

3 A Whole Body

²⁴“My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd; and they will walk in My ordinances and keep My statutes and observe them.

(Ezekiel 37:24 NASB95)

¹⁶“I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd. (John 10:16 NASB95)

The church. There is no church in the Bible. Yep, I know, I’m going to get some heat for this, but it’s true. Not a single one of the denominations, organizations, or clubs, Catholic or Protestant, that exist now, are mentioned anywhere. Every group calling itself a ‘church’ (or synagogue) uses the name trying to get biblical recognition and authority. The truth is that any group of people doing what God says is part of His One Body. Those who don’t are not.

It’s important to get your mind around this idea, because many churches (and synagogues) have usurped God’s authority, and have led people down a primrose path to a destination different than what He wants. Many church leaders will howl in protest at much of the information in this book because it threatens that stolen authority. And I mean howl. That’s what wolves do when you reach over and pull loose the thread holding their wool suits together.

Whenever someone comes to me claiming to offer something for my benefit, I’ve learned to examine their motives to see if this is really true. Remember the Trojan horse? It’s why we say “beware of Greeks bearing gifts.” Too often the benefit offered is not to me, but to the person doing the offering. They will use a benefit to me as sugar-coating for something that really benefits them. For instance, salvation is frequently a thin disguise for “join my church.” If you don’t join their ‘church,’ then you must not be saved. Salvation is the claimed benefit, but the real goal is to claim my wallet for support of the pastor. Or their view of the Bible.

Building programs are coated with the ‘salvation benefit’ too. For some reason we have to have buildings and paid missionaries to reach the lost with ‘the Word.’ But it’s funny how a Baptist church never plants a Presbyterian church, or a Catholic church never starts an Assembly of God. Isn’t it funny that Calvary Chapel always starts other Calvary Chapels, and never a Vineyard? How about a synagogue starting a Baptist church? If reaching the lost is the goal, why is it that churches always reproduce after their own kind? Are they really ‘reaching the lost’ or building up their club? Makes you wonder, don’t it?

One of the standard, visible church teachings in the split parade that is plaguing believers is that a ‘new thing’ called the ‘church’ was created by God at Pentecost. It is taught that God got fed up with Israel and decided to start fresh. They say He didn’t really mean any of the previous dealings with Israel. His goal all along was the ‘new thing.’

Some teach that this new thing replaced physical Israel, while others believe that Israel spiritually merged into the church. Another version says that Israel’s program is suspended while Jesus builds the church. According to the theory, after the new ‘church’ is complete, it will be removed and Israel’s program will continue. Supposedly, the separate and brand new entity got started in Acts chapter 2. These. Things. Are. Not. True.

They’re not even close to what is in the Bible. That is, if it’s allowed to speak for itself.

At the root, teachings like these are developed to chip away the absolute truth of God's Word, and steal some authority. The Bible has only one Body of Christ, which has existed since the beginning. See for yourself. There are only believers and unbelievers, obedient and disobedient, law abiding and law breaking. Roles or jobs might be different,¹ but there is only one body.

12For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. 13For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. 14For the body is not one member, but many. (1 Corinthians 12:12-14 NASB95)

The word 'church' itself has a murky origin.² It is used to translate the New Testament Greek word³ *ekklesia* (or *ecclesia*, pronounced a-klays-see-ah and means 'assembly' or 'congregation') but not all the time. For instance, in Stephen's speech, recorded in Acts 7, he uses the word *ekklesia* to describe Israel, but the translators use the word 'congregation' instead.

38" This is the one who was in the congregation (*ekklesia*) in the wilderness together with the angel who was speaking to him on Mount Sinai, and who was with our fathers; and he received living oracles to pass on to you. (Acts 7:38 NASB95 italics mine. See also Hebrews 2:12)

There are times when it's okay to translate a single Greek or Hebrew word into two or more different English words, or the other way around (several Greek words for 'love' are all translated by the one English word 'love'). But this word is not one of those words. There's no good reason to pick the word 'church' as opposed to 'assembly' or 'congregation.'

To be accurate, we should use the word 'church' in Acts 7:38 (as in 'the church in the wilderness') or all other uses of the word *ekklesia* should be translated as 'congregation.'⁴ The reason they are not is simple preference, or a deliberate attempt to hijack Bible authority and transfer it to the 'church.' Many extra-biblical doctrines don't allow the Body (confused with the church) to exist before the resurrection. The Catholic Church did some hijacking when translating the King James Version. The KJV used the word 'church' instead of assembly or congregation. At the time it was very controversial, and caused many denominations to reject using it for quite a while. Not to mention it has a bunch of errors.⁵

The church is visible and is known for its organizational structures and belief systems (creeds, etc.). The Body, on the other hand, is organized around the Word (the Christ is the head), and is known for its fruit or actions. The church (and synagogue) has people who claim to follow Him, but do not. The Body consists of those who actually follow Him. The church or

¹ For instance, martyrs (Revelation 6:9-11) seem to have a different role and a different reward or perhaps even different position. The 144,000 (Revelation 7) could be part of this group or have still another member role to fill.

² Perhaps coming from the Greek *kuriakon* meaning 'of the Lord,' but more probably coming from the Greek word *kirkos* (ring or circle) by way of the Latin word *circus* (a round arena) or Germanic *kirche*.

³ But not the same Greek word from the Septuagint version of the Old Testament. Funny how that works.

⁴ See also Acts 15:30 where the word *plethos* is translated 'congregation' but is applied to the 'church.'

⁵ Erasmus, the guy who worked on the KJV, didn't have all the Greek manuscripts he needed, so he translated some from Latin into Greek and then into the King's English. This caused a few errors to creep in. Most of the 'KJV positive' crowd wants to reinforce the authority of the church rather than try to keep the translations error-free.

synagogue is simply a congregation or assembly (or a series of congregations or assemblies) just like Israel was (and is) a congregation. The church and synagogue (and Israel) have believers in them, but are not 100% filled with believers. The visible church tends to think it is special, separate and somehow more acceptable, so it promotes a different name for itself.

One of the deceiver's biggest successes, besides convincing people he doesn't exist, is the idea of the church. What I mean is, generally people think the 'church' is God's, and anyone outside of 'church' must be an unbeliever. Believers are supposed to be members of the 'church' in whatever form. The 'church' must be the good guys and 'not-church' must be the bad guys. But that's not the division the Word makes. The Bible says that the good guys do what God says; bad guys don't. Jesus' 'mother,' 'brother' and 'sister' is the one who does God's will (Matthew 12:48-50). Just look at mom and dad in the Garden, or Cain and Able, or Saul and David, or believing and unbelieving Israel, or (well, you get my drift).

