

Building the Ekklesia

I planted the seed, and Apollos watered it, but it was God who made it grow. ⁷ So neither the planter nor the waterer is anything, only God who makes things grow — ⁸ planter and waterer are the same.

However, each will be rewarded according to his work. ⁹ For we are God's co-workers; you are God's field, God's building. ¹⁰ Using the grace God gave me, I laid a foundation, like a skilled master-builder; and another man is building on it. But let each one be careful how he builds. ¹¹ For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Yeshua the Messiah. ¹² Some will use gold, silver or precious stones in building on this foundation; while others will use wood, grass or straw. ¹³ But each one's work will be shown for what it is; the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire — the fire will test the quality of each one's work. ¹⁴ If the work someone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward; ¹⁵ if it is burned up, he will have to bear the loss: he will still escape with his life, but it will be like escaping through a fire.

¹⁶ Don't you know that you people are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? ¹⁷ So if anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you yourselves are that temple. (1 Corinthians 3:6-17, Complete Jewish Bible)

The Foundation

The foundation of the Ekklesia of Jesus *is* Jesus. He is the Cornerstone of the entire building. A cornerstone in a building is either decorative, listing the builders or owners or designers or financial benefactors who created the building, or is operative, defining the three dimensions of depth, width and height as a cube. Any vertical line or plane in a building that has its shape defined by a genuine cornerstone must match the plane or line that is represented by the stone. Level, horizontal surfaces or planes or lines in the building must be defined by the top and bottom planes of the cornerstone, and can be compared to those planes for accuracy during the building process.

Jesus, as a person, as a servant, in character, in integrity, in purpose, in strength, and by nature defines the standards of each of these facets of His identity as they are reflected and manifested by and in His Ekklesia. It is possible to identify the genuineness or the quality or power of love in the Ekklesia by comparing it to the Cornerstone for accuracy. The words the Ekklesia speaks can be compared to the plumb declared by His words to determine if the Ekklesia is out of alignment in her declarations. Any activity a congregation is involved in can be judged by the works of Jesus.

The Design

Because the Ekklesia is made up of people, who according to the revelation given to John, are discernibly recognizable based on tribe and tongue and nationality even in eternity, it has discernible differences in its various gatherings that are cultural expressions of human love for the Lord. Humans differ by language, physical appearance, dress, dance, song, food, family order, and other preferences and distastes. We bring most of these likes and dislikes into our gatherings with the rest of the Ekklesia, and use them to bless Jesus and each other when we are in His Spirit. When we are more interested in honoring our differences in flesh than our likenesses in spirit, we use them to divide ourselves from each other and dishonor Jesus.

Cultural differences brought to Him as a sacrifice of praise please Jesus. He loves hearing His name and character praised in different languages and musical styles. He loves seeing us share the various foods that He has given to us for pleasure as well as strength. He created mealtimes to promote fellowship! He ordained that we would remember His suffering and payment for our lives at meals by use of bread and wine.

The Blueprints

If the Spirit of God had led His people to write material that became Scripture that included a, Ekklesiamanagement manual, even unbelievers could pick up the manual and build the Ekklesia. Being a Genius, He did not do that. We cannot cooperate with Him in building His Ekklesia and get it right without being lead by Him! With all due disrespect for denominational controversies and opinions, the Scriptures contain very little of the “how” that is necessary for designing, building, organizing, and ruling a congregation. What does exist Scripturally with this regard is fairly much found in “love one another as I have loved you.”

This absence of rules for building creates great liberty, and therefore, great danger. As Paul prophesied to the Ekklesia in Corinth, builders who do not build correctly will suffer loss when their work is tested. Deduce from this that there is a correct way to build, with correct material and design, and that there is an incorrect way to build, with incorrect material or design. Some of the great loss caused by error will be inflicted on other members of the body, not just costing the mis-builder.

More positively, some of the greatness of the liberty offered by the lack of rules for building includes the freedom to build culturally relevant expressions of His house. In a culture that values wearing costumes for important events, the use of costumes in worship is part of the worship. Dance or pageantry can be part of our expressions of our praise or glory being offered to our God. Musical styles vary greatly among geographical areas and other divisions of people. Many groups proudly think that their favorite music is God’s favorite and condemn all other rhythms or melodies as either worldly or anti-Christ.

