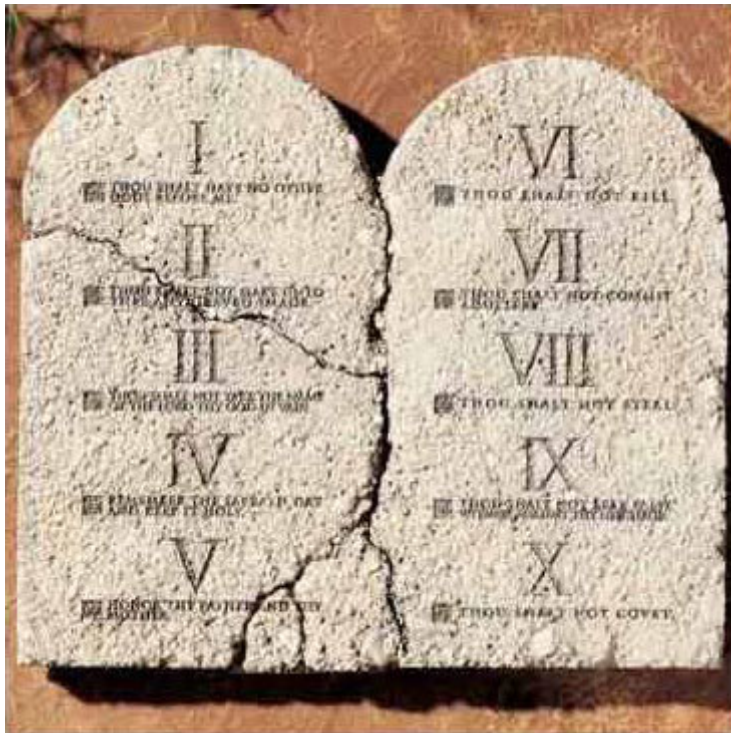


The Law and the Church

By Michael Clark

Any time that you get into a discussion about the Old Testament law, as a Christian you must first answer one question and one question only, "Did Jesus fulfill the law and the prophets of not?" Or let me put it this way, "Was His sacrifice for us perfect or not?" Let's let the Son of God tell us the answer. Jesus said, "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill" (Matthew 5:17, NKJV).

The Greek word *kataluo* {kat-al-oo'-o} in this verse was translated destroy. It means to dissolve, disunite, to destroy, demolish, metaphorically: to overthrow i.e. render vain, deprive of success, bring to naught, to subvert, or overthrow.



The word *fulfill* was translated from *pleroo* {play-ro'-o}. It means to make full, to fill up, i.e. to fill to the full to cause to abound, to furnish or supply liberally, to render full, i.e. to complete, to fill to the top: so that nothing shall be wanting, full measure, fill to the brim, to make complete in every particular, to render perfect, to carry through to the end, to accomplish, carry out (some undertaking), of sayings, promises, prophecies, to bring to pass, ratify, or accomplish. Jesus said that His life and sacrifice on the cross fulfilled, fully completed,

and accomplished the demands of the law and the prophets. That is why he could say with His dying breath, "It is finished."

Paul writing to the Romans said,

Where [is] boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the

law. Or [is He] the God of the Jews only? [Is He] not also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also, since [there is] one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law (through faith). (Romans 3:27-31).

Don't you see it, saints? Through faith in Jesus Christ of Nazareth, you fulfill the whole law! "For Christ [is] the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes." (Romans 10:4). Jesus made an end to all the righteous demands of the law through His perfect sacrifice. Break off that enchantment of keeping the law that has held you captive!

Again in the book of Romans Paul said,

For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. (Romans 8:3-4, NKJV).

But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. (Galatians 4:4,5).

This word *redeem* is *exagorazo* {ex-ag-or-ad'-zo}. According to James Strong, the writer of the famous analytical concordance, *exagorazo* means "to redeem by payment of a price, to recover from the power of another, to ransom, buy off, metaphorically of Christ freeing the elect from the dominion of the Mosaic Law at the price of his vicarious death."

The Apostle Paul wrote in chapter two of the letter to the Galatians,

I said to Peter in front of them all, "You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?"

He continued in chapter three saying:

So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law." Clearly no one is justified

before God by the law, because, "The righteous will live by faith." The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, "the man who does these things will live by them." . . . So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law. You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, [laity or clergy], male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. [bracketed phrases added]

The Showdown at Jerusalem

The early church fathers never taught tithing or many of the rules either written or implied in our churches today. They believed in the power of a changed life with its new heart to lead the believer into all righteousness. And they also believed that God would supply their every need from His riches in glory.

