

UPWARD CALL

Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but this is my one aim: to forget everything that's behind, and to strain every nerve to go after what lies ahead. I press on toward the finish line, where the prize waiting for me is the upward call of God
IN KING JESUS.

(Philippians 3:13-14)

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Church—Temporal or Spiritual? Divided or United?

Why does it seem the church has lost so much ground to the world and seems just as divided as our nation is divided? Why are we so divided as a nation? Why is there so much divisive unrest? Why has the spirit of the world so overtaken our nation that we are spiraling down into a deep hole of darkness? Why is our moral compass spinning out of control? How has **amoral** that leads to **immorality** become so ingrained in our culture? (*Immoral* means "contrary to the moral code of the community; unchaste; lewd; licentious; obscene"; and *amoral* means "not concerned with moral standards; not to be judged by criteria of morality; neither moral nor immoral.") The current **progressive** thinking is that no one is to judge any issue based on a moral code; instead, one must allow anything and everything based on feelings. Simply, moral standards are not tolerated by some, and if one holds a position based on a moral code, then that person is rejected and labeled based on the latest progressive social justice plank. However, it doesn't take too long before amoral issues take on a flavor of immorality. Examples are not needed for the spiritually discerning, for they see it for themselves on nearly a daily basis as the world plunges into further darkness. But it is getting worse as **lawlessness** overtakes our land, not only on the streets but also in our institutions.

How does all this play into a divided church? Could it be that the nation is divided because the church is divided? Or, is the church a reflection of the condition of our nation? Either way, what church are we talking about? Is it the outward, visible, at-large organized and institutionalized, pulpit-pew-centered entity that the world and, frankly, most Christians recognize as the church? Is it, as others call it, the **nominal, public, or temporal** church that markets and advertises itself just like any manmade enterprise, or business; competing for air-time with all the other public things, including religions, of the world? Or, is it the spiritual church (*ekklesia*) that Jesus is building? Answer: **the temporal church is divided!**

The true spiritual *ekklesia* that Christ is building is not divided, for it is **one body** that, at the appointed time, will triumph in the king for all the world to see. Some commentators call this *the church within the church*, a *remnant church*, even a *remnant within a remnant*. Perhaps, another way to describe it is the *conquering church*. These are simply ways to distinguish the true church of God that is close to the heart of God, holding to God's vision and His purpose, from that which is not. Christ's church, which is the *real* church that God sees, is spiritual in nature and, as such, is a hidden and secret work of the spirit of God that can only be discerned and assessed spiritually. **This church is not divided; it is united as one!** This is why the world that is flesh and even the public church that is carnal cannot comprehend the true nature of the real church. All the world can do is judge the nominal church that looks and smells like so many other things of the world to the point that, on many fronts, it is indistinguishable from that which is of the world, except for the fact that it displays the name of Jesus over its door. The end result is that Christ gets measured or judged by the world by what is on display in or by the public church made up of what the world calls *Christians* who are seen as practicing what the world calls the *Christian religion*. This is purposely worded this way to make the distinction between what is of the flesh (i.e., carnal) and what is of the spirit. Again, the true church is spiritual; consequently, the true Christian is spiritual as well, not in practicing a religion but in living, that is, in a way of life, especially **a new creation life** based on Christ within the believer. *King Jesus in you, the hope of glory!*

This is the challenge we face in this day. The world judges and critiques what it *sees* as the church (by extension, Christians) and what comes out of it (us), resulting in the truly good news of Jesus getting filtered and, in many cases, distorted and even destroyed by what comes out of this church, corporately or individually. Why is this so?

For the most part, the nominal church has been driven by doctrines (creeds, statements of faith, themes, systematic theology, interpretative systems, denominationalism, tradition, and the like) and causes (emphases, messages, concerns, programs, strategies, ministries, and the like). Simply stated, **the visible church has been driven by many things**, and these very things, claimed to be biblically based, to a greater not lesser degree, have divided God's people along these lines. Our many and various doctrines, causes, even man-centered ministries have drawn numerous lines and walls between us who claim Christ. To this we must add race and culture as dividing lines as well.

Even worse, many of these things, whether doctrines or causes, have become ends unto themselves that drown out the basic message that is truly the good news, which is summed up in one word: JESUS!

Specific doctrines or causes become the centerpiece of one's message or action. Jesus' name is often attached to them, but generally in name only. But what happens is that the world judges Jesus or identifies Him with these things. Jesus gets judged by the world based on the world's assessment of the doctrine or cause just as it would judge any other cause-driven, man-centered, organization or institution. Unfortunately, it is worse than this, for the world sees the hypocrisy or inconsistency in this outward show and ultimately rejects the message of Christ.

The result is that Christ is outwardly divided, something which Paul exhorted the Corinthian believers not to do. Clearly, history has proven that this exhortation has gone unheeded. On the contrary, many have excelled at division and moved away from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. Instead of the message being Jesus and spirit-led lives reflecting, expressing, and manifesting His life in love, it has become Jesus plus many things or many things with Jesus inserted in them or many things apart from Jesus altogether. The result is that Jesus does not stand out in the message, expressed in words and, most importantly, in life; He is not central, supreme, and preeminent. He is within the message to varying degrees, but He is not the whole of the message. **He is part of but not the whole of!**

There is nothing inherently wrong in holding to doctrines or even causes. Doctrines are tenets or beliefs, and every human adheres to some form of belief or belief system, whether it is good or evil. Causes run the gamut and many of us hold to some form of cause, even if it is to simply hold up the name of Jesus. I could rightfully be accused of having a cause to refute the concept of hell and eternal torture, so I am not exempting myself from any of this. Also, without exception, we all hold to some form of interpretative bias when it comes to our understanding or interpretation of the Bible. There is no way out of this bias, for the Bible is not clear on many points. Often it gives us information without interpretation of what it means. We need *rhema* from the spirit of God for the words written on paper to become living revelation to us. This is a far different cry from being spoon-fed with digested words from the pulpit week after week.

Mind you; none of this catches God off guard, as if He is wringing His hands wondering how to fix this mess. It is fixed. The fix is already in, and it is in His Son, *Yeshua*, the Savior of the whole world and head of His body. The real church, the spiritual church, which is the body of Christ with Christ as head, is being built and nothing can or ever will stop this great building project (plan of God) that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. It is not divided—it is one body! In the mind and heart of God, it is finished and united in His Son!