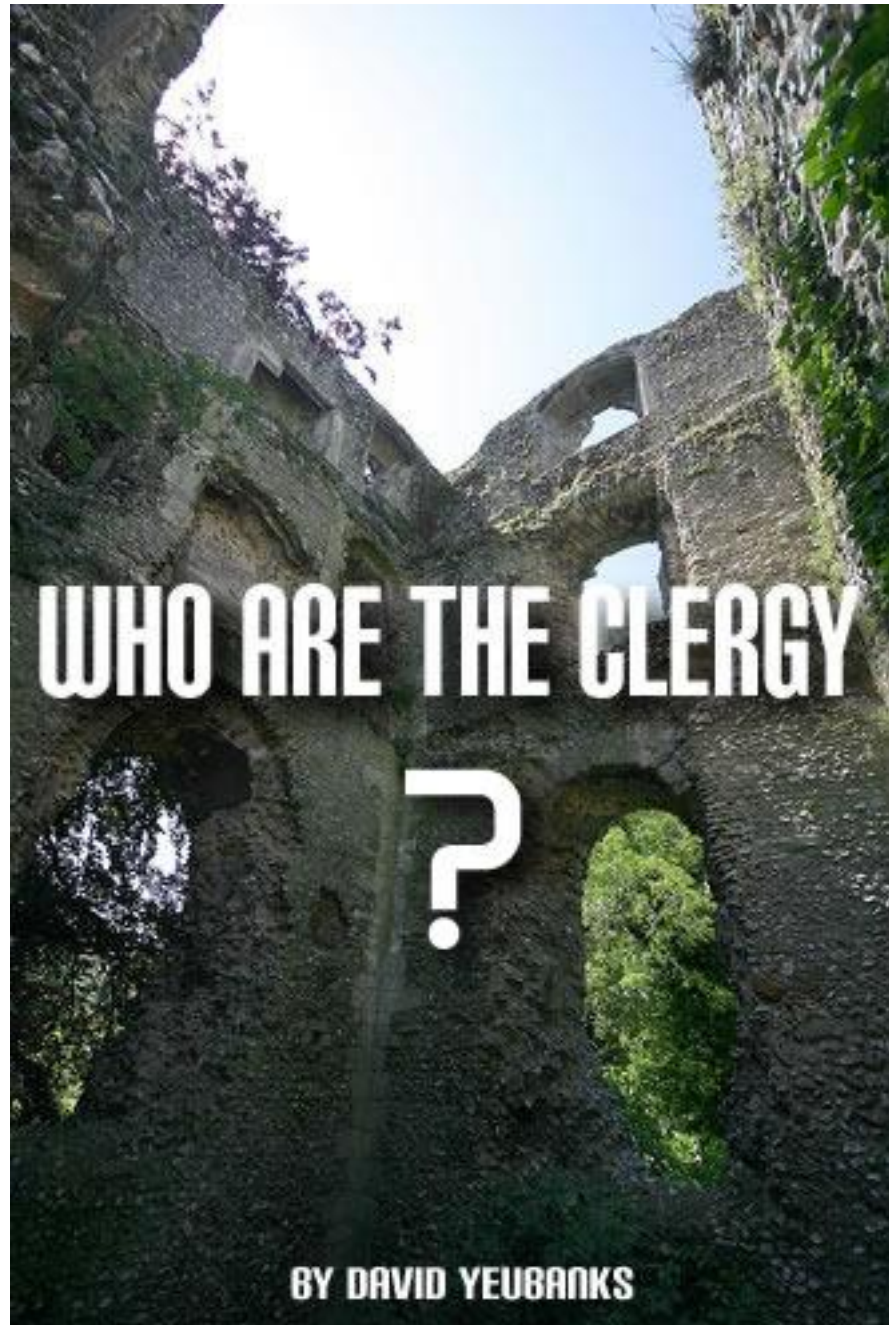




WHO ARE THE CLERGY?

By David Yeubanks

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How many of us were raised with the notion that there is intended to be some elite class of spiritual leaders, which preside over an assembly of Christians (i.e. a church) known as “the clergy”? And by “elite” I simply mean to emphasize that these individuals are commonly understood to be those that inhabit a religious office of ministry, generally as a paid profession, that is believed to be separate and higher (in ranking authority, skill, honor and responsibility) than the rest of the members in a fellowship of Christians. These are typically believed to carry the principle responsibility of hearing from God and bringing His Word to the people every week. They are frequently seen as counselors, whom the people in a congregation expect them to have answers (from God) in response to their daily troubles, hang-ups, questions and need for direction. In turn, these clergymen feel it part of their weekly responsibility to prepare sermons to orate from the platform. Furthermore, along with these common presumptions, often the belief exists that giving to “the clergy” (i.e. tithes, offerings, etc.) and/or giving to “the church” (i.e. time, service, finances, ministry work, etc.) equals giving to God as the clergy are seen as mediators for the people (akin to Old Testament Levitical priests) and “the church” as being a temple (in similitude with the Old Testament structure). Traditionally, the other members who are not clergy are most often recognized as “the laity.”

The question, therefore, presents itself: Does God’s Word actually make such distinctions among His people who are His body? And where did these terms actually come from? Are they clearly defined in Scripture? If so, where? And if they cannot be found in the written Word of God but are proven to have been derived by some other means, then is it wise to maintain support of a system that God has not ordained? Could it, in fact, be damaging to a believer’s process of spiritual growth, reliance on God and intimacy with Christ? These are important questions, which this article intends to examine.

When many people think of “the clergy” the thought of Roman Catholic priests, bishops and popes often come to mind; little white collars, crucifixes and black suits. While it is absolutely true that many of our modern Christian practices actually originate with Roman Catholicism and not expressly Scripture, my intent with this article is not to single out Catholics or any denomination in particular. When I speak of “the clergy” I intend all of those engaged in the profession and position of priest-like office. This may in fact include the modern professional pastoral role, elders, apostles, etc. Many Christians think of these ministries to be religious “offices”, having some higher, separate and intermediary role apart from other believers. So, in this sense, even many who are of the Protestant faith may easily be qualified as clergy. Even our modern English dictionaries define clergy as pertaining to Christian pastors and priests.

My purpose with this article/e-book is to encourage readers to dive deeply into the Word of God and not to merely settle for status quo traditionalism. I hope to offer some strong points to consider and questions to examine. I will also share some of the bold conclusions that I myself have come to. As the author of this work, I humbly submit to my readers that I am not a theologian in any official sense of the word. I do happen to hold an Associates degree in the field and love to study Scripture and Biblical history as a hobby (and I have a number of close

friend who would easily be described as theologians and professors in the field), but I do not suppose that any of these privileges of acquaintance or qualities of earned knowledge make me an expert in matters of Hebrew or Greek interpretation. I, like many other students of the Scriptures, rely heavily upon the multitude of Bible dictionaries, lexicons and commentaries (by scholars more learned than I) available as resources for study as well as examining various Bible translations and biblical contexts. I also rely upon personal time spent in prayer and meditating upon Scripture. I do not ask the reader to simply take my word for anything (even though some of my conclusions are boldly expressed). It is vital that each person diligently study the Scriptures and draw their conclusions based on honest research, fair examination and communion with the Holy Spirit, and not merely because someone else “said so” or simply because something “sounds good.”

This is one of the great frustrations I have with “organized religion” today; People often follow blindly because men, who suppose themselves to be spiritual leaders, often “say so” and few have concern that there may ever be error in their teaching and, many times, even those teachers themselves impose that anyone who rejects their teaching or even questions it is, inadvertently, rebelling against God’s anointed. This is nonsense! God expects us to be watchful and diligent in our pursuit of truth. We should not be ignorant and gullible. Our freedom in Christ depends on it!

While I will agree that there are those who may call themselves members of “the clergy” and are generally sincere and appear to have pure intent to serve God’s people, there are also plenty of hucksters out there that claim to be “anointed” and who claim to preach “the truth.” Some for money (whether for wealth or merely as a profession), others for power, others for fame, notoriety, self-esteem, and still others for any number of reasons beyond a simple and pure intent to lovingly care for God’s children. The latter (those with corrupted hearts and minds) will likely take some offense to this article. The intent, however, is to encourage believers to use discernment. This is not meant, in any way, as an attack on those individuals who have a sincere intent to care for God’s little lambs (not as lords over them, or who do so for money, but as ones who set godly examples and who sincerely care for them the way older brothers watch over their younger siblings – 1 Peter 5:2-3). But it ought to be a solemn reminder and challenge to be careful about the motives of your heart and to make honest examination of these things to be sure you are walking justly before Christ, before His people and in alignment with the truth of God’s Word. Even well-meaning servants can miss the mark, become puffed up with pride, and become an obstacle in God’s path if they lose sight of the truth. The good news is that once we are made aware of our error, we can repent and turn to the right way. All I ask with this writing is that, before you judge my motive, hear me out fully and then check your own.

While the purpose of this article is not to cause people to take on a suspicious attitude about everyone who occupies the functionary role of a “minister” (for, despite some ignorance, there are still many good men and women who occupy traditional religious roles), it is to encourage believers to be watchful – because this is something our Lord commanded of us. Many of those

so-called “leaders” who get angry because some ask questions or require convincing (with Scripture and actions) are – it would certainly seem – simply showing their “fruit” and this should only make them that much easier for you to spot. And once they are spotted, they ought to be left alone – as Jesus commanded.

Matthew 15:13-14 (ISV) - He replied, "Every plant that my heavenly Father did not plant will be pulled up by the roots. Leave them alone. They are blind guides of the blind. If one blind person leads another blind person, both will fall into a ditch."

BEWARE OF SELF-PROCLAIMING “ANOINTED ONES”

Matthew 24:4 (KJV) - And Jesus answered and said unto them, “Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.”

The previous passage (Matthew 24:4), as it appears in the original Greek (the language that much of the New Testament was written in); says that “many shall come in my name, saying, ‘I am Christ...’” The KJV correctly renders it here. A number of newer translations add the word “the” before Christ to indicate that this passage means that men would specifically say that they were Him (i.e. Jesus). While it is true that there were those, even in the first century (and afterwards) who came (as Jesus prophesied) claiming to be Christ (in other words “the Messiah”), the literal words of Jesus here do not add the word “the” to His statement to make it specific to Him. The word “Christ” is “christos”. It means “anointed one.” In other words, what we have here is Jesus talking about MANY who would come IN HIS NAME **claiming to be ANOINTED ONES**. His warning is continued repeatedly in the Gospels...

Matthew 24:24 (NIV) - For false christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect--if that were possible.

The words “false christs” is actually one single word in the Greek; “pseudochristos.” It (literally translated) means “a false anointed one.” Now, consider these things Jesus Himself warned His sheep about... How frequently do we hear men, standing behind their golden pulpits, boasting that they are “anointed ones”? One particular televangelist comes to mind that frequently says on his program, “brother I’m anointed!” Many of you have also likely heard these same individuals warn you not to “touch God’s anointed ones” in threatening tone to avoid being questioned or scrutinized for what they teach and do.

Please notice, dear friend, that Jesus did not merely say that many would come claiming to be Him (i.e. “the” Christ), but that they would come claiming to be “anointed ones” (christs). Why would this deceive so many people? Because Jesus also said they would come “in His name” (in other words, claiming to be sent by Jesus). They would look like the real deal. They would say, “we come to you in the name of the Lord and we are anointed.” But watch carefully when

you hear this kind of boasting. It may be that the voice you are hearing is pseudochristos! Remember, Jesus said there would be MANY who come in His name. Dear friend, it is BIBLICAL to watch out! Don't ever let anyone tell you different! YOUR LORD SPECIFICALLY INSTRUCTED YOU TO BE ON YOUR GUARD ABOUT SUCH THINGS!

And concerning those who attempt to use Scripture in threatening you not to "touch God's anointed", please look with me for a moment at their banner passage, which they so frequently remove from context to manipulate you and induce fear and submission:

Psalm 105:12-15 (NLT) - He said this when they were few in number, a tiny group of strangers in Canaan. They wandered back and forth between nations, from one kingdom to another. Yet He did not let anyone oppress them. **He warned kings on their behalf:** "Do not touch these people I have chosen (anointed), and do not hurt My prophets."

It is 100% clear, by the preceding passage, that God warned AUTHORITIES not to touch HIS PEOPLE! Not the other way around! According to this passage, God regards ALL HIS PEOPLE as being His anointed ones! Keep that in mind when a man attempts to insert himself as your authority and tries to avoid accountability by telling you not to touch him (question him, correct him, disagree with him, or reject his word) because he is "anointed". A true anointed servant of Christ doesn't throw his weight around, boast in titles, or insist on subservience, but he is humble and manifests a clear character of Christ through his actions.

Luke 22:25 (MSG) - But Jesus intervened: "Kings like to throw their weight around and people in authority like to give themselves fancy titles.

Such men like to be lifted up on pedestals. They don't come as fellow brothers among brothers with humility. They enjoy the praise of men and expect to have a reward for their so-called labor. But Jesus taught something different.

Luke 17:9-10 (MSG) - Does the servant get special thanks for doing what's expected of him? It's the same with you. When you've done everything expected of you, be matter-of-fact and say, 'The work is done. What we were told to do, we did.'

WE MUST OBEY GOD AND FOLLOW HIM

Keeping these things in mind, we should be able to spot the fraudulent "servants" who are such only in word (their word) but do not manifest the character and teaching of Christ. You will notice that many of these false servants will direct you to obey their teaching (regardless of your being uncomfortable with it). They say they speak the truth and they speak for God. They will quote the Scripture and say that this is God's will for you to obey them because God has ordained them to lead you and give account for you.

Hebrews 13:17 (KJV) - Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that *is* unprofitable for you.

Does that passage sound familiar? Well, it is important to understand what these words actually mean in the Greek and in context. Obey does NOT mean unquestioned subservience – it does not mean to “follow commands” – and there is also nothing in the original text to support the words “those that have the rule over you.” Now, before you accuse me of heresy, please continue with me here for a moment. Let’s examine this carefully.

The Greek word for “obey” (in the preceding passage) is “peitho” and it means “to be persuaded by argument, to judge whether true or false”! Simply said, this does not mean “obey” at all (not in the way most of us were taught in church world). Rather it means that a person must be convinced by a true example. Once they are convinced, they may choose to submit themselves willingly to that instruction. This submission is not harshly ordered of them; they yield it willingly. They are only expected to yield to something as they are persuaded of its truth by sound reason and trustworthy example. As a matter of fact, every reference to “obey” as it concerns believers within the community of believers, is this word “peitho”, which means to be persuaded by convincing (not to sub serve authorities).