Paul had to confront certain Jewish members of the church for trying to get the Gentile believers to start keeping the law. He finally had a show-down with them in Jerusalem and the outcome of it was the following decree. "For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; that you abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if you keep yourselves, you shall do well" (Acts 15: 28-29).

Wouldn't this have been an excellent time to lay down the law about New Testament tithing? If this was a legal decree coming down from the rulers of today's Churches and denominations, it would be at the top of the list!

These are the four Gentile Church Commandments that the apostles agreed on:

- I. Thou shalt not eat meat offered to idols.
- II. Thou shalt not eat blood.
- III. Thou shalt not eat meat from things strangled.
- IV. Thou shalt not fornicate.

I can handle that, can't you? All four are good for your physical and spiritual health.

Many of us after coming to Jesus were made aware of certain things that would be expected of us by the clergy (and other do-gooders) now that we were "free" in Jesus. Your list of do's and don'ts might have been similar to this:

- 1.) As a Christian you must give 10% of your gross income to the local church.
 - 2.) You must not smoke or chew (or go out with girls that do).
 - 3.) You must pray and read your Bible every day.
 - 4.) You must not do drugs or drink alcohol.
 - 5.) You must be baptized.
 - 6.) You must go to our church every Sunday, morning and evening, and Wednesday nights would be good too.
 - 7.) You must submit to the covering of our pastor.
 - 8.) You must get your hair cut.
 - 9.) You must not date unsaved men or women.
 - 10.) You must be careful of the movies you watch.
 - 11.) You must not dance.
 - 12.) You must not see your friends at the tavern any more.
 - 13.) Keep your knees together!
- Et infinauseum!

Now, aren't you feeling free already?

Jesus came to set men free of the burden of sin and the law. He rose up in the synagogue in Nazareth and read from Isaiah,

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. (Luke 4:18,19)

God has sent Jesus to break EVERY yoke and relieve EVERY burden, especially the ones placed on the shoulders of the believer by men who should know better. Isaiah also prophesied:

Is not this the kind of fasting that I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter-- when

you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?
(Isaiah 58:6,7)

The Law of the Spirit

Don't people have faith in the ability of the Holy Spirit to lead, teach, and keep His people in the power of a changed life and to convict them of sin where necessary? To listen to the teachers in the Church today, you would not think so. Jesus promised to send us help in our walk with God.

But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. (John 16:13)
But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you (John 14:26) [Also read I John 2:20 and 27]

When we, as well meaning Christians, set out to help the Holy Spirit by giving our young charges in the Lord a set of rules to keep them on the straight and narrow, we often cause more damage than good. I remember what a thrill it was to hear a young Christian tell me how depressing it was for him to try a marijuana cigarette again after he got saved. "I felt the peace leaving me and it was really a downer," he said. He had found out for himself how the Spirit could lead him into walking in truth.

Paul warned the foolish Galatian church, "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by the yoke of slavery" (Galatians 5:1).

In a daily devotional titled *A Table in the Wilderness* composed of teaching by Watchman Nee, I read the following story that illustrates the point:

February 29

I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes. (Ezekiel 36:27)
Late one summer I stayed at a hill resort in the home of a mechanic and his wife, both of whom it was my joy to lead to a simple faith in the Savior. When the time came for me to return to Shanghai, I left with them a Bible.

During the winter the man was in the habit of taking alcohol with his meals, sometimes to excess. Soon, with the return of the cold weather, the wine reappeared on the table, and, as had now become his custom, he bowed his head to give thanks for the meal. But today no words would come! After one or two vain attempts he turned to his wife. "What is wrong?" he asked. "Why can not we pray today?" The wife took the Bible, but turned the pages in vain, seeking light on the subject. They could find no explanation, and I was far away. "Just drink your wine," she said; but no, he knew he must give thanks, and could not. "Take it away," he exclaimed at length; and then together they asked a blessing on the meal.

When eventually the man was able to visit Shanghai he told me the story. Using an expression familiar in Chinese: "Brother Nee," he said, "Resident Boss wouldn't let me have that drink!" "Very good," I replied. "You always listen to Resident Boss!"

If we are truly born from above, we have a "resident boss" living inside us and we do not need the religious legal system to keep us in check. He draws us to do what is right with cords of love, not a straight jacket of legalism. ["But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth"](#) (I John 2:20).

