

The
Ekklesia



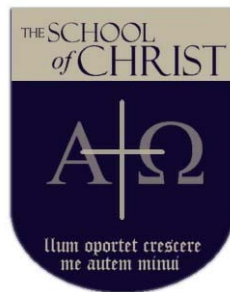
A revelation of the mystery concerning
the Church that Jesus is building.

CHIP BROGDEN

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Ekklesia

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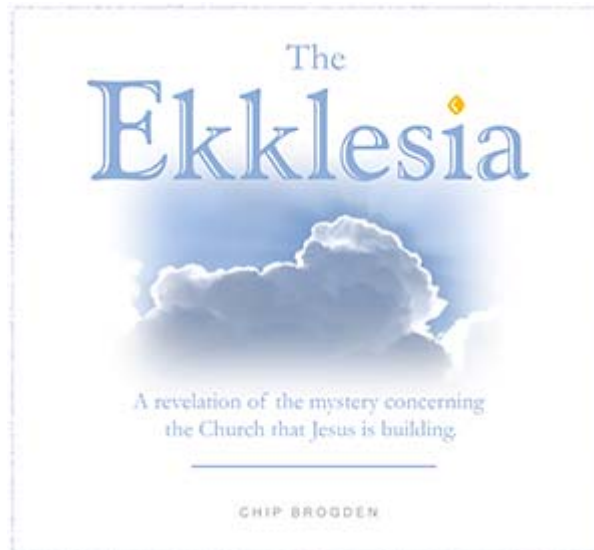
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TO THE READER:

This eBook is based on excerpts taken from a four-part audio series. The spoken form has been retained throughout. For more information on how to get the complete teaching series on four compact discs, please visit the following link:



<http://www.TheSchoolOfChrist.Org/audio/ts121.html>

ἐκκλησία

ekklesia (ek-klay-see'-ah)

Strong's # 1577

From a compound of *ek* and a derivative of *kaleo*

ek: out of, away from
kaleo: to call, to invite

Translated "church" in the New Testament 115 times.

The Spiritual Nature of the Ekklesia

“I will build My Church (Greek: ekklesia); and the gates of hell will not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18).

When Jesus says “I will build My Ekklesia,” He gave that word a spiritual significance and meaning. “I will build My Ekklesia.” Now if we take what we know about that word “ekklesia”, Jesus is saying, “I am building, and I will build, a gathering; an assembly; or, a congregation; a company; a body of people that have been called out. I will build MY Ekklesia – a gathering, an assembly of called out ones.”

Now Jesus said that He would build His Church. But let me ask – has anyone ever seen this building? Has anyone ever seen this Church that Jesus said He would build? What is it made out of? How much money did it take to build it? Did they pay cash for it, or did they raise money for it, or did they borrow money to build it? Where is this Church that Jesus said He would build? Is it located in Jerusalem, or Bethlehem, or Antioch, or Rome?

Well, I challenge you to search the world over and you will never find this Church that Jesus said He would build as a “thing” constructed out of something that can be seen in the natural realm. Why is that? Because ***the Ekklesia is essentially spiritual in nature.*** The Ekklesia, the Church that Jesus is building, is essentially *spiritual* in nature. It is *of* the Spirit. And because it is of the Spirit, it is *spiritual*; and because it is spiritual, it is *heavenly*. It is not earthly, it is not natural. It is not worldly, it is not secular. The Ekklesia of Jesus Christ is essentially *spiritual* in nature. And because it is spiritual, it is eternal. It is heavenly. It is above. It is beyond.

Now, if you can understand this it will answer a lot of the questions and settle a lot of the confusion concerning the Church that Jesus is building. The Ekklesia is spiritual. Now you say, “Brother, don't spiritualize the church!” Well, I'm not spiritualizing it, I'm

saying the Ekklesia, the Church that Jesus is building is essentially spiritual. And because it is spiritual it is heavenly. And because it is spiritual and heavenly, "the gates of Hell will not prevail against it," Jesus said.

The real problem is not *spiritualizing* the Ekklesia, it's *naturalizing* it. Don't worry about spiritualizing it; worry about naturalizing it - making it into something earthly, something to be seen and heard and felt. You begin thinking in terms of buildings and programs, numbers and dollars. And this is the fatal mistake.

Jesus told Peter, "I will build My Ekklesia, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it." Now I'm not sure how Peter interpreted this statement of Jesus. He probably didn't understand it right away, because the disciples didn't understand much of anything that Jesus said right away. But later on, after Peter has received the Holy Spirit and has been rendered spiritual, able to discern things by the Spirit and understand the spiritual truths that Jesus imparted to them, he has this to say in First Peter, chapter two, verse four. He says,

"Coming to Him [coming to Jesus] as to a Living Stone, rejected indeed by men but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (I Peter 2:4,5).

