

Your message burns in my heart and bones, and I cannot keep silent. (Jeremiah 20:9)

The testimony of JESUS is the spirit of the prophecy. (Revelation 19:10c)

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Ekklesia Within the Church (Commentary)

Years ago, I was given a small booklet titled *A Prophet Speaks Again*—a message delivered by Frank Bartleman of Azusa Street fame shortly before his death in 1925. The actual title of the message is *The Deeper Significance of Pentecost*. The primary concept of his message is still relevant, but a discussion of it would be a small booklet in itself. However, here are the opening words of his message.

“THE WORLD IS THE FIELD; the true church is the treasure – like a kernel in a shell. But **the great nominal church, the ecclesiastical body in each generation, is also like a field in which the true spiritual church – the living church – like a treasure, is hidden.**

This brother went on to describe the true spiritual church as the **church within the (nominal) church**. Speaking of the days of an illegitimate, hybrid monster—the formal church that came out of the Dark Ages and was present in Martin Luther’s time—he said:

However, **the living seed of the true church** had remained buried in this mass, even through those long, dark centuries. This seed now began to spring up and germinate – **the church within the church**. The prodigal backslider began to come to himself at last and desire to return home. The church had fed on swine long enough!

The distinction between the living seed of the true spiritual church and the nominal church—the church within the church—is an excellent description of what we see today, nearly a century later.

Given that the word *church* means so many different things in our day, it is a challenge to write about the true church. Even the phrase *church within the church* presents challenges. For this reason, I suggest the phrase the *ekklesia within the church*. In this case, the church is what I often refer to as the *public, visible, or institutional church*, or the *church-at-large*. This church is largely being built by man. In contrast, the *ekklesia* (Greek rendering) is being built by Jesus Himself.

Simon Peter said, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Now, answering, Jesus said to him, “Happy are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood does not reveal it to you, but My Father Who is in the heavens.” Now I, also, am saying to you

that you are Peter, and **on this rock will I be building My ecclesia** [ekklesia], and the gates of the unseen shall not be prevailing against it.” (Matthew 16:16-18 CLV)

We need to be abundantly clear that the bedrock of this building is *the Christ, the Son of the living God!* He is not only the foundational Rock but also the builder of the house of God, the holy temple *in* the Lord, the dwelling *of* God *in* spirit. Thus, the ekklesia is the spiritual house of God built of living stones—Jesus the living stone, the Rock, and many living stones hewed from the Rock—that is, those that are in Him and He in them.

The nominal church is bound to buildings and mortgages, to budgets and organizations mostly fashioned after the world, to many names and heads, to membership rolls, to traditions that refuse to change with the spirit of the Lord, to form without the spirit, to entertainment of the flesh, to doctrines and creeds laid in concrete, to pulpits and pews, to a clergy (pastor)-laity system that divides the body of Christ, to so-called “anointed” individuals with well-known names and titles, to divisions based on race, social and economic strata, to emphases drawn from the world, including national politics, to “another” gospel, and the list goes on. This is not the ekklesia that Jesus is building.

Jesus’ ekklesia has no such bounds. No physical building can contain it. It is boundless as it thrives under an open heaven with only one Head—Jesus—and everything headed up, summed up, and gathered up in Him. **It expresses the inexhaustible and indestructible life of the Son**, having only one name over it—Jesus. It is open to all races, nationalities, and social and economic strata—open to all born of Adam’s race raised up as new creations in the last Adam, the Second Man. The ekklesia lives by the spirit of the Lord, not by the letter of the law. The ekklesia is free to be led by the holy spirit and to do the Father’s will in all things. It knows no division—it is one body of many members, regardless of physical location on earth. The entire ekklesia is anointed with every single member receiving the anointing, beholden to no one person for an anointing but united with all in the anointing—bound to the Anointed One. The ekklesia exemplifies God’s universal divine order.

The ekklesia is the Lord’s precious treasure, not only hidden in the field of the world but also hidden in the field of the nominal church. It is the kernel, the living seed of God planted in the midst of tares and everything contrary to the life of the Son of God’s love. It is the core of *the* LIFE itself that was germinated when God’s Son rose from the grave, ascended to the throne of glory, and sent forth His spirit to dwell in His body, filled with His anointing. You see; this ekklesia exists anywhere and everywhere on earth, including in the midst of the nominal church. But this isn’t all; the ekklesia is found mostly outside the nominal church, having fully come outside the camp, in what the church calls the *unchurched*. Here’s the good news: The rivers of living water have begun to flow throughout the earth through this ekklesia that will express the abundant LIFE to the church and then to the world. The knowledge of the glory of God is about to manifest to all.