Five Biblical Principles of Church Government

(That You Have Never Ever In Your Entire Life Heard Preached From A Pulpit)

GERALD R. THOMPSON

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 1

1st Principle - THE DIFFUSION PRINCIPLE OF AUTHORITY 2
All God-given Authority Is Diffuse, Not Concentrated 2
Diffusion of Authority Within the Church 4

2nd Principle - OF PRIESTHOODS AND CLERGY 7
A Singular Priesthood in the Church 7
Establishment of the New Priesthood 10
Clergy? What Clergy? 11

3rd Principle - SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY AND THE RIGHT TO RULE 13
Sacramental Authority 13
Spiritual Gifts 17
Spiritual Offices 19

4th Principle - THE CHURCH AS INSTITUTION AND ASSOCIATION 23
Dual Nature of the Church 23
Government by Consent, Not Decree 27

5th Principle - THE CHURCH AS A CORPORATION 31
The Invisible Church: Head and Body 31
The Visible Church: Board and Officers 33
Cheaters! 36

THE VISIBLE CHURCH IN REAL LIFE 38
Concentration, Not Diffusion (Rejection of 1st Principle) 38
Reestablishing the Priesthood (Rejection of 2nd Principle) 40
Assertion of Spiritual Authority (Rejection of 3rd Principle) 42
The Visible and Invisible Church Are One (Rejection of 4th Principle) 45
Rejection of Lay Leadership (Rejection of 5th Principle) 47

OF THE OFFICE OF PASTOR 49
Of Sheep and Shepherds 49
Pastors and Elders Not the Same 53
Is Pastor Even A Separate Office? 55

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE? 58
Religious Corruption 58
Starting Fresh 60

FINAL THOUGHTS 61

[Caution: If you don't want to know what it is your church and your minister have not been telling you all these years, put this essay down now and read something else. If you aren't willing to think for yourself and to search for the truth *no matter where it may lead*, stop right here. This essay will bring you nothing but pain. *Ignorance is bliss*.]

INTRODUCTION

> *For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?* 1 Pet. 4:17.

Ah yes, one of my all time favorite Bible verses. Why? Because long story short: *It's time for us to get our own house in order, people (who claim to be the people of God)!* And for all of you hyper-dispensationalists - no, this verse does not apply solely to Jews.

If you've read my *Call For Reclaiming Church Government*, you will see that I've taken a rather severe position with respect to the role (or lack thereof) of clergy in the Church. After listening to comments from readers and thinking on the matter some more, I decided to offer some additional considerations supported by a biblical analysis. The *Call*, after all, only puts forward propositions and doesn't provide any scriptural proofs or underlying analysis. But perhaps now is a good time to expand on the subject to give some context to the propositions I have put forward.

In order to understand the biblical nature of church government, we need to examine five key biblical principles, namely: 1) the diffusion principle of authority and how it applies to the Church; 2) the role of the clergy and the universal priesthood of believers; 3) the nature of spiritual authority - who has it, what it can be used for, and whether it gives anyone the right to rule others in the Church; 4) how the heavenly or invisible Church interrelates with the earthly or visible church; and 5) the nature of the Church as a corporation and what that means with respect to its internal governing structure. I doubt you have ever heard any one of these five principles preached from a pulpit in any church.

There is a general principle in scripture that evidence of a fact or a proposition should be established upon the testimony of two or three witnesses. Deut. 17:6; 19:15; Matt. 18:16, 20; 1 Tim. 5:19. Here, I suggest, we may take each of the five biblical principles as a witness, which when put together are found to always be in agreement pointing to the exact same conclusions. Thus, the five principles provide a *quintuple witness* of the analysis I am putting forward. In this way we may know that the analysis is true and firm.

Now, let me provide a brief overview of these five principles so you can see the order and progression of the overall analysis. The 1st Principle (diffusion of authority) will lay the foundation that God has not put anyone in charge of the worldwide Church except Jesus (who is in heaven at the moment), leaving the Church without a visible (*i.e.*, human) head until Christ returns.

The 1st Principle leaves open the question of whether God has entrusted leadership of the church *at the local level* to various "spiritual persons." So, the 2nd Principle addresses the question of whether

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God has entrusted church leadership to the clergy or a priesthood. We then move on to the 3rd Principle, where the question is whether the distribution of spiritual authority via the sacraments, spiritual gifts, or spiritual offices puts anyone in particular in charge of the church.

The 4th Principle will help us examine the difference between the way the invisible Church which God has instituted is governed, and the way visible church organizations are governed. When we get to the 5th Principle, (the Church as a corporation) we will find out who is actually in charge of God's Church until Christ returns.

Following these, I will take a look at how modern churches function in real life, and the extent to which they follow these biblical principles of church government. I will wrap up this essay with an examination of the office of pastor in greater detail, and also ask the question, *Where Do We Go From Here*?

[Note: I know the terminology gets confusing at times, but I view the *heavenly* Church as functionally equivalent to the *spiritual* Church, the *invisible* Church, and the *universal* Church. Similarly, when it comes to the *earthly* church, it is functionally equivalent to the *temporal* church, the *visible* church, and the *local* church. For purposes of this essay, the distinction I wish to make is between the Church body that *God* has created and the church organizations that *people* have made. This distinction is the key to understanding the matter of church government.]

1st Principle - THE DIFFUSION PRINCIPLE OF AUTHORITY

> *God hates concentrations of power. All the authority delegated by Him to mankind is spread out so that ultimately, no one is in charge of everyone else. And this is no less true in the Church than it is in the rest of society.*

All God-given Authority Is Diffuse, Not Concentrated

The Diffusion Principle of authority is that *all God-given authority is diffuse, not concentrated* - in other words, spread out among a lot of people - *and no one is ultimately in charge of everyone else*. This principle has three main sub-points: 1) God delegates authority via His covenants with people (that's how people get authority in the first place); 2) God hasn't given any person (or subset of people) more authority than everyone else; and 3) the diffusion of powers is the rule (*i.e.*, there are no exceptions).

I first developed this analysis in *Legal Foundations: The Framework of Law*, ch. 7 ("Legal Institutions"). There, I was concerned with the really big picture - the distribution of authority among the various divine covenants, and especially between the four basic social institutions, *i.e.*, individuals, families, the Church and nations. The idea was that God never concentrated authority or power in any one of these basic social institutions, but made them co-equal with each other. That is, He gave them non-overlapping authorities so they would not interfere with each other, and none of them could claim supremacy over the others.

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Thus, for starters, God never concentrated power or authority in either the Church or civil rulers when compared with individuals and families. The two most common governmental errors, historically, have been to allow too much power to be exercised by either civil rulers or religious authorities to the detriment of individuals and families. By God's design, true liberty is achieved only when the rightful authority of individuals and families is respected and secured by civil rulers and religious institutions.

But the Diffusion Principle does not merely apply *between* social institutions, it also applies *within* each social institution separately.

So while individual self-government is co-equal with national authority under God, all self-governments (that is, all *individuals*) are also co-equal with each other. God gave each individual person co-equal authority and no person has any legitimate claim to an inherent right to rule over other individuals. Commonly, we would say that *all men are created equal*. See also John Locke's *First Treatise on Government* (1680), where he argues for the proposition that *all men are born free*. By this he meant all people are equally free from being ruled by others, and supported his analysis with an examination of the book of *Genesis*.

To this end, consider Gen. 1:28, also known as the Dominion Mandate. There, God gave mankind authority over the earth, all the fish, all the birds, and all the animals (literally, every thing that moves on the earth, with emphasis on *thing*). In the lexicon of the Bible, a man is not a *thing*, but a *being* (Gen. 2:7), since people are made in the image of God, but animals are not. So when we look at the Dominion Mandate, no dominion (or *the right to rule*) over other men (or *beings*) is granted. The conclusion is that no human has the inherent right to rule over another human, because such an authority would require an express grant from God, and He gave none.

Similarly, all families have co-equal authority *compared to each other*, and no one can rightfully claim familial supremacy over anyone else's family. Biblically, there is no centralized clearinghouse for getting permission to marry, to have children, or to take dominion. There is no overriding patriarchy or matriarchy built into society. Thus, when two people get married they leave the authority of their parents and start a new family that has all the same inherent authority as any other family. Gen. 2:24. *All families are equal*, and have equal authority.

I won't summarize the analysis here, but again Locke's *First Treatise on Government* (1680) is a useful resource on this question. The purpose of Locke's First Treatise was to argue against Robert Filmer's book *Patriarcha*, which to the modern mind was a defense of the divine right of kings, a position which Locke completely destroyed. Yet, Filmer didn't argue that the English king had special divine authority merely because he was specially chosen by God, as most people today assume. Rather, as suggested by the title, *Patriarcha* was essentially an argument that the king had this right as the *heir of Adam* (the first man) by the *right of patriarchy*.

Filmer argued the English king was the patriarch (or the head of the family) of the entire nation of England and stood in the same place as Adam would occupy if he were still alive. *As if* Adam would

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continue to possess familial authority over all other families of the earth, merely because his was first. So Locke's analysis was largely a deconstruction of patriarchy as a model for the transmission of authority down through the generations. Which, for our purposes, reduces to this: *no man has any patriarchal authority beyond his own immediate family*. Thus we must regard all families (irrespective of time, person or place) as co-equal in authority with each other.

Similarly as to nations and their governments. When God created the nations post-Tower of Babel, He did not put them in any kind of hierarchy. No nation had any more (or any different kind of) authority than any other nation. No nation had the right to rule over any other nation. There is no right of conquest, *per se*, and no right of nation-building in the laws of nature and nature's God. No nation has the right to dominate any other nation either by outside force or internal struggle. As the scripture teaches, God made each of the nations on the earth, and He alone determines where each nation should dwell and how long they should live there. Acts 17:26.

Consider the opening clause of the *Declaration of Independence* (1776): "When in the Course of human Events, it becomes necessary for one People to dissolve the Political Bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the Powers of the Earth, the separate and equal Station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them ..." What is that statement, if not a claim that this new nation being formed will, at its creation, stand on an equal footing with the most powerful nation on earth at the time (Great Britain)? And, that this is an inherent right conferred on all nations by the laws of nature and nature's God.

Therefore, small nations are co-equal in authority with large nations, new nations are co-equal in authority with old nations, and all ethnic lines and nationalities are co-equal in authority as well.

Diffusion of Authority Within the Church

Now let's consider how the Diffusion Principle applies to the Church. And the very *first* question you should ask yourself is whether God would, could or should have dealt with the Church any differently than He has dealt with the other social institutions He has created in terms of the distribution of authority. Is God going to change His whole *modus operandi* of dealing with people, just because the Church is involved?

We already know: 1) God delegates authority via His covenants with people; 2) God hasn't given anyone an unequal authority; and 3) there are no exceptions. So as to the first point, which divine covenant applies with respect to the Church? The new covenant in Christ - the best expression of which is in the Great Commission:

> And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." Mat. 28:18-20.

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This is the clearest statement in the New Testament of a delegation of authority from God to man. Jesus said, in essence, "I have all the authority there is in the world, and here's the specific authority I want you to carry out on behalf of the Church." So yes, the Church conforms to the first point as much as any other social institution.

Who Has Church Authority?

As to the second point, we need to ask whether the authority granted by way of the Great Commission has been vested only in one person, vested only in a specific group of people, or distributed in any manner which is unequal. Who was the Great Commission applicable to?

It is apparent the new covenant in Christ was not given only to one person, because there were eleven people who first heard it, and they all stood in equal position and authority with respect to each other when it was given. Further, if the covenant was limited only to those who first heard it, that would result in a very short-lived Church, *i.e.*, the Church would have died when the last of the eleven disciples died.

On the other hand, the covenant cannot be considered to be applicable solely to the physical descendants of any of the initial eleven apostles. The very fact the covenant is *spiritual* in nature demands that it cannot be made applicable to anyone by reason of biology, *i.e.*, physical descendancy. Participation in the Church covenant is obtained only by spiritual means, that is, faith. Do I really have to prove in detail that Church authority (*i.e.*, the Great Commission) is not transmitted to people by means of a physical birth? Rather, Church authority is transmitted to people via a second or spiritual birth. So who the physical descendants of the original disciples were is irrelevant.

Is there any way the new covenant in Christ can be taken as limited to the initial apostles/disciples and their specific *designees* (*i.e.*, people they chose)? No, because a divine covenant is not an agreement between men that can be assigned to a new party like a business contract. Every person entering into the covenant must come to God directly, not through an assignment, a delegation, or by referral of an existing member, as the means of gaining participation in it. Quite simply, none of the eleven disciples could give their authority away to anyone else. All that was in their power was to invite other people to join in participation - but they did not have the authority to decide who those future believers would be.

When we consider the nature of the new covenant in Christ as a divine covenant, it is evident that it is different from other divine covenants. All of the other divine covenants - Adamic, Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic - run to the natural/physical/biological descendants of the initial recipients. But don't make the mistake of assuming (as some Christians have through the years) that participation in the Church covenant is something that can be passed from one person to another as an inheritance or via family lines. Your parents can't get you into the kingdom of heaven.

Each person is responsible for his own sin and his own salvation. This is a principle far more

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ancient than the Great Commission. "The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father, nor the father suffer for the iniquity of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself." Ezek 18:20, written 600 years before the Great Commission.

Similarly, the appropriation of God's grace and the redemption He provides is profoundly individual. "To him all the prophets bear witness that *everyone who believes* in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name." Acts 10:43. "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to *everyone who believes*, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." Rom. 1:16. Neither physical birth nor infant baptism will get you there.

Therefore, each person is accountable for his or her own sins on an individual basis, and each person can only obtain God's grace and redemption on an individual basis. Unless the authority granted by the Great Commission is also delegated to people solely on an individual basis, nothing makes sense. The nature of the problem (sin) is individual, the nature of the remedy (redemption) is individual, and the nature of the means of obtaining that remedy (covenant authority) is individual. These all have to line up, or the salvation process won't work. The Church covenant only applies to individuals based on faith - *individual faith*.

Consequently, if you become a Christian as an individual, then you receive the authority of the Great Commission as an individual - without exception. Thus, in every way is the Diffusion Principle proved to be the operative principle with regard to Church authority. If you are a member of the invisible Church, you have no more Church authority than any other believer, and no other believer has any more authority than you. Personally, I find that terribly liberating.

Who Is in Charge of the Church?

Additionally, the scripture indicates very clearly that Jesus Christ is the head of His body, the Church. "And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church." Eph. 1:22. "... Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior." Eph. 5:23. "And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent." Col. 1:18. *See also*, Col. 2:19.

But Jesus is not here on earth at present. He is the Head of the Church in heaven, but on the earth He is absent. So although the universal or heavenly Church is one body *spiritually* under the headship of Christ (hereinafter I will refer to this as the *invisible Church*), the headship of Christ is limited to the spiritual or heavenly realm.

Which means the Church is *decentralized* in its temporal or earthly government (which I will refer to as the *visible church*). That's because no one speaks for Christ or is authorized to act in His name, place and stead to govern either the invisible Church or visible church while Jesus is in heaven. Each local body or group of believers is separate and self-governing as each sees fit. I will explore this distinction between the visible and invisible Church in more detail under the 4th

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Principle below.

No person or group of people is the head of the Church, because Christ alone is the Head. Thus, all churches report to Christ, and none report to each other by divine command. Which is the same as saying that all churches are co-equal, and no church has the right to rule over or dominate other churches. And in reality, how could it be otherwise? The head of the Church is absent from the earth. For the time being, His rule is limited to heaven. Jesus said, "*My kingdom is not of this world*." Jn. 18:36. This is a pretty strong argument for the *lack* of a divine ruling authority within the visible church.

On the plus side, each group, body, assembly, association or church is free to exercise that self-government which God both allows and encourages. Each local church is also secure in the knowledge that they are truly not accountable to any other group, etc. for how they do that. On the negative side, some groups choose to govern themselves in absolutely horrible ways. One of the major outgrowths of decentralization is the fracturing of the visible church into denominations, essentially destroying any unity in Christ which may exist in the spiritual realm.

Nonetheless, this negative impact does not operate to change reality. God has not placed anyone on earth in charge of His worldwide Church either to prevent the formation of denominations or to prevent abusive group regulation. And until Jesus returns to take charge of the Church on earth, that's the way things will stay.

2nd Principle - OF PRIESTHOODS AND CLERGY

> *No one in the Church is a priest over anyone else. All believers in Christ have equal access to God compared to each other. Further, there is no clergy-laity distinction in the Church since there is no division in the body of Christ.*

At this point, I have established a baseline principle that all believers have an equal authority derived from the Great Commission to carry out the mission of the Church. Now the question is whether there is a special class of spiritual persons (specifically, a priesthood) in the Church that would give them an unequal authority.

A Singular Priesthood in the Church

If you start with the assumption that there is only one true God, which is the God revealed in the Bible, then certain things follow of logical necessity. Of necessity, all other gods are false. Of necessity, the only valid priesthoods are the ones established by the one true God, and all other priests and priesthoods are false. And if the one true God should restrict the only human priesthood He has authorized to a particular ethnic nation, then by definition there are no, and there cannot be any, other human priesthoods which can later arise legitimately outside of that ethnic nation.

What I have just described is exactly the situation which the scripture indicates the world is now in.

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Let's set aside consideration of the priesthood of Melchizedek for a moment (which I will come back to). God only ever authorized one human priesthood, namely, the Levitical priesthood of the ethnic Jews under the Mosaic covenant. Further, God has not established any other human priesthood since. Therefore, of logical necessity, all claims by people to be priests of God apart from the Jews (*i.e.*, ethnic Israel) are false and invalid, without exception.

If you are skeptical of this claim, I ask you to look at the biblical evidence. How did God establish the Levitical priesthood, and to whom did it apply? For that we have to go back to the establishment of the Mosaic covenant.