Remember Paul's words saints, ["He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant-- not of the letter \(of the law\) but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life"](#) (2 Corinthians 3:6).

The Law of the Tithe

I have always found it interesting how certain church teachers have selected certain portions of the Jewish law to carry over into this new and living covenant of faith in Jesus Christ, then force the Gentile church to follow these Jewish laws and customs which our so called "leaders" pick and choose for their own convenience and well being and for the survival of their man made institutions.

The doctrine of tithing is such an example. It is clearly an old covenant law:

[You shall truly tithe all the increase of your grain that the field produces year by year. And you shall eat before the LORD your God, in the place where He chooses to make](#)

His name abide, the tithe of your grain and your new wine and your oil, of the firstborn of your herds and your flocks, that you may learn to fear the LORD your God always. But if the journey is too long for you, so that you are not able to carry [the tithe, or] if the place where the LORD your God chooses to put His name is too far from you, when the LORD your God has blessed you, then you shall exchange [it] for money, take the money in your hand, and go to the place which the LORD your God chooses. And you shall spend that money for whatever your heart desires: for oxen or sheep, for wine or similar drink, for whatever your heart desires; you shall eat there before the LORD your God, and you shall rejoice, you and your household. (Deuteronomy 14:22-29).

When a man forces this law on the people to insure for himself a steady income or salary, he puts himself and his church under a curse, not a blessing. He also ceases to live by faith. Paul is teaching here that you can't pick and choose when it comes to the law. As we saw from Galatians chapter three, if you follow the smallest portion of it you must keep "everything written in the Book of the Law" perfectly.

In Galatians chapter five Paul continues this theme.

Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. . . For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love. You were running a good race. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth? That kind of persuasion does not come from the one who calls you. "A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough."

When you try to build a strong argument for legalistic tithing from the New Testament, you are really hard pressed to find any scriptural backing. It is interesting that a practice so heavily taught today in churches is barely mentioned by the New Covenant writers.

They only mentioned the practice of tithing in four places:

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices--mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law--justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. (Matthew 23:23, NIV).

Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God. You should have practiced the latter without leaving the former undone. (Luke 11:42, NIV).

Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: "God, I thank you that I am not like other men--robbers, evildoers, adulterers--or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get."

But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner." I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted. (Luke 18:10-14, NIV).

Just think how great he (Melchizedek) was: Even the patriarch Abraham gave him a tenth of the plunder! Now the law requires the descendants of Levi who become priests to collect a tenth from the people--that is, their brothers--even though their brothers are descended from Abraham. This man, however, did not trace his descent from Levi, yet he (Melchizedek) collected a tenth from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. And without doubt the lesser person is blessed by the greater.

In the one case, the tenth is collected by men who die; but in the other case, by him who is declared to be living. One might even say that Levi, who collects the tenth, paid the tenth through Abraham, because when Melchizedek met Abraham, Levi was still in the body of his ancestor. (Hebrews 7:4-10).

In the first two passages, Jesus is chastising the self-righteous Pharisees for tithing, while at same time leaving what matters most undone like justice, love (mercy), and faithfulness. He seems to be saying that they should not have left justice, mercy and love undone in favor of their tithing. Jesus is blasting the Pharisee who stood before God boasting of his regular tithing on the one hand, while He commended the hated tax collector for approaching the altar in humility and getting the forgiveness that he asked for. Wouldn't this have been an excellent chance for Jesus to make it clear how important it is for His church to tithe? Instead, He stresses the importance of showing mercy, doing justice, and walking humbly before God (Micah 6:8).

In the Hebrews passage the author is showing us that Jesus was not of the Levitical priesthood, but of a higher order of authority by comparing him to the mysterious prince and priest of Salem (now called Jerusalem), Melchizedek. Abraham gave Him ten percent of his spoils of war after rescuing his nephew, Lot, from some heathen kings. Here once again Jesus in the form of Melchizedek fulfilled the law of the tithe with the help of Abraham, the man of faith.

For he testifieth, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek. For there is verily a disannulling of the commandment going before for the weakness and unprofitableness thereof. For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope (Jesus) did; by the which we draw nigh unto God. (Hebrews 7:17-19, KJV).

It amazes me that throughout the entire New Testament, neither Jesus nor the Apostles stressed how important that it is that the Gentiles should tithe to their Churches, yet, today it is one of the most repeated teachings coming from our pulpits. As Shakespeare wrote in Hamlet, "The lady doth protest to much, methinks."

Look at the contrast of Paul's heart concerning taking from the Church.