It may surprise some that there is not one verse in the entire New Testament Scripture that instructs believers to “unquestioningly obey” some kind of hierarchy of church officials. The closest example of such a concept would be “obey” as it is found in Titus 3:1 – which has nothing to do with church leaders (“Remind your people to submit to the government and its officers...”). This Greek word for obey in this passage is not strictly “peitho”, though it may be derived from it. It’s a different word, “peitharcheō”, which means “to submit to the authority of hierarchical rulers and superiors.” Like “peitho” it has in mind the idea of willing submission according to persuasion of truth. The difference simply being the subject that kind of submission is given to – a ruler, a government. Again, this word is NEVER used in connection with so-called church leaders (for “archeo” is never used to describe servants of Christ). There is no hierarchy in the Lord’s Church – save Christ Himself as our Head and Master. Peitho belongs to Christian brothers and sisters... Peitharcheo belongs to earthly governments (so long as they do not require us to violate God’s commands). Peitharcheo also belongs to God. But it NEVER belongs to men!

Acts 5:29 (NKJV) - But Peter and the *other* apostles answered and said: "We ought to obey (peitharcheō) God rather than men.

With the exception of our submitting to secular governmental authorities (in so far as they do not violate God's will), the only one a believer must submit his absolute obedience to is GOD. If the author of Hebrews had intended to instruct his hearers that they ought to "obey" church leaders in terms of "following commands", he might rather have used the Greek word "hupakouō" – a completely different word, which means "to hearken unto a command." Hupakouō is used in passages like Ephesians 6:1, which says, "Children obey your parents because you belong to the Lord for this is right." It's also used in Colossians 3:22 concerning obedience to worldly employers. But again, this kind of obedience is never expected in connection with those who serve as ministers of the Gospel – **FOR THEY ARE NOT RULERS OVER THE BRETHREN – THEY ARE SERVANTS OF THE BRETHREN.** It is easy to understand why unquestioned obedience is never ordered of the saints in the New Testament when you consider the many false teachers that had infiltrated the community of believers (which both Jesus and His apostles continually warned about). How would believers be able to judge righteously and even walk away from such men if they had been instructed to obey without question every so-called leader among them?

Now, as we said earlier, there is also no word in the Greek that represents our English KJV phrase "those that have the rule over you." Does this surprise you? It did me too when I first realized this. The actual Greek word is "hēgeomai" and it simply means "to go before, to go on ahead, to lead." In other words, the author of Hebrews is instructing believers to be persuaded by those who have gone on ahead and set a godly example. **THAT'S IT!** It's that simple! It's not talking about blind obedience or unquestioned subservience to church leaders. It's not talking about having a covering. It's not talking about quietly submitting to pastors, teachers, apostles and prophets no matter what personal disagreements you may have with their doctrine. There is no example of Jesus or His apostles teaching others that by submitting to "leaders", even if they be false, that God would still regard their submission as right (as though they were submitted to God despite the error of men). This kind of teaching is a LIE. When you discern false teaching, you must reject it! When men order your submission and do not model the truth, you must avoid them and submit to God rather than man. They have a responsibility to demonstrate the character of Christ in their serving (if they are in fact true servants of Jesus). If they fail to do this, you must judge righteously and not follow them. Christ alone is your covering! He is your Head – even the Head of every man!

1 Corinthians 11:3a (NIV) - Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ...

The following article presents revelation I have found through my own studies in the Scriptures. I pray that your journey through the Word will be just as exciting. And, as always, if you find something here you sincerely disagree with, I welcome comments and questions from anyone.

Finally, I wish to convey that the depth of examination this article presents is limited for brevity sake. It is in no way exhaustive. I realize that there may still be some questions the reader has that are not examined here. I have merely tried to touch on some of the main themes that I believe the Holy Spirit has laid on my heart for this writing. Hopefully, this will inspire a fresh challenge to dive wholeheartedly into the pages of God's Word to seek and find. I completely believe that the Holy Spirit will guide the sincere heart to a comprehension of the truth of Scripture as you pray and read His Word. He is, after all, our blessed Teacher and Jesus assured us that He can be wholly trusted to do just that; to lead us into ALL truth! May God bless you as you examine His Word and tune your ear to the voice of the Holy Spirit.

CLERGY & LAITY AS THE DICTIONARY DESCRIBES IT:

To begin, let's start out with the basics. How is this term, clergy, defined in some of our English dictionaries? The last source I have quoted from below is actually a thesaurus to show commonly designated synonyms of the term clergy.

Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary (1996) - "The body of men set apart, by due ordination, to the service of God, in the Christian church, in distinction from the laity..."

Cambridge **Advanced Learner's Dictionary** - "priests, especially in the Christian Church"

Wikipedia Encyclopedia – "the generic term used to describe the formal religious leadership within a given religion. The term comes from greek κληρος (fortune, or metaphorically, heritage).

Rogets Thesaurus – "clergyman, divine, ecclesiastic, churchman, priest, presbyter, hierophant, pastor, shepherd, minister; father, father in Christ; padre, abbe, cure; patriarch; reverend; black coat; confessor. Dignitaries of the church; ecclesiarch, hierarch; ebdomarius; eminence, reverence, elder, primate, metropolitan, archbishop, bishop, prelate, diocesan, suffragan, dean, subdean, archdeacon, prebendary, canon, rural dean, rector, parson, vicar, perpetual curate, residentiary, beneficiary, incumbent, chaplain, curate; deacon, deaconess; preacher, reader, lecturer; capitular; missionary, propagandist, Jesuit, revivalist, field preacher. [Antonyms: laity.]"

Clearly, by the definitions above, we can see that the clergy is commonly understood to be a specialized office of Christian ministry (and leadership) – separated from those who do not occupy such offices (i.e. the laity). The distinction is very bold and real – the dictionary plainly defining "laity" as the antonym of clergy (the direct opposite – separate and apart from). Some of the very terms marked as synonyms for the word clergy include ones that define positions of authority, hierarchy, reverence, priestly service and elitism.

Before we continue here with the subject of the clergy, let's look briefly at the dictionary's definition of "laity" as well to get an idea of the distinction between itself and the clergy (we will examine these definitions more thoroughly in a moment):

The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition (2000) – "All those persons who are not members of a given profession or other specialized field."

Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary (1996, 1998) – "Those who are not of a certain profession, as law or medicine, in distinction from those belonging to it."

WordNet Dictionary, Princeton University (1997) – "everyone except the clergy."

Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary – "**1:** the people of a religious faith as distinguished from its clergy. **2:** the mass of the people as distinguished from those of a particular profession or those specially skilled."

Note how each dictionary reference shown above emphasizes that the laity represent individuals who are exempt, excluded from, and separated completely from a given profession – most especially, for our discussion here, separate from the clergy. The word "laity" comes from Latin (laicus) derived from the Greek (laos) and, simply translated, means "the people." According to the Dictionary, the laity have no part of the role of clergymen. That is not their task and responsibility. They are exempted completely from the clergy class. In virtually every definition you'll read in a dictionary, it specifically makes mention that these are distinguished apart from the clergy – in other words, they have nothing to do with it. We are talking about a bold division. In fact, as we read earlier, "laity" is considered the ANTONYM of clergy! Now that we have read the distinctions between these two terms as defined in our modern dictionaries (which identify and confirm common use today), let's take a few moments to examine each word in a little more detail – especially according to biblical context, if any.

The word "clergy" comes from the Latin word "clericus," meaning "priest" or "clerk." The word "clerk" or "cleric" comes from the Greek word "klerikos" and stems from the word "kleros" which means "lot", "heritage" or "inheritance." In Webster's extended notes on this term, it references Deuteronomy 18:2 and makes mention of the Levite priests in the Old Testament to example the meaning of this term "clergy." To show context I will quote both verses 1 and 2:

Deuteronomy 18:1-2 (NLT) - "Remember that the Levitical priests and the rest of the tribe of Levi will not be given an inheritance of land like the other tribes in Israel. Instead, the priests and Levites will eat from the offerings given to the LORD by fire, for that is their inheritance. They will have no inheritance of their own among the Israelites. The LORD himself is their inheritance, just as he promised them."

We can see from Scripture (as well as the dictionary) that “clergy” pertains to a people who are regarded as God’s “lot” and have God Himself as their inheritance. Webster’s Dictionary goes on to immediately draw a parallel from Levitical priests to Christian ministers:

Webster’s New World dictionary 2nd College Edition (1970) - “Deuteronomy 18:2, of the Levites, hence the Christian clergy”

Interestingly enough, this same definition is common among many of today’s clergymen. I have myself heard ministers compare their profession to that of Levitical priests, only in a modernized sense. However, this parallel is problematic biblically for several reasons... Let’s look at a few.

THREE REASONS WHY MODERN-DAY CHURCH LEADERS ARE NOT THE EQUIVALENT OF LEVITICAL PRIESTS WHO SERVED IN THE TEMPLE:

REASON NUMBER ONE: Most Christians who attempt to draw these same parallels (i.e. Old Testament priests to New Testament pastors) fail to acknowledge the reason(s) why this priesthood of Levitical clergymen were set up in the Old Testament (and therefore fail to acknowledge why it is impossible to presume that it still exists in some other form today). The Scripture plainly teaches that the old system has been set aside. In fact, Hebrews 7:18 says that it was disannulled (abrogated, abolished, set aside, cancelled, rejected)! Even more astounding is the fact that the author of Hebrews remarks that, not only was it set aside and cancelled, but it was set aside because it was useless and unprofitable!

Hebrews 7:18 (Webster) - For there is verily a disannulling of the preceding commandment on account of its weakness and unprofitableness.

Thayer’s Greek Lexicon (G115 - athetesis) – “abolition, disannulling, put away, rejection”

Strong’s Greek Dictionary – (G115 - athetesis) – “cancellation (literally or figuratively): - disannulling, put away.”

Vine’s Greek Dictionary – (G115 - athetesis) – “a setting aside, abolition, is translated ‘disannulling’ Heb_7:18, with reference to a commandment.”

There is a real challenge set forth here that will be difficult for some to embrace at first. That is the challenge to believe the Scripture when it says that the Old Covenant priesthood and purpose was fulfilled in Christ and therefore the old system abolished (as Hebrews teaches). Why will this be difficult for some to accept? Because if the logic is followed through completely, it means that other facets of the Old Covenant system will also have to be discarded, such as the concept whereby some believe that the Jewish Temple is represented

by the modern day institutional church building. If the Bible is embraced fully (in context), without compromise, it will certainly mean that many of our modern day religious concepts and practices which are often asserted to be essential, must be re-examined, altered, and perhaps even discarded (lest they continue to keep us in bondage and distracted from what truly is essential). Truly many will not be willing to lay the axe to the unbiblical traditions that they have held dear for years and they will reject the truth and embrace their comfortable bondage. I believe that, eventually, these will be some of those who have become part of the harlot church system (Mystery Babylon – Revelation 18), whom God will plead with that they come out of before they are destroyed with her.

I think that if more Christians understood the Old Testament story better (concerning the Law and priesthood), and especially its reason of typology, they would rarely make the kind of mistaken parallels they so often do. They would also appreciate far more, the measure of sacrifice Christ made and the freedom, grace and ultimate blessing He afforded us through His death and resurrection. They would be utterly amazed at how wonderful and precious is this rite of priesthood that God has bestowed on all those who are born into His kingdom.

Here's the kicker: The entire arrangement of the Old Covenant priesthood was presented as merely a temporary substitute. **CHRISTIANS MUST UNDERSTAND AND RECOGNIZE THIS VITAL, BIBLICAL TRUTH.** When the Law was instituted and God set the restrictions for how this priesthood must operate, the people understood that disobedience to any portion of the arrangement, constituted sin and therefore resulted in punishment and death – this was the curse. In other words, when you consider the Old Covenant priesthood, you have to consider the context of the curse under the Law. The fact is that you cannot have the Old Covenant priesthood without the Old Covenant Law (which includes all of its rituals and ordinances). The two are intimately intertwined and require each other to exist and operate. **If any portion of the Old Covenant Law is made requisite, then all of it is equally requisite and failure to comply with any detail puts you under the curse!**

Galatians 3:10 (NKJV) - For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, "Cursed *is* everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them."

James 2:10 (NKJV) - For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one *point*, he is guilty of all.

Keep in mind, this is New Testament instruction we are reading here (by James and Paul). They are not saying you get off the hook if you blow it because Christ gives you grace. No! They are saying, "It's Grace or Law PERIOD! You have to choose! If you choose to live by the Law, then you FORFEIT grace! YOU PLACE YOURSELF UNDER THE CURSE OF THE LAW – NO EXCEPTIONS!!!"

Dear Christian, do you understand this? Young believer who is reading this, don't let anyone rob you of your freedom in Christ Jesus by subjecting you under the Law! Those who have taught you such have not taught you well and their words (which are nothing short of vain babblings) will lead you into bondage and ungodliness! (2 Timothy 2:16) Christ is your Lord and King. He is your covering and Head. No church, pastor, prophet or apostle can occupy this divine position.

Romans 4:14-18 (MSG) - If those who get what God gives them only get it by doing everything they are told to do and filling out all the right forms properly signed, that eliminates personal trust completely and turns the promise into an ironclad contract! That's not a holy promise; that's a business deal. A contract drawn up by a hard-nosed lawyer and with plenty of fine print only makes sure that you will never be able to collect. But if there is no contract in the first place, simply a promise--and God's promise at that--you can't break it. This is why the fulfillment of God's promise depends entirely on trusting God and his way, and then simply embracing him and what he does. God's promise arrives as pure gift. That's the only way everyone can be sure to get in on it, those who keep the religious traditions and those who have never heard of them. For Abraham is father of us all. He is not our racial father--that's reading the story backwards. He is our faith father. We call Abraham "father" not because he got God's attention by living like a saint, but because God made something out of Abraham when he was a nobody. Isn't that what we've always read in Scripture, God saying to Abraham, "I set you up as father of many peoples"? Abraham was first named "father" and then became a father because he dared to trust God to do what only God could do: raise the dead to life, with a word make something out of nothing. When everything was hopeless, Abraham believed anyway, deciding to live not on the basis of what he saw he couldn't do but on what God said he would do. And so he was made father of a multitude of peoples. God himself said to him, "You're going to have a big family, Abraham!"

