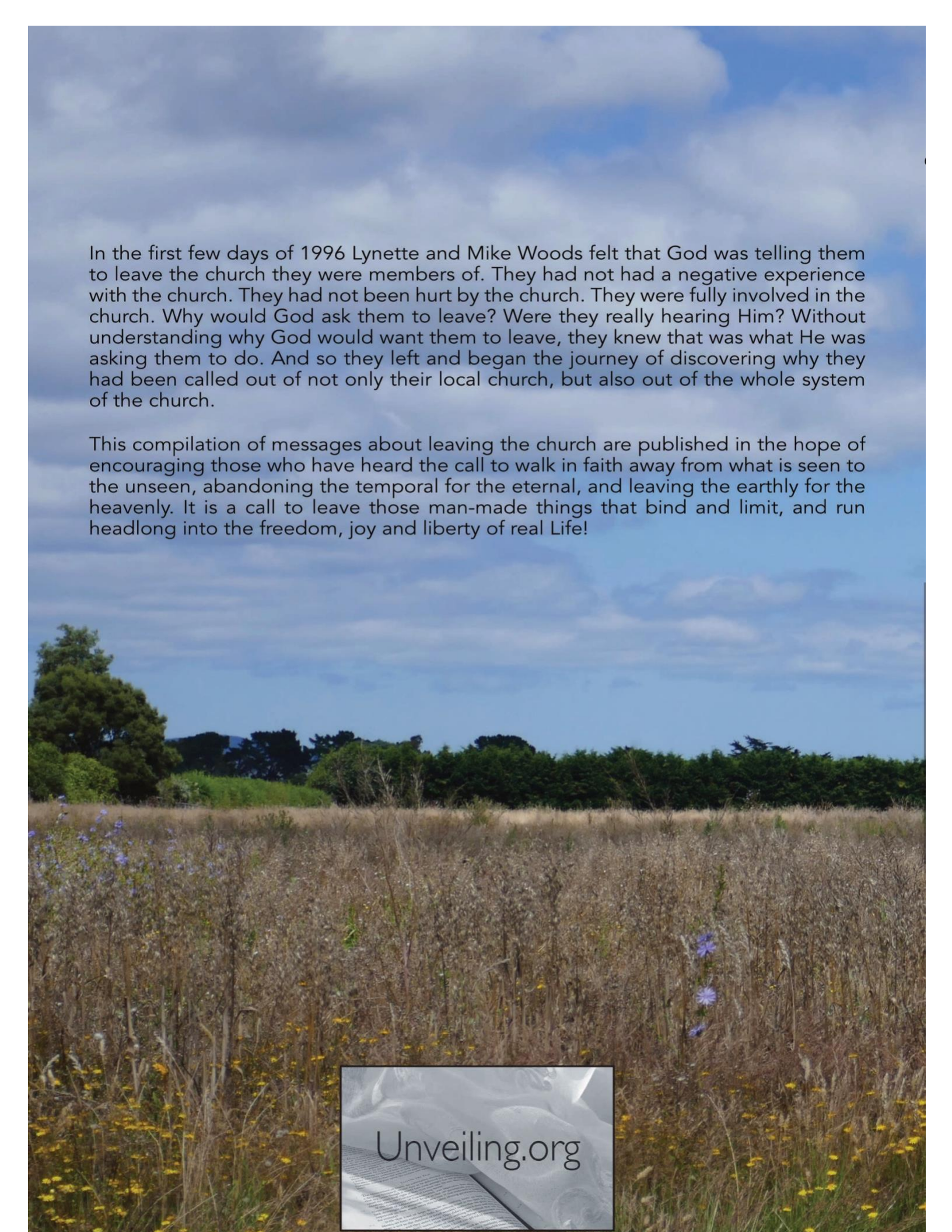


Leaving Church?



Lynette Woods



In the first few days of 1996 Lynette and Mike Woods felt that God was telling them to leave the church they were members of. They had not had a negative experience with the church. They had not been hurt by the church. They were fully involved in the church. Why would God ask them to leave? Were they really hearing Him? Without understanding why God would want them to leave, they knew that was what He was asking them to do. And so they left and began the journey of discovering why they had been called out of not only their local church, but also out of the whole system of the church.

This compilation of messages about leaving the church are published in the hope of encouraging those who have heard the call to walk in faith away from what is seen to the unseen, abandoning the temporal for the eternal, and leaving the earthly for the heavenly. It is a call to leave those man-made things that bind and limit, and run headlong into the freedom, joy and liberty of real Life!



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by

Lynette Woods

Email: look@unveiling.org

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They have been slightly edited so that they are more suitable for a compilation.*

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Chapter 1 – Religion...

but not as we've known it

Being religious extends far beyond Pharisees, beyond Muslims, beyond Christians, to the very core of who we are: Self with a capital S. Jesus said some awful things to the religious, so if this is true, then we may find Him saying some harsh things and upsetting a few of our temple's tables in order to reveal the god that is behind it all, releasing us from our self-made religion and revealing the freedom which can only be found in Him.

"The time is coming when people will not tolerate sound and wholesome instruction, but, having ears itching for something pleasing and gratifying, they will gather to themselves one teacher after another to a considerable number, chosen to satisfy their own liking and to foster the errors they hold, and will turn aside from hearing the truth and wander off into myths and man-made fictions." 2 Tim. 4:3,4.

If there is anything that epitomizes "myths and man-made fictions" then religion would have to be it! These verses describe exactly what we see in the world today, whether people call it "religion" or not. Religion is a word very closely associated with the church and is thought of in a positive light by many Christians. Those outside of the church typically think of someone religious as being legalistic, traditional, crusading for Christianity etc. However, what I'm wanting to focus on is a One World Religion which I believe to be at the root and foundation of every single human being, regardless of age and regardless of what belief system they have and regardless of whether they go to church or not. This One World Religion is behind every religion that is on this earth (whether "Christian" or not). This religion has only one god and this god is worshiped and served like no other. The name of this religion's god is: Self.

The etymology of the word "religion" is quite revealing. It stems from two words: *re* (again) and *ligare* (meaning to bind or tie, a bond or obligation). Religion puts people into bondage and blindness again and again. It is part of the curse because it separates us from God. It is something which has been part of mankind ever since Adam and Eve decided to trust themselves and their own judgments rather than trusting God and we are daily faced with this same choice: trust God or Self.

Even people who believe they are not religious may be part of this religion because the basis of all religions and religiosity is Self; whether it is Self doing works or doing nothing and simply "being". Many leave their religion or church not because they heard God ask them to, but because that is what THEY wanted to do; and the same can also be true for those who go back to it all. Self justifies anything and everything. This religion is quite simply a case of Self listening to Self. Self doing for Self. Self defence. Self righteousness. Self preservation. Self realization. Self help. Self enlightenment. Self justification. Self

discovery. Self expression. Self governing. Self discerning and judging. Self disguised as “spiritual”. Self-ish to the core. This religion is based on us and what we think, do, and say whereas true spirituality is based upon all that *Christ* has done and is doing; upon all that He has said and is saying!

This religion of Self is not particular about whether you go to a church or not, whether you are devout outwardly or not; so long as Self is served. Its creed is: do whatever you believe to be right. This religion is all about what Self likes, what feels right to Self, what Self dictates and then “crusading” towards that end. And when the message which Christ proclaims through the Bible about denying Self, dying daily and losing your life is given, it is often rejected because the god which Self has created would not ever say such things! You get a reaction because the god of Self is governing rather than the God of Jesus Christ.

The Great Deception

The spirit of this world is not ignorant of our susceptibility to being governed by Self and makes the most of it by making what is false sound like truth; but the truth is it can be just our interpretation of what seems right to us. “But you must understand this at the outset, that no prophecy of scripture arose from an individual’s interpretation of the truth. No prophecy came because a man wanted it to: men of God spoke because they were inspired by the Holy Spirit. But even in those days there were false prophets, just as there will be false teachers among you today. They will be men who will subtly introduce dangerous heresies... With their high-sounding nonsense they use the sensual pull of the lower passions to attract those who were just on the point of cutting loose from their companions in misconduct. They promise them liberty. Liberty! – when they themselves are bound hand and foot to utter depravity. For a man is the slave of whatever masters him.” (2 Pet. 1:20-2:1,18,19).

Many these days are bound by religion even when they have left the visible traditions of their religion. Religion has not left them because they are still enslaved and governed by Self; they are finding “freedom” in SELF rather than in Christ. This is an absolute tragedy. It is also diabolically devious... to be tricked into leaving one form of bondage for another in the guise of “freedom” and thinking you are free and yet to still be imprisoned, is tragic.

