

Separation in the New Covenant

No! This is not a leap of illogic. And for two reasons. *First*, as we have seen, evangelism of the ungodly leading to their conversion *must* precede any thought of ‘worship’ that is acceptable to God. On that account, therefore, ‘public worship’ must be ruled utterly out of order. *Secondly*, the assemblies of the *ekklēsia* exist only for believers and the corporate exercise of their spiritual priesthood in mutual edification. Unbelievers, it goes without saying, have no part in this. On these two grounds, public participation in *ekklēsia* life (including the notion of ‘public worship’) ought to be undreamt of: the assemblies of believers should never be prostituted to attract the general public, unbelievers.¹

And that is why we must return to the question of separation.

As we have seen, separation from paganism was to be one of Israel’s leading markers – if not Israel’s greatest marker. It was God’s appointed way of distinguishing his people from all others. So much for the old covenant. But the same has to be said of the *ekklēsia* in the new. Let me prove it.²

The fundamental concept of the *ekklēsia* – the fundamental concept, I repeat – is that believers are the ‘called-out ones’, the ‘separated ones’, separated from the world (1 Cor. 5:12; 2 Cor. 6:14-18). The New Testament is adamant that the *ekklēsia* and the world should be – must be – distinct and separate. The world hates God and his law (Rom. 8:7), and believers are told – commanded – not to love the world (1 John 2:15) since, as James thundered:

¹ Although the new covenant embraces all nationalities whereas the old covenant was limited to Israel (and proselytes), this does not mean we can extrapolate and say that all are embraced in *ekklēsia* assemblies, not merely believers.

² See my ‘No Mixture’ on my sermonaudio.com page.

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You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God (Jas. 4:4).

Believers are in the world but not of it; naturally, they have to have contact with it, but all the while avoid its contamination; they are not to be captivated by it, incorporating its ideas, practices and marketing techniques into the *ekklēsia* to complete a task the Lord never gave them. James 4:4, just quoted, surely rules out tampering with the *ekklēsia* for ‘friendship evangelism’ – friendship with the world.³ Christ, in his great prayer as Mediator, praying for his people, was explicit on the separation of his people from the world:

The world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world (John 17:14-18).

Standing before Pilate, he was blunt:

My kingdom is not of this world... My kingdom is not from here (John 18:36).

Paul leaves believers in no doubt about what has happened to them:

We have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God (1 Cor. 2:12).

[God] has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son (Col. 1:13).

Confronting the vaunted glory of this world, the apostle could not have been more dismissive:

The wisdom of this world is folly with God (1 Cor. 3:19).

Consequently, believers are left with no choice:

³ See my *Relationship*.

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Do not be conformed to this world (Rom. 12:2).

John had no illusions about the two realms; he certainly left his readers in no doubt:

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world – the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and the pride of life – is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever...

No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God. By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother... Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you...

...antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already. Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error...

Everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?... We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one (1 John 2:15-17; 3:9-10,13; 4:3-6; 5:4-5,19).

‘Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you...’. John had learned this from the lips of Christ himself, and learned it well:

If [that is, since] the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master’. If [that is, since] they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep

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yours. But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. Whoever hates me hates my Father also. If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin, but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father. But the word that is written in their law must be fulfilled: ‘They hated me without a cause’ (John 15:18-25).

No wonder James could say to his readers:

As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord (Jas. 5:10).

And, of course, Christ could not have been more explicit:

Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you (Matt. 5:11-12; see 2 Chron. 36:16; Matt. 23:37; Luke 11:50; Acts 7:52; 1 Thess. 2:15; Heb. 11:33-40).

The early church certainly experienced persecution right from the start. It began in Acts 3 – 5; Stephen was martyred (Acts 7); following hard upon his conversion, Paul met it straightaway at Damascus (Acts 9) – and almost everywhere else throughout the remainder of his life, as the rest of Acts shows. And, coming to Revelation, we find John in exile: ‘I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus’ (Rev. 1:9). And it was not just John who was persecuted (Rev. 2:10,13; 3:10, and so on).

Oh yes, faithful prophets and preachers – faithful believers – always have met, and always will meet, opposition, and worse: ‘All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted’ (2 Tim. 3:12). The world hates their separation.

Take the question of the kingdom – Christ’s kingdom – and the believer’s membership of that kingdom; that is, a believer’s

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citizenship.⁴ Nothing better emphasises the concept of separation between the believer and the world, the distinction of the saints from the rest. A believer may be a Briton, an American, or whatever; he has a passport; he has an automatic right of entry into his native land – something denied to non-citizens, foreigners, strangers, aliens: boundaries have to be crossed, conditions have to be met. Thus it is in the world. But the same is true in a spiritual sense; and more so. The believer has a citizenship far more prestigious, far more fundamental, far more separating, than any earthly citizenship could be. He is separated from the world, being a citizen of Christ's kingdom under Christ's law:

Here there is not Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all (Col. 3:11).