So he says you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house – not an earthly house, not a natural house; but the intention and the purpose of God is for a spiritual house of living stones. And Peter says you are being built up as a spiritual house. That word "built up" there is the same Greek word that Jesus is using in Matthew 16:18. It's translated the same way. "I will build My Church" - and Peter says, "You also are being built up." As what? A spiritual house of living stones.

So Peter says that the Church, the Ekklesia is a spiritual house, not an earthly house; not a natural house, and not a place of meeting; not a conference hall, not a home church fellowship, not a Bible study; but a spiritual house of living stones. So we don't need to

worry that we can *spiritualize* the Church, but we do need to be concerned about *naturalizing* the Church.

Just about every thing Jesus taught us about the Kingdom of God is intended to be received on a *spiritual* basis by spiritually enlightened men and women; and if you try to understand it in terms of the natural, in terms of the earthly, you'll not be able to understand it. You'll not be able to appreciate it or discern it. I've heard people say before that, "You can become so heavenly-minded that you're no earthly good." And I always chuckle at that, because I've never met anyone who was truly so heavenly-minded that they were no earthly good. But I have met many people who were so earthly-minded that they were no heavenly good!

The Church that Jesus is building is spiritual and therefore it is heavenly. But you will not understand that if you are trying to define the Church in terms of the natural, carnal, fleshly, realm of this earth.

Everything Jesus taught us about the Kingdom of God is essentially spiritual. To Nicodemus, He says, "You must be born again." Nicodemus immediately *naturalizes* this, and says, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter his mother's womb a second time and be born?" Now we all know that Jesus means a *spiritual* birth, and so we think, poor Nicodemus, he really wasn't too bright, was he? Of course we know Jesus meant a spiritual birth, not a natural birth. But you see how Nicodemus tried to naturalize that spiritual truth.

Another time, Jesus says, "Unless you eat My flesh and drink My blood, you have no life in you." And so what happened? The Jews *naturalized* that statement, and said, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" And it says that many of His disciples turned back and no longer walked with Him. But you see Jesus was talking about *spiritual* life, eternal life. He certainly did not mean for us to *naturalize* this teaching, but that is what human beings are very prone to do.

The disciples were *always* trying to *naturalize* the Kingdom of God. They heard Jesus speak of this Kingdom, and they began to reason it all out: they argued over who

would be the greatest; "Lord, when you come into your Kingdom, let us sit on Your right hand and on Your left." "Lord, will You at this time restore the Kingdom to Israel?" See, they're trying to naturalize this Kingdom. But Jesus *spiritualized* the Kingdom. So Pilate asked Him, "Are you a king?" And Jesus says, "You are correct in saying that I am king... but My Kingdom is *not* of this world." This Kingdom is spiritual, it is heavenly, it is not earthly, it is not of this world.

So when I say the Ekklesia is spiritual, don't look at me as if I have done something wrong by spiritualizing the Church. The Ekklesia *is* spiritual, and the wrong thing is to naturalize it. You don't naturalize the New Birth – it's a spiritual reality. You don't naturalize eating and drinking Christ – it's a spiritual thing, it's a spiritual concept. You don't naturalize the Kingdom of God – it's a spiritual kingdom, not of this earth, not of this world. So why would you, and why do you, naturalize the Ekklesia, when the Ekklesia is a spiritual house of living stones?

See, the trouble is that we do not see the Ekklesia as spiritual, we see it as natural. The problem is in our seeing; the problem is our perception; the problem is we are in the same position as Nicodemus trying to figure out a spiritual birth with a natural idea of what birth is. Right now we have in our minds a thousand ideas about "church", and I guarantee that most of those thoughts, most of those ideas you have about "church", are tradition; they are earthly, they are worldly, they are NATURAL. They are not spiritual.

We all have ideas about buildings and steeples; denominations and congregations; preachers, programs, the worship service; Easter and Christmas; choirs, ushers, deacons, elders, boards; picnics, tithes and offerings; pastors, associate pastors, ministers; seminaries, Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, Youth Group; Sunday morning services, Sunday night services, Wednesday night services; prayer meeting, Men's Meeting, Women's Meeting, and on and on and on it goes. That is what we think about - all these outward things, quite natural, quite earthly, easily seen and heard and experienced.

But do you think when Jesus said, "I will build My Ekklesia, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it" - do you think He's talking about building some church building someplace in Jerusalem? Or having a place where people could come and hear somebody preach three times a week? Where they could come once or twice or three times a week and do some religious things and hold some ceremonies? Well, if you believe that's what Jesus meant, then you are just like Nicodemus, trying to *naturalize* something the Lord intends as a *spiritual, heavenly reality*.

Now, that's not to say that there is no such thing as a *practical expression* of this spiritual, heavenly Ekklesia. We do see a practical expression of the spiritual Ekklesia throughout the Book of Acts. It's very practical. But this Ekklesia is not natural, or earthly, or worldly; it is spiritual and heavenly. For the time being, please, please lay aside all your concern for the natural, practical expression. That will come in due course. But what we are endeavoring to do now is to get to the heart, to the spiritual side, the spiritual foundation, the spiritual intent, the purpose of God in the Ekklesia. And if we can be clear on that then the rest will come forth in due season.