> "Then bring near to you Aaron your brother, and his sons with him, from among the people of Israel, to serve me as priests." Ex 28:1.
>
> And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Bring the tribe of Levi near, and set them before Aaron the priest, that they may minister to him. They shall keep guard over him and over the whole congregation before the tent of meeting, as they minister at the tabernacle. They shall guard all the furnishings of the tent of meeting, and keep guard over the people of Israel as they minister at the tabernacle. And you shall give the Levites to Aaron and his sons; they are wholly given to him from among the people of Israel. And you shall appoint Aaron and his sons, and they shall guard their priesthood. But if any outsider comes near, he shall be put to death." Num 3:5-10.
>
> "And you and your sons with you shall guard your priesthood for all that concerns the altar and that is within the veil; and you shall serve. I give your priesthood as a gift, and any outsider who comes near shall be put to death." Num 18:7.

So, the Levitical priests (or Aaronic priests, who were part of the tribe of Levi), were made priests according to the Mosaic covenant, which was in reality a covenant between God and the nation of Israel. And when I say the *nation of Israel*, I mean the *sons of Israel* (as an ethnic group), in their *corporate capacity*. In other words, people came under the Mosaic covenant exclusively as a matter of biological descent, not as a matter of individual choice (*i.e.*, faith). You are either born an ethnic Jew, or you are not - it isn't something you can individually choose.

Thus, all the priests were Levites, and all the Levites were Jews, so no one could be a priest apart from them. Further, the priests ministered before God in the tabernacle (later, the temple) on behalf of the Jewish people, and no one else. Bottom line: the Levitical priests were exclusively Jewish, they served exclusively Jewish people, and they derived all their authority exclusively from the Jewish law.

In contrast, the Church of the New Testament extends to the people of all nations (*there is neither Jew nor Greek*, etc.) Gal.3:28. In fact, the Church has been predominantly composed of Gentiles ever since the apostle Paul began his ministry. Second, no church authority is derived from the Mosaic covenant or from Jewish law. Third, all participants in the Church covenant have an equal

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authority to carry out the mission of the Church, *i.e.*, the Great Commission. Fourth, no Church authority is transmitted or acquired based on physical birth.

Thus, none of the chief characteristics of the Levitical priesthood (Jewish priests, Jewish laws, tribal lineage, etc.) could possibly have carried over into the Church.

Besides, when you look at the language used in the Old Testament to institute the Levitical priesthood, there is no similar language used anywhere in the New Testament. For example, naming an identifiable class of people who were separated from the rest of the nation along ethnic lines. Or, using words like "to serve me as priests," assigning certain functions to those people, or punishing others who attempted to perform those functions.

The reason why there is a total absence of N.T. language instituting a human priesthood in the Church is because the priesthood of Christ is both *perfect* and *exclusive*. [I do not regard the priesthood of Christ as a *human* priesthood - even though Jesus was incarnate in a human body and was called the Son of Man during His First Advent. Why? Because He is not acting as the high priest of the Church ***now*** in any human capacity. Ever since His resurrection, Jesus has had an immortal (non-human) body, and ever since the Ascension, He has been off-earth (in heaven). A human priest, by definition, refers to a human being on this earth.]

The priesthood of Christ is perfect, in that He is a priest forever, based on the power of an indestructible life, making his priestly office permanent. Heb. 7:16-17. Unlike the Jewish priests, Christ has never needed to make atonement for His own sins. Nor has He ever needed to make sacrifices repeatedly, for His sacrifice was once for all. Heb. 7:23-27. Plus, Christ performs His priestly duties in the heavenly tabernacle, not made by people, based on His own blood and sinless life, securing an eternal redemption. Heb. 9:11-12. Thus, it is not possible that anyone could ever do a better priestly service than He has done.

The priesthood of Christ is also exclusive and repugnant to any form of human priesthood. For "there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." 1 Tim 2:5. Meaning, no one is a priest before God on behalf of others besides Jesus, and no one needs a priest for himself apart from Christ. Besides which, no one but Jesus is capable of being a priest after the order of Melchizedek, that is, a priest who lives eternally and is a priest forever. Heb. 5:6, 6:20, 7:17.

Thus, no one else can add anything of value to the priesthood of Christ which is perfect, or improve on it in any way. To the contrary, any human priesthood arising after Christ would be a step backwards, ushering in impermanence and imperfection. Which, from God's point of view, is pointless. That's what ultimately makes the priesthood of Christ exclusive - any other priesthood within the Church would be pointless.

Keep in mind what a *priest* actually is. According to www.merriam-webster.com, a priest is defined as "one authorized to perform the sacred rites of a religion especially as a mediatory agent between humans and God." Don't be fooled by other definitions which are limited to *the administration of*

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religious rites or the performance of certain sacraments or similar language. The mediatory function is the key to understanding the term. Implicit in the concept of performing sacred rites as a priest is the idea that *not everyone can do this*.

The nature of any priest - not just the Levitical priests, but all human priests - is to be a mediator between regular people (*i.e.*, non-priests) and whatever god the priest serves. In short, every priest is a *gatekeeper*: regular people can't have access to God except through the services of the priest. In modern usage the term *priest* is even applied colloquially to anyone who is a gatekeeper in a certain type of business.

Establishment of the New Priesthood

The end result of the perfect and exclusive priesthood of Christ is the establishment of what many call the *universal priesthood of believers*. By which phrase is meant that all Christians have direct personal access to God through Jesus. And since *access* to God is the key function and purpose of a priest, every Christian is in that sense a priest, *i.e.*, one who has direct access to God. But no, no one as a Christian can take that access to God and extend it to someone else - only Christ alone can perform that function. The priesthood of Christ, administered from heaven, *eliminates any people acting as gatekeepers for God here on earth*.

Alright - you have the basic argument, now let's put it to the test. Do the scriptures confirm that every true believer - every Christian - has direct personal access to God without needing to go through anyone as a gatekeeper apart from Christ?

> Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand. Rom 5:1-2.
>
> And [Christ] came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God. Eph 2:17-19. See also, Eph 3:12.
>
> Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus ... and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith. Heb 10:19-22.

So, the scriptures affirm that all those who have faith in Christ have access to God. All those who have faith in Christ are members of the household of God and stand in equal position with all the saints. And all those who have faith in Christ have confidence to enter the holy places of God. I'd say that's a pretty strong confirmation there are no gatekeepers in Christianity.

As among Christians, God gives everyone co-equal authority, and no one has any claim to a right

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to interpose themselves between God and any other believer as a mediator or priest. In keeping with our prior analysis, *all Christians are created equal*, and not only with respect to our contemporaries, but also equal to all those who came before or may come after us. "Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have obtained a faith of *equal standing* with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ." 2 Pet 1:1.

This equality of standing among believers gives rise to a corollary of scripture: *there are no holy men* - because if some are more holy than others, then all are not equal. Though to be more accurate: *all people are equally unholy*. "None is righteous, no, not one." Rom. 3:10. "But now the righteousness of God has been manifested ... through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for *all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." Rom. 3:21-24.

Notice it is not merely that all people are equally non-holy, but also that all people can appropriate redemption (and therefore all of the rights, privileges and authority appurtenant thereto) solely on an individual basis through the exercise of faith. So believers are not only equal in their inherent unrighteousness, but also equal in the extent to which grace is imputed by Christ.

As far as God is concerned, the people who originally heard the Great Commission were no more worthy to receive that authority than anyone who came after them. Nor did the apostles receive Church authority on behalf of themselves and their descendants, nor on behalf of themselves and their specific delegees, nor on behalf of any particular group or class of men (*i.e.*, clergy). Rather, they received Church authority on behalf of all those who would later individually believe.

The net effect of which is this: *all believers are equally priests before God*. All human intermediaries, or gatekeepers, have been eliminated.

> 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. Rev. 1:5-6.
>
> For you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God. Rev. 5:9-10.

Clergy? What Clergy?

All that I have said so far should lead you to one inescapable conclusion: *in the Church there is no such thing as clergy, and no distinction between clergy and laity*. Why? Because, simply put: clergy = priesthood. Let's review briefly:

> 1) There is no human head of the Church. All church authority on earth is decentralized.
> 2) The authority of the Church is given to every individual believer - not to any group or subset of believers, nor to any leadership or hierarchy among believers.

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3) No one but God can institute or create a priestly class. The only class of priests God created are limited to ethnic Israel, and he has not established any other since.
4) There is a universal priesthood among all believers in Christ which vests no one with any greater or lesser authority than that obtained by every individual believer.
5) There are no holy men, or spiritual persons, except what all believers have in common.

Yet, there is one more good reason why there is no, and there never can be, a clergy-laity distinction in the Church, namely, *there are no divisions within the body of Christ*.

> For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Rom 12:4-5.

> 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 baptized into one body - Jews or Greeks, slaves or free - and all were made to drink of one Spirit. 1 Cor 12:12-13.

> God has so composed the body ... that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. 1 Cor 12:24-25.

> There is one body and one Spirit - just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call - one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. Eph 4:4-6.

So the Church is one body; every member of the invisible Church is part of the same body, that body has no divisions in it, and this is by God's design. Fundamentally, any distinction between clergy and laity is a form of division in the body of Christ which scripture precludes. How can there be a difference between clergy and laity without making such a division?

Plus, what is *clergy*, if not a claim by certain persons that they possess some authority, some leadership role, some spiritual position, and/or some holy purpose not shared by all believers? By definition, the clergy-laity distinction is one that regards believers as *not all being equal*. It is a throwback to the Levitical priesthood, where all Israelites were not equal with respect to spiritual authority, and where one tribe was divided from the rest.

The clergy-laity distinction sets up a *de facto* priesthood, at the very least. But as we will see later, very few clergy try to hide the fact they are claiming a priestly status for themselves. The comparison - no, the equivalence - of clergy and a priestly class is unavoidable.

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3rd Principle - SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY AND THE RIGHT TO RULE

> *No sacramental authority, spiritual gift, or spiritual office - whether expressly stated or reasonably inferred - justifies anyone in the Church having authority to lead the Church or to rule over other believers.*

So far, we have established that all Christians have equal spiritual authority flowing from the Great Commission and by virtue of their membership in the universal Church. Plus, no one can rightfully claim to be an exception to this rule of equality by reason of their status as a member of a priestly class or the clergy. Now, the question is whether anything else in the N.T. might confer spiritual authority to lead or rule over others by reason of any sacramental authority, any spiritual gift, or any spiritual office.

[Note: By *spiritual authority*, I mean *divinely delegated authority* - as separate and distinct from *religious authority* and *ecclesiastical authority*. *Spiritual authority* refers to authority which flows from membership in the Church God has created. It does not apply to all people, but only to those who participate in the Church covenant in Christ. Anyone who claims to have *spiritual authority* within the Church is claiming, in essence, to have received that authority from God via a divine delegation. In other words, spiritual authority never comes from other people.

Religious authority, while still originating with God, is something all people have as a matter of inalienable right - what we typically refer to as the right to religious freedom. It is bestowed on all people by reason of physical birth, not spiritual birth. Thus, religious authority is not something that only Christians have. All people have religious authority no matter what they believe. However, I am not concerned with church-state relations or the authority of civil government over religious matters in this essay, so I will refrain from discussing *religious authority* here.

Ecclesiastical authority, by contrast, refers to the authority structure *within* a particular visible church. It is, essentially, a type of administrative authority or command structure within the organization. Ecclesiastical authority is derived from a delegation of authority made by the members of an association of people, via the consent of the governed. Thus, *ecclesiastical authority* comes from men, not God. It is merely a form of managerial authority, like you would find in any business or other organization, where some people put other people in charge of certain things.]

Sacramental Authority

Let's now look at *sacramental authority* as described in the scriptures, to determine whether there is anything about it which indicates who is in charge of the Church, or who (if anyone) has the right to rule other believers. But first, what is sacramental authority, and is it a type of spiritual authority, religious authority, or ecclesiastical authority as described above? Sacramental authority is simply the right to observe and perform whatever sacraments (baptism, communion, etc.) your local church believes in.

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As between any individual and civil government, sacramental authority is a type of religious authority. That is, it is not the place of governments to interfere with, regulate, license or tax any person's practice of sacramental functions, since such things are a matter of religious freedom. But this, as I said, is not our concern here.

What about within the Church? Is sacramental authority spiritual or ecclesiastical? Which is to ask, does sacramental authority come from God, or from people? I suggest the answer is pretty simple. If the particular sacramental function (*i.e.*, religious rite) is claimed to be a duty owed to God, then the authority to perform it must also come from God. In other words, it is a matter of spiritual authority. But if the particular sacramental function is merely a duty imposed by people (such as a condition of membership in the visible church), then the authority to perform it must come from the people. In other words, it is a matter of ecclesiastical authority.

You see the problem, right? In most churches, church sacraments are claimed to be duties owed to God, but the performance of them is restricted to certain persons who have ecclesiastical authority granted by men. In this, there is an inherent, and unresolvable, contradiction. We have the associational authority of people (the right to form a local church) purporting to limit the way others observe the duties they owe to God.

We have, in essence, the will of men being used to vest a special class of persons (*clergy* - the people with ecclesiastical authority) to act as gatekeepers for everyone else in performing the sacraments. Whereas God expressly gave everyone equal authority to observe *and perform* any duties owed to Him (including church sacraments). What we have, in sum, is the creation of a priesthood in the churches, when God provided that there should be *none*.

All sacramental authority in ancient Israel was exercised by the Levitical priests, who conducted all religious services at the tent of meeting, the tabernacle and the temple - that is, a designated place of worship that was literally the house of God. The authority of the priests in such matters was exclusive. Anyone else who attempted to interfere with priestly functions or to undertake to perform those functions on their own were under a death penalty. See, Num 3:10; 18:7.

However, in the Church age, the priests were the very people God went to some lengths to eliminate from any further spiritual service. Not only did He abolish the Levitical priests from Israel, He instituted a universal priesthood of all believers in the Church under the priesthood of Jesus Christ according to the order of Melchizedek, which precludes any one else from serving as a priest.

It only makes sense that if the priests themselves were kept out of the Church, of necessity all the special priestly things they did would also have to be kept out of the Church. Thus, in the Church there are no animal sacrifices or physical offerings. There are no special feast days or holy days. See, Rom. 14:5 and Col. 2:16. There is no physical temple, no segregated class of temple workers (whether Levites or clergy), and no financial system in place to support those workers (*i.e.*, tithing). In the Church, everyone is allowed to own property and produce income (whereas the Levites could not).

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Similarly, of necessity, *there can be no carryover of any if the spiritual authority exercised by the Levitical priests into the Church*. Whatever spiritual authority the priests had, they had as mediators between God and men. The mediators and the priesthood (one and the same thing) have been eliminated. Thus, there is no one who can today stand in the shoes of the former priests and claim to have or exercise the authority of a mediator in the Church.

Specifically, since every Christian has direct access to God, it means every Christian has equal authority to perform and/or administer whatever religious rites or sacred rituals are a part of the life of the Church. In this regard a common religious tradition produces a curious result. I do not make the claim, but it is often claimed by those who call themselves clergy, that the sacraments of the Church are a means of dispensing the grace (or favor, or blessing) of God. This grace is dispensed to, or through, those in the Church who have access to God (supposedly).

So if we assume that all believers have equal access to God (actually, we have *proved* this point), then the more the sacraments of the Church are related to God's grace, the more they are related to having access to God (from which the grace flows). And the more they relate to having access to God, the more they must be equally available to all believers, because all believers have equal access. Thus, the more you insist the sacraments of the Church are a means of dispensing God's grace, the more you argue for the fact that all believers can tap into that grace on an equal basis without going through a mediator. Ironic, no?

Because of this equality of access, *there is no hierarchy of spiritual authority with respect to Church sacraments*. And here is the applicable rule: every Christian has equal authority to enter God's holy places. Heb 10:19.

Under the Mosaic system, what did the Levitical priests do when they entered the holy places in the temple? They administered and performed the religious sacraments of Judaism. So, access to holy places is equivalent to the authority to perform holy ceremonies. Without the right to access to the holy places, the sacraments could not be performed. If that was true for priests in the Old Testament, it must also be true for priests (meaning every believer) in the New Testament.

Specific Sacraments

Let's examine two of the so-called Christian sacraments more closely. Protestants and Catholics disagree on how many of those sacred rituals are part of Christianity, and what they are specifically. But as far as I know, nearly all Christians accept that water baptism and communion (a/k/a the Lord's Supper or the Eucharist) are valid religious observances of the Christian faith. Let's set aside the questions of whether such rituals are truly sacramental (agencies by which the grace of God is dispensed), or whether these observances are prescribed as *ordinances*, because these questions have no bearing on our analysis.

Take water baptism - is it something every Christian can do, or is it something only certain people within the Church can do? What do the scriptures say?

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The logical place to start, of course, is with the Great Commission itself: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, *baptizing them* in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Mat 28:19. There is no need to rehash what has already been shown. All believers derive equal authority from the Great Commission. Therefore, all believers have equal authority to perform each of its component parts, including baptism. *Res ipsa loquitor*.

There are no words of limitation in the Great Commission as to who may or may not carry out its tasks. In fact, there are no words of limitation anywhere in scripture as to who may or may not perform water baptisms. What we have is an express authorization for every Christian to perform baptisms. To argue against that, we need a limitation on such authority expressly stated elsewhere in scripture - but there is none. You can't prove the existence of a limitation from silence, from extra-biblical writings or edicts, or from the customs and practices of Christians through the centuries. Or from mere inference derived from a peculiar interpretation of other scriptures.