What day of the week we gather on is important to some, irrelevant to others. Having an altar in our gathering place is basic to some and anti-Christ to others. As Paul instructed the Roman congregations in chapter 14 of his letter to them, our devotion of our practices to our God is what sanctifies them, and they can be in direct opposition to each other and both be right!

In the same light, the direction the Architect of the Ekklesia gives to one group of builders regarding building design and order enables them to accomplish the goals and projects He has assigned to them with ease. However, a group of believers who have a different assignment could not accomplish their work without having a completely different design of management and policy.

Even two prophets or two pastors cannot look at each others’ ministries and be sure whether they are fulfilling their individual callings. The work that comes through one person from a certain Spiritual gift can look vastly different from another’s work. The resources of preparation, maturity, available helpers, money, time, mentorship, etc., change what is possible through different people and through the same person at different times. We cannot look at the much more complex assemblies of various ministries into congregations and compare two in order to decide which one is right. We must consult the Architect and ask Him if His design is being followed and His goals are being met. How very dangerous to have to depend on the Holy Spirit

instead of our denominational hindquarters. No, that's headquarters. I forget.

The Builders

"Each man" who builds is, I believe, generically referencing each believer. We are *all* part of the process of building His Ekklesia if we are believers. We are building something or we are *burying* something, like the man who was given only one talent of wealth and feared not being capable of doing anything of value with it, and therefore hid it. What we build - relationships, clubs, ministry, personal kingdom, etc., is our contribution to the Ekklesia. If it is about us, it is probably wood or hay. If it is about Jesus, it is probably more valuable.

Paul described the process of the Ekklesia being built in his letter to the Ekklesia at Ephesus, too:

I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, ² with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, ³ endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

⁷ But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. ⁸ Therefore He says:

"When He ascended on high,
He led captivity captive,
And gave gifts to men."

⁹ (Now this, "He ascended" – what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? ¹⁰ He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.)

¹¹ And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, ¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, ¹³ till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; ¹⁴ that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, ¹⁵ but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head – Christ – ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love. (Ephesians 4:1-16, New King James Version)

The Building

Each member has a calling, each has been given grace, and *as each part does its share*, the body grows - the Ekklesia is built, because love holds us together and accomplishes the miracle. Every believer has an important part to perform in the building process.

Each believer must listen to the Head of the body in order to find his/her part and must be empowered supernaturally with some manifestation of the Holy Spirit in order to get her/his

part done properly. The instruction from the Cornerstone will include directions related to what part of the building to be working on. This would inform the worker about the location of the congregation related to his/her assignment. The workers need to find from the Lord what their burden is, so that they can tell if the yoke they are taking up moves the correct burden, or is doing someone else's work. Trying to pick up whatever work is nearby in whatever congregation is convenient or comfortable may lead a builder to a heavy burden and a difficult yoke, rather than the one the Lord has for them, which would be easy and light.

The next time you hear a person complaining about some lack of activity opportunities or some service they are not receiving or any other problem in the congregation they gather with, ask them if they are related to that congregation because they were instructed to join it by the Holy Spirit. If their answer is "no", ask them why they are there. If their answer is "yes", ask them why they are whining rather than interceding for their coworkers and asking the Head of the Ekklesia how to make the congregation succeed at His mission for it. Most people are related to the Ekklesia in ways that have no concern for what Jesus has ordained them to.

In John 15:16, Jesus told His disciples that He had "ordained" them to go out and bear much fruit. In 1 Corinthians 12:18, when Paul is writing about the ministries each believer brings forth by the working of the Holy Spirit, he used the same word Jesus used in John 15:16 when he wrote that "God sets the members in the body just as it pleases Him." The common word is translated into English in the John narrative as either "ordained" or "appointed". In Paul's letter, it is translated "set". It describes having been put in place on purpose. You don't climb into the place or achieve the place, you are put there. You have to get the authority, the power, the freedom, even the information of the assignment, from God. Presuming to walk into a "calling" prevents your work from *being* a "calling".

