

Preface

“What you know, you can’t explain, but you feel it—like a splinter in your mind.”

If you love Jesus, trust the Scripture that testifies to Him, and have faithfully participated in “church,” yet still sense that something essential is not quite right, you are not alone—and you are not wrong. Many of us have learned to speak fluent “Churchianity,” attend faithfully, and believe sincerely, while sensing a growing dissonance between the Life Jesus demonstrated and the life we actually experience. That unease is not a failure of devotion. It is not a lack of discipline. It is not rebellion. It is a signal—one worth paying attention to.

This book is not written to persuade you to abandon Jesus, Scripture, or **believing in Him**. It is written by someone who has spent decades within religion, seen what happens when ritual and tradition displace Him, and now questions what exactly is **Truth**. What follows is not an argument against Jesus, but an invitation to examine whether we have learned Him **with Him**, or whether we have learned about Him through systems that speak in His name but do not speak for Him.

"What you know, you can't explain, but you feel it...like a splinter in your mind, driving you mad..."

The Matrix is everywhere. It is all around us, even now in this very room. You can see it when you look out your window or when you turn on your television. You can feel it when you go to work... when you go to "church" ... when you pay your taxes. It is the world that has been pulled over your eyes to blind you from the truth."

- Morpheus, "The Matrix" (emphasis, double quotes by the author)

Morpheus describes a counterfeit that blinds people to reality; Paul describes the same dilemma—but his is not a fiction. He describes a blindness with eternal stakes and consequences.

... we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's Word [logos], but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. And even if our message is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case, the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the message of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.

Book to Date

2 Cor 4:2-5 (emphasis, brackets by the author)

I realized this blindness wasn't just around me—it was inside me. My assumptions about Jesus and "church" had been hijacked, and I had to see the difference for myself. I had always assumed that "church" and Jesus were inseparable—until I discovered they were not. If forced to choose between the two, many would reflexively answer "both." I now see the distinction as sharply as the difference between death from below and Life from above.

After decades in "Christianity" and its "church," it became clear that entrusting Life to Jesus is unrelated to the practice of Christianity. One is a Life; the other is religion. I am not starting anything new—no better way to do "church," no new theology. I am showing that religion is not a replacement for Life in Jesus.

Statements of theology and religious tradition don't point to Jesus; they replace Him while using His name.

Believers receive an inheritance so vast that *windfall* is the only description, because it is the same inheritance as God's Firstborn Son—*Life in Him*, so far beyond anything we could have asked for or even imagined from life as we know it.

Meanwhile, many of us are content in our pews—confident that we are rich and need nothing—while Jesus stands outside, offering Life and knocking at the door.

To the extent that we embrace religion, we are cheated out of our inheritance.

Scripture never says that Scripture is the head of the ekklesia.
It never says doctrine is the head of the ekklesia.
It never says theology is the head of the ekklesia.
It never says church leadership is the head of the ekklesia.
It never says a statement of faith is the foundation of the ekklesia.

By contrast, Jesus says, "*I will build my ekklesia*" (Matthew 16:18).
And Paul says, "*He is the head of the body, the ekklesia.*"

That is a closed system.

Our inheritance in the saints—Jesus Himself living in believers when they get together—is stolen the moment anything mediates between Him and us.

Book to Date

A Splinter In My Mind, and The Perfect “Church”

A splinter in my mind—nagging me since grade school—kept insisting: **“This isn’t IT. This cannot be Life in Jesus.”** Over time, every assumption about faith, doctrine, and “church” came under fire. One by one, old ideas fell away, and I came undone, realizing I had been holding the wrong end of the stick all along.

Yet in the wreckage, something became unmistakable: whatever I was losing, I was not losing Jesus. I clung to Him more firmly than before.

Be A Berean!

Be a Berean with everything I say. Search Scripture for yourself—not religion’s translations—and take what you find directly to the living Jesus.

What follows is not meant to replace your discernment, but to awaken it—not merely toward Scripture, but toward **Him**.

Take this to Jesus in conversation with Him—and listen.