Only God can limit what God has authorized. An express limitation is required to override an express grant of authority. Men do not have the authority to contradict God or limit what He has said. Yes, I know Protestants and Catholics take different positions on this issue. That's what the principle of *sola scriptura* is all about. But you're not going to convince me that people can limit what God has said unless and until you can show me *in the Bible* where God has *expressly* delegated that type of authority to people. And that can't be done.

Or consider communion. On the night of the Lord's Supper (the Last Supper) Jesus said, "this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." Mat 26:28. Notice Jesus did not say his blood was poured out just for the apostles, nor that only certain people could administer this ritual. He simply said, "Do this in remembrance of me." Like the Great Commission, this statement was made to a limited number of people, but its intended effect was to apply to all future believers as well.

Thus Paul, when he addresses the Corinthians regarding the unworthy manner in which they observed the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:17-34), tells them (in essence) to shape up and stop observing the Lord's Supper in the way they had been doing. What was his solution - for everyone to stop serving themselves and to delegate the task of administering the elements to the elders, or to deacons, or to pastors? Or that they needed to wait in line and receive the elements from a central dispensing agent? God forbid.

No, what he said was, "Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup." 1 Cor 11:28. Also, "So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another - if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home." 1 Cor 11:33-34. In other words, the solution was for the exercise of better individual self-government. Not to turn the matter over to someone in the Church with more authority, but to exercise the authority God had given each person in a decent manner. *This* is the biblical model of observing communion.

Thus, there is no indication anywhere in the N.T. that only certain persons can perform water

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baptisms or officiate at a communion observance. Once again (repeat, repeat, repeat) God treats everyone one in His Church equally. What a surprise. Are we supposed to infer that some people are called or placed into positions of leadership in the Church by reason of any sacramental authority? I don't see how, if everyone is equal.

Spiritual Gifts

Granted, we must acknowledge that the universal priesthood of believers, although putting each believer in equal standing before God, does not make every person the same. God distributes gifts to believers - not equally, but *severally* - so that each one may build up the Church, the body of Christ. Paul tells us to "think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For [we] ... do not all have the same function." Rather, we each have "gifts that differ according to the grace given to us." Rom 12:3-6. Further,

> Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. 1 Cor 12:4-7.

So clearly, spiritual gifts are not distributed uniformly, that is, not everyone gets the same gift. But does the Bible indicate that any of the spiritual gifts have any different level of authority compared to the other gifts, whether as a mediator, a person in charge, as a supervisor or an agent on behalf of others? Or to rephrase, *do the spiritual gifts have an inherent authority structure?* To answer that question, we have to know what the possible spiritual gifts are.

Rom. 12:6-8 lists prophecy, service, teaching, exhortation, generosity, leadership, and mercy. 1 Cor. 12:8-10 lists words of wisdom, words of knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discernment of spirits, speaking in tongues, and the interpretation of tongues. Finally, 1 Cor 12:28 says, "And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues."

I would ask you at this time to put apostles, prophets and teachers on the back burner in your mind, as we will come back to these when we discuss *offices* in the Church. Spiritual gifts are talents or abilities, whereas offices are positions within the Church, making these two separate things.

So, are any of the things denominated as spiritual gifts things that can reasonably be interpreted as having a special authority compared to the others? Most of the gifts, I suggest, such as healing, generosity, mercy, discernment of spirits and speaking in tongues (among others) have no possible ruling authority or leadership role attached to them as a self-evident truth.

What about *service*, which the KJV renders as *ministry*? I like the definitions given by Noah Webster (1828), because unlike modern definitions he gets right to the heart of the authority question. Thus, *service* is defined as "labor performed at the command of a superior, or in pursuance

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of duty, or for the benefit of another." *Ministry* is defined as "the office, duties or functions of a subordinate of any kind."

With either of these definitions, the gift of service is hardly something that would put a person *in charge* of sacraments, persons or other gifts. You don't call someone a subordinate and then treat them as being in charge. Although, a fair number of ministers see themselves as being in charge.

However, if it is true that ministers *serve* their congregations, it means the congregations are the principals (*i.e.*, the "superior" according to Webster) and the ministers are their agents. However, few clergymen look at themselves that way. It also means the members of the congregation, as principals, can withdraw their authorization and perform the service themselves, bypassing the clergy. See what I mean? The gift of service does not lead to leadership. Same analysis for the gift of *helps*, I suggest.

What about the gifts of *leadership*, or *administration*? Any different result? It's true, what people say - some are born leaders. Plus, no organization can long survive without effective administration. But being a born leader or administrator doesn't actually put anyone in the position or office of leading or administering. A person may have the *talent* to lead or administer, but that's not how the *authority* to lead or administer is acquired. No one is born with the authority to rule others, remember? (All men are created equal; all men are born free.) A gifted person may in fact be put in a position of leadership, but the position does not directly follow from merely having certain talents.

Where does leadership authority come from? There are only two options. If from God, then it must come via a divine covenant, or some other express delegation in scripture. Then the burden is on the person claiming authority to show how it is expressly derived from a divine covenant or other scripture. But none of the O.T. covenants apply to the Church, and everything about the Church covenant screams equality. Which leaves the other N.T. scriptures *which we are right now in the process of examining*. (Guess what? We're not going to find any express delegations of leadership authority there, either.)

The other option is the authority which comes from men, which we call by another name, *i.e.*, ecclesiastical authority, or (if you're a lawyer) consent of the governed. But that's not the authority people claim by way of a spiritual gift, is it? Spiritual gifts aren't given solely to ministers, or to clergy, are they? No one claims they have a spiritual gift *because* they have ecclesiastical authority, or that only those who have ecclesiastical authority have spiritual gifts. The thing about spiritual gifts is, *everyone* in the Body of Christ has one (or more). Spiritual gifts simply are not tied to human authority.

So, make no mistake. Leadership authority *does* come from other people. Spiritual authority and spiritual gifts *do not* - they come from God alone. The two can never be mixed. One does not give rise to the other.

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Therefore, none of the spiritual gifts reasonably denote a leadership (or ruling) authority compared to the others. Conclusion? That *there is no structure or hierarchy of authority inherent within or among the spiritual gifts of the Church*. Yes, the various spiritual gifts are different from each other. But none of them are in charge of, or in authority over, the other gifts. If there *were* an authority structure to be found among them, God would have told us *in scripture* and not left it to mere inference. And He has not told us any such thing.

While Paul does admonish us to desire the higher or best gifts (1 Cor. 12:30), he never indicates which ones those are, except to hint that prophecy is one of the gifts to be most desired. 1 Cor 14:1. Still, scripture nowhere indicates which gifts we receive depend on or are influenced in any way by what we desire. To the contrary, the distribution of spiritual gifts is determined in the sole discretion of the Holy Spirit. 1 Cor. 12:11.

Notice also, none of the spiritual gifts relate to performing any sacraments, including without limitation, baptisms, administering communion, hearing confessions, dispensing forgiveness, or performing weddings or funerals. For that matter, none of the spiritual gifts even relate in any way that I can find to *preaching*. So, is preaching a spiritual gift? Apparently not. Whether preaching relates to any of the spiritual *offices*, we will consider next.

Notice further, there are no gifts (by any express language in the scriptures) for ruling over others, running or leading the Church, having command authority over other believers, or spiritual authority to supervise the activities of other members of the Church. Therefore, be extremely skeptical if anyone claims to have spiritual authority over you either by reason of sacramental authority or spiritual gifts. In fact, don't believe it.

Spiritual Offices

> And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers. Eph. 4:11. (ESV) And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers. Eph. 4:11. (KJV).

The Nature of Spiritual Offices

According to Eph. 4:11, God gave the Church apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and/or teachers. The KJV expressly states what other Bible versions imply, that "he gave *some*, apostles; and *some*, prophets; and *some*, evangelists; and *some*, pastors and teachers." Whether the word *some* appears in the text or not, it is clear from the context that not everyone in the Church is an apostle, or a prophet, or an evangelist, or a pastor and/or a teacher. These are the spiritual offices in the Church.

By using the term *spiritual office*, I intend a meaning which is consistent with the terms *spiritual authority* and *spiritual gifts*. In other words, each of these are something only God can confer. Anything spiritual does not come from oneself or from other people. A spiritual office is a position

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God confers in the universal (or heavenly, or spiritual) Church. By definition, a spiritual office is not something God confers in an association formed by people, such as a local church organization. Nor is it something people confer in the spiritual realm. Human authority is limited to organizations formed by people, and divine authority is limited to that spiritual Body which God has created.

In the visible church, the offices which people confer are not to be confused with the offices which God confers. By that I mean elders or bishops, deacons, and whatever other church managerial positions fall under the category of an ecclesiastical office. Ushers, worship and music leaders, preachers, program directors, and even church secretaries, etc. are all further examples of temporal church offices - offices created and filled by people. I draw a bright line (as I believe scripture also does) between all these man-appointed offices, and the spiritual offices which God appoints.

The number of people in the Church whom God has appointed to one of the spiritual offices will always be a minority - the vast majority of Christians will have other tasks. And the mere fact God *appoints* these people - they do not volunteer for the position, they are not elected to these offices, nor do they receive an office because of education, training or experience - means that these are specialized tasks to be carried out by those whom God alone has selected.

These are, again, distinguished from the temporal offices of elder, deacon, etc., to which a person may *aspire* (1 Tim. 3:1), for which a person may be trained, educated or interviewed, or in respect to which a person may even run for office (in a church election). *Spiritual offices need no approval or recognition by people to be valid*.

Now what is the proper task of each spiritual office? *Apostles* are those who plant churches. Unfortunately, I have to pause right here. A lot of you are thinking the Church doesn't have apostles anymore, that those people were only for the early church (the so-called *apostolic age*). The thought of anyone claiming to be an apostle now scares you.

First, nothing in the scripture ever places a time limitation on this spiritual office. Be careful of taking a position based solely on inference. Second, if the only apostles the Church ever needed are those who saw Christ personally (including Paul), then why does God say He is still appointing apostles (in Eph. 4:11) 30 years after Christ's death? Third, if modern apostles scare you, it's only because you think (or the person claiming to be an apostle thinks) the office means something other than merely planting churches. Usually, a person claiming to be an apostle these days thinks they're in charge. Yeah, those people scare me, too.

The apostle Paul did what? He planted churches, pursuant to his spiritual calling. But in planting those churches, Paul never claimed to be in charge of any of them. Once a church was planted, Paul got out of the way, and let the church come under local leadership. Sure, he often appointed the initial group of elders, but he retained no ongoing appointment authority. Plus, he never appointed himself as an elder or bishop. Paul never claimed any visible church leadership authority. He did not install himself as The Founder of any church, and then build his little kingdom. People who mix the spiritual office of an apostle with local church leadership only *pervert* the spiritual office.

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Prophets are those who proclaim the word of God. Oops - pause again. Supposedly, an office of a bygone age. Combine that with a common misunderstanding of the nature of the office. No, a prophet is not one who necessarily *predicts the future*. A prophet merely says things based on the word of God that provide additional insight, and/or things which people do not want to hear. They are - to those in power, wanting to keep the *status quo* - a threat. Which is exactly why I think God thinks we still need prophets today. There's a lot of stuff done in the name of Christ that needs to be called out and shamed. And it's also exactly why most churches don't regard the office of prophet as valid - they don't want anyone challenging church leaders.

But let me address one other concern, namely, Heb. 1:1-2a. "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but *in these last days* he has spoken to us by his Son." First, this text does *not* say that when Jesus came, prophecy stopped. If that were the case, again, why would God say He's still appointing prophets after Christ's death? Read this verse together with Eph. 4:11, and read them in a way that doesn't result in a conflict. Second, the term *last days* doesn't mean prophecy has stopped, nor is it a reference to the end times. It just means, in this context, *in recent days* Jesus came (in other words, back in 60 AD.

OK - moving along. *Evangelists* spread the Gospel of personal salvation. No, not every Christian is an evangelist. *Some* are appointed ... Gosh, do I have to explain everything? Sure, be "prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you." 1 Pe 3:15. But that verse does not turn every believer into an evangelist, which is a specific spiritual office appointed to *some* by God. Why would you read any verse in a way which contradicts other scriptures?

Pastors ostensibly shepherd believers. Okay, okay. Not a simple matter. However, I will consider this office in detail later on. *Teachers* instruct the faithful, primarily as to the commands of Christ, a/k/a the laws of God. Wait - your teachers don't tell you about God's laws? Wow, things are messed up. But we want to know what God thinks about these offices, not what men's tradition holds. Summing up: all these are as necessary and essential for the Church today as they were in New Testament times.

So why is it, that: 1) many churches do not even recognize the contemporary office of apostle; 2) prophets are generally recognized only in *charismatic* churches, and are always unpaid unless they are the founder of their own cult; 3) evangelists only get paid if they raise their own support or survive on *love offerings*; and 4) lay teachers are almost universally unpaid volunteers; but 5) pastors are paid employees who get regular salaries? Who made pastors special compared to everyone else?

All these spiritual offices have some things in common. Mainly, that these are things *you cannot aspire to*, and which men do not elect or appoint. Rather, they are distributed by God according to His grace and in his sole and exclusive discretion. "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit." 1 Cor. 12:4. "God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose." 1 Cor. 12:18. Members of the body of Christ have "gifts that differ according to the grace given" to them. Rom 12:6.

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Yes, (remember a few pages back) the spiritual *offices* of the Church are also spiritual *gifts*. Recall 1 Cor 12:28, where spiritual offices and gifts are commingled together. "And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues." So, just as you cannot decide what spiritual gift God will give you, you cannot choose whether God will give you a spiritual office or not, or which one (if any).

You cannot *decide* to be an apostle, teacher, prophet, pastor or evangelist - any more than you can *decide* to have the spiritual gift of miracles, healing, helping, administrating, or speaking in tongues. You can, apparently, *ask* God for the gift of prophecy (1 Cor. 12:31; 14:39), but you cannot determine that you will get it, and no man or group of men can determine to give it to you. So either God bestows the gift or the office in His discretion (*i.e.*, sovereignty), or you do not have it. What *you* want (or what your local church elders want) is irrelevant.

The Authority to Rule

Let's revisit our key text with an expanded context.

> And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. Eph 4:11-16.

I have given you more of the context so we can (hopefully) see more clearly what this scripture does - *and does not* - say. Does this text contain a delegation of authority - specifically, granting any of the spiritual offices the right to govern or to rule over others? No, it does not. Is there any mention of the leadership of the Church in connection with the spiritual offices? No. Do other scriptures link the spiritual offices with leadership or governing authority? No again.

Of course, each office may be taken to include the authority to exercise its primary function. Thus, the apostle has the authority to plant churches, the prophet has the authority to speak the word of God, the evangelist has the authority to proselytize, the teacher has the authority to instruct, and the pastor has the authority to shepherd (whatever that means).

There is no implied suggestion, much less an overt statement or express grant, that any of the offices in Eph. 4:11 has authority over the others, that there is any hierarchy among them, or that any of them answer to the others for the manner in which their offices are carried out. When it comes to

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the divine delegation of church authority, *the gifts and offices God appoints have no authority structure*. Which, as I look at it, simply means (consistent with the Diffusion Principle and the priesthood of all believers) that all spiritual offices are equal in authority compared to each other.

This is exactly as we should expect things to be. It was the same for spiritual authority and spiritual gifts - why should spiritual offices be any different? In the spiritual Church, the body of Christ, all believers are equal. There is no hierarchy, ruling authority, inferiority or superiority as between the members of the body. All believers have equal access to God, equal fellowship with Christ, and equal standing as fellow heirs. This does not make everyone the *same*, but no one is above or below anyone else.

There are offices in the Church, but none of these are of a higher calling than any other office in the Church, and none are given as full-time ministry more than the others. Further, none carry a greater authority to rule or to lead than the others, and none are inherently worthy of greater honor than other Church offices. The Bible absolutely nowhere indicates there is any hierarchy among these offices, that any of them are full-time while others are part-time or mere volunteers, that any are compensated while others are uncompensated, or that any have authority or leadership over the others.

All of which leads to a simple conclusion: the spiritual office of pastor or pastor-teacher (whatever it may be) puts no one in charge, either of Christ's body or God's house. Pastors have no elevated status, no higher calling, no leadership authority, no special sacramental authority, and no greater ministry than the other spiritual offices. But I'll bet my bottom dollar that's not the way things are handled in your church, is it?

4th Principle - THE CHURCH AS INSTITUTION AND ASSOCIATION

> *The Church is a mixed entity - in heaven it is a spiritual entity created and governed by God, while on earth it is a temporal entity created and governed by people. But for the purposes of church government, all governing authority comes from people, not God.*

Dual Nature of the Church

In this section we will explore the two-sided nature of the Church, which is also reflected in the way the Church is organized and governed. There is a *spiritual* side to the Church which God alone organizes and governs, and then there is the *temporal or visible* side of the Church which is organized and governed by men. If we are to understand the Church and its government correctly, we must rightly divide between these two aspects of the Church.

The Church as an Institution

Each of the four primary social institutions (individual, family, Church and nation) has certain

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immutable characteristics. Namely, each is: 1) created by God; 2) something you are born into; 3) governed by covenant; 4) has a pre-defined relationship; and 5) a limited jurisdiction over others. I will not rehearse here how each of these characteristics apply to individuals, families and nations.

What concerns us here is that the invisible Church is clearly a *social institution* in the sense described above. First, we know that it was created by God via the priesthood of Jesus Christ. "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. . . . But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired." 1 Cor. 12:13, 18. So it was the Spirit of God who created the invisible Church - not men.

Second, membership in the invisible Church can only be obtained by being born-again, *i.e.*, spiritual rebirth. Again, something that no man is capable of - only God can do this. "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'" Jn. 3:5-7. The only birth which men can prompt is physical birth. Only God, who is Spirit (Jn 4:24), can effectuate a spiritual birth.