Where and When to Build

Sometimes the Spirit speaks to a group or an individual and imparts a building plan for a certain mission. It can include a certain group of people and last for a long or short period of time. His intent can be that the band of believers disbands when the mission is accomplished and each proceeds to His next assignment to each of them. Taking any assignment and extending it beyond His instruction will be building with "wood, grass and straw" instead of something more valuable and more permanent. It will be destroyed in its testing time. Having the correct material to build with comes from listening to the Supplier as He instructs and prepares for the work He has called us to. He makes the resources available to the workers - gives seed to the sower who plants it - the altar worker eats from the altar (2 Corinthians 9:10-15 / 1 Corinthians 9:13).

Minimum Building Materials

The foundation of the Ekklesia, built with Jesus as its Cornerstone, includes prophets and apostles, as Paul described in Ephesians 2:18-22. There is debate whether the apostles and prophets he described there as part of the foundation are all deceased, but since there is no Scripture that declares that the time of needing apostles or prophets in the Ekklesia has come to an end, it is rational to presume that the time for their presence has not come to an end. In contrast, to presume as some do, that the time for their presence has come to an end simply because I may not know someone with either one of those ministries, fits one of the definitive marks of a cult: basing core doctrine on extra-Biblical information or revelation. Someone said, "There are no apostles or prophets today." Since there is no Scriptural statement declaring,

“There are no apostles or prophets today,” only a cult would accept such a statement, basing its authority or truthfulness on something other than Scripture.

Paul wrote to the Ekklesia at Ephesus (quoted above in verse 13) that Jesus gave apostles to the Ekklesia “till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;”. Perhaps there was some period of time in the Ekklesia when that amazing condition was achieved, but I am not aware of it. I am convinced, instead, that such a time has yet to appear, and that it is only going to become possible for it to appear when we not only allow, but approve and endorse and encourage, the Holy Spirit to give apostles, prophets, pastors, evangelists and teachers to the Ekklesia, so that all of the rest of the believers can be equipped for their ministries, empowered by the gifts the Holy Spirit wants to set each member in place with.

Based, then, on the fact that apostles and prophets are still required to be active in their ministries for the Ekklesia to function properly, and based on the fact that Paul took Barnabas and Silas with him as partners in Ekklesia planting, and that Paul called these two ministries part of the foundation on which the Ekklesia is built, I am deducing that a new congregation can be started with these two ministries as a minimum pair of foundational building blocks.

Strategies For Building

Paul’s assignment from the Architect for planting congregations in various places included starting at the local synagogue. There, the local Jewish men met on the sabbath. In an adjacent room, the Jewish women’s presence was tolerated. In another adjacent room, the gentile “God fearers” were allowed to be within listening distance. God fearers (see Acts 13:13-16) were gentiles who wanted to relate to Yahweh, but did not want to relate to Moses. They wanted to have access to the true God of creation and life, but did not want to have to be circumcised or to have to give up pork chops or shrimp with grits. They drew close, but not close enough to cross the line and become proselytes and convert to Judaism.

Paul was a student of Gamaliel, a leader in the Jewish ruling body called the Sanhedrin. He was a Pharisee, an expert in the law of Moses, and was known and respected by almost all Jews. When Paul introduced himself to the synagogue leaders as one of Gamaliel’s disciples, he was instantly respected. Maybe like a graduate of Harvard or Yale. When Paul was therefore invited to speak to the people in each synagogue, he declared that Jesus was Messiah. He showed them in the Scriptures that He was fulfillment of the prophets’ descriptions of what Messiah would be and do. The Jews who allowed the Holy Spirit to open their hearts to believe, believed. ALL of the God fearers would leap at the invitation to come to God by a Door other than Moses. Their greatest dreams and more all came true in Jesus. Paul would reason with the people who challenged him for a few sabbaths typically, and then be thrown out of the synagogue by the unbelieving Jews. To their dismay, they would then watch the believing Jews and all of the God fearing gentiles leave them to follow Paul out the door. They would be provoked to jealousy and rage by this “sheep stealing”, cursing Paul and attempting to have him killed or jailed.

