

Churchianity Today

by Chip Brogden

The sermon critiques the modern concept of church membership and the expectations that come with it, arguing that it can lead to spiritual abuse and a focus on pleasing God through good deeds rather than trusting in God's sovereignty.

Scripture: John 4:24, 1 Corinthians 3:16, Galatians 5:1, Ephesians 4:4, Revelation 18:4

Topics: "Spiritual Abuse", "Church Authority"

Description

Chip Brogden delivers a powerful sermon emphasizing the distinction between the true spiritual Church, the Ecclesia, and the man-made religious organizations. He warns against the dangers of confusing the two and highlights the potential for spiritual abuse and religious elitism when the lines are blurred. Brogden delves into the concept of Babylon as the fusion of church and state, cautioning against the worldly influences in organized religion that can lead to spiritual compromise and antithesis to Christ.

Transcript

We must always be sure to distinguish between the Lord's invisible, universal, spiritual Church (the Ecclesia) and the non-profit religious organization that meets in a building with a steeple on top. The difference is incalculable, and we dare not make the mistake of confusing the two. Please understand that we do not question the right of any religious group to peaceably assemble together, elect their leaders, receive monies, have membership requirements, and govern themselves in the manner they see fit - as long as we realize that such a right is a civil right and is neither inalienable, Scriptural, or mandated by God Himself. That doesn't make it wrong, but neither does it make it spiritual. The Ecclesia is not an organization or invention of man, but an organism filled with the Life, and whether we worship "in Jerusalem or in this mountain" is not as important to God as whether or not we worship Him "in Spirit and in Truth."

So where is the distinction? What makes it an issue? It becomes an issue when spiritual or Scriptural significance is erroneously attached to a mere social contrivance, cultural norm, religious tradition, organizational structure, or place of meeting. When the waters are muddied and the lines are blurred between the social expectation, tradition, or custom of the religious organization and the true spiritual life and essence of the Ecclesia or the individual believer then such a system has the potential to evolve into a dangerous form of spiritual abuse or religious elitism.

What is Babylon? It is the marriage of church and state, religion and government; or to be more direct, it is allowing the leaven of the world to spread via Organized Religion and Institutional Christianity. As an example, consider how pastoring a church has become more of a profession than a calling, and how church government has digressed from a theocratic, Spirit-led consensus to a "Spirit-led" democracy, or worse, a "Spirit-led" benevolent dictatorship of a single pastor or a church board. This is the result of the spirit of Babylon. Whereas the True Church is to be "in the world, but not of the world", Babylon is that which is both in the world and of the world - it is by, for, and of the worldly system, yet it retains the outward appearances of godliness and spirituality. It is a synthesis of God and man, taking the best that each has to offer and fashioning a golden calf with it.

Babylon is always antithetical to Christ. It is anti-Christ. Babylon is represented as a religious whore riding on top of a beast which kills the prophets and saints of God. Perhaps we have missed the point by personifying the Antichrist as a Hitler-type world leader bent on global domination. Antichrist is the religious antithesis of Jesus Christ which flows from Babylon AS Jesus Christ. It is not coming, it is already here, and has been here from the beginning. Perhaps denominationalism is the real mark of the beast. If so, it is no wonder that so many are willing to accept it.

THE TRUE COST OF CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

Usually when you join an organization it's because the price you pay for membership is justified by the benefits of belonging. For example, it costs a great deal of money to join a country club. The benefits are prestige, use of the facilities, social interaction, and networking with successful people. Or, in the case of a professional association, your membership gives you name recognition, credibility, current information affecting your field of expertise, social interaction, and networking with your peers.

How does the organization benefit? They get to charge and collect dues from their membership in order to pay for staff, executive officers, facilities, marketing, expanding their membership base, and other projects. So their motivation is primarily financial.

Now let's look at Organized Religion. How does the church gain from your membership? They stand to benefit in at least five major ways. What are they after? Mostly financial support, followed by leadership support, doctrinal support, attendance support, and volunteer support. Let's look at these individually:

- Financial support means they have the right to expect their members to make donations in the form of tithes, offerings, love gifts, fundraisers, pledges, building funds, and the like.
- Leadership support means they have the right to expect their members to agree with the stated mission of the church and the pastor.
- Doctrinal support means they have the right to expect their members to adhere to the stated spiritual philosophy and teachings of the church and/or denomination.
- Attendance support means they have a right to expect their members to be present at a majority of services and functions (perhaps you've heard the expression, "Visitors welcome, members expected").
- Volunteer support means they have a right to expect their members to donate their time and volunteer as nursery workers, Sunday school teachers, bus drivers, or whatever is needed.