When – not if – the clash arises between the kingdom of Christ and the world, the believer's heavenly citizenship trumps all earthly claims. We have a classic example of this in the way the apostles responded to the Jewish council's edict that they should no longer preach the gospel:

Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard (Acts 4:28-29).

And when, following the apostles' defiance in continuing to preach, the council repeated their charge, the forthright apostolic reply left no room for doubt:

We must obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29).

The fact is, of believers it can be said:

Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners [to Christ's kingdom, the *ekklēsia*], but fellow-citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the

⁴ See my 'Thoughts on the Kingdom' on my sermonaudio.com page.

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Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling-place of God in the Spirit (Eph. 2:19-22).

So, as Paul can say of Christ's kingdom:

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise (Gal. 3:28-29).

Our citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20).

Peter, too, spoke of it:

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ: To those who reside as strangers, scattered... Beloved, I urge you as foreigners and strangers... (1 Pet. 1:1; 2:11).

In this, new-covenant believers have an affinity with the believers in the day of the old covenant when they:

...acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth (Heb. 11:13).

By nature, they were in the realm of darkness, but they can now say:

[God] has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son (Col. 1:13).

How? By:

...the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father (Gal. 1:3-4).

And:

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen (Rev. 1:5-6).

Therefore, said the apostle:

We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to

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be saved, through sanctification [separation]⁵ by the Spirit and belief in the truth (2 Thess. 2:13).

And:

...by the sanctifying [separating]⁶ work of the Spirit (1 Pet. 1:2).

Thus ‘separation’ is a key factor of the new covenant – if not *the* key factor – for the way believers live and, especially, for how they regard and conduct the life of the *ekklēsia*. ‘Worship’ is not exempt from this principle.

Calvin:

There is no sacrifice more acceptable to God than when we sincerely and heartily connect ourselves with the society of the righteous, and being knit together by the sacred bond of godliness, cultivate and maintain with them brotherly goodwill. In this consists the communion of saints which separates them from the degrading pollutions of the world, that they may be the holy and peculiar people of God...

We cannot be united into the one body of the church under God, if we do not break off all the bonds of impiety, separate ourselves from idolaters, and keep ourselves pure and at a distance from all the pollutions which corrupt and vitiate the holy service of God...

We cannot be judged and acknowledged to be [God’s] servants unless we depart from sin, and practice holiness. God is in himself the fountain of righteousness, and he must necessarily hate all iniquity, unless we could suppose that he should deny himself; and we have fellowship with him only on the terms of separation from unrighteousness...

Salvation [cannot] be hoped for, except we be separated from the world.⁷

⁵ See my *Fivefold*.

⁶ See previous note.

⁷ Calvin’s comments on Ps. 16:3,4; 97:10; 1 Pet. 3:21. Calvin, alas, because of his theological system – including infant baptism – held to mixed churches comprising regenerate and unregenerate, thus contradicting the scriptural principles he so eloquently argued above.

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But we do not need Calvin to tell us what's what; long before Calvin, Paul had set it out in black and white, doing so in this paramount passage:

Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers.⁸ For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said: 'I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty'. Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness⁹ to completion in the fear of God (2 Cor. 6:14 – 7:1).

Do not miss how extensively Paul called upon the old covenant in making his case. I referred to this when speaking of God's insistence on Israel's separation. This point is of such importance, I want to set it out in some detail.

The apostle's use of 'yoked' is a clear echo of God's command to Israel:

You shall not sow your vineyard with two kinds of seed... You shall not plough with an ox and a donkey [yoked] together. You shall not wear cloth of wool and linen mixed together (Deut. 22:9-11).¹⁰

⁸ See my 'No Mixture' on my sermonaudio.com page.

⁹ The root meaning of holiness is separation.

¹⁰ As Paul had already said to the Corinthians: 'Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth' (1 Cor. 5:6-8).

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The Israelites were forbidden to yoke an ox and a donkey – a clean with an unclean animal.

As for God dwelling among his people:

Let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst (Ex. 25:8).

You shall not make idols for yourselves or erect an image or pillar, and you shall not set up a figured stone in your land to bow down to it, for I am the LORD your God. You shall keep my sabbaths and reverence my sanctuary: I am the LORD. If you walk in my statutes and observe my commandments and do them, then... I will make my dwelling among you, and my soul shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people. I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that you should not be their slaves. And I have broken the bars of your yoke and made you walk erect (Lev. 26:1-4,11-13).

