

Discerning New Evangelicalism

Lesson Fourteen

Churchianity or Christianity

“¹⁵ He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? ¹⁶ And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. ¹⁷ And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed *it* unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. ¹⁸ And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. ¹⁹ And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 16:15-19).

“¹⁵ Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. ¹⁶ But if he will not hear *thee*, *then* take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. ¹⁷ And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell *it* unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. ¹⁸ Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 18:15-18).

It is obvious from the two portions of Scripture we have just read that we have two different views of the “church” being presented. In the first use of the word (Matthew 16:18), it seems obvious that Christ intends the word “church” to be an all encompassing, inclusive term referring to all true believers of the Church Age. In the second use of the word (Matthew 18:17), it is obviously intended to be a local assembly of believers functioning in a judicial capacity. The latter use is the general and normal use of the word in the New Testament.

“Of the 117 usages of the word ‘church’ in the New Testament all but five (Acts 7:38; 19:32, 39, 41; Heb. 2:12) refer assuredly to Christ’s ecclesia. Hebrews 2:12 can hardly be an exception since it is a quotation from the Old Testament, is prophetic, and found its fulfillment in New Testament times. These 112 usages of the word refer either to a particular assembly of Jesus Christ on earth, or to His general assembly in glory” (italics in the original, Dr. Richard Clearwaters, **The Local Church of the New Testament**, Central Press, page 12).

The Ecumenical and Theonomic distortion of the doctrine of the Church is directly related to development of Covenant Theology. This is related to their distorted eschatological view of the Kingdom that goes way back to Augustine (the father of Roman Catholic heresies). The Postmillennial and Amillennial perversion of the Kingdom have distorted the Ecclesiology of Christianity creating even further theological distortions. This has generated a smorgasbord of theology regarding the doctrine of the Church (Ecclesiology).

“Some centuries after the Apostles, some leaders began minimizing the distinction between Israel and the Church; and eventually a doctrine was formulated which identified one with the other. The Kingdom’s physical aspects were vaporized or transmuted into spiritual blessings and applied to the visible organization of the church. The Abrahamic and Davidic Covenants were transferred to the Papacy or Protestantism.” (Kenneth H. Good, **God’s Blueprint for a Church**, Regular Baptist Press, page 35).

The evolution of this heresy found its full development formulated in Augustinian Theology. Under Augustine, the Church was viewed as universal (i.e., Catholic or an international conglomerate). This Catholic (Universal) Church was seen as centrally local (physical) and administrated by a hierarchy of clergy extending from the Pope down to the local parish priest (sacerdotalism/Nicolaitanism).

This view held that there are two parallel governing forces in the world. These two parallel governing forces are Civil Government and Ecclesiastical Government (the Church). However, the Church was the authority in ordaining matters of moral law. These “laws” were to be enforced by civil authorities. The kings of nations were viewed as the “ministers of justice” in the enforcement of the “edicts” of Law from the Church.

Up until the Reformation, the Roman Catholic cultus was the *State Church* of most nations in the world. The Kings of those nations became the subjects of the Pope. He established their moral laws and the Kings enforced those laws according to the Pope’s edicts. This view was the historical view of Roman Catholicism. The Reformers did not abandon the heresy of the *State Church*. They simply replaced Roman Catholicism with their own denomination and hierarchy of clergymen (known as *Churchmen*).

“The Roman Catholic *Visitor* in 1946 was explaining how the ‘Protestant Reformation’ happened: This official organ of Rome declared that the Reformation was not religious in its nature; it happened at a time when the Roman Catholic church was weak *politically* (italics in the original, Dr. Richard Clearwaters, **The Local Church of the New Testament**, Central Press, page 2)!”

When they say they were “weak politically,” they mean they did not have the kings of certain nations under their authority. Once the Reformation took place, various nations began to accept other sects as their *State Church*. For instance, Lutheranism became the *State Church* of Germany and viewed itself as not only a spiritual authority in the nation, but also a political authority.

“All of the leading Reformers, who so heroically freed the church from the Roman Catholic Church and the Pope, fastened a State Church upon the people wherever they went, and the true New Testament sovereign local church that stood for absolute religious liberty was persecuted by these State Churches of the Reformers: This was true of – Luther, who fastened a State Church upon Germany [Lutheranism]. Zwingli, who fastened a State Church upon Switzerland [the Reformed Church]. John Knox, who fastened a State Church upon Scotland [the Reformed Church]. Henry VIII, who fastened a State Church upon England [Anglican or Episcopalian]” (italics in the original, [added] Dr. Richard Clearwaters, **The Local Church of the New Testament**, Central Press, page 2).