The words 'assembly' (Hebrew qahal ka-hall) and 'congregation' (edah (a-dah) are used for Israel,⁶ especially when they were camped out at Mount Sinai. So the word assembly = congregation = ekklesia = qahal = edah = church = synagogue.⁷ They all mean pretty much the same thing. There are small congregations and big assemblies, but there is only one Body.

The name 'Christian' (Acts 11:26, 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16) was bestowed on those who were 'partisans of the Christ' early on, sort of like a political term. But there are lots of unbelievers that would call themselves a partisan yet refuse to actually do what the Christ says. Like Constantine did in 325 C. E. So this is where the overlap comes in. People can call themselves partisans; maybe even believers, then form a club and call it a church. However, like Keith Green used to say, standing in a garage doesn't make you a Porsche.

Israel in three. According to the Word there are three groups called Israel. The first is the group of people descended from Jacob's (renamed Israel by God) twelve sons, called out of captivity in Egypt by God through Moses. The second Israel, also called Ephraim (later Samaria), was the group of ten tribes living in the north part of the Land after the 12 tribes split into two nations.⁸ The southern nation consisted of Judah and Benjamin but was called Judah.

The children of Jacob are now known in general as Jews, a name which comes from 'people of Judea' or Judah. The word can mean a physical child of Jacob, someone who dwells in the land of Judah, or someone who has converted to Judaism (someone who lives or acts like a Jew). The third Israel technically is first, but it is not as obvious in the text as the first two. It includes all people since the beginning who have believed and obeyed God no matter who their parents are. Paul highlights this fact in Romans.

But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel; nor are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants, but: "THROUGH ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS WILL BE NAMED."⁸ That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants. (Romans 9:6-8 NASB95)

Members of the third Israel⁹ are not determined by genetics but by obedience to God the Father and Jesus His Son.¹⁰ The people who join with the Messiah are also called the Bride

⁶ In the Septuagint, *ecclesia* is used quite a bit for the Hebrew words 'congregation' (*edah*) and 'assembly' (*qahal*).

⁷ Compare also Matthew 4:23 where synagogue is used for G4864 *sunagoge* but in James 2:2 it's 'assembly.'

⁸ Actually, the split between Israel and Judah goes as far back as the reign of King David and possibly even further.

⁹ There is no numbering system nor are the numbers meant to imply primacy or lack of it.

(Isaiah 61:10; Revelation 19:17), the Body (Romans 12:5), the remnant, an olive tree, saints (called out ones), elect, and a temple.

Joining with the Messiah is not limited to people who lived after the resurrection. Any person who trusts and obeys God is part of Israel (1 Peter 1:10-13; Hebrews 11:39, 40). Hebrews 11 contains a nice picture of those who will join all believers in the city God is building (Hebrews 11:13-16). This is the believer's family tree.

¹A Psalm of Asaph. Surely God is good to Israel, To those who are pure in heart!
(Psalm 73:1 NASB95)

We know 'all Israel' (all Jews) are not pure in heart. But the psalmist is equating those who are pure in heart with Israel. It is not the natural father or mother that proves membership in the family of Israel. It is the actions. A person shows they are a 'chip off the old block' by behaving the same way as their parent. If we do what God says, He is our Father. If we don't, we are illegitimate.

Jesus (or Paul) did not start a new thing called the church. He (they) promoted God's kingdom which He has been building since the beginning. Membership in the body (or Bride) is by the gracious choosing of God through trusting obedience (faith) to His call. Everyone must be 'born again' in this process (even Jews) to be part of the body.

Believers are God's congregation, the sheep of His pasture, a nation of kings and priests (Exodus 19:5,¹¹ 6; Isaiah 61; 1 Peter 2:5, 9; Revelation 1:6, 5:10). At the present time, we are scattered like salt in the world. God has merged the first two Israels back together (Ezekiel 37:15-28) and will soon winnow the chaff from His kingdom and bring us all back to His home.

The Mixed Multitude. The Scriptures say that when God through Moses delivered the first Israel from Egypt, they came out a 'mixed multitude,' meaning there were lots of people that were not physical children of Jacob.

³⁸A mixed multitude also went up with them, along with flocks and herds, a very large number of livestock. (Exodus 12:38 NASB95)

This mixed multitude probably included Egyptians who learned to fear God through watching or experiencing the plagues. Or perhaps there were slaves from other countries that had decided to join with Israel while they were still in Goshen.

²⁰The one among the servants of Pharaoh who feared the word of the Lord made his servants and his livestock flee into the houses; ²¹but he who paid no regard to the word of the Lord left his servants and his livestock in the field. (Exodus 9:20-21 NASB95)

The division was not by genetics; it was by fear of the Lord. There were (and are) those who "feared the word of the Lord" and those who didn't. Just like it is now. When the 12 spies returned from taking inventory of the Land, Caleb the Kenizzite (a non-native) advocated for God's plan along with Joshua (Numbers 32:11-12). Later, we see the mixed multitude in the Land in Joshua 8:33-35. Ezra (6:21) speaks of people who had separated themselves from the

¹⁰ Search for the word 'obey' in the Bible. I found over 150 uses in the ESV that connect it with God's voice.

¹¹ Yes I know this verse applies to the first Israel, but it can apply to whoever acts like God's people Israel.

impurity of the nations joining Israel to seek God. Lots of people were (and are) part of Israel without having Jacob as a genetic father.¹²

The founder of physical Israel was a Gentile. Abraham is part of Israel, but of course not descended from Jacob. Jesus has a reformed Gentile harlot (Rahab, Matthew 1:5) and a Moabite woman (Ruth, same verse) in His human lineage. Those believers who lived before Abraham are also, without a doubt, part of the third Israel. The kingdom of God has always been mixed.

"Many nations will join themselves to the LORD in that day and will become My people. Then I will dwell in your midst, and you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent Me to you. (Zechariah 2:11 NASB95)

Strangers in the Mix. Some people limit the meaning of 'stranger' to a person who is not a Jew. They will also apply the words 'foreigner' and 'sojourner' only to Gentiles. They've made it into a genetic thing when it's really not. It's true that at times the term 'foreigner' or stranger applied to anyone outside of the community of Israel. But it seems from the text that the application of all these words depended on whether someone was following God correctly. In other words, if Israel was practicing God's Torah the right way, then a stranger was one who didn't. However, if Israel wasn't following Torah, then they were just as strange as the Gentiles. Perhaps even more so because they were supposed to know better.