In addition, the church enjoys a greater control over its membership by meting out discipline when someone goes astray in one or more of the above areas. This typically plays out in sanctions against the offending member resulting in the loss of a leadership position or voting rights.

Whether or not these expectations are realistic, fair, or Scripturally justified is beside the point. The point is, THIS is what you are buying into when you decide to join a church. These are the standard expectations and conditions of membership in a typical church. They are not necessarily unreasonable when considered from a business perspective - if you don't pay your dues to the country club you don't get to use the golf course.

But to determine if church membership is for you, you have to do the other side of the cost-to-benefit analysis. The benefits to the church are many, but what's in it for the member? Basically, the church member gets a vote in major decisions like picking a pastor, a say-so in some financial matters, and the privilege of being in leadership (Sunday school teacher, worship leader, etc.) if you have a penchant for such a thing.

Remember at the beginning of this article I wrote that you join an organization because the price you pay for membership is justified by the benefits of belonging. Take into account the amount of time, money, and cooperation expected from church members, and the tremendous amount of individual control that is relinquished to church leadership. Then consider what you get in exchange - a small part in the political process of church government. Is it really worth the investment?

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ORGANIZED RELIGION

Those who ballyhoo the spiritual benefits of joining a church should be reminded that we are already joined to the Body of Christ, the Ecclesia, and are already realizing every spiritual benefit of membership in HIS Church. The only qualification for such membership is a New Birth. There is no responsibility but to abide in Him, and every action springs forth from that abiding. Joining a church may be good, proper, beneficial, and moral - but it is not a condition of salvation, thus it is not a condition for being a Christian.

Many Christians believe that we are saved by grace because we are unable to achieve salvation through good works (unfortunately there remain many more who believe they can work their way to heaven apart from Christ). But what happens once they acknowledge this truth and trust in the Lord to save them by grace? Immediately, Organized Religion comes along and convinces them that they now have to work to keep that which is freely theirs in Christ. What do we mean? They are instructed to pray, read the Bible, join a church, give to the work of the Lord, witness to everyone they meet, stop doing so and so, start doing this and that.

We are not arguing that these things are wrong. We are pointing out an inconsistency in the Gospel according to Organized Religion. What is the message here? That good Christians do "X", and don't do "Y". What is the end result? We are trying to please God. We could not please God as sinners, but now that we are Christians it is our duty to please Him. So we set out to do so, and unwittingly fall into a works-oriented faith.

What Organized Religion fails to convey is that you can no more please God as a Christian than you can as a sinner. Any attempt to please God with your charitable deeds, church service, or spiritual activity will be met with frustration and failure. We are not interested in how good, holy, just, proper, or moral your deeds are; we are only interested in your motivation for doing them. Many are laboring and sweating at

trying to live Organized Religion's idea of a good Christian life. They have fallen from grace, and are consumed with works.

The most righteous man or woman on earth cannot please God by their righteousness. Take all the righteous men and women on earth and put them together and they still will not measure up. But go further than that, and store up all the righteous deeds of every righteous man and woman who has ever lived on the earth and pile them up together and the wide gulf between God and us will still be as large as it was before. Our very best effort amounts to nothing. Nothing! We cannot please God in and of ourselves.

What then? There is One Man who is pleasing God, and that is His Son, Jesus Christ. "This is my Beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased." Ah, the crux of the matter is Jesus Christ, not me. We live the Christian life the same way we enter the Christian life, that is, by trusting Jesus Christ to do something in and through me that I know I cannot do myself. It is not as I am, but as He is, that makes the difference.

"Come unto Me, all that are burdened and heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Rest from what? The excruciating burden of work, toil, and labor under the cruel hand of Organized Religion.

FELLOWSHIP APART FROM ORGANIZED RELIGION

If we are one with the Head, we are one with the Body, even if we are not gathered together. But, if we are not one with the Head, we are not one with the Body, even if we are gathered together.