In all of these cases, the theologians began to establish civil law. These civil laws were enforced by the civil governments. Of course this was not as absolute as it was under Roman Catholicism. However, in the majority of the cases the Church continued to be viewed as a *Universal* Theonomic institution.

This *Universal* concept of the Church has taken many different avenues over the years. However, in almost every case, those holding to a *Universal* concept of the Church have maintained a Theonomic worldview. In most cases they continue to view the Church as having the authority to establish all moral law, which in turn should be enforced by civil authorities. This is a carry over from the heresies of Augustine and Roman Catholic doctrines stemming from Augustine’s Covenant Theology and his view that the nation of Israel was replaced by a new Theonomic force called the *Church*. Robert L. Saucy (a Lutheran) explains this view very well (he goes on to clarify the distinction between the Church and Israel).

“Much discussion has centered around the relationship of the church and Israel. Some Biblical interpreters, emphasizing their similarity, view them essentially as one people of God. The term *Israel* represents not a national people but the spiritual people of God. Therefore, the members of the church are considered to be New Israel. Spiritual Israel was related to national Israel in the Old Testament but it has now been enlarged to become a universal spiritual work in the church. The Israel of the Old Testament is thus superseded by the church, and the prophecies concerning the nation of Israel are, for the most part, no longer literally applied to the nation but rather to the church now and in the future” (Robert L Saucy, **The Church in God’s Program**, Moody Press, pages 69-70).

Ecumenicism finds its origins in the attempts of Covenant Theologians to unite all of Christendom into a one world Theonomic political *Police Force*. Under this worldview, Christianity loses its doxological missional vision with its soteriological imperative. Under this worldview, Christianity is reduced to a Theonomic political force with a sociological missional vision. Christianity is perverted into Churchianity.

“Of vital concern is the very popular revival of the old Puritan ecclesiology, now generally known under the term *Theonomy* or *Christian Reconstructionism*. In varying degrees some Baptists have become involved in this program, which is extremely attractive to the intellectually inclined. But once again, it is a matter of the concepts of the nature of the church that is central to the problem. Many Baptists are awakening to the fact that the ecclesiology of this movement is not merely un-Baptistic, but actually anti-Baptistic” (Kenneth H. Good, **Are Baptists Reformed?**, Regular Baptist Heritage Fellowship, page 19).

Although many New Evangelicals take this universalistic view of the Church, the majority do not see this *Universal Church* as a physical entity. They see the *Universal Church* as a spiritual or mystical entity. Although this *mystical church* is being built today, this *mystical church* is not a functioning entity in the Church Age dispensation. It will not be a functioning entity until the Millennial Kingdom on earth. It will not be assembled until the time of the rapture when the Bridegroom comes for His Bride.

However, most New Evangelicals and Evangelicals put their ecclesiastical emphasis in their exegesis and application on this *invisible Church* rather than the *visible church*. This is because they continue to be influenced by the Reformed Theological view of the Church. Most of the Reformers viewed the Kingdom of Christ as existing on earth in their time due to their allegorical and preterist interpretation of Revelation. The Church (meaning whatever denomination they founded) was both the visible and mystical representation of that Kingdom.

“It has been the practice of a large majority of professing Christendom to identify the church with the kingdom. This view has its basic foundation in the teachings of Augustine. The previous study of this church Father in chapter two has demonstrated the truth of Berkhof’s statement that ‘Augustine viewed the kingdom as a present reality and identified it with the Church’ ” (Earl D. Radmacher, **What The Church Is All About**, Moody Press, page 166).

I would not go so far as to say all Evangelicals and New Evangelicals take this view of the Church. However they very frequently see all professing Christians (whether those professing Christians believe in salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone or not) as this universal, mystical body. Although they see both the *visible* and *invisible Church*, their exegesis of Scripture and the resulting applications, lean towards the *invisible*. For instance, when dealing with such portions of Scripture as Ephesians 4:1-3 regarding spiritual unity, they would apply this to all of Christendom rather than to individual local churches.

“¹ I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, ² With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; ³ Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:1-3).

One of the central reasons for the theological misnomer of the *Mystical Church* as a functioning entity for the Church Age dispensation lies in a shallow exegesis of the Greek word *ekklesia* (ek-klay-see'-ah) and a misapplication of the “body of Christ” metaphor.