The Law indeed condemned all men to death because no human could keep the Law perfectly. In order for humans to walk in fellowship with God, and become a kingdom of priests as He had always desired, they would have to be a perfect observance of every minute detail of God's Law. Not just outwardly, but inwardly as well (as Jesus demonstrated and taught). God knew this would be impossible for men (He knew that righteousness would never come through the Law – not because the Law was evil but because men are imperfect and full of sin), but His plan was to send His Son as the final and complete sacrifice for sin because He Himself was sinless and perfect, who would restore man to God as a kingdom of priests. Until this time, however, Israel was under a Covenant that entailed a curse for disobedience of the Law.

As a side point here, I would like to note how many Christians today like to cite Old Testament passages like Deuteronomy 28 (the list of blessings and curses). They think if they follow this list of rules and righteous deeds then God will grant them amazing blessings. The problem is that even Israel couldn't keep this arrangement. They consistently broke God's Covenant. So all of them were placed under a curse. Note, in the Deuteronomy passage, the wording is

100% consistent with the New Testament reiterations (as stated previously). God requires that the only way to avoid the curse is to keep, not a few of the laws, not just one or two really well, but ALL (EVERY SINGLE ONE) of them.

Deuteronomy 28:15 (NKJV) - "But it shall come to pass, if you do not obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully ALL His commandments and His statutes which I command you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you..."

As anyone can clearly see by reading this passage, there is not a shred of gray permitted here! If a person wants to obtain the blessings of Deuteronomy 28 through keeping the Law, they had better not miss a beat because it could cost them their life! Just look again at the severity of the curses for disobedience... Better put on your seatbelt and helmet for this one!

Deuteronomy 28:15-45 (NLT) - But if you refuse to listen to the LORD your God and do not obey all the commands and laws I am giving you today, all these curses will come and overwhelm you: You will be cursed in your towns and in the country. You will be cursed with baskets empty of fruit, and with kneading bowls empty of bread. You will be cursed with few children and barren fields. You will be cursed with infertile herds and flocks. You will be cursed wherever you go, both in coming and in going. "The LORD himself will send against you curses, confusion, and disillusionment in everything you do, until at last you are completely destroyed for doing evil and forsaking me. The LORD will send diseases among you until none of you are left in the land you are about to enter and occupy. The LORD will strike you with wasting disease, fever, and inflammation, with scorching heat and drought, and with blight and mildew. These devastations will pursue you until you die. The skies above will be as unyielding as bronze, and the earth beneath will be as hard as iron. The LORD will turn your rain into sand and dust, and it will pour down from the sky until you are destroyed. "The LORD will cause you to be defeated by your enemies. You will attack your enemies from one direction, but you will scatter from them in seven! You will be an object of horror to all the kingdoms of the earth. Your dead bodies will be food for the birds and wild animals, and no one will be there to chase them away. "The LORD will afflict you with the boils of Egypt and with tumors, scurvy, and the itch, from which you cannot be cured. The LORD will strike you with madness, blindness, and panic. You will grope around in broad daylight, just like a blind person groping in the darkness, and you will not succeed at anything you do. You will be oppressed and robbed continually, and no one will come to save you. "You will be engaged to a woman, but another man will ravish her. You will build a house, but someone else will live in it. You will plant a vineyard, but you will never enjoy its fruit. Your ox will be butchered before your eyes, but you won't get a single bite of the meat. Your donkey will be driven away, never to be returned. Your sheep will be given to your enemies, and no one will be there to help you. You will watch as your sons and daughters are taken away as slaves. Your heart will break as you long for them, but nothing you do will help. A foreign nation you have never heard about will eat the crops you worked so hard to grow. You will suffer under constant oppression and harsh treatment. You will go mad because of all the tragedy around you. The LORD will cover you from head to foot with incurable boils.

"The LORD will exile you and the king you crowned to a nation unknown to you and your ancestors. Then in exile you will worship gods of wood and stone! You will become an object of horror, a proverb and a mockery among all the nations to which the LORD sends you. "You will plant much but harvest little, for locusts will eat your crops. You will plant vineyards and care for them, but you will not drink the wine or eat the grapes, for worms will destroy the vines. You will grow olive trees throughout your land, but you will never use the olive oil, for the trees will drop the fruit before it is ripe. You will have sons and daughters, but you will not keep them, for they will be led away into captivity. Swarms of insects will destroy your trees and crops. The foreigners living among you will become stronger and stronger, while you become weaker and weaker. They will lend money to you, not you to them. They will be the head, and you will be the tail! **"If you refuse to listen to the LORD your God and to obey the commands and laws he has given you, all these curses will pursue and overtake you until you are destroyed.**

As we already read in the book of Galatians and James (and now in Deuteronomy), failure to meet every detail of the Law condemned you (and O did it condemn you). You couldn't just keep one or a few to exempt yourself from the curse. Israel never received those blessings in the fullness that God purposed. In fact, when the Messiah finally came, they rejected Him entirely.

Christians so often fail to realize this important detail about the Law – you can't pick the deeds you want in order to try and move God's hand and get blessings. If you are going to try and keep one detail of the Law in order to get the blessings attributed, you therefore obligate yourself to keep EVERY detail of THE WHOLE law – and therefore you place yourself under the curse of the Law – it's just that simple! Again, as Paul said so plainly to the Christians in Galatia, "For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.'"

Are you one that has been taught or that currently believes you need to keep certain laws to gain blessings, favor, provision and protection from God? Were you taught things like you need to tithe your money to a local church organization or ministry, attend services every week (i.e. Sabbath keeping), recognize a clergy caste system in the religious organization you frequent, etc? If so, then let me boldly ask you this: **Were you also taught the rest of the story;** that the Bible clearly says that you are choosing to live under a curse because you believe and attempt to practice rituals you think will get you points with God? (Galatians 3:10; James 2:10) Were you also taught that God's grace through Christ does not apply to you and Jesus' sacrifice on Calvary was meaningless and without any value for you since you have chosen to expect God to find favor with you because you keep the Law? (Galatians 5:2, 4) Do you know that if you have believed any of these things **YOU HAVE NOT BELIEVED THE TRUTH BUT A LIE?** (Galatians 5:7-9) And not only a lie but **ANOTHER GOSPEL!** (Galatians 1:6)

DO YOU UNDERSTAND THAT THIS IS WHAT YOU ARE AGREEING TO WHEN YOU PUT UP WITH A TEACHER THAT INSTRUCTS YOU TO LIVE UNDER THE LAW?

We need to realize that there are false brothers and false teachers in our midst and the Bible teaches that they are masquerading to spy out our freedom in Christ to look for some way they might trip us up and lead us into bondage (Galatians 2:4). Jesus warned us about the times of the end; the earthquakes, the famines, the wars and rumors of wars... but He warned us about the danger of false prophets, false leaders, false anointed ones and false teachers **FOUR TIMES AS MUCH!** Paul said that he did not cease to warn the believers for **THREE YEARS** with tears streaming down his face because he knew that savage wolves (dressed up like sheep – even from their own numbers) were going to come in and try to devour them!

Acts 20:29-31 (NIV) - I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.

Consider for a moment, if you will, each of those concerns we talked about earlier – the ones that so many Christians voice because of what they have been taught by teachers who were in error; Concerns that God will not bless and watch over them if they do not religiously adhere to certain laws and legalistic practices. For example, consider how prevalent is the pressure for Christians to “bring their tithes into the storehouse” (storehouse meaning “the church” according to this frame of thinking). Many Christians have been taught that if they neglect to give money to a religious organization (and its clergy), that God will not bless them, or guarantee provision, or protection. Some even believe or have been taught that they may also reap curses for not giving into such “storehouses.” But the idea that God only takes care of His children (even lavishing them with His blessings) if they obey certain religious rules and regulations (especially those in the Law of Moses – not to mention those entirely made up by men) runs 100% contrary to the teaching of Jesus. Remember His words?

Matthew 6:25-34 (BBE) - So I say to you, Take no thought for your life, about food or drink, or about clothing for your body. Is not life more than food, and the body more than its clothing? See the birds of heaven; they do not put seeds in the earth, they do not get in grain, or put it in storehouses; and your Father in heaven gives them food. Are you not of much more value than they? And which of you by taking thought is able to make himself a cubit taller? And why are you troubled about clothing? See the flowers of the field, how they come up; they do no work, they make no thread: But I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God gives such clothing to the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is put into the oven, will he not much more give you clothing, O you of little faith? Then do not be full of care, saying, What are we to have for food or drink? or, With what may we be clothed? **Because the Gentiles (the unbelievers) go in search of all these things:** for your Father in heaven has knowledge that you have need of all these things: But let your first

care be for his kingdom and his righteousness; and all these other things will be given to you in addition. Then have no care for tomorrow: tomorrow will take care of itself. Take the trouble of the day as it comes.

Do you see this? It is the unbelievers that worry about having their needs met (fearing that if they don't work hard enough – they will be without and fail to prosper). I repeat, this is a NON-CHRISTIAN mindset that believers are succumbing to. A mindset that Jesus instructed His followers to flee! While the televangelists are telling everyone that the pursuit of prosperity is what the exercise of faith is for, Jesus is saying, "you who run after these things only prove that you have hardly any faith at all!"

Jesus proclaims to His followers that if the birds of the air don't even sow or gather into storehouses and yet God feeds and clothes them, HOW MUCH MORE will He feed and clothe us? What, my friend, does this say for all of those "storehouse tithing to get blessing" sermons? Hmmm...

And isn't it interesting how God illustrates the simplicity of the flowers of the field (who do not even labor at all)? This should be a most striking revelation – for Jesus said that NOT EVEN SOLOMON (the richest man that ever lived) was so splendorously clothed as even the smallest flower of the field – OF HOW MUCH MORE VALUE ARE WE TO OUR FATHER IN HEAVEN?

Matthew 10:29-31 (NLT) - Not even a sparrow, worth only half a penny, can fall to the ground without your Father knowing it. And the very hairs on your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are more valuable to him than a whole flock of sparrows.

Continuing on this same matter concerning some of these faulty mindsets that have become so widespread among church-attending "laity" today, we see how many Christians are taught that their acceptance by God and their being recognized by others as a true Christian is perceived to be qualified and validated according to their keeping of religious rules, attendance of religious meetings, financial support of religious organizations, and their submitting themselves, often without question, to a leadership system that governs their behavior, mediates their relationship with God and claims to speak on His behalf (bring them "the word of the Lord"). This is the principle danger of the clergy-laity distinction; it clogs up the spiritual pipes (so to speak) and the Lord is no longer permitted to be the Lord. No longer is he the One Mediator between God and man, but other mediators have stepped into place. Whether they intend to be roadblocks or not does not change the reality that this is what their position creates. Many a sincere clergyman has become an obstacle to spiritual growth and intimate relationship with the Father without even realizing or intending it.

It is a common teaching in the clergy system to instruct the laity to give tithes "cheerfully." While this article is not intended to be an in-depth study on tithing, it is perhaps an important detail to at least briefly examine because it is primarily through the doctrine of monetary tithing that the

whole clergy system (and organization as well) is generally maintained (most often without question). On the simplistic side of things, we might recognize the fact that buildings and programs cost money to build and maintain. If tithing were simply a matter of suggesting an amount that people could contribute to help finance the organizations that they have chosen to participate in (leaving any biblical question aside for the moment), that would be one thing. But things are not usually presented so basically.

Most often Christians are introduced to this subject under the teaching that God has ordained a system of clergy and organized religion for a people (i.e. "the laity") to submit to and who are expected also to finance it. Tithing, therefore, is not a mere suggested amount – it is rather said to be "the commandment of God." Christians are, therefore, not being told to give out of free will volition, grace or love (as Paul commanded in 2 Corinthians 9:7), but out of law and coercion (the very thing Paul warned them not to give out of). Ironically, many in the clergy try to soften the sound of this legalistic requirement to pay tithes by massaging various passages of Scripture to make them sound as if they agree with their teaching. They say that lay people should give their tithes out of grace. The problem is: you can't give that which you are told that you owe. You can only pay it. Tithing is LAW. It has nothing to do with Grace! And that's without even mentioning the hard fact that there is not even a doctrine of monetary tithing anywhere in Scripture! What we have seen in operation is what Jesus warned about in the book of Mark:

Mark 7:7-9 (GNB) - It is no use for them to worship me, because they teach human rules as though they were my laws! "You put aside God's command and obey human teachings." And Jesus continued, "You have a clever way of rejecting God's law in order to uphold your own teaching."

Paul never taught tithing at any time (and certainly not anything we might call "grace tithing"). Paul taught the Romans that if you pay money to a worker, that cannot be regarded as a gift because a worker earns his wage. Therefore, giving **MUST** be a matter of freewill otherwise it is not giving at all. Grace is crucially tied to the subject of giving in the New Testament. Legalism like tithing cannot have anyplace within Christian practice because it fights against grace. Tithing says, "in order to gain God's approval, blessing, protection, favor, anointing, provision and prosperity, **YOU HAVE TO KEEP THE LAW!**" Are you beginning to see why this is so crucial to comprehend? Because Christ set the ultimate example and **GAVE HIMSELF FREELY** to us. I must repeat, anyone who teaches you that God shows favor on you because you "do something" to earn it, **THEY ARE NOT PREACHING THE TRUTH!** The Word of God in Scripture teaches the opposite!

Romans 4:3-8 (CEV) - The Scriptures say, "God accepted Abraham because Abraham had faith in him." Money paid to workers isn't a gift. It is something they earn by working. But you cannot make God accept you because of something you do. God accepts sinners only because they have faith in him. In the Scriptures David talks about the blessings that come to people

who are acceptable to God, even though they don't do anything to deserve these blessings. David says, **"God blesses people whose sins are forgiven and whose evil deeds are forgotten. The Lord blesses people whose sins are erased from his book."**

Are your sins erased from God's book? Has He forgiven your sins? Then that is all the qualification you require to walk in His blessings. The minute you start to believe that He favors you and grants blessing or suddenly reaches in to protect you because you "measure up" in some way (whether it be through tithing, keeping commandments or attending religious meetings regularly), is the minute you have lost sight of the truth. God loves you! God blesses you because He loves you! And He knows, just like the woman who anointed Jesus' feet manifested in Luke 7:47, that **he who has been forgiven of much shows forth much love.** THIS IS WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT FOLKS! God desires His children to respond to His love – not to Law. The clergy system is a system comprised of legalism. Upon legalism it thrives. Through that legalism A DIFFERENT GOSPEL is presented to people! And in that legalism the believer in Christ who becomes caught in the deception will lose sight of the truth because it is a worldly system that fights against the way of the Spirit.