If we are walking in the Light as He is in the Light then WE HAVE fellowship with one another whether we are attending a church building or not. Joining a church is not a condition of fellowship. Some join a church for the social benefits - meeting other believers, making friends, etc. Perhaps they don't realize that they can still fellowship, meet other believers, and even make friends without actually joining a church. In fact, you'll attract far more attention as a mere attendee (if attention is what you seek, and that's another cause for concern). As a potential but as-of-yet-not-signed-up visitor, there are virtually no expectations placed upon you. When you give money it is appreciated all the more because they know you aren't obligated to do so. When you donate your time and talent as a non-member it is all the more impressive because no one is expecting anything from you. And when you show up for a service or function it isn't taken for granted.

The faithful members and their leaders often label those who regularly attend different churches but do not join any of them as "Churchhoppers". These creatures flit about from group to group, "Churchsurfing", hoping to find the perfect pastor, music program, youth group, etc. Churchhoppers are criticized for their unrealistic expectations and lack of commitment. To be sure many of those participating in the "Church Shopping Network" are so infatuated with their needs and wants that they will never be satisfied and will forever remain uncommitted. But before we write off this group of people we would do well to enquire into their personal history with churches, what they are seeking, and why they are unwilling or unable to commit to church membership. We may discover a history of hurt or a pattern of spiritual and emotional abuse that has left them wary of churches in general. We may find the churches they visit to be cold, aloof, or cliquish. That they even make an attempt to attend somewhere is a positive sign, but the phenomenon only underscores one of the troubles with Churchianity today. Many more have left, never to return again, and we can only speculate as to their real spiritual condition before the Lord.

Among aggressive, growth-oriented churches the goal is to persuade you to join the church (actually discussed among pastors privately as "getting you plugged in" or "getting fresh blood"). This is presented as the next logical step of your attendance. Once you do decide to join, however, the tide changes, the wind shifts, and the honeymoon is over. The list of expectations, rules, regulations, and by-laws make their appearance. You are educated in what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable behavior. Suddenly your performance is being measured in terms of dollars contributed, services attended, and hours donated. All too often, consciously or unconsciously, your worth as a member is determined by your overall "support" factor.

Of course we do not mean to suggest that every single church is engaged in a conspiracy to use their members as unwitting pawns to achieve some wicked end, or that the pastor and deacons conduct covert meetings in cigar smoke-filled underground cellars thinking up strategies to trap unassuming visitors into a black-hole of church membership. We're only pointing out how easy it is for the generally accepted attitudes, traditions, rituals and practices of Organized Religion to quickly deteriorate into something wholly other than what the Lord has in mind for a community of Believers. Our contention is that the way we go about "doing" church is far removed from what "being" the Church is all about. Church as most know it has become a business, social, or legal arrangement, not a community or family. As such, our assertion is that Organized Religion seeks, retains, and manages its members in much the same way as a country club - but without the golf course. It provides a mostly intangible, invisible (and therefore highly subjective and difficult-to-quantify) service while expecting tangible, material things in return: your cash, your time, and your allegiance.

We are not necessarily advocating a boycott of church services, but we do wish to demonstrate the difference between joining a church and attending a church. In the case of membership, support is expected and enforced. Non-conformers are removed from membership, and although the instances of actually refusing to allow someone to attend services are rare, the amount of psychological pressure brought to bear upon the offending member is usually enough for them to leave on their own accord.

THE ISSUE OF FINANCIAL SUPPORT

The motivation for all financial support should be "as the Spirit leads", not as the rules of membership dictate. For example, a Christian should give not under compulsion, but liberally, from the heart, as led by the Spirit. That sort of giving cannot be legislated, no matter how hard you try, through spurious teachings on the ten percent tithe, "sowing and reaping", "love" offerings, "faith promises", etc. - yet that is precisely what Organized Religion attempts to do.

Notwithstanding, anyone deriving a benefit from an organization should support it. If you attend a church at all, member or not, you should modestly compensate them for the trouble of providing you with climate-controlled facilities, nursery care for your kids, and refreshments during Sunday school. That's just good manners. If you eat the food you should offer to wash the dishes. Beyond that, you should wholeheartedly and unreservedly give as the Lord directs you to give. That could mean an offering in the collection plate, the donation of clothes or food, anonymous gifts to individuals in need, and the like. Ours should not be an "I don't owe you anything" attitude. We should always give more than we take. But once our freewill support is legislated and expected as a condition of membership in a religious institution, it ceases to be spiritual and philanthropic. We are no longer giving with no expectation of receiving. Instead, we are giving in order to receive or maintain the privilege of membership. Therefore, we have our reward here on earth, and not in heaven.