When Adam and Eve sinned, they became strangers to God; not in the sense of lack of familiarity, but in nature. Perhaps 'estranged' gives a better understanding. This is opposite of 'knowing' God. The word 'stranger' can be applied to any person or nation estranged from God. The Bible sometimes calls Israel 'strangers,' and also people groups who are not physically children of Jacob. Gentiles¹³ (the nations) are called strangers because they have not agreed to live by God's Word as did the first Israel (Ephesians 2:12). The people of Israel were 'strangers' in Egypt because it was not their land (Genesis 15:13; Exodus 19:34, 23:9). But when they wandered away from Him they got stranger.

¹⁷ Then he said to me, "Have you seen this, O son of man? Is it too light a thing for the house of Judah to commit the abominations that they commit here, that they should fill the land with violence and provoke me still further to anger? Behold, they put the branch to their nose. (Ezekiel 8:17 ESV)

But it is obvious in Scripture that the main division is between believers and non-believers (strangers or foreigners). The designation of 'stranger' really applies to whoever acts like a stranger with God. People try to make a false division between Jews and Gentiles on the basis of genetics, but God makes the division between sheep (believers) and goats.

Paul describes the inclusion of Gentiles as "fellow heirs" in the body of Christ as a "mystery" (Ephesians 3:4-7). Not because it didn't exist until Acts chapter 2, it is because few were paying attention. If we study the Word, we can see that His congregation has always included anyone who wants to follow Him, regardless of parents. Like Ruth and Rahab.

¹² 2 Chronicles 2:13-14 shows intermarriage in a good way. Numbers 25:1-3 shows a bad way. Ezra 9 and 10 speak of mixed marriages being bad but obviously because of idolatry (Ezra 9:13-14) rather than simple genetics.

¹³ The English word 'Gentile' comes from the Hebrew word goy or goyim (plural) which is sometimes translated 'nation' (nations) and simply means a people group. The Hebrew word ger¹³ (gayr) means stranger and is applied to Israel (Exodus 22:21) and non-native residents in Israel, as well as those outside of Israel (Gentiles).

Instead of being a ‘house of prayer for all nations’ (Isaiah 56:7; Matthew 21:13) the first Israel chose to disobey God. By the time of the Incarnation, it had developed into an exclusive club rather than a home for all followers of God. But Gentiles have always been included in God’s family if they choose to repent and follow the ways of God instead of their own. The body of Christ does not have boundaries, nor is it limited by family or tradition. It is made up of all believers everywhere who fear God and do what He says.

3Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the Lord say, “The Lord will surely separate me from His people.” Nor let the eunuch say, “Behold, I am a dry tree.” 4For thus says the Lord, “To the eunuchs who keep My sabbaths, And choose what pleases Me, And hold fast My covenant, 5To them I will give in My house and within My walls a memorial, And a name better than that of sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name which will not be cut off. 6“Also the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, To minister to Him, and to love the name of the Lord, To be His servants, every one who keeps from profaning the sabbath And holds fast My covenant; 7Even those I will bring to My holy mountain And make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be acceptable on My altar; For My house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples.” 8The Lord God, who gathers the dispersed of Israel, declares, “Yet others I will gather to them, to those already gathered.” (Isaiah 56:3-8 NASB95)

23And He did so to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, 24even us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles. (Romans 9:23-24 NASB95)

The first Israel is a real hard ‘project’ for God (in more ways than one). But it is also a picture of God’s efforts to form the third Israel or Body of Christ out of man in general. Some in both groups cooperate fully, others pretend to cooperate but just give Him lip service, and some reject Him utterly.

There is nothing special about the first Israel that would attract God (Ezekiel 16). The fact that the first Israel didn’t help share the Word as they should, never halted God’s plan for His Body. The mixed multitude of the first Israel gives us a picture of the mixed multitude of the third Israel. There is no split in the Body between Jew or Gentile, male or female, as Paul says.

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:28 NASB95)

There is also no Catholic, Presbyterian, Baptist, Methodist, Anglican, Seventh-Day, non-Denominational, Mormon, Messianic, Church of Christ, Assembly of God, Muslim or whatever, either. Of course, we know that Jew and Gentile still exist. We know that male and female still exist. What a dull world we would have if there weren’t such variety as God has created! ‘One body’ doesn’t mean everyone is identical, it just means that all believers are united through our

Messiah Jesus. A person born a Jew is not treated any differently than a person born a non-Jew, if each of them is adopted into God's family.

The Remnant. Part of Israel is called the "remnant" sometimes. All through history, there has been a remnant for God that He has preserved for Himself. Abel and Enoch were part of the remnant. Noah and his family were a remnant, and part of The Remnant. God tells Elijah of 7,000 that hadn't bowed the knee to Ba'al (which were probably Jewish but not necessarily), and most of the prophets speak of this remnant.¹⁴

25As He says also in Hosea, "I will call those who were not My people, 'My people,' And her who was not beloved, 'beloved.' " 26"And it shall be that in the place where it was said to them, 'you are not My people,' There they shall be called sons of the living God." 27Isaiah cries out concerning Israel, "Though the number of the sons of Israel be like the sand of the sea, it is the remnant that will be saved; 28for the Lord will execute His word on the earth, thoroughly and quickly." 29And just as Isaiah foretold, "Unless the Lord of Sabaoth had left to us a posterity, We would have become like Sodom, and would have resembled Gomorrah." (Romans 9:25-29 NASB95)

18"Yet I will leave 7,000 in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal and every mouth that has not kissed him." (1 Kings 19:18 NASB95)

18Who is a God like You, who pardons iniquity And passes over the rebellious act of the remnant of His possession? He does not retain His anger forever, Because He delights in unchanging love. 19He will again have compassion on us; He will tread our iniquities under foot. Yes, You will cast all their sins Into the depths of the sea. (Micah 7:18-19 NASB95)

2God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel? 3"Lord, they have killed Your prophets, they have torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they are seeking my life." 4But what is the divine response to him? "I have kept for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal." 5In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God's gracious choice. (Romans 11:2-5 NASB95)

But it doesn't apply only to physical descendants of Jacob (Acts 15:16-17 ESV). Remnant is another one of those words that can have different meanings depending on context. It doesn't necessarily mean 'saved' in the sense of eternal life. It mostly means a leftover group. Noah and family were saved from the flood, but we really don't know their 'saved' status as far

¹⁴ Isaiah 10:20, 22, 28:5; Jeremiah 31:7, 50:20; Ezekiel 6:8, 11:13; Amos 5:15; Micah 2:12, 5:7, 8; Zephaniah 2:9, 3:13; Zechariah 9:7; see also Romans 9:27 quoting Isaiah

as being adopted into God's family. From later behavior, it seems that while the family might've all been saved from the flood they did not all express their thanks by sticking with God.