How could we be so deceived? Because religion is a *spirit*, it is *spiritual*. Behind all of religion are spiritual forces which are determined to deceive “if possible even the elect”. How do they attempt to do this? Through Self: what we see, hear, think, desire and even genuinely believe. When God opens our spiritual eyes to see what is real and true and what is merely an illusion of reality and truth, it is quite shocking. We wonder how we could have been duped and been so blind! Knowledge is a very powerful commodity; it can either release or bind. When we think we know something, we will stubbornly cling to that knowledge and not seek to find out more because we think we already know. But it is only when we realize we know *nothing* that we begin to know Everything (Christ) and receive

Him as our Wisdom which sets us free from our very little world and religion of Self... We begin to discover the ever expanding Universe which is Christ in God.

Only what is received and revealed through Him can transform us. Religion will simply conform and deceive us. We need to be *born* into our Father's family and not just call Him "Father" or "Papa" because others do. We need a Revelation of Christ and not a religion about Christ. Saul of Tarsus was not released from religion by Stephen's amazing and Holy Spirit inspired speech; all it needed was for him to *personally see, experience and hear Christ for himself*; a Revelation of Christ. This principle still applies to each of us today.

We each need to see and know Christ for Who He really is rather than how we would like Him to be. My love for Him is not truly for Him if I don't want to see Him or accept Him as He is. Both historically and today, He often reveals something of Himself and people reject Him... just because He is different to what Self/Religion expected! Listen to what He says: "Anyone who intends to come with Me has to let Me lead. You're not in the driver's seat; I am. Don't run from suffering; embrace it. Follow Me and I'll show you how. Self-help is no help at all. Self-sacrifice is the way, My way, to saving yourself, your true self. What good would it do to get everything you want and lose you, the real you? If anyone intends to come after Me, let him deny himself [forget, ignore, disown, and lose sight of himself and his own interests] and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever wants to save his life, will lose it; and whoever gives up his life for My sake and the Gospel's will save it." (Mark 8:34-36).

True Freedom

Only freedom from Self will bring true freedom from religion, obligation and bondage. This is why the message of freedom given in the Bible is Life which comes through death! The only way to be free of Self is to die to Self. Doing whatever Self wants is not freedom, but bondage; because you are bound to do what YOU want – Self is your master. Some pride themselves on what they can do within religion; others pride themselves on what they can do outside of religion. BOTH can still be religious because whether legalistic or liberal, by the book or having none, BOTH extremes may be dictated by Self and by the temperament or type of person they are naturally. BOTH extremes can be based on Self's preferences and what Self naturally likes; it is a religion where the god of Self is worshiped, deified and obeyed without question!

"God's will must not be made subject to my own temperament. When we know a man's make-up it is often all too easy to guess what "guidance" he will get, because his natural proclivities intrude so subtly upon the leading of God. Too much so-called guidance among us is little more than personal bias. A timid brother is "guided" to take a back seat. A forward brother is "guided" to take a front seat. Each claims to be led of the Lord. Is he? Or is his temperament ruling him? The pure will of God demands of me that what I am temperamentally shall be set aside. I should be so Spirit-filled that the man beside me cannot foresee, on grounds of my temperament alone, how God will

lead me. Oh let me beware of slanting the will of God in the direction of my own natural leanings! Even the Lord Jesus, whose own will was surely faultless, nevertheless set it aside in favour of the Father's who sent Him. If He should do that, how much more must I!" (*Watchman Nee, A Table in the Wilderness*).

Yes, *how much more must I?* Being led by the Spirit of God does not mean we are led by our natural preferences and whatever we like as some seem to believe. Religion and Self distort God, even to the point of creating a god in our own image; a god we are happy and content with, a god we can understand and identify with, a god we can worship and love. But *there is nothing loving about a god who does not convict or correct you* and just allows you to believe a lie and do whatever you want (see Heb. 12:5-11). That is not the God of Jesus Christ Who Himself said: "Those whom I dearly and tenderly love, *I tell their faults and convict and convince and reprove and chasten them*" (Rev. 3:19).

In the same way as we confuse socializing with fellowship, licentiousness with freedom, and condemnation with conviction, so too we can confuse being religious with being spiritually mature. There is a vast gap between each of these 'dynamic duos,' for one is earthly and the other is heavenly.

God did not create religion, man did. At the tower of Babel man had a spiritual-sounding goal and were even united in their efforts "to reach the heavens". But God's verdict on all their hard work was: "If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other. So the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city." (Gen 11:6-8). Why did He do that? We today might think it a good thing to be as one people, all working together in unity on one thing, but God does not. Why? Because pride and Self were at the root of it and not God Himself. We still see His same judgment on religion in the world today: wherever people are like-minded and 'speak the same language' and work together building something here on earth, you eventually find division after division among them as they are scattered abroad.

Leaving the Confusion of Religion

Religion is certainly a confusion of many voices, it is a mixture of what is true and false that God must divide in order to reveal what is of Him and what is not. The very essence of Babylon and religion is mixture and confusion; in fact the name "Babylon" (which is the same Hebrew word for Babel) means: confusion by mixing. From the Garden of Eden to the end of this world, the mixing of truth with error remains a very successful means of deceiving and seducing us. In the book of Revelation in reference to Babylon is written, "by your magic spells and poisonous charm all nations were led astray, seduced and deluded. And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints..." (Rev. 18:23,24) and the cry to us all is: "*Come out from her, My people*, so that you may not share in her sins, neither

participate in her plagues..." There are some things which God *must* divide and separate and which we *must* reject and turn away from.

We are new creations in Christ and as our minds are renewed we learn daily through experience to distinguish and discern between what is the new Life in us, and what is the old nature: Self. What is from God often makes no sense to Self, instead it may completely contradict what we naturally think. Not one of us is willingly deceived or duped by Religion. We will instead be sincerely deceived; we will sincerely believe that we are right! But sincerity does not mean something is true. We cannot discern right from wrong or truth from deception ourselves; at all! Discernment must come from outside of Self... it comes only from knowing the living Word of God; not a head knowledge of Him, but a genuine, experiential, intimate, heart knowledge of Christ as He really is which results in distinguishing between His voice and the many voices, *including our own voice*.

Religion robs God of what is rightly His: people's hearts! Religion is a substitute for Christ. The religious heart is absorbed and blinded by what it sees and worships – and it is the same end result whether you're worshiping Mary, the Church, Allah or unconsciously worshiping your Self! Religion results in blindness, bondage and death – again and again; *re*-ligion = being bound again. We desperately need to know through personal experience the liberation and freedom which only Christ brings and the true meaning of the word "release": to free and loosen (relax) and to have a lease again – to be given over to Another with a new lease of Life! May this be the experience and living testimony of each one of us.

"The Spirit of the Lord... has sent Me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" Luke 4:18,19.

Chapter 2 – Leaving Church

When God first called us out of religion in 1996, we didn't understand exactly what He was asking us to leave. Over time we saw that He was not just calling us to leave the church we were part of, but anything and everything that was a substitute for Him. Thankfully He did not reveal this to us all at once, He has been leading us on a journey, through a process, one step at a time...

Eventually Father brought me to another step which involved my use of the word "church". Until this point, I believed that although He had called us out of religion, we were part of the church which Jesus was building; we were called to BE the church because the church was the people rather than the building. I felt I needed to constantly correct the common "misunderstanding" of the word "church", both to myself and others, and yet saying "we are the church" was very open to misunderstanding too. Some would think we were saying "we are THE church" or "WE are the church" or thought it was just semantics. Unbelievers couldn't fathom it at all. They understand what the word church means in English and it is simple: It is a religious place where religious people go to do religious things!

Whether we like it or not, the church is part of a religious system which not only substitutes itself in place of Christ in people's lives, but also actively prevents them from knowing Him outside of the construct of itself. Jesus is building something heavenly and not earthly; *He is not building the religious, institutional, compromising, man-created mixture that is the church.*

Father suddenly opened my eyes to see all of this and simultaneously gave me the freedom to leave the word "church" and stop trying to redeem it. I sensed that there had been a season for that, but now I felt released to simply use the word "church" for what we know it to mean.

When I saw this, I realized we could no longer say we are the church or part of the church. While the world will be able to accept this without much trouble, those who consider themselves part of the church may not find it so easy. To me now, it seems like saying we were part of the church was a justification to those who were church-goers – a way of reassuring them that although we were not attending a church, we *were* still part of the church because the church was the people of God... It made them, and us, feel a little bit better about it all!

But now we have left not only the buildings, the meetings, the system; we have also left the word "church". And just because we have left those things, doesn't mean that we don't have more religious sacred cows that need to be slaughtered and barbecued! Our religious mindsets blind us regardless of whether we are in a church or not. We have met people who consider themselves outside of the church system and yet are just as religious as

anybody in a church. This is not about where we go or do not go, what we do or do not do, what we say or do not say – religion is an affair of the *heart*, and the heart rightfully belongs to only One. Seeing our religious prejudices how God sees them is an unveiling which begins in the spirit, and then brings change to the heart, mind and body. But change is often not easy for us to accept...