Introduction

Transformation Plundered—and Everything Else We Hope For

Do you long for real transformation in the depths of your soul, knowing that Jesus is the only answer? Does your desire for Him burn so intensely that it sometimes overshadows even your need for food or sleep? Have you spent decades fully bought-in to what you believed was the Life in Jesus, only to find yourself wondering why your life—and the lives around you—look nothing like the lives you read about in Scripture. And questioning what you have been doing all these years.

Perhaps what we trusted as Life is something else entirely. And the desire for that Life is intensifying into an unquenchable thirst—revealing that the water was never where we thought it was, and we do not know where else to go.

Consider Oswald Chambers, who went through a similar struggle—a struggle that began as thirst, even after years of what he understood to be a normal Christian life. He wrote:

“I determined to have all that was going, and went to my room and asked God simply and definitely for the baptism of the Holy Spirit, whatever that meant. From that day on for four years, nothing but the overruling grace of God and kindness of friends kept me out of an asylum.”

The thirst intensified into desperation. Chambers continued:

“The last three months of those [four] years things reached a climax. I was getting very desperate. I knew no one who had what I wanted; in fact, I did not know what I did want. But I knew that if what I had was all the Christianity there was, the thing was a fraud.”

Like Chambers, you may feel desperate—unsure of exactly what you want, yet certain that what you have known as religion cannot reach the depths of Life you crave. If this resonates, pause and consider:

- What do you deeply desire that religion has never touched?
- In what ways has your longing for Life been frustrated rather than fulfilled?

I am writing to you if you crave Jesus so intensely that you would welcome the chance to exchange your life for His—without regard for relationships that may be lost, the opinions of others, or every piece of religious baggage you have carried so far. Whether you agree with anything I say or not, religion has a way of holding Jesus at arm’s length while speaking fluently in His name. But if you are willing to let all of that go for the chance to know Jesus as He truly

Book to Date

is—to see His Life manifested and to experience the reality behind the words—then join me. That is what I am seeking.

My purpose in writing is to expose how religion **stands in place of Jesus**—substituting His message, His purpose for us, and the Life in Him that we long for. My hope is that together we will come to recognize the Life He has always offered—unfiltered, unhindered, and fully His.

Chapter 1

The greatest crime stories aren't about stealing fortunes with brute force. They're about sleight of hand, misdirection, and forgeries.

Sometimes the strategy is so intricate and clever that nobody sees it coming. Sometimes a forgery hangs in place of the original for years as if it were real. Sometimes a diversion steals the guards' attention for just a second. And yes—sometimes the cowboys blow up the safe with dynamite.

In rare cases, the forgery is treated as the original for so long that everyone who knew it was fake has passed on. Everybody left thinks they have the real thing and wouldn't recognize the original if they saw it. Anyone who questions the substitute is in more danger than the thieves.

This book is about such a forgery.

Jesus' name is everywhere. It's in liturgy. It's in songs. It's in Christmas pageants. It's even in culture's curse words, for heaven's sake. And yet many of us sense that something essential about Him is missing—because we know, at some level, that something essential we inherited had already been masterfully forged. It feels central—so central that we can't shake it—because if we ever find it, everything changes.

At one point, imperial persecution was so brutal that easing felt like deliverance. What few recognized in the moment was that almost immediately they were absorbed into a system that would, in time, suppress dissent just as effectively as it had once tried to silence believing. Life in Jesus gave way to operating the system. With power aligned with the Empire, the religion spread rapidly.

Believing in Jesus became faith in a system about Him.

Whether at birth or later in life, we all enter a fully formed system—complete with language, roles, rituals, and expectations. We are taught, often without realizing it, to read Jesus through this lens rather than to measure the lens by Jesus Himself. The forgery still captures our attention, and most of us never knew there was a robbery.

Jesus did not come to improve an existing religious institution. He did not recruit followers to staff a hierarchy. He announced the arrival of God's kingdom—and then acted as though it were already here. People were healed. Authority from above arrived with Jesus. Power from above changed everything. Wherever that happened, the forgery could no longer pass as the original.