But we cannot get to the spiritual side of the Ekklesia by trying to decipher or dissect it from the natural side of things. We don't want to be in the position of Nicodemus, who tried to grasp spiritual birth with a natural understanding, with a carnal mindset, a carnal mentality. Spiritual things never do make sense when we try to understand them naturally. Nicodemus is confused; the Jews were offended; the disciples were disappointed; all because they tried to take the *spiritual* side of things and turn them into something that they could apprehend *naturally*. And that's what we need to avoid...

The Spiritual Life of the Ekklesia

In our first message, we established (pretty convincingly I believe) the spiritual nature of the Ekklesia, and we said that this Church that Jesus is building, this Ekklesia, is a spiritual house of living stones. And because it is *spiritual*, it is *heavenly*; and that means it is not earthly. It is not worldly, it is not carnal, it is not secular, it is not political, it is not natural. Just like the Kingdom of God, Jesus said, is not observed, it's not seen with the eyes; but the Kingdom of God is within you, or the Kingdom of God is among you - it is a *spiritual* reality. So in the same way, the Ekklesia, the Church that Jesus is building, is a *spiritual* reality.

Jesus said, "I will build My Ekklesia", and so we know that this Ekklesia is not built by man, it's not organized by man. Man is not the author or the creator of it. Jesus is building His Church, and so, it is a thing that is quite beyond man, quite beyond what man is capable of. It is not a system of man, it is not an organization of man, it is not a denomination of man, it is not a movement of man. But just like the new Birth, the Ekklesia is "from above", something that originates *in* the Spirit and *by* the Spirit. And so it is spiritual.

We said that the word "Ekklesia" means the assembly, or the gathering together, of those who are called-out; and we saw how the Scriptures (both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament) paint for us a picture of a spiritual house of living stones and this gathering together INTO CHRIST of a called out people. That's what we have in mind when we use, and when Scripture uses, the word "Ekklesia". Jesus said He would prepare a place for us, and He would come to us, and would receive us unto Himself. "Come unto ME," Jesus said. And I believe this "place" He has prepared is IN HIMSELF. He has prepared a place for us and it is a place of dwelling and abiding in Himself. "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life," He says. He has, and He is, this Place prepared for us, and He is the Way into that Place. He is our Destination, He is our Purpose, He is our Promised Land, He is our Sabbath Day, He is our Rest.

So the Ekklesia, the Church that Jesus is building, is a spiritual house of living stones. It is the gathering together INTO CHRIST of those who are called out of the earthly, out of the carnal, out of the natural, out of the worldly, out of the fleshly, out of that which is merely human, out of darkness, out of death, and into the spiritual, into the heavenly, into the very Life of God Himself.

How powerful this is! How wonderful this is! And can you really see how we have utterly failed when we try to bring the Ekklesia down to earth, to make it natural, to think of it only in terms of meetings attended, sermons preached, or programs implemented! It is far greater, far more wonderful, than anything we can imagine or define in earthly terms. And because it is spiritual, because it is heavenly, and because it is a gathering together in the Spirit, INTO JESUS CHRIST HIMSELF and out of everything outside of Christ, this Ekklesia is LIVING.

And so the title of this second message is "The Spiritual Life of the Ekklesia". Because it is spiritual by nature, it is living. "I am the Life" Jesus says. And we see this life and this union in John 15, if you will turn there please.

Now, you might not be accustomed to thinking of the Ekklesia, of the Church, in terms of the Vine and the Branches. We usually think of this in terms of our personal relationship with God, our personal walk with God. It certainly includes that, but the teaching of Jesus in John 15 is not a teaching about The Vine and A Branch (*singular*); it is teaching us about The Vine and The Branches (*plural*). And the idea is that there is a living union that exists between the Vine and the Branches. It is a living union that exists between the Lord and the Ekklesia, which is the gathering of those who are called out of darkness and into His marvelous light, out of where they are and into union with Christ. That idea is conveyed in the Vine and the Branches. They are joined to one another organically. They are joined to one another in essence, in spirit, and they share in the same Life. So let's read that in John 15:

"I am the True Vine, and My Father is the Vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it

may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me and I in you..." (John 15:1-4).

Now we already saw in John 14 that Jesus says, "In My Father's House there is much dwelling space - there's plenty of room to abide." Now He says, "Continue to abide; continue to dwell in Me, and I in you." Abide in Me, and I will abide in you. Dwell in Me, and I will dwell in you. LIVE in Me, and I will LIVE in you!

We're in verse 4:

"As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples" (John 15:4-8).

