

WHO IS LEADING

THE CHURCH?

By Colin Winfield

A Booklet written to ask the question
“Does Jesus need to be acknowledged
afresh as our ONLY leader?”

INTRODUCTION

‘Those who are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God,’

Rom 8.14

Nowhere in Scripture is it suggested that ‘being led by the Spirit’ is an option. Either our minds are set on the things of the flesh, which produces death, or our minds are set on the Spirit, which brings life and peace, (Rom 8.15-17). Though we may declare that Jesus is our Lord, in reality He is not our Lord unless we are led by the Spirit of God and thus in a place to hear the voice of our Shepherd. We need the Holy Spirit to glorify and reveal Jesus to us, who in turn will lead us into the will of our heavenly Father. Jesus said that it is not saying, “Lord, Lord,” that enables us to enter the Kingdom of Heaven but doing the will of the Father, (Matt 7.21).

Jesus’ Church, which is his body, appears to be weak and divided. The manifestation of the victory that Jesus wrought through the cross and his resurrection is difficult to find. The body of Christ is seemingly paralysed, bound in chains, and unable to rise up in victory. What is it that prevents this victory? This booklet endeavours to identify the cause of this problem, which has beset the Church for 2000 years. Except for brief moments when some of God’s people have shone brightly, much of the body of Christ has had little effect on the world. Satan has always managed to ensure that the Church, when she has begun to move in corporate resurrection power, is drawn back into that place where she is again paralysed.

As we approach the subject of this book we can be confused because there is a lack of understanding that there is a Christian Religion, devoid of life and power, as well as true Christianity. Indeed, this is the very heart of the problem, for it is the spirits of the antichrist and religion that Satan uses to bind the church in chains. All too easily we, the Church, are deceived, for we find it easy to be religious and live in the area of the flesh and so, whilst looking like the real thing, the Christian Religion can produce a counterfeit.

As we draw near to the time of the Lord’s Second Coming will the body of Christ break free from these chains? I believe we will. However, to achieve this we need the Holy Spirit to give us spiritual discernment and understanding, for the answers will only come by revelation in the knowledge of God and the Lord Jesus Christ, which only the Holy Spirit can give us. So this booklet not only sets out to identify the problem but endeavours to direct the reader to the ministry of the Holy Spirit as the only Teacher, the one who can ensure that we, the body of Christ, are rightly connected to our Head, the Lord Jesus Christ. Only then can Jesus truly be our King.

CHAPTER ONE

Who is leading the Church?

Who is your leader?

Who is *your* leader and by whom are *you* being led? Jesus said, “Call no man leader for One is your Leader, even Christ” (Matt 23.10) yet within the Church systems this appears to be totally ignored. However, those who refer to themselves as *leaders* would justify their *position* from Scripture and those who are being led by men usually feel comfortable with this situation. Thus we can see that we, the Church, the body of Christ, have been manoeuvred into a position which directly contradicts the words of Jesus.

This booklet is written to examine this situation and encourage true believers to obey the words of Jesus and so make him their only Leader and come under his effective Lordship.

Christian Organisations

When we look at the differing Christian organisations we see they are *all* built on a similar pattern. Whether we look at the Catholic Church, the Anglican, Presbyterian, Baptists or Pentecostal Church or even those House Churches which have been more recently formed, we see they are basically structured in the same way despite endeavours over the centuries to achieve church government in line with Scripture.

These attempts to achieve correct and scriptural church government have not been without much pain and at much cost. Nevertheless, other than for short periods of time, we, the body of Christ, have still not effectively removed men as our *leaders* so that Christ can take his rightful place.

Some 'church structures' which have tried to comply with the words of Christ in this respect and have removed men from their hierarchical position as leaders have not correctly acknowledged the function of the Holy Spirit. Either the Word is put in a position that is rightly due to the Holy Spirit or, rather than being led by the Holy Spirit, men are led by the soul where flesh and demons counterfeit the Holy Spirit's leading.