Of course, new forgers arose. Their work still hangs in prominent places, hiding the original wherever it can.

Book to Date

What began as a movement as natural as breathing fresh air became an inherited museum of forgeries. What began as community in Him became museum attendance. What began as shared Life became a system designed to maintain the museum. Life never was—and is not—found in a museum, but it has gone on so long that most of us no longer know how to imagine Life outside it.

The question is not whether the modern church contains sincerity and devotion. It clearly does. The question is whether it still resembles the Life Jesus began—or whether that Life has been exchanged along the way.

This chapter simply raises the flag and says: forgery.

If something is a forgery, it can only be recognized by comparison with the original. That comparison requires patience, honesty, and a willingness to hold long-standing assumptions loosely—and to recognize them as assumptions when warranted. It also requires resisting the urge to defend what feels familiar before listening carefully to what is actually there.

Han van Meegeren was once accused of treason for selling a Vermeer painting to an enemy. He escaped conviction by confessing that the painting was a forgery. The court didn't believe him—the work was too good.

To prove his claim, he painted another “Vermeer” under court supervision, demonstrating that he possessed the ability to produce such a forgery.

The chapters that follow return repeatedly to Jesus’ words and actions—not to build a new system, but to expose the gap between the Life He announced and the systems often practiced in His name. Some discoveries will be clarifying. Others may unsettle you. They unsettled me. Hold on to both responses. Listen to Jesus. Trust Him to bring Life out of the questions.

If the theft is real, it is not merely philosophical. It is personal.

Revelation that brings Life from above does not begin with reforming a forgery.

It begins by recognizing the original instead.

Book to Date

The primary strategy used by the U.S. Secret Service to detect forgery is to study the original—its look, feel, printing methods, paper composition, security features, and production tolerances. When the original is intimately known, forgeries become obvious. Retroactively projecting forgery attributes onto the original may be clever, but it never lasts forever.

Easier said than done.

This is how most of us first encountered Jesus. By the time we heard His words, they were already framed within the system's narrative. By the time we read His story, we already knew what it was supposed to mean. No one was dishonest about it—we were all trained in the narrative. The system came first; Jesus came packaged inside it.

Jesus asked one simple question: “Who do you say that I am?”

The question now is what the answer was before anyone learned how to tell the story.

Not what others later claimed He said.

Not the story that came later.

But what the original accounts themselves reveal.

Before there were buildings, titles, services, programs, or hierarchies, Jesus appeared and announced something startling: God's Kingdom is here—and nothing will be the same again.

He did not explain it, define it, or systematize it. He believed it—and acted.

And God's Kingdom started happening.

People were healed—immediately, publicly, and no one had to apologize first. Authority was redefined. Demons reacted before experts did. Fishermen left their jobs. Crowds gathered, not because they were members, but because something alive was happening before their eyes.

Has anything but Life been established so far?

As you read the early accounts without preconception, notice what isn't there.

There is no blueprint for governance. No concern for longevity. No instructions for replication. No anxiety about succession.

All of that is retroactive projection—layered onto Jesus after another narrative was created.

The early accounts show Jesus calling a woman He healed “daughter.” He weeps at His friend's tomb. He exposes religious leaders as sons of hell. He calls His students His friends. He fashions a whip and drives business out of the temple. Life pours out of Jesus in ways no system could design or manage. This is **Who** promises to be with us forever.

Book to Date

Instead, everything depends on His personal presence.

Where Jesus is present—and depended on together—Life happens.

When the Anointed King speaks, God's Kingdom defines reality.

When people believe in Him, Life overflows.

Chapter 2

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Book to Date

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Chapter 3

Mary Knew Jesus

We don't know a lot about Mary. She was from Magdala, a town on the Sea of Galilee. She was one of the women who traveled with Jesus, alongside the twelve, as they went through Galilee proclaiming God's message that His Kingdom has arrived.