Christians should be encouraged to give anonymously in order to ensure no reciprocal benefit. Jesus says when you give a gift don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. Yet Organized Religion has to have some means of enforcing the Financial Support clause of the membership contract. How? With those little offering envelopes and a place to write your name. Remember that for every benefit there is a loss of freedom. It's certainly your right to claim the tax deduction if you wish, but in exchange for that benefit you lose anonymity. Now the church has a way to track your giving (or lack thereof), and if you don't think they will use that to their advantage if necessary, you better read your membership contract again. Even so, a few pastors have resolved to take no knowledge of the personal giving records of their members. Though an admirable first step, you can still rest assured that someone in authority at the church has access to the information and it can and will be used against you if necessary. For instance, when you're being considered for a leadership position, or when the church board wants to determine the active voting membership. Of course, if you aren't a member, none of that will matter to you anyway. But it again demonstrates that your value as a church member is being measured in dollars and cents.

Jesus did not advocate anonymous charity in order to make us paranoid or fearful of being caught doing a good deed. He did it to liberate us, to enlarge us, to help us experience the pure joy of a no-strings-attached gift, to ensure we would not become proud, and very importantly, to prevent others from rewarding, manipulating, regulating, or expecting us to give to them on a continual basis apart from His direction. He understood how easily people, even with the best of intentions, make value judgments of others based on material possessions (see James). He obviously didn't want that to be the case among His people. Unfortunately, acquiring, building, and catering to people of affluence has been the modus operandi of Organized Religion since its inception, and continues to run rampant in Churchianity today. Yet for all its money and temporal possessions, Organized Religion has always been in a state of spiritual impoverishment.

THE ISSUE OF LEADERSHIP SUPPORT

Support of the pastor and his vision cannot be mandated; either the Spirit bears witness with what is happening or He doesn't. Titular authority is based on perceived rank, status, charisma, spiritual gift or popular appeal: it's a fantasy, a piece of dirt painted gold.

The philosophy of Organized Religion is to maintain the distinction between clergy and laity. To reinforce this philosophy most churches consider the pastor (or priest) to be the spiritual head of the church. Most pastors see the local church as an extension of their own personal ministry and calling, thus the congregation is made in the image of the pastor. It is important that we note this carefully, for we maintain that God's people do not belong to anyone but Christ, and the Church is His Church, and not ours. All authority is given to Him, and whatever weight or influence we as individuals have over one another is ours by reason of our depth of knowing Christ and our willingness to love and serve one another. The "elders" are just that - those who are older and more experienced in the things of the Lord, the implication being that they are more conformed to His image and are thus gentle, loving, kind, and able to instruct and encourage the younger.

But who are the leaders of Organized Religion? Those who have been elected to fill leadership positions. Democracy is a fine system of government, but we note that the Kingdom of God is not and never will be a democracy. The political process of church government is as corrupt as the political process of secular government. What makes it worse is most people know how corrupt secular government is, yet they seem either unable or unwilling to believe the same corruption exists in their own church. If you've ever been

involved in a church split you'll understand when I say the political intrigue and behind-the-scenes treachery rival a Tom Clancy spy novel.

Again, we are speaking in generalities. But a thinking person must admit that something is wrong with a process in which a pastor can be voted into and out of the position of spiritual leader by a certain majority of the congregation. If this were God's way then Moses would have been voted out, Israel would have returned to Egypt, and they would probably still be there making bricks today. Spiritual processes and God's holy call and selection cannot be reduced to search committees and paper ballots. Once the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit, they stopped drawing straws and started praying towards a consensus. The Spirit made it evident who He wanted. A distinction needs to be made between what the majority wants and what the Lord wants, as typically there is a difference between the two.

The process and method of selecting deacons and board members is even further removed from the Biblical idea of the diakonite. Invariably we find those who rise to some level of church leadership are big financial supporters or have some family connection to the establishment of the church.

In most cases, there is no mutual submission, as the Bible commands. Instead, submission is a one-way street from bottom to top. Those who know God understand that calling attention to one's supposed "authority" is a sure sign that there is no authority to be found there. Real authority doesn't have to vaunt itself and demand others be subject to it. I received a letter once from a human religious authority I was involved with that took me to task for "attitudes and opinions which imply a compromised loyalty to the church and the pastoral leadership." Human authority is threatened at the mere suspicion of independent thought, whereas God's authority never defends its rights or demands capitulation. Since it sees God as the only Head of the Church it is not possessive over God's people and is neither compelled to defend itself nor insistent that everyone do things its own way. It sees itself as a steward, not an owner, of what God has given.