Our problem is not one of just removing men as our leaders but in actually being led by the Holy Spirit.

The Charismatic Revolution

Since the mid 1950's, what has come to be known as the Charismatic Ecumenical Renewal has caused those in all denominations who are born again to be given the opportunity of being baptised in the Holy Spirit. This Charismatic Movement has largely not challenged the existing structures but endeavoured to encourage believers to be filled with the Holy Spirit and subsequently led by him whilst remaining in those structures.

However, whilst the gifts of the Holy Spirit have been magnified and much sought after, the function and ministry of the Holy Spirit as Teacher and Guide has not been emphasised, because the realisation that men should not be our teachers or guides (leaders) has not been fully recognised.

Because of this, men's structures have been left in place and perpetuated. Even in any new structure, built for the Lord rather than by him, we see they are usually built to the same basic pattern.

The Early Church

Some church historians identify the beginning of our dilemma as starting with Ignatius, a convert of the apostle John, who in A.D. 115 wrote seven letters to Antioch saying that there should be a *monarchal* bishop over the church there. One bishop *above them all*. He was to decide between truth and error. Here we see a man taking over the function of the Holy Spirit.

What appeared to be a good idea, possibly done with good motives, was in fact contrary to Scripture. If we allow the ministry of the Holy Spirit to be taken away from us we cannot discern truth and error or be led by the Spirit.

According to the rules of Ignatius, the Lord's supper was forbidden without this bishop being present. He said, "let no one do aught concerning the church without the bishop".

There was not, however, the very beginning of this problem, for John wrote of a believer who 'loved to be first among them' in 3 John 9, and Paul warned that from among the elders of the church at Ephesus men would arise who would draw away disciples after themselves (Acts 20.28-32).

Indeed, John writes that when the church had just begun, many spirits of antichrist had arisen, and that they had gone out from among themselves (1 Jn 2.18-19). We need to recognise that this problem is actually caused by the 'spirit of antichrist'!

The Spirit of Antichrist

The word 'Antichrist' is usually used to refer to a man who will arise in the end times who will be worshipped by the whole world and who is otherwise called 'the beast' in Rev 13; 'the man of lawlessness' in 2 Thess 2.3; and 'the little horn' in chapters 7, 8 and 11 of the book of Daniel.

Although the word 'Antichrist' has been adopted as the all-embracing title of this man who will oppose the saints, the word 'antichrist' is not found anywhere else in Scripture other than in John's three letters.

John refers to '*the* Antichrist', and to many spirits of antichrist, and goes on to tell us what it is that enables us to stand against these spirits. John points us to the 'anointing within us', telling us we have 'an anointing from the Holy One and we know all things' (1 Jn 2.20).

He explains that the 'anointing' which we received from him abides in us, and that we have no need of anyone to teach us, but his anointing teaches us, about all things, and is true and not a lie (1 Jn 2.27).

Many believers have trouble understanding these scriptures because they rightly recognise those within the body of Christ who have a teaching ministry. However, Jeremiah prophesied regarding the New Covenant that "they shall not teach again each man his neighbour and each man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord', for they shall *all know me*, from the least of them to the greatest of them", declares the Lord (Jer 31.34). We need to realise that anyone who teaches, even if he is a 'gift ministry' to the church, is not actually *the* Teacher. Unless what is taught is taken by *the* Teacher, the Holy Spirit, and revealed to our spirits we only have mental assent and mental understanding.

Christ and Antichrist

The words 'Christ' in Greek and 'Messiah' in Hebrew mean 'Anointed One'. Jesus is *the* 'Anointed One'. When we are born again and become a new creation we discover Christ *in* us the hope of glory (Col 1.27). Having been crucified with Christ it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives *in* me (Gal 2.20). Paul tells us that if we do not have the Spirit of Christ we do not belong to him and if Christ is *in* us our spirit is alive because of righteousness (Rom 8.8-10). Thus we find we have an anointing, this witness in ourselves (1 Jn 5.10).