I will not be burdensome to you for I seek not what is yours, but you, for the children ought not save up for the parents, but the parents for the children. And I will gladly spend and be spent for you.(2 Corinthians 12:14,15).

Now you are probably saying, "If this is so, how are we going to support all our buildings and pastoral staffs?" The New Testament church didn't see this as a problem. Those who were doing the work of ministry were walking by faith. These men and women trusted God to meet their needs and often worked to support themselves and others. These believers practiced giving to the poor and the needy (See Acts 2:44-45, 4:32; James 1:27; 1 John 3:17-18), and were encouraged to support the ministries feeding them (see 1 Corinthians. 9:9 and 1 Timothy 5:18). They often gave their whole fortunes, not just ten percent, because of the overwhelming love of God for the lost, the needy and His ministers. But there were no salaries and no buildings to support, just hearts that supplied the needs of all in need out of love.

Temple Worship

Does the New Testament command us to build buildings in which to worship or even give us such an example? Search the book for yourself. It's not there! Jesus made it pretty clear that day to a Samaritan woman who asked Him where she should worship.

The woman said to Him, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem (the temple) is the place where one ought to worship."

Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem (the temple), worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." (John 4:19-24, NKJV).

Steven seems to have summed it all up with his last words before the Jewish religious leaders killed him:

But Solomon built Him a house. However, the Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands, as the prophet says: "Heaven [is] My throne, And earth [is] My footstool. What house will you build for Me? says the LORD, Or what [is] the place of My rest? Has My hand not made all these things?"

[You] stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers [did], so [do] you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept [it]. (Acts 7:47-53).

No wonder they stoned Steven to death. He showed the Jewish rulers that God had done away with their whole power base and had established a new order leaving them out in the cold with their legalistic self-righteousness.

There were no salaries or buildings to support in the early church. That all came much later with the decline of the church. The first church building that needed to be

supported didn't come until around 225 AD. (according to archeologists), after the apostolic visionaries were dead and gone, but it didn't really become vogue until the advent of Constantinian Christianity in about 325 AD. It is not clear when legalistic tithing was reinstated, but it probably came in around 600 AD. with the rise in power of the Catholic church with its priesthood and cathedrals. I'm sorry folks, but salaried staff and church buildings are a hang over from the Dark Ages.

The Spirit is showing us the importance of gathering in homes for support and ministry in small groups so every person has a chance to minister to the rest and give testimony of what God is doing in his life. There is nothing wrong with God's people having larger gatherings in commercial buildings for the purpose of worship and praise to Jesus. This is often very edifying. There are large meeting halls and parks in almost every city and town that can be used or rented for this purpose.

Something is dreadfully wrong with the leadership of the Church when we give God's precious resources to a rich banking system in exorbitant interest payments so we can have a place to worship! Just think how many more of God's people could be supported in the work of the gospel with the money that is now given to this Beast system. This wasteful symbiosis sounds to me like the Whore who rides the Beast in Revelation 17 and 18, and not the Bride of Christ.

If God moves people to give for the purpose of putting up a humble meeting hall, fine. Let it be built without the waste of usury (which God condemns in the Old Testament). Even in the old covenant the tithe was never used for buildings. The temple was built from gifts and offerings. The tithe was for widows, orphans, the homeless and destitute, and the support of the priesthood (Deuteronomy 14:27-29). The spirit of this law was evident in the Book of Acts when all gave from their abundance and no one was lacking. I believe the time is coming when we will be forced to meet in homes because of persecution and oppressive taxation on the church.

The Storehouse

Consider this. You have heard it taught that we are supposed to "bring the whole tithe into the storehouse" (Malachi 3:10)? Well, where was this Old Testament "storehouse" to where the tithe was to be brought? In Nehemiah 10:38 it says that the storehouse for the tithe was the house of God. Great! So the Church is being taught that its members are supposed to take 10 percent of their income and put it in the collection plate on

Sunday, right? The only problem with this line of thinking is, where is the temple of God according to the New Covenant?

It was this very argument that got Steven put to death by the Jewish leaders. He hit them right where it hurt. . .in the pocket book!

However, the Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands, as the prophet says: "Heaven [is] My throne, And earth [is] My footstool. What house will you build for Me? says the LORD, Or what [is] the place of My rest? Has My hand not made all these things?" (Acts 7:48-50)

If the temple of God isn't made with the hands of men, then where is His house? The answer is in Ephesians 2:19-22.

