

## CHAPTER II

**JESUS AND THE CHURCH**

Now we turn to the task of evaluating the modern church in the light of the teaching of Jesus. He was involved in calling out from the world a people for himself. They were to form associations for mutual fellowship and encouragement; indeed the negative response he expected from the world would force them to bond so as to withstand the opposition. The primary responsibility of the individuals in this association of "called out" people was, and is, to be his witnesses, to "Preach the Gospel to every creature." But Jesus was not concerned in the least as to what to name this human entity, this gathering of God's children he was and is calling out of the world to follow him. He referred to this "called out gathering" in a various ways, but one way, as indicated above, was to designate them, at least in their final assemblage to stand before him, as the *ekklesia*.

**Jesus' Use of *ekklesia***

As I have already stated, there are two instances where this word appears in Jesus' utterances. In the first instance, when he blessed Peter after his good confession and said,

. . . on this rock I will build my *ekklesia* (Matthew 16:17,18),

he may simply have acknowledged his intention to call out a growing body of persons from the world, individuals knit together in love and founded upon himself and the confession of their faith in him as the Messiah, the Son of the living God. Contrary to the Roman Catholic interpretation, this reference does not imply that the Christian *ekklesia* was to be founded on Peter as the confessing apostle. The stonemasons typically selected a site consisting of a large rock surface for a foundation. Then, upon that, they added the building blocks, smaller stones joined together with mortar and built up into a great building. In similar manner, Jesus the Christ is building up his "assembly," by setting them upon the foundation rock. This rock is Jesus himself, and also our good confession of him as the Christ. He sets us individually upon the rock and joins us with the mortar of love and of trust in his Holy Word. But he gave no distinctive name to this structure. He chose *ekklesia*, a word that was in common use to define numerous types of gatherings, all defined as being "assembled" or "called out" or "congregated" from a large population.

It is very significant that he gave no attention to defining his followers by the application of a unique name that would distinguish them from all others. Most of us, if we were concerned with creating an organized body that would likely survive us and carry on our work in the world, would be tempted to give much thought to selecting a distinctive name. We would want something that sounds impressive and that would, to some degree, define its purpose and remind the world that we were charter members. This would seem to be motivated by at least two things, both of which Jesus was devoid. One is pride, the tendency to exalt ourselves, to want to leave one's mark on the world. The other is closely associated with this, and is the deep seated belief that this world is a place of great inherent value and significance. I mean that if we looked upon the world as if it were a society of criminals, we would not be so inclined to want to leave our mark upon it. So Jesus, devoid of human pride and unconcerned about how this world of transgressors might view

## JESUS AND THE CHURCH

him in the long run – indeed, thoroughly comfortable with the fact that the world was to hate him and his followers, gave no attention to the selection of a name by which to distinguish us. If we are true to our calling, the distinction is always there, and the name by which we are called is of no concern.

Jesus' other utilization of *ekklesia* to define his followers has a somewhat different focus (Matthew 18:15-17). Here, he clearly used it to define some larger body. In the first instance, if your brother sins against you, go to him alone, taking no one with you, and seek to reason with him. If he hears you and responds appropriately, you have gained your brother. However, if he refuses to acknowledge his fault, then expand the action. Take two or three others with you and go to him a second time. If he hears you and responds appropriately, you have gained your brother. But if he continues to harden his heart, then take the matter to the *ekklesia*, the larger group consisting of many others, having the "two or three" present to witness to his intransigence. If he still does not hear you, let him be to you, said Jesus, "as a Gentile and a tax collector." Look again at the order: first, go alone; then take two or three others; finally, take them with you to the *ekklesia*. The *ekklesia* seems to have no more significance than to imply the gathering of a progressively larger group at a local site. Or does it?

Wait! Are we about to miss something? Here, in Jesus' *ekklesia*, there are no Gentiles or tax collectors! Else, why would Jesus have said to them, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector? Furthermore, it is clear that the common Jewish attitude towards Gentiles and tax collectors must in this context be acceptable to Jesus, otherwise how could he have recommended, even commanded, it to his disciples?