THE ISSUE OF DOCTRINAL SUPPORT

At first glance doctrinal support of the church you aspire to join seems self-evident. Yet denominations have an incredible knack for making doctrinal mountains out of molehills. We agree everyone who names the Name of the Lord should be in one accord on major tenets of faith, such as the fall of man, the inspiration of the Scriptures, the deity of the Lord Jesus, His resurrection from the dead, etc. Yet if we trace the histories of the thousands of denominations which have sprung up in the last few centuries we will find most began by laying particular emphasis on one doctrine or method or means of grace to the exclusion of all others.

For example, nearly every charismatic denomination stress the baptism in the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues as their doctrinal distinctives. We certainly find no fault with being filled with the Spirit or exercising spiritual gifts as the Spirit leads. But again, the way in which we live out our beliefs in these areas cannot be legislated by some governing body. It is a spiritual thing bound up within the faith of the individual who endeavors to follow the Spirit. It is most improper to make one particular expression of faith as the sine qua non of Christianity and make it a condition for salvation or a prerequisite for fellowship with a particular religious group. To do so is to promote sectarianism, a thing which God has expressed not just a relative dislike for, but a passionate hatred of.

A good example is the belief among certain religious groups that anyone not joined to their particular fellowship or adopting their particular nuance of Biblical interpretation is on the way to hell. A far more

common and just as damaging belief among more mainstream churchgoers is that anyone claiming to be a Christian who does not attend church services regularly is either not truly saved, or is backslidden. Thus, a socially accepted practice of going to church has become the de facto standard by which the spiritual lives of millions are judged. Or the reverse, deeming someone as a good Christian based solely upon their faithfulness in some institutional church capacity. This is nothing more than salvation by works, a concept most Christians say they don't adhere to yet frequently practice and impose on others.

Another example is esteeming views independently of what the pastor says to be the result of a rebellious spirit that should be bound or cast out. Or, assuming that a failure to conform to the particular style of congregational worship is indicative of some hidden, unconfessed sin holding the individual back. Or, that a failure to respond to the altar call is a sure sign that you "don't mean business with God." We might add, the expectation that everyone who is on the cutting edge of what God is doing is going to come on board with the latest revival, movement, or spiritual teaching. All the instances cited above are attempts to add spiritual weight or credibility to the decision of a group or individual leader when there is no Scriptural mandate or justification for doing so.

This is the sort of peer pressure and "Groupthink" presented under a veneer of spirituality that is devastating to all who fail to measure up in the eyes of their fellow parishioners, in spite of the fact that God neither desires nor commands that we all worship, pray, sing, or serve in the same capacity. Threatening some spiritual result or consequence for failing to live up to the expectations of the group or the leadership, when in fact no such spiritual consequence exists, is a blatant abuse of religious authority. Examples are numerous, but they commonly involve money. "If you don't pay your tithes (e.g., go on the record with a systematic and verifiable contribution to this particular church) then God will not bless your finances." There is no Scriptural support for such a caveat. A more legitimate warning would be, "If you don't pay your tithes, you'll lose your active member status at First Church and your voting privileges will be suspended." That is a natural consequence of a natural action. It is a statement of fact, no matter how much you disagree with the politics of it; if you bought into church membership you accepted that as part of the deal. The line is crossed by the leadership when spiritual punishments are meted out in addition to the natural consequences of one's actions.

THE RENUNCIATION OF DENOMINATIONALISM

It is our position, then, that a believer who is standing on the ground of Christ and has seen the Body cannot but renounce once and for all the scourge of denominationalism. The reason is simple. We must receive all whom God receives. If the Life of God is found in them, we will receive them as brothers and sisters and not make peripheral issues the basis of our joining or not joining with them.

Let us be clear: while we cannot render support to a church or group which meets on sectarian ground, we can and will receive the individual members who desire our fellowship on the basis of Christ.

We should also investigate thoroughly any group or church that claims to be "independent". We often find these independent or non-denominational groups to have an even more narrow and sometimes bigoted focus on issues of secondary importance to the basic elements of faith. All too often the group is built upon the charisma and influence of one man, and since he doesn't answer to a denominational board, there is a greater than normal risk of spiritual abuse or excess.

