



THE KINGDOM LIFESTYLE

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# THE CHURCH

## AS A GOVERNING BODY

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What tries to break us can never  
be as strong as what unites us.

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**DEDICATED TO**  
**PASTOR TUNDE MALAOLU**

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TIMILEHIN IDOWU

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# THE CHURCH

*What tries to break us can never be as strong as what unites us.*

TIMILEHIN IDOWU Youth Mentor · Pastor · Transformational  
Writer

THE KINGDOM LIFESTYLE · [www.kingdomlifestyle.org](http://www.kingdomlifestyle.org)

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The Church

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## DEDICATION

*To my Pastor, Pastor Tunde Malaolu.*

This book calls the Church back to what Jesus actually built: a family bought by His blood, held together by an authority He has never revoked. You lived that out long before I put it into words. Your understanding of what a healthy, biblical church government looks like, and the liberty and support you gave my wife and me to pastor Worship Nation International Church, Festac Town, is the proof that everything argued in these pages is not theory. It is lived.

Every chapter here stands on ground you helped us build. Thank you, Sir.

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## PREFACE: THE DECLARATION THAT STILL STANDS

***"And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter,  
and upon this rock I will build my church; and  
the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."  
(Matthew 16:18)***

Read it slowly. He did not say "I have started a religion." He did not say "I will leave behind a set of teachings for you to argue about." He said *I will build my church*. Present tense intention. Future tense certainty. A builder speaking about a building only He could see the plans for.

And with that one sentence, everything that follows in this book becomes necessary. Because if Jesus is building something, the first question is not what denomination it belongs to. The first question is what the word He used actually means.

He used the word *ekklesia*. We have translated it "church" for so long that the English word has become furniture. It sits in our sentences without doing any work. So before this book goes one page further, we are going to take that word apart, the way you would take apart an old engine to see what it was actually built to do. Not what it has become. What it was built to do.

Then we are going to sit with the writings of the men who received that declaration first hand and spent the rest of their lives explaining it to churches that were already, even then, finding new ways to divide. Paul writing to Corinth about a body with many members and one Spirit. Peter writing about living stones. John writing from exile about seven churches, each praised or corrected on its own terms, all of them still called one Church. Their writings are not background reading for this book. They are load-bearing walls.

And then, only then, this book will offer its own claim. A simple one, and I hope an unavoidable one once it has been argued properly across the fifteen chapters ahead.

### **The Church is the family of people connected by blood.**

Not by shared preference. Not by shared architecture, or shared songs, or shared politics, or shared skin, or shared nation. Blood. One blood, shed

once, covering every person who has ever genuinely belonged to Jesus Christ, in every century, in every tradition, under every name we have since given our separate rooms in His house.

I have written elsewhere about that blood as the bond that outlasts our divisions. If you have read *The Prayer He Still Prays*, you already know the shape of that argument, and you already know the number: something in the region of forty five thousand denominations, all bearing the name of the same Saviour. This book is not going to repeat that argument. It is going to go somewhere that argument did not go. Because unity was never only about what we feel toward each other. It was about what was purchased, at what cost, and what that purchase legally restored to us that the first man lost in a garden long before this one.

That is where this book is going. Not just to the blood as bond. To the blood as price. And a price paid in full does not only forgive a debt. It also returns to the buyer everything the debt had taken.

Read slowly again. What tries to break us can never be as strong as what unites us. By the end of this book I want that sentence to stop sounding like decoration and start sounding like a legal fact you are prepared to act on.



THE CHURCH

## **PART ONE: THE FAMILY**

## CHAPTER ONE: THE DECLARATION

*What kind of builder announces the building before He has laid a single stone in public view?*

Caesarea Philippi was not a neutral place to say what Jesus said next.

It sat at the base of Mount Hermon, beside a rock face out of which a spring poured, and in front of that rock face stood a temple built to the Greek god Pan, the god of wild places, next to shrines to a dozen other gods, next to a temple built by Herod for the worship of Caesar himself. The Jews of the region called the area "the gates of Hades," because a cave nearby was believed by the local pagan cults to be an entrance to the underworld. Rome. Greece. Caesar. The underworld. All standing together on one hillside.

That is the exact spot Jesus chose to ask His disciples a question.

*"Whom say ye that I am?" (Matthew 16:15)*

Peter answered. "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." (Matthew 16:16)

And Jesus answered him with the sentence this whole book is built on.

*"And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." (Matthew 16:18)*

Notice where He said it. In front of the temples of every rival power the ancient world could name, with a literal cave the locals believed opened into the realm of the dead sitting in view, Jesus made His announcement. He did not wait for a safer location. He picked the one place that made the claim as loud as possible. Every god on that hillside had a temple already standing. Jesus had not built anything yet, and He announced that what He was about to build would outlast all of it.

That is not a small detail. That is the whole posture of the sentence. He was not making a modest claim about a new club forming quietly. He was making a claim in the shadow of every established power of the region that His unbuilt Church would still be standing after every one of those temples had fallen into the dust they now lie in.

## The Rock

There has been more ink spilled over the phrase "upon this rock" than almost any other three words in the New Testament. Some traditions have said the rock is Peter himself, and built entire structures of church authority on that reading. Others point out that the Greek text uses two related but distinct words here. Peter is called *Petros*, a stone, a piece of rock you could pick up. The rock Jesus builds on is called *petra*, bedrock, an immovable mass. The wordplay works in Greek the way "you are Rocky, and on this rock formation I will build" would work in English. A small stone and a mountain are not the same thing, even when they share a name.

What is not actually in dispute, whatever tradition you come from, is this. Peter's confession, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, is the content of the rock, whether the rock is Peter as the first to confess it or the confession itself. The Church is not built on Peter's personality. It is not built on his office. It is built on what he said when the Father revealed it to him. "Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." (Matthew 16:17)

That single detail should already be correcting something in how the modern Church thinks about its own foundations. The rock was not human insight. Peter did not work this out through study, or through years of religious training. It was revealed to him. The Church that Jesus builds is built on revelation received, not credentials accumulated. That will matter enormously later in this book, when we come to the modern habit of building entire denominational empires on the personality and title of one senior leader rather than on the revealed confession that Christ is Lord.

## I Will Build

Read the verb tense again. *I will build*. Not "I have built." Not "you will build for me." Jesus takes personal, ongoing, first person responsibility for the construction of His Church.

This matters because it means the Church, properly understood, is not primarily a human project that God occasionally blesses. It is a divine building project in which human beings are the material, not the architect. Paul will later describe himself as a "wise masterbuilder" laying a foundation (1 Corinthians 3:10), but even Paul is working under contract.

The architect is Christ. The building belongs to Him. "My church," He says. Not "a church." Not "religion in general." His.

Every leader who has ever stood over a congregation and treated it as a personal kingdom has, in that moment, quietly edited this sentence. The building is not theirs to found. It was already founded, on a hillside near a cave the locals thought opened into hell, by a man who had not yet died for it.

## **The Gates of Hell**

The phrase most people remember from this verse is the second half. "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

Notice the imagery carefully, because it is usually misread. Gates do not attack. Gates do not march out and besiege a city. Gates are defensive structures. They exist to keep something in or keep something out. If the gates of hell are what Jesus says will not prevail, then the picture is not hell attacking the Church. The picture is the Church advancing on hell's own territory, and hell's gates failing to hold against the assault.

This single reversal changes the entire posture the Church is meant to hold in the world. We have often preached this verse as a promise of protection, as though the Church is a fortress and hell is the army outside trying to get in. Read plainly, it says something bolder. The Church is the army. Hell is the fortress. And its gates were never built strong enough to keep Christ's people out of what they came to reclaim.

We will return to that reclaiming in the final chapter of this book, because it connects directly to what Adam lost and what the last Adam went to retrieve. For now, hold this much. Jesus did not promise a Church that survives. He promised a Church that storms.

## **Why the Declaration Still Matters**

Two thousand years on, this sentence has not expired. Every denomination reading it today, every congregation meeting under whatever name it has chosen, is still standing under the same single declaration. Jesus did not say "I will build my churches," plural, one for every tribe and tongue and taste. He said "my church." Singular. One building project, with many workers on many different parts of the site, and only one Architect.

That is the tension this whole book intends to sit inside honestly. Not to pretend denominational difference does not exist. It plainly does, and some of it is the healthy specialisation of one body with many members doing different work (we will come back to this in Part Three). But underneath every branch of that difference, the declaration was singular. One church. One builder. One foundation, laid at Caesarea Philippi in front of the temples of every god that has since crumbled into tourist ruins, while the thing Jesus said He would build is still, right now, somewhere on this earth, gathering to worship Him.

Before we can understand what He built, we need to understand the word He used for it. That word has been hiding in plain sight inside our English Bibles for four hundred years, translated so smoothly that we stopped noticing it was ever anything other than the word "church." It was not always that word. It carried a very specific, very political, very deliberate meaning in the world Jesus and His apostles actually lived in.

That is where we go next.

## CHAPTER TWO: ECCLESIA

*What if the word Jesus used had nothing to do with a building, and everything to do with power?*

Open almost any English Bible and you will find the word "church" well over a hundred times. It appears so often, so early, and so comfortably that most readers assume it has always meant what it means to us now. A building with a steeple, or a gathering on a Sunday, or a denomination with a name on a sign outside.

Jesus never said any of that. He said *ekklesia*.

The English word "church" almost certainly comes down to us through the Greek word *kuriakon*, meaning "belonging to the Lord," a word used for a building set apart for worship. That word is not in Matthew 16:18. The word Jesus actually used was *ekklesia*, and it did not mean a building. It did not primarily mean a religious gathering at all. Getting this word wrong is not a small translation quibble. It has shaped, and in many places misshaped, what the Church has believed she exists to be.

### Called Out

Break the word apart and it tells you plainly what it is. *Ekklesia* comes from two smaller Greek words: *ek*, meaning "out of," and *kaleo*, meaning "to call." Put them together and you get "the called-out ones," or more literally, "those summoned out."

Called out of what, and summoned for what purpose? That is the question the rest of this chapter answers, and the answer is more political than most churchgoers have ever been told.

### A Word Borrowed From the Marketplace

Long before Jesus ever spoke it, *ekklesia* was already a well-known word in the Greek-speaking world, and it had nothing to do with religion. In cities across the Greek and later the Roman world, the *ekklesia* was the formal assembly of citizens, summoned by a herald's trumpet, gathered to deliberate on the affairs of the city and to vote on binding decisions. Not everyone in the city was part of it. Only citizens, only those with legal standing, were called out from the general population to sit in that assembly and exercise real authority over what happened next in their city.

This was not a private club and not a passive audience. The Greek *ekklesia* had the power to declare war, to pass laws, to try citizens for crimes, to exile troublemakers, and to appoint leaders. It was, in the plainest sense, a governing body. When the herald sounded the call, ordinary citizens stopped being spectators of their city's fate and became, for the length of that assembly, the people who decided it.

Scripture itself preserves this exact secular meaning, in a passage most readers skip past without noticing what word is sitting inside it. In Acts 19, a riot breaks out in Ephesus over Paul's preaching, and the city's town clerk finally quiets the crowd with these words: "If ye seek any thing concerning other matters, it shall be determined in a lawful assembly." (Acts 19:39) The Greek word translated "assembly" there is *ekklesia*. The very same word. Luke uses it three times in that one chapter for the unruly civic gathering in the Ephesian theatre (Acts 19:32, 39, 41), the ordinary Greek word for a city's governing assembly, sitting in the same book of the Bible that also uses it for the Church of Jesus Christ.