I conclude, therefore, that in the mind of Jesus this *ekklesia* must refer to the synagogue, which remained a part of the lives of Jesus and his disciples, and where Gentiles and tax collectors were hardly honored. The synagogue consisted of Jews, to whom Gentiles (except God-fearers) and tax collectors (publicans) had no true knowledge of God and were therefore to be avoided. Jesus was giving instructions that were immediately authoritative, but no church (as we know it) yet existed. It would seem, therefore, that he could not have been indicating that they should take the matter before the church, as we understand that word. If so, it is also to be distinguished from that *ekklesia* that he would build upon the foundation of the Good Confession. Therefore it is highly unlikely that anything resembling a unique assemblage of Christian disciples was indicated by this use of *ekklesia*.

Nor does this incident imply that Jesus hated, or despised, Gentiles and tax collectors. Everyone is aware of his love and concern for these categories of people, and of his willingness to accept them, on his terms, as his disciples. Nevertheless they were excluded from the synagogue (except for God-fearers and full converts), which is surely what Jesus is here indicating. Yes, Jesus has here instructed his disciples to take the matter before the Jewish synagogue! There remains, then, only one reference to the *ekklesia* that could possibly imply a unique assemblage of disciples, the one in which he promised to build it upon the foundation of the Good Confession, and which is best interpreted, I believe, to mean the assemblage of the saints to stand before him at the last day. But the fact that Jesus used *ekklesia* only twice in the Gospels, of which one use applied specifically to the synagogue of the Jews and the other to an entity that he would build suggests that his *ekklesia*, the one he would build, also bore enough similarity to the synagogue to merit also being identified as such. What he proposed to build on the grounds of Peter's Good Confession may be his synagogue, a synagogue of Jews distinguished from other Jews only by their confession of and belief in Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God. This being what he implied by one use of *ekklesia*, it is likely that this was his primary meaning in the other of the two uses. The *ekklesia* before which one is to lodge one's complaint against an offending brother is, then, the synagogue. But as indicated, he may also have meant to specify the assembly of his sheep, called out from the world to stand before him at the last day.

This is important because he always chose his words carefully, using an economy of words, to

## PAUL: THE STRANGER

express precisely his ideas. It follows that Jesus never, in all the New Testament record, made reference to a Gentile institution to be called "the church," and furthermore, institutions that we call "church" are nowhere defined in the Gospels. Instead, he used completely different terminology when referring to the associations of his disciples throughout the world. We will come back to this below. It also follows, since Jesus made no specific provision for the institution of the church distinct from the synagogue, that he laid no plans for founding that Gentile institution we call the church.

Grant, then, that the name is not important (although the method of its derivation may be very significant). Grant also that Jesus gave no attention to the selection of a distinctive name for the body of his disciples, either locally or world-wide; that the name that is now used in the English speaking world to describe their assemblages, *church*, is a name Jesus is not recorded to have uttered; and that the name used throughout the New Testament to identify the assemblage of his followers, *ekklesia*, is a non-specific name that applied to many entities. These included rioting mobs and the synagogue. Then also grant that Jesus himself only used it twice in the Gospel record, to apply either to the assemblage of the saints at the last day or to the body of believers in the world in one case where it almost certainly was in his mind a synagogue, and to definitely apply to the synagogue in the other.

## Provisions for the Ecclesia

Did he then make no provision for the perpetuation of his movement through the establishment and continuation of an institution defined as the body, or assemblage, of his disciples throughout the world and apart from Judaism? Yes. What follows is an effort to define these provisions and put them in perspective. If we do this properly, we should have a meter stick by which to evaluate the qualifications of what men call "church" to merit its designation as the genuine body of the disciples of Christ in the world. Or, alternatively, we may find that there is no body so qualified.

There are at least four different things to be examined here. They are

- (1) The synagogue;
- (2) The perpetuation of the Word in the world;
- (3) The basis of unity of the disciples; and
- (4) The administrative structure, or hierarchy.

### 1) The Synagogue

Jesus' attitude toward this institution is consistent with his general approach to all institutions of this world: he accepted it as he found it and gave no instructions to change anything. He expected that his disciples would, after his departure, maintain a continuing relationship with the Jewish institutions. He was himself establishing a new (Jewish) synagogue of disciples. He set an example for them in frequent appearances at the synagogue. At his home city of Nazareth, he first entered into the synagogue and taught the people. It was his custom, the evangelists tell us (Luke 4:16), to attend on the Sabbath Day, and that is where he first declared himself. Likewise, the apostles went first to preach the Word in the synagogues of the cities they visited in the course of their missionary journeys. They were seldom well received, just as the message of Jesus was not well received in the synagogue at Nazareth. Jesus knew before hand that this would be the response of the synagogues, and said so. The following quotations are illustrative of his expectations:

## JESUS AND THE CHURCH

. . . they will scourge you in their synagogues (Matthew 10:17).