The Word: Church

English is a language which is evolving and constantly changing. As I will endeavor to show, there is nothing sacred about the word “church” although some may feel like there is due to their mindsets and what they have believed. The words we use *are* important. To use a word which means one thing to most people, but something different to you and a few others, is to ask for misunderstanding.

For instance, with the word “gay”, we don’t see many people trying to redeem the word to mean happy or insisting that *they* will use it by its original definition regardless of what it now means. Instead most people accept that the definition has changed and know what others mean when they use it. It is the same with us and the word “church”; why use a word that doesn’t mean what we think it should mean?

Most of us have thought of church as being Biblical; after all, didn’t Jesus say He was building His church? That is what our Bibles say He said and although we can go back to the original Greek and look back in time to see how we got this word “church”, it won’t achieve anything unless we have been given eyes to see things spiritually. Only God can open our eyes to see and accept Truth... so what is shared here is not for convincing you or condemning you if you don’t see what I have seen, but is given in the hope of watering the seeds that have been planted in the hearts of those who have heard the call out of religion.

Most linguists agree that the word “church” is derived from the Greek word “kuriakos” which simply means “the Lord’s”. The word was used only twice in the Bible: in 1 Cor. 11:20 for “the Lord’s supper” and in Rev. 1:10 for “the Lord’s day”. It did not mean anything like what the word “church” means today! By the time the Roman Emperor Constantine had legalized Christianity in the year 313, another word had been added: *doma*. *Kuriakos doma* meant the Lord’s house or domicile, a building that was the Lord’s. When the Emperor declared Christianity to be Rome’s religion, he gave tax exemptions to the leaders of it, appointed Christians as high ranking officials, supported the church financially, and... built churches – “kuriakos doma”. However, the phrase “kuriakos doma” is *not in the original Greek Scriptures* at all.

The word commonly translated into English as “church” in the Bible was the Greek word “ekklesia” which simply meant a gathering or assembly. It was not a religious word, it was an every day word used in ancient Greece. However, in the Greek language now, ekklesia means a church. Today derivations of “ekklesia” such as “iglesia” and “église” also mean

“church” in Spanish and French as well as other languages. Many now believe the word means “called out ones”. I will explain why in the next chapter.

Obviously we do have this word “church” in our Bibles and this is because in 1611 when the officially sanctioned English version of the Bible was produced by England’s King James (who was the head of the church in England) number 3 of the 15 rules the translators were given by him was:

“The old ecclesiastical words to be kept, viz.: the word ‘Church’ not to be translated ‘Congregation’ etc..

The reason King James had to mandate this departure from the Greek meaning of the word “ekklesia” was because there had been a previous translation of the Bible into English by William Tyndale in which the word “ekklesia” *was not translated as “church”*. Instead “ekklesia” was translated as “congregation” even though there were churches around when Tyndale was alive. But the translators for King James were specifically commanded to translate ekklesia as “church” and also to not contradict the traditions of the established church of which he was the head. This accounts for many of the mistranslations still in our Bibles today.

Interestingly, William Tyndale *did* use the word “church” twice in his translation; in relation to *pagans and their places of worship*. This is what he wrote (in old English): “Then Iupiters Preste which dwelt before their cite brought oxe and garlondes vnto the *churche* porche and wolde have done sacrificise with the people.” (Acts 14:13 in modern English reads, “And the priest of Zeus, whose *temple* was at the entrance to the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds”). The second instance was: “For ye have brought hyther these me whiche are nether robbers of *churches* nor yet despisers of youre goddes.” (Acts 19:37 now reads, “For you have brought here these men, who are neither robbers of *temples*, nor yet blasphemers of your goddess”).

Note that even though the word “church” was used originally, it was changed to “temple” in modern English. I wonder why that might be? o Isn’t it interesting that the word “church” was first used for pagan temples – it is NOT a biblical word!

Tyndale’s translation was written in 1525, 86 years before the King James version and it seems quite clear that in those days churches were places associated with idolatry and pagans (some would say they still are). Not once did Tyndale associate the word “ekklesia” with the word “church” or with a building.

The House of God

Some people call the church “the house of God” and this phrase occurs in the New Testament six times and is from two Greek words: “oikos theos”. The word

“oikos” (*translated as both house and household or in some more recent translations as “family”*) means an “inhabited house” or the “household of a house”, which obviously refers to people. The instances where the phrase “oikos theos” occurs in the New Testament are interesting. The phrase refers to people in 1 Timothy 3:15 and 1 Peter 4:17 and refers back to the temple of the Old Testament in all the other instances (Matt. 12:4; Mark 2:26; Luke 6:4; Heb. 10:21). The writer of the book of Hebrews had been comparing the Old Testament temple to what we now have in Christ Who is the unseen, spiritual, heavenly House and Temple of God, that is NOT built with man’s hands here on earth.

The Scriptures make it very clear: the Temple of the Old Covenant was an example and parable *until Christ came*: “When God speaks of a new covenant, He makes the first one *obsolete (out of use)*. And what is obsolete (out of use and annulled because of age) is ripe for disappearance and to be dispensed with altogether. Now even the first covenant had its own rules and regulations for divine worship and it had a sanctuary, *but one of this world...* Into the second division of the tabernacle none but the high priest goes... *by this the Holy Spirit points out that the way into the true Holy of Holies is not yet thrown open as long as the former tabernacle remains a recognized institution and is still standing*. Seeing that that first tabernacle *was a parable (a visible symbol or type or picture of the present age)*... But when Christ appeared as a High Priest of the better things that have come and are to come, *then through the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not a part of this material creation*, He went once for all into the Holy of Holies, not by virtue of the blood of goats and calves, but His own blood, having found and secured a complete redemption (an everlasting release for us). *For Christ has not entered into a sanctuary (building) made with human hands, only a copy and pattern and type of the true, but into heaven itself*, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.” (Heb. 8:13; 9:1,7-9,11,12,24 AMP). That is pretty clear!!!

Stephen, who was accused of saying: “this Jesus the Nazarene will tear down and destroy this place, and will alter the institutions and usages which Moses transmitted to us” (Acts 6:14) further enraged the Jews when he said, “It was Solomon who built a house for Him. However, *the Most High does not dwell in houses and temples made with hands*; as the prophet says, Heaven is My throne, and earth the footstool for My feet. What house can you build for Me, says the Lord, or what is the place in which I can rest? Was it not My hand that made all these things?” (Acts 7:47-50).

These verses mention a Building “not made with hands”. This was a radical and offensive shift from the earthly buildings and systems of Judaism (which were seen and made by man) to the heavenly which is spiritual and made by God. He had originally given the design for the temple, but it had become an end in itself and had served its purpose. Now Christ was in full view: “In Him the whole structure is joined (bound, welded) together harmoniously, and it continues to rise, grow and increase into a holy temple in the Lord. In Him you yourselves also are being built up with the rest, to form a fixed abode (dwelling place) of God in (by, through) the Spirit” (Eph. 2:19-22 AMP). Yet leaving the earthly for the heavenly is not easy.

“We consider and look *not to the things that are seen* but to the things that are unseen; for the things that are visible are temporal (brief and fleeting), but the things that are invisible are deathless and everlasting” (2 Cor. 4:18). This House is *spiritual*, but we humans delight in having something which WE can make, feel, touch, see, hear, name, go to and worship in, in the here and now on this earth; so we have churches.

The Assembly of God

Since “ekklesia” means something different to church, you may well wonder why the word has not been amended in subsequent translations of the Bible. Perhaps that is because few people today would buy a version without the word “church” in it! It would be unthinkable. The church has such *deep roots* in our society, traditions, beliefs, and culture. However, two versions of the Bible *were* subsequently published without the word “church” in them: Young’s Literal Translation in 1898, and in 1826 in a translation of the New Testament called “A Living Oracle” by Dr Alexander Campbell. In the preface entitled “An Apology for a New Translation” is written the following:

“A LIVING language is constantly changing. Like the fashions and customs in apparel, words and phrases, at one time current and fashionable, in the lapse of time, become awkward and obsolete. But this is not all. Many of them, in a century or two, come to have a signification very different from that which was once attached to them. Nay, some are known to convey ideas not only different from, but contrary to, their first signification... that the common version [KJV] was made at a time when religious controversy was at its zenith; and the tenets of the translators whether designedly or undesignedly, did, on many occasions give a wrong turn to words and sentences bearing upon their favorite dogmas... But some are so wedded to the common version, that the very defects in it have become sacred; and an effort, however well intended, to put them in possession of one comparably superior in propriety, perspicuity, and elegance, is viewed very much in the light of ‘making a new Bible’ or of altering and amending the very word of God. Nay, some are prepared to doom every attempt of the kind, to the anathema, in the conclusion of the Apocalypse, upon those who add to the word of God, or subtract from it.”