That is not an accident, and it is not a coincidence of vocabulary. It is a clue Luke leaves in plain view. When Jesus and His apostles took the word *ekklesia* and gave it to the Church, they were reaching for the language of civic authority and applying it to a spiritual body. The Church was never meant to be a passive audience gathered to observe a religious performance. She was called out to govern, to deliberate, to exercise real, binding, delegated authority over what happens in the territory she has been sent into.

## A Word Rooted in Israel

There is a second river feeding this word, and it runs even deeper than Greek civic life. Roughly two centuries before Christ, Jewish scholars translated the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek in the version we now call the Septuagint. When they came to the Hebrew word *qahal*, meaning the assembly or congregation of Israel gathered before the Lord, they consistently rendered it into Greek using the word *ekklesia*.

*Qahal* is the word used for Israel gathered at the base of Mount Sinai to receive the Law (Deuteronomy 9:10 calls it "the day of the assembly"). It is the word for the whole covenant community summoned before God, distinct from the surrounding nations, called out of Egypt specifically to belong to Him. "Ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy

nation" (Exodus 19:6), spoken to the very *qahal*, the very *ekklesia*, gathered at that mountain.

So when Jesus said *ekklesia*, two rivers converged in a single word. From the Greek city, He took the sense of a summoned body with real, deliberative, governing authority. From the Hebrew Scriptures, He took the sense of a covenant people called out from every surrounding nation to belong exclusively to God. Neither river had anything to do with a building. Both had everything to do with a people set apart, summoned, and given standing to act.

## What the Apostles Understood

The apostles inherited this word with its full weight intact, and their writings show it.

Paul uses *ekklesia* more than sixty times across his letters, and he never once uses it to mean a building. To the believers at Corinth he writes "unto the church of God which is at Corinth" (1 Corinthians 1:2), naming a people, not a property. To the Ephesians he goes further still, describing the Church as Christ's own body: "which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all" (Ephesians 1:22-23). A body is not a venue you visit. A body is a living organism you belong to, with your own life bound up in its life.

Peter, writing to scattered believers across Asia Minor, reaches for exactly the covenant language of Exodus 19 and applies it directly to the New Testament Church: "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people" (1 Peter 2:9). That is Sinai's *qahal* language, transferred without embarrassment onto Gentile believers who had never stood at that mountain. The called-out assembly of Israel and the called-out assembly of the Church are, in Peter's mind, the same movement of God continuing across a new covenant.

James, writing to Jewish believers scattered by persecution, addresses his letter "to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad" (James 1:1), deliberately using the language of Israel's assembly for a community he understood as its continuation and fulfilment, not its replacement.

And John, writing from exile on Patmos, addresses seven actual local assemblies by name, Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea (Revelation 2 to 3), each one praised or corrected



on its own record, and yet every one of them called *ekklesia*, every one of them understood as a local expression of the one Church that Christ is building across every city they occupy.

## Why This Recovery Matters

If *ekklesia* is a summoned body with real authority, called out from the world and bound together by covenant, then several habits common in the modern Church need to be re-examined honestly.

A building is not the church. You can knock down every physical structure a congregation meets in and the *ekklesia* remains fully intact, because she was never the building. She is the people, called out, standing with authority.

Attendance is not the same as belonging. A person can sit in a service every week the way a spectator sits in a stadium, watching, unmoved, uninvolved in any real decision or any real cost, and never once function as *ekklesia* in the sense the word actually carries. The called-out assembly was summoned to deliberate and to act, not merely to observe.

And authority was never meant to rest with one office, one title, or one building's leadership alone. The Greek *ekklesia* functioned as a body exercising shared, delegated authority under recognised process. This matters enormously for a later chapter of this book, when we examine what has happened to that shared, delegated authority under the modern branch-and-centre model of church government, where a single founder or senior figure has, in many structures, absorbed into himself the deliberative authority the word *ekklesia* originally described as belonging to the whole called-out body under Christ.

## The Called-Out Family

Here is where this chapter's recovery of the word meets the thesis of the one that follows.

If the Church is *ekklesia*, called out from the world, bound by covenant the way Israel was bound at Sinai, then the question of what actually holds her together becomes urgent. A civic assembly in ancient Athens was held together by citizenship, a legal status you either held or did not. Israel's *qahal* was held together by the covenant sealed in blood at that same mountain (Exodus 24:8, "the blood of the covenant"). The Church's

*ekklesia*, called out in the same pattern, is held together by a covenant sealed the same way, in blood, at a far greater mountain, by a far greater Mediator.

That is not a metaphor borrowed for effect. It is the actual mechanism by which the called-out people became one people at all. And it is the subject of the next chapter.

## CHAPTER THREE: THE FAMILY BOUGHT BY BLOOD

*What binds a family together when the members share no culture, no language, and often no century?*

Families are usually built on things you cannot choose. You do not choose your parents, your bloodline, or the accident of the household you were born into. That is what makes family different from friendship. A friend is chosen. A family member simply is one, whether you like it or not, because the same blood runs in both of you.

The Church calls herself a family. Brothers and sisters. Sons and daughters. Household of God. And most of the time we say those words the way we say "team" or "community," a warm figure of speech for people who happen to like each other and gather on the same day. This chapter is going to argue that the family language is not a figure of speech at all. It is a legal description, and the blood behind it is not metaphorical.

### **Purchased, Not Assembled**

Paul says something to the elders of the Ephesian church that ought to stop every reader who has ever thought of church membership as a matter of preference.

*"Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." (Acts 20:28)*

Read that final clause slowly. The church of God, purchased with his own blood. Not gathered. Not recruited. Not persuaded by good preaching or good music. Purchased. The Greek word behind it, *peripoieomai*, carries the sense of acquiring something for yourself at cost, the way you would acquire property by paying its full price. The Church did not form the way a club forms, by people discovering they like the same things and deciding to meet. She was bought, the way you buy something you intend to keep permanently and defend absolutely.

This is why the family language is not decorative. Families, in the ancient world Paul and Peter and John were writing in, were not sentimental units

either. A household was a legal and economic reality, with real obligations of loyalty, inheritance, and protection running between its members whether they personally got along or not. When the New Testament calls believers a family, it is reaching for exactly that weight of meaning. Not a support group you can leave when the culture stops suiting you. A household you were bought into, with obligations that do not evaporate because you find another member of the family difficult.

## **Blood as the Mechanism of Covenant**

Scripture has never treated blood as a symbol chosen for dramatic effect. Blood is, from Genesis to Revelation, the actual mechanism by which binding covenants were sealed.

*"Without shedding of blood is no remission." (Hebrews 9:22)*

At Sinai, when God bound Israel to Himself in covenant, Moses did not read them terms and ask for a show of hands. He took the blood of sacrificed animals, sprinkled half on the altar and half on the people, and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD hath made with you." (Exodus 24:8) The covenant was not sealed by agreement. It was sealed by blood, applied to both parties, binding them together in a way that ordinary agreement never could.

This is the pattern Jesus stepped into, on the night before He died, when He took the cup and said, "This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." (Matthew 26:28) He was not inventing new imagery. He was announcing that the covenant blood at Sinai had been a shadow of what He was about to actually provide. His own blood, once for all, sealing a new and final covenant, with an entirely new household bound into it.

Peter makes the point explicit to Gentile believers who had no history at Sinai at all: "Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold... but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." (1 Peter 1:18-19) Redeemed. Bought back, out of a former ownership, into a new one, by a price paid in blood rather than currency.

## **One Blood, Every Nation**

Here is where the family language stops being sentimental and becomes almost unbearably literal. John, given a vision of heaven's own worship, records the song sung around the throne, addressed to the Lamb who was slain.

*"Thou art worthy... for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation." (Revelation 5:9)*

Every kindred. Every tongue. Every people. Every nation. One blood, spanning every ethnic, linguistic, and national line human beings have ever drawn between themselves. We will spend a full chapter later in this book on the specific human divisions that blood dissolves, Jew and Gentile, bond and free, and every other line drawn since. For now, notice simply the scale of the claim. This is not a family bound by a shared culture, a shared nation, or a shared century. It is a family bound by one purchase, made once, covering every person who has ever genuinely belonged to the Lamb who made it, regardless of what else divides them.

That is a family bond stronger than any the natural world produces. A biological family shares genetics but can still be torn apart by distance, disagreement, and time. This family shares something no disagreement can touch, because the bond was never in the members' hands to begin with. It was purchased over their heads, before most of them were born, by someone who is not asking their permission to keep them.

## **Adopted, Not Merely Admitted**

The New Testament goes one step further than membership language. It uses the language of adoption.

*"Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself." (Ephesians 1:5)*

*"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God... ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father." (Romans 8:14-15)*

Adoption, in the Roman world Paul was writing into, was not the quiet, informal arrangement it can sometimes be today. A Roman adoption was a formal, legal, public act that permanently and irrevocably transferred a person out of their old family, cancelled their old debts, and placed them

as a full heir into a new family with every right a natural-born child possessed. It could not be undone by the adopting father's later change of heart. It was final, the moment it was completed.

That is the legal category Paul reaches for to describe what happens to a believer. Not membership in a club you can resign from when the meetings become inconvenient. Adoption into a household you cannot be quietly removed from, because the transaction was never in your hands or in any other member's hands to reverse. Every genuinely adopted son and daughter carries the same standing before the Father, purchased and sealed the same way, regardless of the branch of the household they have since been placed in.

### **What This Means for Denominational Loyalty**

If this chapter's argument holds, and I intend to spend the rest of this book proving that it does, then a great deal of what currently passes for conviction inside denominational loyalty is, honestly examined, misplaced.

It is right to hold theological convictions. It is right to belong to a tradition that has shaped your understanding of Scripture, your worship, your discipleship. This book is not arguing for a flavourless sameness across the Body of Christ, and we will say plainly in a later chapter why differing expressions of the one Church can be a strength rather than a weakness.

But conviction about a tradition and contempt for another branch of the same purchased family are not the same posture, and too often we have allowed the first to curdle into the second. Before you dismiss a brother or sister whose expression of the faith looks unfamiliar to you, this chapter asks you to hold one question in front of every other judgement you are tempted to make. Were they purchased by the same blood?

If the answer is yes, and for any believer who has genuinely placed their faith in Jesus Christ the answer is yes, then the line you are tempted to draw between "real church" and "not really church" has to be drawn with far more care than it usually is. Because you are not drawing a line between yourself and a stranger. You are drawing a line inside a family, between two people who were bought at the exact same price, by the exact same Person, on the exact same afternoon outside Jerusalem.

### **The Argument Ahead**

This chapter has made the claim. The chapters ahead are going to prove it from every angle Scripture offers.

We will look closely at what Jesus Himself said about the cross that purchased this family, and then at what each of His apostles individually understood the cross to have accomplished. We will look at the specific human divisions that blood dissolves, and at the price that was actually paid to dissolve them. We will look at what was returned to this family that a much earlier family lost in a garden, and at what it will cost the modern Church to actually walk in that inheritance rather than merely singing about it.

But the foundation is now laid, in the same order the Preface promised. The Declaration. The word He used for what He was declaring. And the claim His own blood makes on everyone it has purchased.

What tries to break this family can never be as strong as what unites it. The next part of this book goes to the place where that union was purchased.

THE CHURCH

## **PART TWO: THE CROSS**



## CHAPTER FOUR: WHAT JESUS HIMSELF SAID ABOUT THE CROSS

*What did the cross mean before it happened, in the words of the only person who chose it?*

A cross today hangs from necklaces, sits on top of buildings, gets tattooed onto forearms, and prints onto the cover of hymn books. It has become the most recognisable symbol on earth, and familiarity has done to it what familiarity does to everything. It has softened. We have worn the offence off it.