The word 'elect' is another term that is used for the remnant or the Body. Someone who is 'elect' can be chosen for a purpose. Pharaoh was (Exodus 9:16-17; Romans 9:17), even though the word elect is not specifically applied to him. (Mostly 'elect' is used in the NT and 'remnant' in the OT). The elect can also refer to Israel, as in 'chosen nation.' The remnant is also the elect, because they are chosen by God to be His own. The important thing about the elect and the remnant is that regarding eternal life (salvation) or God's household, they are all One Body. There might be other remnants that are elected for a purpose, but there is only one remnant that is both elect and His one Body.

The Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God (or Kingdom of Heaven) is a term related to the body. Except 'body' or 'remnant' indicates those who willingly belong to Jesus. The Kingdom term includes people who are not so willing (people and spirits or angels). Much like a mustard bush has birds as in Matthew 13.

In the broadest sense of the term, the kingdom is all creation. God rules everything all the time (Revelation 19:15, among many others) including Hell. But in the narrowest sense of the term, the Kingdom is anywhere that God rules the heart.

Many Jewish people think that the Kingdom is the same as physical Israel. To get into the Kingdom they think other people must convert to Judaism and follow all those traditions. But there's no Scriptural warrant for this belief. It's obvious that Jewish people for centuries have various members in the Kingdom, and quite a few out of it. Since when does the Kingdom have anything to do with genetics? In the resurrection, righteous people will be 'the Kingdom' while unrighteous unrepentant people, Jew or Gentile, will not (Revelation 21:8).

Some people may look like they are part of the Kingdom, but they will not continue. The important thing to realize is that all creation belongs to God, and He will do with it what He chooses. He is in charge and everything is going according to His plan, though we may not understand it all. Our part is to accept His ways, His Word, and let them get past our lips and into our limbs.

The Olive Tree. Paul gives us another picture of the Body of Christ when he discusses the nature of the olive tree in Romans 11. He says that branches are broken off due to lack of faith, and other branches are grafted in by faith.

17But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree, 18do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you. (Romans 11:17-18 NASB95)

The olive tree is a picture of the third Israel. Romans 9:6 says "they are not all Israel who are from Israel" and 11:26 "all Israel will be saved." In other words, Israel is everyone who is truly following God. Natural branches have to produce fruit or they don't make the cut to stay part of the tree. Branches that are grafted in have to show they are part of the kingdom by also producing fruit. If they don't, they aren't really a part of the tree and can be broken off again.

Don't confuse the illustration Paul is using by inserting the argument of 'once saved always saved,' though true, because it doesn't belong here. The illustration is limited to fruit and grafting. Looking at the olive tree from the outside, you can only tell a branch by its fruit.

Salvation cannot be lost in my opinion, but we do not really know who is saved and who isn't. Someone can look like they are part of the tree for a while, or naturally grow from it. But if they have no fruit then they were not really part (dead branches). If we are saved we keep doing what God says. If we are not, we fall by the wayside. Maybe a saved person goes up and down, but they still move towards God. The parable of the sower in Matthew 13 tells us that of the four different kinds of people, three show growth. But only one of the three actually shows fruit.

It is more consistent with the Word to see the olive tree as the third Israel, planted and husbanded by God through the centuries. He has been grafting people on who come to trust Him, and pruning off branches that bear no fruit. So all believers are at least a little fruity. John the Immerser says this fruit is in keeping with repentance (Matthew 3:7-12).

The Presence of the Holy Spirit. Some argue that the Spirit didn't 'fill' or 'dwell in' believers until the first Pentecost (Hebrew *Shavuot*) after the resurrection of the Messiah. But even a quick look at the Word proves this to be false. The list of people in the OT directly said to be filled with and/or led by the Spirit is long and distinguished. It is clear in the plain meaning of the text that there is very little difference between leading and filling.

Bezalel (Exodus 31:3 and 35:31)
 Moses and the 70 Elders (Numbers 11:17, 25, 26, 29)
 Balaam (Numbers 24:2)
 Joshua (Numbers 27:18 and Deuteronomy 34:9)
 Othniel son of Joshua (Judges 3:10)
 Gideon (Judges 6:34)
 Jephthah (pronounced Yayftah - Judges 11:29)
 Samson (Judges 13:25, 14:6&19, 15:14)
 King Saul (1 Samuel 10:6, 10, 11:6)
 King David (1 Samuel 16:13)
 Messengers of Saul (I Samuel 19:20)
 Amasai, chief of the 30 (1 Chronicles 12:18)
 Azariah son of Obed (2 Chronicles 15:1)
 Jahaziel (2 Chronicles 20:14)
 The Branch (Isaiah 11:2); My Servant (Isaiah 42:1); the Anointed (Isaiah 61:1)
 The people of Israel (Isaiah 63:11)
 Ezekiel (Ezekiel. 2:2, 3:12, 14, 24, 11:5)
 Micah (Micah 3:8)
 Zerubbabel, Joshua, and the people of the land (Haggai 2:5)
 The former prophets (Zechariah 7:12)

The presence of the Spirit is not marked only by speaking in other languages or with miraculous actions, or even by prophetic signs and utterances. His primary mark is on a heart that responds to God in trusting and loving obedience. God's Spirit is all around and works to varying degrees depending on the willingness of people to work with Him.

He may sometimes work in spectacular ways, but that is not the only way He works. For instance, He can be present without salvation, as He is in creation. He makes seeds grow and keeps air on our planet with gravity. The planets revolve and orbit the sun by His hand. The only place He has trouble getting His way is in the human heart.

Replacement. As we can see from Scripture, something called ‘the church’ has not replaced Israel at all. Rather, Gentiles have been ‘grafted in’ to an existing body of believers, as they have always been.

To object, some will quote Matthew 16:18, where Jesus says to Peter, “...upon this rock I will build my *ekklesia*, and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.” They say that “will build” means that the assembly had not been built. Jesus was going to build it later. The problem is, “will build” is not connected with time. It could just as easily mean the building blocks (believers) will be gathered together at some future time and used for building. After all, believers are still being added to the Body aren’t they? And wouldn’t you wait till you had all the material together to build something? Right now He’s growing a temple (Ephesians 2:19-22) but it’s not finished yet. So He was, and is, and will be, building His assembly then and now.

Paul cautions us to beware of arrogance, and replacement theologies are arrogant. What is grafted onto the tree can be broken off again, just as some of the natural branches were broken off. Like Bill Cosby kiddingly quotes his father, “You know, I brought you into this world; I’ll take you out. And it don’t make no difference to me, ‘cause I’ll make another one that looks just like you.” We must look to our own fruit, and abide in the vine. We don’t want to end up as some of the natural branches. There is no room in the Body of Christ for pride of place.