As John identifies the spirits of antichrist he also highlights the 'anointing within' from 'the Anointed One' as our sure defence, for he says, 'greater is he (Christ) who is *in* you that he who is in the world' (1 Jn 4.4). He tells us that Jesus Christ abides *in* us, by the Spirit (of Christ) which he has given us (1 Jn 3.24) and so John is able to exhort us 'test the spirits' (1 Jn 4.1).

Antichrist can either mean 'against Christ' or '*instead of* Christ' or 'one who assumes the guise of Christ' (Vine's Dictionary of Bible Words), a good copy or counterfeit.

John links 'false prophets' to these spirits of antichrist in 1 Jn 4.1 and we know that many 'false christs' (Gk: -pseudochristos) and many 'false prophets' will arise and will show great signs and wonders before the return of the Lord, so as to mislead (for that is their purpose) if possible, even the elect (Matt 24.24). As the early church saw these spirits of antichrist released, so they are to be seen still misleading *many* as the church age draws to a close (Matt 24.11).

The absolute necessity for our very spiritual survival is that we abide in him and are led into all truth by the Holy Spirit, and thus ensure we are under the leadership of Christ so that Jesus may be Lord, our Head, and our King THIS IS WHY SATAN HAS MOST SUBTLY DECEIVED THE CHURCH INTO THAT PLACE WHERE IT DOES NOT ACKNOWLEDGE THE 'ANOINTING WITHIN' BUT SUBSTITUTES **LEADERSHIP BY MEN** CONTRARY TO GOD'S ORDER UNDER THE NEW COVENANT.

New and Old Covenant

It is important to recognise that God's order under the Old Covenant is different from the New.

Under the Old Covenant, God's people were not born again of the Spirit and so were unable to be led by the Holy Spirit. God spoke and communed with his people, Israel, through the Prophets, Kings and Priests. God's Old order mirrored that of the world in that it was a hierarchical structure with men as leaders.

However, under the New Covenant, God's order **changed!** No longer were there to be priests standing between God and man, for all believers are now priests (1 Pet 2.9). Under the New Covenant there is only one King, our **one** and **only** Master, the Lord Jesus. **WE ARE ALL BROTHERS** (Matt 23.8).

In Numbers 16 we read where Korah rebelled against the Old order complaining that Moses and Aaron had exalted themselves above the assembly, but this hierarchical order was ordained by God for that time. The rebellion was in challenging God's correct order. Now, God's New Covenant order is the exact opposite. His correct order is that we should all be on the same level. Jude warns, "Woe to us if we are found in rebellion like Korah" (Jude 11). He does not mean we should acknowledge leaders, but that we should ensure God's correct order is maintained.

Hierarchy or Not?

To be part of a hierarchical system is not wrong. Within the world, in which the Lord has placed us with the proviso that 'we are in it but not of it', we are part of hierarchical world structures and are exhorted to submit to these authorities (Rom 13). However, when it comes to the church, Jesus said that 'the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them and great men exercise authority over them, but **IT SHALL NOT BE SO AMONG YOU**, but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant' (Matt 20.25-26). **There should be no exercise of authority through position within the church.**

Jesus tells us 'not to be called Rabbi, for One is your Teacher and you are ALL BROTHERS'. Jesus said, 'Do not call anyone on earth father, for One is your Father who is in heaven, and **DO NOT BE CALLED LEADERS**, for One is your LEADER, even Christ; whoever exalts himself shall be humbled and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted (Matt 23.8-12). (It should be noted that the King James Version of the Bible wrongly translates this passage making it lose its meaning and significance.)

So we see that we are *all* brothers, part of the church of Jesus Christ, which has no hierarchical structure and where no authority flows down from one man (lord) to another, yet this is contrary to the majority of the church government structure that we observe in the denominations which ensure that Jesus is not *effectively* Head of those structures. Although those who belong to men's structures may say He is their Head, He can only *effectively* be so to those who are led by the Spirit.