Mary knew Jesus. She knew God's royal message because she was traveling with the King. She had personally experienced God's Kingdom through Jesus, who had delivered her from seven demons. Whatever else we do or do not know, this much is clear: Jesus was not doctrine to her. He was not tradition. He was not the subject of weekly meetings. He was her Lord, her deliverer, her companion, and her friend.

Can you imagine Mary's heart as she watched Him nailed to a cross—already beaten nearly to death, bloodied from head to toe by a Roman scourge—and then lifted up to hang until it was finished? She watched as they hurriedly placed Him in a tomb before the Sabbath began. As soon as it was over, she ran back to the tomb, only to find it empty.

How brutal can this get? Now His body had been taken as well. She had come prepared with spices to give Him the final honor she still could. Now she could not even do that. In less than a week, Jesus had gone from a King's welcome to crucified, buried, and gone.

Even after the others left, Mary stayed. She stood outside the tomb weeping. She could not leave.

The messengers told her He was gone—but it did not make sense.

And then she turned.

Jesus was there before Mary recognized Him. She mistook Him for a gardener.

Then Jesus spoke her name. She collapsed at His feet.

She knew!

The recognition stole her breath.

Imagine yourself on a warm summer afternoon—a simple family moment by the river. **Life is as it should be, maybe better.**

And then, without warning, everything turns upside down.

A scream as a small boy is pulled under the current, and suddenly everyone is scrambling, diving, grasping in the murky water, searching blindly. Time stretches into panic. Then—miraculously—someone breaks the surface with him after what feels like an eternity.

Book to Date

You grab your son. He isn't breathing. There is no color. You beat on his chest, calling out his name, over and over, doing the only thing left to do.

And then—suddenly—water erupts from his lungs. A violent cough. A sharp, desperate intake of air.

His very being lives again, as if every cell responded with a “yes” to your calling.

Your legs give way. You collapse.

This is what recognition looked like for Mary.

You may be experiencing the same recognition as Mary. Jesus is not where you thought He was, nor is He like you thought He was—but He is right here. Right now.

Religious leaders turned Jesus over to Pilate. Religion continues to oppose Him by reducing Him to doctrine and tradition practiced within an institution.

Yet religion has never come close to the recognition Mary had when she thought she had lost Him forever. Nor to the recognition given to Peter. Or to Paul on the road.

The only reason to read on is to find Jesus as He is—just as Mary found Him—because religion never had Him to begin with, and the tomb it guards is empty.

If we do not live in Jesus—and He in us—He is no longer present when we come together.

Chapter 4 — When Jesus Lives in His People, His

Ekklesia Happens When They Get Together

Jesus turned everything upside down—or upside right, depending on perspective. “You’ve heard it said... but I tell you” is one of His hallmark phrases. When we receive the revelation of who He is and come to Him for the Life of abiding in Him—and He in us—the purpose, nature, and action of coming together cease to belong to human systems.

Ekklesia is not a thing that needs to be restored. It is not even a thing that can be restored.

“Church” is so deeply ingrained in us that even when we recognize Jesus never said the word, we still assume there must be an *it* that He instituted. We instinctively ask, “If church isn’t it, then what is it?”—as though Jesus left behind a missing structure we are meant to recover. Yet nothing Jesus said or did implies such an *it* at all. The term *ekklesia* is not even central to His message. He used the phrase “My ekklesia” only once, and almost in passing. Religion later layered itself onto the word and retroactively claimed that Jesus “instituted” it.

This is difficult at first—especially for those of us trained to think in terms of attending, beliefs, reforms, traditions, structures, and “getting back to the early church.” But the blindingly obvious truth—once it is seen—is this: ekklesia is not something we do. It describes something that happens.

It happens when Jesus is alive in His people.

It does not happen when people try to do it.

Trying to systematize ekklesia is like trying to systematize hanging out.

For centuries, we have tried to recover ekklesia as a model: a way of meeting, a style of leadership, a flattened hierarchy, a return to homes instead of buildings, participation instead of spectatorship. But this assumes that Jesus instituted something that could be modeled as a religion—when He was instituting a dynamic Life in Him, which cannot be modeled by human hands. The instincts are not merely incomplete; they are based on the wrong assumption entirely. The model itself is the impostor.