Jesus never had that luxury. Before it happened to Him, He had to describe what it was going to mean, to people who had only ever seen a cross as an instrument of public torture reserved for the empire's worst criminals and its conquered rebels. This chapter stays with what He actually said about it, in His own words, before the event, and asks a direct question at the end. Does the modern Church's cross match the one He described?

### **Announced, Not Ambushed**

The first thing Jesus said about His cross is that it was coming, and He said it repeatedly, plainly, and in advance.

*"From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things... and be killed, and be raised again the third day." (Matthew 16:21)*

He said it a second time, not long after. "The Son of man shall be betrayed into the hands of men: and they shall kill him, and the third day he shall be raised again." (Matthew 17:22-23) And a third time, with more detail than before, naming the mockery, the scourging, and the manner of death specifically. "The Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify him." (Matthew 20:18-19)

Three separate announcements, growing more specific each time, spoken to men who did not want to hear it and repeatedly tried to talk Him out of it. Peter, on the first occasion, took Him aside and rebuked Him for saying

it (Matthew 16:22). Jesus did not soften the next announcement in response. He repeated it, and added detail.

This matters for one plain reason. Whatever the cross was, it was not an accident that overtook a good man. It was not a plan that fell apart. It was an event Jesus described in advance with growing precision, to disciples who resisted hearing it, right up until the week it happened.

## **Authority Over His Own Death**

The clearest statement Jesus ever made about the nature of His own death removes any possibility that it was something done to Him against His will.

*"Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." (John 10:17-18)*

Read the verbs carefully. Lay down. Take again. Both are things He does, not things done to Him. And notice the specific word Jesus uses for His own capacity to do this. Power. The same Greek word, *exousia*, used elsewhere in the Gospels for delegated legal authority, the authority of a magistrate, the authority Jesus Himself claims in Matthew 28:18 when He says "all power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." His death was not a tragedy that overtook someone powerless. It was an act carried out by someone who held, and exercised, full legal authority over whether it happened at all.

This detail becomes important later in this book, when we ask what authority was actually transacted at the cross, and to whom it was returned. For now, notice simply that the cross Jesus described was never a defeat inflicted on Him. It was an authority He exercised.

## **A Ransom, Not a Sentiment**

Jesus gave His disciples one further phrase to describe what His death would accomplish, and it is drawn from the language of the marketplace rather than the language of feeling.

*"Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." (Matthew 20:28)*

A ransom is a specific transaction. It is the price paid to release a captive, a prisoner, or a slave from the power holding them. Jesus did not describe His death as an example of love in the abstract, though it certainly was that. He described it as a price, paid to release people held under a power they could not free themselves from. We will return to the identity of that power, and to exactly what was reclaimed by the payment, in the closing chapters of this book. Hold the word for now. Ransom. Not sentiment. Price.

### **Lifted Up to Draw All Men**

Here is the statement that should sit at the very centre of any honest chapter on what Jesus said about His own cross, and it is astonishing how rarely it is preached with the weight it deserves.

*"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." (John 12:32)*

John immediately clarifies that Jesus said this "signifying what death he should die" (John 12:33). This is not a general statement about attraction or popularity. It is a specific statement about what the crucifixion itself would accomplish. Lifted up. Drawing all men.

Notice the word Jesus does not use. He does not say He will draw some men, the theologically careful ones, or the ones who share a worship style, or the ones descended from Abraham, or the ones born on the correct side of a denominational line drawn centuries after His death. He says all men. The cross, in His own stated purpose for it, is a drawing mechanism aimed at the entire human race without exception of tribe, tongue, or tradition.

This is the verse this whole book has been building toward since the Preface. The unity of the family bought by blood, argued in Chapter Three, is not merely a happy side effect of the cross. According to Jesus' own words, it is the stated purpose of being lifted up in the first place. He did not die and incidentally create unity as an afterthought. He announced, before it happened, that being lifted up would draw all men to Himself, and by necessary consequence, to one another in Him.

Compare that announced purpose honestly against what the cross has often become in practice. A private transaction between an individual soul and God, useful for personal salvation but rarely preached as the actual mechanism drawing together believers who look, sound, and worship differently from one another. A badge stitched onto one denomination's identity rather than the universal drawing-point Jesus said it would be for every tribe at once. A decoration on a building rather than the centre of gravity holding together a divided family. Jesus said the lifted-up cross draws all men. The Church has too often behaved as though it draws only the ones already like us.

### **Instituted as a Meal to Be Shared**

On the night before it happened, Jesus gave His disciples one final way to hold what the cross would mean, and He gave it as a shared meal rather than a private thought.

*"This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me... This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you." (Luke 22:19-20)*

He did not instruct them to remember His death privately, each disciple alone with his own reflections. He instituted a shared table. One loaf, broken and distributed among many. One cup, poured and shared among many. Paul will later draw out the logic of this explicitly: "For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread." (1 Corinthians 10:17) The meal Jesus instituted to remember His cross is, by its very structure, a meal that cannot be taken alone. It requires a body to distribute it to, and the distributing itself proclaims the body's unity.

### **What He Said, Compared to What We Have Made**

Gather what Jesus Himself said about His cross, in His own words, before it happened, and a clear picture emerges. It was announced in advance, not accidental. It was carried out under His own authority, not inflicted against His will. It was a ransom, a price paid to release captives from a power holding them. It was, by His own stated purpose, a drawing of all men to Himself, without exception. And it was instituted as a shared meal, structurally incapable of being a private, individual memory alone.

Set that against the way large sections of the modern Church actually treat the cross. Preached, in many pulpits, almost entirely as a private transaction for personal forgiveness, true and precious as far as it goes, but stopping short of its own stated purpose of drawing all men into one family. Worn as jewellery emptied of its ransom price. Displayed on buildings that have, in practice, drawn believers away from other buildings rather than toward them. Remembered, in some traditions, so infrequently or so individually that the shared table Jesus instituted has become closer to a private moment than a family meal.

The next chapter turns from what Jesus said to what His apostles wrote after they had time, decades of it, to work out the full implications of what they had watched Him say and do. Their writings will not contradict a single word of this chapter. They will deepen it, layer by layer, until the drawing of all men that Jesus announced becomes the explicit theology of Paul, Peter, John, and the writer to the Hebrews.

## CHAPTER FIVE: WHAT THE APOSTLES WROTE ABOUT THE CROSS

*Four very different men, writing decades apart to entirely different audiences. Why do they all land on the same cross?*

Paul was a trained rabbi who had once approved the killing of Christians. Peter was an uneducated fisherman who had denied even knowing Jesus on the night it mattered most. John was the beloved disciple who leaned on Jesus' chest at the last supper and lived to old age. The writer to the Hebrews is unnamed to us, addressing Jewish believers tempted to abandon their new faith and return to the old sacrificial system. Four different men, four different temperaments, four different audiences, writing across a span of decades.

And when each of them turns to explain the cross, they converge, independently, on the same claims. Not identical language. The same underlying architecture. That convergence is itself a kind of evidence, and this chapter is going to walk through each voice in turn before showing what they all, without collaboration, ended up saying together.

### **Paul: The Cross That Kills the Enmity**

Paul's letters contain more direct theology of the cross than any other New Testament writer, and he begins, characteristically, by admitting how strange it sounds.

*"For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God... unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God." (1 Corinthians 1:18, 23-24)*

Notice already, in Paul's very first extended treatment of the cross, the pairing he reaches for. Jews and Greeks. The two categories that, in the ancient world, defined the deepest possible human division, religious insider against religious outsider, covenant people against the nations. Paul's first move is to say the cross is offensive to both categories on their own terms, and yet becomes, to those who are called out of both categories, the identical wisdom and power of God. The cross does not

merely offend both groups equally. It becomes, for those who receive it, the thing both groups now hold in common.

He makes the unifying function explicit a few years later, writing to the Ephesians about Jew and Gentile specifically. "For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us... having abolished in his flesh the enmity... for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; and that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby." (Ephesians 2:14-16)

Read that final phrase again. Slain the enmity. Not managed it. Not negotiated a truce between it. Killed it, at the cross, the same instrument that killed Jesus' own body. Whatever hostility existed between Jew and Gentile, the deepest division the ancient world knew, Paul says was executed at Calvary along with the Saviour. We will examine the full breadth of what other divisions this covers in the next chapter. For now, notice that Paul's cross is never merely personal. It is, in his own repeated language, the site where hostility itself was put to death.

Paul goes further still, describing the cross as a defeat inflicted on hostile spiritual powers. "Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; and having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it." (Colossians 2:14-15) The cross, for Paul, is simultaneously the cancellation of a legal debt and the public humiliation of every power that had held that debt over humanity. Whatever authority those powers had exercised over mankind, Paul says it was stripped from them in that same act.

And Paul reduces his entire ministry to this one point of focus. "For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." (1 Corinthians 2:2) Not a varied curriculum with the cross as one unit among many. One subject. Everything else in Paul's theology, justification, adoption, the Spirit, the resurrection, hangs from this single point.

### **Peter: The Cross That Heals by Substitution**

Peter, writing to scattered and suffering believers, reaches for the cross not primarily as a theological abstraction but as the pattern that makes sense of suffering itself.

*"Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed." (1 Peter 2:24)*

Peter is drawing directly on the servant song of Isaiah 53, written some seven centuries earlier, and applying it without hesitation to the crucifixion he had personally witnessed. "By whose stripes ye were healed" is almost a direct citation of Isaiah 53:5, "and with his stripes we are healed." Peter, who denied Jesus three times on the night of His arrest, later stakes his entire pastoral appeal to suffering believers on the substitutionary suffering of the very man he had abandoned. He bore what was ours, in His own body, so that we could live what was His.

Peter states the substitution even more starkly elsewhere. "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God." (1 Peter 3:18) The just for the unjust. Notice the direction of the exchange, the innocent absorbing what belonged to the guilty, so that the guilty could be brought into the presence of the very God their guilt had excluded them from. This is the same Great Exchange this book acknowledged in its Preface as already treated in Lessons from the Death of Jesus. Peter's contribution here is the specific frame he adds to it: that this exchange is the pattern every suffering believer is now invited to imitate, not only benefit from. "Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps." (1 Peter 2:21)

## **John: The Cross That Cleanses for Fellowship**

John, writing late in life to churches he had pastored for decades, ties the cross directly to the practical, daily reality of believers actually living alongside one another.

*"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." (1 John 1:7)*

Read the order of that sentence with care. Fellowship with one another is placed in the same breath as cleansing by the blood, not as two separate topics but as one continuous thought. John is not saying the blood cleanses you individually and, separately, you happen to have fellowship with other cleansed individuals. He is saying the fellowship and the cleansing are bound together, the same blood that clears your account



with God is the basis on which you can actually walk alongside another cleansed sinner without either of you needing to hide from the other.

John returns to the cross again in the opening of Revelation, in a doxology so compressed it is easy to read past. "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father." (Revelation 1:5-6) Washed, and immediately after, made into something, kings and priests, a body with standing and function, not merely individuals who have been privately forgiven. The washing and the commissioning arrive in the same sentence, because for John they are the same movement of grace.

### **Hebrews: The Cross That Opens the Way In**

The unnamed writer to the Hebrews, addressing Jewish believers who understood the old sacrificial system intimately, builds his entire argument around a single contrast: the blood of animals, offered repeatedly and never finally, against the blood of Christ, offered once and finally.