Those who see themselves as leaders tend not to recognise the effect of this error for they are themselves mostly free from the authority of men *above* them. Much teaching in recent years has reinforced the error that if you do not submit to the 'authority' of those above you, you are in rebellion. It is this error which keeps the church in chains. The members of the body of Christ are thus kept from being led by the Holy Spirit and unable to discern spirits of error and so are open to deception. This deception is increasing now the time of our Lord's return draws near.

What does Scripture say?

In the New testament, the word 'leader', which is 'hodegos' in Greek, meaning 'guide', is only used of blind leaders of the blind in Matt 15.14 & Matt 23.16! The Greek word 'kathēgetēs' rendered 'master' or 'leader' also means guide and is used in Matt 23.10 where Jesus tells us not to be one!

Those who endeavour to defend the present church system often quote from the letter to the Hebrews, where the Greek word 'hegomai' meaning, 'to lead' is found, but is rendered 'to rule' in the King James Version (Heb 13.7, 17, 24). In Hebrews 13.7 we are told to imitate the faith of the one 'leading us', which in the King James Version is rendered 'the ones who have *rule* over you'!

We easily misunderstand the place of brethren going before, or leading us, for we should not do what they say, as one would take commands from one with authority over us, but rather 'imitate', for they are only leading the way, being under the authority of their King as we should be.

In Heb 13.17, the writer of the letter tells us to 'obey the ones leading you' (hegomai) and submit to them for they watch on behalf of your souls. Again, the King James Version of the bible says that we are to 'obey them that have the rule over us', reinforcing the idea of submission to those who have an authority over us. However, the word 'obey' in Greek is 'peitho' and means 'to persuade', and the obedience suggested is not by submission to authority but resulting from this persuasion. (Vine's Dictionary of Bible Words.)

Those brothers who are more mature and leading us in the race are to watch over the souls of the less mature but should never be related to their brethren in such a manner as to take the place of Jesus in their lives or exercise any rule or authority by virtue of a 'position' which they actually do not have. In Heb 13.24 of the King James Version of the Bible it tells us to 'salute all men that have *rule over you*, which takes the adjective 'hegomai' meaning 'the ones leading you' and calls them by the noun 'leaders', contrary to the teaching of Jesus. **Much error comes from translating adjectives (function) as nouns (position).**

Lastly, we find the Greek word 'proistemi', meaning 'to stand before' or 'preside', which is also rendered 'to rule' in the King James Version of the Scripture in Rom 12.8. Again, this is an adjective and describes those brethren who are "leading or in front". This may be leading in general or leading for a particular meeting or gathering. For there to be God's order in any meeting it is right that we have one brother 'preside', not to

effect control, but to ensure the headship of the Lord, who works through men, is maintained, and to ensure Satan is kept from spoiling the meeting. This is the function of elders who are not *over* the flock but *among* the flock and who guide the flock, (proistemi in Greek = guide in 1 Tim 5.17), not as a permanent 'position' but as an ongoing 'function' whenever it is needed. This does not place the elder 'over' the flock. Indeed, elders are to ensure Jesus is rightfully over each and every believer, encouraging, teaching and exhorting their fellow brothers to be hearing the Lord for themselves that the corporate local body be led by the Spirit. This function is very different to the one assumed by 'elders' in the hierarchical church structures found in the denominations. It is time to recover the correct functioning of elders within the church. This is not easy for many would rather follow men than learn how the Lord speaks to us personally and be led by him.

Denominations

Each structure, by its very nature, takes a name for itself, which is what the word 'denomination' actually means. The *only* name which should be over the true Church is 'Jesus Christ', for we *are* the Church of Jesus Christ. Whilst we can describe a group of particular believers as the church at 'a particular town', or the church that meets at 'someone's house', this is only descriptive and not their name. The church that meets at John's house is, therefore, not 'John's Church' but that part of the body that meets at John's house.