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

Yes! That's right. We are the temple of God!

You say, "Well, if that is true, are we supposed to give the tithe to ourselves?" Yes and no. Our giving is supposed to go where it is needed the most in the body of Christ. James said it this way, "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world" (James 1:27). This is exactly what Steven was doing before he was killed by the religious system of his day. He was looking after the needs of the widows as one of the Church's servants (Greek *diakoneo*).

The early church "tithed" this way:

There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need. (Acts 4:34-35).

The offering was laid at the apostles' feet. These leaders didn't pick it up and take it to the bank to keep it out of the reach of the congregation! It was there to be redistributed to whoever was in need. Consider verse six below.

Now Peter and John went up together to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour. And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms from those who entered the temple; who, seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, asked for alms. And fixing his eyes on him, with John, Peter said, "Look at us." So he gave them his attention, expecting to receive something from them. Then Peter said, "Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk." (Acts 3:1-6, NKJV).

When it came to mammon, these two guys were broke, but when it came to the riches of Christ, they were wealthy!

When It came to the needs of our brothers and sisters, James put it this way:

Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, 'Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead (James 2:15-16).

Most of us in today's Church put the responsibility for the care of the needy on the government or the Church "benevolence fund," which is usually very meager, and we in reality do nothing about our brother or sister's needs. The Jewish leaders had the same sin. Jesus said in Mark 7:10-13,

Moses said, "Honor (provide for in their old age) your father and your mother," and, "Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death." But you say that if a man says to his father or mother: "Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is Corban" [that is, a gift devoted to God], then you no longer let him do anything for his father or mother. Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that."

We are the temple, and the love of Jesus will show you where you should give your support. I would venture a guess that it won't be to give it to a big time banker (God

hates usury, i.e. taking interest on a loan) to pay the mortgage on some building with His or some man's name on it.

Yes, the New Testament does say that a laborer is worthy of his hire, and that we are not to muzzle the ox that grinds out the corn. We do have an obligation to support a brother or sister who is giving all their time to the work of the ministry, so they can be free to continue their work without having to support themselves. But when the modern church spells laborer it is spelled P-A-S-T-O-R. Paul wrote,

Let the elders (older ones [plural, not the pastor only!]) who rule (guide and give aid) well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine. (1 Timothy. 5:17).

I believe that all the elders who serve the Church well should be counted worthy of double honor--the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the teachers, instead of to a single cast like class called "pastor." Still even in the support of these, the giving is going to the storehouse members of the body of Christ.

I wonder how many more men with God's call on their life would be out there doing the work if all of those precious resources were not being squandered on buildings, their furnishings, and the salary of a man at the top of each local church whose income rivals that of many of the world's CEOs? OOPS! There's another one of those holy cows!

The New testament Priesthood

In Christ God has set in order a new priesthood with Jesus as its high priest.

If perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the law was given to the people), why was there still need for another priest to come--one in the order of Melchizedek, not in the order of Aaron? For when there is a change of the priesthood, there must also be a change of the law. (Hebrews 7:11-12, NIV).

Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus, who was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also [was faithful] in all His house. For this One has been counted

worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as He who built the house has more honor than the house. For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things [is] God. And Moses indeed [was] faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken [afterward], but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end.” (Hebrews 3:1-6).

In the New Testament Church there is no such thing as this cast system that we call clergy and laity. What we have today is a hangover from the church that Emperor Constantine designed after Rome's pagan priesthood in about 311 AD. Out of it came the Catholic Church. What the New Testament does say is that we are all priests unto God. Peter wrote,

Coming to Him [as to] a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God [and] precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ... But you [are] a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once [were] not a people but [are] now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.” (1 Peter 2:4,5,9,10).

When someone calls you, laity, lay leader, lay person, etc., doesn't it make you feel like one of the unwashed masses or a second class citizen in the kingdom of God? Well, this is not the way Jesus sees you. The scriptures have said this all along:

Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all. (Colossians 3:9-11, NIV).

That's right, all of Jesus is in all of us! The fullness of Jesus' priesthood has been made available in all of us! It takes all of us to manifest the fullness of Christ, not just one or two in each Church body (See 1 Corinthians. 12:12-30). It is an affront to Him that His saints would be made to feel that they are nothing but serfs whose job is to support the priest cast that rules over them.

Don't forget that we all have equal access to our High Priest.

For [there is] one God and one Mediator between God and men, [the] Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time. (1 Timothy 2:5,6).