. . . (some) ye shall scourge in your synagogues (Matthew 23:34).

And when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not be anxious how or what you are to answer or what you are to say . . . (Luke 12:11).

. . . they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons . . . (Luke 21:12).

. . . they shall put you out of the synagogues . . . (John 16:2).

Jesus expected the disciples to follow his example by going first to the synagogue to preach the message. He also expected the synagogue to be no more receptive to them than to him, foretelling that they would be scourged there, persecuted, delivered up to prisons, and cast out.

Therefore, he certainly knew they would not long have a continuing fellowship within the synagogue. If not there, where? If not according to the Jewish customs and institutions, how? He was strangely silent. Had I been in his position, I would surely have felt charged with a responsibility to lay down some administrative guidelines for the fellowship of the disciples that must inevitably grow as they were more and more expelled from the synagogues. This brings us to the second item listed above:

### 2) The Perpetuation of the Word in the World

When Jesus prophesied the fall of Jerusalem, he concluded the prophecy by saying:

Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away (Mark 13:31).

This is as forward looking as a prophecy gets, seeing that it looks all the way forward in time to the passing of the heavens and the earth. There was one thing that was destined to endure, not only to the end, but, if we accept his statement literally, beyond the end; for this one thing, his very words, will not pass away. Thus far, after nineteen centuries, the prophecy remains secure. Now, it was to the Jewish nation that the oracles of God, including those of Jesus, had been given. Jesus was careful to direct his ministry to the Jews, maintaining that he was not sent but to the lost sheep of the House of Israel. He directed the disciples to do the same, right up to the day of his ascension from the earth, when he finally commanded them to go to all nations and preach the Gospel to every creature. Yet there is no record that he gave them instructions as to how to pursue their worldwide ministry, how to organize for effective proclamation of the Word, or how to maintain the work. Nevertheless, the Word has survived, has maintained its power and has not passed away so that, twenty centuries later, his testimony to the perseverance of the Word in the world has certainly been confirmed. He did, however, have a plan, as expressed in John's Gospel.

This plan revolved around the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the Counselor, whom Jesus would, and did, send following his departure from this world. The Holy Spirit was to fulfill certain duties, listed as follows:

. . . he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you (John 14:26).

. . .he will bear witness to me (John 15:26).

. . .he will convince the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment. (John 16:8).

. . . he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but

## PAUL: THE STRANGER

whatever he hears he will speak and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you (John 16:13,14).

It is obvious that the duties of the Holy Spirit focus upon the Word, or utterances, of Jesus. He will bring them to the disciple's remembrance, he will bear witness to Jesus, that is, to his words. He will utilize these words to convince the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment, and he will speak in the world whatever he hears from the Lord, for he will take what belongs to Jesus (his words) and declare it to the disciples. He will declare the things that are to come. It is through these activities that the Holy Spirit is operating to maintain the Word in the world, and he will continue to do so until the end. This is the sole explanation of how the Word has persevered and is still alive in the world.

The Counselor, the Holy Spirit, initiated his work on the Day of Pentecost according to the *Acts* which contains the primary record of the events that transpired shortly following the Ascension.

The disciples being gathered in one place, He fell upon them and inspired them to proclaim the Gospel in other (national) tongues, for all the foreigners present heard them speaking in their native tongues, even though the disciples were apparently not versed in those languages. While the *Acts* does not inform us of the location of their gathering, it was in a public place, perhaps in a court of the Temple. In any case, the commotion was heard by many, who rushed together to see what was afoot. Then Peter, inspired by the Holy Spirit, stood up with the eleven and expounded the Gospel, beginning with the prophet, Joel, where he found an explanation for the strange event. Many received the Word and were baptized, being about three thousand in number.