Now, this chapter is so full, but even with the fragment that we have read, I hope you can see that Jesus has something very definite in mind for us. You know He did not leave detailed, specific instructions on how to conduct a religious service. He did not give us any guidelines on anything to do with growing the church, organizing a movement, planting churches, or doing any of the outward "works" that we think are so very important - those outward things that we hold to be the very essence of what "church" is. He never does address those things. He is after one thing, and this one thing that He is after is a spiritual matter; an inward condition, not an outward thing. So what is He after? He is after fellowship. Communion. Relationship. He is after a sharing of Life together. Sharing Life with you and with me as we abide in Him and He abides in us, as we live in Him and He lives in us.

It's very obvious from John 15 that He wishes us to abide in Him, to be together with Him. So much so that He says apart from Him, apart from this abiding, we can do nothing. Now, it is true that we can do many things apart from Him, but the point is that

everything we do apart from Him amounts to nothing! It is of no consequence outside of Him, it is of no value to the Kingdom of God apart from this abiding, living union with Jesus. Why? Because He is the Life of the Ekklesia, He is the Life of the Believer, and everything outside of Him, and everything apart from Him, is spiritually dead. In Him is Life: "I AM the Way, the Truth, and the Life". Yes, things done *for* God, *apart* from God, are dead things. Things done *for* Jesus, things done *in the name* of Jesus, but done *apart* from that abiding relationship with Jesus, are unfruitful, dead things.

So the Ekklesia consists of those who are abiding in Christ and sharing in His Life. Because the Ekklesia is called out of death and into Life, the Ekklesia is living. What is the implication? Well, among other things, if the Ekklesia is living and abiding in Christ, this eliminates the need for revival! What is revival? Well, it's a Latin word that means "to make alive again." It means something has died and we are going to revive it. That is revival. But we have already seen that when we abide in Christ we share in His Life. The Ekklesia is living because Christ lives. And so *the Ekklesia has no need of revival, because it shares in the life of the Lord.*

Now see, we try to take that concept of "revival" and we apply it to things that are dead, things that are outside of the Ekklesia - our church buildings, our religious programs, our church services, our membership - and we hope that through "revival" we are going to increase our ministry, enlarge our church, get more people saved, or whatever the goal is. But my point is the Ekklesia does not need revival. You are trying to raise something from the dead with revival, but the Ekklesia is living.

The Ekklesia is growing spiritually. It is expanding. How is it growing? How is it expanding? Numerically? Well, perhaps; but the real measure of growth is not in terms of numbers or dollars. The Ekklesia is growing spiritually with the increase of Christ. Stated differently, *the Ekklesia enjoys spiritual oneness with Jesus*, and so it grows spiritually (and may I say, it grows spontaneously), without effort, and is fruitful as it continues to abide in that spiritual oneness that already exists in Christ.

So if you believe that you are in need of revival, do not try and resurrect something that is dead - simply get into Christ Who is Life! Come into that abiding relationship with Jesus that the Ekklesia enjoys, this spiritual oneness with Him, and you will enjoy Life of Him. Fruitfulness in the Spirit. Increase with the measure of Christ. Why? Because of this spiritual oneness, this union. "I will prepare a place for you," Jesus says, "And I will come and receive you unto Myself, that where I am, there you may be also." That is oneness! Because He lives, we live. Because he is the Life, we are alive together with Him...

The Spiritual Fellowship of the Ekklesia

The thought and intention and purpose of God is for a spiritual oneness, a spiritual unity, a spiritual fellowship, a spiritual communion (and even in that word "communion" is the idea of union, a "common union"), a sharing of life together; and towards this end He calls us - Jesus calls us - out of this world, out of the earth, out of our very selves, and into another place that He has prepared for us, a place He says [where] He will come again and receive us unto Himself. And I believe this indicates that this place that He has prepared is a place within Himself: "the Secret Place of the Most High God" - not some external thing that we go and we meet Him in, but *within Himself*. Because that is where all of this is heading. That is God's Thought, His Purpose, and His Intention: "*to gather together in one all things in Christ.*" And we who are the Ekklesia have simply entered into Christ already and we have taken the first step into this Kingdom of God, and we are - the moment we have entered into Christ - we at the same time are immediately brought into a very large circle, this vast company of fellow believers (past and present) who have entered into this living union with a living Christ.

And that will be the topic of this message: "The Spiritual Fellowship of the Ekklesia"; and all these other things we have discussed prepare the way for this Spiritual Fellowship. We cannot enter the Ekklesia until we let go of all expectation for something "here and now", something in this earth, something in the natural. At one time or another we have all been guilty of taking the spiritual reality and bringing it down to earth. We go here and there looking for what we call "spiritual fellowship" but really what we are looking for is a "meeting". We are looking for a church service, or a home group, or a conference. These things are not the Ekklesia; they are things that we do, and things that can be done, completely in the realm of the world. That is to say, we can attend church services and still not touch upon or enter into the Ekklesia. We can have meetings and sermons and conferences and still not know anything about the spiritual fellowship that exists within the Ekklesia.