Friends, how can we believe for a moment that God will not lavish His blessings and His provision upon us when we consider the birds of the air and the flowers of the field as Jesus so clearly taught us? How can we dare ignore His words and place the Law in precedence to even Christ? The kinds of doctrines have been propagated for centuries through the clergy system in an attempt to coerce people into supporting them and their system. But, whether all of them realize it or not, their doing such comes at the expense of forsaking the truth and trading the liberty and joy of the Gospel for the legalism and bondage of religion.

We need to keep alert, study the Scriptures, and trust the discernment of the Holy Spirit. This is vitally important my brothers and sisters in Christ. Paul the apostle marveled at how those he taught the truth were so quick to embrace a different gospel and to put up so easily with false teachers. These teachers come in with their "principles" and their "spiritual keys" and their "revelations" and their "commandments of Jesus" (twisting the Word of God to fit their teachings and traditions) and what they mostly amount to is nothing short of legalism, neatly packaged in Christian wrapping paper. We cannot allow our liberty in Christ to be trampled on. This is what the enemy desires; to rob us of the joy and intimacy of our relationship with Jesus, the Lord.

2 Corinthians 11:2-4 (NLT) - I am jealous for you with the jealousy of God himself. For I promised you as a pure bride to one husband, Christ. But I fear that somehow you will be led away from your pure and simple devotion to Christ, just as Eve was deceived by the serpent. You seem to believe whatever anyone tells you, even if they preach about a different Jesus than the one we preach, or a different Spirit than the one you received, or a different kind of gospel than the one you believed.

Christians rarely, if ever, consider these things when they take certain passages out of their context (as many have been taught to do) to try and manipulate the hand of God in getting His blessings. It's sad that so many believers today fail to understand the power of the Gospel and neglect to see that, through Jesus, we obtain every spiritual blessing possible!

Ephesians 1:3-11 (NLT) - How we praise God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we belong to Christ. Long ago, even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. His unchanging plan has always been to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. And this gave him great pleasure. So we praise God for the wonderful kindness he has poured out on us because we belong to his dearly loved Son. He is so rich in kindness that he purchased our freedom through the blood of his Son, and our sins are forgiven. He has showered his kindness on us, along with all wisdom and understanding. God's secret plan has now been revealed to us; it is a plan centered on Christ, designed long ago according to his good pleasure. And this is his plan: At the right time he will bring everything together under the authority of Christ-everything in heaven and on earth. Furthermore, because of Christ, we have received an inheritance from God, for he chose us from the beginning, and all things happen just as he decided long ago.

Isn't that the best news you've read all day? What incredible cause for joy! How often have we really considered the depth and breadth of Jesus' amazing love and incomprehensible grace? How could we ever presume that legalistic subservience to religious rules and regulations could be more blessed than what Christ has given to us FREELY and COMPLETELY by His Spirit? How could we ever trade the willing obedience to His Spirit for the killing letter of the Law?

2 Corinthians 3:6 (GNB) - it is He who made us capable of serving the new covenant, which consists not of a written law but of the Spirit. The written law brings death, but the Spirit gives life.

The prospect of gaining blessings by observing laws is only for those who wish to trade the Gospel for the "ministration of condemnation" (2 Corinthians 3:9)! Yes, I said trade the Gospel. You can't have it both ways. On the other hand, those who choose the ministration of the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:8) and believe the Gospel of Grace, will live unto God through obedience to Christ... and for them there is no condemnation.

Romans 8:1-4 (KJV) - *[There is]* therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

THE LEVITICAL PRIESTHOOD

Now, back to our discussion of the Old Covenant priesthood and why it doesn't fit with our modern concept of clergy over the laity. Let's take a few moments to look at how the priesthood and the Law was implemented in the Old Testament. I'm going to have summarize quite a bit to get us through this as briefly as possible.

Exodus, chapter 20, marks the introduction of the Law (the 10 commandments). God set forth a stipulation (see Exodus 19:5-6) that IF His people would obey His voice and keep His covenant, they would be to Him a kingdom of priests. Exodus, chapter 25, marks the command of God to build the Tent of Meeting. The Tent of Meeting (or Tabernacle) was a portable structure that the Israelites took with them on their journey in the wilderness. This God desired in order that He may dwell among His people. Exodus 28:1 marks the beginning of the priesthood of Aaron.

Before this time every man was, essentially, the priest of his own household by virtue of God designating that all the firstborn in the land be dedicated unto Him (Exodus 13:2). God desired that His people would all become priests unto Him. The Tabernacle was to be God's dwelling among men and so it was that the people would draw near to the Tent of Meeting and God would speak to His servant Moses as a man speaks to his friend and all the people observed.

But then, something went terribly wrong (not without God's foreknowledge though). The people failed to listen to God's voice and they rebelled against His Covenant (see Exodus 32); even turning from Him to worship idols.

There is a side point here I would like to make. This point was inspired by a close friend of mine, Deanna Rodriguez, who encouraged me with some important details that we ought not to miss from this passage of Scripture. You may have noticed, as I have, that some of the movies which depict the story of Moses returning from the mountain and finding the people in idolatry, show the tribe of Levi as though they were innocent bystanders who did not participate in the rebellion. But you know what? The Scripture does not say this. What it does say is that God drew a line when he observed the sin of the people. **Exodus 32:26 (NIV)** tells us that Moses "...stood at the entrance to the camp and said, 'Whoever is for the LORD, come to me.' And all the Levites rallied to him." I mention this side point to encourage us all that none of us are without sin. We all have embraced error at one time or another. We all have turned our back on God at some point. But just like God drew the line and said, "I know you have sinned grievously against Me, but now I ask you, who will leave that behind and stand with Me?" I believe God can challenge us with the same call. Just as Jesus told Peter that he would deny Him three times, but that afterward he would be restored and encourage his brethren. Some of us have embraced some faulty teaching over the years. I did myself for many years (and many of those old religious ways of thinking still plague some of my thought processes and I have to continually lay them down at the cross). God lovingly and passionately calls out to us, "come away with Me. Come out of the error you once embraced. Repent of it. Will you stand on My

Word and believe My truth? Will you do it even if it's not the popular consensus?" Levi responded to God's call and they chose to align themselves in the Way.

So God chose, from this point, that the Levites (adopting them alone) would be set apart and serve Him continually as priests.

God told Moses that the people ought to be destroyed because of their sin and for breaking the Covenant, but Moses prayed to the Lord and God withheld His wrath. He vowed not to destroy them if they would enter again into covenant with Him. At this time, God still permitted Israel to draw near to the Tent of Meeting. It is at this point in Exodus that we read about this restored Covenant and how God calls for the Tabernacle to be adorned with gold and precious jewels and the priests robes also were to be laden with fine ornaments. This is also where we read of the other "furniture" that was made for the Tabernacle; the Arc of the Covenant, the Mercy Seat, the Candlestick, the Table of Shewbread, the Holy Anointing Oil, the Incense, etc. It would take another, lengthy, article to discuss each of these types and shadows in detail.

We then move into the book of Leviticus, which details all of the sacrifices and ordinances of the Law and every function of the Levitical priesthood.

Look now to the book of Numbers (chapter 18), where God designated that the food tithes of Israel be designated to the Levites as a support for their ministry to Him because they were not allowed an inheritance of land with the rest of Israel and were set in "office" as a substitute. It is at this point that God orders that no longer shall anyone be permitted to draw near unto the Tabernacle lest they bear sin and die.

Numbers 18:22-24 (NLT) - "From now on, Israelites other than the priests and Levites are to stay away from the Tabernacle. If they come too near, they will be judged guilty and die. The Levites must serve at the Tabernacle, and they will be held responsible for any offenses against it. This is a permanent law among you. But the Levites will receive no inheritance of land among the Israelites, because I have given them the Israelites' tithes, which have been set apart as offerings to the LORD. This will be the Levites' share. That is why I said they would receive no inheritance of land among the Israelites."

In Numbers 18 it references how the people could no longer draw near to the Tabernacle and hear directly from the mouth of God lest they bear the consequence of their sin and die. This was because of the rebellion of Korah and his men (prior in chapter 16), who incited the people to complain against Moses and Aaron and tried to convince them that the priesthood, which God had ordained, was a common thing. Korah and his followers rebelled against God's order and they were killed. Forever from this event forward, the Israelites were no longer permitted to draw near to the Tabernacle or they would die.

The Deuteronomy account (18:16-17 – shown below) reflects back on the entrance of this

whole system, when the people, because of fear, pleaded that Moses would go up and hear God for them and then reiterate His words to them (also see Exodus 20:19; Deuteronomy 5:24-28; Hebrews 12:19).

Deuteronomy 18:16-17 (NLT) - For this is what you yourselves requested of the LORD your God when you were assembled at Mount Sinai. You begged that you might never again have to listen to the voice of the LORD your God or see this blazing fire for fear you would die. Then the LORD said to me, 'Fine, I will do as they have requested.'

Until the death and resurrection of Jesus, it was required that priests go before God on their behalf and prophets to speak on behalf of God to them. No man could draw near to God because he would die. The priesthood and the ministry of the Tabernacle was set up as a temporary arrangement until at last the Great High Priest, Jesus Christ, would die for all mankind, paying the price once for all, allowing people to draw near unto the Lord once again – themselves becoming His Tabernacle. Deuteronomy continues:

Deuteronomy 18:18-19 (MSG) – “I'll raise up for them a Prophet like you from their kinsmen. I'll tell him what to say and he will pass on to them everything I command him. And anyone who won't listen to my words spoken by him, I will personally hold responsible.”

The previous passage reveals a two-fold message from God concerning how He would deal with His people. In the first respect, He would send them prophets who would proclaim His words to them until the coming of the Messiah. In the second respect, God here intends that this coming “Prophet” is actually also a reference to the Messiah Himself who would save His people from their sins and restore fellowship between man and his Creator. This truth is evidenced by Peter's reiteration of this passage in the New Testament.

Acts 3:17-26 (MSG) - "And now, friends, I know you had no idea what you were doing when you killed Jesus, and neither did your leaders. But God, who through the preaching of all the prophets had said all along that his Messiah would be killed, knew exactly what you were doing and used it to fulfill his plans. Now it's time to change your ways! Turn to face God so he can wipe away your sins, pour out showers of blessing to refresh you, and send you the Messiah he prepared for you, namely, Jesus. For the time being he must remain out of sight in heaven until everything is restored to order again just the way God, through the preaching of his holy prophets of old, said it would be. Moses, for instance, said, 'Your God will raise up for you a prophet just like me from your family. Listen to every word he speaks to you. Every last living soul who refuses to listen to that prophet will be wiped out from the people.' All the prophets from Samuel on down said the same thing, said most emphatically that these days would come. These prophets, along with the covenant God made with your ancestors, are your family tree. God's covenant-word to Abraham provides the text: 'By your offspring all the families of the earth will be blessed.' But you are first in line: God, having raised up his Son, sent him to bless you as you turn, one by one, from your evil ways."

Stephen also confirms this understanding in his last message, given before his martyrdom:

Acts 7:37 (LITV) – “This is the Moses who said to the sons of Israel, “*The Lord your God will raise up a Prophet to you*” “from your brothers, *One* like me.” You shall hear Him.”

In conclusion of this point, what we have seen is how God intended the Old Covenant Levitical priesthood to temporarily substitute and model, as a type and shadow, the coming priesthood under a New and better Covenant. Hebrews very clearly tells us that this priesthood and everything associated with it was imposed **with a time limit**; that one day, its need to exist would be fulfilled in Christ – and thus the former system would come to an end.

Hebrews 9:8-11 (MSG) - This was the Holy Spirit's way of showing with a visible parable that as long as the large tent stands, people can't just walk in on God. Under this system, the gifts and sacrifices can't really get to the heart of the matter, can't assuage the conscience of the people, but are limited to matters of ritual and behavior. It's essentially a temporary arrangement until a complete overhaul could be made. But when the Messiah arrived, high priest of the superior things of this new covenant, he bypassed the old tent and its trappings in this created world and went straight into heaven's "tent"--the true Holy Place--once and for all.

Ephesians 2:15 (NASB) - by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, *which is* the Law of commandments *contained* in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, *thus* establishing peace.

Colossians 2:14-17 (KJV) - Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; *And* having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it. Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath *days*: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body *is* of Christ.

Hebrews 8:13 (NLT) - When God speaks of a new covenant, it means he has made the first one obsolete. It is now out of date and ready to be put aside.

REASON NUMBER TWO: The second reason why the common parallel made between Old Testament priests and New Testament pastors is problematic biblically is because of the number of New Testament passages (especially the book of Hebrews) that tell us there has been a drastic change in the priesthood (1 Peter 2:5-9; Revelation 1:6). The Old Levitical code was completely set aside! It was taken out of the way to make room for a new High Priest and an entirely new priesthood. This new priesthood would no longer be an elite, exclusive group (except in the sense that they would be separate from the world – which would perhaps be a more proper modern concept of “laity”), but this new priesthood would include all those who had been born into the kingdom of God through Christ Jesus. No longer would a human serve as

priest between God and His people, but now Christ alone would be the High Priest between God and men. In the richest sense, “the clergy” was transferred among all “the laity.”

Hebrews 7:11-28 (NLT) - And finally, if the priesthood of Levi could have achieved God's purposes-and it was that priesthood on which the law was based-why did God need to send a different priest from the line of Melchizedek, instead of from the line of Levi and Aaron? And when the priesthood is changed, the law must also be changed to permit it. For the one we are talking about belongs to a different tribe, whose members do not serve at the altar. What I mean is, our Lord came from the tribe of Judah, and Moses never mentioned Judah in connection with the priesthood. The change in God's law is even more evident from the fact that a different priest, who is like Melchizedek, has now come. He became a priest, not by meeting the old requirement of belonging to the tribe of Levi, but by the power of a life that cannot be destroyed. And the psalmist pointed this out when he said of Christ, "You are a priest forever in the line of Melchizedek." Yes, the old requirement about the priesthood was SET ASIDE because it was weak and useless. For the law made nothing perfect, and now a better hope has taken its place. And that is how we draw near to God. God took an oath that Christ would always be a priest, but he never did this for any other priest. Only to Jesus did he say, "The Lord has taken an oath and will not break his vow: 'You are a priest forever.'" Because of God's oath, it is Jesus who guarantees the effectiveness of this better covenant. Another difference is that there were many priests under the old system. When one priest died, another had to take his place. But Jesus remains a priest forever; his priesthood will never end. Therefore he is able, once and forever, to save everyone who comes to God through him. He lives forever to plead with God on their behalf. He is the kind of high priest we need because he is holy and blameless, unstained by sin. He has now been set apart from sinners, and he has been given the highest place of honor in heaven. He does not need to offer sacrifices every day like the other high priests. They did this for their own sins first and then for the sins of the people. But Jesus did this once for all when he sacrificed himself on the cross. Those who were high priests under the law of Moses were limited by human weakness. But after the law was given, God appointed his Son with an oath, and his Son has been made perfect forever.