By naming themselves, groups of believers have placed a name other than Jesus over themselves and effectively removed Jesus from His rightful Headship, for all 'named groups' have 'leaders' who by having a 'position' become head.

When God moved by His Spirit in the early 1900's amongst believers gathering at an old barn in Azusa St., Los Angeles, the Lord told an eyewitness, Frank Bartleman, that 'they were going to organise' and effectively take the move of God from Him. This happened when they placed a name over the door, 'Azusa St. Mission'. The Holy Spirit moved that day to another location! Frank Bartleman's understanding was that God did not want a 'party' spirit. What God wanted was a channel through whom he would evangelise the world, a thing He cannot accomplish with a 'sectarian' party. 'God's people must be free from hierarchism', is what he wrote of that occasion.

Membership

To effectively become part of a denomination one becomes a 'member' of it, necessitating some commitment or allegiance to the 'named group', and agreement to submit to the authority of a recognised leadership of men over oneself.

When we are born again we are baptised *by the Spirit into* Jesus' body, becoming members of His body, which is the church. This is the 'one baptism' referred to in Eph 4.5. 'By one Spirit we were all baptised into one body' (1 Cor 12.13). We who are born again are therefore already members of one another, *commanded* to love one another as Jesus loves us. (His love for us led Him to die for us.) A commitment beyond this is not scriptural. Indeed, to promise to be committed to any particular group brings a binding effect. Making a promise is described by Jesus as 'evil' in Matt 5.37. 'Let your statement be, Yes, yes or No, no; and anything beyond this is of evil', is what Jesus taught, (see also Jas 5.12). We need to repent of these things and renounce such commitments in Jesus' Name, seeking forgiveness that He might restore us in this 'end time' hour, for joining our groups has separated us from the rest of the true body, for there is only one Church.

The Place of Money

To uphold a fixed leadership, the church structures pay their leaders. The money to do this usually comes from tithes given by those who are under such leaders. Whilst tithes were scriptural under the Old Covenant and part of God's order for upholding the necessary Levitical priesthood, teaching on tithing is not found in the New Testament, although reference is made to Abraham tithing the spoils of war (not income!) (Heb 7.4). However, nowhere are we told in the New Testament to tithe, only to 'freely give'. Tithing is defended from scripture using selected Old Testament scriptures, but again we need to realise we are no longer under the Old Covenant. When one considers ALL the Old Testament scriptures it is difficult to justify the present practice within the church (e.g. see Deut 12.17; 14.23; 26.12).

This does not mean we should not give to those who minister to us, neither should we minister ONLY if we receive payment. Freely we have received and Jesus tells us that 'freely we should give' (Matt 10.8). We should not muzzle the ox whilst he is threshing (1 Cor 9.9) but we should not pay for an ecclesiastical hierarchy above us, or place those with a ministry gift in 'position' over us, making *them* a substitute priesthood requiring tithes.

The Ministry Gifts

Ephesians 4 explains that to *each one of us* grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift and when He ascended far above all the heavens He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints (v7, 11).

We all recognise these 'gift ministries' but the desire is great to place them over us and submit to them. We are to submit to the authority of the Spirit given word that gift ministries may minister by the Holy Spirit but not to them personally.

A common form of church structure within the denominations sees pastors being placed in the *position* of shepherd *over their* flock; a flock with a name, membership and tithing. These pastors may indeed be ministry gifts of pastor given by the Lord to his church, but we effectively ruin their ministry by removing them from servanthood and allowing them to be lords *over* a flock which they wrongly acknowledge is theirs.

The ownership by these pastors of their flocks can only be achieved if the flock have submitted to their authority by some form of commitment and membership. Once a believer has done this the pastor is indeed over that believer and is able to exercise authority. Failure to submit in this situation is called 'rebellion' but this authority, submission and rebellion are all contrary to the Kingdom of God and God's correct order in the Church.

The word 'minister' (Gk diakonos) means, 'servant'. Despite attempts to speak of 'servant leadership' these are mutually exclusive terms. A 'servant leader' as found in denominations should not be found in the body of Christ. A servant should be a servant!