If you look in the Bible for the church as we know it, you cannot find it. The closest you will find is the temple system which Jesus said He would destroy and replace with Himself.

That is incredibly significant and yet many continue to unknowingly believe in and support a Judaistic type of an earthly temple, admiring churches that are large and impressive, giving them their money and service, going to them regularly, and even calling them “the house of God”. Those things appeal to our human senses and to our image of what *we think* is worthy of God. They appeal to our mind and emotions and so people confuse the soul with the spirit, the earthly with the heavenly, the emotional, cultural, and intellectual with the spiritual, and end up thinking that it is all of God when it is one awful unholy mixture. We

desperately need discernment... to discern not only Christ's Life, but also to discern when something is simply appealing to our mind and emotions.

Substitutes for Christ

The focus of the church is on Self rather than on Christ: Salvation is for us, Heaven is for us, Fellowship is for us, Ministry is for us, Healing is for us, the Anointing is for us, Teaching is for us, Christ is for us, etc. etc.. Church is a place to go and get your needs met; whether it is your need to minister or your need to be ministered to, or your need to simply belong. SELF is the centre and circumference with God being presented as being like us – made in our image, instead of us being transformed into His image.

“Since the Fall, blinded man has ever continued to make himself central. From his point of view, even in the religious realm, concepts and resulting methods become twisted until it often seems the church is presenting a God whose entire working is for man – his benefit, welfare, blessing and bliss. Some will admit they frankly feel this is the true work of the church. Who else is important? What else should we preach? Who else but man is important to God? Does not God Himself expend all His energies and purposes *for man*? Yes, until man has had a major rectification he will, even as a believer, be the very center of his very small universe – seeking to make all things serve himself.”
(DeVern Fromke, *“The Ultimate Intention”*).

While I am not saying that everybody in the church is like this, many do cling religiously to the mistaken beliefs, teachings and traditions of man instead of allowing God to break through and shatter those things and instead lead them to Truth Himself. While that breaking is very costly and uncomfortable, surely we don't want to be holding onto things that we think are sacred and yet are simply the traditions of man! Otherwise we may be in danger of making void the Word of God for the sake of our traditions as Jesus said in Mark 7.

Often the church is a substitute for Christ in people's lives. Church is their focus, their identity, what they live for, what they work for, what they love and fight for and they cannot comprehend leaving it. Ever. It is their *life*! And *that* is very telling indeed.

We are the assembly of those who have been *called out* by God – called out of all substitutes to know and experience the Reality and Truth of Christ and His Life! There is only One Who is our Life and Love, and through Him God has provided the Way to free us from Sin, Self, AND from all Substitutes. A substitute is a diabolical way of keeping us from the real and true because we are usually satisfied and quite happy with the substitute – that is exactly what it is designed to do. It is only when you have encountered the Real, the Most Excellent, the Truth, that the substitute is shown to be a lie, a counterfeit and a very poor imitation.

Called Out

After reading this some may concede that even if the word “church” isn’t Biblical, the institution of the church is still obviously of God because look at how people can find Jesus there and all the good it does in the community etc.. I would say to just look at how it *takes the place of Christ* and not only turns people off, but *away* from God. The fact is that He not only can, but does, use many people and many things that do not even acknowledge Him or know Him. We see this in the Bible and we see it now: He is God and He can utilize anything and anyone to reveal Truth! Just because He spoke through a donkey yesterday and uses a Hollywood movie tomorrow doesn’t mean those things are suddenly holy or sacred.

Just because God uses something or someone in a church to touch people’s lives doesn’t mean He either approves of it or is blessing it.

I have heard Him speak through believers and through unbelievers; but what is more uncommon is holiness... God is holy, and every one who is wholly His, will have the same character.

Being “out of the institutional church” is an accepted and researched phenomena now, but the fact is that while many have heard the call to leave the church, very few have had the church leave them. Many have heard the call out, but not many have heard the call into Christ. Most of us have years and years of deeply rooted religious beliefs that still need to be unveiled and pulled out. While I can no longer say that I am part of the church (which to me is wholly temporal and earthly), I can say that I am part of Christ’s Body (which to me is wholly eternal and heavenly).

There is a danger that we will stop and camp out with the last thing God showed us and not go on. Leaving church is only *one* step! We must KEEP listening, KEEP seeing, KEEP walking, KEEP on leaving all those things which God reveals as earthly and which are mere substitutes for the reality of Christ in our lives.

“The implications of any movement of God are not always recognized at the beginning, but if we go on with Him we shall find that much that is done here and is of time is – and has to be – left behind. The spiritual and the heavenly is pressing for a larger place and becoming absolutely imperative to the very life of the instrumentality and those concerned. It is spontaneous and just happens. We wake up to realize that we have moved into a new realm or position, and no amount of additional earthly resource can meet the need... The great pity is that so many just will cling to the old framework or partial vision. God presents His *heavenly* pattern in greater fulness and demands adjustment... But because it is ‘revolutionary’ or not ‘what has been in the blessing of God’ etc., etc., it is rejected and put aside... God in sovereignty will run the risk of shattering, or allow the shattering, of so much that He has used of scaffolding or framework in order to realize the fuller purpose... So, things may be taking a new and

different shape, but the purpose of God is the same. We may be presented with His vision in new and further-on aspects, but it is only what He originally meant. Can we adjust? Can we leave “the things that are behind”? Without raising any questions as to the right or wrong of what has been, can we “go on” and “grow up”, “attain”? (T. Austin-Sparks, *“Vision and Vocation”*).

God is delivering, separating, purifying, setting free and establishing what the enemy has always sought to destroy. Jesus IS building His called-out ones into an unseen, holy, heavenly Building of His design and making; He is calling us out of Sin, Self and Substitutes into Himself as *The Place* where God is... in Life, in Freedom, in Peace, Rest, Love and All that Christ Himself is!

Come and, like living stones, be yourselves built into a spiritual house, for a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable and pleasing to God through Jesus Christ. 1 Pet. 2:5

Chapter 3 – Assembly Required

It is quite common these days to buy something that says “Assembly Required” on the box. Some see this as an enjoyable challenge, while others view it as a necessary evil!

The process of assembly can go very smoothly if instructions are followed AND, very importantly, if all the parts are present. However, it can also be very frustrating if there are no instructions or if there are parts missing.

Spiritually, we too “require assembly”. However, when most Christians think of “assembly”, instead of thinking of God putting people together, they almost immediately think of assembling *themselves* together by attending a church meeting of some description. Assembly, in a church or religious context, is usually assembling in a structure made by man, for man, led by man, and instigated by man. And attending regularly *is* a requirement (whether voiced or not!) that is imposed on all those who are part of these structures.

In contrast to that, the assembly of God’s people are being gathered and assembled together into an *unseen* structure, *unseen* company, and *unseen* family by our *unseen* Father – what is spiritual and heavenly is not immediately visible to the earthly. It is very important that all the parts for this assembling are present and accounted for. Every single person/part is essential for this assembly. And there is a Greek word in the New Testament that means “assembly”. This word is: “ekklesia”.

Ecclesiastical Words

The Greek word “ekklesia” is mistranslated as “church” in most English Bibles. I know that some replace the word “church” with “ekklesia”, but doing this is not ideal for a number of reasons:

1. Ekklesia is a *Greek* word and *not* an English word, and as such, it needs defining and carries the risk of misunderstanding. Instead of making things clearer, it can make things esoteric, mystical, cryptic and unclear.
2. It encourages an elitist and divisive “us and them” mentality by having a “special” word that some are “in the know” about while others are not.
3. We are already given a number of descriptive words in English without needing a “new” word that is not even part of our language.
4. It is already an *ecclesiastical* word – it is associated with the church and with religion and therefore tainted.

5. The word has been transliterated into Spanish and French as “iglesia” and “église” and the word means “church” in those languages. Also, in spoken Greek today, the word “ekkklesia” means a church! “Ekalesia” means “church” in a number of Pacific nations (eg Samoa, Cook Islands, Tuvalu, Niue).

On a recent trip to Samoa we saw these churches/ekalesiae everywhere:



There were so many churches/ekalesiae in Samoa, even on the remote island that we were on. They were quite large, ornate buildings in stark contrast to the thatched fales/houses where people lived, that were often without walls. It was clear that these religious buildings are important to the people and therefore lots of money is spent on them. As our son wrote, “Fales (Samoan thatched houses) and elaborate churches. That was about all the buildings you would see. Lots of churches, and even more fales. Tourism was a minuscule business compared to religion it appeared...”