*"But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come... neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us." (Hebrews 9:11-12)*

Once. Not repeated annually like the Day of Atonement his readers had grown up observing. Once, and eternal redemption obtained by it. The writer draws the practical conclusion directly from this. "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh." (Hebrews 10:19-20)

Boldness to enter. Not the terrified, once-a-year, heavily mediated access of the old high priest. A new and living way, open now, to every believer this letter addresses, Jewish and Gentile alike who have come to faith in Christ. The writer names the blood explicitly as superior even to the first blood covenant recorded in Scripture, the blood of a murdered brother. "To the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel." (Hebrews 12:24) Abel's blood cried out from the ground for justice against his brother Cain. Christ's blood speaks a better word, not accusation but access, not justice demanded but welcome extended.

### **Four Voices, One Architecture**

Set these four voices beside each other and the convergence becomes impossible to miss. Paul says the cross killed the enmity between Jew and Gentile and made one new man out of formerly hostile parties. Peter says the cross was a substitution, the just bearing what belonged to the unjust, opening the way to God. John says the blood of the cross is inseparable from believers' fellowship with one another, not merely their private standing with God. Hebrews says the blood of the cross opened a new and living way into the presence of God that no previous sacrifice, however many times repeated, had ever fully opened.

Four men. Different decades, different audiences, different personal histories with the man they were writing about. Not one of them treats the cross as a private transaction concluded the moment an individual believes. Every one of them, independently, ties it directly to what happens between believers afterward. Enmity killed between groups. Suffering endured together as pattern. Fellowship enabled by shared cleansing. Access opened for an entire covenant community, not a single soul.

This is not four writers reaching the same conclusion by copying one another. Paul had likely never read a line John would later write. Peter's letters were circulating before Hebrews was likely composed. What we have here is four independent witnesses to the same event, reaching, under the same Spirit, the same conclusion Jesus Himself had already announced in His own words in the previous chapter. Lifted up, He said, to draw all men to Himself.

The apostles did not soften that claim once they had decades to reflect on it. They sharpened it, gave it legal and covenantal and priestly language, and handed it to us in writing precisely so that no later generation of the Church could quietly narrow it back down to a private transaction. The next chapter takes their combined testimony and applies it to the specific human divisions Paul named directly: Jew and Gentile, bond and free, and every other line drawn since.

## CHAPTER SIX: THE CROSS THAT CONNECTS

*What happens to a wall built over centuries when the one who built it dies on the very thing that made the wall necessary?*

Paul wrote one sentence that lists more human divisions in a single verse than almost anywhere else in Scripture, and he does it as a matter-of-fact statement rather than a slogan.

*"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus."  
(Galatians 3:28)*

Read the categories he chose. Jew and Greek, the religious and ethnic division that mattered more than almost any other in the ancient Mediterranean world. Bond and free, the economic and legal division between slave and citizen that structured nearly every household and workplace of the time. Male and female, the division built into creation itself. Paul does not say these categories cease to exist as facts about a person's life. A Jewish believer remained Jewish. A slave remained, legally, a slave until manumission. Paul says something more precise. In Christ, none of these categories any longer determines standing, value, or belonging within the one new family. All one. Not merged into sameness. United under one Head, in a way none of these categories can any longer divide.

Paul repeats and extends the list a few years later, adding another category his first readers would have understood immediately. "Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all." (Colossians 3:11) Barbarian and Scythian were, to a Greek-speaking reader, close to the outer limit of the civilised world's contempt, the Scythian in particular held up in ancient literature as the very picture of an uncivilised outsider. Paul places even that category inside the same dissolving formula. Christ is all, and in all. Not most groups. Not the respectable ones. All.

### **One Blood, Every Nation of Men**

Long before Paul wrote a word of the New Testament, Scripture had already laid the foundation for this claim, in a verse spoken by Paul

himself, in a public address to pagan philosophers in Athens who had never opened a Hebrew Scripture in their lives.

*"And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth." (Acts 17:26)*

Notice what Paul reaches for here. Not a theological argument aimed at believers already inside the family, but a creational fact aimed at unbelieving Greek intellectuals standing in front of him. One blood. Every nation of men descends from it. Whatever distinctions of nation, culture, or, in categories that would come to matter so much in the centuries after this sermon, the colour of a person's skin, human beings share a common origin that predates every line later drawn between them.

This is the natural foundation the cross builds its supernatural claim upon. Humanity was already one blood by creation, descended from a single origin, before sin fractured that unity into the tribal hostilities, the racial hierarchies, and the national contempt that have marked every century since. The cross does not manufacture a unity out of nothing. It restores, by a far greater blood than the first, the unity that a common origin had already established and that centuries of pride had since buried.

This is why the divisions this chapter must name plainly include the division of race, Black and White and every other line drawn along the colour of skin, alongside the ancient divisions of Jew and Gentile, bond and free. Scripture does not treat racial contempt as a modern invention outside its concern. It treats every human division, whatever grounds it claims for itself, as a fracture inside a family that was one blood before it was anything else, and that has since been purchased back into a far deeper unity by a second, greater blood.

## **The Wall Named and Destroyed**

Paul gives the clearest single image in all of Scripture for what the cross did to the specific wall standing between Jew and Gentile in his own day, a wall that was not only theological but architectural. In the Jerusalem temple itself stood an actual dividing wall, the Soreg, beyond which no Gentile could pass on pain of death, a stone barrier with inscriptions warning trespassers of the consequence. Paul had almost certainly stood beside that very wall many times before his conversion.

*"For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace." (Ephesians 2:14-15)*

Broken down. Abolished. Made of twain, two, one new man. Paul is not speaking abstractly. He is almost certainly picturing the literal stone wall he had walked past countless times, and declaring that the cross accomplished, in reality, what that wall had been built to prevent, Jew and Gentile standing together as equally welcomed members of one household. He completes the image two verses later. "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God." (Ephesians 2:19)

Strangers and foreigners no longer. Fellow citizens now. Household members now. Whatever wall a Gentile had once stood on the wrong side of, inscribed in stone with a death threat for crossing it, the cross rendered obsolete.

## **In Whom Dwelleth All the Fulness**

Paul gives one further statement that this book's Preface flagged as central, and it is worth sitting with directly, because it explains the authority behind everything else in this chapter.

*"For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, and ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power." (Colossians 2:9-10)*

This is not primarily a verse about unity among believers. It is a verse about who Christ actually is, and it is precisely because of who He is that His cross carries the authority to dissolve every human division this chapter has named. The fulness of the Godhead, dwelling bodily, is not a partial deity or a delegated authority. He is the head of every principality and power, every rival claim to authority that human division has ever hidden behind, whether the authority of empire, of caste, of tribal hierarchy, or of racial supremacy. A cross carried out by anyone less than this would be an inspiring death. A cross carried out by the one in whom all the fulness of the Godhead dwells bodily is a legal event with authority over every other claim to authority on earth.

## A Living Case Study, Not Just a Doctrine

Scripture does not leave this claim as abstract theology. It shows the early Church working it out in real time, at real cost, against real prejudice.

When Peter is sent to the household of Cornelius, a Roman centurion, a Gentile, a member of the very occupying power that had crucified Jesus, Peter arrives having only just had his own categories broken open by a vision. His conclusion, spoken aloud in that Gentile household, could serve as the summary of this entire chapter. "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him." (Acts 10:34-35)

No respecter of persons. Not Jewish persons preferred over Gentile persons. Not any nation preferred over any other nation. Peter, who had grown up under the strictest possible religious and cultural prohibition against entering a Gentile's house at all, stood inside that house and said so publicly, at real cost to his own standing among more traditional Jewish believers, a cost Paul later has to address directly when Peter wavers under pressure back in Antioch (Galatians 2:11-14). The unity this chapter describes was never merely believed. It had to be lived, awkwardly, at cost, by people whose instincts had been shaped for a lifetime in the opposite direction.

## The Vision at the End

Scripture's final picture of the redeemed family, given to John on Patmos, confirms that this unity was never intended to dissolve distinctness into sameness, but to gather distinctness into worship.

*"After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb." (Revelation 7:9)*

Nations, kindreds, people, tongues. Still distinguishable, still recognisably themselves, standing together before the same throne, worshipping the same Lamb who was slain to redeem them "out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation" (Revelation 5:9). Heaven's own vision of the finished family is not a flattening of every distinction into a grey uniformity. It is every distinction, gathered, and united, in worship of the one who purchased all of them at the identical price.

## **What This Chapter Demands of Us Now**

If the cross accomplished all of this, killed the enmity, broke down the wall, dissolved the ancient categories of Jew and Greek, bond and free, and restored, by a second and greater blood, the unity of one blood that a common human origin had already established before sin fractured it, then a Church still organised around racial contempt, tribal preference, or national superiority is not merely behaving badly. She is denying, in practice, what she confesses in doctrine.

This is not a call to erase legitimate distinctness, culture, language, tradition, the particular gifts one expression of the Body brings that another lacks. It is a call to stop treating those distinctions as grounds for a hierarchy the cross has already abolished. The wall is down. The question the modern Church still has to answer honestly is why so many of us keep behaving as though it is still standing.

The next chapter turns to the price that accomplished all of this, and asks what a price paid in full actually restores to the one it was paid for, beyond mere forgiveness.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: BOUGHT WITH A PRICE

*When a debt is paid in full, does the payment only cancel what was owed, or does it also return what was taken?*

Paul says something to the Corinthians twice, almost word for word, as if he wants to make sure it was heard the first time.

*"Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)*

*"Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men." (1 Corinthians 7:23)*

Bought with a price. Elsewhere in this book, the blood of Christ has been shown as the bond that unites the family (Chapter Three) and the mechanism that dissolved every human division (Chapter Six). This chapter asks a narrower and, I think, under-asked question. What does a price actually do, beyond forgiving a debt?

### **A Price Restores, Not Only Forgives**

Think practically about what happens when a debt is paid in full. Imagine a man who has pledged his house against a loan he cannot repay, and the bank has begun the process of repossession. If a stranger walks in and pays the debt in full on the man's behalf, two things happen simultaneously. The debt is cancelled. And the house, which the bank had begun to claim, is returned to the man's possession. A price paid in full does not merely erase a number in a ledger. It reverses a transfer of possession that the debt had set in motion.

This is the category Scripture uses for redemption, and it is worth taking seriously as an actual transaction rather than a spiritual metaphor emptied of its commercial force. Redemption, in the ancient world Paul was writing in, described the specific act of buying back a slave out of bondage, or buying back property that had been mortgaged away, restoring it to its original owner. Paul is not reaching for a vague image of rescue. He is reaching for a precise legal category, and applying it to something far larger than a house or a single slave.



## The Practice Standing Behind Paul's Words

Paul's readers in Corinth would have recognised the language of being "bought with a price" from a practice well documented in inscriptions surviving from Delphi and other Greek religious centres of that era. A slave who had saved enough money would deposit it with a temple treasury, and the temple, acting on the slave's behalf, would formally purchase the slave from his owner in the name of the local god. The inscription recording the transaction would typically read something to the effect that the slave had been sold to the god, for freedom. The price was real money, the transaction was legally binding, and the practical result was that the slave, now technically the property of the god who had bought him, walked away from his former master a free man, answerable to no human owner again.

Paul takes this exact, recognisable social practice and applies it to what Christ has done. Believers are bought, at a real and specific price, and the effect of that purchase is not a transfer into a harsher ownership but into a liberating one. "Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men." The former master, whatever power had held a person captive, sin, the curse, the accuser, loses all further claim, because the full price has already been paid to a greater owner who has no interest in exploiting what He purchased.