The Greek word *ekklesia* (ek-klay-see'-ah) is made up of two Greek words, *ek* (ek) meaning out of or away from and *kaleo* (kal-eh'-o) meaning to call out or invite. If we merely use the grammatical meaning of the word *ekklesia* (ek-klay-see'-ah), it simply means to call someone out of the world. However, the word historically was used to mean a calling out of the world (or public) to an assembly. Therefore, understanding the meaning of the word Scripturally is always connected to a local assembly.

“*Ekklesia* was used by the early Greek-speaking people with its full meaning of those called forth. It was a term for the ‘assembly of citizens summoned by the crier, the legislative assembly.’ The idea of summoning, however, soon passed away in usage. In Athens, *ekklesia* signified the constitutional assembly which met on previously fixed dates and did not need to be specifically summoned, much like our modern legislature . . . In addition, in secular Greek *ekklesia* refers only to the assembly or meeting and never to the people which compose that assembly. When the people are not assembled, they are not considered as composing an *ekklesia*. A new *ekklesia* existed each time people assembled” (Robert L Saucy, **The Church in God’s Program**, Moody Press, page 12).

The idea of a Church existing as an invisible entity even when unassembled is foreign to the historical meaning of the Greek word *ekklesia*. This idea comes from the ecclesiology of Covenant Theology and its ideas regarding *Spiritual Israel*. Even though many Evangelicals and New Evangelicals may clearly differentiate between Israel and the Church in their ecclesiology, many do not. Even when they do, their Ecclesiology often fails to be definitive. When New Evangelicals deal with those Scriptures that speak of the Church, they almost always make their applications to the invisible or mystical church.

“While the church may have begun with those who were in reality the True Israel within the larger, visible body, the church is much more than a mere extension of that entity. The church is radically different from either National or Spiritual Israel, and these distinctions are markedly clear in the apostolic revelation. . . Much of Biblical exegesis and interpretation which has its origin in Reformed thinking tends to equate the principles of the Old Testament Body with that of the New, making little distinction between Spiritual Israel and the Invisible church” (Kenneth H. Good, **Are Baptists Reformed?**, Regular Baptist Heritage Fellowship, page 24 & 25).

I believe New Evangelicalism was partially conceived out of the failure of the Fundamentalist/Modernist controversy to landmark these fundamental issues of Ecclesiology. The central issue of the Fundamental/Modernist controversy was the verbal inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture. Those who believed in certain basic *fundamentals* were deemed *Fundamentalists* regardless of their positions on eschatology or ecclesiology and sometimes even on salvation by grace alone through faith alone.

Baptist’s institutions, Bible Colleges and Seminaries continued to teach that Jerome, Origin, Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, Knox, Wesley (and a host of others) are our *Church Fathers*. Often, Baptist institutions continued to develop their theologies from Covenant Theologians such as Matthew Henry, Benjamin B. Warfield, Charles Hodge, W.G.T. Shedd, Robert L. Dabney, Henry B. Smith, Augustus H. Strong and James H. Snowden. It is little wonder our young fundamentalists have a tough time *towing the line!*

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1. Read Matthew 16:15-19 and Matthew 18:15-18. Discuss the two different views of the Church presented by the Lord in these two different portions of Scripture. _____

2. Discuss the differences between how Covenant Theology and Dispensational Theology see the doctrine of the Church (Ecclesiology). _____

3. Discuss the Augustinian view of two parallel governing forces in the world and how these two forces interrelate. _____

4. In the context of your answer to the above question discuss why Roman Catholicism and most of the Reformers established *State Churches*. Do they view themselves more as a *spiritual influence* in the world or a *political influence*? _____

5. Since all the Reformers who established State Churches continued to persecute Baptists, what do you think Baptists can expect in the future from the theonomic agenda of those of the Covenant Theology persuasion? _____

6. Discuss why seeing the *Church* as a replacement of the Nation of Israel gives the Covenant Theologian the right to see the *Church* as the final authority over all civil governments and the establishment of Civil Law. _____

7. Discuss how Ecumenicity relates to Covenant Theology and how this replaces Christianity with Churchianity. _____

8. When will the Mystical Church (Invisible Church) become a functioning entity? Discuss why this is important. _____

9. When a person's understanding of the doctrine of the Church leans toward an invisible entity, how does this impact the interpretation of such portions of Scripture as Ephesians 4:1-3? _____

10. Discuss the difference between the grammatical and historical meanings of the Greek word *ekklesia* and how this difference impacts the whole doctrine of the Church (Ecclesiology) especially regarding the belief that the Invisible or Mystical Church is a functioning entity for the Church Age. _____