The idea that a split God created a split Body is just not biblical. The one Father has been adding to one body through one faith by one Spirit and one baptism for a very long time. There are giants of the faith such as Abraham and Sarah, Noah, and Moses. There are also the humble of station such as Ruth and Rahab. Queens like Esther, and mighty kings like David and Solomon are included, as well as judges such as Samson, Deborah and Gideon. Believers in the Body share a wonderful family tree.

The Jews? Before we talk about the Jews, we have to figure out who they are. Even Jews aren’t sure who is a Jew. A Jew can be either a physical descendant of Abraham, or a convert to Judaism. Some think at least dad has to be a Jew; others think mom has to be a Jew. Throw in the different brands of Judaism (orthodox, ultra-orthodox, reformed, etc.), and there is a real problem figuring out who is Jewish. A person can be physically Jewish and still not practice Judaism, while a physically non-Jewish person can convert to most forms of Judaism.

A whole-Bible Christian holds a special place for the Jewish people in his or her heart. We bless the Jews in every way we can, from prayers to pocketbooks, because God asks us to bless them (Genesis 12:3). In fact, it is my firm belief that people who love Israel, and the Jewish people, love God. People who hate Israel hate God. The deceiver hates Israel and keeps trying to destroy them because they are the physical representation of God’s kingdom on earth. The deceiver’s people hate Israel just like the deceiver does. So one of the ways we can tell believers from unbelievers is by the love, or hatred, of Israel.

To our shame, the church (and our country) has not done what they should in defending the first Israel. The Jews are God’s chosen nation on earth, whether they embrace the job or not. They are the “the apple of His eye.”

8For thus says the Lord of hosts, “After glory He has sent Me against the nations which plunder you, for he who touches you, touches the apple of His eye.
(Zechariah 2:8 NASB95)

⁴ They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. ⁵ To them belong the

patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen. (Romans 9:4-5 ESV)

We don't bless them for their sakes, or because they deserve it, as much as we do for God's sake. They are the elder brothers and sisters of the faith. In many ways if they are not moving forward in leadership pointing to God, then nobody else is moving forward either. God has selected them as His people. As long as they lead people to God, they do a wonderful job.

Judaism, on the other hand, is a different subject than Israel or the Jewish people. Judaism is the collection of religious practice and tradition that Jewish people have gathered over a long history. It comes from rabbis, and its main point is to preserve Jewish identity.

Judaism includes the 'oral law' in two different versions, both called Talmud (to learn). Both versions are merely collections of rabbinical rulings and teachings. The oral law was likely included in the term "whole law" spoken of in the New Testament. Much of the struggle with the law in the NT was over customs and traditions rather than with God's Word. It was definitely a big sore spot between Jesus and leaders of Judaism (Matthew 15:2-6; Mark 7:5-9).

Not all Jewish people are practicing the religious things of Judaism. It is difficult to estimate the number of non-practicing (secular) and practicing Jews,¹⁵ because Judaism has so many sects. But about 30% to 40% are uninvolved and 60% to 70% are involved at least a little.

Religious Jews are split into all sorts of factions, from ultra orthodox (the smallest division) to barely practicing (perhaps the largest division) and even some anti-God humanists.¹⁶ Like the Protestants, Judaism has many forms practiced by many different groups of people. It is not all one religion. Even at the time of the incarnation, it was like this. And like Christianity, Judaism has a core of godly beliefs, but they have not always been true to them either.

There is a tendency in some circles to think that being Jewish or practicing Judaism is the same as following God. The idea seems to be that a Jewish person, or a person who practices Judaism(s), is either automatically doing what God requires or is somehow practicing biblical faith in a way superior to non-Jewish people or practices. This comes from thinking that Jews have historically followed God. Therefore, they must have a sort of 'inside track' that should be followed if we want to practice what we preach.

Sadly, the Scriptures tell a different story. In the pages of God's Word, Judaism is generally known for stiff-necked, belligerent and hard-hearted idolatry. Many Jews willfully disobey the spirit of the Law while looking at times like they follow every letter.¹⁷ Happily for us, there is also a remnant of Jewish people, such as the writers of the Word and people like Jesus or Nicodemus or Joseph of Arimathea, who really do follow their (our) God.

But to say that Judaism, or any other group of religious practices, is automatically better in God's eyes is missing the point entirely. Judaism and Christianity both have seen success in God pleasing behavior, but both have also seen miserable failure. Neither is holier than the other.

It is not genetic or cultural or traditional people groups that define God's family; it is the response to what God says. Jewish people are like any other people. They have been known for both the highest and lowest behavior that is possible from human beings. So being Jewish, or

¹⁵ According to Wikipedia (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jewish_population) the Jewish People Policy Planning Institute calculated in 2007 that there were 13.2 million Jews worldwide with 4.5 million as secular. Other estimates range from 12 to 18 million.

¹⁶ For instance, Greg Epstein of Cambridge, the 'humanist rabbi.' Search online, you'll find him.

¹⁷ Exodus 32:9, 33:3-5; Deuteronomy 9:6, 31:27; Judges 2:19; Nehemiah 9:16-29; Psalm 78:8; Ezekiel 3:7; Zechariah 7:8-14; Matthew 15:7-9; Acts 7:51-53

practicing Judaism, does not mean the same thing as being Godly or doing godly things. It is the actions of the person as they match or stray from the Word that shows who is in the Body or not.

28For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. 29But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God. (Romans 2:28-29 NASB95)

19Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but what matters is the keeping of the commandments of God. (1 Corinthians 7:19 NASB95)

6For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love. (Galatians 5:6 NASB95)

The whole-Bible Christian realizes that there is a large difference between Jews and Judaism. We bless the Jewish people but don't have to copy every tradition. We do not embrace Judaism, nor do we reject it out of hand. We just see the need to match up whatever we do, Jewish or Gentile, with the Word. Keep what is good and avoid the bad.

The Messianic Movement. The Messianic movement began within Judaism as a group of Jews who had realized that the long-awaited Messiah was in fact Jesus (people like Peter, James, and Paul). In a way, most practicing Jews have always been 'messianic' in that they look for God's Messiah. The Messianic movement really goes back to the beginning with whoever trusted God and His Promise. But the modern Messianic movement accepts Jesus as the Messiah, and maintains Jewish heritage and practice (sort of).

There are factions within this group just as there are in Judaism. It had grown a lot since the '70's, but seems to be shrinking in the last few years. This might be due to an emphasis on Jewish traditions and trying to be as 'Jewish' as possible. But it's clear to me, in view of the large number of non-practicing Jews, that even Jews are not all that interested in Judaism, messianic or otherwise.