I will be the God of all the clans of Israel, and they shall be my people. They shall be my people, and I will be their God (Jer. 31:1; 32:38).

My servant David shall be king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd. They shall walk in my rules and be careful to obey my statutes. They shall dwell in the land that I gave to my servant Jacob, where your fathers lived. They and their children and their children's children shall dwell there forever, and David my servant shall be their prince forever. I will make a covenant of peace with them. It shall be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will set them in their land and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in their midst forevermore. My dwelling place shall be with them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD who sanctifies Israel, when my sanctuary is in their midst forevermore (Ezek. 37:24-28).

Consequently:

Depart, depart, go out from there; touch no unclean thing; go out from the midst of her; purify yourselves, you who bear the vessels of the LORD (Isa. 52:11).

I will bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you are scattered, with a mighty hand and an

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outstretched arm, and with wrath poured out... For on my holy mountain, the mountain height of Israel, declares the Lord GOD, there all the house of Israel, all of them, shall 'serve' me in the land. There I will accept them... with all your sacred offerings. As a pleasing aroma I will accept you, when I bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you have been scattered. And I will manifest my holiness among you in the sight of the nations. And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I bring you into the land of Israel, the country that I swore to give to your fathers. And there you shall remember your ways and all your deeds with which you have defiled yourselves, and you shall loathe yourselves for all the evils that you have committed. And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I deal with you for my name's sake, not according to your evil ways, nor according to your corrupt deeds, O house of Israel, declares the Lord GOD. (Ezek. 20:34,40-44).

And so to God's promise to the obedient:

I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son (2 Sam. 7:14; 1 Chron. 17:13).

Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth, everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made (Isa. 43:6-7).

The number of the children of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. And in the place where it was said to them: 'You are not my people', it shall be said to them: 'Children of the living God' (Hos. 1:10).

Paul's heavy use of old-covenant material to strengthen his argument in 2 Corinthians 6:14 – 7:1, just quoted, plays powerfully into my thesis: as with Israel in the old covenant, so with the *ekklēsia* in the new – separation is key. Consequently, the merest hint of a suggestion that believers might encourage pagans to join them in their assemblies ought to be out of the question.

Separation played a vital role in Paul's underlying argument when he was dealing with the case of discipline in the Corinthian *ekklēsia*; having spoken of the old-covenant shadow of the passover with its stress on holiness and separation, the apostle

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came to his stark peroration with a thundering emphasis on the distinction, the separate-ness, of the *ekklēsia* from the world:

What have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church [the little ones within] whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. 'Purge the evil person from among you' (1 Cor. 5:12-13).

Clearly, for Paul there was a great gulf between the *ekklēsia* and the world. The echo to the way Nehemiah dealt with Jews and pagans over the sabbath in the days of the old covenant (Neh. 9:13-15) – to which I have already referred¹¹ – is unmissable. There is only one conclusion: the distinction between the *ekklēsia* and the world, the separation between the *ekklēsia* and the world, is paramount, and must be resolutely maintained!

The majority of evangelicals today, however, do all they can to make 'church' attractive to pagans; from the opening welcome to the closing farewell, from the decor of the building to the ambience of the meeting, from the style of 'worship' to the preaching, from the 'all one together' social interaction to the provision of a range of diversions – all is designed to encourage unbelievers to participate in virtually every activity of the *ekklēsia*. Certainly, nothing must be done to confront them or make them feel uncomfortable. How contrary to biblical principles! How different to what we know about the early believers from extra-scriptural historical records, records which confirm that the early believers – certainly post-Nero (AD54-68) – regarded themselves and their assemblies as secret societies, even to the extent of having stewards at the doors to vet newcomers.¹²

The apostles and the early believers never bothered their heads about attracting the 'unchurched', the 'not-yet-Christians'. In fact, the notion of anybody being 'unchurched' would absolutely flummox them. Where, in Scripture, do we come across

¹¹ See the chapter 'Israel's Separation'.

¹² See Alan Kreider: 'Worship and Evangelism in Pre-Christendom (The Laing Lecture 1994)' in *Vox Evangelica*, 1994.

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believers debating the question of attracting anybody to ‘church’?

An objection

What about 1 Corinthians 14:23-25?