## Redeemed From the Curse

Paul names exactly what was reclaimed by this price in his letter to the Galatians.

*"Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." (Galatians 3:13)*

The curse Paul has in view goes back to the very first pages of Scripture, to a garden and a fall and a dominion lost. We will trace that connection fully in the closing chapter of this book, where the authority the first man lost is shown to be the very authority the last Adam went to reclaim. For now, hold this much. The price paid at the cross was not aimed merely at an accounting problem, a ledger of sins to be forgiven. It was aimed at a curse, a specific state of loss and subjection that had gripped humanity since Eden, and the price was paid precisely to redeem, to buy back, what that curse had taken.

Paul completes the thought in the next breath. "To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." (Galatians 4:5) Redemption and adoption arrive together, in the same sentence, because they are two sides of the same transaction. What was lost is bought back. And the one bought back is not merely released into neutral freedom, but placed into the full standing of a son, an heir, with everything that standing carries.

## **Kings and Priests, Reigning on the Earth**

John's vision in Revelation states the restored standing with a specificity that ought to arrest every reader who has ever thought of redemption as merely a ticket out of hell.

*"Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth." (Revelation 5:9-10)*

Redeemed, and made kings and priests. Not merely forgiven and awaiting a distant heaven. Made into something, given standing and function now, and told plainly that this standing includes reigning on the earth. Whatever the price purchased, it purchased more than a cancelled debt. It purchased a restored office, kingship and priesthood, functions that belong, in the earliest pages of Scripture, to the dominion given to man before it was lost.

This is the thread this book has been laying since the Preface, and it will be gathered fully in the final chapter. A price paid in full does not only forgive. It restores what the debt had taken. And what was taken, all the way back in a garden, was not merely innocence. It was dominion.

## **A Transfer of Citizenship, Not Only a Cancelled Debt**

Paul gives one further description of what this price accomplished, and it is worth placing beside the redemption language already covered, because it adds a dimension neither forgiveness nor adoption fully captures on its own. "Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son." (Colossians 1:13) Delivered, and translated. The Greek word behind "translated" was used in the ancient world for the wholesale removal of a defeated or resettled population from one territory into another, an entire people group

transplanted, under new governance, into new citizenship. Paul is not describing an internal, private change of feeling. He is describing an actual transfer of territory and allegiance, out from under one kingdom's power and into the kingdom of another, accomplished by the same price already under discussion in this chapter.

This pattern is not new with the cross. It echoes the redemption of the firstborn that God commanded Israel to observe from the very night of their exodus out of Egypt. "Sanctify unto me all the firstborn... it is mine... All the firstborn of thy sons thou shalt redeem." (Exodus 13:2, 13) A price, or a substitute, had to be given for every firstborn son, marking the entire nation as belonging, from that point forward, to the God who had redeemed them out of slavery. The cross does the same thing on a scale Israel's ceremony only foreshadowed, redeeming, translating, and re-citizing an entire family gathered "out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation" (Revelation 5:9), not merely forgiving them where they stood.

### **What the Modern Church Has Underpriced**

Here is where this chapter must speak plainly to the present moment. Large sections of the modern Church preach the cancelled debt with real conviction, forgiveness of sin, freedom from guilt, peace with God restored. All of this is true and precious and this book has spent two chapters establishing it.

But far fewer sections of the modern Church preach, with equal conviction, the restored dominion. We have often left believers standing at the threshold of a house that was fully bought back for them, content to know the debt is cancelled, without ever walking further in to discover that the price also purchased their reinstatement as kings and priests with real authority over the territory they occupy. A forgiven slave who never learns he has also been made an heir will go on living like a slave, out of habit, long after his chains were struck off.

The next two chapters will go deeper into exactly what was forsaken to purchase this, and exactly what was exchanged. The chapters that follow after that will turn from theology to practice, asking what it would look like for the modern Church to actually walk in the fulness of what was purchased rather than settling for the smaller half of it. But the principle has to be stated here, at the centre of this book, plainly. The price was not partial. Neither is what it bought back.

## CHAPTER EIGHT: FORSAKEN THAT WE MIGHT BE ACCEPTED

*What does it cost to make an enemy fully welcome, when the enemy cannot pay any part of the price themselves?*

Seven centuries before a Roman cross stood outside Jerusalem, a prophet in Judah wrote a passage so specific about a suffering, substitutionary death that later readers have sometimes wondered whether it was written after the event and only credited to an earlier hand. It was not. Isaiah's fifty third chapter stands centuries ahead of the crucifixion, describing it in advance with a precision no other ancient text approaches.

*"He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief... Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." (Isaiah 53:3-6)*

Read that last clause again. The LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. Not a portion of it. Not the iniquity of one nation or one class of sinner. All of it, gathered and placed on one man, by God's own hand, seven hundred years before that man walked to a hill outside Jerusalem to carry it.

### **Silent Before the Shearers**

Isaiah gives one further detail that the Gospel accounts confirm almost word for word centuries later. "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment... he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken." (Isaiah 53:7-8)

This is the same silence Chapter Four of this book already noted before Pilate, described here seven hundred years in advance, down to the detail of an unjust legal proceeding, taken from judgment, that produced no

genuine verdict of guilt. Isaiah adds a further, almost throwaway detail that Matthew records being fulfilled with striking precision. "And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth." (Isaiah 53:9) Crucified between two criminals, and yet buried in the borrowed tomb of a rich man, Joseph of Arimathea (Matthew 27:57-60), a detail so specific it is difficult to read as coincidence rather than prophecy fulfilled to the letter.

## **Bruised by the Father's Own Will**

Isaiah goes further than describing the suffering. He names whose will was behind it.

*"Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand... he shall bear their iniquities... he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors."  
(Isaiah 53:10, 11-12)*

It pleased the LORD to bruise him. This is not a sentence that yields easily to comfortable reading, and it should not be softened. The suffering of the cross was not merely permitted by the Father as a regrettable necessity. It was, in Isaiah's own prophetic language, something that pleased Him, because of what it accomplished, an offering for sin that would justify many and open intercession for transgressors who had done nothing to deserve it.

## **Why Have You Forsaken Me**

Seven centuries after Isaiah wrote, the man his prophecy described hung on that cross and cried out in words that had themselves been written down a thousand years earlier still.

*"And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46)*

This is a direct quotation of Psalm 22:1, a psalm of David written roughly a thousand years before the crucifixion, describing in unsettling detail a suffering righteous man, centuries before crucifixion existed as a Roman practice at all. The psalm records the mockery of onlookers in words the

Gospel writers record being fulfilled almost verbatim. "All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the LORD that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him." (Psalm 22:7-8) Matthew records the crowd at the cross taunting Jesus in language too close to be coincidental. "He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him." (Matthew 27:43) The same psalm describes physical details of the crucifixion itself, written centuries before the Romans had refined it into an execution method. "They pierced my hands and my feet... they part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture." (Psalm 22:16, 18) John records the soldiers doing exactly this at the foot of the cross, and notes that they did it "that the scripture might be fulfilled" (John 19:24).

Jesus, in His moment of deepest anguish, did not invent new words for what He was experiencing. He reached for the ancient psalm that had already described it in its opening line, and in the culture of His day, quoting the first line of a psalm was widely understood as invoking the psalm in its entirety. The psalm He quoted does not end in abandonment. It ends in vindication and praise, moving from the cry of forsakenness in verse one to the confident declaration, "For he hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath he hid his face from him; but when he cried unto him, he heard." (Psalm 22:24) The cry from the cross was real. So was the resolution the same psalm had already promised, a thousand years before the cross existed to fulfil it.

But the forsaking itself must not be minimised or explained away too quickly. Something happened at that cross between the Father and the Son that had never happened before and has never happened since, an actual rupture of the fellowship that had existed eternally between them, so that the fellowship we had forfeited could be restored. He was forsaken, genuinely, in that moment, so that the forsaking that our sin deserved would never fall on us.

### **The Great Exchange, Named Precisely**

Paul gives the theological name to what this forsaking accomplished, in a single verse this book's Preface already flagged as central to its argument.

*"For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." (2 Corinthians 5:21)*

Made to be sin. Not merely made to suffer for sin committed by others, though that is also true. Made to be sin itself, in some sense Scripture does not fully explain but does not shy away from stating. And the purpose clause that follows is the entire point of this chapter. That we might be made the righteousness of God in him. Not merely forgiven sinners, tolerated at a distance. Made the righteousness of God, a standing so complete it can only be described using the very righteousness that belongs to God Himself.

Paul states the same exchange in relational rather than legal terms elsewhere. "For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life." (Romans 5:10) Enemies, reconciled. Not merely pardoned criminals released on parole, watched with suspicion. Reconciled, restored to relationship, the estrangement genuinely ended rather than merely managed.

### **Forsaken That We Might Be Accepted**

Here is the exchange this chapter has been building toward, and it deserves to be stated as plainly as the two halves it connects. He was forsaken, in the deepest sense Scripture describes, so that we could be accepted, in the deepest sense Scripture describes. Not accepted provisionally, on probation, still proving ourselves worthy of a welcome we might yet lose. Accepted as the righteousness of God in Christ, a standing as secure and as total as the forsaking that purchased it was real.

This is the price this book has been describing since the Preface, and it is worth returning here to the family language of Chapter Three. A family bought at this cost, by a forsaking this total, purchasing an acceptance this complete, is not a family whose members have any grounds left for treating one another with the suspicion, contempt, or tribal distance that so often marks denominational life. If God the Father accepted us at the cost of forsaking His own Son, on what possible grounds does one accepted sinner withhold acceptance from another, purchased at the identical price?

The next two chapters turn from what was purchased at the cross to who was given to apply and govern what was purchased. The Holy Spirit, promised by Jesus and received by the apostles, is the subject to which this book now turns, and He is not merely a comforter for private distress. He is the one Jesus said would guide the whole Church, and the early Church

discovered exactly what that guidance looked like when their unity was first seriously tested.



## CHAPTER NINE: THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE GOVERNMENT OF THE CHURCH

*What happens when a brand new, ethnically divided movement faces its first real crisis of unity, and who actually settles it?*

I have written elsewhere, in *The Prayer He Still Prays*, a full walk through the Upper Room and the promise of the Comforter that Jesus made to His disciples on the night before He died. This chapter does not repeat that ground. It goes instead to the moment the promise was tested, when the very first ekklesia faced a real dispute that threatened to split it permanently along the exact ethnic line Chapter Six described, and asks what actually resolved it.

### **The Promise Before the Test**

Jesus told His disciples plainly what the coming Spirit would do among them. "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth." (John 16:13) Not merely comfort you in private grief. Guide you, as a body, into truth you did not yet possess. He repeated the promise of power just before His ascension. "Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." (Acts 1:8)

Notice the geography of that promise. Jerusalem, the home territory. Judaea, the wider homeland. Samaria, a people the Jews of that era despised and avoided. And the uttermost part of the earth, every nation beyond. The Spirit's power was never framed as a private, individual endowment alone. It was framed as the power that would carry the gospel, and the ekklesia carrying it, across every one of those widening, historically hostile boundaries.

### **Pentecost as a Reversal**

When the Spirit came, at Pentecost, the sign that accompanied Him was itself a statement about unity across division. "And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." (Acts 2:3-4) The crowd that gathered, drawn by the sound, was itself a list of nations. "Parthians, and

Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia... we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God." (Acts 2:9-11)

Many scholars have noted the deliberate echo here of Babel, where God had once confused a single human language into many as judgement on human pride (Genesis 11:1-9). At Pentecost, the confusion is not reversed by restoring one language, but by the Spirit enabling many languages to carry one message simultaneously. The unity the Spirit produces was never uniformity. It was, from its first recorded moment, many tongues carrying one truth.