Jesus is building His Church upon the foundation of Himself. This is the only safe ground to build or stand upon.

INSTITUTIONAL HOUSE CHURCHES

The clarion call of recent years has been the Scriptural injunction to "come out of Babylon", and when applied to the Institutional Church, it is interpreted to mean have nothing at all to do with the present religious system as represented by the clergy / laity distinction, the hierarchy of leadership with the pastor at the head, and the platform-based, event-oriented programs and church building projects. Invariably the trend has been towards informal small groups and home churches. We believe this to be a partial but incomplete solution. We see Babylon not as a political or institutional state, but a spiritual state. To truly come out of Babylon requires something more than deciding to meet in homes or resolving to do away with the external trappings of Churchianity. Many claim to have come out of Babylon because they no longer attend church services, but Babylon has not come out of them. They have only exchanged one sophisticated form of religious bondage for a less sophisticated one, perhaps creating an Institutional House Church in the process.

More than changing a few external rituals and adopting a so-called New Testament pattern to the exclusion of all others, coming out of Babylon requires an attitudinal adjustment on the part of the believer, a genuine paradigm shift and seeing the Lord and the Lord's Church; it cannot merely be a reacting to the obvious wrongs perpetuated in the name of God by Organized Religion. It is quite possible to be out of the system but still be bound to Babylon, still chained by bitterness and fixated with all that is wrong with the Body.

It is just as possible to be somewhat within the trappings of Organized Religion outwardly speaking, but have an ascendant spirit that overcomes within the midst of Babylon. Our whole goal should be to look beyond the external characteristics of how and where people worship. The only way to do this is to have an all-consuming revelation of Christ and the Ecclesia, the Body, His Church. Once we see that, we will understand that the external accessories of Organized Religion can neither help nor truly hurt the True Church, since Christ is bringing all things into subjection to Himself through the Church. This includes Organized Religion, Babylon, systems of false worship, denominationalism, wheat and tares, sheep and goats. The one that abides in Christ is joined to the Ecclesia and thus transcends all that is contrary. This contagious, unbridled liberty in Him cannot be bound or brought again under subjection to, or dependence upon, earthly religious institutions. Its identity is found in Christ, therefore it requires no external support systems or crutches. It accepts no substitutes, and immediately and effortlessly resists all attempts to rein it in.

"BY THE RIVERS OF BABYLON WE WEEP

Perhaps the fear is that once we are escaped from Churchianity that we may be deceived again, but not so with the one who has finally seen the Body. It is not that we find it necessary to wax bold or stand guard continually and purposely resist all attempts to institutionalize us in the name of God. When we have seen Christ and His Church, anyone attempting to lord over, corral, enclose, intimidate, manipulate, unlawfully influence or exert his or her spiritual whims upon us is rebuffed with a calm, quiet spirit. It is like striking the air, or stopping the ocean. The spirit of Jezebel simply cannot stand before the Spirit of Christ. It's so simple. We do not need to understand the spirit of Jezebel, we only need experiential knowledge of Christ within.

Again, we reiterate that it is not a question of learning or knowing, but of seeing. If we see Christ we will immediately react to all that is anti-Christ. Those who belong to Him will never accept the mark of the

beast. All who know Truth can easily see through the false.

It is not uncommon for someone to sit within Babylon for years, know something is wrong, but be unable to express what it is. It is only after much soul-searching, prayer, counsel, sleepless nights and painful experiences that we are able to understand why the Spirit of Jesus is troubling us with regard to what is done in the name of Organized Religion. But we need not understand what troubles us in order to be troubled. To all who listen, to all who have ears to hear, He will voice His disapproval of all that is not sanctioned or condoned by Him. God is not so silent as many imagine, it is just our ears are dull. But when our hearing is sensitive, we will hear His protest when something is said or done in His Name that He does not endorse. If we are listening, we cannot but hear Him disavow the televangelist who begs for more money, or the pastor who treats the sheep with contempt, or the prophet who speaks out of his own imagination.

If we can sit within Organized Religion, day in and day out, and drink it all in without the slightest provocation, without even a hint of being troubled in our inner man, with no twinge in our gut or pain in our heart whatsoever, then we are far gone; our hearts are hardened and our ears are dull. We are blind Pharisees.