Jesus taught that the greatest would be a servant washing his brothers' feet, working freely and exercising no authority, for a servant, by the very meaning of the word, does not exercise any authority!

Other ministry gifts, e.g. evangelists, are sometimes given the position of pastor over churches, even though their gifting is not that of pastor. We have thus effectively ruined the ministry and calling of many anointed men. We need to release these men from the bondage of title and position and allow them once more to be led and used as the Holy Spirit directs under the Headship of the Lord Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER TWO

So who is in Charge?

“I will build my Church; and the gates of hell will not prevail against it” Matt 16.18b.

Who is in Charge?

Jesus said that He would build his Church, so we can be certain that HE will do it, and Satan’s attempts to prevent it will not succeed. However, if we who are born again into His Church, which is his body, have made others head, placing men between Jesus and ourselves, we have prevented Jesus from being *effectively* our Head and our Lord. Whilst the *effect* may be smaller or greater it nevertheless has deteriorating *effect* upon our spiritual walk. The extent of the *effect* upon us is dependent on the power of the spirits of antichrist and religion that bring spiritual death. Separation from our Head produces spiritual death sooner or later, and results in our ineffectiveness! As salt we lose our savour. As lights we are dimmed or hidden.

Separation from our Head causes us to lose our ability to discern and lose our ability to hear Jesus’ voice. We may be aware that we cannot hear our Shepherd’s voice any longer, or worse, begin to be led by our flesh or wrong spirits. We may not even realise Jesus is no longer in our midst! We are in great danger if we have ceased to hear the Lord.

Jesus declared to the Church in Laodicea that He would spit them out of his mouth (Rev 3.14-22). Jesus told them that He was standing at the door and knocking, and if anyone *heard* his voice and opened the door, He would come in to him and dine with him, and he with Jesus (v20). The Laodicean Church had ceased to hear the voice of their Lord. He was therefore no longer in their midst, and they did not even realise it!

If Jesus is our Pastor (Gk poimen = shepherd or pastor) we can hear his voice, because Jesus said, ‘My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me’ (Jn 10.27) and, ‘Every one who is of the truth hears my voice’ (Jn 18.37b). Hearing the Shepherd’s voice and being led by the Spirit of God are both part of our walk in the Spirit. When we first believed, the Spirit himself bore witness with our spirit that we were a child of God (Rom 8.16). Our walk in the Spirit had begun. Even before we were born again the Holy Spirit convicted us of sin and righteousness (Jn 16.8). When we first believed, by His Spirit, the Lord was able to ‘open our minds to understand the Scriptures’, just as He did for the disciples on the day He was raised from the dead (Lk 24.45). The Holy Spirit ministry is effective even before our new birth, but this needs to be differentiated from Him enduing us with power, which the disciples received when Jesus baptised them with the Holy Spirit at the first Pentecost after His resurrection. So, the anointing within begins to teach us about all things and the Spirit of Truth begins to guide us into all truth, to glorify Jesus, take of his, and disclose it to us (Jn 16.13).

As each believer is led by the Spirit the church corporate can likewise be led by the Spirit. When the church first began it was the congregation who selected the ministries to serve at tables (Acts 6.2-3). In Acts 15.22 ‘it seemed good to the apostles, and the elders, with the whole church’, to choose men to send to Antioch. These events do not describe a process of electing those we prefer, but discerning who the Holy Spirit is indicating.

Our leading, both individually and corporately, is only possible when we acknowledge that the Father has a plan and purpose He wishes us to walk in; that Jesus is our Head and as such will tell His body what He wants; and that by the Holy Spirit we can walk in Jesus’ Kingdom purposes.