### **The Test: A Church Divided Along the Exact Line the Cross Had Already Broken**

The clearest demonstration of what this book means by the Spirit governing the Church comes some fifteen years after Pentecost, when the young movement faced a genuine crisis. Gentile converts were entering the Church in large numbers, and a faction of Jewish believers insisted these converts had to be circumcised and keep the law of Moses to be genuinely saved. This was not a minor disagreement. It threatened to split the ekklesia permanently along precisely the Jew and Gentile line Chapter Six showed the cross had already broken down.

The apostles and elders gathered at Jerusalem to settle it, and Luke records the actual shape of the meeting in enough detail to show exactly how the Spirit's guidance and the Church's own deliberation worked together in practice. Peter stood first, and grounded the argument not in preference but in what he had personally witnessed God already do among the Gentiles. "God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith." (Acts 15:8-9) Barnabas and Paul then reported the miracles and wonders God had already worked among the Gentiles through their own ministry (Acts 15:12). And James, the Lord's brother, presiding over the gathering, closed the debate by appealing directly to the Hebrew Scriptures themselves, quoting the prophet Amos to show that Gentile inclusion had been the plan all along, not a late improvisation. "And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David... that the residue of men might seek

after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called." (Acts 15:15-17)

Testimony, witnessed experience, and Scripture itself, weighed together by the gathered leadership, produced the decision. The letter they sent out to the Gentile churches records the language they themselves chose to describe how it had been reached.

*"For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things." (Acts 15:28)*

It seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us. Notice the order, and notice that both are named. This was not a vote taken by human wisdom alone, with the Spirit invoked afterward as a rubber stamp. Neither was it a claim of private revelation bypassing the gathered leadership of the Church. It was a council, deliberating together in the manner Chapter Two showed the word *ekklesia* always implied, arriving at a decision they themselves attributed jointly to the Spirit's guidance and their own gathered discernment. This is what it looks like, in the one clear historical instance Scripture gives us, for the Spirit to actually govern a divided Church toward unity. Not bypassing human process. Governing through it.

## **One Spirit, Many Gifts, One Body**

Paul systematises this pattern a few years later, writing to a Corinthian church that was, in its own way, badly divided, over which apostle's name to follow, whose spiritual gift was most impressive, and whose social class deserved the best seat at the shared meal.

*"For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit." (1 Corinthians 12:12-13)*

One Spirit, producing one body, made up deliberately of members who differ, Jew and Gentile, bond and free, the exact categories this book has already traced through Chapters Three and Six. The diversity of gifts Paul goes on to describe, wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, prophecy, tongues, is not a threat to the unity of the body. It is, in Paul's own architecture, the evidence of it, because "all these worketh that one and

the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will." (1 Corinthians 12:11)

### **The Unity Already Given, Now to Be Kept**

Paul states, writing to the Ephesians, that this unity is not a project believers must construct from nothing. It already exists, given by the Spirit, and the only labour required of the Church is to guard it.

*"Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.  
There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope  
of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and  
Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."  
(Ephesians 4:3-6)*

Keep the unity. Not create it. Paul's command assumes the unity already exists, given the moment every believer was baptised into one Spirit, and the visible fracturing the Church has since produced is not the absence of a unity that never existed. It is the neglect, generation after generation, of a unity that was already there to be kept.

This is the governing pattern this chapter has traced. The Spirit is not merely a private comforter, valuable as that ministry is. He is the one Jesus said would guide the whole body into truth, the one whose coming at Pentecost reversed Babel's confusion rather than merely comforting individual hearts, and the one the apostles themselves named as the actual authority behind the decision that saved the infant Church from splitting along the very line the cross had already broken. The next chapter asks a harder question. What happened to that governing pattern between the early Church that lived it and the Church we occupy today.

## CHAPTER TEN: THE HOLY SPIRIT THEN AND NOW

*If the same Spirit is present in the Church today, why does so much of church life today look nothing like Acts?*

The book of Acts gives us a description, written by an eyewitness companion of Paul, of what the early Church actually looked like in daily practice, in the months immediately following Pentecost.

*"And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers... And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need." (Acts 2:42, 44-45)*

*"And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common." (Acts 4:32)*

One heart, one soul, doctrine held in common, possessions shared according to need, prayer as a steadfast practice rather than an occasional formality. This is not a description of an unusually devoted congregation. Luke presents it as the ordinary texture of church life in that first generation, produced directly by the Spirit poured out at Pentecost. And it was noticed, not only by the believers themselves, but by the watching pagan world around them. The early Christian writer Tertullian, defending the Church against Roman suspicion barely a century and a half after Pentecost, records the reputation this generosity had earned even among hostile outsiders, who, he says, were struck by nothing so much as the sight of Christians caring for one another across social lines Roman society did not normally cross. It was this visible, costly, unforced unity, not clever argument, that first made the surrounding world stop and ask what these people had that they did not.

This same early community also had order, not merely spontaneity, and Paul's instruction to the Corinthians shows that the freedom of every member functioning did not mean chaos was tolerated. "Let all things be done decently and in order." (1 Corinthians 14:40) The early Church's gatherings held together two things the modern Church has often struggled to hold together at once: real participation from every member

present, and real order governing how that participation was expressed. Neither was sacrificed for the other.

## **What Has Changed, Honestly Named**

This chapter is not going to pretend the modern Church has simply misplaced a few minor practices. It is going to name, as honestly as the previous chapters of this book have tried to name every other uncomfortable fact, several specific shifts.

The early Church's unity was produced by shared devotion to the apostles' doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer, held in that order and held together. Much of the modern Church has, in many places, allowed one of those four elements, often the doctrine of a particular teacher or tradition, to eclipse the other three, so that fellowship, shared table, and shared prayer across different expressions of the Body have become rare rather than steadfast.

The early Church's generosity was structural, not occasional, driven by genuine need rather than annual campaigns. Much of the modern Church has professionalised generosity into institutional budgets, valuable as those budgets often are, in a way that can quietly remove the direct, personal, one-heart-one-soul character Luke describes, where believers actually knew who around them was in need and acted without being asked.

The early Church's decisions, as Chapter Nine showed, were reached through gathered deliberation that named the Spirit's guidance explicitly and specifically, tested against Scripture, in the hearing of the whole body. Much of the modern Church has, in many structures, concentrated that decision-making authority into a single office or a single founding figure, with the language of the Spirit's leading sometimes invoked to bless a decision already made privately, rather than describing a process the gathered body actually witnessed and weighed together, the way the Jerusalem council did.

## **Not Every Change Is Loss**

It would be dishonest, and this book has tried throughout to avoid dishonesty in either direction, to claim that every difference between the first century and the present is decline. The Church today reaches languages, nations, and technologies Acts could not have imagined.

Theological understanding has, in many genuine respects, deepened across two thousand years of careful study the apostles themselves did not have leisure to produce in written form. Scale itself is not the enemy; large gatherings are not automatically less spiritual than small ones, and the New Testament nowhere commands smallness as a virtue in itself.

What this chapter is naming is narrower and, I think, harder to argue with once named plainly. Whatever has grown, has it grown alongside the specific fruit Acts records, one heart and one soul, generosity that needed no campaign, and decisions genuinely reached together under the Spirit's acknowledged guidance? Or has growth, in many places, been purchased at the cost of exactly those things, professional structure replacing shared devotion, denominational self-protection replacing gathered deliberation, and personality replacing the pattern Chapter Nine showed the apostles themselves modelling at Jerusalem?

### **The Test This Book Will Keep Applying**

The remaining chapters of this book are going to press directly into this gap. Chapter Twelve looks honestly at the denominational landscape this loss of shared deliberation has produced. Chapter Thirteen looks at the specific structural pattern, a single founder or centre controlling every branch, that has in many places replaced the Spirit-led, gathered pattern of Acts 15. And the closing chapters return to the authority this whole book has been building toward, the dominion purchased at the cross and given to the whole Church, not concentrated into a single office.

But the test this chapter leaves standing is simple enough to carry forward through every chapter that follows. Not, does our church feel spiritual. Rather, does our church look like one heart and one soul, generosity that needs no campaign, and decisions the whole gathered body can recognise as genuinely reached together under the Spirit rather than announced to them from a platform. Acts is not a museum piece to admire from a distance. It is the standing description of what the same Spirit, present in the Church today exactly as He was present then, still intends to produce, whenever the Church actually makes room for Him to govern rather than merely to inspire.

## **PART THREE: THEN AND NOW**



## CHAPTER ELEVEN: THE EARLY CHURCH AND THE CHURCH TODAY

*If you set the first generation of the Church next to the Church you attend, which parts would you recognise?*

The previous chapter compared the early Church's experience of the Spirit against the present. This chapter widens the lens, and looks at the shape of church life itself, leadership, gathering, mission, and cost, across the same gap of two thousand years.

### **Leadership: Plural Then, Often Singular Now**

Wherever the New Testament describes a local church being established, it describes a plurality of leaders, never a solitary one.

*"And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed." (Acts 14:23)*

Elders, plural, in every church, singular. This is the consistent pattern. Paul instructs Titus to "ordain elders in every city" (Titus 1:5), not an elder. When Paul calls for the leadership of the Ephesian church to meet him, he sends for "the elders of the church" (Acts 20:17), and addresses them collectively as those among whom "the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers" (Acts 20:28), plural overseers, over one flock. Peter, writing to elders across several provinces, instructs them as a body of equals: "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly... neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock." (1 Peter 5:2-3)

Not one lord over God's heritage. A plurality of shepherds, each an example, none exercising the kind of singular, unaccountable authority Peter explicitly warns against. Much of the modern Church, by contrast, has organised itself around a single senior figure, a founder or head pastor whose personal authority effectively exceeds that of the eldership around him, who function in practice as advisors to his vision rather than co-equal shepherds under Christ. We will examine this specific shift in full in the next two chapters. For now, simply note the gap. Plural then. Increasingly singular now.

## **Gathering: Homes Then, Buildings Now**

The early Church, for its first three centuries, met almost entirely in homes. "And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart." (Acts 2:46) Paul's letters greet "the church that is in their house" (Romans 16:5), repeatedly, because there was, for most of the first century, no other kind of church building to greet.

This is not offered as an argument against buildings, which the New Testament neither commands nor forbids. It is offered to notice something about the texture of gathering that a house naturally produces and a large auditorium can, without anyone intending it, gradually erode. In a home, everyone present is close enough to be known, and Paul's instruction to the Corinthians assumes exactly this intimacy of participation: "How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying." (1 Corinthians 14:26) Every one of you. Not a platform ministering to a passive gallery, but a gathered body in which every member was expected to bring something and everyone else was near enough to receive it.

## **Formation: Costly Then, Often Instant Now**

Entry into the early Church was not treated as a single decision made in a moment and left there. New believers were expected to undergo a genuine, often lengthy, period of instruction and examination before being received into full membership through baptism, a practice the Church continued and formalised for generations after the apostles, precisely because belonging to this family, purchased at the price this book has already described, was never meant to be entered into lightly or without real understanding of the cost. Paul's own pattern of ministry reflects the same seriousness. He spent a year and six months teaching in Corinth (Acts 18:11), and a further three years in Ephesus, "ceasing not to warn every one night and day with tears" (Acts 20:31), because he understood that a family this significant could not be formed by a single decision made under emotional pressure and left unattended afterward.