Jesus’ ekklesia is not a paradigm that can be modeled to produce Life. It refers to the Life that already exists in His believers.

When Jesus is reduced to theology, services, doctrines, and membership, the resulting gatherings are altogether separate from Jesus’ ekklesia in concept and function—even if His

Book to Date

name is spoken. Jesus' *ekklesia* is formed when He Himself lives in people, and those He calls together share that Life with one another as He leads in Person.

The collective Life within those called together—*this, and nothing else*—is the body of Christ.

Perspective

“Church” has claimed *ekklesia* as its Greek source in English since the Middle Ages. Following Constantine’s legalization of Christianity in 313 AD, the transliterated Latin term *ecclesia* was applied not only to the authorized religious organization, but also to the large, state-sponsored buildings constructed for it. Jesus’ Life expressed within His gathered people was no longer something lived; it was redefined as a place people went. This redefined concept later entered English not as *ekklesia* at all, but as *church*, derived from *kuriakos*—“the Lord’s house”—cementing the shift from people to place.

This was not a shift. It was a deception with consequences measured in Life and death.

The result was not merely a change in terminology, but a change in perceived reality. What people came to recognize as “church” no longer referred to Jesus living in His people, but to an institution that spoke about Him, represented Him, and claimed authority in His name.

Once this redefinition became culture, everything else followed. Authority shifted from Jesus. Leadership roles became career paths. Mediation between people and God was accepted. What had been shared Life in Jesus became formal, managed ritual—along with beliefs and personal behavior.

This did not require malice, nor did it begin as an attempt to hijack Jesus. Constantine perceived the widespread believing in Jesus to be a religion, legalized it as one option among Rome’s many religions, and then led its practice according to Rome’s existing religious order. In doing so, Life was not denied—but it was reclassified. What had *Lived* through people was now life governed as a religion, administered rather than shared, managed rather than trusted.

From the moment of legalization forward, the Roman religious framework layered itself over Jesus, step by step by step. What began as legal recognition hardened into cultural, religious, and governmental pillars. The Life among the people that built them up was replaced by institutional offices that ruled over them.

This layering reshaped what people believed in when they gathered. Participation replaced presence. Order stood in for Life. Instruction, ritual, and oversight became normal, while shared dependence on Jesus quickly faded from view. People were trained to look to official staff for direction rather than to the Life among them. The new religion did not require Jesus to function; it only required His name.

Book to Date

Chapter 5

Jesus' ekklesia did not disappear by accident. It was neutralized through a predictable threefold strategy inherent in a world that revolves around three fundamental forces: **God, Money, and Power**. These strategies were not conceived as a coordinated attack on Christianity, yet in hindsight their effects are unmistakable. Together, they explain how Jesus' living ekklesia was displaced by something else that now bears His name.

1. God — Redefining Where Authority Resides

In Jesus' model, God's power rests in His ekklesia. God defines what is real, what is true, and how reality functions. This stands in direct opposition to how the world operates. "*The kingdom of God has arrived*" is not a slogan—it announces God's authority over reality itself.

When people trust their own perceptions rather than God's self-definition, they build systems to stabilize their version of reality. Religion is one such system. In the case of ekklesia, "church" systematizes "Christian" principles into hierarchy, while Jesus' ekklesias form dynamically as He leads people on mission with the Father.

Scriptural functions meant to operate relationally and responsively, as the Holy Spirit manifests Jesus in each member in lockstep, are converted into staff positions—static, predictable, schedulable. "Church" then interprets Scripture through its own structure, elevates the texts it controls to final authority, and replaces Jesus' ekklesia itself. In doing so, "church" reshapes God, humanity, and even Jesus into its own image.

2. Faith — From Trusting Jesus to Believing About Him

Trusting Jesus—entrusting Him with our life and living in His Life—is replaced by holding correct beliefs about Him. This is the functional role of creeds. Creeds do not summarize faith; they substitute theology *for* the living Jesus.