The Scripture teaches that this new priesthood of Christ is UNCHANGEABLE (verse 24)! The Old Levitical system, including the priesthood and EVERYTHING PURPOSED TO SUSTAIN IT (including the tithes and offerings), were set aside! They were no longer needed!

Hebrews 7:18-19 (ISV) - Indeed, the cancellation of the former regulation has occurred because it was weak and ineffective (for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by which we approach God.

Remember what Numbers 18 told us about the old system of the Levitical priesthood and even the tithes that were purposed to support it? They were imposed because of the curse and they were set in motion because men were not allowed to draw near to God, lest they die because of their sin. Jesus set the record straight once and forever! No longer are we kept from drawing

near to the Father. No longer are tithes, offerings, sacrifices, physical temples, and a Levitical (or even Levitical-type) priesthood necessary to enter into relationship with God (let alone maintain any aspect of it). The priesthood was changed and so was the Law (verse. 12). There is no tribe of Levitical priests in operation today! **If a minister today suggests that he is a modern type of Levitical priest (clergyman), he suggests such on NO authority of Scripture.** The Scripture is very precise as to what the function of a clergyman is:

Hebrews 5:1 (NLT) - Now a high priest is a man chosen to represent other human beings in their dealings with God. He presents their gifts to God and offers their sacrifices for sins.

I have sat in church services where newly ordained ministers were read the ordination of Aaron, the high priest, aloud from Scripture to the congregation (Exodus 29) as a charge to serve well in their religious office and to emphasize their being set apart for ministry in the church! I still marvel at how God's people choose to remain in such ignorance about things like this, refusing to acknowledge that there is only ONE High Priest of our confession today – it is Jesus Christ. But then, Paul marveled at this same thing; how Christians so easily put up with false teachings.

2 Corinthians 11:3-4 (MSG) - And now I'm afraid that exactly as the Snake seduced Eve with his smooth patter, you are being lured away from the simple purity of your love for Christ. It seems that if someone shows up preaching quite another Jesus than we preached--different spirit, different message--you put up with him quite nicely.

There is only ONE priesthood of men, and that is each believer in his/her direct relationship with God. Dear reader, I pray you catch this critical revelation and I pray it completely excites you and sets you free. Christ, our High Priest, makes His throne within our hearts. The Scripture says, as we read previously in Hebrews 7, that His is an UNCHANGABLE priesthood. The order of priesthood is therefore complete. There is no need for another.

1 Timothy 2:5 (EMTV) - For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.

Hebrews 3:1 (NLT) - And so, dear brothers and sisters who belong to God and are bound for heaven, think about this Jesus whom we declare to be God's Messenger and High Priest.

Hebrews 9:11-12 (NLT) - So Christ has now become the High Priest over all the good things that have come. He has entered that great, perfect sanctuary in heaven, not made by human hands and not part of this created world. Once for all time he took blood into that Most Holy Place, but not the blood of goats and calves. He took his own blood, and with it he secured our salvation forever.

Now, if we know what a priest is (someone who is chosen to represent other human beings in their dealings with God as well as present gifts to God and offer sacrifices), how can we ever

attribute such function to a man who is set over other people? The New Testament, as we have examined, presents us with two kinds of priests ONLY! One is Christ, our High Priest. His sacrifice for sin was ONCE for all and He ever stands as our Mediator between us and God. The other priest (clergyman) is the believer himself who has direct access to God through Jesus Christ. And what sacrifices and gifts do these kinds of priests offer to God? The Scripture is clear:

Hebrews 13:15-16 (NLT) - With Jesus' help, let us continually offer our sacrifice of praise to God by proclaiming the glory of his name. Don't forget to do good and to share what you have with those in need, for such sacrifices are very pleasing to God.

1 Peter 2:5 (NLT) - And now God is building you, as living stones, into his spiritual temple. What's more, you are God's holy priests, who offer the spiritual sacrifices that please him because of Jesus Christ.

Who are the real "clergy" today? Isn't it clear? We, the body of Christ, are!

1 Peter 2:9-10 (NIV) - But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Revelation 1:6 (NLT) - He has made us his kingdom and his priests who serve before God his Father. Give to him everlasting glory! He rules forever and ever! Amen!

REASON NUMBER THREE: The third reason why the common parallel made between Old Testament priests and New Testament pastors is problematic biblically is because we know, from our prior examination of the literal meaning of clergy in both Scripture and modern dictionaries, that the Greek word(s) "klarikos", "kleros", etc. (which "clergy" is derived from) pertains to a group of individuals who have identified God alone and His kingdom as their inheritance and they, in return, are also regarded as His beloved heritage, His lot. It is so evident, yet again, that under the New Covenant, ALL OF GOD'S PEOPLE are the heritage of God in Christ Jesus! Our inheritance is to partake of His kingdom as His people, His priests, His children both now and in the world to come.

Look now at the following passage as it is rendered in the King James Version of the Bible. Notice, in this encouragement by the apostle to those who were entrusted to care for God's people, what the apostle calls God's people here. He does not call them "the laity"; rather, he calls them "God's heritage" – the Greek word used here, "kleros", means "heritage, inheritance, lot". In other words, God is telling the elders not to lord over His CLERGY (that is the very word

used), and those clergy are **all** of His people!

1 Peter 5:1-3 (KJV) - The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over **God's heritage**, but being ensamples to the flock.

I find it interesting that several of the newer translations of the Bible do not translate the Greek word used in this passage (kleros) as “God’s heritage” but rather alter it completely – even changing it from describing a people who are counted as God’s heritage that no man is to “lord over” and transfer ownership to the elders; some example of how “kleros” is incorrectly translated in other versions is: “others” (MSG), “those assigned to you” (NAB); “those allotted to your charge” (NASB); “those entrusted to you” (NIV); “the flock under you” (EMTV); “your possessions” (Darby); etc.

Few versions translate it as it is defined so clearly in the Greek. Among those few are Young’s Literal Translation (YLT), which translates it “the heritages”; the 1833 Webster Bible (WEB), “God's heritage”; and the Bible in Basic English (BBE), “God’s heritage”. But the gold medal goes to the Douay-Rheims Bible of 1899, which translates the word “kleros” as “the clergy”!

You can see how quoting this verse as “the clergy” presents a major problem with the hierarchical religious structure that has been employed for the last 1,700 years; this one verse alone demolishes it! Likely this is why some have sought to alter its translation. But, there are others like it, which present a consistent harmony of the Scriptures. Consider Paul’s letter to the Ephesian Christians:

Ephesians 1:11 (ASV) – (Christ) in whom also **we were made a heritage**, having been foreordained according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His will.

The Greek word used for “heritage” in the previous passage also means “inheritance”, which it is also translated as in other versions of the Bible. The Greek word is “kleroo” and is akin to klerikos and kleros. Kleroo means: “to obtain an inheritance or to make a lot (i.e. a heritage).” To give a little bit broader example of its use elsewhere in the Scripture, note that it is the same word used in the following passage:

1 Peter 1:4 (GW) - We have been born into a new life which has an inheritance that can't be destroyed or corrupted and can't fade away. That inheritance is kept in heaven for you.

The hope is not merely of eternal existence, but that we become heirs of God, joint heirs with Christ as we see from the following passages:

Galatians 3:29 (BBE) - And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and yours is the heritage by the right of God's undertaking given to Abraham.

Revelations 21:7 (WNT) - All this shall be the heritage of him who overcomes, and I will be his God and he shall be one of My sons.

Indeed we are His Clergy and He is our ultimate inheritance! You will not find one New Testament passage that identifies a separate ruling class of priests separate from the rest of the body of Christ. This is the great myth, nay – the lie, of tradition!

THE CLERGY SYSTEM = THE WORLD'S SYSTEM

So what does all of this mean for the popular clergy-laity distinction? It means simply that it runs 100% contrary to the Word of God as presented in Scripture! It presents a problem of incredible division within the body of Christ! When men divide themselves into a clergy class that stands apart from the rest of the believers in an assembly, this division is completely against the Scriptures! It is a fraud! Its alleged authority is only sham authority. Men who employ and maintain this modern system of priesthood, whether in ignorance or by deliberate intention, are essentially placing God's free people back under the Law. While it is good to forgive and pray for those who may do these things to the body of Christ, God's people need not subject themselves to such unbiblical nonsense. Remember:

Galatians 5:1 (CEV) - Christ has set us free! This means we are really free. Now hold on to your freedom and don't ever become slaves of the Law again.

We also see a very clear picture in the 1 Peter 5:3 passage of the purpose for "pastors" (elders) if you will allow the term. They are not rulers or authority figures in the lives of believers. Peter clearly says that those of you elder ones are not to be as lords over the people but SERVE AS EXAMPLES!!! Peter also says that they are to care for the flock which they are AMONG, not over. Following this consistent verbiage, it seems impossible to imagine that in a split second (in the very same verse) Peter would shift from this mindset of love, service, humility and brotherhood to one that implies a possession of God's people by human rulers! It is so evident that this man, Peter, walked closely with the Master, for his words are entirely reminiscent of the directive of Jesus to His disciples:

Matthew 20:25-28 (NIV) - Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave-- just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to

serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

What is Jesus here describing? Nothing less than the world's system of hierarchical government. He says to His own, "among you it will not be so!" I must reiterate His words: AMONG YOU IT WILL **NOT** BE SO! Even greater He says, "do you want to have the highest place of honor in My eyes? Then you must become the slave of your brethren – even to the point of laying down your very life for them." This is an incredible thing the Lord requires of his would-be "leaders". The word "slave" in this passage is an extreme word. In fact, it is a word that manifests itself as the OPPOSITE of what we typically see modeled in the modern organizational church system. It represents the picture of a bond slave.

Thayer's Greek Dictionary defines "slave" (in this passage) as one who is "devoted to another to the disregard of one's own interests." Strong's simply describes the position of a slave who remains in a constant state of subservience and subjection to others. This is the image of one who takes no reputation or title upon himself, no boasted display of authority or strength, no calling of attention to himself or his deeds, but lowers himself to place of a lowly servant; one who washes feet and waits on tables... in other words, THE OPPOSITE of what you would expect from a worldly ruler who stands before all as one higher and more important, is addressed by a formal title and exercises authority over the others. Jesus describes the complete opposite of that image and even says that this servant will be most like unto Himself, as one who would even give his life (die) for the others he serves.

This servant will also be as Jesus, who DID NOT CHARGE for the service He enacted (Matthew 10:8 – "...freely you have received, now freely give..."). Remember, a bond slave is one who serves – not because he is forced to or because he is hired to – but because he chooses to out of no other motive but love. The true "pastor" is simply an elder brother. He is one who serves others in the fashion of a humble bond slave. He doesn't do it for money, honor, or position – HE DOES IT FOR LOVE. He doesn't seek to be noticed by others. He doesn't sport an official title. He is a SLAVE of Christ and a bond servant of his brethren.

I realize that there are many who sincerely intend to serve God's people as "ministers", although they do so under the false designation of a "clergyman". As Jesus said, speaking of our ignorance in the sins we have committed against the Truth, "Father forgive them, they know not what they do." Thank God for His mercy, but we ought to move from ignorance to truth. Many of these individuals (these "clergymen") we could most likely assume, based on the general demonstration of their visible service, are not necessarily "in it for the money" per say and, in fact, may live on a very modest salary. Perhaps they even labor long hours, ministering to others. There may even be some who, inspired by the writings of Paul, do not ask for a salary at all but are supported only by freewill offerings of their congregations and who place no coercion upon God's people to give of necessity (though these would be extremely rare in today's religious society). I sincerely hope there are such persons who serve God's people with such mindsets. My intent with this article is not to assert that all "clergymen" are inherently evil

because they may take money from their congregants and are addressed by a title; however, we need to examine this tradition according to the teaching of Scripture and if it is found to be inconsistent with the instruction and example of Christ and His apostles (and I will boldly suggest to you - it is), then we must bring ourselves to that crossroads and choose our path. God is rich in mercy and He forgives and equips us for His service. We should not be afraid to trust Him as we also lay down ourselves and the ways that seem right to us (or that we have always done out of tradition and habit) at the foot of His cross. While I will agree that some of these individuals “in the ministry” have simply been misled themselves and engage in profession out of ignorance or misunderstanding, this does not lessen their error and the problem it creates among God’s people. It does not lessen their need to face facts, examine these truths and repent. And while there are certainly men and women of God who serve from a pure heart (even though they may have embraced some things in ignorance), how many of the others today who preside in positions of professional (paid) “ministry”, whom also often regularly preach on authority, submission, giving money to “the ministry”, and who separate themselves from the rest of the believers in terms of the unbiblical clergy-laity distinction – have you ever seen example (with their lives) the uncompromising image of the one Jesus described to His followers; one who does NOT rule over the others, making himself chargeable to them, but makes himself their slave? Hmmm... You see, this will be a point of conviction no matter what motive a man/woman approaches his “ministry”. For some, even the best-intentioned among us, this will be a painful thing to examine. And, again, the purpose of this writing is not to cause pain, but to encourage spiritual growth – that we may even experience the vibrant existence as brothers and sisters walking together that those in the early Church knew.

Dear professional clergyman reading this, God’s mercy is extended to you... please do not allow the character or image of a false shepherd to have any application for you. If you are a sincere servant of Christ and sincerely desire to care for God’s flock, then cease from ignorance this day. Hear what the Spirit of the Lord is saying; stop perverting the teaching of Christ and align yourself with the truth. If you sincerely love God’s people then let your actions prove this sincerity. The body of Christ needs true servants of God, who will not get in the way of the Lord and His sheep but who will lead them to Him and who will sacrifice himself, if need be, for their protection – so that their vision will never become distracted from their One Lord and Shepherd. Remember, they are not your sheep! They do not owe you money and you do not own them. They belong to ONE Shepherd and they are God’s children. Do not cause them to stumble.