I readily admit that in the early days of the new-covenant age, according to these verses, unbelievers would, from time to time, come into an *ekklēsia* assembly – stray in, wander in, I might say, yes. But all the evidence is that their presence was unusual and unsought (maybe it was feared – who knows if any of the unknown visitors might be spies?), and when it did occur, it was merely occasional:

If the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in [languages], *and some who do not understand or some unbelievers come in*, will they not say that you are out of your mind? But *if an unbeliever or someone who does not understand comes in* while everybody is prophesying, he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner and will be judged by all, and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So he will fall down and ‘worship’ God, exclaiming: ‘God is really among you!’ (1 Cor. 14:23-25).

‘*If an unbeliever... comes in*’. Or, as James puts it: ‘Suppose a man [an unbelieving man, that is] comes into your meeting’ (Jas. 2:2). Do not miss the ‘suppose’. I admit that James did not literally use the word, but that is what he meant: ‘For if any have come into...’. Again, I know he talked of ‘synagogue’, but he was, in truth, speaking of the believers’ ‘meeting’ or ‘assembly’.¹³ ‘Suppose an unbeliever comes into one of your meetings, attends one of your assemblies...’.

¹³ See Joseph Henry Thayer: *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Ninth Printing 1991. ‘This is the only place in the New Testament where the Jewish word [synagogue] is used for a Christian congregation’ (Charles John Ellicott: *Commentary*; see also Jamieson-Fausset-Brown; Matthew Poole: *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, Vol.3, The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, reprinted 1975; M.R.Vincent *Word Studies in the New Testament*, Macdonald Publishing Company, Florida).

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The fact is, the Corinthian passage does not say unbelievers were present at *ekklēsia* meetings. Not at all! We have to remember that the thrust of the entire passage – its context – is that believers assemble for mutual edification. Consequently, their meetings must be conducted in a fitting, suitable or appropriate way. What they must not be is something akin to a madhouse! How could such confusion edify anybody? What glory would that be to God? Just think what a field day an unbeliever would have with it! Moreover, think of the opposite: think of an unbeliever overhearing an assembly engaged in profitable mutual edification. He wouldn't make head or tail of it, of course, but it would surely make him think: 'God is really among you!' And who knows? And so on.

But the notion that the first believers were actively encouraging unbelievers to attend their meetings, that they were going so far as to make this their number-one priority, devising and putting on events and activities designed to attract as many unbelievers as possible, and building or acquiring larger buildings to cater for the swelling numbers and the necessary events to maintain their interest, is simply fantastical. Cloud-cuckoo land! And worse!

Take the entire context of a 1 Corinthians 14 assembly: there is a Godward aspect (1 Cor. 14:2), a self-ward (individual) aspect (1 Cor. 14:4) and an *ekklēsia*-ward aspect for its edification (*passim*). What there is not is any thought of designing the assembly with pagans in mind – certainly not to attract them!

But what of the pagan's 'worship' in 1 Corinthians 14:24-25? Does it not torpedo my thesis?

Peterson:

Paul's single application of the common 'worship' term *proskunein* is in 1 Corinthians 14:24-25, where he mentions the possibility of an unbelieving 'outsider' entering a church gathering when 'all prophesy'... The 'worship' described here is an act of submission or unconditional surrender to God... Such language suggests the conversion of the unbeliever... Although the conversion of an unbeliever in the course of the church

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‘service’ [Peterson was using Christendom-speak] is much to be desired, evangelism, however,¹⁴ is not the primary purpose of the gathering, according to 1 Corinthians 14.¹⁵

Again:

Although the apostle’s main point is to encourage the readers to minister effectively to one another as the body of Christ, his concern is that even the unbelieving stranger should be able to understand what is said, be convinced by it and be converted (1 Cor. 14:22-25). [But] there is no warrant from this text for saying that every [any? – DG] Christian meeting should be designed fundamentally to appeal to unbelievers.¹⁶ On the other hand, as the church is edified intensively – being strengthened, consolidated and preserved as the community of God’s people – it may also be edified extensively – being enlarged by the conversion of those who may be visiting or invited by Christian friends.¹⁷

Nothing that I have said should be misconstrued to make it seem that I am against sinners being converted when observing believers in assembly. Of course not! But this is a far cry – a far cry, I repeat – from believers tinkering with the *ekklēsia* to encourage unbelievers to join them. How grievously does contemporary church life injure God’s purpose in forming the *ekklēsia*, his ‘plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things’! God’s plan was:

...that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places... To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen (Eph. 3:9-10,21).

I am afraid that many contemporary churches convey quite another message!

¹⁴ Original ‘however, evangelism’.

¹⁵ Peterson p196.

¹⁶ Of course, meetings can be held to preach the gospel to unbelievers – but they should be kept quite distinct from assemblies of believers. See my *Gadfly*.

¹⁷ Peterson p211.