You who call yourselves Christians: are you troubled by all that is proclaimed, confessed, bought and sold, taught, prophesied, promoted, and prayed about these days in Jesus' Name? Then rejoice, because you are still able to discern the Spirit of Jesus above the cacophony of religious voices spewing forth from Babylon. But if you are able to shrug it off or lightly dismiss it, blithely going your merry way, I would consider your Christianity to be nominal at best.

The Lord does not take it all in stride, or shrug it off. The responses of Jesus to the organized religionists of His day were many and varied. We find Him driving the merchants out of the Temple with a scourge of cords. We find Him engaging in public denunciations of the Pharisees, holding them up as shining examples of what NOT to do. At other times, He was silent, or simply hid Himself and departed. Which response strikes you as the most profound? In my opinion, it is a weighty matter to observe the Son of God simply walk away and ignore the religious leaders of His day. There is a time and season to speak, and a time to refrain, and we find the Lord knows how to do both. But I must confess that His silent rebuke, Him hiding His Face and turning away, strikes as much fear in my heart as His spoken Word and piercing gaze. What unbearable, deafening silence! What contempt He had for their hypocrisy! How His holy nature must have been repulsed! How can we not also be moved to indignation?

THE WAY OUT OF BABYLON

There is only one right way to leave Babylon, and that is by way of Christ. To leave because of hurt, bitterness, dissatisfaction with the status quo, rebellion, or anything short of seeing Christ is to be in a precarious situation. Certainly hurt, bitterness, and the like are compelling reasons to leave, but only when they drive us to Christ do they help and not hinder. If our experiences drive us into a quagmire of depression and unforgiveness then all meaning and purpose for the experience is lost. On the other hand, if our disenchantment, disillusionment, and despair drive us deeper into Christ, we will find healing through Him and we will be enabled to extend grace to those who persecuted us. Then the experience is meaningful, the pain had purpose, and the lesson is learned.

This is why we do not command all Christians everywhere to stop attending church services. To leave, or to stay, apart from revelation, apart from seeing Christ and His Body, and based only upon the word of

some man or group, no matter how true, is not sufficient to escape from Babylon. Others may bring us out of Babylon, but they cannot bring Babylon out of us. This is the Lord's work. And this explains why we find some who have left Organized Religion but are not better off spiritually than they were before leaving. In fact, after several years they have become cold, aloof, distant, critical, and suspicious of others. Their world has become smaller, whereas the one who leaves Organized Religion because of revelation lives in a much larger world as entire new vistas of opportunity appear. With an awareness of the Body, fellowship is no longer restricted to time, place, church, or denomination, thus opportunities for fellowship abound. But with no consciousness of the Body, only an awareness of our personal pain and harsh treatment at the hands of a few, our defense mechanisms will prevent us from seeking out fellowship or risking further hurt by engaging other believers.

When we enter this Body consciousness we will not find it necessary to wax bold or stand guard continually and purposely resist all attempts to institutionalize us in the name of God. We do not have to fear what man may do to us. When we have seen Christ and His Church, anyone attempting to lord over, corral, enclose, intimidate, manipulate, unlawfully influence or exert his or her spiritual whims on us is rebuffed with a calm, quiet spirit. It is like striking the air, or stopping the ocean. The spirit of Jezebel simply cannot stand before the Spirit of Christ. It is so simple. It is only difficult because we make it difficult. We do not need to understand the spirit of Jezebel, we only need experiential knowledge of Christ within.

This experiential knowledge of Christ will also enable us to recognize Him in others, and call upon us to enter into fellowship with brothers and sisters of all backgrounds. We will not be overly critical or unnecessarily suspicious. The Anointing will teach us and lead us into proper relationships with others in the Body. No more will we judge others or restrict ourselves to our little home group, church, or denomination. Our basis for fellowship is Christ, and with Him as our common ground we will not be uncomfortable or threatened by people of different philosophical or doctrinal nuances. Either the Life is present, or it is not. If it is, we must not call Unclean whom God has called Clean.

We may be able to passionately and persuasively expound upon the evils of the religious institutionalism, be correct with our arguments, confirm the experience of others and sway the opinions of many; but perhaps the most compassionate thing we can do for those still bound by Organized Religion is to become secure enough in our walk with God and clear enough in our vision of Christ and His Body that we can worship together with them in spite of our ideological differences, modeling the freedom which belongs to all who are in Christ Jesus, in hope that they, too, can escape from Churchianity and experience the same liberty from the deadness of the Letter towards the freshness of the Spirit, far beyond the influence of Babylon.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/chip-brogden/churchianity-today/>

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