Third, the Church is of course governed by covenant, namely, the new covenant in Christ Jesus, one of the six divine covenants between God and people. "But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises." Heb. 8:6. Plus, we have already looked at the Great Commission (Mat. 28:18-20) as an expression of the terms of that covenant.

Fourth, when I say there is a pre-defined relationship in the Church, what I mean is each Christian is adopted into the family of God as a son, has equal access to God, and is a fellow heir with Christ. "For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, 'Abba! Father!' The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him." Rom. 8:15-17; *See also,* Gal. 4:4-7.

Fifth, the authority which the Church has over others is limited to the tasks it is authorized to perform pursuant to the Great Commission. That is, to "make disciples of all nations, baptizing them ... [and] teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." That's it: to make disciples, baptize converts, and to teach. *Not* to condemn to hell or persecute, to conduct inquisitions, to maintain armies or conduct wars, to free the Holy Land, to force conversions, to kill or punish infidels, or to enforce the laws of God which He has reserved for Himself alone to enforce. Nor can the spiritual Church - through any human agency - grant or withhold pardon or salvation, or determine the eternal destiny of souls.

The spiritual aspect of the Church, that is the invisible Church, is governed exclusively by Christ

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as its head. Eph. 4:15; 5:23. We have repeatedly seen this play out - in the lack of any priestly class in the Church, in the equal distribution of sacramental authority among all believers, in the equality all believers share with respect to access to God, and the lack of any authority structure within or among the spiritual gifts and offices. Which is to say, God simply has not delegated any discernable authority to men to rule over *things which are merely spiritual*, including His Church.

I therefore conclude the invisible Church has no governmental structure, as far as people are concerned. Spiritual things fall under God's exclusive jurisdiction. To the extent people have any authority to rule, it is only in temporal matters. Thus, the only authority which people may exercise with respect to the Church must be confined to its temporal side, *i.e.*, the visible church.

The Church as an Association

This may come as a surprise to you, but the visible Church is not an institution created by God. What else is it? Welcome to the wonderful world of *voluntary associations*. Allow me to now demonstrate how much your local church is *not* the same as the invisible body of Christ.

When we examine visible churches, regardless of denomination or creed, we see that none of the characteristics of a *social institution* (as described above) truly apply. Every visible church organization in the world was formed not by God, but by specific people, at some specific time and place, under the auspices of some civil authority. All you have to do is pull a copy of any church's Articles of Incorporation or other founding document to prove conclusively that they were not signed or filed by God and dated 30 A.D.

In contrast to a social institution, each voluntary association has these characteristics: 1) it is man-made, 2) it is something you join, rather than being born into, 3) it is governed by contract, not covenant, 4) your relationship to the association can be whatever the association bylaws provide for, (*i.e.*, not pre-defined) and 5) you can quit the association and the association can quit you at will.

For starters, I've already mentioned how visible churches are formed, *i.e.*, every local church starts with someone's decision to form a local church. And that someone is always a human being, not God. There is no visible church yet that sprang up from the ground by divine action.

Second, if you are a member of a local church, I can guarantee that didn't happen because you were born into it - at some point you joined it. I don't even need to get into the issue of whether you became a Christian or a member of the Church when you were confirmed as a child or baptized as an infant. The reality is this: neither your childhood confirmation nor your infant baptism occurred as a divine act coincident with your physical birth. Confirmation and baptism are the result of a human decision - the decision of your parents, *after* birth - not an act of God *at* birth.

Third, God keeps a record of those who are His in the Book of Life. When you are listed on your local church's member registry, does that affect how God keeps His records? In other words, does

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a change on your local church's member registry change what's written in the Book of Life? No. Can your local church leaders gain access to God's Book of Life to see who is, and who is not, in it? No. So, two separate registries, two separate memberships. And two separate entities (visible church vs. invisible Church). Q. E. D.

Which is to say, the Church covenant in Christ does not govern your relationship with any local church. Your local church is not governed by any divine covenants at all. Your membership with them is a matter of human agreement, typically as found in the church bylaws. It is no different, in the eyes of God, or the civil laws, than your membership in any other nonprofit group or association.

Fourth, can a local church grant you the things God grants you - access to the throne of grace, eternal life, and communication by prayer? Let me turn it around - can a local church deny any of these things to you? No. They can't grant them either. Those things are in the spiritual realm under God's exclusive jurisdiction. On the other hand, does merely being a Christian entitle you to a position of leadership in a local church? No. How are local church leaders determined? By joining, electing and/or appointing. So your relationship to any local church is not pre-defined from the foundation of the world. Instead, it is governed by your church's governing documents, whatever they are. But whatever they are, it isn't the gospel, scripture, or the Word of God.

Fifth, perhaps most telling is the fact that with any visible church, you can join it, quit it, rejoin it, or abstain from joining it at all, all the while leaving your membership in the invisible Church unaffected. You can even switch your local church membership from one church to another. And if a local church decides to discipline you or dissociate from you, it has no effect on your listing in God's Book of Life, your access to Him, or your spiritual gifts and offices.

Thus, the visible church and the invisible Church cannot possibly be the same - they are completely separate. So what jurisdiction does any visible church have over you, really? Only that which you give it. Not quite the same as God, who can discipline you without your consent in whatever way and for whatever length of time He wants.

But, it is here, on the temporal side, where all human governmental authority in the church resides. The visible church exists in the human realm, and its government has been committed to people. What that government looks like, we will examine in the next section.

Not So Strange

This dual nature of the Church - created by God in some respects, and made by men in other respects - is not unique in society. Consider again the four basic social institutions created by God: individuals, families, the Church, and nations. Notice I did *not* say "civil governments." I said *nations*. What's the difference? *God makes nations, men make governments.*

Which is just another way of saying, *a nation and its government are not the same thing*. We often

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think of them together as though they are the same, but they are not. I explain this principle in detail in the essay, *The Right To Alter or Abolish the Government*. In that essay, I show how this principle has played out both in ancient Israel and modern America. Both of those nations changed their form of governments at one point, but it did not alter or abolish the nation in either case.

We have already seen that there are some offices in the Church appointed by God, and others that are chosen by men. Yes, all the *spiritual* offices are appointed by God. But there are also *temporal* offices in the visible church, and these are chosen by people. Which means that we can say of the Church, as with nations, *the invisible Church and the visible church are not the same thing*. Also, that *God made the invisible Church, people make the visible church*. Don't allow yourself to be confused by thinking these are the same.

So the fact that the Church has this dual nature - a God-made part and a man-made part - is not that strange or unique. This is the way God does things - He doesn't do it all himself, He expects us to do our part. You can even see this play out with families in a limited extent - God has created the institution, its purposes and its laws, but people decide who they should marry all on their own. And that's the way God planned it.

Government by Consent, Not Decree

To discern what principles govern the visible church we must look to principles of government God has directed in other aspects of society. We already know the Church is both an institution like other social institutions, and an association like other associations. How are those things generally governed, and how might that inform the way in which the Church on earth is governed?

I refer specifically to the principle that any human government (and that's what the visible church is - a form of human government) must ultimately be ruled by the consent of the governed. Think about it - civil government, as the expression of the government of nations, is subject to rule by the consent of the governed. Does it make more sense or less sense that God would choose to have other institutions He has created be governed by the same principle?

This is especially relevant since I have already drawn a parallel between the Church and nations, both of which are created by God, both of which are nonetheless governed by men, and both of which are separate and distinct from their earthly governments. So the likelihood that both of them are subject to the principle of the *consent of the governed* is pretty darn likely.

And voluntary associations - how are they governed? By contract (or agreement) of the members of the association rather than being imposed top-down from a superior sovereign. And isn't that just the same as consent of the governed? It may strike you as odd to speak of church government in these terms, but when you consider the history of ancient Israel and compare it to the Church, it isn't so odd after all.

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Let's start by observing three facts about the nation of Israel. *First*, Israel was clearly created by God - not at Babel as were other nations, but it was made from the descendants of Jacob (renamed Israel) centuries later.

> And God said to him, "Your name is Jacob; no longer shall your name be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name." So he called his name Israel. And God said to him, "I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply. A nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall come from your own body. The land that I gave to Abraham and Isaac I will give to you, and I will give the land to your offspring after you." Gen 35:10-12.

Second, ancient Israel is the only nation in which God was actually a party to the national covenant (*i.e.*, constitution).

> Then he [Moses] took the book of the covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. And they said, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient." And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant that *the Lord has made with you* in accordance with all these words." Exo 24:7-8.

Third, God was actually the king of the nation of Israel. "And the Lord said to Samuel, 'Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have *rejected me from being king* over them.'" 1 Sam 8:7.

Are you seeing the parallels here? God created Israel, and God created the Church. God was in direct relationship with Israel via the covenant delivered through Moses, and God is in direct relationship with the Church via the covenant delivered through Jesus Christ. God, as the original king of Israel, was the head of the nation, and God (*i.e.*, Jesus) is the head of the Church. So God was no more or less in charge of Israel than He is in charge of the Church, and *vice versa*.

Which means that God ruled Israel with an iron fist, right? Not really. For the first 400 years or so following the Exodus (the period of the judges), government in Israel was generally characterized as a time of extreme self-government. "In those days there was no [human] king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes." Jdg 21:25.

When we get to the time of the introduction of the monarchy, we see in 1 Sam 8:7 (above) that rather than imposing His own will on the people, God told Samuel to "obey the voice of the people." Yes, people - God makes nations and *men* make governments. *Even in a theocracy when God is totally sovereign over the people*.

We don't have time to rehearse it in detail here, but if you study the manner in which God anointed Saul, David and the rest of the Hebrew kings, you see the same pattern repeated. Namely, that

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merely being anointed by God did not make anyone a king, ever. Only when the people assented to the choice of a new king did that person then actually begin to rule.

Thus, David was anointed Israel's king in 1 Sam. 16:13, but it was several years before David actually became king, and then only when accepted as king by the people. In fact, David ruled over only the tribe of Judah for 7½ years. 2 Sam. 2:11. He was not installed as king over the entire nation until the elders of all the tribes of Israel came to David and made a covenant with him, *i.e.*, until David had the consent of the people. 2 Sam. 5:1-4.

The Nature of Ecclesiastical Authority

So what is the obvious lesson here? That God's people the Church are to be ruled the same way as God's people the Israelites - not by a king, *per se*, but by the consent of the governed. Not top-down, by the edicts or decrees of leaders who impose their will on the people. But bottom-up, by the consent of the people, who are the ones with ultimate governing authority. So in ancient Israel, the ultimate governing authority was *We the People*, and likewise in the visible church the ultimate governing authority is *We the People*.

In the visible church, the people are in charge, and *the leaders serve them*. In the language of agency, the members of the Church are the principals, and church leaders are their agents or servants. When church leaders fail to fulfill their duties properly, church members can remove and/or replace their leaders. If the structure of any church is found to be lacking in any way, the members of the church may alter or abolish it, and establish such a new form of government as seems best to them to secure their spiritual well-being.

Logically then, all ecclesiastical authority is derivative and delegated, not original or inherent. All such authority is derived from and through the consent of believers in voluntary association with each other, not directly from any divine source. We have already firmly established the principle that the spiritual Church is ruled solely by Christ in His divine capacity, and all things spiritual can only come from God. Similarly, the visible church (and any ecclesiastical authority) is ruled solely by people, and all temporal authority can only come from them.

In other words, and burn this into your brain well, *no church leader rules by divine authority*. I cannot stress this enough. *God didn't put anyone in a leadership role or a position of authority in your local church*. Church leaders serve at the pleasure of the people (*i.e.*, church members), and whether to hire or fire anyone is an authority that resides with the members, not the leaders. God, would that Your people took this to heart!

Further, *accountability runs to the source from which authority is derived*. Thus, all church leaders are accountable to the association of believers from which their authority is derived, *i.e.*, general church members. As no ecclesiastical authority proceeds directly from any divine source, no church leaders may avoid accountability to church members by claiming to be accountable exclusively to

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God. Or to any ecclesiastical group, for that matter.

Understand what I'm saying here. Your church pastor/leader/minister/priest is accountable to God for the spiritual authority, gifts and offices bestowed on them by God. But for everything temporal, visible or physical, your church pastor/leader/minister/priest is accountable to the people who hired him or her. And that temporal authority - by definition - does ***not*** include anything spiritual. So if your pastor/leader/minister/priest uses his or her position of leadership (temporal) to govern you or rule over you in spiritual matters, they have exceeded the scope of their authority. In *God's Church*, no one has ruling authority over spiritual matters.

But again, I'll bet my bottom dollar that's exactly what your pastor/leader/minister/priest does as a routine matter of course. Try to rule over you in spiritual matters, I mean. And, they think they have a divine mandate to do it.

And finally, believers in association with each other always retain the inalienable right (acting by mutual consent) to alter or abolish any ecclesiastical organization, which right cannot be restrained or denied by church leaders. Church leaders have no right or authority to maintain their positions of leadership apart from the consent of believers in association with each other. The visible church has no organizational *right to life*. Only persons God creates have the right to life. Your local church can be killed at any time by its own members, and that's OK, because your local church is only a creation of men.

So if your local clergy are off making their own associations of clergy only, separate and apart from general church members, trying to preserve their organizational status against any actions of the church members, that should be a warning sign. *Flag on the play! Foul!* Dare I even say, *Penalty!* Can you say, *Presbytery*, or *Diocese*?

Teaching and Preaching Authority

At this point you may be asking yourself whether the preaching and teaching performed by your local pastor/leader/minister/priest runs afoul of these principles. Actually not, for the most part. What I have said is that spiritual authority carries with it no *ruling authority*. But mere teaching (instruction) or preaching (exhortation) is not leadership or ruling authority, *per se*. The authority to teach (including, but not limited to, the authority to teach granted in the Great Commission) is only the authority to present ideas for the consideration of the hearer. Teaching authority does not include forcing people to listen, forcing them to accept certain ideas, or forcing people to submit to the teacher. Nor does it include using guilt as a form of manipulation.

Unfortunately, it is not uncommon for people to claim that church members should *sit under* the teaching of a local pastor. This smacks heavily of the idea of *submission* - that church members have a duty to attend services and *hear the word*, or a duty to accept what the preacher says, and have a willingness to be taught. This last element is often euphemistically called having a *teachable*

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spirit. But what it means, again, is being submissive. *Don't think you know all that you need to know. Your pastor* (someone trained, qualified, and licensed or ordained) *will tell you what things you need to know. Trust them.* And to some extent, *trust them only*.

But church members - as well as everyone else on the planet - always retain the God-given right and authority to test what any preacher or teacher says, and to accept or reject what is said. Each member also retains the inalienable right to seek out teachers of their own choosing, no matter who or how many. Obviously, some teachers and preachers will be better than others. But judging who those better people are is always a matter for the individual member to decide - not any church leaders. Absolutely *never* substitute someone else's judgment for your own. Good judgment - spiritual discernment, really - is like a muscle. The more you use it, the better (stronger) you get. The less you use it, the weaker it becomes.

5th Principle - THE CHURCH AS A CORPORATION

> *Just because God has not put anyone on earth in charge of His Church doesn't mean He has left us without guidance as to how it should be governed. In fact, He wants the Church to be governed consistent with its true nature as a corporation.*

The Invisible Church: Head and Body

If you look at what the New Testament has to say about church structure and authority, I suppose to the average person it can seem wondrous or perhaps mysterious, and to the average clergyman it will look pretty much like a pastor-centric organization. But if you put on the eyes of a corporate attorney, the scripture practically screams the Church is a corporation. And this analysis applies both to the invisible church and the visible church, although in different ways.

In fact, going back at least 400 years, the modern legal concept of a corporation is based on the historic understanding of the nature of the invisible Church, the body of Christ. Yes - what I'm saying is that the modern idea of a corporation came from the Bible.

Modernly, corporations are generally acknowledged to possess four main characteristics which distinguish them from natural persons. Lawyers use the term *artificial person* to refer to corporate bodies, and *natural person* to refer to human beings, because corporations are the creation of man, whereas humans are the creation of God. (Do you see how this distinction between things God creates and things man makes carries over into many different areas of life?)

The four characteristics of a corporation are: 1) it is one legal body with many members (thus giving rise to the axiom that a corporation is a single *person* in the eyes of the law); 2) it must be chartered or formed by the permission of the civil sovereign authority (in the U.S., either a state or the federal government); 3) it is capable of perpetual life (which is to say, the entity can survive beyond the lives of any of its individual members); and 4) its members will generally have limited liability.

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As to this last point, it does not mean there is any pre-defined limit on what a corporation may be liable for. Instead, it means the individual members or shareholders of the corporation will not be *personally* liable for the debts of the corporation. Thus, the liability of the individual members of a corporation is limited to what they have invested in it - if anything. And in a nonprofit corporation, that investment (by members) is typically *zero* - at least monetarily.

It is also common for people to talk about a corporation having the ability to enter into contracts, hold property, and to sue and be sued. But in reality these are simply the consequences of being a legal *person*. Another common attribute of corporations is the transferability of ownership, but this only applies to for-profit or business corporations, which has no application to the Church. Rather, the proper analogy between the Church and the corporate world is a *nonprofit corporation*.

A nonprofit corporation is distinguished from a business corporation in this key respect: *no one owns it personally*. Thus, there are no ownership interests to be transferred. In fact, in many states the proper terminology for a nonprofit corporation is a *non-stock corporation*, or a corporation with no stockholders. So the word *nonprofit* actually has nothing to do with what a corporation may earn. Rather, a nonprofit entity is one in which no one can profit *as an owner*. Typically, a nonprofit corporation has members, but these people are not shareholders or owners. Members have voting rights (*i.e.*, a voice in corporate government), but not a financial stake in the enterprise.