With this beginning, the Holy Spirit went on to direct the literal "explosion" of the Word to both Jews and Gentiles, as partially recorded in the *Acts*. This composition, commonly called "The Acts of the Apostles" might better be called "The Acts of the Holy Spirit," since the Holy Spirit is credited with directing the initial activity of proclaiming the Word of Jesus to the world, both Jew and Gentile. However, in reading *The Acts of the Apostles*, one must keep ever in mind that it was written, by its own testimony, by Luke, a faithful disciple and protege of Paul. I use it here because it is the only readily available record we have, though there are other references in other ancient texts that give some clues as to the events of those early days.

It was the Holy Spirit that directed Peter to go to Caesarea with the messengers of Cornelius, a centurion and a Gentile, to be the first to preach the gospel to Gentiles with the result that many were converted and the Holy Spirit fell upon Gentile converts. In this, we see clearly how it was the work of the Holy Spirit to direct the activity of the Word in the early days of the *ekklesia*.

On the other hand, when we come to the description of events related to organization and administration of the fellowship, or *ekklesia*, we find that it is the apostles and disciples who are acting, not the Holy spirit. The Eleven presided over the appointment of Matthias to take the place of Judas. When the disciples at Jerusalem entered into a communal arrangement by selling their possessions and making distribution to all according to their needs, there is no evidence of activity by the Holy Spirit. When the first deacons were selected and set apart to serve tables, it was the twelve who initiated the action, not the Holy Spirit. When the disciples in Antioch decided to send relief to the brethren in Judea, there is no mention of the Holy Spirit. When the apostles and elders, together with Barnabas and Paul, met in Jerusalem to consider the circumcision controversy that had arisen in Antioch, it is the apostles and elders who are acting, not the Holy Spirit. When they reached a decision and wrote a letter to the brethren in Antioch to confirm the results, they first said regarding their decision, . . . it seemed good to us. . . , then later in the letter added, . . . it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us. . . . It could be, here, that they made their reference to the Holy Spirit only as an after-thought.

This could also be an early example of a practice that began in those days and continues to this day, according to which people clothe their words and deeds in spiritual language when the Spirit has had nothing to do with them. In any case, it appears that Jesus was not depending on the

## JESUS AND THE CHURCH

organization of the "church" to carry on his work of spreading the Word in the world; rather, he had assigned this task to the Holy Spirit, who would use certain persons as instruments to this end.

### 3) The Basis of Unity

Any institution, such as the disciples' *ekklesia* in the world, must have some mortar – some unifying power – that binds its parts one to another, providing a unity of purpose and action and a common motive underlying its operation. Jesus provided this "mortar" for the unification of his disciples through the ages and you may be surprised as to its character. But first, let us take a look at the basis of the unity of the church as defined by Paul. He defined the *ekklesia* as a body (I Corinthians 12:12f) of which we are individually members, knit together in love (Colossians 2:2). In the Ephesian letter, he developed a very elaborate presentation of the basis of the unity of this body, the body of Christ, the "*ekklesia*." There is, he said, one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all (Ephesians 4:4-6).

Behold, the many grounds of the unity of the *ekklesia*! Paul here lists seven, the magic number! They are body, Spirit, hope, Lord, faith, baptism, and God the Father. Then he proceeded to explain that this unity is further facilitated by gifts, which were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, for the equipment of the saints, for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love (Ephesians 4:11-16). Surely, there is no more profound statement of the grounds of the unity of the body of Christ, the *ekklesia*, than this one. As I look at Paul's words, I am impressed to shout "Wonderful!" Yet with it all, he failed to focus on the very essence of unity in Christ; that is, the principal ground as defined by Jesus himself:

I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me, as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep, that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice. So there shall be one flock, one shepherd (John 10:14-16).

"This fold" is, of course, the Jewish nation. Those not of "this fold" are the Gentiles of all nations of the world. The "one flock" is the assembly of his "sheep" from out of all the nations, including the Jewish one. And if you look sharply, you can clearly perceive the unifying factor: and they will heed my voice. It is only in consequence of this heeding of his voice that the unity of the "one flock" is produced. The heeding of his voice is the one fundamental that defines his "sheep." He is their one and only shepherd!

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. . . (John 10:27).