Much of the modern Church, by contrast, has in many places reduced the process of belonging to a single moment of decision, valuable and real as that moment can be, followed by comparatively little of the sustained, personal, sometimes years-long formation the early Church considered

normal. A family bought at the price described in Chapters Seven and Eight deserves formation as serious as the price that purchased it.

### **Mission: Urgent Then, Often Managed Now**

The early Church's default posture toward the world was outward and urgent. Persecution scattered believers, and Luke records the result almost in passing. "Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word." (Acts 8:4) Not merely the apostles. Ordinary believers, scattered by suffering, preaching everywhere they landed. Paul describes his own ministry in terms of active, costly frontier work, "labour, travelling night and day" (1 Thessalonians 2:9), and reports his ambition plainly: "Yea, so have I strived to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man's foundation." (Romans 15:20)

Much of the modern Church's structure, by contrast, is organised around the maintenance of an existing congregation rather than the urgent extension of the gospel into unreached territory, a shift that is understandable given the very different world the Church now occupies, but a shift worth naming honestly rather than assuming away.

### **Cost: Real Then, Optional Now**

Belonging to the early Church carried a cost most modern believers, in most parts of the world, will never be asked to pay. Believers were imprisoned, beaten, and killed for the name they carried, and Paul's letters are saturated with the vocabulary of suffering as the ordinary Christian experience rather than the exceptional one. "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." (2 Timothy 3:12)

Where the Church today enjoys freedom and safety, this is a mercy to receive with gratitude, not guilt. But it changes what belonging costs a person to demonstrate, and it changes what commitment can hide behind. In a persecuted Church, nominal belonging was rarely worth the risk. In a comfortable Church, belonging can become a matter of preference and convenience, chosen and abandoned the way a person changes any other consumer habit, in a way the early Church's members, weighing the same decision against real danger, simply did not have the luxury to do lightly.

### **What This Comparison Is Not**

This chapter is not arguing for a return to persecution, nor romanticising danger the New Testament itself never asked believers to seek out. It is not arguing that buildings, denominational structures, or professional ministry are inherently unspiritual innovations to be dismantled. Every generation of the Church has had to find fresh form for the same unchanging gospel, and form is not the enemy.

What this chapter is arguing is narrower, and it is the thread the next two chapters will pull on directly. Some of what the early Church held, plural leadership accountable to one another and to Christ, gathering intimate enough for every member to function, mission urgent enough to reach beyond comfort, has quietly given way, in large sections of the modern Church, to patterns the New Testament does not command and in some cases explicitly warns against. The next chapter turns to the clearest visible symptom of that drift: the sheer number of separate rooms the one house of God has been divided into.

## CHAPTER TWELVE: MANY BRANCHES, ONE ROOT

*Can a tree have thousands of branches and still be one tree, or does a number that large prove the tree has died?*

Jesus gave His disciples an image, on the same night He prayed the prayer for unity this book has already referenced, that speaks directly to the question of legitimate diversity within a single living thing.

*"I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing." (John 15:5)*

Notice what the image permits and what it forbids. It permits many branches. A vine with a single branch is not a healthy vine; it is a stunted one. Branches, plural, spreading in different directions, bearing fruit in different seasons and different shapes, are exactly what a flourishing vine is supposed to produce. What the image forbids is a branch that no longer draws its life from the vine. "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me." (John 15:4)

### Where the Traditions Genuinely Differ

This book has already established, in Chapter Nine, that the Spirit distributes different gifts to different members of the one body, and that this difference is the evidence of unity rather than its enemy. The same principle extends to the different traditions the Church has produced across two thousand years and across every culture the gospel has reached. A tradition that emphasises the sacraments with particular depth, a tradition that emphasises the Spirit's present gifts with particular boldness, a tradition that emphasises the careful exposition of Scripture with particular rigour, each can be a genuine branch of the one vine, bearing a fruit the others, left to themselves, might grow to neglect.

The question this chapter presses is not whether different branches should exist. Scripture's own record shows Jesus dealing with seven distinct local churches in Revelation, each addressed by name, each praised or corrected on its own specific record, Ephesus for abandoning her first love, Sardis for being spiritually asleep while thought alive, Laodicea for a lukewarmness that made Him sick (Revelation 2 to 3).

Difference of local expression, even difference of spiritual health, was present in the New Testament itself, addressed directly by the Lord who nonetheless called every one of them His churches.

## **The Test the Vine Applies**

The question this chapter presses is narrower and sharper. Is a given branch still abiding in the vine, or has it, in practice, begun treating itself as the vine.

Paul gives the exact warning needed here, addressed to Gentile believers tempted toward exactly this posture, using a related image of a cultivated olive tree with some of its natural branches broken off and a wild branch grafted in among the remaining ones. "Boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee. Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in. Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear." (Romans 11:18-20) The warning generalises easily to every denominational boast since. No branch bears the root. The root bears every branch. A denomination that has begun to speak, in practice if not in official doctrine, as though it were the root rather than a branch drawing life from the same root every other genuine branch draws from, has stepped outside the image Jesus gave, whatever its official statement of faith still says correctly on paper. And Paul's warning cuts in both directions along the graft. A wild branch grafted in has no more grounds for pride than a natural branch broken off has grounds for despair; both stand or fall by the same single condition, continued faith in the root that holds them, not by the accident of which branch they happen to be.

Jesus' own messages to the seven churches confirm that abiding in the vine was never automatic, even for congregations founded directly by the apostles themselves. Ephesus, a church commended for sound doctrine and hard work, was warned in the same breath that doctrine and labour were not enough on their own: "Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent." (Revelation 2:4-5) Laodicea, a wealthy and self-satisfied congregation, received the sharpest rebuke of all seven, precisely because comfort had replaced abiding. "Because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need

of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." (Revelation 3:16-17) Neither church was told it belonged to the wrong branch. Both were told, plainly, that abiding itself was in question, regardless of the branch's history, doctrine, or wealth.

This is the honest test this book asks every reader, whatever tradition they belong to, to apply to their own branch before applying it to anyone else's. Does our tradition still draw its life, visibly, from Christ and from submission to His Spirit, the governing pattern Chapter Nine described at Jerusalem? Or has our tradition, across time, begun to draw its identity chiefly from what distinguishes it from other branches, until distinctiveness itself has quietly become the thing it actually abides in.

### **Forty Five Thousand and the Question That Matters More**

Elsewhere in this series I have named the commonly cited figure of some forty five thousand Christian denominations worldwide, and argued there that the blood of Christ covers every genuinely redeemed person inside every one of them regardless of the number. This chapter is not repeating that argument. It is asking a different question the number alone cannot answer.

The number, by itself, proves nothing either way. A vine can have a great many healthy branches. What the number cannot tell us, and what only an honest local examination can tell us, is how many of those forty five thousand rooms are genuine branches still abiding in the vine, drawing life from Christ and submitting to His Spirit even where their forms of worship, government, and emphasis differ sharply from one another, and how many have, in practice, become something closer to a vine unto themselves, defined chiefly by what they are not, rather than by what they are still drawing their life from.

### **A Root Deep Enough to Hold Every Genuine Branch**

The image Jesus gave was never meant to produce anxiety about which branch is the correct one. It was meant to produce a single, repeated, daily dependence. Abide in me. Whatever branch of the Body you belong to, whatever tradition shaped your understanding of baptism, of governance, of worship, of the gifts of the Spirit, the test that actually matters is not which branch you are on. It is whether you are abiding, drawing real and daily life from the vine every branch shares, or merely hanging from it by the accident of your birth and habit, bearing no fruit of your own.

The next chapter turns from the health of the branches themselves to a specific structural pattern that has, in many places, grown up around them, a pattern of centralised human control that the New Testament names, describes, and directly condemns in one of its shortest and most pointed letters.



## CHAPTER THIRTEEN: CENTRE AND CIRCUMFERENCE

*What happens when one man decides he, not the Spirit, will be the centre every branch answers to?*

Scripture gives us, in one of its shortest books, a portrait of exactly the structural problem this chapter needs to name, and it is worth sitting with in full before drawing out its modern parallel.

### **Diotrephes, Named and Condemned**

John, writing what we now call his third letter, mentions almost in passing a man causing serious trouble in a church connected to the one he is writing to.

*"I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church." (3 John 9-10)*

Loveth to have the preeminence. Casteth them out of the church, for the offence of receiving people Diotrephes had decided should not be received. This is a portrait, drawn by an actual apostle about an actual leader in an actual first century church, of a single man positioning himself as the controlling centre of a local body, punishing dissent by expulsion, and resisting the correction even of an apostle who had personally walked with Jesus. John does not soften his judgement. He names it, plans to address it directly, and holds up, in the very next verse, the opposite example. "Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good." (3 John 11)

### **The Warning Jesus Gave in Advance**

Jesus had already warned His own disciples against exactly this posture, in a rebuke prompted by an argument among them over who would be greatest.

*"But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant." (Matthew 20:25-27)*

It shall not be so among you. Jesus draws a direct contrast between the Gentile pattern of authority, dominion exercised downward over subordinates, and the pattern He requires of His own Church, greatness measured by service rendered, not control exercised. Peter, writing decades later to elders across several provinces, gives the same instruction in almost identical terms, warning specifically against leaders becoming "lords over God's heritage" (1 Peter 5:3), the very phrase that describes precisely what Diotrephes had made himself into.

### **Even Peter Was Corrected, to His Face**

Scripture gives us one further scene that shows what genuine, plural, accountable leadership looks like in practice, and it involves the very apostle Rome and several later traditions would come to treat as a singular, unchallengeable centre.

Peter, visiting the church at Antioch, had been eating freely alongside Gentile believers, until certain men arrived from the Jerusalem circle, at which point Peter withdrew from the Gentiles out of fear of how it would look to them. Paul's response is recorded without any softening. "But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed... I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?" (Galatians 2:11, 14)

Withstood him to the face. Before them all. Paul does not appeal to a higher human office to discipline Peter, and Peter does not claim an authority that places him beyond correction. One apostle publicly corrects another, over an action that threatened the very unity across Jew and Gentile this book has already shown the cross accomplished, and the correction is recorded in Scripture as right, not as insubordination. This is the accountable, no-single-unchecked-centre pattern the New Testament actually models, standing in direct contrast to both Diotrephes' demand for unquestioned preeminence and to any modern structure organised so

that its founding figure occupies a position no one under him is genuinely free to correct.

### **The Modern Pattern, Named Honestly**

Set beside these texts, a specific structural pattern common across many parts of the modern Church deserves direct, careful naming, not to condemn every large ministry structure as illegitimate, but to test the specific pattern against the specific Scripture just quoted.

In many denominational and network structures today, a single founder, general overseer, or senior pastor occupies a position functionally equivalent to Diotrephes' ambition, the acknowledged centre through whom authority over every branch congregation flows, whose decisions the branch pastors exist to implement rather than to weigh alongside him as genuine co-elders. Branch pastors, in such structures, often hold their position at that centre's discretion, subject to reassignment, correction, or removal by a single office rather than by the gathered, plural eldership pattern Chapter Eleven showed was the New Testament's consistent form. The centre, not Christ and not the locally gathered Spirit-led eldership described in Acts 15, becomes in practice the final court of appeal for every branch.