And so we see that the invisible Church is very much like a nonprofit corporation. We already know that the Church is one body, or one entity, with many members. 1 Cor. 12:12-14. And God refers to this body as a person when He calls it the Bride of Christ. Rev. 19:7. We have also seen that the invisible Church was chartered or formed by God, the universal sovereign. 1 Cor. 12:18,24,27-28.

The Bible also tells us the invisible Church will be with God forever and individual members of it will have eternal life. Rom. 6:22-23. Thus, the Church as a body will outlive the physical lives of all of its members. Additionally, every member of the invisible Church may be said to have a limited liability. In other words, each person's liability is limited to loss of their physical life. But a member will never lose his or her eternal reward. *See*, Mat. 10:28. Also, 1 Cor. 15:50-58.

Finally, no member of the body of Christ may be said to be an owner of the invisible Church. Yet, each member has a voice (via consent of the governed) in the government of the visible church. And in the Millennium, each member of the Church will participate in the government of the kingdom of Christ. Rev. 20:4. So, membership basically means participation, not ownership.

These parallels between the invisible Church and a nonprofit corporation were recognized centuries ago. Unfortunately, the mood of the times (back when many nations approved of the state establishment of religion) was to carry the analogy too far. Thus, temporal corporations were modeled after the singular Head and body concept (*i.e.*, Christ as head, and everyone else as the body). This gave rise to what we modernly call a *corporation sole*, where (typically) a religious figure or church leader was recognized as the head of the visible church, and everyone else in the

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church was a member of *his* body.

Obviously, from our standpoint (now that state establishments of religion are out of fashion), we recognize that the head and body concept applies strictly to the invisible Church, whose head is Christ. Earthly corporations ought not to model themselves after God's example *in that respect*. Although, there are still some *corporations sole* out there, remnants of an earlier time, many in connection with the Roman Catholic church.

But for our present purpose, I wish to establish only that the universal Church is analogous to a nonprofit corporation. Which is significant, seeing as how nearly every visible or temporal church in the Western world is also organized as a (surprise!) nonprofit corporation. It indicates that there is a divine pattern here, given to us for our edification.

Now, being analogous to a nonprofit corporation tells us nothing about the governing of the universal Church, because it is governed exclusively by Christ as its head. But as to the visible church, it tells us almost everything we need to know. And from that starting point, we can next inquire how it is that nonprofit corporations are typically governed.

The Visible Church: Board and Officers

Nonprofit corporate governance is no big secret. The members elect a board of directors (sometimes called a board of trustees), and the board selects or appoints officers of the corporation. In the nonprofit world, members generally have no rights except to vote for board members and on certain important questions affecting the organization, such as mergers, the purchase and sale of property, changes of name or purpose, and dissolution, etc.

The board of directors/trustees set policy for the corporation, oversee its affairs, and exercise ultimate control of the budget and assets of the corporation. The board supervises the officers and employees of the corporation, and expects reports and updates from them in order to keep advised of corporate affairs. The board usually doesn't handle the day-to-day business of the entity, but they can form committees to exercise a more direct role in key corporate activities. And in the nonprofit world, board members almost always serve without compensation, *i.e.,* they are volunteers. Typically, but not necessarily, directors/trustees are also members of the organization.

You should be starting to pick up on the fact that a corporate board basically functions as a committee of overseers. And this should tell you where the analysis is going.

Officers are typically compensated employees of the corporation, but they can also be volunteers, depending on the overall budget and whether their tasks are part-time or full-time. Officers tend to be the key employees in any corporation, but it is common in the nonprofit world to have the daily affairs of the entity run by an *executive director*, who may be neither an officer or director, or either one or both.

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Authority and accountability flow in opposite directions. The members have ultimate authority, but since the board members are regarded as *fiduciaries* for legal purposes, that's where most corporation laws fix the ultimate responsibility for a corporation. Nonetheless, the members retain the authority (as *We the People*) to remove and replace any board member, as a general rule. The board has authority to hire and fire the officers, and sometimes the general staff.

In other words, authority flows from the members to the board to the officers and down to the staff. Accountability runs from the staff to the officers up to the board and finally to the membership - in other words, in exactly the opposite direction. All these relationships - and the procedures for holding meetings, resolving disputes, and the distribution of authority - are handled in the corporation's bylaws. All this is the normal expectation for nonprofit corporate governance.

And when we look at what the scriptures have to say about church governance, what do we see? We see provision for members of the body, elders/overseers who function as a board of directors, and deacons who function as officers and/or staff.

Apparently, this arrangement was first introduced in the early Jerusalem church:

> Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." Acts 6:1-4.

Let me interpret. The *twelve*, *i.e.*, the original apostles, were the functioning elders or overseers of the Jerusalem church. Peter (one of the twelve) confirms that he was an elder in 1 Pet. 5:1, referring to himself as "a fellow elder." Their duties centered around oversight and teaching, consistent with Paul's admonition to Timothy that an elder be "able to teach." The seven other men selected by the elders were to have the initial primary duty, according to Acts, of serving tables. Yeah, pretty much sounds like deacons to me.

Later on, Paul writes to Timothy concerning the qualifications or requirements for the positions of elder and deacon in the churches.

> The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? He must

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> not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil. 1 Tim 3:1-7.
>
> Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus. 1 Tim 3:8-13.

First, as to elders, the scripture says it is an office *that men may aspire to*. In other words, you can desire to be an elder, and it is an office you can run for, in essence. You decide you want this position, and other men decide to elect or appoint you - God is not involved in the process. If your church teaches that being an elder is something a person is divinely called to, the scripture does not support that. And although it is not explicitly stated, it is fair to imply a person can also aspire to the office of deacon.

Thus, we know that elders and deacons are *not* spiritual offices, and the people who hold these positions are appointed by men, not God. This conclusion is confirmed by the presence of stated qualifications for the offices of both elders and deacons. If God were doing the appointing, as He does with spiritual gifts and offices, He would not need a list of qualifications, or tell us what they were if He had one. These qualifications are for our benefit - to help *us* appoint worthy men to office.

All of this is perfectly consistent with government by the consent of the governed. There is no divine right to rule given to people with respect to the visible church. No elder or deacon sits by reason of a divine appointment.

Second, the visible church, from its very earliest days, was *not* ruled or governed by spiritual persons (or persons supposing themselves to be spiritual). Which translates into modern parlance as being governed by *lay leadership*. No priests, pastors, ministers of the gospel, or any so-called *spiritual persons* are placed in authority to oversee the church at any point in the New Testament. The visible church is to be led by people holding temporal offices, plain and simple. In other words, leadership of the visible church is to be *from within, not from above*.

Is this arrangement of members, elders and deacons to be taken as gospel? By that I mean, must every church be organized like this, or is there any flexibility in the way the visible church can be organized and governed? It will probably surprise you when I say that, strictly speaking, this arrangement is not required. Yes, it would seem to be the preferred model - and the only one

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suggested in the N.T. And I don't have any reason to disfavor it for any reason.

But if we are to take the principle of government by consent to its logical conclusion, we would expect liberty in the choice of the form of government among visible churches, just as we do for civil governments. There is not only one right way to organize a civil government prescribed by God - why should the visible church be any different?

However, this liberty comes with a *caveat*, namely, we do not have the liberty to choose a form of local church government which ends up conflicting with any of the biblical principles of church government. Thus, for example, we do not have the liberty to establish a priestly class in the church - even by consent - because it would undermine the priesthood of Christ, which as you may remember, is exclusive. So the very existence of a priestly class negates the equality within the Church that the priesthood of Christ guarantees. Similarly with the other principles. So in the long run, permissible deviations from the corporate model are going to be limited and small in scope.

This naturally brings up the question of how well the visible church has fared in observing these biblical principles of church government throughout its history.

Cheaters!

A couple of pages back I said, "authority flows from the members to the board to the officers and down to the staff. Accountability runs from the staff to the officers up to the board and finally to the membership." All of which assumes a "standard" nonprofit corporation setup, where the articles of incorporation provide for members, who elect the directors, who appoint the officers and staff.

However, most state corporation laws allow nonprofit corporations to be incorporated on a "directorship" basis. In a *directorship corporation* there are no voting members of the organization, meaning that *members do not elect the directors*. Instead, the directors appoint or select their own members - the board of directors is self-perpetuating. The board may or may not solicit *input* from the members (*i.e.*, the congregation) as to director selection, but ultimately the choice belongs to the board, not the members.

(A directorship corporation may still have members, if it has bylaws that expressly provide for them. However, there is a difference between having members defined by the Articles of Incorporation, and having them defined only in the bylaws or an internal constitution. The Articles are a public document, which can only be changed by filing with a state office. Also, members provided for in the Articles get all of the protections afforded to members under the state's corporation laws. Members created by the bylaws do not get those protections, and they have no legal right to vote. Plus, the bylaws are a private document no one has a right to see, and they can be changed at any time. In addition to all of that, if you ever get in a bylaws dispute with a church, courts will generally ***not*** intervene.)

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This scenario is increasingly being used by churches as the preferred form of corporate organization. There are three main dangers flowing from this choice of an internal arrangement. *First*, it allows for cronyism to go unchecked. The board will tend to select directors who are friends or relatives of the existing directors and/or the pastor. *Second*, it takes the power of removal of a director away from the members. The members have no real say in who gets on the board, or who gets booted off. *Third*, in the event of a church crisis - the pastor is forced to leave because of some scandal, or there is a church split and several directors leave in disgust - what happens to the church is left in the hands of very few people (sometimes just one or two).

In all three of these scenarios, there is no true accountability of the board of directors to the people - the congregation. Even though most (if not all) of the people in the congregation will think of themselves as members (and have probably been told as much). The means of accountability has been eliminated (*i.e.*, the power to change who sits on the board). Accordingly, setting a church up as a directorship corporation is just a blatant (although usually unpublicized) effort to consolidate and control power for the pastor and/or whoever else is really in charge.

But ultimately, what a directorship corporation does is call into question what the definition of a church really is. In the universal Church, the body of Christ, Jesus is the head of the Church, but He Himself is *not* the Church. Jesus Himself is *not* the body. The body of Christ - the true Church - is made up of the people who are believers. Without the people who are members of the body, *there is no Church*. God never refers to the Church apart from the people who are its members. If there is no such thing as a heavenly Church that has no members, how can there be a visible church without voting members? Yet, that is exactly what a directorship corporation is.

You may say, "Well, believers have no voting rights in the heavenly church. There's no reason why they should have voting rights in a visible church." Except that Christ actually does rule the heavenly Church by the direct authority of God (*i.e.*, top-down). But your local church is actually ruled by the consent of the governed (*i.e.*, bottom-up). Your church leaders have probably told you their authority comes from God, and God established the visible church. Your denomination probably says exactly that in its organizational documents.

But as we have already seen, this is a grossly mistaken belief. *God never came down to earth, incorporated your church, and personally installed your church board.* No matter how old your church is, it was formed by *people*, its organizational documents were written by *people*, and its leaders were all chosen by *people*. And no, your church does ***not*** trace back corporately or organizationally to 30 A.D.

There is also a definitional principle here. No church, whether visible or invisible, is defined by its leadership. Which is to say, no church exists merely because church leaders are in place. The presence of a leadership structure, or an ecclesiastical hierarchy, is not what makes a church a church. I'm talking about *clergy* here, folks. A church without clergy is still a church in God's eyes. And I'm not just talking about a congregation in transition, when a pastor leaves or dies, and they

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are looking for a replacement. I mean a church body permanently without a clergy person is still a church. God intended the visible church for lay leadership, remember?

Yet, I dare say all, or nearly all, Christian denominations (including Protestant ones) provide in their organizational documents that a church body is not, and cannot become, a part of the denomination unless it is lead by an approved member of the clergy. In other words, a congregation is *not* a church, unless a clergy person leads it. And there is not one single verse in all the Bible to support such a position.

You have been duped. *God established the visible church. Your church leaders have been appointed by God. Your church leaders have spiritual authority to rule. The heavenly church and the visible church are both under the headship of Christ. Pastors and elders are the same thing. Church authority is essentially top-down. Members have no inherent voting rights. A church without clergy is not really a church. Lay leadership operates under the authority of the clergy. Oh, and you owe us some of your money.*

Believe what you want, but if your church was formed as a directorship corporation, it only *proves* that God had absolutely no hand in establishing it, because God never formed a church without members. Ironic, no? And the people who have robbed you of your rights as a member (in the name of efficiency and good order) are just *cheaters*. Is it any wonder then, that so many churches teach a message of "giving up your rights for the sake of Jesus," and "submit yourselves to each other"? Ever notice how the submission only ever works one way?

(Note: all church articles of incorporation are a matter of public record in every state in the U.S. All states make their corporate records available online, and the vast majority allow document downloads for free. In those few states who charge for download copies, the cost is really minimal. Do yourself a favor - look up your church's articles of incorporation and see what is really going on.)

THE VISIBLE CHURCH IN REAL LIFE

> *The witness of church history shows that over the years the visible church has taken great pains to suppress, subvert and sidestep all of the basic principles of church government God gave the Church for its benefit.*

Concentration, Not Diffusion (Rejection of 1st Principle)

The biblical witness is that God has not placed anyone on earth in charge of the visible or the invisible Church. Unfortunately, history bears witness that people have not been entirely satisfied with this situation, and it seems human nature wants to impose a divine chain of command where there is none. Thus we see that the vast majority of churches - regardless of their form of government - have made an effort to concentrate church power and authority in just a few persons, notwithstanding God's refusal to put anyone in charge.

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There are three general types of church government, *i.e.*, *hierarchical* (alternately called *episcopal*), *congregational*, and *presbyterian*. While there are definite differences in the level of bureaucratic entanglement involved with each one, for most purposes *they all reduce to the same thing in the end*. The inevitable tendency of human nature (or so it seems) is to concentrate power in the visible church instead of diffusing it.

Notwithstanding the great latitude God has given to Christians, or the resurgence of independent and home churches in recent years, the predominant form of church organization utilized in the last 2,000 years is the hierarchical model, as exemplified by Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy and the greater Anglican Communion (including the Episcopal Church in America).

A hierarchical or episcopal church is characterized by multiple levels of ecclesiastical authority, that is, multiple layers of clergy. At the lowest levels there are clergyman who have charge of a local congregation or parish, and even at this level there may be a hierarchy of senior pastor, executive pastor, associate and assistant pastors, ministers of music or education, etc. But an episcopal church ensures there are additional layers (or a hierarchy) of clergyman above these, forming synods, dioceses, presbyteries, etc. These may include one or more layers of bishops (overseers) and councils, and may even be capped off with a supreme pontiff, as with the Catholics.

Hierarchical churches also share a number of additional characteristics, *i.e.*, new church plants are top-down (decided at the upper levels and implemented at the lower levels - but not by ordinary church members in any event). Additionally, the hiring or assignment of ministers is top-down, and church property tends to be owned by the hierarchy, not the local congregation.

And despite the ballyhoo made by Presbyterian churches that they are modeled after a republican-style form of government, in reality they function just like an episcopal church in many ways. Thus, there are multiple layers of ecclesiastical authority (General Assembly, over the Presbytery, over the local clergy) which inevitably tend to concentrate power up the line. Plus, the ecclesiastical superstructure tends to control the assignment of ministers, and it is not unusual for church property to be owned by the Presbytery, not the local congregation.

Historically, both Catholicism and Orthodoxy have made the claim each of them is the exclusive earthly representation of the invisible Church. They have each claimed, in essence,"unless you are part of us, you are not really a Christian." I do not know how widespread this claim is among other hierarchical churches. Any claim of exclusivity of this nature is a fundamental denial of the Diffusion Principle, by which all churches are on an equal footing.

This kind of obvious exclusivity is generally not present among non-hierarchical churches. Still, you can get a sense of how exclusive any church believes itself to be by how many other churches it will hold fellowship with (or to speak Christianese, *extend communion to*). When a church grants fellowship or communion, it is a signal that it acknowledges the legitimacy of the other group. To withhold communion is to deny an equal footing. Congregational churches are not immune from

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this type of behavior.

To deny fellowship or communion is inherently heavy-handed. It takes what is essentially an individual decision (Am I a Christian who is worthy to partake of communion wherever it may be offered?) and turns it into a corporate decision (No matter what *you* think, *we* will decide whether you are worthy to share our communion table). It is tantamount to saying that communion will be extended on the basis of membership in a particular visible church, rather than the invisible Church. It's hardly a basis for equality among church groups. And it trashes the concept of Christian liberty (*i.e.*, individual conscience) along the way, taking power out of the hands of the individual and putting it elsewhere.

In a number of ways, the Reformation didn't go nearly far enough - primarily in the areas of church authority and deference to the supposed ecclesiastical authority of the clergy. A Second Reformation of ecclesiastical authority is long overdue.

Reestablishing the Priesthood (Rejection of 2nd Principle)

It is bad enough that in the greater part of the visible church the clergy openly refer to themselves as *priests*. What an absolute insult and subversion of the eternal and *exclusive* priesthood of Christ, who eliminated the need for any human mediators between God and men! But why should that be a surprise? Jesus said, "And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven." Mat 23:9. Nevertheless, how very many people call their minister *Father*, a practice in direct disobedience of the command of Christ!

Less common, perhaps, but just as offensive to the gospel, is the title of *Reverend*. What is that title, if not a claim the person it applies to is a holy person? But we know beyond any doubt, *all men are equally unholy*. None are righteous, no not one. People of God - why do we let anyone get away with this? Why are *you* calling your minister Father or Reverend? This practice only continues because people go along with it.

