. But this was just a **part** of their life, for they assembled on a daily basis ... sharing meals, ministering to the needs of one another, meeting in homes, and living as a community of believers ... on a daily basis.

This continued when the ecclesia gathered by Paul's ministry, and made up of Gentile and Jew alike, met in homes.

The problem is that "the church" today would say that those not regularly going to or active in a "visible church" are not meeting together as the Scriptures call for Believers to do. But they will often place so much emphasis on **GOING** to church that they fail to recognize that they **ARE** the church, seven days a week, wherever they happen to be.

Meeting together with other Believers, wherever and whenever this happens, is important as we cause one another to consider how we might "incite to love and ideal acts" (Hebrews 10:25). But of greater importance is that we understand that we **ARE** the ecclesia, and Christ's Ambassadors, in all places and at all times.

"For Christ, then, are we ambassadors, as of God entreating through us. We are beseeching for Christ's sake, 'Be conciliated to God!'" For the One not knowing sin, He makes to be a sin offering for our sakes that we may be becoming God's righteousness in Him." (2 Corinthians 5:20-21)

A FAMILY

Paul tells the Ephesians that they "belong to God's family" (Ephesians 2:20).

Many within "the church" may call one another brother or sister, but they are most certainly not acting as if they really believed this to be the case.

God is our Heavenly Father, and we are His children. Within the ecclesia, then, we are brothers and sisters within a family. It is not so important that we **CALL** each other "brother" or "sister," but it is important that we live our lives as if we really believed this to be true.

Family members love one another, spend time together, pray for one another, and meet needs within the family. This is what we see modeled in the ecclesia found in Scripture.

If we can live our lives together in this fashion .. as as "functional family" ... being Christ's Ambassador and proclaiming the evangel would be a natural thing. No courses in evangelism would be necessary. The ecclesia would be such an exciting thing that it would be impossible to prevent personal evangelism, or "ambassadorship," from taking place.

UNITY

Within the ecclesia we have allowed the many different denominations that exist today to divide. Paul sought to bring unity to the ecclesia:

"Be attuned to the same mind and to the same opinion" (1 Corinthians 1:10)

Of course there will be differences of interpretation as we come to God's Word, but these differences should be worked thru openly as we strive to become "attuned to the same mind and to the same opinion." The church today will instead use Creeds and Articles of Religion to stifle discussion, claiming to do so to preserve unity, while in fact they create division and preserve error.

We must also realize that none of us has a full understanding of the meaning and interpretation of God's Word, as evidenced by the many different denominations and individual churches that differ from one another. We must remember that God is patient with us (2 Peter 3:9), and we are called to be patient with others (1 Thessalonians 5:15). Love is patient (1 Corinthians 13:4), and love is the most important message proclaimed throughout the Word of God.

REFORM ... NOT TEAR DOWN

As our observations concerning "the church" draw to a close, it must be stressed that I do not advocate tearing down all churches that are active today. Most certainly the ecclesia is operating within the form of "the church" in many instances.

I am suggesting that we remove the impenetrable force field that protects "orthodoxy," denominations, and church bureaucracies that are present today ... and that prevent error from being removed. I advocate **reform**, and not destruction, of "the church" as it exists today.

Certainly many good works are being done by "the church," as the ecclesia is called to do.

"As we have occasion, we are working for the good of all, yet specially for the family of faith." (Galatians 6:10)

And thru "the church," Christ is proclaimed as Saviour.

But **reform** is needed, to eliminate error from the evangel being proclaimed ... so that the love and wisdom of God, and the effectiveness of Christ's work upon the Cross is fully proclaimed.

And the denominational and other boundaries that divide the Body of Christ must be removed. We are one Body ... one ecclesia. Our loyalty is not to Wesley, or Luther, or Calvin, or Moody, or Finney (see 1 Corinthians 3:4ff). These were great men who did much to further the work of God in their day, but they were not infallible ... and their differences now divide us into denominations and schools of thought that many are not willing to question.

As a **reformer** I encourage the ecclesia to return to the pure Word of God, correctly translated and carefully interpreted. In short, **reform** is needed so that we can become the "ecclesia" that God calls us to be.

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING ... LOVE

As we conclude our thoughts, we must remember that the most important thing is **LOVE**.

Jesus pointed out that love was the culmination of the law ... the most important command. He said that His disciples would be recognized by their love (John 13:35).

Paul writes that of all things, the greatest is love (1 Corinthians 13). Despite all of the spiritual endowments we might have manifest in our lives, if we have not love we have nothing.

This is why the writer of Hebrews points out the reason for meeting together is, at least in part, "to incite to love and ideal acts" (Hebrews 10:25).

Within the ecclesia we see many visible boundaries keeping us apart. Paul's charge was:

"to bring the evangel of the untraceable riches of Christ to the nations, and to **enlighten** all as to what is the administration of the secret, which has been concealed from the eons in God, Who creates all, that now may be made known to the sovereignties and the authorities among the celestials, through the ecclesia, the multifarious wisdom of God ..." (Ephesians 3:8-12)

In Paul's day some within the ecclesia became more enlightened than others. And as we work thru differences in understanding and enlightenment, we are to strive for unity and remember that the thing of most importance is love.