Whether we like it or not, the Greek word “ekklesia” is not only tainted, but saturated with religion and with the business of religion. Instead of being translated, the Greek word was transliterated into Latin as “ecclesia” and from there became an ecclesiastical word, associated with religion and the church. And although the word “ekklesia” is the Greek translation of the original Hebrew word “qahal”, “ekklesia” is translated in most English Bibles as “church” even though the original Hebrew word “qahal” is not *once* translated as “church” in the Old Testament! Instead “qahal” is translated as congregation, assembly and company.

As previously mentioned, William Tyndale’s translation of the Bible into English translated the word “ekklesia” into English as “congregation” even though there *were* churches around when Tyndale was alive. Not once did William Tyndale translate either “qahal” or “ekklesia” as a building or as “church”.

Called Out

Many of us believe that this word “ekklesia” means “called out ones”. It is true that the word “ekklesia” is a composite noun made up of two Greek words: “ek” meaning “out of” or “away from”, and “kaleo” meaning “called”, and as a result, many conclude that “ekklesia” means “called out ones”. However, language is more complicated than simply seeing the root words and thinking that is what a composite word means. Just as composite nouns in English cannot be broken apart but instead make up a *new* word with a *new* meaning, so it is in the Greek.

The meaning of a composite word is *changed* from the individual parts of the word, into a new *composite* word with a new meaning and definition. Some assembly is required in order to become a new word! You cannot take apart the new word. For instance, we can’t take the word “outcome” in English and take it to mean “come out” – the composite word does not mean that. In the same way we can’t take “ekklesia” – out called – and say that it means “called out” because *it did not mean that in the Greek*, so it is rather disingenuous for us to suggest that it did.

The words *ek* and *kaleo* were used separately in Greek, but the composite word *ekklesia* meant a gathering of people called together. It was not a religious word, it was an every day word used in ancient Greece. The closest words we have in English for “ekklesia” are assembly, gathering, conference or meeting.

In 1889 a Greek scholar wrote the following:

“The reason why I have chosen the term Ecclesia is simply to avoid ambiguity. The English term *church*, now the most familiar representative of *ecclesia* to most of us, carries with it associations derived from the institutions and doctrines of later times, and

thus cannot at present *without a constant mental effort* be made to convey the full and exact force which originally belonged to *ecclesia*...

“There is no foundation for the widely spread notion that ἐκκλησία (ekklesia) means a people or a number of individual men called out of the world or mankind. In itself the idea is of course entirely Scriptural, and moreover it is associated with the word and idea ‘called,’ ‘calling,’ ‘call.’ But the compound verb ἐκκαλέω (ekkaleo) is never so used, and ἐκκλησία (ekklesia) never occurs in a context which suggests this supposed sense to have been present to the writer’s mind. Again, it would not have been unnatural if this sense of calling out from a larger body had been as it were put into the word in later times, when it had acquired religious associations. But as a matter of fact we do not find that it was so. The original calling out is simply the calling of the citizens of a Greek town out of their houses by the herald’s trumpet to summon them to the assembly and Numb. 10 shews that the summons to the Jewish assembly was made in the same way.” (Pages 1, 5, “*The Christian Ecclesia*” by Fenton J A Hort, 1889).

If we say that “ekklesia” means “called out ones”, it loses some of its emphasis because it is *not just a matter of being called out* (although that is a very important aspect) but it is also vital to recognise that we are *called into being gathered together*. We are not called out to be individual “ones” isolated and alone; we are called out to be *together* in a heavenly *company* and *community* that is being *assembled and gathered together* in Christ.

Being Assembled Together

At this point you may be remembering the “not forsaking assembling” verse. This verse (Heb. 10:25) is usually completely misunderstood and is often misused and abused in trying to convince people that attending church meetings is essential and Biblical. The verse reads, “Let us consider and give attentive, continuous care to watching over one another, studying how we may stir up to love and helpful deeds, not forsaking or neglecting to *assemble together* as is the habit of some people, but admonishing, warning, urging and encouraging one another, and all the more faithfully *as you see the day approaching*” (Heb. 10:24,25 TAB).

Firstly, the word “ekklesia” commonly translated as “church”, is *not even in this verse*, even though some Bibles would have us believe that it is. For instance The Living Bible misinterprets this verse as: “Let us not neglect our church meetings, as some people do...” That bears *no resemblance* to what the original Greek says.

The Greek word used in this verse for “assemble together” is not “ekklesia”, but “episynagoge”. This word means “being gathered or collected together *in one place*”, “gathered with others already assembled”, “a *complete* collection”. The word is used only in one other verse in the Bible: “concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our *being gathered together* to Him” (2 Thess. 2:1) – and that Place is where *all* are gathered,

complete, in one Place: in Christ. Please see this: Christ IS the One Place where we are all gathered and assembled and collected together – both in the context of 2 Thessalonians, AND in the context of Hebrews 10! The exact same word is used in both.

If, as many people do, you take those verses in Hebrews to apply to a literal, physical assembly or church meeting here on earth, then tell me this: how is it possible for us all to be physically *episynogoge* – gathered together in one place, a complete collection – when we are scattered all over the world???

The answer is that it is very clearly NOT speaking about a physical gathering on this earth at all, but it is speaking *spiritually*: we ARE gathered and assembled together in One Place: in CHRIST, in the heavenlies! This is not about attending a place physically here on earth, but *being gathered in One Place (Christ) spiritually*. This is the “new and living Way” that the writer of Hebrews had just mentioned five verses earlier! If you’re not being gathered into Christ spiritually, then you’re also not being assembled and gathered together with one another – regardless of whether you meet together physically or not. While it is always good to be physically gathered together with loved ones here on this earth, our primary and first gathering must be a spiritual one with our loved One!

Another interesting thing in this verse is the word translated as “manner” or “habit”: “not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the *manner* of some is” or “as is the *habit* of some people”. That word in the Greek is “ethos” and it means “a custom, rite, or institute that is prescribed by law”. Now, does a custom and rite sound like what God is building, or what *man* is building? Does that sound like something spiritual, or something religious? Could it be that this verse has been misinterpreted to mean the exact *opposite* of what it was intended to convey? Perhaps the author was saying, “We are not abandoning our being gathered together in one Place (in Christ in the heavenlies) as some are in the habit of doing (by their laws, customs, rituals, and institutions that *take the place* of Christ) *but...*” and then there is another interesting word: *parakaleo*, translated in the KJV as “exhorting”.

Remember how “ekklesia” is made of two Greek words: ek and kaleo, this word “parakaleo” is also made of two words: para (near, beside) and kaleo (called). The first meaning of the word is “to call to your side, to summons”. The secondary meaning is “to call upon in entreaty, comfort, and instruction”. Remember that the author of the book to the Hebrews was challenging *everything* that the Hebrews had known and believed was right in their religion and was instead emphasising the *spiritual* and not the physical that was so important to good religious Jews. Just reading chapter 9 brings all that is in chapter 10 into this spiritual context and away from the literal physical. In *that* context, it makes sense that this verse could be interpreted as meaning: “We are not abandoning our being gathered together as a complete collection of people in one Place (in Christ in the heavenlies) even though some are in the habit of doing this (abandoning Christ by their devotion to their religious meetings and customs or “habits” here on earth) *but* instead we’re calling one another to come alongside us (with Christ in the heavenly places) and encouraging others in Him even more as we see the Day approaching”.

So, all those who are being assembled together in Jesus Christ in the heavenlies, regardless of whether they go to any meetings on earth or not, are the ones who are truly “not forsaking the assembly” because we are *gathered in Him!*

What *Are* We Assembled Into?

From the very beginning, God’s intention has been a collective, a family, a company of people. He promised Jacob, “A nation and a community (qahal/ekklesia) of nations will come from you” (Gen. 35:11). In Isaac’s blessing to Jacob he said, “May God Almighty bless you, make you fertile, and increase the number of your descendants so that you will become a community (qahal/ekklesia) of people” (Gen. 28:3). Most of us have an innate desire for community, family, friendship, fellowship, but most of us fulfill that desire through going to one another instead of gathering in One Place: Christ.

It is a fact that when we are being assembled in Him, we are also being assembled together with all the others who are in Him. Will that be expressed through us physically on this earth? Yes! But it must be an assembling, a gathering together that is *brought about by, and for, Christ* and as such may not look like what we would expect.

We have already been given quite a number of word pictures of what God is assembling that express and explain who we are and what we can be called without needing to use a Hebrew, Greek, or Latin word! The danger with using a foreign word that is *not* part of our language is not only of misunderstanding the word, but also of creating a “special” religious and ecclesiastical term (like “ekklesia”) that becomes exclusive and used only by those “in the know”; in short, it becomes a thing of pride and a popular religious buzzword.

Some of the word pictures that have already been given to us in the Scriptures, besides an Assembly, are: Christ’s Body, Kingdom, Family, Wife/Bride, Household, Temple, Grapevine, Light, Salt, Bread, a City, and Nation. Each of these express an element of truth about this unseen construction that Christ is building/assembling and we can use any one of them to describe facets of who we are.