Yet, names and titles are just the tip of the iceberg. Even more sad is the fact that clergy in churches all over the world effectively function as priests, even if they don't use the title. At a very basic level, the very existence of a clergy class is every bit a *de facto* priesthood. By its very nature, the clergy-laity distinction sets apart certain people from all others based upon a purported distinction in spiritual authority. What is this, if not a division in the body? A division that, if the clergy are to be believed, is by God's design. Yet, God's word specifically prohibits class divisions within the Church - visible or invisible. Plus, all spiritual authority is distributed *equally*.

This division of the body is reflected in all sorts of ways in nearly every church organization in the world. What is clergy, if not that certain people, and certain people only, can wear certain clothes, use certain instruments, stand in certain pulpits, go into certain rooms (just like the priests in Israel), perform certain rites and ceremonies, preside over certain services, lead corporate worship, etc.?

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Does your church have a room designated as a *sanctuary*? You do know that there are no physical sanctuaries (*i.e.,* temples) in the Church, right? Is your church called a *temple*? Are there places in your church designated as a *nave*, a *narthex*, or an *altar*? You do know there are no physical altars in Christianity, because there are no animal sacrifices in Christianity, right? Apparently, a lot of people *don't* know it. Or they do know, but don't care - which is worse. There is absolutely no biblical validity to the idea that an *altar* is a place where a person comes to Jesus.

Does your church have two pulpits - a greater pulpit (stage right) and a lesser pulpit (stage left)? Who may stand in the greater pulpit? Clergy only. Who formally presides over corporate worship in your church? The clergy - unquestionably. Because corporate worship can't happen unless a clergyman is present, am I right? Try holding a worship service without one in your church and see what happens. How is this anything other than a division in the body, dividing those who can from those who can't?

And this is only the half of it. The other half? That only clergy can be employed as pastors, opt out of social security, enjoy the tax benefits of a minister's housing allowance, be recognized as a minister of the gospel under law, be members of an ecclesiastical hierarchy and participate in the medical and pension benefits thereof, etc. Oh yes, many are the special material privileges of being a member of the clergy. Did you think this was just about spiritual authority? *Follow the money*.

Who Are the Preachers of the Gospel?

I see no evidence God put clergy in authority over the Church, or over people with other various callings, gifts and offices, such as teachers and evangelists. Rather, I see the scriptures holding out preachers as fellow-heirs and fellow ministers alongside, and equal in authority to, the other gifts and offices. Valid, but not at the top of the heap. Necessary for the body, but not in charge of it. Although, notice that I refer to such people as preachers (or ministers) and *not* pastors.

One of the logical conclusions of seeing the various spiritual offices as equal in necessity and authority is that none of them is more entitled to earn a living or to solicit contributions from church congregations than the other offices. And before you start quoting 1 Cor.9 at me, consider this: nowhere in that chapter, nor in 2 Cor. Chapters 9-11, is the language directed towards *pastors*. If anything, one can make a case those chapters are specifically directed towards apostles only, and who among pastors today claim to be an apostle? Very few. Or, at best, the language is directed to preachers of the Gospel - but again, preaching is never linked in scripture with being a *pastor*.

Do you think it mere coincidence that none of the New Testament writers ever refer to themselves as a pastor? And even though the books of 1st and 2nd Timothy and Titus are commonly referred to as the *pastoral epistles*, are you aware that the word *pastor* is never used in any of them, even once? Go ahead, get out your concordance or online Bible and check it out.

Paul variously refers to himself as a minister, preacher, apostle and teacher - but *never* as a pastor.

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Curious. And while apostle and teacher are listed among the spiritual offices in the Church, neither minister nor preacher are. Nor is a preacher ever equated with being a pastor anywhere in scripture. Curioser and curioser. So who are the preachers of the gospel? Seriously - who does the scripture say the preachers of the gospel are? Truth be told, it never does, in so many words. But we can still reason it out.

Are evangelists preachers of the gospel? I should hope so. Isn't that what an evangelist does - preach the gospel? Is an apostle a preacher of the gospel? Well, if the apostle Paul is any indication, then yes. What about teachers and prophets, who teach the word of God and speak forth the word of God - are they preachers of the gospel? Wait - are you saying they're not? What is being a preacher of the gospel if not speaking and teaching the word of God?

So what is the scriptural evidence, except that *all* of the spiritual offices are ministers or preachers of the gospel. There is *nothing* in scripture to indicate that pastors are more a minister of the gospel than any of the other spiritual offices in the Church. *And maybe less* (see below). Equality - not division - is the rule governing spiritual offices in the Church. And if this is the case, there isn't much need for a priestly class or a clergy-laity distinction, is there?

Assertion of Spiritual Authority (Rejection of 3rd Principle)

Much of the analysis of the abuse of spiritual authority in the visible church is wrapped into the discussion of the reestablishment of the priesthood. After all, who are the people exercising sacramental authority in your church? The clergy - the *de facto* priesthood.

I am happy to say that in recent years, I have seen a number of local churches allowing the heads of families to baptize their own children and to administer the elements of communion to their own families. This is a good thing. But most people don't understand the logical implications of what they are doing. Namely, that they don't need their pastor's permission, blessing or oversight to do these tasks, nor do they have to come to church to do them. They could just as well do these things at home, by themselves, on their own authority. And in God's eyes, it would be equally valid with doing them in a public assembly.

Which is why it is to the everlasting shame of the visible church that any of its ministers refer to themselves as having sacramental authority akin to the O.T. priests. And this is done even in some Protestant churches. For example, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church provides that "Pastors shall preach and expound the Word, to be God's prophet to the people and to *be the people's priest before God*." Book of Order (2015-2016) Rule 9-5(A)(2). A footnote to that text provides, "'Priest' highlights the Pastor's special responsibility to pray for the needs of the congregation and *regularly administer the means of grace through the* ministry of the Word and *Sacraments*."

Which is essentially no different from the way a priest is defined by Roman Catholics. "The priest is the minister of Divine worship, and especially of the highest act of worship, sacrifice. In this

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sense, every religion has its priests, exercising more or less *exalted sacerdotal functions* as intermediaries between man and the Divinity." Catholic Encyclopedia, *Priest*, at http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12406a.htm. I assume you understand that *sacraments* (Protestant) and *sacerdotal functions* (Catholic) are essentially the same thing. For shame, for shame.

Also, have you noticed how infrequently the spiritual gifts and offices are discussed in the overwhelming majority of churches? It's as if they don't exist, for the most part. And frankly, it is not enough that a church offer a sermon series on spiritual gifts from time to time. My belief is that it is the responsibility of every church congregation - as a means of building up and edifying the saints - to help each church member to *identify* his or her own spiritual gifts and offices, and then *empower* each member to use them as they see fit.

Just once - *just once!!* - I would like to attend a church where, once I start attending regularly, someone would ask me what my spiritual gift or office is, and when I say *teacher*, not to run for the hills, but to embrace it and encourage me. No, I'm not holding my breath. Or if I didn't know, they would offer to help me identify my spiritual gifts and/or office. Why don't churches do this? I'll tell you why. Because once they know what your gift is, they have a responsibility to let you utilize your gift in the body. And that's the last thing any church wants.

I mean, think of the chaos! Letting people do what God has equipped them to do. It's madness! We have to put a lid on that. That would destroy the pretended spiritual authority of the clergy, and my God! - the church would fall apart if that happened. Whose outlandish idea was this anyway? The very idea, letting people get it into their heads they possess any real spiritual authority on their own. It could shake the very foundations of organized religion. We have to stamp this out now!

You think I exaggerate? Then why does every single church avoid identifying the spiritual gifts of their members like the plague? For starters, some church members might find out they aren't actually saved yet, and that would be just disastrous - it could jeopardize church contributions. The only thing worse than doing that, in most churches, is to start talking about God's laws as if they were really a legal thing ...

Go back and read Eph 4:11-16 again. Yes, again! Do you see it?

> And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, *to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ*, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, *so that we may no longer be children* ...

Your church wants you to believe they are equipping you and building up the body of Christ, but how do we become equipped and built up according to the scriptures? Through the spiritual gifts

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and offices God bestows. So if you don't know what your gift and/or office is, how well equipped are you? *Not very*. If you know what your gift and/or office is, but your church won't let you use it in the congregation, how built up is the body of Christ? *Not very*.

What is the ultimate result of this failure to equip (and empower)? *People in the pews lack maturity*. If that is the case, how will a church treat its members? *Like children*. Does your church treat you like a child, needing constant help and guidance, not being able to decide things for yourself? Or does it actually treat you like a mature adult, in whose judgment the church trusts, allowing you to use your discretion in the exercise of your gift and/or office? Sorry, that was a rhetorical question - *we both already know the answer*. Why do you think some ministers want you to call them *Father*? *Children should be seen, and not heard*.

Here's another thought for you to chew on along the same line. Some hierarchical churches regard their leader as a person who is purportedly chosen by God, who speaks for Christ, and who is the actual earthly head of the Church in Christ's absence. This is epitomized by the Roman papacy, where the pope is claimed to be the successor of Saint Peter, in particular.

The Orthodox Church prefers oligarchy to monarchy, apparently, vesting supreme authority in what amounts to one or more committees, *i.e.*, the bishops and ecumenical councils. The Anglican Communion claims that its bishops are direct successors to the original apostles by reason of *holy orders* - essentially, a mechanism for choosing *apostolic designees* (an idea I have already discussed and discredited).

Why would any church make this dubious claim - that somehow they received the mantle of leadership of the Church from one or more of the original apostles? Especially when there is absolutely no evidence for such a thing in scripture? There is only one reason I can think of - to claim a special dispensation of spiritual and ecclesiastical authority, and then mix them together in an unholy communion. Essentially, to claim supremacy as to church government and other so-called spiritual matters *when in reality there is no supremacy available to be had*.

Your church doesn't merely want to treat you as a child - they want to *control* you. And it is so much easier to control the masses if church leaders claim to speak for God.

The Keys of the Kingdom

Before moving to the next point, let me address head on the matter of Mat. 16:18-19, which is used by the Catholic church and others to variously justify the papacy, the clergy, ecclesiastical spiritual authority, and conflating the visible and invisible churches. Jesus said, "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

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It is easy to see why people get confused by this text due to the similarity of the name Peter (*petros*) to the Greek word for rock, *i.e.*, *petra*. But here is the key to understanding verse 18: *the word "rock" does **not** refer to Peter*. In a sense, the rock upon which the Church is built is the bedrock principle that Jesus is the Christ, which Peter acknowledges in the prior two verses.

But more to the point, *the rock is Christ*. We know that Christ - not Peter - is the chief cornerstone of the Church. *See* Ps 118:22; Isa 28:16; Eph 2:20. Plus, Jesus is often referred to as a rock in scripture. See, 2 Sam 22:32, 47; Ps 18:2, and 1 Cor. 10:4 ("the Rock was Christ"). So when Jesus said, "on this rock I will build my church," He was affirming Peter's recognition of who Jesus was, and using that recognition as the basis (or the rock) upon which the Church would be built. So ultimately, when Jesus said "on this rock" he was referring to Himself.

So what about verse 19 and the *keys to the kingdom*? It is clear from the larger context (Mat 16:13-20) that this is part of a conversation Jesus is having with the twelve disciples, not just Peter. So when Jesus gives the keys of the kingdom out, He is giving them to all the disciples equally. How do I know this? Because Jesus repeats the *binding and loosing* language in Mat 18:18, where He again is speaking to all the disciples, not just Peter. Which, at a minimum, means that Peter didn't receive anything (in Mat. 16:19) that the other disciples did not also receive.

We can therefore interpret this language in a manner consistent with the Great Commission, where Jesus is again speaking to all of the disciples. What He says to all of them is to be understood in a representative capacity on behalf of all believers who were to follow them. Neither the Great Commission, nor the binding and loosing language of Mat 16:19 and 18:18, were intended to apply solely to the people who first heard them. All subsequent believers stand on an equal footing with the initial disciples in terms of the authority granted by Christ to His Church.

Consequently, neither Peter, nor the twelve, nor their heirs nor designees, received any special, unique or peculiar authority with respect to the Church. Moreover, nothing in Mat 16:13-20 even remotely suggests Jesus is making a distribution of *governing authority* to certain individuals. No one could come out of that committee meeting and claim to be in charge of the whole enterprise, as subsequent New Testament history confirms. Did Peter ever claim to be the leader of the worldwide Church? No. Then how can his heirs claim to have what he never claimed for himself? So in the long run, who has the keys to the kingdom? Every believer.

The Visible and Invisible Church Are One (Rejection of 4th Principle)

I have made a fairly forceful case that the invisible Church and the visible church are two completely separate things, because one is *created and ruled* by God, and the other is *made and ruled* by men.

But doggone it, visible churches keep trying to confuse the issue anyway, have you noticed? Baptism, in particular, is used by many churches as a way to associate (or directly tie) membership in the local assembly with the spiritual conversion experience. Such churches make it seem like you

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are joining both the invisible church and the visible church at the same time, thus blurring the distinction between the two. However, there is absolutely nothing in scripture which ties baptism (either water or spiritual) to local church membership.

Other mechanisms include infant baptism, which creates the impression that somehow parents and the church can cooperatively induct a child (who has no idea what is really going on) into church membership and/or the spiritual "covering" of the church. In associational terms, infant baptism leads people to believe the visible church is something you can become a member of without joining (*i.e.*, no personal choice of the child is necessary). Infant baptism mimics the O.T. covenants (which have no bearing on the matter) by linking church membership and/or covering to mere physical birth. It makes a mockery of the Church covenant as a covenant of faith.

Some denominations try to slide around these glaring defects by saying that infant baptism doesn't actually confer membership in the church, in just brings the child into the *household of faith*. This phrase, taken from Gal. 6:10, is intended to refer only to believers in Christ, *i.e.*, Christians. But it is often used by some denominations to imply that being a member of the immediate family of a Christian is enough to secure some kind of spiritual blessing, or covering. *As if* God confers any spiritual blessings in the Church based on family relationships. What a sham! In fact, the whole idea behind bringing a person under the *covering* of a church is to maintain control. *Don't leave the local church, or you will lose your covering!* What crap.

The Roman papacy is certainly the most obvious, but not the only, example of the leader(s) of a visible church claiming direct authority from God to lead the church and provide for its spiritual guidance. What does this do, except reinforce the idea that the visible church has been created and ruled by God - if not directly, then at least by His chosen agents? The idea that the visible church is man-made and man governed is entirely suppressed in very many churches.

If you have ever heard a minister say that Christians have a duty to submit to the governing authorities in the Church, this is a blatant effort to cause you to believe your relationship with local leaders is pre-defined by God and also that they have a pre-defined jurisdiction to rule over you in specific ways. Yet, the phrase *governing authorities* is derived from Rom. 13:1, a text which applies solely to authorities *instituted by God*. And as we have seen, God has never instituted any temporal/visible church, so Rom. 13:1 simply does not apply to them. Don't be fooled by such trashy theology.

Yes, friends, your church - *your church* - is actively engaged in making sure you never draw a clear distinction between the invisible Church and the local congregation, even though scripture makes it abundantly clear that they are two entirely different things. (I can hear the voice of Yoda speaking to me as in a movie:) ***Keep you in the dark, they will. Give in to the dark side, you must not.***

There is only one reason for claiming the invisible Church and visible church are the same. Namely, to use ecclesiastical authority as a way to exercise spiritual authority so as to rule over church

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members in spiritual matters. Right? If you want to mix man-made and God-given authority together, you need to mix the man-made church and the God-made Church together. If they are the same, then church leaders have a plausible argument for exercising spiritual and ecclesiastical authority *together*, but if they are not the same, that argument evaporates.

But more than anything else, they want you not just to believe, but to accept without question - and accept without ever really thinking about it - that everything your church leaders say and do has the authority of God behind it. To be brutally honest about it, to the extent your church leaders blur or ignore the distinctions between the invisible Church and the visible church, they don't want merely to treat you as children ("we know what is best") - *they want to control you* ("thou shalt comply"). You are to be passive, and submissive. *Show up, pay up, and shut up*.

But, you might say, "my church leaders are such nice people." Yes, yes they are nice. But have you ever heard any of them tell you what I've shown you in this essay? Are they using different Bibles? For the most part, no. But if they're telling you *some* truth, but not the *whole truth*, what do we call that? *False testimony*. *Bearing a false witness of the scriptures*. Yet they do it so nicely.

Rejection of Lay Leadership (Rejection of 5th Principle)

The essence of any hierarchical church is to deny and reject lay leadership of the visible church. The whole point of an hierarchical structure is to superimpose a multi-layer system of clergy over all church functions as well as all matters of spiritual doctrine and practice. On the other end of the church government spectrum, supposedly, is the congregational form of government.

Whereas hierarchical or episcopal churches are organized top-down, congregational churches are organized bottom-up. Meaning that each local church is self-governing and is, for the most part, independent of other churches. However, many congregational churches choose to loosely associate with others of like mind in associations or conventions of churches. Whereas hierarchical churches tend to look like a monarchy or oligarchy, congregational churches tend to look more like the United States under the Articles of Confederation (that is, a weak union as opposed to a strong union).

But don't be fooled - a congregational church is, in many ways, just a scaled down version of an hierarchical church without all the bloated bureaucracy. Often the pastor - whether the sole pastor or the senior pastor - is a practical monarch, the local church is his kingdom, and his word is law. At least in Catholicism you can almost always find others of like mind in some segment of the church - because it is so large. But in a congregational church there is rarely a safe haven. If you disagree with the pastor, you will likely end up leaving - whether by your choice or by his.

Ostensibly, the Presbyterian form of government is supposed to be halfway between the other two. It is set up as a representative government, with a board of elders (or a *session*) who are elected by the members, and who rotate in and out of office (but are elders for life). The catch is the clergy are also usually elders - so-called *teaching elders* as distinct from *ruling elders*. But if you think the lay

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elders are actually in charge of things at the local level, you are sadly mistaken.