Matthew 18:6 (MSG) - But if you give them a hard time, bullying or taking advantage of their simple trust, you'll soon wish you hadn't. You'd be better off dropped in the middle of the lake with a millstone around your neck.

Most Christians are familiar with the passage that tells us if our eye offends us, cut it out... but what many fail to realize is that Jesus was talking to His disciples (the ones He would be sending out to care for His sheep). Jesus’ instruction to cut off any offense was TO THEM WHO PRESUME TO LEAD OTHERS! In other words, they were not to EVER get in the way of

God who is the Father of His children. If they did He says it would be better for them to cut off their hand that allow an offense! Please observe this passage according to its proper context

Matthew 18:7-10 (MSG) - Doom to the world for giving these God-believing children a hard time! Hard times are inevitable, but you don't have to make it worse--and it's doomsday to you if you do. If your hand or your foot gets in the way of God, chop it off and throw it away. You're better off maimed or lame and alive than the proud owners of two hands and two feet, godless in a furnace of eternal fire. And if your eye distracts you from God, pull it out and throw it away. You're better off one-eyed and alive than exercising your twenty-twenty vision from inside the fire of hell. **Watch that you don't treat a single one of these childlike believers arrogantly.** You realize, don't you, that their personal angels are constantly in touch with my Father in heaven?

In the first book of John, we find an interesting verse, which actually further stresses the severity of Jesus' command that we just examined earlier in Matthew 20 (the command for His disciples not to be aligned with the world's style and concepts of government):

1 John 5:19 (NIV) - We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.

There is something interesting about the original Greek word for "world" in the preceding passage. It actually refers to, not just the earth or the people in it, but the governmental system and order of the Gentile (or non-Christian) world. This is very important to recognize because Jesus told His followers in Matthew 20:25-28 that they were not to relate to one another based on the pattern of the world's governmental system. This truth strikes boldly in the face of the majority of institutional church leadership structures today, which have completely ignored Jesus' command and patterned themselves PRECISELY after the world's governmental hierarchical leadership paradigm.

This is an issue that must not be swept under the table for it is not merely a suggestion by the Lord; it is a commandment. Churches who do not follow the Lord's teaching here are therefore operating under a false spirit (the very spirit of anti-Christ – the spirit which lies in accord with the rule of the evil one), for the Lord does not govern His Church according to the Gentile nations (i.e. the spirit of the world). Either we are for Him or we are against Him. Granted, this is a hard thing to consider, but it must be considered. What will be our response? Will we yield to the Lord (who has commanded us not to exercise authority over His people as the world does in their governmental systems), or will we reject Him and follow what seems right in our own arrogant eyes? If we expect to walk in all that which God intends for His people, we must follow His Spirit completely and put off the way of the world.

1 Corinthians 2:12 (GNB) - We have not received this world's spirit; instead, we have received the Spirit sent by God, so that we may know all that God has given us.

John 17:14 (MSG) - I gave them Your word; The godless world hated them because of it, Because they didn't join the world's ways...

When John warned the believers about coming false teachers and anti-Christes he said such would rise out of their own midst (1 John 2:19) because such men had loved the world and its ways of doing things. John gave a bold appeal to the Church and declared boldly that if we follow the world's way, we actually demonstrate with our actions that we do not walk in the love of the Father (as Jesus also said, "you cannot serve two masters" Matthew 6:24). The world's system is the gateway to pride and greed. Is it any wonder these two things are so prevalent among many so called "leaders" in today's system of organized religion?

1 John 2:15-16 (CEV) - Don't love the world or anything that belongs to the world. If you love the world, you cannot love the Father. Our foolish pride comes from this world, and so do our selfish desires and our desire to have everything we see. None of this comes from the Father.

1 Corinthians 3:18-20 (GNB) - You should not fool yourself. If any of you think that you are wise by this world's standards, you should become a fool, in order to be really wise. For what this world considers to be wisdom is nonsense in God's sight. As the scripture says, "God traps the wise in their cleverness"; and another scripture says, "The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are worthless."

Paul, who wrote the words quoted in the previous passage, was the same man who had been thoroughly educated in matters of religion, the Law, and religious government, yet he despised all of that and brought none of that foolish counsel into the Christian community. In fact, there is a word he gave it; DUNG! (Thayer's Greek Dictionary – "any refuse, as the excrement of animals, offscourings, rubbish, dregs") Many preachers have quoted pieces of this passage talking about how Paul counted all things loss for the sake of Christ, but not many of them dare mention this truth that the very thing Paul counted loss is often the very thing they love to glory in; their religious credentials, titles, authority and wisdom.

Philippians 3:6-10 (MSG) – (*I was*) a fiery defender of the purity of my religion, even to the point of persecuting Christians; a meticulous observer of everything set down in God's law Book. The very credentials these people are waving around as something special, I'm tearing up and throwing out with the trash--along with everything else I used to take credit for. And why? Because of Christ. Yes, all the things I once thought were so important are gone from my life. Compared to the high privilege of knowing Christ Jesus as my Master, firsthand, everything I once thought I had going for me is insignificant--dog dung. I've dumped it all in the trash so that I could embrace Christ and be embraced by him. I didn't want some petty, inferior brand of righteousness that comes from keeping a list of rules when I could get the robust kind that comes from trusting Christ--God's righteousness. I gave up all that inferior stuff so I could know Christ personally, experience his resurrection power, be a partner in his suffering, and go all the

way with him to death itself.

Still think that God favors an elite clergy caste system? Earlier, we examined Matthew 20:25-28. Now, if this wasn't a strong enough exhortation by Christ, look at what the Lord commanded His followers concerning the bearing of religious titles and ranks of authority and honor (only further illustrating His rejection of the world's system of leadership as it pertains to his followers and those would serve Him):

Matthew 23:8-12 (NLT) - Don't ever let anyone call you 'rabbi,' for you have only one teacher, and all of you are on the same level as brothers and sisters. And don't address anyone here on earth as 'Father,' for only God in heaven is your spiritual Father. And don't let anyone call you 'Master,' for there is only one master, the Messiah. The greatest among you must be a servant. But those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

Scholars agree that the term “rabbi” as it was used in the time of Jesus was a title that the Pharisees invented for themselves to ascribe honor to their teaching abilities. It was a title completely inflated with pride and vain glory. According to scholars, the Pharisees liked to tell people they received the title from kings and gloried in the title as if they were kings themselves (see John Gill's Exposition of the Bible concerning Matthew 23 for the full historical reference).

Matthew 23:5-7 (NLT) - "Everything they (the Pharisees) do is for show. On their arms they wear extra wide prayer boxes with Scripture verses inside, and they wear extra long tassels on their robes. And how they love to sit at the head table at banquets and in the most prominent seats in the synagogue! They enjoy the attention they get on the streets, and they enjoy being called 'rabbi.'

Albert Barne's, in his commentary on this passage, noted the implication behind the use of the term; as he said, “every time it (the title ‘Rabbi’) was given to them (the Pharisees) it implied their superiority to the persons who used it, and they were fond, therefore, of hearing it often applied to them.”

One might wonder, concerning these things, what is the true motive that fuels the use of religious titles today? Have things really changed that much from when Jesus ushered this bold, uncompromising warning to His followers; not to take up titles and insert themselves as masters (official leaders) over their brethren? The very use of such lofty titles as Rabbi carries with it the implied meaning that the one uttering the title is less than the one receiving it (less in authority, less in importance, less in honor, less in ability, less in spiritual and intellectual maturity, less, less, less).

To bring Jesus' words into an even clearer, present-day context, we might note how several biblical commentaries equate the word Rabbi with our modern day title “Doctorate of Divinity”

(for example, see People's New Testament Commentary on this passage). Jesus said to let these kinds of things alone!

Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Bible says, "Our Lord plainly foresaw that, in process of time, a spiritual domination would arise in his Church; and, to prevent its evil influence, he leaves the strong warnings against it which are contained in the former part of this chapter (Matthew 23). As the religion of Christ is completely spiritual, and the influence by which it is produced and maintained must come from heaven; therefore, there could be no master or head but himself: for as the Church (the assemblage of true believers) is his body, all its intelligence, light, and life, must proceed from him alone."

Paul the apostle echoed the mindset of Christ when he heard news that Christians were following their teachers and calling themselves after their names. Herein is evidence of denominationalism in the Bible itself. Note that Paul scorns it and return focus to Christ alone. Note that he asserts so boldly that denominationalism (division) has no place in God's family:

1 Corinthians 1:10-13 (NLT) - Now, dear brothers and sisters, I appeal to you by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ to stop arguing among yourselves. Let there be real harmony so there won't be divisions in the church. I plead with you to be of one mind, united in thought and purpose. For some members of Chloe's household have told me about your arguments, dear brothers and sisters. Some of you are saying, "I am a follower of Paul." Others are saying, "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Peter," or "I follow only Christ." Can Christ be divided into pieces? Was I, Paul, crucified for you? Were any of you baptized in the name of Paul?

Paul said so boldly, that when Christians employ these kinds of practices THEY ARE ACTING LIKE UNBELIEVERS! Look at the following words he also gave to the Corinthians:

1 Corinthians 3:4-7 (NLT) - When one of you says, "I am a follower of Paul," and another says, "I prefer Apollos," aren't you acting like those who are not Christians? Who is Apollos, and who is Paul, that we should be the cause of such quarrels? Why, we're only servants. Through us God caused you to believe. Each of us did the work the Lord gave us. My job was to plant the seed in your hearts, and Apollos watered it, but it was God, not we, who made it grow. The ones who do the planting or watering aren't important, but God is important because he is the one who makes the seed grow.

We might as well look at how this is done many times today; For example, you have groups like the "Lutherans" (named after the one whose doctrine they follow; Martin Luther), you have the "Church of Christ" (which would constitute a denomination that says, "I am of Christ"), you have the "Pentecostals" (which name themselves after Pentecost), and so on. Even many, who classify themselves as "non-denominational" or "house church-goers", by making emphasis of these things in distinction apart from the rest of the body of Christ, are thereby removing the simple focus from Christ Jesus alone. All of these are evidence of division in the body of Christ.

It is just as sinister as the unsanctioned distinction between clergy and laity in the body of Christ! If that offends someone, I am sorry to offend. My heart is not wound anyone with these words. But God's Word is so clear on these points. We are forsaking the commandments of God for the traditions of men by ignoring His Word and embracing our own system of religion!

FUNCTIONARY GIFTS NOT OFFICES

Considering all we have examined thus far, it should already be clear that the distinction presented forth by organized religion called clergy and laity is most apparently false and against the teaching of Scripture! Please understand that my point is not to suggest that the many individuals who consider themselves "pastors" and "teachers" in the body of Christ are all evil people. Many of them are sincere and love God deeply and desire to serve the Lord with all their hearts. Truly some abide by these concepts out of ignorance and others keep them because of fear. But let us move now from ignorance to truth! And let us stop fearing men but trusting God at last, for either we trust that He is Lord or we don't. Let us center our lives around the strong foundation, which is Christ the Lord!

It is a grievous thing among God's people today when we miss the bold admonishment of Scripture, which teaches us to recognize such gifts that God gives us as intended simply for function in the body to help us to grow up together in Him; not to make us lords over one another and not to create offices and religious titles for ourselves to prance around in. A lot of those in "church leadership" love to quote Ephesians 4:11 as their banner verse to justify what they call "the five fold ministry"; representative of institutional church government and hierarchy.

Ephesians 4:11 (NIV) - It was He who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers...

So much is implied in this kind of terminology (i.e. "the five-fold government") that is, in all actuality, the imagination of man... far beyond what the Scripture passage itself actually teaches. Paul never says in this passage that these five ministries are offices. Nor does he say they are titles or official positions of "ministry." What Paul does say, first of all, is that these are GIFTS:

Ephesians 4:8 (NKJV) - Therefore He says: "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, And gave gifts to men."

And here is where the real damage has been done; In the actual Greek, these "ministries" are actually descriptions of FUNCTION not office! They are NOT titles! They are all ACTION words! Paul is not listing hierarchical church offices or titles for men to wear on their shirt; he is making mention of gifts of service to the body of Christ - PERIOD. Unfortunately, you will not

likely ever hear this preached from a pulpit any time soon because if the truth were told (or in some cases we might start with “known”), this would cause these false kingdoms of men, even the entire clergy system, to begin to crumble.

Let’s look at these ministries, briefly, one by one and then we will re-examine this passage according to its literal translation...

The first gift he (Paul) mentions is that of apostles. The word in the Greek is “apostolos” – it means “one that is sent” and more specifically, “one that is sent/commissioned/appointed BY CHRIST with the message of the Gospel.” It is exactly synonymous with the Greek verb (apostellō), which means “to *send out* (as on a mission); to go to a place appointed”. Generally, in the New Testament, it is used in past participle form but, on occasion, it is used in present participle form (e.g. Matthew 10:16 – “I send you out...”). It is the same as to say, “a **‘sent one’** is one who is **‘sent out’**.” They are both, essentially, the exact same word in the Greek but only one is the noun form of the word and one is the verb form of that same word (e.g. as “worker” is to “working” or “worked”). Look at the following verse to gain a better comprehension of this word’s use as a verb – Notice how Paul, in this passage, rather than simply saying, “I am an apostle,” he rather describes the function of his calling – “being sent” (apostled, if you will) to spread the Good News.

1 Corinthians 1:17 (GW) - Christ didn't **send me** (apostellō) to baptize. Instead, he sent me to spread the Good News. I didn't use intellectual arguments. That would have made the cross of Christ lose its meaning.

It is really this simple in the Greek. But religiously-minded men, whose thinking has been corrupted by this world’s system (and the religious traditions developed over the centuries), imply that it is far more complex and it is they who insert the “officialdom” to these concepts. Scripture simply describes function. Anything else would incite to pride and be opposed to the teaching of Christ concerning service in the body. Gerhardt Kittel’s Theological Dictionary of the New Testament says the following concerning the Greek word “apostolos” to illustrate how religious tradition throughout history began to reshape how people conceptually viewed the gift of “apostling” and turned it into a title and an office:

"Originally it was an adjective as shown by Plat. Ep. VII, 346a...The most that can be said is that **the word denotes the quality of being sent**, unless we are to regard it as no more than a stereotyped term...Thus **its later Christian usage [as a title] was an innovation** to Greek ears or those familiar with Greek. This is shown by **the fact that the Latin did not translate it**, but took it over as a lone word into ecclesiastical Latin (apostolus)".