Word pictures are packed full of meaning... and while not one image contains the whole picture, and in some ways may even be a paradox when compared with the other images, if we take the primary elements of each, we begin to see what this Community of God’s is about. What I have extracted and shared here is obviously incomplete, there is so much more to be gleaned from these examples.

As **Christ’s Body** (1 Cor. 12:12-27) we are intimately part of one another and Him – we simply *cannot* be separate units. It is a matter of Life and death. My fingers are either part of my body, or they are not; if they are no longer joined to my body, then they are no longer part of me, they do not have life, and do not function apart from me. All of my body works together being directed by my head without even realizing it or thinking about it; we are one.

So it is with Christ! It does not matter whether you are physically with another part of Him here on earth or not, because IN Christ you simply *are* joined inseparably with every other part of Him, whether you are with them physically or not, because this is a spiritual and heavenly *Body*!

As loyal subjects of the King and **His Kingdom** (Col. 1:13) we know and love our King and we live for Him in a community known as a kingdom. He is the One we worship and serve, not ourselves. He is the One who rules, not us. He is the One who governs, not us.

As a member of **God's Family** (1 John 3:9) we are conceived and born into this very large Family. We are born from above, of heaven, and as such, we do not belong to this earth, our real life is above: with Christ, seated in the heavenlies. We have only one Father and many, many siblings. No matter how large a family gets, each child is unique and part of the whole. As children, we trust our Father and know Him as our Provider, Protector, Comforter, Teacher and so much more. As children we carry our Father's Name, character, and likeness wherever we go, as His representatives. We are also His heirs and we treasure our inheritance.

As the Wife and **Bride of Christ** (Rev. 21:9) the imagery is of two becoming one unit. Christ is, and always will be, separate from us in His Deity just as a husband retains his identity and personality apart from his wife, and vice versa. But we are joined with Him through choosing to be married, the two becoming One in love and commitment to one another. Companionship and friendship is an important part of this relationship. And the ultimate goal of marriage in God's plan was reproduction, and it is the same in His spiritual plan also. He desires to see His Son reproduced through us and others...

As the **Household of God** (1 Pet. 4:17) we live in His spiritual Home. The house and its occupants are one unit. The house protects and contains all that is needed for the inhabitants. The people living there are viewed as one household. This is where they eat, work, rest, sleep and live...

As the **Temple of God** (1 Cor. 3:16,17) we are being built and joined together as living stones; not bricks (for conformity) but individual stones formed and fitted together with one another by the Architect/Builder. A temple is a place of worship, and historically was a place made for God to live in. He now lives in us as His Temple and we worship Him in our spirit, in the holiest place...

As branches of **the Grapevine** (John 15:5) we bear fruit without even trying, simply because of the Life that flows through us. As the **Light of the world** (Matt. 5:14) we are joined with the One Fire that illuminates, exposes, and cannot be hidden. As He is, so are we in this world. Our flame is fed by the oil of the Spirit. As **Salt** (Matt. 5:13) we are used to preserve, purify and add flavour in this world. As **Bread** (1 Cor. 10:17) we are part of one Loaf (Christ) for others to feed from and gain strength and energy for their journey.

As the **City of God** (Heb. 12:22) we are many houses united as one City. Houses in a city are there permanently; they don't suddenly lift themselves off their foundations and move to another city! A thriving city is constantly being built, constantly expanding. It is also a place that visitors will come to and either choose to remain, or leave.

As citizens of **God's Nation** (1 Pet. 2:9) we are literally: "one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all" and I am not for one moment thinking of the USA – I am not an American citizen. As citizens of this new Israel, this new Nation, we leave behind *all other* national loyalties and citizenship. We defend and fight for *this* Nation. We are patriots of *this* Nation. We are many individuals who have left our countries and national loyalties of this earth and are now formed into a new Nation, but not one that can be seen on this earth....

Jesus said, "On this rock I will build and establish My Household..."

"Here there is no question of a partial or narrowly local Ecclesia. The congregation of God, which held so conspicuous a place in the ancient Scriptures, is assuredly what the disciples could not fail to understand as the foundation of the meaning of a sentence which was indeed for the present mysterious. If we may venture for a moment to substitute the name Israel, and read the words as 'on this rock I will build my Israel,' we gain an impression which supplies at least an approximation to the probable sense. The Ecclesia of the ancient Israel was the Ecclesia of God; and now, having been confessed to be God's Messiah, nay His Son, He could to such hearers without risk of grave misunderstanding claim that Ecclesia as His own." (Page 10, *"The Christian Ecclesia"* by Fenton J A Hort, 1889).

We do require assembling, we are part of one another, and we are being assembled into the City and Nation that God as our Architect is building and assembling. Regardless of those we see or do not see physically around us, we *are* being gathered together and assembled in Christ – we are placed in Him and we are seated with Him in heavenly places! Let's endeavour to recognise this assembling work of God among us, and cooperate with Him in it, and delight in our being gathered together into Him!

You *have come* to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to countless thousands of angels in a joyful gathering. You *have come* to the assembly of God's firstborn children, whose names are written in heaven. (Heb. 12:22,23 NLT)

Chapter 4 – A Temple Made by Human Hands

It is one of our natural, human desires to want to do something for those we love, and this obviously includes doing things for God; we desire to please Him with whatever we can do for Him. This was clearly demonstrated by Peter when he saw Jesus revealed (Matthew 17). Peter's natural response upon seeing Jesus, Moses and Elijah was the desire to *do* something: to construct and build something for all three men. He said: "Lord, it is good for us to be here; let us make three shelters (or tabernacles) one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah". This was his natural, human reaction without even needing to think about it!

So many of us today do exactly the same thing as Peter with those we perceive to be spiritual men and women – and without thinking about it. We delight in them, they are aweinspiring, they are our heroes. We love to listen to them and while we may not physically build a tabernacle or temple for them, in our hearts we may effectively do so without realising it, and end up worshiping them instead of the Son of God. Moses and Elijah were great men of God, but God's response to this suggestion of building something was, and still is: "*THIS is My dearly loved Son, who brings Me great joy; listen to HIM!*"

When God breaks our mindsets and opens our eyes to see and hear His Son, our response is the same as that of the disciples: "When the disciples heard the voice, they were so afraid that they fell flat on the ground. But Jesus came over and touched them. He said, 'Get up and don't be afraid!' When they opened their eyes, *they saw only Jesus*." Through what they saw, and in hearing God's admonition to listen to *Him*, and even in spite of their fear, the end result was that "*they saw only Jesus*". When we experience seeing and knowing Jesus Christ in an earth-shattering, revealing way, no longer will we idolise the earthly, because we will have eyes for One only. No longer will we see building churches and temples as being something good for God and "good for us" but quite the opposite, for we will see God's intention and that He has only One in view: "I saw **no temple** in the city, for the Lord God Omnipotent and *the Lamb Himself are its temple*" (Rev. 21:22).

This Temple (Christ) is not a physical building that we can see or go to, nor can He be constructed by us – it is ludicrous and presumptuous to think that we could do so! But that in itself can present a challenge and an offence to us.

"God who made the world and all that is in it, being Lord of both Heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by human hands, nor is He ministered to by human hands, as though He had need of anything – seeing that He is the One who gives to all men life and breath and everything else." Acts 17:24,25.

The Temple – Made with Hands

Oh, how we do love to do things and make things which we (and of course others) can see, hear and touch on this earth! As Stephen said in his speech:

“Our ancestors carried the Tabernacle with them through the wilderness. *It was constructed according to the plan God had shown to Moses.* Years later, when Joshua led our ancestors in battle against the nations that God drove out of this land, the Tabernacle was taken with them into their new territory. And it stayed there until the time of King David. David found favor with God and *asked for the privilege of building a permanent Temple* for the God of Jacob. But it was Solomon who actually built it. However, *the Most High doesn't live in temples made by human hands.* As the prophet says, ‘Heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool. Could you build Me a temple as good as that?’ asks the Lord. ‘Could you build Me such a resting place? Didn't My hands make both heaven and earth?’ You stubborn people! *You are heathen at heart and deaf to the truth.* Must you forever resist the Holy Spirit? That's what your ancestors did, and so do you!” (Acts 7:44-51).

What was Stephen referring to that was ‘heathen’ and resisting the Holy Spirit? In the context of what he'd just been speaking about it seems to speak of one thing that all religions had in his day and still have today: **temples**. Or, in modern Christian terms: churches. The temple was a very sacred thing to the Jews (just as the church is to many Christians) and the significance of what Stephen said was not lost on them. They were very angry with him for saying that God didn't need or want their sacred buildings and promptly killed him; thinking they were doing God a favour. And that is what is still often done today because the truth that God doesn't need or want these structures that we build, hits right at the very heart of idolatry.