This is not a claim that every leader who founded a growing work has become a Diotrephes. Many genuinely humble founders exist, exercising real oversight with real accountability built around them, and the New Testament nowhere forbids a gifted founder's continued involvement in the movement his labour produced. The test this chapter asks such a leader, and every branch under him, to apply honestly is the same test Chapter Twelve applied to denominations generally. Does final authority in this structure still function as accountable, plural, Spirit-submitted eldership answering to Christ as Head, the pattern of Acts 20:28 and Acts 15:28 together, or has it, in practice, narrowed down to the discretion of one man whom every branch must ultimately satisfy.

### **Christ the Head, Not a Human Centre**

Paul states plainly who the actual centre of the Church is, in language that leaves no room for a human office to occupy the position by default.

*"And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all." (Ephesians 1:22-23)*

He is the head over all things to the church. Not a founder. Not a general overseer. Not a senior pastor whose office has absorbed the deliberative authority the whole gathered, Spirit-led eldership was meant to exercise together. A structure in which every branch answers, in practice, to a human centre rather than to Christ as directly received and discerned by a plural, accountable, locally rooted eldership has, whatever its statement of faith says, quietly relocated the headship Scripture reserves for Christ alone.

The correction this chapter calls for is not the dismantling of large, connected ministry structures, which can genuinely serve the Body when rightly ordered. It is the restoration of the pattern Chapter Nine already established as the New Testament's actual model of church government: decisions reached by a plurality of elders, submitted to the Spirit's discernible leading, tested against Scripture, accountable to one another rather than to the unchecked discretion of one man who loves, as Diotrephes did, to have the preeminence.

## **PART FOUR: THE FOUNDATION AND THE DECLARATION**

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN: THE CHIEF CORNERSTONE

*If you inherited a half-built structure, would you notice the materials being used to finish it?*

Paul, writing to the same Corinthian church whose divisions have surfaced repeatedly throughout this book, gives builders of every generation, including the leaders and structures examined in the previous chapter, a direct warning about how they build, not merely whether they build.

### One Foundation, Many Builders

*"According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." (1 Corinthians 3:10-11)*

No other foundation can be laid. Whatever branch, whatever tradition, whatever structure of leadership a given part of the Church has organised itself under, the foundation beneath every legitimate part of it is the same, singular, non-negotiable foundation: Jesus Christ, and no other. This is the one fixed point every chapter of this book has assumed, and Paul states it here as the test that settles every other argument about legitimate diversity this book has raised. Different builders, working on the same one foundation, cannot lay a different foundation of their own and still be building the same house.

### How You Build Matters, Not Only That You Build

Paul does not stop at the foundation. He turns immediately to the materials builders choose once the foundation is laid.

*"Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is." (1 Corinthians 3:12-13)*

Gold, silver, precious stone, against wood, hay, stubble. Materials that endure fire, against materials fire consumes instantly. Paul's warning is not

aimed at unbelievers building something else entirely. It is aimed directly at believers and leaders building on the correct foundation, warning them that the foundation being right does not guarantee the materials being right. A leader can build on Christ, genuinely, and still build with materials, methods of control rather than service, structures of human centralisation rather than Spirit-submitted plurality, that will not survive the fire's test, even while the foundation beneath them stands.

This is the direct link back to the previous chapter's warning about Diotrephes and every modern structure resembling him. The foundation may be sound. The structure raised upon it, if built with the wood, hay, and stubble of unaccountable human control rather than the gold, silver, and precious stone of humble, plural, Spirit-submitted service, will still be revealed by fire for what it actually was.

## **A Temple, Not a Platform**

Paul presses the image further still, and the word he chooses next raises the stakes of how a leader builds beyond a question of reward or loss.

*"Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are." (1 Corinthians 3:16-17)*

Paul has moved, within the space of a few verses, from a building site to a sanctuary. The Church is not simply a structure someone is permitted to build carelessly and merely forfeit reward for. She is a temple, indwelt by the Spirit whose governing role this book has already traced through the Jerusalem council. To defile that temple, whether by false doctrine at the foundation, or by the kind of unaccountable, Diotrephes-shaped control this book examined in the previous chapter, is treated by Paul not as a matter of poor management style but as an offence against something holy. The severity of Paul's language here should settle, for any reader still weighing the previous chapter's critique of centralised human control as merely a preference, that Scripture treats how the Church is built as a matter of consequence, not merely of taste.

## **Living Stones, Fitly Framed Together**

Peter extends the same building image, and adds a detail that returns this book directly to its opening declaration.

*"To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house... Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded." (1 Peter 2:4, 6)*

Peter is quoting Psalm 118:22, "The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner," a psalm Jesus Himself applied to His own coming rejection and vindication (Matthew 21:42), and which Peter had already quoted, boldly, to the very council that had condemned Jesus to death: "This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other." (Acts 4:11-12)

The same fisherman who once denied Jesus by a charcoal fire later stood before the Sanhedrin and identified the rejected stone as the only foundation of salvation available to any man. And Paul, writing to the Ephesians, completes the architectural image with the precision of a builder describing a finished structure: "Ye are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord." (Ephesians 2:20-21)

Fitly framed together. Every stone, every branch, every tradition, every local expression this book has examined, aligned to the one cornerstone with enough precision that the whole structure rises true rather than leaning. A cornerstone in ancient construction determined the entire building's alignment; every other stone was set by measuring against it. A structure that drifts from its cornerstone does not merely develop an interesting variation. It develops a lean that compounds with every additional stone laid upon it, until what began as a minor deviation becomes a structure that cannot stand.

## **Building With Care, Now**

This chapter's warning is addressed to every reader with any share in building the Church, which is to say every believer, not only those in recognised office. Take heed how you build. The foundation is fixed and cannot be relaid. The materials are not fixed, and every leader, every congregation, every denomination examined honestly across this book's previous chapters, is still choosing, today, whether to build with gold,



silver, and precious stone, or with wood, hay, and stubble that the fire will one day reveal for exactly what it was.

The final chapter of this book now turns to what all of this was building toward from the very beginning, the authority the first man lost, and the authority the last Adam went to war to reclaim on behalf of the very Church this book has spent thirteen chapters examining.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN: AUTHORITY RESTORED

*What did the first man actually lose, and did the last Adam only forgive it, or did He go back and take it again?*

This book opened with a declaration and has been walking toward its full meaning ever since. "Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." (Matthew 16:18) Chapter One noted that gates do not attack; they defend. If hell's gates are what fails to prevail, the Church was never merely meant to survive an assault. She was commissioned to advance on ground that had been taken from mankind long before Calvary, and to take it back. This final chapter explains what that ground actually is.

### What the First Man Held

Scripture's opening pages are explicit about the authority given to the first man, in terms that leave no ambiguity about their scope.

*"And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth... Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion." (Genesis 1:26, 28)*

Dominion. Subdue. The vocabulary of rule, given to man over the earth, as God's appointed governing representative within it. This was not a suggestion or a blessing offered in passing. It was an office, a delegated authority, handed to the man and the woman as the terms of their standing in the garden.

### What Was Lost

Genesis records, with unflinching honesty, how quickly that dominion was surrendered, not stolen by superior force, but handed over by choice, to the very serpent the man had been given authority over. Paul draws out the legal consequence centuries later. "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." (Romans 5:12) Sin entered, and with it, death, and with death, a functional subjection to the very power the man had been commissioned to rule over. Dominion was not merely

disobeyed. It was, in practice, transferred, by surrender rather than conquest, out of the hands it had been placed in.

## What the Last Adam Went to Reclaim

Paul names the two men whose actions determine the destiny of the human race, and the contrast between them is the hinge of everything this book has argued.

*"And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit." (1 Corinthians 15:45)*

*"For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ." (Romans 5:17)*

Notice the verb Paul chooses for what believers now do, and does not soften it into something safer. Shall reign in life. Not merely escape death's reign, though that is also true. Reign, the very vocabulary of dominion handed to the first man in Genesis 1, now restored, by grace, through the last Adam, to everyone who receives what He accomplished. This is not a minor detail tucked into a longer argument about justification. It is Paul stating, in the plainest terms he has, that the authority lost in a garden has been recovered and reissued through a second man, to a family this book has spent fourteen chapters describing.

## All Power, in Heaven and in Earth

Jesus states His own recovered authority, after the resurrection, in terms that answer directly to what was lost in Eden.

*"And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations." (Matthew 28:18-19)*

All power. In heaven and in earth. The very earth the first man was given dominion over, and lost, is named specifically as territory now under the authority of the last Adam, who immediately, in the same breath, commissions His Church to go into it. This is not a private authority Jesus intends to keep to Himself in heaven while the earth remains under its former subjection. He hands the same commission, exercised under His

own recovered authority, to the very family this book has described as bought by His blood, called out as ekklesia, and built on Him as the one foundation.

He had already told His disciples, before the cross, what this recovered authority would mean for them directly. "Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you." (Luke 10:19) Serpents. The exact image of Eden's usurper, now placed under the feet of the very family the usurper had once dispossessed. And He had given Peter, at Caesarea Philippi, in the same breath as the declaration this book opened with, the specific instrument of that recovered authority. "And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." (Matthew 16:19)

Keys are not merely symbols of access. In the ancient world, to be given the keys of a house or a city was to be given genuine administrative authority over what happened inside it. Binding and loosing were recognised terms for authoritative decision-making, the very authority Chapter Nine showed the apostles exercising together at Jerusalem, under the Spirit's acknowledged guidance, to settle the Church's first great crisis of unity.

## **Reigning Now, Not Only Someday**

John's vision of heaven confirms that this reign is not deferred entirely to a future age. The redeemed, purchased "out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation," are made "kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth" (Revelation 5:9-10), the very promise Chapter Seven flagged as the true scope of what the price purchased. The dominion lost in a garden, reclaimed by the last Adam's authority, exercised through the keys given to the Church He is building, is not a distant inheritance to be collected only after death. It is, in the consistent testimony of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation, the present standing of the family this entire book has described.

## **The Declaration, Fulfilled and Still Advancing**

Every thread this book has traced from its Preface converges here. The Church is ekklesia, called out with real authority, not a passive audience (Chapter Two). She is a family bought by blood, one price covering every

kindred and tongue (Chapters Three, Six, Seven). Her Lord was forsaken so she could be fully accepted, made the righteousness of God in Him (Chapter Eight). She is governed, not by a single human centre, but by the Spirit working through a plurality of Christ-submitted elders, the pattern Jerusalem set and Diotrephes violated (Chapters Nine, Thirteen). She is built, and must take care how she is built, on the one foundation no other builder can replace (Chapter Fourteen). And she carries, reissued from the last Adam who reclaimed it, the very dominion the first Adam surrendered, authority over the earth, over the enemy, and over what is bound and loosed in the courts of heaven itself.

What tries to break this family can never be as strong as what unites it. It was never stronger than the blood that purchased her, and it will never be stronger than the authority that blood restored to her.

Jesus said it once, on a hillside crowded with the temples of every rival power the ancient world could name, before a single stone of what He described had been laid in public view. He has been building ever since, through every century this book has surveyed, through every branch, every failure, every Diotrephes, every wood-hay-stubble structure the fire will one day try, and He is building still.

"I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

## **A WORD TO WHOEVER IS READING THIS**

You did not choose the family you were born into by blood, and if you belong to Christ, you did not ultimately choose this family either. You were purchased into it, at a price you could never have raised yourself, by someone who intends to keep what He paid for.

Whatever branch of this family you currently call home, whatever wound another branch of it may have given you, whatever centre or structure has, somewhere along the way, quietly stood in the place only Christ was meant to occupy, the root beneath you has not changed. The blood that purchased you has not weakened. The authority handed back to this family at the cross has not been revoked.

What tries to break us can never be as strong as what unites us. Go, and help build what He is still building.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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