I'd like you to turn, if you will, to Matthew chapter 18, because I want to show you the basis of this spiritual fellowship in Christ. This is very simple, yet it's very deep and very profound, and so it's very easily misunderstood. But let's read Matthew 18, verse 20. Jesus is speaking. He says:

"For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."

That's not a very long verse. It's a very short verse. Very succinct. But very, very profound because it gives us all the ingredients of spiritual fellowship. Let's read it again. Matthew 18:20:

"For where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there in the midst of them."

I just love the simplicity of Christ and the simplicity of everything Jesus does, including the simplicity of this Church, this Ekklesia that Jesus is building. Spiritual things are very easily implemented once we apprehend them spiritually. Once we see them they are very easy to implement and put into practice.

Now take a look at this fragment of Scripture. Jesus does not say there must be two or three million gathered, or two or three thousand gathered. He does not even say two or three hundred, or two or three dozen. But isn't that how we judge something? How many people do you have on the membership roll? How many people did you have in the service this morning? They keep attendance records so they can measure the thing to see if it is getting bigger or smaller, and they put the numbers up on the wall so they can see what they are doing compared to last year – better or worse. Well, that has nothing to do with spiritual fellowship, and Jesus made it clear that *His Presence in the midst is what counts for something*, even if the group is so small as two or three.

The key thing is not how many people are gathered, but that, however many there are, they are gathered together "in His Name", and He is there in the midst of them. Now we should probably search that out, because many things done "in the name of Jesus"

have nothing to do with Jesus. It is the spirit of Religion, not the Spirit of Jesus. So even when we say we are gathered "in His Name" it is not what we say that really matters. The proof is whether or not Jesus is in the midst. Is He there?

Remember, the Ekklesia is a spiritual house, so we do not take signs and wonders and manifestations and feelings and excitement and good music and good preaching to be the presence of Jesus. When Jesus is in the midst it will not be something we can see or hear or feel in our flesh; His words are Spirit and they are Life. This is a spiritual house that He is building, and it is a spiritual oneness, and it is a spiritual Life that must be discerned spiritually. So either He is there or He isn't there, and having a lot of music and noise and sermons and crowds of people will not make up for a lack of Jesus being in the midst.

"Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them." Well, the numbers don't matter to Jesus. They really don't. He doesn't even say there *must* be two, or there *must* be three. He just says, "Two, or three". Just two or three. He's very relaxed about the whole thing, isn't He? Well then, what about the place? Where do we gather? Jesus did not say anything about where they had to be gathered together. He did not tell us to go to church on Sunday and seek His Presence. He did not tell us to go to Jerusalem and search for Him there. He did not say start a fellowship in your home and I will meet with you there. You can do all those things and still not have spiritual fellowship.

Remember the woman at the well, and how (in John chapter four) she tried to get Jesus to answer this religious question, this question of WHERE are we supposed to GO and worship God? "Now the Jews say Jerusalem is the place where God is to be worshipped, because that is where the Temple is. But my people say it's in this mountain that we are to worship. So which is it Jesus? Just tell us which you prefer. What location should we gather at, and we will go there to worship."

And what does the Lord say? "Neither! Neither! Neither! Neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem. The time has come for Spirit and Truth worship," He says, "And that

has nothing to do with geography, location, where you hold the gathering, where you conduct the meeting. I am not interested," He says, "In the earthly side of things, only in the spiritual side, only in the heart. God is SPIRIT, and so if you want to worship God, you will have to worship Him in Spirit and in Truth."

Simply put, the Ekklesia is a group of people who are learning how to worship God in Spirit and Truth, how to serve God in Spirit and Truth, how to love God in Spirit and Truth, how to make warfare in Spirit and Truth, how to enter the Kingdom of God in Spirit and Truth. The Ekklesia is a spiritual house of living stones who offer up spiritual sacrifices to God and are growing into a spiritual Temple! That's it! Nothing at all to do with feasts and festivals and holy places and holy objects and holy vestments and holy rituals and holy ceremonies. Spirit and Truth is the only real holiness that counts in this Kingdom of God.

"Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them." Just meditate upon the simplicity of this. O.K., Lord, if the numbers don't count for anything, and the place does not matter, then WHEN are we to gather together? Is it once a week? Is it twice a week? Is it three times a week? Is it the Sabbath Day? Is it Saturday? Or is it Sunday? We get into such bondage with these things. Here we are, trying to project our own religious mindset and add to the simplicity of Christ.

Well, what did He say? Nothing at all about how often to gather, or when the gathering is to take place! Take a look. He does not say, "Where two or three are gathered together in my Name on Sunday, there I am in the midst of them." How absurd! "Where two or three are gathered together in my Name on Saturday, there I am in the midst of them." Absolutely nonsensical. Here's my point: if it were important then He would have mentioned it, wouldn't He? Since He didn't mention it, it must not be that important to Him! And if it's not important to Him it doesn't need to concern you and me. And that's all that matters.