Success had been achieved in planting a new congregation already, though, by the gathering of the godly Jews in the crowd and the God fearers, who were familiar with the Scriptures and could be used as very fertile soil by the Holy Spirit to become a life-filled and life-imparting congregation in a short period of time. There were already relationships among the people that naturally and supernaturally developed into eldership and order in the new expression of the body of Jesus. As their gifts surfaced and developed, they were quickly a

valid work of God in His earth.

How to Build Today?

Jesus told Peter “I will build My ekklesia...” (Matthew 16:18). Paul clarified the process in 1 Corinthians 3:10 by his warning to “each person” regarding how they build on the foundation that he laid. We are His body, and we are enacting the works He wants done in the earth, including the building of His Ekklesia. He is the Head of His body, though, so we only do what He instructs, or our movements as members of His body will look spastic or “involuntary.” Another contrasting picture is to be so work-less that we make His body seem to have suffered a stroke.

Where is He telling His feet to walk today? What labor is He desiring to set His hands to? He wants you to know what your part is. Your desire to know what that part is must be great enough to drive you to ask and seek and knock until you hear the answer and receive the directions if you don't sense Him volunteering them. Give Him reasons to believe that His instructions are valuable to you. Give Him some evidence that you will be worthy of being trusted with the revelation.

Core Values

Three values help me identify people who can tolerate building with me. If people I encounter already believe these, or are easily convinced by the Spirit that they are true, we can build together:

1. Every Believer has an important ministry
2. Every Spiritual gift and resultant ministry or work that can be found in the Bible should be found *somewhere* in the Body
3. In order to equip *every Believer* for their ministry, the *environment* should facilitate the discovery and freedom to practice those ministries: not lines or rows (prayer lines and pews), but small circles (homes or businesses or parks where small groups of people manifest the presence and love of Jesus), where everyone is on the front row. Leaders who believe the first two values should intentionally create a space of welcome both to receive ministry and develop skills for offering ministry.

Congregations that facilitate every ministry should be growing congregations that plant other congregations. When two people get married, the woman usually becomes pregnant soon. Normally, if she does not become pregnant, it is because they have done something to prevent it. The design of humanity includes an intentional benefit of intimacy being reproduction. The design of the Ekklesia includes a similar benefit of intimacy. When our relationship with Jesus, our Husband, is proper, we will become reproductive as a congregation.

Distraction From the Mission

When we are more interested in our hobbies and possessions and activities and buildings and so on and so forth, anything but becoming intimate with our Lord, we will manage to avoid pregnancy with His purpose for an indefinite period of time. His mercy may be able to get our attention focused back on our first Love, but not necessarily. Another possibility is that He would take the vineyard from us and rent it to a people who would tend it to fruitfulness. Our desire is that we would be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the earth with love of the Savior and

with obedience to the King.

Every healthy congregation should probably be giving birth to other congregations. Any congregation that we plant that does not produce leadership to “give birth” - become the leaders of a new congregation - is unhealthy and probably needs to have its members distributed among a few other healthy congregations. Every congregation that has access to unbelievers should be fruitful, though. Each generation of Believers mentoring and encouraging and equipping the next generation with the words and the Spirit of God should make the momentum of our work to not be stoppable until Jesus declares that the harvest is in the barn.

Discipleship / Inheritance

The cost of participating in the mission of teams planting congregations includes a commitment to the other team members. This commitment expects Jesus to fill and use them to serve you and gives Him permission to use you to serve Him by serving them. Listening to and giving prayerful consideration to prophetic leadership regarding targets, locations, and timing for missions the teams move into is a responsibility of each team member. Loving other members *enough* to confront in love, empower in love, lead in love, and heal in love is at times very expensive. Love is the mortar that holds together the living stones that Jesus is using to build His Ekklesia.

The 13th chapter of 1 Corinthians, according to the last verse of chapter 12, is a “way” to be part of the team of people who are the servants in the Ekklesia. Chapters 12 and 14 are descriptions of “what” the Ekklesia does, and chapter 13 is a description of “how” it stays in a level of unity that makes the “what” possible. Receive His love *for you* and give Him permission to administer His love *for others* through your life and your resources. He is trusting you to do things His way. When you do, we will honor Him with the nations as an offering to worship Him and glorify Him forever.

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