Paul erred, but he was not in error, neither did he omit any grounds of unity of the faith, for when he specified one Lord, and designated Christ as the head into which we grow up, he was absolutely correct. But by failing to indicate that Christ is identified with his Holy Word, and that it is only by heeding his voice, the words he uttered, that unity is obtained, he left the field open to many different interpretations of the meaning of the words one Lord, and Christ, the head. As I indicated above, he has no oil for his lamp.

## PAUL: THE STRANGER

Unfortunately, throughout the history of Christendom, churchmen have focused on Paul rather than Jesus when they were considering the administration of the church and we can easily see the result as we cast our eyes about to observe the great numbers of disparate bodies that have arisen. It is this most fundamental ground of unity that Paul failed to define adequately when he elaborated the various grounds of unity of the *ekklesia*, and it is, I firmly believe, the only valid explanation for the great divisions and conflicts among the churches of Christendom. Paul failed to define it, and so the churchmen failed to define it; but that is no excuse, because Jesus plainly specified it in John 10:27.

There are many different denominations because churchmen have not heeded his voice; there are so many different, conflicting beliefs and doctrines in Christendom because churchmen have not listened to his voice; and there are doubtless so many sad souls professing his name who yet have not heard his voice, and who therefore do not know him, who are not among his sheep, and whom he does not know, all because they do not hear his voice and because they have not heeded the very words of God the Father that were broadcast in the world by Jesus, the Son. One can count on the fingers of one hand the times Paul appealed to the sayings uttered by the voice of Jesus, in all his epistles. Rather, he appealed to no higher authority than himself, his claimed apostleship, his signs and wonders and his vision of the risen Lord. It is not strange, therefore, that he should fail to comprehend the essence of unity of the body of Christ as expressed by the voice of the historical Jesus.

### 4) The Administrative Structure

Paul, in Ephesians Chapter 4, as quoted above, named five offices, or functions, in the *ekklesia*. These are apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. He elsewhere (I Timothy 3) specified the qualifications for additional offices of bishop (overseer) and deacon (*diakonos*). These, added to the five listed above, again give us the magic number of seven. The churches of Christendom have them all, more or less, because they have always been there, and, of course, because Paul set them forth in the beginning. This, however, could have been done only by totally ignoring the instructions of Jesus. I refer you to the following quotation:

But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brethren.  
And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. Neither be called masters, for you have one master, the Christ (Matthew 23:8-10).

The prohibition of "father" as a title is extremely important and lies at the very foundation of Truth. I discussed it in Jesus, the Rock of Offense, and elsewhere in this book. Now, however, we are concerned with the prohibition of the title of teacher, or rabbi. "Rabbi" is Hebrew for "teacher," but whatever the language, Jesus' disciples are not to be called "teacher." Yet Paul plainly attributes to the Lord the gift of the office of teacher. The Lord forbids it, yet Paul boldly proclaims that the Lord provided the office of teacher as a gift. Furthermore, if you examine the churches in the world today, you will find them full of "teachers." Yet for those who listen to Jesus, who hear his voice, there can be no such office and no such title, except as applied to the Lord Jesus himself. He applies but five titles for all of us:

- 1) that of servant (Greek, *diakonos*, Matthew 20:26) and
- 2) that of slave (Greek, *doulos*, Matthew 20:27),
- 3) that of witness (Acts 1:8),
- 4) that of disciple (John 8:31) and
- 5) that of friend (Greek, *philos*, John 14:13-14).

## JESUS AND THE CHURCH

At least, Paul got the "deacons" right (I Timothy 3:8)! The most we can be, in the hearing of the voice of Jesus, would be, perhaps, teacher's aids. But to be called a teacher he has absolutely forbidden. This also means that he has forbidden his disciples to be called "doctor," for this is from the Latin for "teacher." But in the churches, instead of being ashamed of this appellation, they take great pride in being called "Doctor," and every congregation seems to want a learned doctor in the office of pastor, all in gross disobedience to the Lord. The same applies when we seek to call someone a leader among us. Jesus has forbidden it, because he is the sole leader as he is the sole teacher. This becomes reasonable only in the light of the establishment of his Word as our sole leader and teacher. Even the Holy Spirit cannot be a teacher or leader, except as an aid, for Jesus stated:

. . . he will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you (John 16:14).