The Place of the Whole Church

We need to recover again and recognise the function of the ‘whole church’, doing nothing without all the saints being given opportunity to discern the Lord’s will with regard to what affects them. After Paul’s first missionary journey we see that on his return to Antioch he ‘gathered the church together’ to report all things that God had done (Acts 14.27). When dissension arose in Antioch, Paul and Barnabas were sent on their way to Jerusalem ‘by the church’ (Acts 15.3) and on their return gathered ‘the congregation together’ to hear the letter sent by the apostles and elders of Jerusalem. Indeed, we see in all Paul’s letters, other than the personal epistles, that they were addressed and sent to all the saints in any particular locality.

The Place of Elders

The role of elders is much misunderstood. When Paul first preached the gospel in any town he would spend varying lengths of time with the new disciples (of Jesus). Later he returned to appoint elders for them in every church (Acts 14.23. Likewise, Paul left Titus in Crete 'to set in order what remained and appoint elders in every city' (Titus 1.5). One role of an apostle is the first appointing of elders. We see from scripture that there was *always a plurality* of elders. These were not, and must not be, *above* the congregation. They are *among* the flock that they are made overseers (bishops) of, to shepherd the church of God which has been acquired with His own blood (Acts 20.28). Their role or function is to help ensure Jesus is Head of His flock, to help ensure that each believer is hearing the Lord for himself, and that the church *corporate* discerns by the Spirit what the will of the Lord is in any given situation. To usurp this 'function' is easy and dangerous. Savage wolves amongst the elders at Ephesus drew away disciples after themselves (Acts 20.30). Without realising it, those taking a position over a flock they call their own can do just the same thing.

The Place of Gift Ministries

Jesus has given gifts to His church, some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers (Eph 4.11). We recognise these giftings in our brothers but appear to be unable not to lift them above us, creating 'positions' for those God-given 'functions' that should operate 'amongst' us, not 'over' us.

Many church structures have *one* pastor or shepherd over a flock that he calls his own. This pattern is not found in scripture¹

We do not need a brother to permanently shepherd us, though in our early Christian walk we may need more care. We certainly do not need to belong to his flock for we are already in the flock. I do not need to belong to his church for I am already in the church.

What is the Church?

The church is the body of Christ (Eph 1.23). We have no difficulty with this concept when we consider the church worldwide, but seem to have great difficulty with it when we consider the local church.

The church (Gk ekklesia) means 'called out ones'. We do not go to church for we are already the church. The local church gathers. The church is not a building, for we are the temple of God, individually (1 Cor 3.16; 6.19) and corporately (Eph 2.22). We cannot join a church for we are already members one of another, part of the church.

Because we belong to one another we should not separate ourselves from our brethren, even if they separate themselves from us, which belonging to a denomination effectively does. Jesus prayed that 'we may all be one' (Jn 17.21). He prayed that 'we might be one even as He and the Father were one' and 'that we might be perfected in unity' (Jn 17.22-23). So it is necessary that we recognise each other as members of one church, whether this is its universal aspect or its local, even when some hold beliefs, allegiances and 'submissions to men' which effectively separate them from us.

The Church and the Kingdom

Some differentiate between the Church and the Kingdom, but when we were made new creations we were transferred from the domain of darkness to the Kingdom of His (God's) beloved Son (Col 1.13). As part of his Kingdom, Jesus *should* be our King. When Jesus is King He *should* be reigning in our lives. To have Jesus as King is the equivalent to having Him as Lord.

The preaching of the Kingdom of God, which began before Jesus was crucified, continued in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 19.8; 20.25; 28.23, 31).

We have been deceived into preaching a gospel of salvation only, linked to our wrong understanding of church and our having created structure and organisations *for* Jesus but which have not been ordained *by* Him. Having pointed unbelievers to the Lord and made them disciples of Jesus we soon make them disciples of men. We have been guilty of making believers members of our churches, teaching them to submit to men and to accept the doctrines of our particular denomination.