I believe we are in the "Second Reformation." God is restoring the priesthood and responsibility of ministry back into the hands of all believers in Christ. We are hearing the Spirit tell us that there is no such thing as a clergy/laity division in God's New Testament church.

Plurality of Leadership

Today, all over the established Church, we have a tendency to have a "senior pastor" who resembles a CEO more than one who actually pastors Jesus' sheep. But it wasn't always that way.

In the early Church each area church had a multiplicity of eldership with no man who was the chief elder or pastor (elders are to "shepherd the flock," see I Peter 5:1-4). Christ Himself is the Chief Shepherd watching over us all. Paul established a multiple leadership called elders (older saints) over each church that he founded and they jointly shepherded the people. Notice in each of the following verses elders is always plural:

Acts 11:30 This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

Acts 14:23 So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

Acts 15:2 Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question.

Acts 15:4 And when they had come to Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders; and they reported all things that God had done with them.

Acts 15:6 Now the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter.

Acts 15:22 Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, [namely], Judas who was also named Barsabas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren.

Acts 15:23 They wrote this [letter] by them: The apostles, the elders, and the brethren, To the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia: Greetings.

Acts 16:4 And as they went through the cities, they delivered to them the decrees to keep, which were determined by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem.

Acts 20:17 From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church.

Acts 20:28 Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

Note here that it says that all of the elders in the Ephesian church were to shepherd the flock, not just one pastor or senior elder. Continuing with the "elders" verses:

Acts 21:18 On the following [day] Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present.

Philippians 1:1 Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops (overseers) and deacons (servants)...

1 Timothy 5:17 Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine.

Titus 1:5 For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you...

James 5:14 Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.

1 Peter 5:1 The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed...

1 Peter 5:2 Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly.

1 Peter 5:5 Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to [your] elders. Yes, all of [you] be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble."

Revelation 4:4 Around the throne [were] twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads.

Revelation 4:10 the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne.

In these last two verses even God believes in a multiplicity of eldership in His heavenly leadership! Now lets see where this word elder is used in a singular form in the epistles:

Titus 5:19 Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses.

1 Peter 5:1 The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed...

2 John 1:1 The elder, To the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth, and not only I, but also all those who have known the truth.

3 John 1:1 The elder, To the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth...

Nowhere in the New Testament does it mention that a single elder is in charge or single-handedly making the decisions over a local church. Even in Jerusalem where the

Pharisees with their legalistic minds had infiltrated the Church, decisions were made in multiplicity (See Acts chapter 15).

I believe the best example of godly leadership in practice in a local church is portrayed in Acts chapter thirteen:

Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent [them] away. (Acts 13:1-3).

These elders who were made up of prophets and teachers were giving themselves to fasting and ministering to the Lord and the Holy Spirit spoke through them. There was no argument, no contention, no debate. God was able to freely speak his governing will to them and they did it! There was a whole different scene in Jerusalem two chapters later.

Open Handed Leadership

So with all of this in mind, what attitude should we have toward God's people as His priests?

Jesus said, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. . .but you shall not be so; but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger..." (Luke 22:25,26). When the disciples were arguing over who would be greatest in the kingdom, He sat a little child down in their midst and said, "Unless you are converted and become like children, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:1-3).

Today in the church this concept of Godly leadership from a position of childlike-ness and weakness has almost been lost. Instead, there is a two-fold dynamic which restricts the spiritual growth of the church. One aspect of this is the "Give us a King" mentality (see 1 Samuel chapter 8), and the other, men who "love the preeminence" (3 John 9), taking control of the church. These both restrict the life of the church in the Holy Spirit and sever it from God's blessing.

The Israelites in the wilderness rebelled against God and said, "Let us make us a captain and let us return into Egypt." (Numbers 14:4). When we want to make a man our leader, we are telling God we want to go back to Egypt. The "one-man band" style of leadership is not God's way, nor do godly men desire it.

Moses cried out to God that leading the children of Israel in the wilderness was too big a burden. He asked for help. God agreed to take the anointing on Moses and put it on seventy other elders, who had proven themselves, so they could also lead. When the anointing fell on them, they all prophesied continuously, even two who were not present at the time but elsewhere in the camp. Joshua wanted to forbid Eldad and Medad from prophesying because they were off "doing their own thing." Moses exemplified God's heart when he said to Joshua, "[Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put His Spirit upon them](#)" (Numbers 11:29).