Oh, the religious mindset is keenly interested in all these external things! Because that's the only way they can measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves

and lift themselves up above one another. "Oh, we worship God on Saturday." "Well, we worship God on Sunday." "Well, we keep the Sabbath." "Well, we keep the Lord's Day." And in the midst of all of that they can't understand the Ekklesia because it is a spiritual reality, something beyond your ability to measure and record and schedule! The Spirit of Jesus is not bound by your schedule! He is not bound by your place of meeting! He is not bound by your rules and regulations for religious activities!

"Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them." All right, Lord. If the numbers don't count, and the place doesn't matter, and how often the gathering takes place isn't important, then surely you must have some instruction for us, some thing we ought to perform, when we gather. What do we DO when we gather together? Shall Peter open us up with a word of prayer? Shall James lead us in a song? Shall John bring us a teaching? Shall Judas take up an offering? Give us some order, give us some kind of structure for the gathering! What are we supposed to do? And you know, Jesus doesn't give us a plan, He doesn't give us a schedule, He doesn't give us an order of service, He does not give us a checklist, He doesn't even say what these two or three gathered together are supposed to do! Now why do you suppose this is? I'll tell you why: it's because *a spiritual fellowship is led by the Spirit.*

The Lord says, "You just gather together in My Name, and I will be in the midst, and then I will show you the next step. You'll have to step out in faith. You'll have to let go. This is what it means to be in My Ekklesia. You'll have to give up your desire to *control* things, to *direct* things, to *manage* things, to *systematize* things, to *organize* things. That is the spirit of Religion. I am building a *spiritual* house, and I am teaching you how to be *led of the Spirit*, and so I'm not going to get into the specifics of what to do, and where to do it, and how often it should be done, and how you should go about it. Just remember one thing: when two or three of you are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of you. It will be all right! Just relax. Let go. Let me be the Head. Let me be the Good Shepherd. Let me be the Bridegroom. And whenever, wherever, you allow that to happen, I AM THERE!"

Praise the Lord. Now folks, that is absolutely amazing. That is the Ekklesia. It is Jesus in the midst of His people, leading us, guiding us, teaching us. That is spiritual fellowship...

The Spiritual Ministry of the Ekklesia

Everything we have said so far concerning the spiritual *nature* of the Ekklesia, and the spiritual *life* of the Ekklesia, and the spiritual *fellowship* of the Ekklesia, prepares us for this fourth aspect, that is, the spiritual *ministry* of the Ekklesia.

You recall, in my first message on this subject, we discussed how we associate certain meanings and thoughts to words, and when a word is used, we begin to get a picture in our mind of what we think that word means, and it's usually based on our experience with that word previously. We talked about how the word "church" has been spoiled over the ages so that it means something completely different than a spiritual Ekklesia being built by Jesus. Well, in the same way, that word "ministry" has been spoiled. It has been tarnished. It has been tainted. May I say, it has been defiled. And when we think of that word, "ministry", we tend to immediately, unconsciously, connect it and associate it with the word "church"; and since our mental image of "church" is usually wrong, our mental image of "ministry" becomes distorted as well. It is one of those words that has lost its significance because it has been cheapened.

We need to recover our spiritual vocabulary again. There is a Spirit-breathed language and vocabulary in the Scriptures, and we have lost it, by and large. We have lost the spiritual meaning of so many words that we toss around. Church. Ministry. Pastor. Deacon. Prophetic. Apostolic. We have made them into religious words - we have *naturalized* them, and so it is very difficult to get at the spiritual truth they once contained, the spiritual meaning those words once conveyed. Well, "ministry" is one of those words. The spiritual ministry of the Ekklesia is a very wonderful, wonderful thing - but it has nothing to do with gathering support, raising money, going to school, getting a program on television, building a large mailing list, flying all over the world doing meetings or constructing church buildings. I said it is a *spiritual* ministry.

And doesn't that make sense? I mean think about it. If the nature of the Ekklesia is *spiritual*, and the life of the Ekklesia is *spiritual*, and the fellowship of the Ekklesia is

spiritual, do you think the ministry of the Ekklesia - the practical expression of it - is going to be something natural, carnal, earthly, worldly, or secular? That doesn't even make sense. But here's the thing: if you don't understand the essentially spiritual nature of the Ekklesia, you aren't going to understand the essentially spiritual nature of the ministry. If you don't understand the spiritual life of the Ekklesia you won't know how to carry out the spiritual ministry of the Ekklesia. And if you don't know what the spiritual fellowship of the Ekklesia is all about, you won't even know what to do with the spiritual ministry of the Ekklesia. So I have approached these truths in a particular order. It has to be in this particular order. The practical expression, the spiritual ministry of the Ekklesia, is the overflow, it's the outflow, it builds upon everything else that we have already discussed.

We don't know what true ministry is because we don't know what the true Church is. We look at religion and define ministry in the context of religion. Well, *spiritual* ministry must be considered in the context of a *spiritual* Ekklesia. Otherwise it's impossible to discuss it.