For example, "churches" produce statements of faith—mini-creeds—confessing Scripture's inspiration and inerrancy while displacing the very directive Scripture gives: to believe in *Him*, the living head of the ekklesia, rather than in statements about Him.

This shift relocates authority. Faith no longer rests in a present Person but in authored statements. Creed-makers gain the power to amend, expand, and include themselves, producing a self-perpetuating justification.

The proliferation of statements of faith across churches and denominations are the descendants of this practice—**creed worship**.

3. Money and Power — Institutional Self-Preservation

Every system, once established—even for good reasons—develops an unavoidable conflict of interest. Livelihoods and authority become tied to continuation. This is why “church” centers on fundraising.

Fundraising occurs in services, online, and through campaigns. The pastor functions as the primary fundraiser, supported by staff and boards. Churches maintain accounts, property, and registrations. Where does most of the money go? To salaries and buildings.

“Church” cannot imagine itself without resources. Once money, power, and identity are bound to survival, theology can no longer remain free. What preserves the structure shapes the message—its self-justification, hierarchy, use of Scripture, and rationale for extracting money.

At the center, “church” behaves as though it holds the keys to salvation and repentance. **Ekklesia, by contrast, doesn’t require a budget.**

Chapter 6 Perspective

I need to get a little technical for a moment.

“Church” has claimed *ekklesia* as its Greek source in English since the Middle Ages. Following Constantine’s legalization of Christianity in 313 AD, the transliterated Latin term *ecclesia* was almost immediately applied not only to the authorized religious body, but also to the large, state-sponsored buildings constructed for it. What had meant *assembly* was relocated—legally, culturally, and physically—into an institution with clergy, hierarchy, and sacred space.

This shift matters.

The English word *church* does not derive from *ekklesia* at all. It comes from the Greek word *kuriakos*, meaning “belonging to the Lord.” Jesus never used that word.

What is often overlooked is that Jesus used the possessive phrase “*My ekklesia*” only once in all four Gospels combined. He used the word *ekklesia* elsewhere, but only once did He

Book to Date

claim it as His. Every other New Testament reference to *ekklesia* that involves His followers either traces back to that single statement or refers to someone else's *ekklesia* entirely.

This makes it absolutely crucial to understand what Jesus meant when He said it.

Jerome was not unaware of these issues. He was classically educated, fluent in Greek and refined Latin, and fully capable of translating *ekklesia* using existing Latin words such as *congregatio*. Instead, he retained *ecclesia*, preserving the institutional meaning already embedded in church culture. This choice parallels his use of *paenitemini* for *metanoeō*—not because better options were unavailable, but because the theological culture had already decided how these words would function.

Jesus' Ekklesia Is Unequaled — Not Like Any Other Ekklesia

The fact that Jesus said “*My ekklesia*” implies that other *ekklesias* already existed. If we begin with a church-first narrative, we naturally assume this is where Jesus announced a new institution. From that assumption, every other reference to *ekklesia* is forced into the same mold.

But *ekklesia* was an old word long before Jesus used it. In ancient Athens, the *ekklesia* was the assembly of citizens gathered to govern civic affairs. In Acts 19, a tradesman who produced idols for Artemis incited fellow craftsmen, who then stirred up the city, resulting in a near riot that rushed into the theater. Luke calls that crowd an *ekklesia*—three times. It was an *ekklesia* formed around a shared identity and a shared purpose, even though that purpose was destructive.

This is the key point: *ekklesia* is defined by who gathers and why they gather.

Some object that civic *ekklesias* should be treated differently from “spiritual” ones. But this only exposes the problem. Translation choices change not because the word changes, but because theology intervenes. The same word is rendered differently to preserve a religious narrative.

The meaning of “*My ekklesia*” is therefore completely dependent on Jesus’ purpose for it. There is no abstract *ekklesia* floating free of purpose. There are only gatherings formed around a specific calling. That purpose is not static, but specific to the moment when the *ekklesia* is called out.

Jesus makes that purpose unmistakably clear in Matthew 16.