Knowing something is not right, we search for 'that' which will bring life but do not recognise we have separated ourselves and each other from the Vine. Occasionally we appear to 'get it right' but copying any new formula does not work and it seems even that which seemed alive soon begins to die once more. The Gospel of the Kingdom is not only the good news of salvation but includes the whole purpose of God. As Jesus commissioned us in Matt 28.18-20, we should make disciples (of Jesus). Disciples are those taught by Him. Jesus said, 'This Gospel of the Kingdom will be preached to all nations and then the end (of this age) will come' (Matt 24.14). This gospel will bring persecution, for the spirits of antichrist cannot survive side by side with it. They can survive with the gospel of evangelism ONLY! The gospel of evangelism ONLY brings ecumenism, for though it claims to uphold love it does not uphold truth. When the Spirit of Truth is not effectively recognised, deception and error soon create compromise, which eventually leads to spiritual death.

The time of the end of the age is like no other time in the last 2000 years. For 2000 years tares and wheat have been allowed to grow together but there is a time of harvest, a time when the tares are gathered and put into bundles which will be burned, and when the wheat is gathered into Jesus' barn (Matt 13.30). Jesus explains that at this special time the stumbling blocks and those who commit lawlessness are gathered OUT OF HIS KINGDOM, and then the RIGHTEOUS WILL SHINE FORTH AS THE SUN in the Kingdom of their Father (Matt 13.43). Daniel prophesies of this time saying, 'Those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness like the stars for ever and ever (Dan 12.3).

This time of the Lord's return is drawing near. I believe this time of separation of tares and wheat has already begun. For 40 years, what has been known as the Charismatic Ecumenical Renewal has upheld a belief that we can renew the old wineskins of our man-made denominations by acknowledging the ministry of the Holy Spirit upon believers whilst not fully acknowledging the ministry of the Holy Spirit within believers.

Satan can counterfeit anointings upon but he cannot counterfeit the anointing within. He may deceive by providing a substitute in our soul realm to the anointing within our spirits however. Thus we need to learn to identify the difference. Spiritual understanding and discernment is *the only way* to know what is of the Spirit of Truth and what is the spirit of error. This spiritual understanding and discernment is available from the Holy Spirit.

As Paul prayed for the early Church, so we Christians should pray similar prayers to those Paul prayed in Eph 1.17; 3.16; Phil 1.9; Col 1.9; 2 Thess 1.11; Phm 6, asking for a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, that the eyes of our hearts might be enlightened. We should ask to be filled with a knowledge of the Father's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, for our Father wants to reveal His will to us. We need to pray that our love may abound more and more in real knowledge and *all* discernment so that we may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be blameless until the day of Christ (Eph 1.17; Col 1.9; Phil 1.9).

The spirits of antichrist have been able to move the Church from a life in the Spirit to a deadness of religion for 2000 years, but the last 40 years have been unusual. All previous moves of the Spirit have been outside the denominational structures, but each move has eventually resulted in a new denomination if it did not get swallowed up again by the old denomination. The Charismatic Ecumenical Renewal however has been markedly different for it has sought to 'renew' the denominational structures, a 'renewal' many believe is of God and is still on course. This accelerating Ecumenical Unity is fast producing a 'union' which will produce a One World Church. This 'unity' at the expense of truth, or a 'unity of the faith' is a counterfeit production of the prayer Jesus prayed that the Church be one! As this 'renewal' draws to its climax a quiet revolution is taking place. The Lord is beginning to open the eyes of His people to the tactics which have always succeeded in Satan's hands. Jesus is saying, 'Come out of her my people...for her sins have piled up as high as heaven' (Rev 18.4-5) but this 'coming out' is of no use unless we come unto Him. It seems we have not dared contemplate that our 'separation unto Him' would require renunciation of our allegiance to organisations and should require our repentance for having submitted to men and religious organisations which take the place of Jesus without our necessarily realising it.

Jesus said, 'When He, the Spirit of Truth comes, He will guide you into ALL the truth' (Jn 16.13). As the end time deception increases will we be found to be part of His Church, truly demonstrating that Christ is our Leader, that the reality of His Kingdom may come into our hearts and lives?

.....Colin Winfield