But wasn't the temple God's idea in the first place? No, it was the *tabernacle* that God asked Moses to make, and the tabernacle was a *tent* and not a building.

The tabernacle was in use right up until the time of King David and then it disappeared... David thought he had a better idea: a permanent building, a temple like other religions had. If you read the passage above again, you will see that it was *David* who asked to build the temple, and *not God who asked for it*. This fact is made even clearer in the Old Testament accounts, one given in 2 Samuel 7, the other in 1 Chronicles 17 (from the NKJV):

“Now it came to pass, when David was dwelling in his house, that David said to Nathan the prophet, 'See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of the covenant of the Lord *is under tent curtains.*'”

I had never realised until reading that verse, that building the temple was *David's* idea. God didn't ask David to build the temple, nor did He want him to (which He clearly tells David shortly thereafter). Apparently it didn't seem fair to David – from his earthly, human

perspective – that he lived in a beautiful palace while the ark of the Lord was in a tent. That, of course, sounds very noble and good to us humans, and when he told the prophet Nathan about his idea, Nathan's response to David was:

"Then Nathan said to David, '*Do all that is in your heart*, for God is with you.'"

One question needs to be asked here: *had God been consulted*??? Had He said *anything* to either Nathan or David about a temple up to this point? Apparently Nathan thought the idea of building a temple sounded like a good idea too, so it appears that he presumptuously endorsed it on God's behalf because the following verses make it clear that he hadn't yet asked God what HE thought about the idea. Just because God is with us and has blessed us, doesn't mean we can go and "do all that is in your heart" – not even for the man who was said to be a man after God's own heart. And just because we see something that we think God needs us to do for Him, doesn't mean He wants us to do it.

That very night God came to Nathan with a strong message:

"But it happened that night that the word of God came to Nathan, saying, "Go and tell My servant David, 'Thus says the Lord: "***You shall not build Me a house to dwell in.*** For I have not dwelt in a house since the time that I brought up Israel, even to this day, but have gone from tent to tent, and from one tabernacle to another."

So God said the opposite of what Nathan had told David on His behalf. Instead of God telling David to "do all that is in your heart" He told him through Nathan that he was NOT to build a temple. The tabernacle or tent is significant here because it was a *temporary dwelling*, entirely adjustable, and would move on easily. Whenever the pillar of fire moved in the wilderness, the tents were packed up and the people moved with God leading them on. But you cannot move a temple building; it is firmly attached to the earth, it is earthly. A temple's foundations are fixed on this earth and *not* in the heavens. God did not want to be stationary, He is a God Who moves. He went on to say,

"Wherever I have ***moved about*** with all Israel, ***have I ever spoken a word to any of the judges of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd My people, saying, 'Why have you not built Me a house of cedar?'*** Now therefore, thus shall you say to My servant David, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts: "I took you from the sheepfold, from following the sheep, to be ruler over My people Israel. And I have been with you wherever you have gone, and have cut off all your enemies from before you, and have made you a name like the name of the great men who are on the earth. Moreover ***I will appoint a Place*** for My people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own and move no more; nor shall the sons of wickedness oppress them anymore, as previously, since the time that I commanded judges to be over My people Israel. Also I will subdue all your enemies."

It sounds as though God was reminding David WHO was in charge and that He was quite capable of asking David or anyone else to build Him a temple if that had been what He had wanted. God was satisfied with the tabernacle, even though man might despise it for being so temporary and unimpressive. He continued, *“Furthermore I tell you that the LORD will build **you** a house.”*

God's House – Made Without Hands

David appeared to have had things around the wrong way; instead of him building a house for God, God wanted to build *him* a house! But was this promise to David fulfilled, did God build David a house? No, not on this earth, and not in David's lifetime. We can now see that this promise was fulfilled in Christ and that God was speaking of Him: “Destroy this temple, Jesus answered, and in three days I will build it again! ...But Jesus was talking about His body as the temple.” (*John 2:19-21*). And God had something far, far greater than Solomon's temple in mind: Christ, “Something greater and more majestic than the temple is here!” (Matt. 12:6).

God's message for David continued along these same spiritual lines:

“And it shall be, when your days are fulfilled, when you must go to be with your fathers, that I will set up your Seed after you, who will be of your sons; and I will establish His kingdom. ***He shall build Me a house, and I will establish His throne forever.*** I will be His Father, and He shall be My Son; and I will not take My mercy away from Him, as I took it from him who was before you. And I will establish Him in My house and in My kingdom forever; and His throne shall be established forever.”

Was this literally fulfilled? No, even though David thought God's words were about his son Solomon and it was partially fulfilled through Solomon. However, Solomon's throne was *not* established forever on this earth. The temple that Solomon built lasted in all its glory for a mere 34 years before being ravaged and spoiled, beginning a cycle of restoring the temple only to have it ravaged again and again, until it was eventually destroyed. God in His grace did inhabit that structure for a short time, but when He inevitably moved on, the temple could not move with Him and it was left behind; an empty shell for man to maintain. They would continue to hold their meetings and perform their rituals in it, but they would not meet God there, they would meet only each other.

The temple had replaced the tabernacle, but Solomon's temple was to be replaced with a new Temple, which Ezekiel saw very clearly. This House is God's creation and God's Way: Christ! “When God speaks of a “new” covenant, it means He has made the first one obsolete. It is now out of date and will soon disappear... By these regulations *the Holy Spirit revealed that the entrance to the Most Holy Place was not freely open as long as the Tabernacle and the system it represented were still in use.* This is an illustration pointing to the present time... For that old system deals only with... physical regulations that were in effect only until the time of reformation and setting things straight.” (Heb. 8:13, 9:8-10 AMP).

Jesus said “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will build it again,” meaning Himself. But this was extremely offensive to those whose lives revolved around the temple, just as it is offensive today to those whose lives revolve around the church, because so much of this temple mentality continues today as though God is inhabiting it and pleased with it.

The tabernacle (and the Sanctuary of the temple) were simply a picture of what was to come, they were symbolic of Christ in this world. The outer courts of the temple were a busy and noisy place where animals were tethered, slaughtered and sacrificed on the altar. But the Sanctuary consisted of the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. The Holy Place had very little activity compared with the outer courts; it was where the lampstand, the table of showbread and the altar of incense (all symbolic of Christ) were kept. The Holy of Holies was only entered into once a year and the priest did very little in it – a big contrast to the daily, busy activity of the outer courts of the temple.

It is significant that Jesus did not say that the whole temple would be destroyed and rebuilt; only the Sanctuary itself. John used *two different words* for “temple” in John chapter 2. The first two instances of the word “temple” is *hieron* and means the whole of the temple including its outer courts. But the word which is used three times at the end of the chapter (including the one Jesus used in reference to Himself) is a different word – “naos” – which means ONLY the Sanctuary itself, consisting of the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. Matthew and Mark bear this out as they used exactly the same words for what Jesus had said. All other writers in the New Testament also used this word “naos” in reference to the Body of Christ instead of “hieron” (Acts 7:48, 17:24; 1 Cor. 3:16,17, 6:19; 2 Cor. 6:16, Eph. 2:21, Rev. 3:12, 21:22 to name a few). It is significant that our English word “hierarchy” is derived from the root of the word “hieron” meaning temple.

The secular Greek definition of this word “naos” or sanctuary, was “inmost part of a temple, containing the image of the god” and interestingly, “a portable shrine” – reminiscent of the tabernacle or tent of the Lord. This word is also used of us as the ‘temples’ of the Holy Spirit in 1 Cor. 3:16. There are no instances of the word “hieron” (the temple) being used in reference to Christ or His Body in the New Testament at all. Instead the word meaning a sanctuary or holy place is used, but our English translations don’t differentiate between the two.

The fact is that there is only One who fully satisfies God, and we share in God’s pleasure and delight in His Son when we are in Him – when we are living stones being built into this House which is Christ. As I said, it is one of our natural, human desires to want to do something for those we love, and this obviously includes doing things for God; we desire to please Him with what we do and with whatever we can make for Him. But, in the words of T. Austin-Sparks, “It is not what is done for God, but what is done *by* God that will last.” And that is a very important distinction.

Kings and Kingdoms

I think it is beyond refute that it was never God's intention for us to have buildings or temples on this earth in which to worship Him like the religions of this world who have temples for their gods. Most of us are aware of the fact that the Israelites having a king was not God's idea either (1 Sam. 8:4-7). Their reason for wanting a king was so that they would "be like all the other nations" and have a king who would lead them and defend them (1 Sam. 8:19,20).