Roots. Some teach that Gentile believers have been "grafted in to a Jewish (or Hebrew) root," or that the church has "Jewish roots." They do this to promote unity between Jews and Christians. The goal is worthy, but scripturally all believers are grafted into the root of the Messiah,¹⁸ not the root of Judaism. Yes, Jesus is Jewish, from the tribe of Judah. But the Scriptures don't make a point of it except in respect to the Promise (Genesis 3:15).¹⁹

The roots of the church are in Judaism. Note how stubborn both groups are, and steeped in idolatry. But the roots of believers (the Remnant, body, bride, etc.) are in Jesus, and this body has been around for a much longer time.

The first Israel was supposed to be a holy nation of priests and kings (Exodus 19:6) but so far has failed to completely live up to the billing. The church in general has also poorly represented Him. Meanwhile God has kept a remnant for Himself in spite of the seeming wholesale departure of people from His rule.

¹⁸ Who is actually called the root, see for instance Isaiah 11:10, 53:2; Romans 11:16, 15:12.

¹⁹ I have to make a note here also about the two-house teachings. I don't have space to cover it all here, but it is a false teaching that contains very little truth. There are articles on my website www.wholebible.com under 'Commentary' if you need more.

The Body is grafted onto the root of the eternally existent Messiah. Judaism (or Christianity) is not and never has been the ‘root.’ There are people who want to follow all of God’s Word but realize that Judaism isn’t the point. We also think that the church is not the point either, especially in the area of extra-biblical and worldly traditions. What counts is keeping the commandments of God (1 Corinthians 7:19).

Growing pains. The book of Acts is not the beginning of the Body of Christ; it is another chapter in the story. It is also a picture of what the first Israel should’ve been from their beginning. This is why Jesus goes to the Jews first, why the apostles went to the Jews first, and why Paul went to the Jews first when he arrived in a new town (Acts 18:6). Since Israel is supposed to be God’s point men, they are given a number of chances to get it right.

The book of Acts describes growing pains, not labor pains. The Body was already there. It just needed a kick in the pants and some direction again. The principles that God had been trying to get across for centuries (love, obedience, whole-hearted devotion) were dusted off and given a new push. The entrenched Jewish leaders resist the move back to the purity of God’s ways. So there were a series of ‘synagogue splits’ between believers and non-believers (both Jew and Gentile).

Paul makes it a habit to go into a synagogue in every new town he visits and attempts to unmask the riches of the Word. He mostly succeeds in getting himself booted out and needing to start a new synagogue. One of the main sticking points, besides Jesus, is his focus on Gentile inclusion in the Body. See for instance Acts 22:1-22, where Paul is making a defense of himself to the Jews. They are fine with almost every statement (even the ones about Jesus) until he mentions including the Gentiles in verse 22. Then the fireworks really go off.

Over time, more and more believing Gentiles become a part of the new synagogues with believing Jews. Hardened non-believers (also Jews and Gentiles) fight, kick and scream about it. After the time frame of the book of Acts, as the apostles depart this life for the next, the new congregations get more and more anti-Jewish. The Jewish leader’s rejection of Jesus was part of the problem. Also, there were differences of opinion about how to handle Roman occupation and the various high-handed actions against the Jews.

Two key events caused further separation. First was the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE. Second was the destruction of Jerusalem itself in 135 CE. By the later part of the first century, the Christians were already starting to see themselves as a separate ‘church.’

Over more time, the roots of conflict in Acts show fruit in church teachings developed to either replace or merge Israel with the Church. These teachings are kind of a childish ‘nyah nyah nyah’ reaction to the rejection of Christ believers by many Jewish leaders. All of these teachings have, sadly, a great deal of anti-Jewishness in them. In fact we could say that Christians defined (and continue to define) themselves more and more sharply in opposition to anything Jewish. This is the main energy behind the modern rejection of His Law. Jesus took great pains to tear down the wall between us, and we couldn’t wait to put it back up.

The Nicolaitans. As the centuries have progressed, the church has continued to split and divide and split again. Every modern day congregation calling itself Christian (or some form of it) was formed by splits from other congregations. Some of these splits had good intentions trying to correct errors. Many were just splits for the sake of splitting, or control and power. Some came from an inability to get along. A handful came from revivals such as Pentecost.

Splitting is not necessarily bad. It is the reason for the split that has to be examined. If the split is for power, such as the split between Ephraim and Judah, that’s bad. If it is over the Word,

such as the many splits caused by Paul, then it is good.²⁰ Not to be desired perhaps, and painful when they happen, but generally good and needful. So if you have split from a group over the Word, you are not alone.²¹

⁴Those who forsake the law praise the wicked, But those who keep the law strive with them. (Proverbs 28:4 NASB95)

All the people who have split think of themselves as ‘new wine’ which can’t fit into the ‘old wineskin’ (Matthew 9:14 -17; Mark 2:22; Luke 5:37). So they think they have to make a new wineskin (organization). Some groups might actually have started out as new wineskin, but over time, they too get old. So does the wine, as the group drifts away from the Word.

We are reaping fruit now from that drifting which accelerated in the ‘60’s and ‘70’s.²² Many church groups who have rejected absolute truth are polarized into fundamental and liberal camps. That doesn’t mean one is correct and one isn’t. Both are built on sandy foundations. Neither one accepts the whole of God’s single, living, absolute Word. Those of us who are whole Bible Christians didn’t leave the church, the church left us.

Every split eventually hardens into something called a bureaucracy (literally ‘rule by desk’). Most churches or synagogues today are run by bureaucracy. In all my experience with churches, from Assemblies of God to Wesleyan, Baptist to Calvary Chapels or Evangelical Free to Vineyard, every single one of them have developed their own bureaucracy.

Bureaucracies resist change because they take on a life of their own (if you can call it life). They get this way because the number one rule for all of them (church or not) is ‘survival of the bureaucracy.’ They don’t care about individuals. I know, I’ve searched and searched and haven’t found one yet that cared for me or my family. I’ve found other people who cared, just not an organization. If we are not careful, when we get together in groups we can resemble a mob more than a Body.

A comparison that occurred to me a few years ago is that churches have become like fast food franchises. They only serve certain food a certain way, they replicate only after themselves, and they have a rigid, top-down management structure. If you get tired of the same old food at one franchise, you have to go to another. A burger place doesn’t serve pizza, and a taco stand doesn’t serve burgers. If you want to change something, you can’t. It doesn’t matter what you say because the number of outlets is what’s important. The real concern for a franchise is making money. Yep, the more I think about it the more the current crop of churches looks a whole lot like a bunch of fast food stands.