Unfortunately, the concept of “apostle” as a hierarchical term of official, even professional, leadership – as biblically false as that concept is – has remained, due to the so-called “wisdom” of the clergy and their made up traditions which have influenced so many. It really is like the blind leading the blind. Both are headed for a ditch. God-willing, it is my prayer that many will awake and come to a knowledge of the truth.

NOTE: Also notice in the previous passage (1 Corinthians 1:17) how Paul states that he didn’t use intellectual arguments to persuade people because that would have made the cross of Christ lose its meaning. Isn’t it interesting that one of the principle purposes of homiletic preaching, as taught in seminaries, is to learn to orate skillfully and with intellectual reason in order that you may effectively persuade your hearers? This is man’s strength, not the strength of the Holy Spirit. The Gospel itself is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16), not how cleverly we can manipulate people to respond to alter calls or subjugate themselves to the traditions of men that sound godly but are utterly godless in origin.

1 Corinthians 2:2-5 (NASB) - For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.

Some may say, “but you did not continue with the rest of the passage Dave... Paul continued to say there was a time to preach with wisdom.” Yes, with wisdom, but not wisdom as man regards. Observe:

1 Corinthians 2:6-7 (MSG) - We, of course, have plenty of wisdom to pass on to you once you get your feet on firm spiritual ground, but it's not popular wisdom, the fashionable wisdom of high-priced experts that will be out-of-date in a year or so. God's wisdom is something mysterious that goes deep into the interior of his purposes. You don't find it lying around on the surface. It's not the latest message, but more like the oldest--what God determined as the way to bring out his best in us, long before we ever arrived on the scene.

So, getting back to our subject, we can see, according to the actual language of Scripture, that this is not a reference to someone who has been through 8 years of Bible College and earned some theological degree. This is not a reference to someone who has been formally ordained to a religious office by some denomination or organization of men. Neither is it some officially

weighted title conferred on an individual by another title bearer (i.e. one “apostle” to another). In fact, Paul himself was a “sent one” and he made it very clear that his calling to go and preach the Gospel had **NOTHING to do with being appointed or approved by men**, let alone some official religious group. He made it a point to say that no other apostle gave him this commission and he did not receive his commission in the most likely place one would expect there to be a religious commission to transpire (Jerusalem – the hub of the religious world). Listen as Paul describes his functionary ministry as a sent one (notice how he describes his calling as being “to preach” – ACTION – notice that he does not claim some title or office or religious profession but simply the fact that God called him to service – a service that he regarded wholly as God’s rich grace):

Galatians 1:15-19 (NASB) - But when God, who had set me apart *even* from my mother’s womb and called me through His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus. Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas, and stayed with him fifteen days. But I did not see any other of the apostles except James, the Lord’s brother.

Take some time and examine every reference to Paul or any one of the apostles in the New Testament. It may impress you to find that there is not one place where a servant of God is referenced by a title preceding their name. Paul, for example, NEVER identified himself as “the Apostle Paul.” Peter was never called “Pastor Peter.” And no man, in all of Scripture, is ever called “Reverend” (only God alone bears this title – Psalm 111:9)! In every case, if there is any direct mention made of their gift at all, it is ALWAYS descriptive of function – NOT OFFICE. Isn’t this curious? You would think the example of titles of ministry were plastered all over the pages of the New Testament when you consider how the modern day church system thrives on them. But Jesus never told Peter, “If you love Me, be ordained as a pastor.” No, rather He said, “if you love Me, feed (pastor) My sheep.” You see? Function. Service. Love. Paul, as I mentioned earlier never called himself “The Apostle Paul” but he sometimes referred to himself as simply “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ” (in other words “a commissioned messenger of the Lord”) – 2 Corinthians 1:1 for example. Again – ALWAYS FUNCTIONAL SERVING THROUGH LOVE AND OBEDIENCE TO CHRIST. Another example is the opening statement in his letter to the Romans:

Romans 1:1 (GW) - From Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle and appointed to spread the Good News of God.

Furthermore, we might also want to consider the fact that Paul’s commission was rejected by the religious leaders of his day. They did not recognize him as being sufficiently “authorized” to declare the message of God and they were so infuriated that he dared to preach and claim he

was called by God to share God's message that they actually plotted to kill him (Acts 9:23)!

The whole notion of “special ordination” by some church or denomination or whatever, is simply COMPLETELY foreign to God's Word!

Continuing on, let's look at some of the other “gifts” mentioned in the Ephesians 4 passage...

Vs. 11 – “...some as prophets...”

The Greek word is *prophētēs* and is also an action word. Again it is NOT a title or office – and it's certainly not a religious profession. This word simply identifies one who speaks by divine inspiration and “declares to men what he has received by inspiration, especially concerning future events, and in particular such as relate to the cause and kingdom of God and to human salvation” (Thayer's Greek Lexicon). Its verb form is “*prophēteuō*”, which means to speak by divine inspiration.

Again, this is not a word describing “office” and there is NO MENTION of any ordination requirement for such who operate this gift of God. BECAUSE IT IS A GIFT OF GOD! Furthermore, it is not a gift excluded to an elite few, but given to each one according to God's choosing.

1 Corinthians 12:7 (MSG) - Each person is given something to do that shows who God is: Everyone gets in on it, everyone benefits. All kinds of things are handed out by the Spirit, and to all kinds of people!

1 Corinthians 12:11 (MSG) - All these gifts have a common origin, but are handed out one by one by the one Spirit of God. He decides who gets what, and when.

According to 1 Corinthians 14, a prophet is simply anyone who prophesies! Read the chapter. Examine the context. See if this is not absolutely true.

1 Corinthians 14:31 - For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged.

Next, Ephesians 4, **Vs. 11** – “...some as evangelists...”

This Greek term, *euaggelistēs*, simply refers to “one who brings good tidings”. In other words it

is one that God has called to declare (or “preach”) the joyful news of the Gospel to others. Not the “Word of Faith” teaching, not the “doctrine of tithing”, not “how to be a good person and get blessings from God”, not “how to grow your church in 15 easy steps”, BUT THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST! Again, it is a term that represents function and action. It is not an exclusive ministry occupied by only an elite few who have been formally ordained by special, “qualified” religious leaders. Just like the others, this is a GIFT OF GOD, that GOD HIMSELF places in the heart of WHOEVER HE WILLS! It does not require the commissioning or approval of men to actuate.

Paul, as a matter of fact, was also an “evangelist” as much as he was an “apostle” (or put more correctly – Paul “evangelized” just as sure as he was “sent by Christ” to bring God’s glad tidings to the Gentiles). Observe the following verse:

Galatians 1:16a (NLT) - Then he revealed his Son to me so that I could **proclaim** the Good News about Jesus to the Gentiles...

The word “proclaim” (euaggelizō - “to bring good tidings”) is EXACTLY synonymous in the Greek with the word for “evangelist” (euaggelistēs – “one who brings good tidings”).

Finally, still **verse 11**, we have “...some as pastors and teachers...”

These two (in my studied opinion) should actually be recognized as one connected ministry gift. The word “and” is not an adequate translation of the Greek term in use here. At best, these two words ought to be hyphenated as “pastor-teachers”.

The word pastor, “poimen”, describes “one who tenderly, though diligently, watches out for the others”. The Greek concept of a shepherd is one who “guides” sheep, not who drives them. He leads not merely by speech but with the example of a life submitted to Christ and which models the character of Christ. He may watch over, but he doesn’t rule over. His service is under the Great Shepherd and he does not call the sheep his own.

The word teacher, “didaskalos”, describes the gifting to “teach others in the way of the truth” The teacher is one whose teaching is coupled by a life that models what he guides others in. The Pharisees loved to be called “Rabbi” (which means “my honored Teacher”) by their followers, but Jesus did not tell others to follow everything they do just because they regarded themselves as authorities and ones who loved to be praised by men and to be called Teachers. Rather Jesus said to the Jewish crowds and to His disciples (my paraphrase of Matthew 23:2-4), “these men like to think they are qualified teachers concerning Moses’ Law... so, do what they teach as it remains in accord with the truth, but don’t do as they do because they don’t put

into practice what they teach. Instead, they re-package God's Word in a bundle of laws and legalisms to place on you as a heavy burden... a burden that they exempt themselves from."

What might Ephesians 4:10-13 look like, in a modern paraphrase, if we honestly translated it according to the proper context of Scripture and put it into terms conveying the actual thought of things?

Ephesians 4:10-13 (paraphrase) – The same Lord, Jesus Christ, who came down from heaven to this earth, is the same One who ascended higher than all the heavens, so that He might fulfill all things and, being Lord of all, fill both heaven and earth with His gifts. It is He who gave some in the body to go as His ambassadors and envoys; to serve Him as ones who are called by Him, commissioned and sent with the message of the Gospel. He gave some to speak forth by the inspiration of His Spirit to declare such things as relate to the cause and kingdom of God and concerning human salvation. He gave others to joyfully declare the good tidings of the Gospel to the lost. And He gave some to lovingly care for His sheep, teaching them about the Lord, their Shepherd, and watching out for wolves that may try to distract them from their Lord, enticing them away from Him, only to devour them. These gifts of functional service, the Lord gave freely (distributing them among all of His people) so that His body – together – would be built up, strong, wholly nourished in the Way, and become more effective in their service to others because they're being pulled closer together, everyone moving rhythmically and easily with each other, efficient and graceful in response to God's Son (their Lord and Head), fully mature adults, fully developed within and without, fully alive like Christ.

This is my paraphrase (intending to convey the thought which describes each function)... I trust you get the general idea. Paul means to convey the rich gift of Christ to see His body built up together in HIM. Jesus did not come so that men could set up their own kingdoms and make themselves to be heads over His people. Only Christ is the Head of His Church and only He holds the place of preeminence over His people! (or at least – only He should)

Colossians 1:18 (GNB) - He is the Head of His body, the Church; He is the source of the body's life. He is the first-born Son, who was raised from death, in order that He alone might have the first place in all things.

It would likely take another lengthy article or book to thoroughly examine the full range of the subject concerning "financing the ministry". While I considered delving deeper into the subject here (for there is much I could share), I felt the Lord prompting me to share only what I have. I realize that some may have a lot of questions concerning this issue that are only briefly covered in this writing. I will say that there are a number of excellent resources that have already been written on this topic by others. Rather than attempt to duplicate what many of them have already so eloquently presented, I will instead recommend their work and encourage the reader

to examine this topic fully for themselves. One of the best is a book by a good friend of mine, Russell Earl Kelly, called "Should The Church Teach Tithing." It examines, not only tithing, but the vast subject of giving as taught in the Scriptures. This is a theologian's textbook! Highly recommended reading. It is available through my website:

www.truthforfree.com

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

We need to recognize that when Paul talked about ministry giftings (EVERY TIME), he was describing all of them in the context of family function. NEVER at any time did Paul, or for that matter Christ or the other apostles, teach some formula of hierarchically-led organized religion. The word "office" does not even appear ANYWHERE in the New Testament with respect to serving God or His people (and to show how far we have fallen today, consider how even the Old Testament Prophets did not identify themselves with titles – rather they were humble servants of God, utterly despised by the world and sometimes even by those claiming to be God's people because they did not love the truth but had itching ears; desiring to hear what they wanted to hear).

In the New Testament there is no mention of titles, offices, or professional ministry paradigms. There is to be no such division in the body of Christ represented in some false system of a clergy caste who presides over laity. Jesus said, "among you is must NOT be so!" (Matthew 20:26) Jesus said, "you are all on the same level as brothers and sisters!" (Matthew 23:8) All of these fallacies, these concepts of religious hierarchy, entered into Christian practice literally hundreds of years after Calvary. It was the device of the pagan world and misled believers were influenced by these things, so they gradually moved in among Christians in their gatherings. Satan used these heathen concepts to wreak havoc on the Church; to place God's people in bondage, to blind their eyes from the truth, and rob them of their freedom, their zeal, their peace and their joy in serving Christ and one another.

The confrontation of this bold conclusion will, no doubt, cause some to say, "this cannot be a good thing, for if there is not leadership in the body of Christ, then there will be disorder and chaos and heresy!" While I, myself, have identified with this concern in the past (because it was the same concern I first voiced when the Lord began to open up my understanding and exposure to these things), I remind such people who are concerned about this; don't let the enemy and tradition distract you from what God's Word compels us to embrace... Remember that I have not once, NOT EVER, said that there is no leadership in Christ's body. Neither would I dare say that the Word of God presents a leaderless Church. Please hear this and please listen to these words carefully. I believe God desires that there be no confusion concerning this matter in our hearts, but there is a core motive that needs to be exposed and

that many of us need to repent of and come to a full realization of the truth. I do not exempt myself from the need to repent of motives that have, at times, steered me away from total submission to the truth God has revealed. That is to say that when God opens our understanding to things it can be wonderful, but it can also be very uncomfortable and even painful because it means we must then lay the axe to our preconceived religious misperceptions. Many of the concepts that we have learned over the years (through some of our religious traditions), thrive on our deep insecurities, the evil desires of our flesh, the wisdom of the world that has influenced us and which appeals to our old nature, and the enemy as well that has lied to us and captivated our attentions away from the truth. Some of these things are hard to confront. Mostly because they remove us from the ability to control one another and to put God into a religious box. But if we don't yield to His truth we will be devastated in our error and miss the intimacy and strength that comes from truly knowing Jesus as Lord.

I will continue to reiterate that Christ is the ONLY Head of His Church (1 Corinthians 11:3; Ephesians 1:10, 22; Ephesians 4:15; Ephesians 5:23; Colossians 1:18; Colossians 2:10, 19; etc.), the very core and center (1 Corinthians 3:7; 2 Corinthians 1:12; Colossians 2:2; Revelation 1:13; Revelation 5:6; Revelation 7:17; etc.), the Lord (John 13:13; Acts 10:36; Acts 17:24; Romans 14:9; Philippians 2:11; etc.), the Great Shepherd (Hebrews 13:20) of His flock (the Senior Pastor if you will). What "leadership" is failing here?