God warned the Israelites that the result of their demanding a king would be that they would be in bondage and subjection to their king and that he would use them and abuse them. He told Samuel to say to the people, "If you have a king, this is how he will treat you. He will force your sons to join his army. Some of them will ride in his chariots, some will serve in the cavalry, and others will run ahead of his own chariot. Some of them will be officers in charge of a thousand soldiers, and others will be in charge of fifty. Still others will have to farm the king's land and harvest his crops, or make weapons and parts for his chariots. Your daughters will have to make perfume or do his cooking and baking. The king will take your best fields, as well as your vineyards, and olive orchards and give them to his own officials. He will also take a tenth of your grain and grapes and give it to his officers and officials (*the tithe*). The king will take your slaves and your best young men and your donkeys and make them do *his* work. He will also take a tenth of your sheep and goats. You will become the king's slaves." (1 Sam. 8:9-17). All of this is so clearly evident in churches today where there is loyalty to the system, to the building, to the meetings and to the pastors or religious leaders, instead of loyalty to God alone. God took this decision very personally; He saw that the people were rejecting Him as their King (1 Sam. 8:7). He wanted to be their only King just as He wants to be our only Meeting Place.

Our common ground is not meant to be whether we go to church or what denomination we are part of, or what doctrines we believe, or what teachers we listen to; our common ground, our communion (common union), our Place of Meeting is simply Christ! When He is both King and the Meeting Place in a person's life, we find that we have instant communion and fellowship with them because Christ IS our Place of meeting! In this Holy Place we find ourselves in union with God and with His Family.

Today the majority of Christians are no different than the Israelites who wanted a temple and a king, just as Stephen said in his speech. We have built "temples" and we have wanted "kings" to look up to and to tell us what to do and what not to do, what to read and what not to read, what to believe and what not to believe, where to go and where not to go (the list is endless) instead of asking, and hearing, and knowing God for ourselves. The result of all these kings and temples are many religious kingdoms which are sustained by man and not God and which often abuse and exploit people. Jesus gave us the example of true leadership Himself by being a servant and *running away* when the people wanted to make Him their King (John 6:15). The Kingdom of God is NOT of this world: "My kingdom," said Jesus, "doesn't consist of what you see around you. If it did, My followers would fight

so that I wouldn't be handed over to the Jews. But I'm not that kind of king, not the world's kind of king." (*John 18:36*).

We each need to honestly answer the question: "WHO is king in my life?" A kingdom is a place where the king governs and decides everything. Even though we may not yield to another person as king, often we fail to realise that the one person who may be acting as king by reigning and ruling supreme in our lives, stares back at us every time we look in a mirror! In speaking of who is king in our lives, we are talking about what our heart loves above all else, for the heart is the throne where whomever we love and admire the most resides. When Christ is our King we find ourselves lovingly yielding to Him and seeing His Way, His Truth, and His Life established in our lives as we become like the One we love....

Building a temple/church reveals that inherent desire of ours to *do* something for God, and wanting a religious leader to tell us what to do and how to do it reveals our inherent desire to have a king here on earth to govern us. But both a king and a temple are focusing upon what is seen here on earth rather than spiritually perceiving what is unseen (2 Cor. 4:18). They are substitutes for the Real and the True and we often idolise them – allowing them to become the centre of our lives instead of Christ. Whatever we idolise very effectively blinds us from seeing Truth because our eyes are on our idol so we can see nothing past that. We need to be shaken out of our idolatry by hearing God's words deep in our hearts: "*THIS is My dearly loved Son*, who brings Me great joy; *listen to HIM!*" May God continue to shatter our idols and open our eyes so that we will see and worship "*only Jesus*".

"Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation." Heb. 9:11

Chapter 5 – Seeing the Son

God will often speak to us and teach us spiritual things through natural things He has created and also through circumstances He places us into. The following is an example which occurred when we were visiting a farm. We were attending a barbecue as part of a missionary reunion in Queensland, Australia and a group of about ten of us were outside talking and admiring a sunset. We were all looking at the sky above a house which we were only ten feet away from. I noticed that one person had gone off alone to the side of the house and was looking at the sunset from there. I realised that of course the view would be much better from there, away from the house, so I decided to go and look at it from there too.

When I got there I saw that the view was far more spectacular and beautiful than from where I had been viewing it from, so I called out to the other people to come and see. But nobody heard me, even though I was only a few feet away from them, everybody was busy talking to each other. So I called again, louder this time, and as I did so, I felt God impressing upon me that I was to pay close attention to what was happening because He was going to teach and show me something important through it.

Again, although I had called louder, nobody heard or paid any attention to me. So I decided to try calling a person by their name. This person heard and responded and came over. She too saw how much better the view was with the house out of the way and she then called some others who came over and appreciated the much-expanded view.

What God showed me later was that the whole scenario is symbolic of what He has done and is doing with us. Initially we saw some of the glory of the heavens but could only see it in part because a man-made structure (house) was very effectively blocking a good deal of our view of what was above.

Not many (*only two of us*) had realised that there was more to be seen of the glorious sunset. When we moved position and got the house out of our focus, we saw the fuller picture of the glory of the sunset! We saw different colours and shades of colour that could not be seen before, we saw it in all the glory of GOD'S creation instead of man's creation blocking our view. His creation is diverse, creative and organic, like a large tree which was silhouetted against the sunset. The tree wasn't blocking the view because it could be seen through and only added to the beauty of the picture instead of blocking it. In His creation God's unspoken truth is spoken everywhere!

The house that was blocking our view represents man-made churches. The farm house was made of bricks, which are not the living stones that God builds with; bricks are made by

man for conformity, each one the same so WE can fit them together easily and build with them. It is man's way and not God's, it is the way of the world and Babylon. The tower of Babel was built with bricks, but the new Jerusalem is built from "living" stones – otherwise known as jewels (1 Peter 2:5; Isaiah 54:11,12; Rev. 21:11,18,19). If we are bricks instead of living jewels, we will be earthly and conformed to one another instead of being heavenly and transformed into the image of God.

Only God can shape jewels that transmit His Light and Glory, He has created them and has shaped them for His purposes. He creates them to be fitted together and places them beside other living stones exactly where He knows they belong in His *spiritual* "House" which HE is building. "We have from God a building, a house *not made with hands*, eternal in the heavens" (2 Cor. 5:1).

Above the house we had seen *some* of the effects of the Son – some colours in the heavenlies – but we did not see the fuller picture of the Son or the heavenlies in their splendour and glory *until we had made moved position*. The structure made with manmade materials was very effectively obstructing the more excellent view. The glory of the heavenlies was encroached upon by the building. Obviously the house was not going to move so that more of the glory of the heavenlies was revealed, and bricks, unlike jewels, are not transparent so the glory could not be seen through them. It required those who heard the call to *adjust themselves and move position* so that they could see more.

God called us away from the man-made structures of organised religion because He had something more and different that He wanted us to see and be part of. It was not until I saw more of the glory of the Son that I realised what we had been missing out on when the man-made house had blocked our view! I called out to the others to come on over so they too could share in and enjoy God's glory and see the fuller and more glorious picture. They were too busy talking to each other to hear.

Those who were inside the house were completely oblivious to what they were missing outside of it; artificial lights were switched on instead and they knew nothing of the sunset. Those already outside the building had to have eyes to see and ears to hear in order to move, but not many want to hear or see, let alone move position.... Unfortunately we are often too preoccupied with what is immediately in front of us and are too busy talking and listening to one another and so cannot hear or see anything else or even comprehend that God may have more to reveal to us. Sometimes it will be only one or two that will hear and see and their hearing may be because of our personal relationship with them as opposed to preaching/calling to the masses.

"If our Message is obscure to anyone, it's not because we're holding back in any way. No, it's because these other people are looking or going the wrong way and refuse to give it serious attention. All they have eyes for is the fashionable god of darkness. They think he can give them what they want, and that they won't have to bother believing a Truth they can't see. They're stone-blind to the dayspring brightness of the Message that shines with Christ, who gives us the best picture of God we'll ever get. Remember, our Message is not

about ourselves; we're proclaiming Jesus Christ, the Master. All we are is messengers, errand runners from Jesus for you. It started when God said, "Light up the darkness!" and our lives filled up with light as we saw and understood God in the face of Christ, all bright and beautiful." (2 Corinthians 4:3-6).

Whatever we are most occupied with becomes the thing which veils our eyes because it is right in front of us. It is our primary focus and consequently blinds us to anything else. When we see the Son and *He* is our focus and is the One Thing that occupies us, then our eyes are progressively opened as He unveils and reveals more and more of Himself and His glory to us. And this unveiling and revealing of Himself in all His glory is going to go on throughout eternity!

I saw no temple in the city, for the Lord God Omnipotent Himself and the Lamb are its temple. And the city has no need of the sun nor of the moon to give light to it, for the splendor and radiance and glory of God illuminate it and the Lamb is its lamp.

And there shall be no more night; they have no need for lamplight or sunlight, for the Lord God will illuminate them and be their light, and they shall reign forever and ever. Revelation 21:22,23 22:5