Godly leadership is never threatened when God leads others to minister in the gifts God has given them. In Mark 9 the disciples found someone who wasn't of their number casting out demons in the name of Jesus. They forbade him to do this, but when they reported the incident to Jesus, He surprised them by replying, "[Forbid him not...for he that is not against us is on our part.](#)"

The disciples of John the Baptist were threatened when they realized that Jesus, whom John had baptized, was now baptizing more disciples than John. The prophet's reply is recorded in John 3:26-30: "[A man can receive nothing except it be given him from heaven... He must increase, but I must decrease.](#)"

Paul's letters repeatedly encourage members of Christ's body to edify one another. Some of the most notable passages are found in I Corinthians. "[Now there are a variety of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. And there are a variety of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.... But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.](#)" (1 Corinthians 12:4-11). Paul also said, "[...When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification](#)" (1 Corinthians 14:26). Other

related passages are Romans 12:6, I Corinthians 7:7, Ephesians 4:7 -13, I Thessalonians 5:20, and I Corinthians 14:39.

Can't you see that God's leaders are never threatened by another man's ministry or calling? To the contrary, they encourage others to go on in their callings and are servants to the one called. Where is this kind of leader today? My experience is that they are few and far between.

Give Us a King so We can be Like the World System

In I Samuel chapter 8, the people rebelled against God, who they could not see, and asked Samuel to give them a king. "We will have a king over us," they said, "that we might be like all the nations and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles." The Lord instructed Samuel to do as they wished, for they had rejected God that He should no longer rule over them. When we take a man, whether he be an apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor or a teacher, and put him in a position to rule over us, we reject God's rule and we get what we deserve.

I believe this type of leadership that lords over God's people is the root of the division in the Church today. Paul chastised the Corinthian church when he said, "[For you, being so wise, bear with the foolish \[leaders\] gladly. For you bear with anyone if he enslaves you, if he devours you, if he takes advantage of you, if he exalts himself, if he hits you in the face. To my shame, I must say that we have been weak by comparison.](#)" (2 Corinthians 11:19-21).

Jesus said to the Church at Pergamum, "[...you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Repent therefore or else... I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth](#)" (Revelation 2:15,16). The word *Nicolaitan* in the Greek is from two words, *Nikos* and *Laodikeus*, and it literally means victorious over the people. The false doctrine of clergy ruling over the laity like a conquering monarch goes back to the first century of the church and God hates it (See Revelation 2:6,15).

Here in America we tend to choose the beautiful and the powerful as our leaders. Saul was tall, dark, and handsome. He really stood out in a crowd (See 1 Samuel 9:12). God chose him to save the Israelites from the Philistines. He was definitely king material, but God also warned them that this "king business" was not what it at first appears.

He will take your sons and make them serve with his chariots and horses, and they will run in front of his chariots. Some he will assign to be commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and others to plough his ground and reap his harvest, and still others to make weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves and give them to his attendants. He will take a tenth of your grain and of your vintage and give it to his officials and attendants. Your menservants and maidservants and the best of your cattle and donkeys he will take for his own use. He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his slaves. When that day comes, you will cry out for relief from the king you have chosen, and the LORD will not answer you in that day." (1 Samuel 8:11-18, NIV).

Jeremiah lamented about his people in his day:

An astonishing and horrible thing Has been committed in the land: The prophets prophesy falsely, And the priests rule by their own power; And My people love to have it so. But what will you do in the end? (Jeremiah 5:30,31, NKJV).

God was warning Israel that a man can't handle power righteously. As Sir J. E. E. Dahlberg observed, "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely."

Years later, God repented of choosing Saul as king and chose another, this time a man after his own heart. David was a lowly herder of sheep, but Saul herded asses (See 1 Samuel 9:3). David was just a boy when God chose him (You must come as a child). When Samuel was looking over his brothers in Jesse's house, he was about to choose another tall, dark, and handsome type, Eliab, when God warned him not to. "But the Lord said to Samuel, 'Do not look at his appearance, or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him [Eliab]; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart'" (1 Samuel 16:7).

Samuel asked Jesse if these were all his sons. "Oh yeah," Jesse seems to reply, "there is David. He's out with the sheep because I knew there was no way God could want the runt of the litter." Everyone was surprised when Samuel chose David because of his heart. David could have been that kid that left standing there alone after both captains of a sandlot baseball game had chosen their teams. Do you want to choose elder material for your body? Choose from the world's rejects. God does. Jesus did not chose a single religious leader to be his disciple. Do you remember the story of

Gideon? Our God chooses the weak things of this world to confound the mighty (See 1 Corinthians 1:26-29).