Excursus: the Lord's supper

If any aspect of *ekklēsia* life speaks of separation, surely it must be the Lord's supper. The apostle issued a stark warning to the Corinthians:

Anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world (1 Cor. 11:29-32).

Whatever that warning involves, at the very least it must prohibit pagan participation in the supper. Yet contemporary observance of the supper is becoming increasingly inclusive; not infrequently it takes place even in the time of 'public worship', even in the middle of 'a service', with no warning – or, at best, a cursory mention of it.¹⁸

There are other concerns. Peterson had some powerful words on contemporary observance of the Lord's supper – which, if anything has been institutionalised out of all recognition, this has – saying:

It is the 'horizontal' significance of the Lord's supper that is so often played down in contemporary practice. Many churches need to reassess the way in which they celebrate the supper, to recover something of this essential dimension. According to Paul, those who disregard the responsibility to welcome and care for fellow-believers in this context cannot be 'worshipping' or 'serving' God acceptably!¹⁹

Do not miss the proper emphasis on the mutual care of believers for each other which is enconced at the centre of *ekklēsia* life.

¹⁸ In any case, churches and their elders cannot evade their responsibility by issuing a warning *intended for believers* in the (often vain) hope that pagans might be stopped in their tracks, even though the church is doing all it can in every other way to make pagans feel at home. Do unbelievers fix their eyes on the bared teeth or the wagging tail?

¹⁹ Peterson p218.

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This – not making pagans at home in ‘church attendance’ – must be high on the believer’s agenda.

What did Paul mean when he spoke of those who participate in the supper communing with ‘the blood’ and ‘the body of Christ’ (1 Cor. 10:16-22)? The Greek word he used – *koinōnia* – means ‘fellowship, association, communion, joint participation’, concerning which Paul compared Jewish, pagan and Christian meals. As Gordon D.Fee observed:

Precisely what [Paul] intended by that term is problematic... The problem has to do with whether Paul’s point – or emphasis – is that in sacred meals, one has *koinōnia*²⁰ with the deity (in the Christian’s case, with Christ himself), or with fellow-participants in the meal as they ‘worship’ the deity by sacrifice and by eating in his/her honour. Because of 1 Corinthians 10:17, the emphasis would seem to fall on the union between the participants. The ‘fellowship’... was most likely a celebration of their common life in Christ, based on the new covenant in his blood that had previously bound them together in union with Christ by his Spirit... They were thus together in his presence, where, as host at his table, he shared anew with them the benefits of the atonement... Since... the cup is specifically interpreted by the Lord (*cf.* Mark 14:24), and continued to be so understood in the early church (1 Cor. 11:25), as ‘my blood of the new covenant’, this language almost certainly refers to their sharing in the provisions and benefits of that covenant.

Fee explained that Paul was teaching believers that when they were participating in the supper:

...they were by faith looking back... and were thus realising again its benefits... In this way, they shared ‘in the blood of Christ’... Thus [the apostle]... clearly explains²¹ in 1 Corinthians 10:17, they are herewith affirming that through Christ’s death they are ‘partners’ in the redeemed community, the new eschatological people of God... By this meal, they affirm what

²⁰ I have anglicised the original Greek.

²¹ Original ‘interprets’.

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the Spirit has already brought about through the death and resurrection of Christ.²²

As Paul put it:

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptised into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and all were made to drink of one Spirit (1 Cor. 12:12-13).

All this confirms the essential point; namely, that separation is to be the hallmark of the *ekklēsia*. Church is for believers!

One final comment on separation. Some think of it in terms of separation from false teachers, their preaching and their practice, and confine their concern to such. Now there never will be a shortage of false teachers trying to infiltrate the *ekklēsia* and infect it with their doctrine and their works (Matt. 24:11-13, 23-26; Mark 13:21-23; Luke 21:8; Acts 20:28-31; 2 Cor. 11:12-15; Gal 2:4; 1 Tim. 4:1-4; 2 Tim. 3:1-9; 4:1-4; 2 Pet. 2:1-22; Jude 3-25), and a heavy responsibility is laid upon believers – especially, but not only, the elders – to keep the *ekklēsia* clear of such (Matt. 7:15-23; 1 Cor. 5:1-13; Gal. 1:6-9; 2:11-21; 2 Thess. 3:6, 14; 1 Tim. 4:1-7; Tit. 3:10-11). But, as we have seen, the *ekklēsia* must be kept separate, not only from false brothers and their pernicious doctrines and ways, but from pagans and their principles, their ideas, schemes, values, and such like.

²² Gordon D.Fee: *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, William B.Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, reprinted 1991, pp466-471,549-551.