The other catch is that Presbyterian clergy are not members of the local congregation, but are actually members of the overriding presbytery (*i.e.*, ecclesiastical superstructure) which regulates the local congregations. Local church members usually get to vote on whether to "call" a pastor, but candidates always come from a pool of candidates approved by the presbytery and who are usually already members of it. Clergy pensions, insurance and like matters are often controlled by the presbytery, not the local congregation. Not exactly the epitome of lay leadership or control.

In many churches, the members are divested of any real voting rights - all selections of trustees and staff are made by clergy. Many clergy regard themselves as not being accountable to the general membership, even when they occupy a position as an elder/overseer. Many clergy are not even members of the organizations in which they work - their membership, their authority, and their accountability all run to what is essentially a third party - *i.e.*, a separate ecclesiastical structure, such as a diocese, presbytery, or whatever.

Often, the clergy are nothing more than an employee or staff person, yet somehow they are at the top of the authority pile and everyone is accountable to them. Which turns the entire corporate model of governance (authority flows from the members to the board, to the officers and then down to the staff) upside down. In my experience, in the vast majority of cases, even when clergy see themselves as part of the member-board-officer structure in some limited respects, there will always be significant ways in which the pastor/minister is simply out of that chain altogether.

So here is what all forms of church government look like at ground level. Hierarchical - the local priests are in charge of local congregations, but they are selected by the ecclesiastical hierarchy and are accountable not to church members, but the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Congregational - the pastor is in charge of the local congregation. He may be brought in by a vote of the members, but once installed, he is accountable to no one except his cronies who he has stacked on the board of trustees. Presbyterian - clergy are in charge of local congregations yet must be approved by the ecclesiastical hierarchy; they are not accountable to church members, but only to the presbytery.

Are you starting to see a pattern? *Regardless* of the ostensible form of church government, the clergy are always in charge, their allegiance is usually owed elsewhere than the local congregation, and they never view themselves as accountable to local church members. Let me be more blunt: regardless of how a local church is organized, *clergy always think they are in charge*. And for the most part, they actually are. According to conventional wisdom, *this is the way things must be according to divine will*. Such is the sad state of affairs in the visible church today.

Now of course, in the real world there are many variations on theme and what we might call mixed government organizations, modeling parts of their government after one type and other parts from another. *But the bottom line never changes*. Except for perhaps the so-called *home church movement*, which is pretty insignificant compared to the rest of the world of churches, the clergy is

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always in control and they always view themselves as accountable solely to God, not to church members.

The basic problem with this whole situation, of course, is that God never put the clergy in charge of the visible church. But, like a bunch of dupes, people allowed this to happen anyway.

OF THE OFFICE OF PASTOR

I realize this last main section will be the most ... er, challenging. My promise to you is that I am only following the biblical evidence wherever it leads, no matter where the chips may fall.

Because of the manner in which Eph. 4:11 has been (and continues to be) either ignored or misinterpreted, I feel it necessary to examine it in even more detail as it concerns *pastors*. The prevailing myth propounded by churches everywhere is that the people who hold this office are God's appointed leaders in the churches. However, the truth is something else altogether.

Of Sheep and Shepherds

What Is A Shepherd?

Let's determine what it means to be a shepherd so we can better understand what it means to be a pastor. (The English word *pastor* comes from the Latin word *pastor*, meaning shepherd.) Specifically, we want to find out if shepherding in the context of a church carries with it any special spiritual authority, such as the authority to *care for men's souls* and/or to *give spiritual guidance*. Generally speaking, outside of the church context, a shepherd is a person who tends sheep, meaning a person who: a) feeds and cares for sheep; b) protects and guards sheep; and c) guides sheep from pasture to pasture.

In John 10:1-18, we see Jesus modeled as the good shepherd spiritually. In that text, Jesus says [now I'm taking excerpts of the key phrases and concepts from this text and condensing them]:

> "I am the door of the sheep. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. I know my own and my own know me. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord."

It is a fair question to ask, whether any member of the body of Christ can claim any of these attributes of a shepherd modeled by Christ as descriptive of how he or she fulfills the office of pastor.

So *first*, can any pastor claim to be the door of the sheep (*i.e.*, believers)? Well, no - because that

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role is exclusive to Christ and no one else. Jn. 14:6. No pastor is the way, the truth and the life. No one finds salvation by entering the kingdom of God via a pastor. Jesus is the sole mediator between God and men. 1 Tim. 2:5.

Second, can any pastor say that he lays down his life for the sheep? Certainly not in the same sense as Jesus, who literally died for our sins. All pastors die, but no pastor can die for our sins. And it is quite clear from the text that when Jesus talks about laying down His life of his own accord, He is referring to the crucifixion. Again, something that does not apply to any pastor.

Now, don't get hung up on mere metaphors, here. Sure, a pastor may "sacrifice" his or her time, efforts, and resources to help someone else out. But such a sacrifice, if it can truly be called that (it's not like pastors are the only people who sacrifice things to help others), won't provide anyone with spiritual redemption. Nothing a modern day pastor can sacrifice can be compared with the sacrifice of Jesus in any spiritual sense.

Third, Jesus says he knows his sheep and his sheep know him. Can any pastor say that? *Not really*, because no one knows the heart of man except for God, and no pastor is God. Jer. 17:10; 1 Sam. 16:7; 1 Chr. 28:9. Jesus is God, so it makes sense for Him to say that, but not for anyone else to say it. No pastor can truly discern, much less decide, who is saved and who is not. Sure, a pastor can know who his church members are and are not, but the kind of knowledge Jesus referred to is knowing the true spiritual condition of another person's heart. A pastor can guess at such things, but again, no pastor is God.

We also know that Jesus (as the good shepherd) alone has authority over our souls.

> He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. 1 Pet. 2:24-25.

Do pastors have authority to act as the shepherd and overseer of men's souls? *Your local clergy would like you to think so.* But Jesus never delegated authority over men's souls to other men. The authority men have in the Church is much more limited. Go back and re-read Acts 20:28 and 1 Pet. 5:1-3. To whom does God commit the "care" of the Church? To the elders. And pastors aren't elders. (More on this later.) But even elders are not the overseers of other people's souls in the same sense Jesus is. Yes, they are overseers of the church's *temporal* affairs. But no, elders aren't God either, and they have no actual knowledge of any other person's true spiritual condition.

So what is left? Are we to infer that being a pastor/shepherd means such a person is in a position of authority with respect to the sheep (other believers), just because Jesus is the head of the body the Church? But look at the text in John 10 - *in no place does Jesus refer to being a shepherd as one who has the authority to rule over the sheep.* In other words, nowhere does Jesus equate being a shepherd with being the Head of the body. Those are two separate metaphors that are unrelated

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to each other. Thus, there is no basis for importing any kind of headship into the office of pastor just because pastoring ostensibly involves some undefined act of shepherding..

Who Are You Calling A Sheep?

I now want to call your attention to a little acknowledged, much less openly embraced, aspect of the Bible that some of you will find uncomfortable. Namely, that the word ***sheep***, whenever it is used in the Bible metaphorically to refer to ***people***, almost always refers exclusively to the Jewish people. Yes, there are a couple of exceptions, but allow me to demonstrate the usual case first.

"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all." Isa. 53:6. If you have attended church for much of your life, you have probably heard a sermon based on this verse at some point. But who was Isaiah writing to? The Jews. Isa. 1:1. The Church did not even exist at the time this verse was written. It was therefore not written to the Church. OK, I know you are skeptical - keep reading.

> For thus says the Lord God: "Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land. And I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the ravines, and in all the inhabited places of the country. I will feed them with good pasture, and on the mountain heights of Israel shall be their grazing land. There they shall lie down in good grazing land, and on rich pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel. I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord God." Ezek. 34:11-15.

Put aside your preconceptions for a moment and let the scripture speak for itself. God says He will "bring them out from the peoples and *gather them from the countries*, and will *bring them into their own land ...and ... feed them on the mountains of Israel*." When did this ever describe the Church - as a people scattered among the nations, whom God will one day return to their *homeland in Israel*? Never. This scripture can only refer to Israel. Yet, it is striking, isn't it, how closely this text parallels John 10:1-18 above. This is no coincidence.

Jesus said, "I was sent <u>only</u> to the *lost sheep of the house of Israel*." Mat. 15:24. Whoops - what? Have you ever heard a sermon preached on that verse? Probably not. But there is more. Jesus expected the twelve disciples to follow His lead in this respect. "These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them, 'Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the *lost sheep of the house of Israel*.'" Mat. 10:5-6. If you're like most people, you never knew those verses were in your Bible.

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So too Peter, as one of the original twelve apostles, limited his ministry to the Jews. "When they saw that I [Paul] had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as *Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised* ..., and when James and Cephas [Peter] and John ... perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me, that we should go to the Gentiles and *they to the circumcised*." Gal. 2:7-9. It's really not that hard to understand. Peter's ministry, unlike Paul's, was exclusively to the *circumcised*. And *circumcised = the Jews*.

So when Peter writes to the "elect exiles of the dispersion" (1 Pet. 1:1), who is he writing to? Believing Jews. And when he says, "For you were straying like *sheep*, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls" (1 Pet. 2:25), who is he writing to? You get it. Again, Peter says, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." 1 Pet. 2:9. Look, how obvious can it get? *He's quoting Exo. 19:5-6, for crying out loud*. Who is he talking about? Believing Jews. Only believing Jews. Not any Gentiles.

Now I said there were a couple of exceptions to the general rule that *sheep = Jews*. What are they? "I have other sheep that are *not of this fold*. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd." Jn. 10:16. Who are the *sheep not of this fold*? Gentiles, presumably. Also, Jesus will separate the sheep (believers) from the goats (unbelievers) at the time of final judgment. Mat. 25:32-33. But even in these verses, members of the Church (Body of Christ) are never actually called *sheep*. Notice that? Not directly, anyway. Whether the term *sheep* actually refers to Gentile believers is a matter of interpretation (*i.e.*, inference), not any express declaration. Unlike the Jews, who are plainly and expressly called sheep in scripture.

So what is my point? That Jesus came only to save the Jews and not the Gentiles, too? No, that's not what I am saying. "For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised [Jews] to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, *and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God* for his mercy." Rom. 15:8-9. In the next few verses, Paul then quotes a number of O.T. scriptures to reinforce the point that Jesus also came for the Gentiles.

But what I want you to get out of this is that *Gentile Christians are never directly called sheep in the Bible*. Not that we are any less saved, etc. Only that this allegorical expression is never applied directly to us.

Which logically begs a certain uncomfortable question: If God never directly refers to the Church as sheep, why on earth would God give the Church *shepherds, i.e., pastors*? He wouldn't. It wouldn't make any sense. It's a *non sequitur*. So the next time a minister-type person calls you a *sheep*, or the congregation a *flock*, consider shouting out, "*I am not a sheep!*" That'll shake things up.

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Pastors and Elders Not the Same

Let me now make explicit what I have been hinting at in all the discussion of pastors and elders so far. Namely, that those two offices in fact have nothing to do with each other. This is not a new argument. Just go back and compare Eph. 4:11 and 1 Cor. 12:28 (regarding spiritual offices), with 1 Tim 3:1-2 and Tit 1:5-7 (regarding elders).

There are some specific offices God appoints, which He alone decides in His sole discretion. These are *spiritual* offices, chosen for *spiritual* tasks, in the *spiritual* (*i.e.*, invisible) Church. Then there are other offices (that is, elder/overseer and deacon), completely separate, which men can aspire to, and which men can select. These are *temporal* offices, chosen for *temporal* tasks, in the *temporal* (*i.e.*, visible) church.

We have already shown that people cannot and do not transfer any spiritual authority to either elders or deacons. Spiritual authority comes from God, not from people. We also know that spiritual authority carries with it no ruling authority, and ruling authority carries with it no spiritual authority. Ruling authority comes from people, not God. The two things *cannot* be mixed together. Therefore, it is utterly impossible for anyone sitting as an elder in any church to have any spiritual authority whatever. *The spiritual authority of a church elder is absolutely zero*. That applies to *every* elder, in *every* church.

So why do many church elders constantly see themselves as having spiritual oversight or spiritual care of the church? It comes primarily from one verse:

> Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping *watch over your souls*, as those who will have to give an account. (Heb. 13:17).

However, the Greek word *psuche* - here translated as *souls* - often just means *persons*, or *lives*. And depending on the translation, it is usually translated as *persons* or *lives* roughly half the time whenever used in the New Testament. We do not, and cannot, infer from this one isolated verse that somehow God has actually given some people (chosen by men, no less) *authority* over the spirits of other people. If that were the case, we would expect the Greek word to be *pneuma* (or *spirit*), rather than *psuche*. However, the problem with that is more than just a choice of words.

If God actually granted one person authority over the spirit of another, it would be in direct contradiction to a fundamental tenet of Christianity. Namely, that spiritual faith is *individual* - no one can choose for (or even know the choice of) anyone else. God alone knows our true spiritual condition, and only He can see the heart.

A church elder can see no one's heart, know no one's spirit, or actually oversee anyone else's spiritual condition. In fact, scripture is quite clear that an elder, just like everyone else, can't even see their *own* heart or spirit accurately. (1 Ki. 8:39; Jer. 17:9). How can they possibly oversee the

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spiritual welfare of others? The one who actually watches over our spirit is the Lord Himself. (Prv. 24:12). No, the care that any church elder has for the souls in the church is strictly temporal care - physical necessities, health, support, teaching, and such things. Spiritual oversight? - forget it.

Unlike modern church practice, scripture never confuses spiritual offices and temporal offices. The scripture never talks about qualifications for spiritual offices, or a selection process for spiritual offices. Similarly, the scripture never talks about God distributing elders and deacons among the body of Christ in His discretion, or that God ever puts anyone in charge of the visible church. *So pastors and elders are not, indeed cannot, ever be the same thing*. This we already know.

So why do churches invariably treat the office of pastor as something which men may aspire to? Does scripture even hint at the idea that people can decide to *go into the ministry*? Not that I can find. And if the office of pastor is indeed a *spiritual office*, then why do we impose on that office a set of qualifications (sometimes even using the qualifications for elder as criteria for a pastor), or such nonsense as needing to graduate from a seminary, or needing congregational approval?

By definition, if an office is something you can aspire to or for which you need to meet certain qualifications, it is *not* a spiritual office and it is *not* appointed by God. So if you have been thinking about the office of pastor according to the current *status quo* (as something one can aspire to), now you know how far you have to go before you have truly unshackled your mind from the clergy-laity distinction you have had drummed into your brain since forever. (Yoda voice again:) ***You must unlearn what you have learned!***

Let's consider the extreme irony of this for a moment. A church group, desiring to obtain a spiritual leader, *i.e.,* a pastor or minister, puts out a "call" (essentially, Church Speak for a want ad notice). The church will set up a pastoral search committee, whose job is to specify criteria for candidates, set up a process for interviewing them, and recommending a final choice. The criteria may include personal characteristics similar to the biblical criteria for an elder, but usually with some variation. There will almost always be specific training and licensing requirements - candidates must have graduated from an approved seminary, and be a member of the clergy of an approved denomination.

Candidates who look good on paper will be invited to speak to the congregation (that is, give a guest sermon) to try them out, and gauge member response. Eventually, the committee will make a recommendation, and the congregation may vote to "call" (*i.e.*, "hire") a pastor. The candidate, of course, is someone who decided to go into the ministry, decided to get a seminary education, decided to apply for the job, and aspired to be hired.

This process, from start to finish, is a process conducted by people, all leading to a mutual choice between people. People aspire to the job, job criteria are used to vet candidates, certain qualifications must be met, and everyone has to approve the result. ***God is not involved***. The Holy Spirit has distributed nothing as He wills. The whole thing is a purely human process. Merely because the search committee prays at each meeting and/or prays over candidates does not transform the

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process into a divine selection or appointment.

The irony, of course, is that the church congregation *thinks* (actually, they have been *fooled* into thinking) they have hired someone to be a spiritual leader, who will conduct spiritual functions (sacraments and sacerdotal functions), and who has spiritual authority. But everything about the process by which they hired this person mitigates against that result. They have, by their hiring method, *converted their pastor into an elder*, someone who holds a merely temporal office, and who has no spiritual authority.

The whole process is, in a word, a *sham*. The church thinks they are doing one thing, but they are actually doing a completely different thing, and they have absolutely no idea they are doing it. Yes, I call that an extreme irony.

Oh wait - are you ready for the rest of the irony? In many churches, they actually call their pastors elders, or teaching elders, or make them members of the church board. *On purpose*. They do this ostensibly to vest their clergy with temporal powers (to make them more powerful). But what they are really doing - biblically - is stripping their clergy of any and all spiritual authority, and converting them to a merely temporal office. How's that for irony?

Yet, the manner in which churches treat the office of pastor is inconsistent not only with its supposed nature as a spiritual office, but also with the way churches typically treat the other spiritual offices. Just ask yourself - Why don't churches send people to seminary to become prophets? Why don't churches license apostles? Why are pastors generally paid, but the other offices are not? The fact is - there are no good answers. But that's not the worst of it, as we will see in the next section.

Before we get there, one final note: churches treat the office of *bishop* similar to the way they treat pastors, that is, they blur the distinction between spiritual and temporal offices. A *bishop*, in the Bible, is just another word for an elder or overseer. See Plp. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:1-2; and Tit. 1:7. In other words, a bishop is a lay leader, and a temporal office with no special spiritual authority. But if your church is one which has bishops, who are those people? *Clergy*. Specifically, clergy who oversee other clergy. Thus giving the impression that a bishop is a spiritual office with spiritual authority. I have one word to respond to that: *fraud*.

Is Pastor Even A Separate Office?