What Jesus Meant by “My Ekklesia”

Book to Date

When Jesus spoke the words *My ekklesia*, He had already demonstrated exactly what He meant—not once, but repeatedly.

He first confronted Satan alone. That was not an ekklesia—there was no gathering.

Then He called four men out of their boats. That was His first ekklesia: people called out of ordinary life to be with Him. He added Levi, then others, until they numbered twelve. They traveled with Him, preached with Him, healed with Him, and watched authority exercised firsthand.

This same ekklesia took a second form when Jesus sent the Twelve out under His authority to do the same works without Him physically present.

Later, He formed a third ekklesia when He sent out the Seventy-Two—expanded in number, but unchanged in purpose or power. They returned rejoicing that even demons submitted to them in His name, and Jesus responded by saying He saw Satan fall like lightning.

These are not illustrations. They are definitions. They show what an ekklesia is, how it is called, and the purpose for which it exists.

What is conspicuously absent in every case is an institution. Jesus did not model a system. He released people.

Jesus Rejoices in a Job Well Done. Religion Builds an Institution

Jesus did not model services.

He did not establish a worship schedule.

He did not demonstrate a system for religious maintenance.

He unleashed Life from above into people who trusted Him—and sent them out to do the same.

He rejoiced to His Father that these things were revealed to “little children,” not to the wise and learned.

When Jesus lives in His people, His ekklesia does not need to be organized.
It simply happens.

Chapter 7

Jesus' ekklesia did not disappear by accident. It was neutralized through a predictable threefold strategy inherent in a world that revolves around three fundamental forces: **God, Money, and Power**. These strategies were not conceived as a coordinated attack on Christianity, yet in hindsight their effects are unmistakable. Together, they explain how Jesus' living ekklesia was displaced by something else that now bears His name.

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In Jesus' model, God's power rests in His ekklesia. God defines what is real, what is true, and how reality functions. This stands in direct opposition to how the world operates. "*The kingdom of God has arrived*" is not a slogan—it announces God's authority over reality itself.

When people trust their own perceptions rather than God's self-definition, they build systems to stabilize their version of reality. Religion is one such system. In the case of ekklesia, "church" systematizes "Christian" principles into hierarchy, while Jesus' ekklesias form dynamically as He leads people on mission with the Father.

Scriptural functions meant to operate relationally and responsively, as the Holy Spirit manifests Jesus in each member in lockstep, are converted into staff positions—static, predictable, schedulable. "Church" then interprets Scripture through its own structure, elevates the texts it controls to final authority, and replaces Jesus' ekklesia itself. In doing so, "church" reshapes God, humanity, and even Jesus into its own image.

2. Faith — From Trusting Jesus to Believing About Him

Trusting Jesus—entrusting Him with our life and living in His Life—is replaced by holding correct beliefs about Him. This is the functional role of creeds. Creeds do not summarize faith; they substitute theology *for* the living Jesus.

For example, "churches" produce statements of faith—mini-creeds—confessing Scripture's inspiration and inerrancy while displacing the very directive Scripture gives: to believe in *Him*, the living head of the ekklesia, rather than in statements about Him.

This shift relocates authority. Faith no longer rests in a present Person but in authored statements. Creed-makers gain the power to amend, expand, and include themselves, producing a self-perpetuating justification.

The proliferation of statements of faith across churches and denominations are the descendants of this practice—**creed worship**.

3. Money and Power — Institutional Self-Preservation

Every system, once established—even for good reasons—develops an unavoidable conflict of interest. Livelihoods and authority become tied to continuation. This is why “church” centers on fundraising.

Fundraising occurs in services, online, and through campaigns. The pastor functions as the primary fundraiser, supported by staff and boards. Churches maintain accounts, property, and registrations. Where does most of the money go? To salaries and buildings.

“Church” cannot imagine itself without resources. Once money, power, and identity are bound to survival, theology can no longer remain free. What preserves the structure shapes the message—its self-justification, hierarchy, use of Scripture, and rationale for extracting money.

At the center, “church” behaves as though it holds the keys to salvation and repentance. **Ekklesia, by contrast, doesn’t require a budget.**