So what is the spiritual ministry? The spiritual ministry of the Ekklesia flows out of the Life and the Fellowship we enjoy in Christ, and this spiritual ministry is nothing more and nothing less than the expression of Christ Himself to each other and to the world around us. *Spiritual ministry is the expression of Christ*. It is not expressing myself, my vision, my work, my ministry, my church, my group. It is the expression of Christ: His Work, His Ministry, His Life, through me.

Now maybe you were hoping for something a little more definitive. What do you mean "the expression of Christ" through a person? How is that ministry? Here is another one of those things that is easily implemented once you see it, it's easy to walk in once you grasp it, but it's so simple your mind tricks you into thinking it can't be that easy!

Well, let's go to First Corinthians chapter 12 so we can illustrate this and hopefully enter into the thought of the Holy Spirit here. First Corinthians chapter twelve. You really

need to study this entire chapter, but that might be overwhelming at this point. Let's focus on a portion of this, beginning in verse 4:

"There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all" (I Corinthians 12:4-6).

Now do you see that Paul has given us the Trinity here? We have something coming from the Spirit, something coming from the Lord Jesus, and something coming from God the Father. Diversities of gifts, he says, but they all come from the same Holy Spirit. Different administrations, but they all come from the same Lord. Different operations, but they all come from the same God. So you have the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. These three are one, and spiritual ministry is simply the expression of God Himself, working through the Ekklesia, to accomplish His Will through many different yielded vessels.

But look at some of those words there. "Administrations". "Operations". Sounds very technical, doesn't it? Sounds very corporate. Well here again, in my opinion, the King James Version has failed to communicate something. The word "administrations" here is the Greek word *diakonia*, and virtually everywhere in the New Testament it is translated as "ministry" or "ministries". It's where we get our English word "deacon" from - *diakonia*. And where they got the word "administration" from I have no idea; I suppose they just pulled it out of the air. But that's another example of how we project our own religious sentiment into something spiritual and we make it natural.

Well, if we want to translate that fairly, then we should be consistent. So we would say, "There are differences of *ministries*, but the same Lord." And I'm pleased to note that in the New King James Version they make that correction. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. Paul is not talking about some administrative thing, like a corporate executive who sits behind a desk. He is saying, "There are differences of ministries but the same Lord." That is to say, *"There are different expressions of Christ, but they all express something of the same Lord Jesus."* Does that make sense to you?

Different expressions of Christ but they all are expressing something of the same Lord. Like different facets of a diamond. Each facet reflects a particular aspect and angle of that diamond. There are different expressions of Christ, different ministries, but the same Lord.

Now here's the key: spiritual ministry is the expression of Christ, it is the fruit of our abiding in Him. It is not something that we do for Jesus, it is Jesus Himself living through us. That is spiritual ministry. It is the ministry of Christ through the Ekklesia, through His Church. Now how will He express Himself? There is a wide range of expression. Do not think of this spiritual ministry of the Ekklesia as standing behind a pulpit preaching a sermon, or leading a worship service. Jesus expresses Himself in the everyday, in the ordinary; in the mundane, and in the common little things that we call life. What happens inside the context of a "gathering" or a "meeting" of Believers is only one very small aspect of the Ekklesia. *Everywhere we go, everything we do, has the potential to express Christ.*

I say it has the *potential*. We must *abide* in Him in order for that expression and that Life to have the liberty to flow through us. The way we live, the way we work, the way we spend time with our family, the words we speak to a stranger. It is so much more than preaching a sermon or singing a song. Of course, all those things are included also, but spiritual ministry is not limited to activities such as preaching and singing and witnessing. There are a billion, billion ways to express Christ.

If you really get the fact that you are one with Christ, and Christ is one with you; that you are a branch abiding in the Vine, and can do nothing of yourself; then it is a simple thing to just let Christ express Himself through you. Just get out of the way! Let Him do it! He is there, but He will not force Himself, because Love does not demand its own way, right? So you surrender, you yield, you step aside, you open the door, and He rises to the occasion. Spiritual ministry is the expression of Christ. It is the fruit of our abiding in Him.

I said earlier that the Ekklesia enjoys spiritual oneness with Christ. This spiritual oneness, this union, this unity with Him - it is not something we have to earn, or merit, or work towards. It is not the REWARD for spirituality, it is the BASIS of spirituality. Oneness with Christ is not the GOAL of spirituality, it is the BEGINNING of spirituality. Oneness with Him, unity with Him. It is the foundation of everything, this spiritual union and oneness with the Lord Jesus. It's the whole reason for the Holy Spirit. Jesus said it is expedient for you if I go away - it's better for you if I leave! Why? Because when I leave the Holy Spirit will come. And then we understand that once the Holy Spirit comes, Jesus is no longer limited by His physical body, no longer bound by geography and time and space, no longer restricted to merely walking around with a few disciples. With the sending forth of the Holy Spirit He can now live within us, and we can live within Him. That is the whole teaching, the whole background of John 14, 15, 16, and 17.