So far - and I've purposely deferred this issue until almost the end of this essay - we have assumed that there is such a thing as the spiritual office of pastor because of the wording in Eph. 4:11.

As noted earlier, the word *pastor* simply means *shepherd*. But did you know that the Greek word translated as *pastor* in Eph. 4:11 is everywhere else translated as *shepherd* throughout the New Testament? And earlier in this essay, we examined what it means to be a shepherd. But what was the outcome of that analysis, really?

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What we found is that in every key sense in which Jesus is the model of a good shepherd, no man claiming to be a pastor could actually emulate. No one claiming to be a pastor can actually follow the example of Jesus and: 1) be the door to the sheep; 2) lay down his life for the spiritual well-being of the sheep; 3) truly know his sheep (in their innermost hearts); or 4) have care over the souls of the sheep. I didn't say it then, so I'm saying it now - What else are we to conclude, but that *no one in the Church can truly function as a shepherd*?

Again, I'm only following the scriptural evidence here. In what real sense - supported by scripture - can anyone in the Church claim to be a shepherd after the model of Christ?

Let me also add, I don't mind thinking of myself as a sheep with respect to the Son of God, but I don't (and can't, really) ever think of myself as a sheep compared to any other mere mortal man. *We are equals. I don't need to be led around, thanks just the same.* I have the same access to God as any pastor. God can speak to me without going through anyone else. I am as capable as anyone else of finding my way in the world with the direct guidance of the Holy Spirit. And I can interpret the scripture consistent with the will of God completely on my own.

Do you realize the New Testament never tells us to follow other men? In fact, Paul rather strongly condemns the practice in 1 Cor. 1:10-13. ("I follow Paul, Apollos, Peter, etc.") And in the instances where the KJV seems to indicate we should follow Paul, the ESV renders more accurately that we should *imitate* Paul as he imitates Christ. So this whole idea of a pastor as a leader of sheep (in reality, a leader of people) has no basis in the scripture.

Meanwhile, here's a rather *inconvenient truth* to ponder: in the ESV, KJV and NASB translations of the Bible, Eph. 4:11 is the only time the word *pastor* is ever used in the N.T. Ask yourself - How can we legitimately build the entire structure of the visible church around an office that never even gets a second mention in the Bible?

This fact - that the word *pastor* is only ever used in the N.T. ***once*** - should raise a red flag. A giant, flaming red flag. Because you can't make good doctrine from just one verse. And things mentioned only once tend to be less important. How many times have you heard it said, when God wants to emphasize something, He repeats it? So what does it mean when God does *not* repeat something? Most likely that it is something not to be emphasized.

This is a good indication there really is no separate office of *pastor* in the Church. If there were, it would be mentioned more than once. It is much more likely that the word *pastor* is simply a modifier of the word *teacher* (in Eph. 4:11), so instead of *pastor-teacher* (which some denominations twist into meaning a *leader-teacher*, or worse yet, a *teaching elder*), it really means a *shepherding teacher*. In other words, the word *pastor* acts more like a modifier than a noun.

If we look at the way the words *shepherd* and *teacher* are used elsewhere in the N.T., this usage is confirmed. Thus, in several places, *shepherding* is an attribute of the office of elder a/k/a overseer.

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> Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to *care for* [*Greek: shepherd*] the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. Acts 20:28.
>
> So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: *shepherd the flock* of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. 1 Pet. 5:1-3.

Let's look at the scriptural wording very carefully. In the two verses I just quoted, the word *shepherd* is actually the verb form (*to shepherd*), and in both cases it is used to describe the function of elders, not clergy.

Further, the majority of uses of the word *shepherd* in the N.T. are in the four gospels - which we can pretty much ignore because neither the Church nor any Church offices existed at that time. This leaves exactly four other uses of the word *shepherd* in the N.T. (Heb. 13:20; 1 Pet. 2:25; 1 Pet 5:4 and Rev. 7:17), ***all*** of which *specifically refer to Jesus Christ.* This means, my friends, that there simply are no instances anywhere in the scriptures directed to the Church of any person being a shepherd in the Church other than Christ.

So when I ask whether it is possible for anyone in the Church to *be* a shepherd (as a separate thing), the answer is *No*, but it is possible for elders to exercise their office in a *shepherd-like manner*. Of course, the office of elder (being one that is appointed by men) is not a spiritual office carrying spiritual authority. There's a *big* difference between that and the way most churches think about their pastors and elders. Elders, by definition, are temporal officers in the temporal church, deriving their authority from a temporal source (other people). Which means, that to the extent elders perform their tasks in a shepgerd-like manner, they are doing that only with respect to temporal things. You know, like church funds and church property. *Temporal* affairs.

The scripture also makes it clear that teachers, unlike so-called pastors, are indeed a separate and distinct office from all other offices in the Church.

> "And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles?" 1 Cor. 12:28-29. [*Please tell me - if pastors are that important to the Church, why aren't they listed here? Pastors aren't even fourth, fifth or sixth ...*]
>
> "Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers . . .." Acts 13:1. [*What? No pastors? How did they hold worship services?*]

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Hence, the traditional understanding of a *pastor* as a separate office in the Church which is vested with authority to rule (either as an elder or independently of the elder board) is unsupported by the scripture. To quote Sgt. Friday from the old *Dragnet* TV show, "*I didn't write the book, ma'am, I just follow it*." The separate office of pastor in the Church is a mere *chimera* - **it does not exist**.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Religious Corruption

So, what are we to conclude from all of this? God has given His Church a number of very clear and unambiguous principles for governing the visible church, but for the most part churches naming the name of Christ ignore these principles, subvert them, and outright reject them. These principles are not difficult to understand.

If you are thinking I have portrayed *organized* Christianity in a rather unfavorable light, you would be right. The question is whether that portrayal is deserved. Remember what Jesus said about the Jews of His day:

> "Why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? ... So for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God. You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: 'This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'" Mat 15:3,6-9.

At that point in time, Judaism had been around for only 1500 years. Not only had they filled Judaism up with all kinds of human traditions that opposed the laws of God, they had developed a system of fractured political parties, oops - I mean ecclesiastical bodies (the Pharisees and Sadducees) that only compounded the problem. And things have only gotten worse since then, with the fracturing of Judaism into reformed, conservative, orthodox and Hasidic variations.

What makes anyone think that after 2000 years of Christianity, the Church would or could have done any better? It is only human nature to corrupt all things over time. But we must not become slaves to corruption. "They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved." 2 Pet 2:19.

Speaking of corruption, consider the book of Malachi. It's a short book and an interesting read. Other than the occasional sermon on tithing, you probably haven't heard many sermons preached from Malachi, because the entire book is all about religious corruption. Essentially, God lays out five complaints against Israel (and particularly the Levitical priesthood) for religious malpractice, 400 years before Christ. It's worth a brief look at these complaints.

First, in Mal 1:6-14, the Lord accuses the priests of offering polluted food on the altar. Don't let

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the sacrificial context throw you. In verse 7 God talks about how the Jews despise "the Lord's table." No, it's not a direct reference to communion or the Eucharist, but there is an obvious symbolic link between O.T. sacrifices and the death of Jesus Christ. Essentially, God is here complaining that the Jews have profaned their religious practices, in this case a "sacrament."

Parallels with the modern Church are obvious. We treat communion and baptism as matters best governed by clergy under corporate policies, rather than proclaiming the individual liberty Christ came to secure. We not only permit, but praise those who claim spiritual authorities and spiritual titles that no one is entitled to claim. We openly encourage church leaders to exercise a priestly authority that subverts the exclusive priesthood of Christ. You don't think God considers any of these things to be a form of religious profanity?

Second, in Mal 2:1-9, God rebukes the priests for causing "many to stumble by your instruction," and also for showing partiality in their instruction. Some things never change, do they? The churches today are riddled with all sorts of false teachings, such as the acceptance of open immorality among the clergy and laity alike. And what is the clergy-laity distinction, if not a form of partiality the clergy instructs everyone to maintain?

Third, in Mal 2:10-16 the Lord scolds the people of God for their wayward marriage practices. He takes Israel to task for marrying "the daughter of a foreign god." In other words, for openly condoning people becoming unequally yoked with unbelievers in marriage. Then God blasts them for tolerating easy divorce. Sound familiar? All of a sudden, God's complaints against His people in Malachi don't seem so long ago and far away. In fact, it sounds like the church down the street.

Fourth, in Mal 2:17-3:5, the Jews are reprimanded for saying, "Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delights in them." And by asking, "Where is the God of justice?" Here, I think God is calling the Jews to task for screwing up their ideals of social justice. Back then it was tolerating sorcery, adultery, false witnesses and taking advantage of the disadvantaged. Today it manifests in the clergy defending abortion, advocating for LGBT rights, arguing for communism and marching with the 99 percenters a/k/a the Occupy movement. Darn right the churches today have screwed up social justice goals. And I lay this squarely at the feet of the clergy.

Fifth, in Mal 3:6-15, God complains, "From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts." Now listen to me carefully - if you think this text is all about tithing, you are missing the point. The tithe, in this context, is merely a convenient example of a part of God's laws the Israelites have not kept. The takeaway from this text *for Christians* is not to return to tithing, but to return to keeping God's laws as they apply to us. And the Church simply has not done a very good job of following God's laws, has it?

Are churches today doing any better in pleasing God than the Jews in the time of Malachi? Hardly. The words of 1 Sam 15:22 are as meaningful today as they were to king Saul, "*to obey is better than*

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sacrifice."

King Saul, you might remember, lost his kingdom for ostensibly trying to please God. Saul was told to utterly destroy the Amalekites, including all their men, women, children and livestock. 1 Sam 15:3. Instead, Saul spared the Amalekite king and he allowed the people to keep all the best livestock. Then, he had the gall to justify this so the people could "sacrifice to the Lord your God." In other words, Saul did what *appeared* to be religious and a good thing, but was in *substance* a violation of God's command. And He thought God would accept this action.

Saul's actions gave every appearance of being compassionate, humanitarian, and well intentioned - things many churches pride themselves on today. After all, it's what is in the heart that counts, right? God looks on the heart, and as long as our attitude is trying to be pleasing to God, we act in faith and this is what God accepts, isn't it? Not if we, in doing so, violate God's laws or act in reckless disregard of those laws. And ignorance is no excuse.

It is popular among Christians today to talk about the *sacrifice of praise* and to acknowledge God's name with our lips. Heb. 13:15. However, this is what the Lord says: "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men." Mat 15:8-9; Mk 7:6-7. Thus, Christians today are just like Saul - doing things that look religious, but which actually flaunt God's laws. It's easy to go around saying, "Praise Jesus!" But that's a lot less important than following Christ's commands.

God is not impressed by our religious traditions which merely have the appearance of being spiritual, but in substance violate the principles God expects us to live by. And so I say, it's time for Christians to shut their mouths and start obeying God's laws.

Starting Fresh

I wish I had some real nice words of encouragement to give you. But taking the book of Malachi as a whole - while there is an implied theme throughout of "repent and return to Me" - there is no promise implied or explicit that God will relent from the judgment of His people. In fact, the whole tenor of the book seems to be that Israel is so far gone, nothing will spare them from the wrath which is to come. The only thing they have to look forward to is an eventual restoration after the great and awesome day of the Lord comes.

Apart from foretelling the appearance of Jesus Christ and John the Baptist (who would not come for 400 years), Malachi offers people little hope in their lifetimes. The only snippet of good tidings we get comes near the end of the book:

> Then those who feared the Lord spoke with one another. The Lord paid attention and heard them, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who feared the Lord and esteemed his name. "They shall be mine, says the Lord of hosts, in the day

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> when I make up my treasured possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him. Then once more you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him." Mal 3:16-18.

I think it's fair to say we are in a similar situation today. The church culture (when taken in its entirety) is so far gone that we cannot bring it back to true godliness. I liken it to a herd of lemmings rushing headlong towards a cliff. The actual cliff (that is, God's judgment) comes suddenly and by the time you figure out what is happening, it's too late. But preceding the actual fall is a long march towards it, when everything seems alright. At the time, nothing truly drastic is happening, and from a theoretical standpoint, anything that hasn't actually happened yet can be prevented. Except you have to account for inertia.

The temptation is to think that just because judgment hasn't fallen yet, there is still time to save a significant portion of the herd (*i.e.*, churches). But that misses the issue, which is this: At what point is the inertia of all those heading toward the cliff unstoppable? We have to change people's minds and hearts, obviously. But, how many minds and hearts have already turned towards the cliff, and how many can we possibly reverse?

Unfortunately, very many churches and religious organizations themselves are actively pushing people toward the cliff. What is the realistic prospect we can change the position of entire churches, denominations and ministries? To turn the minds of churchgoers we need to change the minds of clergy everywhere, but those are the very people who have a vested interest in keeping the current system in place unchanged. Besides, to turn the clergy you have to change seminaries and academia first. And what is the realistic prospect we can change the minds of most of them – some of them – any of them? Does anyone really think we can bring the system of organized religion – as a whole – back? Really?

I maintain that mainstream Christendom has already reached the inertial point of no return. So many people are heading in the wrong direction that the overall direction of the mass cannot be changed. You can pray for revival if you want. But neither Malachi nor God, apparently, were anticipating or even hoping for a revival, and certainly none came.

FINAL THOUGHTS

It's not that hard to re-imagine how churches should be governed and what they should be doing. Just keep in mind a few basic truths:

> *There are no holy people*
> *No one has divine authority to lead a church*
> *There are no priests in Christianity, nor any clergy*
> *There are no sanctuaries, no altars, and no temples in Christianity*
> *There are no holy places in Christianity*
> *There is no tithing in Christianity, and no believer is under any duty to financially support*

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any other believer
A church is a group of believers, not a building or a place
All Christians have equal access to God and equal spiritual authority to carry out the purposes and functions of the Church

Yet, how many people are actually going to take these principles to heart and then act upon them? Precious few. The cliff is fast approaching - maybe it's time to separate from the crowd and stand apart from the masses. Perhaps following current trends and/or church tradition is the wrong way to go. In fact, I daresay God is not trendy, nor does He care for the traditions of men. If the book of Malachi is any indication, God is pretty darn rooted in His own words. "Remember the law of my servant Moses, the statutes and rules that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel." Mal 4:4.

Is it possible God might be saying something similar to the Church today? Something like, oh I don't know, "Remember the covenant in Christ, and the principles and rules I gave in the New Testament for all the Church." Or maybe a more direct, "What makes you think the word of God given in the New Testament has expired, so you can act differently?"

But we don't need to conjecture, for this is what God has already said:

> "For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore *whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven*, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven." Mat 5:18-19.

It's a simple question really. Are the things I have explained in this essay part of God's laws, or the commands of Christ, or not? If not, *then ignore them*. But if so, then the churches had better change their ways. As the scripture says,

> "*let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall*. No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it." 1 Cor 10:12-13.

The problem is correctable, if churches are willing. But if they are unwilling, going back to our opening verse, *it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God*.

> We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, *being ready to punish every disobedience*, when your obedience is complete. 2 Cor 10:5-6.

Here's my parting thought: *If we can't govern the visible Church correctly, how can we expect to know how to govern the earthly kingdom of Christ when the time comes?*

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THE SEVEN STAGES OF ANGER

(For clergy who have read Five Biblical Principles of Church Government)

Stage 1: Anger at the Author - for having written such a mean, horrible, outrageous and disrespectful hit piece, while still calling himself a Christian and a member of the Church. Whatever possessed him to write such a scurrilous screed?

[Author's note: Of those reading this, 90% will never get beyond Stage 1 in real life experience. Oh well, too bad.]

Stage 2: - Realization #1 - that some of what the essay said, in fact most of it, actually has merit and is a valid reading of scripture. This requires some more thought ...

Stage 3: Anger at my Teachers - and professors and mentors, for failing to teach me any of this - ever. Surely they must have known some of this stuff - why were they hiding it from me? Or is it possible all of them were truly ignorant of any of this? How can that be?

Stage 4: Anger at my Peers - and co-workers, and my ecclesiastical hierarchy, some of whom are very bright people, and most of whom have good hearts. Who also happen to be the very people most heavily invested in preserving the status quo. Wait a minute ...

Stage 5: Anger at Myself - for missing this information, even though it is plain to see. What's the matter - I've tried my best, with a pure heart, to seek the will of God and to search the scriptures. I should have been able to figure this out on my own, even if no one else told me. Where did I go wrong?

Stage 6: Anger at God - for not bringing this information to my attention a lot sooner. Here I am, at this stage in life, and at this point in my career, having believed a lot of wrong stuff for years. Why wasn't I made aware of this much earlier, when I could have taken a different path?

Stage 7: Realization #2 - Although, until I'm dead or in a coma, I can still do something about this, can't I? I need to make a list of people to talk to, right away. There's still time ...

[Author's note: Congratulations. If you have come this far in real life experience, then Welcome to the Second Reformation.]

Other publications by Gerald R. Thompson:

A Biblical Worldview Primer

A Call For Reclaiming Church Government

A Pro-Life Attorney Explains Why Abortion Is Not Murder (So Please Stop Saying It Is)

Biblical Genealogies and the Law of Inheritance

Brief and Manifesto Against A Mandatory State Bar (co-author)

Civil Disobedience in an Age of Tyranny

Federal Taxation In the U.S.: A Biblical and Constitutional Perspective

Five Biblical Principles of Church Government (that you have never ever in your entire life heard preached from a pulpit)

God's Laws of Authority

The Gospel of the Kingdom

The Great Commission and God's Law

The Israelification of the Church and False Traditions We Cling To

The Kingdom of Darkness

The Last Kingdom On Earth

Legal Equality: No Respecter of Persons

Legal Foundations: The Framework of Law

No Part of the Mosaic Covenant Has Ended

Politics & Prophecy: A Lawyer's View of the End Times

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