Bureaucracies are not what God intended for His Body. Jesus collided with such a hardened system run by Pharisees, Sadducees, priests and scribes (Matthew 23). Later He said:

¹⁴But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit acts of immorality.

¹⁵So you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the

²⁰ Jesus is the ‘rock of offense’ and a ‘stumbling block’ to many, see for instance Isaiah 8:14; Romans 9:32-33; etc.

²¹ In 1 Corinthians 1:10 Paul says “there should be no divisions” and 11:19 he says there must be factions so that “those who are approved may become evident among you.”

²² See for instance “A Patriot’s History of the United States,” Larry Schweikart and Michael Allen, published by Sentinel, a member of the Penguin Group, 2004. Especially pages 731 through 736 titled ‘Sex, the Church, and the Collapse of Marriage.’

Nicolaitans. 16‘Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth. (Revelation 2:14-16 NASB95)

We do not know for certain what a Nicolaitan is. It has something to do with the methods of Balaam²³ and a hierarchy. A hierarchy has two groups – one of rulers and one of ‘lay’ people. The meaning of Nicolaitan means ‘destruction of, or victory over, people.’ Sounds like a bureaucracy to me.²⁴

Bureaucracies or hierarchies certainly qualify as a destruction of people. They resist change by squashing almost every form of independent thought.²⁵ Whatever doesn’t conform to the bureaucratic mindset is rejected. It has to be this way for the bureaucracy to survive.

I have collided with many bureaucracies myself. It’s bound to happen when a Bible reader asks questions, earnestly seeking His God. Many theological systems and creeds are not biblical, and my questions ruffled a lot of feathers. I wondered a lot whether the professed love of Christ was really present after I was told, sometimes politely, sometimes directly, to hit the road. There were quite a few loving people within the organizations. But taken together the groups were more concerned with self-preservation than preaching and practicing the Word.

Groups tend to grab power and hold onto it at the expense of individuals. Often this is by preaching a message of unity. By unity, however, they mean the unity of the system, not the Word of God. You have to think like they do. “That’s not the way we do things here” is the rallying cry of bureaucracies everywhere. Rather than teaching ‘how to think’ based on reading and doing the Word, they only teach ‘what to think.’

The reason is that if people knew how to think for themselves through the Bible, they wouldn’t need the bureaucrat. Then poof goes the paycheck for the priest, pastor or rabbi. This type of unity is why pastors boast of everybody being of one mind in a congregation. It’s because everybody either agrees with him or gets booted out (or chilled out or ignored away).

So why does God allow these ‘churches’ to keep going? Well, it seems for the same reasons He doesn’t just roll up the whole creation and start over. In His kindness He is waiting for people to repent and come to Him. Paul also says that “*whether pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice*” (Philippians 1:15-18). So the word about Jesus is being spread, however watered down, masked, or hidden in plain sight. And Matthew quotes Jesus telling us to leave the weeds, sown by the enemy. He’ll take care of them later (Matthew 13:24-30).

Bureaucrats try to convince us we need to follow God by following them. But they are like tollbooths on a bridge to nowhere. Jesus did not come to establish a bureaucracy. Just because you don’t belong to one doesn’t mean you don’t belong to God. Following God is an individual effort. We each answer for our own words and actions (Romans 14:10). The Temple veil torn in two (Matthew 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45) means Jesus restored direct access to God for everyone who wants it. A balanced meal is available directly from Him. We don’t have to be satisfied with burgers only. The buffet in His Word is waiting and free for anyone who wants life and that more abundantly.

Tradition. The word ‘tradition’ means something ‘handed down.’ It can be simple, such

²³ Balaam gets about three chapters in Numbers (22-24) and was killed in Joshua 13:22. Revelation 2:14 summarizes his sin as teaching Israel to depart from God through immorality.

²⁴ Strong’s G3531; *nikolaites*, followers of Nicolaus. *Nico* is Greek for conquer; *laites* is Greek for laity (as opposed to priests). This may only apply to an immorality cult, but it is still a destructive system coming from a leader.

²⁵ C. S. Lewis said that “Of all tyrannies a tyranny sincerely exercised for the good of its victims may be the most oppressive.”

as baptism, or more complex such as the Christmas holiday. God's Law is 'handed down,' and in a way, almost anything we get handed down to us is a tradition.

Traditions by themselves aren't bad, but bad traditions are bad. I define a bad tradition as one which interferes with, or leads away from, God's Word. We have many, many such traditions dear to the hearts of millions now. Christmas and Easter, for instance, are not in the Bible and have many pagan practices associated with them. The church has hijacked pagan holidays by mixing in some Bible stories, but mixing like this is never approved by God. Now the pagans want their holidays back, and I say let 'em have 'em.

One of the main tools used by most bureaucracies to enforce their will is tradition. In their hands, tradition is a powerful weapon. It plays on our sentiments and conditions us to think a certain way. Many appeals to 'orthodoxy' are actually appeals to tradition. One family I know instructed my son to return to 'mainstream Protestant doctrine.' They weren't happy with his desire to avoid the paganism (like a Christmas tree) in his future home. In their minds rejecting Christmas is the same as rejecting Jesus, which is not even close to the truth. He wants to stay biblically true, but those people appealed to tradition rather than the Bible.

Speaking of Christmas, Catholic theologians laugh privately at the Protestants, because though they 'protest' the Catholics, they're still following many of their decrees. It is the Catholic Church that invented Christmas and Easter. They changed (or tried to change) the Sabbath to Sunday from Saturday (the biblically correct day). Protestants still follow these decrees, as well as many others, in lockstep.

Catholics also set up their priestly hierarchy (copied from Judaism). The Protestants in turn copy it with their own version of pastors and lay people. Protestants may not have a single pope, but all they did was trade one pope for many. These popes and 'little popes' are one reason why you'll get so much resistance as soon as you start asking about the basis for extra- or non-biblical rules and traditions.

Sentiment, which goes hand in glove with tradition, will get us off-track with God every time. When feelings become more important than His Word, they confuse us and get us lost. Adam was probably sentimental when he decided to eat the fruit that his wife gave him. Unrestrained sentiment and hardened tradition have caused a lot of damage throughout history.

The other anointing. This brings us to the topic of self-anointing, because often, whenever a 'lay' person questions the rulers, the argument of 'touch not mine anointed' is used as a defense (I Chronicles 16:22). In other words, the religious bureaucrat thinks of himself as 'anointed by God.' He wants authority, and uses anointing to grab it.

Therefore, according to them, if you question them you are questioning God (or His Word).²⁶ You only find out what the leader really thinks when you insist on Bible back up for teachings. Kind of interesting, isn't it, in view of what Jesus said about another anointing?