Jesus also forbade us to apply the title "father" to any man on earth, as stated above, and as explained earlier in this book and in Jesus, the Rock of Offense. This was very specific, and was accompanied by the reason: the disciples have but one father, even the Father in heaven. Clearly, the Father is jealous of this, his name, and if we are his obedient children, we apply it to no other. But Paul was very bold, so bold as to call himself the father of the disciples at Corinth:

For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. I urge you then, be imitators of me (I Corinthians 4:15,16).

Now, Jesus has elsewhere counseled us to be merciful, even as the Father is merciful – in other words, to imitate the Father. But here, Paul has made himself the father to the disciples in the Corinthian church, and urged them, literally, to imitate him. The man has put himself in the place of God! Elsewhere Paul emphasizes the Fatherhood of God, but here he is obviously entirely ignorant of the exclusiveness of this relationship in the Word of Jesus; he has not heard his voice.

Turn now again to the church in the Twentieth Century and what do we see? Everywhere it consists of "fathers" and those who call themselves "fathers" in radical disobedience to Jesus. Even the pastor-priest is called "Father." The male parent is called "father." The Pope is called "Holy Father!" The Patriarch of the Orthodox Church is, literally, the ruling father. All in the church, all in the name of Jesus Christ, all in radical disobedience to him. It is obvious that all of them, beginning with Paul, are assigning to themselves and other men a name and title so exalted as to fit only one person, The Eternal Father in heaven. This is self exaltation of the grossest sort! It may even be sacrilege. The passage from Matthew 23, quoted above, goes on to conclude with the words:

He who is greatest among you shall be your servant; whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted (Matthew 23:11,12).

In these verses Jesus is contrasting the disciples with the scribes and Pharisees, who sought to exalt themselves among their fellows by assuming the titles "rabbi," "teacher" and "father." If we turn back to Matthew 20, he makes a similar comparison with the Gentiles and their governors:

You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant (Greek, diakonos), and whoever would be first among you must be your slave (Greek, doulos); even as the son of man come not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Matthew 20:25-28).

Here he has said essentially the same thing, with this profound addition that surely applies everywhere: **It shall not be so among you!** I take this to be, not an exhortation, but a simple statement of fact and I understand it to mean that among those disciples of Jesus who are disciples indeed, who listen to his voice, there is, in very fact, no such title or authority. I say this

## PAUL: THE STRANGER

regretfully, reluctantly, after nearly a lifetime of careful consideration, not as a judgment of my own, but solely on the recognition of the simple Truth as enunciated by Jesus and as received by all who hear his voice. It shall not, he said, be so among you.

Jesus therefore provided a very limited number of offices for his little flock, and none of them carry administrative authority. The offices of servant, diakonos, and slave, doulos, are typical. In doing this he was expressing a deep concern about two things: greatness and authority. Unlike the Gentiles, the sheep of his flock do not exercise authority over one another. There is but one authority, the Good Shepherd. However, it is possible to aspire to greatness. All who truly qualify as mere servants (diakonos) one of another are among the great ones; and any one who becomes the slave (doulos) to all is the greatest of all. Of course, it follows that if there is one who is servant to none, that one is least of all. This is inverse pecking order! When I was a farm lad, there seemed always to be one from the flock of hens that could peck all the others and lord it over them without fear of attack. Then there was one who could peck all except the first one, without fear of attack from the others, and so on until the last poor creature, its head and comb raw, that was pecked by all and received satisfaction from none. The word slave, as used here by Jesus, is extreme language and can be accepted only when we realize that these questions of greatness and authority are extremely important to him.

If we turn our attention again to the office of pastor, one that nearly every congregation has, we can make some interesting observations. *Pastor* is a term that comes from the pastoral setting, and literally means "shepherd." A shepherd is, with respect to the sheep, their leader. He has authority over the sheep and commands them to remain in the way he intends for them to go. But Jesus has forbidden that his disciples should be called leaders, and identified himself as their "Good Shepherd." There can therefore be only one shepherd, the Good Shepherd, and the sheep hear his voice. Any other shepherds are not allowed; they, as pastors, are usurping the office that belongs exclusively to Jesus himself!

The administration of the *ekklesia*, following the precepts of Paul as specified in the New Testament and as applied in the churches everywhere, is overthrown as soon as we begin listening to Jesus. He allows for only one leader, only one pastor, only one teacher, only one Father and all the rest, friends who serve only as servants and slaves.

