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The church is the body of Christ and not just a gathering of believers who meet together every week. We must make sure then that it is that Body that we are building and not just a "religious Christian group". Any man can organize a religious group. It takes grace and an anointing from God however, to build Christ's Body - and for this we have to deny ourselves, die daily and be filled with the Holy Spirit.

The Israelites under the old covenant were a congregation and not a body. Many large churches today also are congregations and not a body. Some smaller house-churches are a little better - they are clubs but not a body. But Jesus is building His body.

The first body of Christ was seen by man, lying in a manger (a feeding-trough for cattle). The reproach of that humiliating birth was the mark by which Christ's body was identified by the shepherds (See Luke 2:12). It was again, in reproach that Christ's body finally hung on a criminal's cross at Calvary. From birth to death, the first body of Christ was characterized by reproach from the secular world as well as the religious world.

Any true expression of the body of Christ today will suffer the same reproach from the world and from Babylonian Christendom. If our local church does not have such a covering of 'the reproach of Christ', over it, it is possible that we have become compromisers, and have not gone "outside the camp of Babylon" (Heb.13:13). There is however a vast difference between the reproach of Christ and any reproach that is the result of our own sin or foolishness or lukewarmness. We should not mistake one for the other.

It was written of Jesus that "there was no attractiveness in Him at all.....He was despised and not esteemed" (Isa.53:2, 3). His glory was in His inner life - full of grace and truth - which was hidden from most men (John 1:14). Our local churches too must not be attractive - either to the world or to Babylonian Christendom. The church must be attractive only to those who come inside seeking for a godly life. The tent of the tabernacle had beautiful curtains on the inside. But the outer covering was of dark brown ram's skins covered with dust and dirt. The beauty was all on the inner curtains, inside the tent. The Bride of Christ also is "glorious in her inner life" (Psa. 45:13). And "over her inner glory there will be a covering (of reproach)" (Isa.4:5).

This is where the leaders of the church have a great responsibility. The way they lead the church forward is going to determine whether the church is going to be like Jesus Who was not esteemed by men, or whether it will be praised and honoured by the world. If we seek for commendation from the world or from other carnal or soulless Christians, then we will certainly end up building Babylon. When we become popular and accepted by Christendom in general, we can be certain that we have missed the footsteps of Jesus altogether.

Jesus said, "Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matt.5:11,12). Herod and his soldiers were eager to kill that first body of Christ, the baby Jesus, 20 centuries ago. And there are many who are eager to destroy the beginnings of the body of Christ in many places today. Joseph protected that body by being sensitive to God's voice and by being quick to obey what God told him to do (Matt.2:13-15). We who have responsibility in Christ's church have also got to be like Joseph. We have to be 'listeners' - listening to what the Holy Spirit tells us, and quick to obey what we are told. If we don't listen and obey, then the body of Christ in our locality will suffer loss in some way - and we can be held responsible for that in the final day. We have to take our responsibility seriously in this matter, for we have to give an account to God for every soul committed to our charge (Heb.13:17).