²⁴"For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect. (Matthew 24:24 NASB95)

²⁶ Mark Driscoll, for instance, in a video on 2/25/08 titled "Putting Preachers in Their Place" (http://theresurgence.com/mark_driscoll_2008-02-25_video_putting_preachers_in_their_place) said, "The Spirit of God anoints a preacher to open God's Word and preach God's Word." Really? Where's the reference? He assumes that the pulpit is needed for preaching, ignores the anointing of all believers, and implies that to question the preacher you are questioning God. Notice he has no Scripture back-up for many of his positions.

¹² And what I do I will continue to do, in order to undermine the claim of those who would like to claim that in their boasted mission they work on the same terms as we do. ¹³ For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. ¹⁴ And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. ¹⁵ So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds. (2 Corinthians 11:12-15 ESV)

Remember the word ‘Christ’ means anointed. Anointing, however, is proved by actions. Look what happened, for instance, with Saul and David. Both were anointed kings of Israel, yet Saul fell into pride and self-service. His actions were not consistent with his anointing and he had the kingdom torn out of his hands (1 Samuel 15:27-29). David, on the other hand, ended up being the most recognized and blessed of Israel’s rulers next to Solomon. The reason was that he had a heart after God’s own (1 Samuel 13:14) and acted according to his anointing.

In Matthew 16:13-20, Jesus asks the disciples if they know who He is. After Peter tells Jesus that “you are the Christ” Jesus responds with “on this rock I will build my church.” This has been hotly debated for a long time. Some think Peter was the rock, and the first pope. Others think the confession of “Jesus is Christ” is the rock. Check the context though. Just before this, Jesus warns the disciples to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees, right after that group had wrongly asked for a sign (to approve His authority). The issue was authority (anointing). The leaders wanted to assert their authority by demanding to see a sign of Jesus’ authority. The Jewish leaders grabbed authority, but it wasn’t anchored with God’s Word. The disciples were given authority consistent with the confession of Jesus as the Christ. By extension all believers have the same authority, if they teach in the same confession.

The disciples didn’t have to worry about whether their authority (anointing) was recognized by the other Jewish leaders or not. As long as they preached Christ as The Anointed, their authority was on the rock. We are all like Peter in the sense of being a ‘rock’ or stone if we confess the same thing as he did. And all of us living stones are being built into a spiritual house as Peter himself says.

⁴ As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, ⁵ you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 2:4-5 ESV)

If a person says he is anointed, yet teaches or behaves in a way that contradicts the Word (not just mistakes) there is no way possible that he retains an anointing from God. Even if he had one to start with. We will, after all is said and done, know them by their fruits. And biblical fruit, proving anointing, has nothing to do with the number of followers or the size of the paycheck.

Jesus never testified about Himself (except perhaps for quotes such as Luke 4:18) as many of the false teachers do, because His identity was obvious from His actions. He never used the ‘touch not’ verse even though He really was The Anointed. A number of people sure did touch Him, some in a murderous fashion.

27As for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him.
(1 John 2:27 NASB95)

Godly anointing is always, and I mean always, in line with His Word and the teachings in it. A truly God-anointed person does not flinch from real, godly, Bible-centered questions. He will always be glad to give an answer for the hope that is in him (1 Peter 3:15). He does not have to use the ‘touch not’ verse because his teaching is ‘on the rock’ in the first place.

He will also not hesitate to spend time helping people understand the Word. Far too often the false anointed are quick to send a person away who asks too many questions. They prefer the wide-eyed, trusting and loyal proselyte (Matthew 23:15) over the Berean (Acts 17:10, 11). There may be an anointing on the bureaucrats, but more likely, it is a self-anointing by a spirit other than God’s. We can see this in the fruit as Jesus teaches us (Matthew 7:15-23).

A lot of these ‘anointed’ guys will fight much of what I am relaying to you from the Bible in this book. They will waive their credentials around and remind you of the many initials after their name on a business card. So what. They are blind guides. The ‘educated’ religious leaders fought Jesus and Paul too. But if leaders don’t stick with scriptures, then all they’ve got is just so much alphabet soup. And not very nutritious soup at that.

Real authority comes from the Word. The anointing for many leaders comes from the self or from a club full of groupies, neither of which could be mistaken for the Holy Spirit. Maybe the (false) anointed was called into the ministry...by his mom. When the self-anointed chop the Word into little pieces and tell us to ignore some of them, authority goes right out the window. If teaching doesn’t match the Word, don’t follow. There is no reason to listen to such a person or be afraid of them.

It’s a God thing. Every once in a while, God decides to shake the bureaucracies, systems and programs that man creates, and remind us that He is the One who’s in charge. It’s His Word, not ours, that is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword (Hebrews 4:12). He re-injects this Word through sermons on mounts, judges, prophets, apostles and events such as Pentecost. He rescues believers, and provides ways around those who try to block access to Him.

We can see from history that after the Word is refreshed, it doesn’t take long for man to take over and pervert God’s changes, innovations, and fresh starts. The systems of men hinder instead of help the work of the Spirit. Now He is repeating His message again, calling people to repent and return to the whole of His Word in thought and deed.

We do not need a bureaucracy to get to God. We don’t we need self-anointed leadership terrified of biblical questions that threaten the paycheck. God has taken great pains to make His Kingdom and His Word available to anyone who wants it. All we have to do is read and heed.

You may find yourself rejected by a bureaucracy. The church or synagogue may remind you more of a snooty country club than a family dedicated to God’s Word. But don’t think you are outside of the Body. The Body and the church are not the same by any stretch of the imagination. It is no surprise that truth seekers have trouble finding a place in the country clubs. Take comfort in the Word your Father provides, and hold onto it above all else.

The one Body goes back much further than just the first century; it goes all the way back to the Garden. It is as old as man’s relationship with God. There is no split and no separation, except between believers and unbelievers. We need to return to His roots, but not the roots of

Judaism, Hebrews, or the first century church. The one Body is built on the foundation of the whole of the Word which we eat and drink as if it was life itself. The gates of hell will not stand against it, and neither will the bureaucracies of men.

Believers are a kingdom of kings and priests (Exodus 19:6; Revelation 1:6, 5:10) after the order of Melchizedek (Genesis 14:8; Hebrews 7). We take in the body and blood of His Word while offering sacrifices of lips and limbs, and share it with any who ask.

His kingdom is not a martial kingdom with bloodshed and forced rule (yet). It is a kingdom made up of obedient new creations born again by the Spirit. We don't need to create unity according to the Scriptures. We just need to maintain it (Ephesians 4:3; Philippians 2:2). Our job is to take in His Word and apply it to ourselves, and then share it with those who want it. It isn't a Jewish thing or a Christian thing, it's a God thing.