### 4. The Governance of the Disciples

Then how, on earth, did Jesus provide for the governance of the body of his disciples? He provided but one thing for the administration of the ecclesia. That is the Logos (the body of his utterances that will never pass away). This Logos is, among other things, the Constitution of the Body of Christ in the world, in much the same fashion that the Constitution of the United States is the foundation of the American nation. The Logos is here on the earth, having been planted by Jesus and protected by the Holy Spirit, and it is accessible. However, it does nothing until it is heard. That is why it is so important that a person listen to him. When we do so listen, and believe what we hear, we have believed in Jesus and have become his sheep and members of his flock. Furthermore, in his flock we are a unit for each hears and responds to the same voice. The ability to listen to Jesus' words, to truly hear him, puts us into a unique category that, by the essence of its nature, unites us. Much as the American nation is one nation under the force of its Constitution, so the flock of Jesus is one flock, perfectly one, under the unifying power of his Holy Word, the Logos. If we can truly hear his voice, if he is our Good Shepherd and if he is Lord indeed, we are one people knit together in love, and thus his Word becomes the ground of our unification. If we cannot listen to him, our unity is fractured; our members are divided, our religious world becomes a hodge-podge, exactly as we see it today. But as it is, in the true flock of Jesus, we are one people because we have one teacher, the Christ; we are one people because we listen to only one voice, the voice of Jesus, our shepherd (pastor); we are one people because we have only one leader, Jesus of Nazareth; we are one people because we have only one Constitution, the Logos of The Father; we are one people because we have but

## JESUS AND THE CHURCH

one Father, the Father in heaven. When Paul enumerated the bonds of our unity in the Ephesian letter, he got many of them correct; he properly included one Lord but he failed to define the Lord as known only through his Holy Word, and thus omitted the most important, most effective one – the Logos. It is, first of all, through listening to Jesus that we are molded into a unit. Only when we hear his voice do we become one. And this is not the voice of Paul, or the voice of the apostles, or the voice of the prophets or of Moses or of the pastor as he speaks from the pulpit. It is uniquely the voice of Jesus of Nazareth, and only Jesus of Nazareth. Paul came close with the stipulation that there is "one Lord," but by failing to explain that Lordship is realized only through listening to the voice of Jesus and responding to his Word, he left the door open to all manner of errors with the results that we see in Christendom. We realize this when we listen to Jesus and hear him say:

Why do you call me "Lord, Lord," and not do what I tell you? (Luke 6:46)

But let's become practical. Whom will we select for our pastor? Nobody! We already have a pastor, always have had a pastor and always will have a pastor – the one shepherd of all the sheep, the Good Shepherd who alone is authorized to tend the flock of the Father. Within the Logos, I do not even see a provision for an under shepherd, or assistant pastor. We only need to listen to him! Whom will we employ to teach in our Sunday Schools, Bible schools, and seminaries? Nobody. We already have a teacher, always have had a teacher, and always will have a teacher: the Lord Jesus, through his Word. The words are simple; we need only listen and allow the Holy Spirit to provide anything else we may need toward understanding them. The Word is so marvelously simple that children can readily understand. We only need to listen to him!

Then whom will we select for our bishops, our priests, our pastors, our presbyters, our elders, and our overseers? Nobody! We have one and only one leader; there is only one person in authority over us. We have always had him and always will have him, the Christ. We do not need another. When we begin to seek other leaders, we create division, and are no more one people, one flock of God. This leaves only the friends, the servants and the slaves, and we all fill those categories when we qualify to join his flock. We need only listen!

But where shall we meet and how are we to provide for our worship and educational structures? Again, Jesus has the answer. He said:

Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them (Matthew 18:20).

The answer is, therefore, simply "where" or "wherever." Are we deaf and blind? Can we not see that the practice, in Christendom, of building and congregating in great houses of worship, and of setting up administrative structures and authorities, is one of the most divisive things we could do? And the answer is so simple when we are able to listen to Jesus. Just think how simple and uncomplicated is that one word, "where." If we can listen to him, that is all the answer we need. It requires no explanation. Every child can understand "where." Why do we not heed him?