Christ came to set men free of the tyranny of sin and sinful men who would bind burdens and put them on men's shoulders but do nothing to carry those burdens themselves (See Matthew 23). Don't be foolish and allow yourself to be deceived. If the church you attend is based on this give us a king model, ask God to lead you to Godly leadership, elders (mature, older saints) who are about the business of building up the saints to fulfill their callings.

Remember God's way is to give. "Give and it shall be given unto you....For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return" (Luke 6:38). If you are employing a tight fist style of leadership over Jesus' sheep, don't be surprised if you are losing them. Jesus is drawing His flock to Himself and out of the hands of abusive and possessive shepherds. Read and pray over Ezekiel chapter 34. Jesus said that when the steward forgot that he, too, was a servant and began abusing his fellow servants he lost his stewardship and was cast out into the place that was appointed for the hypocrites. But to those who he finds giving His household meat in due season [His word that He is speaking to the Church today], "He will make him ruler over all His goods" (Matthew 24:45-51). Remember it was prophesied about Jesus that "a bruised reed He would not break and a smoking flax he would not quench" (Isaiah 42:3). Strengthen that which remains.

Back in the beginning of this section I quoted Jesus in Luke 22:25 and 26. The New American Standard puts it this way: "And He said to them, 'The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who have authority over them are called "Benefactors." But not so with you, but let him who is the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as the servant.'"

This phrase *exercise lordship* or *lord it over* is from the Greek word *kurieuo* {ko-ree-yoo'-o}. It means to have dominion over, exercise lordship over, or be Lord of. Jesus said this is not the godly way to lead His sheep but it is the way of worldly leadership. He is the only one who has the right to lead in this manner and even He leads in humility and not with heavy hand (See John 10 and Psalms 23).

So What is Left?

Not much if you are looking for an earthly kingdom to be what men call "the Church." Jesus told us not to expect a visible kingdom:

Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, "The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you." (Luke 17:20-21, NKJV).

God's leaders are not even to desire to be high profile, but humble and simple men like the Master.

Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. (Matthew 11:28-29, NKJV).

In Christ's true Church there are no men ruling for Him, no legalistic tithing to support them, no clergy - laity division, no garish buildings that need constant support, and oh yes, no seminaries either, but one body in which all are priests. We are called to just be family and love one another with the same example that Jesus and the early Church gave us. If we give any honor at all it is to be to the "least of these, My (His) brethren" and not to those who are highly visible and endowed (see James 2:1-7).

Oh you foolish Christians, are you better than Jesus? Can you complete for God what Jesus has already made complete? Who has bewitched you? Paul pleaded with the church at Galatia:

O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified? This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh? Have you suffered so many things in vain--if indeed [it was] in vain? Therefore He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you, [does He do it] by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? (Galatians 3:1-5).

I am sure that some of you who practice heavy handed control and teach God's people to keep the law are boiling against me and this teaching by now, but consider this...if we who believe this way are in error, we are in good company.

Stephen's accusers said, "They also set up false witnesses who said, 'This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place (the temple) and the law'" (Acts 6:13).

Of Paul they said, "This [fellow] persuades men to worship God contrary to the law." (Acts 18:13). And "Men of Israel, help! This is the man who teaches all [men] everywhere against the people, the law, and this place; and furthermore he also brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place." (Acts 21:28).

And even Jesus came under this same attack, "Now the chief priests, the elders, and all the council sought false testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, but found none. Even though many false witnesses came forward, they found none. But at last two false witnesses came forward and said, 'This [fellow] said, "I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days."'" (Matthew 26:59-61).

Yes, the law is holy and the temple is holy! But the whole law is summed up in the phrase, "You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart, your whole mind, and your whole strength and you shall love your neighbor as yourself." As for the temple, we the Church are God's temple, not some heavily mortgaged pile of bricks, mortar and wood that sucks the life blood out of the ecclesia of God.

Then Jesus went out and departed from the temple, and His disciples came up to show Him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said to them, "Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not [one] stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down." (Matthew 24:1,2).

Would you be one to "rule" the Bride of Christ? Not me, brother! The days of these kind of so-called "ministers" are coming to an end.

Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. (1 Corinthians 15:24, NKJV).

Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven

saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away. (Revelation 21:2-4, NKJV).

This is the city of God, the Bride of Christ, that should fill our hearts and vision. This is the Body of Jesus of which all who believe are members. Rejoice and be free in Christ's precious name, dear saints of God.