Spiritual oneness. But we say it so easily! "Oh, I know Jesus lives in me and I live in Him." *But do you really get that?* Do you really comprehend that? I'm just beginning to comprehend it myself.

Look at the ministry of Paul. What a spiritually rich ministry it was. Why was his ministry so rich? So fruitful, is what I mean. Why was it so fruitful? Outwardly he says we are poor, yet we are making many people rich! That is a spiritual ministry! Well, where did all that fruitfulness come from? *"It is no longer I who lives, but Christ Who lives in me."* That is the secret of spiritual life, the secret of spiritual ministry. Spiritual fruitfulness is the result of living in Christ, abiding in the Vine. See how it all goes back to that personal relationship with Him? *"He that is joined to the Lord is one Spirit with Him."* One Spirit! One Life!

So members of Christ's Body, the Ekklesia, are not called upon to do anything in their own strength, or out of their own ability. I do not have to rely upon my leadership skills, or my talents, or my limited understanding when it comes to spiritual ministry. In fact, the less I have, the better! The less I know, the better! The weaker I am, the better! Because in that position I can originate nothing, I can't carry anything out. I can do nothing except trust in the Life of Another, the Life of Someone Else. And this is what it

means to enter into Rest, *to observe the Sabbath as a Person, not as a day* - to cease your labor and enter into this place of Rest, this place in Christ that He has prepared for us. It is a Promised Land.

Now all this relates to spiritual ministry. If it is a true, spiritual ministry - born of the Spirit, empowered by the Spirit, led of the Spirit - then it is not *your* ministry, it is the ministry of Christ. And who are you? You are merely a vessel, a servant, someone through whom Christ is expressed. That is, if your ministry is indeed spiritual, and not the invention of man, or something that you created to give yourself something to do. Of course, with a secular ministry in a secular church you can do whatever you think is right in your own eyes; build everything around your personality, around your charisma, around your leadership skills, around whatever assets you think that you have. But the Ekklesia reflects and expresses Christ because it is One Spirit with Him, and spiritual ministry flows out of that oneness, just as the River of Life flows out of the throne and through New Jerusalem.

The Spiritual Ministry of the Ekklesia is the expression of a living Christ. We do not have time to look at all the ministry gifts: the apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, teacher. Nor do we have time to look at all the spiritual gifts, and all the different functions and ministries and expressions of Christ in this Ekklesia. But in a nutshell, these ministry gifts and these spiritual gifts are simply different expressions of Christ. He is all those ministry gifts, and He is all those spiritual gifts, and He simply expresses something of Himself through these different ministries, through these different gifts.

There are certainly more expressions of ministry than we have time to name. "Husbands, love your wives". Men, that is an expression of Christ, and it is a spiritual ministry - but I doubt most men have ever thought about their marriage as a ministry to their wife. Raising your children is a spiritual ministry, because that also is an expression of Christ. All these practical things discussed in the Epistles about everyday living and relationships, they are not unrelated to the Ekklesia, they are very directly related. Why? Because everything we do, we do in the name of Jesus - whether we are gathered in the name of Jesus, or praying in the name of Jesus, or washing dishes in the name of Jesus, or

loving our wives in the name of Jesus, or raising our kids in the name of Jesus. "*Whatsoever* things you do," it says, "In word or in deed, *do all things* in the name of Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father by Him."

What does it mean to do something, or to say something, "In the name of Jesus?" What does it mean that whatever you do in word or in deed do all things in the name of Jesus? It means to do nothing in your own name, it means to say nothing in your own name. It means to do it as if He Himself is doing it; to represent Christ in word and in deed; it is an expression of Jesus.

Well, that is beyond us, humanly speaking. So we must walk in the Spirit, and if we are abiding in Christ then it becomes more than just a thing that we do, when we do all these things, all these ordinary, mundane things. It is, and it becomes, a spiritual ministry that expresses something of the Lord Jesus - something of His Love, His Joy, His Peace, His Patience, His Gentleness, His Goodness, His Faithfulness, His Meekness, His Self-Control . That is the fruit of the Spirit - but all those things are simply expressions of the same Lord Jesus Christ! "Differences of ministries" Paul says, but behind all of them, whatever you call it, there is the same Lord Jesus, revealing some aspect of Himself.

"It is no longer I that live...but Christ Who lives in me." That is a powerful, powerful thing, and I don't know about you, but it goes way beyond anything I have ever considered in terms of ministry. And that kind of spiritual ministry, that kind of expression of Christ, is available to every member of the Ekklesia. Every member of His Body, every Branch, has that potential for an expression of Christ through them. That Jesus can be all that in me, that Jesus can be all that in you and through you, in us and through us together, is what it means to live in union with Him; and that is what it means to be a part of this Ekklesia, this Church that Jesus is building - those who are called out, set apart, and gathered together into CHRIST.



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