Christ promised that His Spirit would lead His followers into ALL truth (John 16:13-15). And He vowed that no one would be able to snatch them from His hand (John 10:27-30). To insure that Christ's Lordship would not be usurped by false leaders, He gave gifts to build up His body, to keep her growing and strong, to keep her safe from wolves and religious vipers that would try to get in the middle of their relationship with Christ and manipulate them and draw them after themselves (Acts 20:30).

Yes, absolutely, there is leadership in the Lord's Church, His body, but it looks absolutely NOTHING like what wholesale religion has sold most people today! Scripture confirms this so boldly! Those who are afraid of potential chaos and heresy among God's people (if they are not "submitted" under the "covering" of some denomination) are more than likely operating in fear and lack of faith in God's promise and ability to protect, lead and nourish His people!

I have often wondered (aside from the obvious Scriptural ignorance that exists) how it is so many Christians today speak of "the five fold ministry" when no such phrase is ever used at any time in Scripture. Not only that, but it is not a consistent picture of Paul's instruction concerning gifts of service (or "ministry"). There is nothing to indicate that the five (or "four" depending on how you read the original Greek) ministry gifts mentioned in Ephesians 4 are exclusive. For example, there is another passage in 1 Corinthians 12:28, which mentions, not five... not four... but EIGHT!!!

1 Corinthians 12:28 (MSG) - You're familiar with some of the parts that God has formed in his

church, which is his "body": apostles prophets teachers miracle workers healers helpers organizers those who pray in tongues.

It seems rather obvious that Paul is not saying in either passage that "there are only five important ministries" or that "there are eight". It seems clear he's not describing titles or offices or religious leadership pyramids. He is describing that there are gifts of functional ministry in God's family. But men take the function and the family out of things and replace it with their worldly concepts of hierarchy and business organization and they end up programming the life right out of the gathering of the saints. They kill the body for the sake of building a machine... an idol that reflects their image. A brother I correspond with by the name of Andy shared an article he wrote on the "five fold" gifts and the following are some excerpts from that writing:

"Paul begins by stating that each one of us is given grace. Note that he includes himself in this, "us" referring to the measure (metron) Christ had given him. It is an interesting study to search out in Paul's epistles how many times he refers to the grace given to him as it related to what he said and did, "according to the grace given unto me" (see Romans 12:3, 12:6, 1 Corinthians 3:10, Ephesians 3:7, 4:7, etc.). However outstanding as Paul's service may have been, he made no distinction between the grace given to him and the grace given to the rest of the believers. This verse alone refutes the idea that a few are exceptional. He goes on to tell how these cooperate—on what basis these graces are given and on what basis they are received. One Bible teacher (Derek Prince) used to say, "When you see the word 'therefore' in the Bible you need to look and see what it's there for." Here the word "therefore" implies that the following words are an extension and development of the previous thought. In this case it attaches the statement to the explanation of how every one of us is given grace, "he ascended up on high . . . and gave gifts unto men." We see then that the gifts given by the ascended Christ are not given to a special few but are distributed among all."

"Simply put, "all" means every one of us! The God and Father of every one of us, is above and upon every one of us, working through every one of us and in every one of us. Nothing could be clearer. Not all are apostles or sent-ones, but all are given grace. These graces or divine empowerments are distributed among all believers to accomplish specific tasks. They are not given to exalt anyone person above the rest. Jesus did not ascend on high and bestow entitlements to rule. He bestowed power to serve."

"We have a choice to make. Will we continue on in our comfortable padded pews Sunday after Sunday and abdicate our high callings in Christ's body to the few, or will we move on into the glory of God? We have all been given our measure of Christ that enables us all to do the work of the ministry and equip each other to do the same in the fullest way possible."

But some will still grab their tried and true King James Bible and say, "no Dave, Paul clearly is

describing order and position, because he says that apostles are first, etc.” Well, in 1 Corinthians 4:9 he (Paul) says they (those who function as apostles) are last, not first. What about that? Obviously, people who fail to see the humility of Paul’s intent and his description of simple functional service among ALL the brothers and sisters in Christ, are reading their religious bias into the text and not comprehending anything God intended. In case some are still not convinced, let’s continue to examine the broader context of Scripture, for Paul spoke again about functional ministry in his letter to the Romans. How many clergy men are counting the ministries listed in this passage?

Listen what Paul said to the Romans.

Romans 12:6-13 (NLT) - God has given each of us the ability to do certain things well. So if God has given you the ability to prophesy, speak out when you have faith that God is speaking through you. If your gift is that of serving others, serve them well. If you are a teacher, do a good job of teaching. If your gift is to encourage others, do it! If you have money, share it generously. If God has given you leadership ability, take the responsibility seriously. And if you have a gift for showing kindness to others, do it gladly. Don't just pretend that you love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Stand on the side of the good. Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other. Never be lazy in your work, but serve the Lord enthusiastically. Be glad for all God is planning for you. Be patient in trouble, and always be prayerful. When God's children are in need, be the one to help them out. And get into the habit of inviting guests home for dinner or, if they need lodging, for the night.

Isn't it interesting that Paul never says, “if your ability is to teach, then make sure you get formally ordained as a Teacher by an official appointing of a church organization and expect others to honor you by this title and make sure it is etched on the door of your church office and on your ministry resume.” No! A thousand times no! Paul simply says, “if you’ve got the gift, then give it!” (We might also note, in comparison with the other passages speaking about ministry gifts, again, Paul does not limit his mention to a mere “five-fold” – or “eight” as we examined in 1 Corinthians 12:28 – but here he mentions “seven”... So, which is it all you “five-folders” out there?) I hope it is becoming clearer to us all what these passages mean to represent to us as members of one body.

The ministry of the Church, is just that – The loving service of the family of God. The Lord’s Church is not represented by a building or a program (not any place in the New Testament)! Just as “ministry” in the Scripture is not a profession. It is functional service in the family of Christ.

I hope that I have helped to clearly illustrate why the concept of a modern day clergy system is problematic at best in light of God’s Word? I hope the contradiction has become more evident? The priesthood of the New Covenant is intimately and completely tied to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. If there can be another order of priests (i.e. the modern clergy system) who exist beyond

what we have been plainly taught in Scripture, then we are left with a most difficult choice to consider; Either God has not told us what is true in His Word (that there is only One Mediator between God and Man, One High Priest, and one single priesthood which includes every believer in Christ before God), or else one must believe that sometime (hundreds of years after the apostles had all died) God changed His mind and introduced “new revelation” that actually was so powerful it had the authority to cancel out the former written word of God. In fact, not only would it have to make the writings of the New Testament inferior, but it would mean that there is another “new covenant” and the New Covenant of Scripture is now obsolete. Either way, it would mean that Scripture no longer holds any application for the believer in Christ – for it stands in total opposition to the entire foundation which holds up the modern clergy system. The New Testament teaches a priesthood that is only mediated by Christ, who dwells in the hearts of His people. They (not a building) are His Temple and they (all of them) are His priests. No other intermediary clergy is mentioned and we must therefore conclude that such is entirely false.

This leaves us with a most sobering discernment we must engage: Any time, I repeat – ANYTIME, a man steps in-between this holy, divine order (where Christ presides over His priesthood – a priesthood he purchased and “covered” with His precious blood), and this man enacts some intermediary function between Christ and the believer – dare I say even positioning himself “over” that believer as an authority, who claims to speak for God and order their obedience (as the modern clergy system essentially does), he is in gross error and proves by his visible position, his title, his words and his actions that he, apparently, does not know or practice the truth in these things.

This is not to say that he necessarily has evil intent or even that he does not have some desire to serve God. It simply says (one of three possibilities) that he is either ignorant himself, deceived, or deliberately deceiving others. Either way, no matter how much good he intends, his position stands in opposition to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and distorts the truth for those following, causing them to stumble and fall into a ditch; widening the wedge of separation between the believer’s relationship with His Lord, and causing them to place their dependence more upon man than God.

The end result is a mass of believers who lack for knowing who they fully are in Christ and how they are intended to function in the body with one another. They grow weaker and weaker the longer their priesthood is denied and ignored and the voice of the Holy Spirit becomes harder and harder to hear. Haven’t you ever wondered why it is that so many church folks run to their pastors, apostles and prophets to inquire what God wants them to do? It is for the very same reason that many precious brothers (and sisters) in Christ who have taken on themselves the title of a clergyman (or clergywoman) have become weary and burned out in their profession. Because of the error that both have embraced, both are being spiritually shortchanged and the enemy laughs as they stumble around as if in the dark. They have traded their priesthood and replaced it with a counterfeit! O, dear Christian reading this (whether “clergyman” or

“layperson”), I pray that God by His wonderful Spirit would set you free in this revelation; that you would no longer be deprived of knowing Christ in the fullness of who He is – Lord, Head, Master Teacher, and Great High Priest. I pray that you would know with such bold confidence, the truth that there is ONE MEDIATOR between you and the Father and it is not any man whatsoever. It is essential that you know Him as He is.

Concepts like those prevalent in the clergy-laity distinction present a severe problem of division in the body of Christ. Many sincere men and women of God throughout the centuries (yes even among the clergy profession) encountered this revelation through God’s Word and were moved by it. Some literally gave their lives, shedding their own blood, for the liberty of the Gospel – because their message was not often well received. It bucked hard against the established system. They were branded as heretics, rebels and fools. Many were burned alive, tortured, imprisoned and killed for their refusal to bow to a system that robbed them of their priesthood in Christ. Sadly, however, many others thought they could simply repair the problem and reform the system rather than eliminate it altogether in favor of fully embracing Scripture. Oddly enough, these men are often considered heroes in the Christian Faith and we even title them “The Reformers” because they sought to “re-form” the system itself.

But even the reformer, Martin Luther, towards the end of his life, recognized that his “reformation” of organized religion did not (and could not) eliminate all the evils of Rome’s influence. In truth, as much as he is to be credited for the good things he accomplished (in his sincere attempts to follow Christ within the system), he is also responsible for many of the negative marks that remain. Though most of Luther’s intentions were good, he is a very large part of the reason most Christians live under Protestant substitutes for Roman Catholicism rather than purely biblical influence. Because of Luther we have professional pastor/priests. Because of Luther we partake of Communion as a solemn funeral-like ceremony (instead of in the context of a full meal in the home as did the early saints). Because of Luther we sit passively in pews and listen to long sermons instead of interacting spontaneously in fellowship with one another whenever and wherever the opportunity may present itself. Because of Luther we have all sorts of churchy, religious traditions that have no foundation in Scripture but are simply carry-overs from Roman Catholic traditions – and we are often led to believe that such are essential to the Christian’s walk with God and so we start to consider rules made by men as though they were commandments of God, thus fulfilling Jesus’ comments in Matthew 15:3, 6, & 9.

Please understand, this article is not intended to question the sincerity of those people who are currently part of the clergy system. But it is to question the validity of the clergy system itself. Some of my own heroes of the Faith include men and women of God that were identified with the clergy system. What makes their story exciting to me is that their eyes began to open to the Gospel and it radically transformed so much of their thinking. Many of these endured great personal risk to step out of the known territory they walked blindly in for so many years. I love reading about the Martin Luthers, the William Tyndales, and the John Wycliffes. I sincerely

thank God for the many sincere soldiers of truth that have responded to the promptings of the Holy Spirit and the revelation of Scripture and sought to obey the Lord and see God's people delivered from bondage (this was Luther's heart and passion, despite his failures); however, I have begun to realize myself that one of the principle problems in most moves of God has been that men have sought to "reform" a system of religion that did not purely originate with God to begin with. Rather than understanding fully that Christ is the One who builds His Church and who has declared that the forces of hell even will not prevail against it, they busy themselves with this other thing, which they also wrongly call "the Church", but that is a system whose every root can be traced back to the organizations of men.

History seems to continue to repeat itself time and time again. You would think by now we would recognize the patterns. Man so often tries to box up the moving of the Spirit into a program (turning revival into religion). But God cannot be held inside a box just like the wind cannot blow in a sealed chamber. The organization of religion may accomplish some apparent good in the world in terms of the control it exerts over the external actions of men, but it is powerless to effect real change in the heart and it will always kill the life of the Spirit by inadvertently replacing the voice of God with religious rules and regulations. It's really not that different from what the apostles confronted in their day. We can see the same bold proclamation by Paul in the following passage:

Colossians 2:16-23 (MSG) - So don't put up with anyone pressuring you in details of diet, worship services, or holy days. All those things are mere shadows cast before what was to come; the substance is Christ. Don't tolerate people who try to run your life, ordering you to bow and scrape, insisting that you join their obsession with angels and that you seek out visions. They're a lot of hot air, that's all they are. They're completely out of touch with the source of life, Christ, who puts us together in one piece, whose very breath and blood flow through us. He is the Head and we are the body. We can grow up healthy in God only as he nourishes us. So, then, if with Christ you've put all that pretentious and infantile religion behind you, why do you let yourselves be bullied by it? "Don't touch this! Don't taste that! Don't go near this!" Do you think things that are here today and gone tomorrow are worth that kind of attention? Such things sound impressive if said in a deep enough voice. They even give the illusion of being pious and humble and ascetic. But they're just another way of showing off, making yourselves look important.

It really is time we faced facts; that the clergy system produces division and declines spiritual growth among believers in Jesus. It distorts our clear view of the Gospel. It misrepresents the body of Christ. It entangles believers in the law; robbing them of their liberty. It blinds them from the revelation of fully knowing who they are in Christ and short changes them of their role as priests before God. It diminishes their joy and destroys their confidence. It frustrates the grace of God. It denies the truth. It numbs the conscience and the ability to discern truth from error. It is a counterfeit that all true believers must expel if they sincerely desire to live without compromise before the Father.

These titles, terminologies and concepts the world gave us will simply not do. We are family – the very family of God – and we are all brothers and sisters who sit at the feet of one Lord.

As **John Wesley** said so well:

"Would to God that all party names and unscriptural phrases and forms which have divided the Christian world were forgot; that we might all agree to sit down together as humble, loving disciples at the feet of a common Master, to hear his word, to imbibe his Spirit, and to transcribe his life into our own."

And the great reformer, **Martin Luther**:

"St. Paul would not permit that any should call themselves of Paul, nor of Peter but of Christ... Cease, my dear friends, to cling to these party names and distinctions; away with them all; let us call ourselves only 'Christians' after him from whom our doctrine comes."

And finally, as it was stated in a fantastic article I read once on servantsnews.com:

"Let's expose "rank" for what it is: **rank!** And realize from where the "clergy versus laity" mentality comes: **The Adversary.**"

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