This is a sterling example of what I mean by the simplicity of the Word of Jesus. How uncomplicated it is! It is the men of this world who need the huge buildings in which to draw multitudes under the aegis of the human leader. Jesus does not need such structures. How large must a building be to house "two or three?" The early Christians, cast out of the synagogue, resorted to meeting in their homes. That was adequate then and it is adequate now. When they later broke out of those small gatherings and, empowered, proceeded to build churches and cathedrals, they laid the foundation for the apostasy that yet prevails. We only need to listen to him!

Jesus chose the word "fold", or sheepfold (Greek, aule), very carefully. When he stated that there is but one fold, he used this word that describes an open, roofless enclosure. No great

## PAUL: THE STRANGER

stone edifice, no huge cathedral with flying buttresses, well roofed and protected. No, none of this; his figurative expression for shelter for his flock is only an open, fenced enclosure, with a gate. And he is the Good Shepherd, the sole authority, who leads them all out and calls them by name, and guides them to pasture. And there is but one fold, one fenced and gated enclosure! In Jesus, we are all sheep and we are all his sheep! We are the lambs of his flock, and the sheep of his pasture. We have but one shepherd or pastor, the Good Shepherd. His rod and his staff, they comfort us. He leads, teaches, and protects us. The ecclesia of Jesus is the one Little Flock that bears no resemblance to the worldly institution of Christendom, called the church. It is rather the Little Flock called out from the world and assembled in the one fold. If you want to see how Jesus provided for the future associations of his disciples in the world, then look for the sheep, look for the sheepfold, and look for the Little Flock. We only need to listen to him!

So you see, he did indeed provide for the administration of his flock; he established their offices and their constitution, appointed their single administrator, provided a clear line of authority together with standards of greatness and gathered us all into the single, fenced enclosure, the sheepfold. And, he provided the terminology. We need absolutely nothing else. But if you are looking to Jesus for a provision of cathedrals, offices, authorities, and gathering places of the churches of Christendom, you look in vain. You will need to look elsewhere for that! "It shall not" he said, "be so among you."

Now pause to take note of an interesting condition that results from the above considerations. There is no pastor, but only the Good Shepherd, Jesus, who is invisible but who is nevertheless present through his Word. There is no authority save the authority of the one Lord, Jesus, who again is invisible. There are no merely human leaders, bishops, overseers and the like. There is only one leader who, again, is invisible. There is no teacher whom we can see, for we have only one teacher who, yet again, is invisible, yet ever present. There is no structural grounds of unity, no visible edifice, nothing save the Word of Jesus, that again, while it is heard, is nevertheless invisible. There is no father or patriarch of the visible sort. There is only one Father, the Father in Heaven, who likewise is invisible. Everything pertaining to the Little Flock is spiritual, not physical, and therefore is invisible to men. There is only one visible entity related to the Little Flock of the Good Shepherd, and that is the sheep. But even they have no visible congregation beyond the "two or three gathered in my name." They are scattered throughout the world, in and out of the churches, mixed in with many others and, while always distinguishable by their attitude to life, their only local assemblage is the "Little Flock."

Does this *ekklesia*, this synagogue of Jesus, this Little Flock of the Good Shepherd, really exist in the world? Of course! Everyone who hears his voice, who truly listens and believes, belongs to it, for he said,

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me, and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand (John 10:27,28).

Every such person is a lamb of his flock, and as again and again I must emphasize, that status has only one qualification: the ability to listen to his voice, to hear the Holy Word, the Logos of God the Father. And I must again repeat, so that there can be no question of the significance of the utterances of Jesus, that this hearing of his voice applies only to the hearing of the very words uttered by Jesus of Nazareth and recorded in the gospels, for that, alone, is the Logos of God. It exists in the world, this Logos, this living body of Truth bound up in human language and planted in the hearts of the first disciples. It is maintained through the ages by the Holy Spirit and the faithful "preaching" of this Gospel of the Kingdom throughout the world. Through it, through the Logos, the flock continues and renews itself daily by the admission into its membership of every one who begins to hear his voice and keep his Word. And, where two or three of these are assembled in his name, there he is in the midst of them – because his living Word abides in their hearts. Their fellowship is therefore with him and, through him, with one another and with God

## JESUS AND THE CHURCH

the only Father. Everything, absolutely everything, depends upon hearing and keeping his Word. Listen:

If a man love me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. He who does not love me does not keep my words; and the word which you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me (John 14:23,24).