

PROTESTANT

THREADS

...things we learned from Babylon...

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INTRODUCTION

In *Scarlet Threads*, I traced the origins of the world's religious system from the ancient days of Babel through the Roman Empire that still is with us today in the form of the religio-political system that operates out of Vatican City. At least 20% of mankind is controlled directly by this force, much more indirectly.

It should be obvious to seekers of truth that one cannot stop at Rome when decrying Babylonian ways in today's church and world. Though the Reformation gave birth to a mammoth pull-away from Rome, it is obvious that a unity with her was reclaimed through the years and is expressed in many ways through "Protestant" groups today.

I will touch on only a few of the similarities, and, as is my custom, encourage readers to continue the search on their own. I am becoming especially sensitive to the church government issue, and the similarities between Rome and her daughters in this area. Most of the booklet is devoted to this subject.

Other things I touch on are merely reminders that, like it or not, regardless of the nametag we wear, we are subjected to the traditions of men, and need to keep returning to God's pattern.

TITHING

The tithing tradition is an excellent example of that of which I speak. Neither Jesus or the apostles gave a clear command to first-century Christians, Jew or Gentile, about the ten per-cent payment exacted by God of Jews under the Old Covenant. Yet today, Christian leaders teach tithing to their people as though the New Testament abounded with this concept.

The argument goes something like this: Tithing was in effect long before the law of Moses (valid). Tithing is an "eternal" principle (possibly). So, we too must pay our tithes into the storehouse (using Malachi's terminology). Now, the storehouse is the local church to which you belong. (sorry, no longer valid, totally indefensible by Scripture)

Monies thus collected then go to pay for an assorted variety of expenses, most of which have to do with local concerns of that fellowship, and most of those concerns center around the building in which the group meets. Justification for this is found in the great amount of material wealth spent on the temple etc.

Oh, we've drifted a long way from the path trod for us by the original church.

- 1) Cash collected in the early church was given to (a) the man of God who was unable to gain regular employment because of his itinerant ways (although Paul often refused it anyway!), (b) elders worthy of "double honor" because of their extra labors in the church, (c) the needy in their fellowship and other fellowships. The collections were given to apostles to carry to other places. Churches did not consider money their own, and individuals were taught to have this attitude also.
- 2) No mention of a percentage is given in the New Testament because people in love with Jesus give everything. The concept of tithing is an insult to one whose entire fortune has been given to God's use. The early Christians sold what they absolutely did not need, gave the entire proceeds to the church, and allowed the

church to distribute to the needy.

No one was or should be forced into this way of life. Forced sharing is communism. But voluntary sharing, Christianity at its best, there was. And the storehouse? Simply the People of God, whatever their location, whenever a need existed. And the needs had nothing to do with those money-draining edifices called "church buildings", since they were not introduced until the days of Constantine.

So why is tithing practically the universal way among us? Slowly the church drifted back to Judaism, encouraged later by a priesthood which also resembled the Jewish way. The first love left, and rules remained. What better rule, thought the church, than God's rule to His Old Covenant people? Oh, it's logical enough. But it is a tradition, nonetheless, with not one ounce of support by apostolic writings!

This is not, in any way, to condemn tithing or tither. Some need to grow enough to give even that much. My point is that Jesus wants it all from His true love slaves, and that, even though the tithe is of Jewish origin, its implementation by the church makes it a Babylonian device. Whenever ritual, rite, or habit, replace the moving of the Holy Ghost, there is religion. Whenever a man feels good because he performed a religious act "for God," he misses out on the greater "feeling" of the acts of grace that his God wishes to put in him. Whenever one ignores the New Testament picture of joyful giving and substitutes joyless paying, he has entered Babylonian ground, has become religious, and is in grave danger.

THE SABBATH

Advocates of the Old Testament-based tithe totally reverse themselves when discussing the Jewish sabbath. Though the Sabbath pre-dates even tithing, it is considered Mosaic and thus not to be observed. Others spiritualize the idea of sabbath by saying we have a "Christian sabbath" (interesting hybrid!), Sunday.

No one can deny it. We do have a day that looks like the sabbath, but is in fact the first day of the week. But, like church buildings, the all-day rest on "Sun"-day originated with Constantine, not Jesus. Constantine, Emperor of the Romans in the early fourth century, believed he had been chosen of God to fight the Christian's battles. He brought them out of their prisons, helped put them in church buildings, and, partly to help the slaves of the day, partly to honor the Sun God he worshipped, partly to help the church, he declared the day of the sun as a time of weekly rest.

Now, Scripture indicates that Jesus rose on the first day of the week. Further, it says that certain brothers met on the first day of the week. Then Paul directed one congregation during one crisis situation, to collect an offering on the first day of the week. But Scripture also mentions several 7th-day meetings. Also, it declares that the Christians were meeting daily! But gradually the first-day tradition set in. With Constantine's push, it became not only the meeting day, with its scant Scriptural support, but the rest day, with NO Scriptural support. In later generations of the church it became such a holy day that severe punishments could be had for daring to work on that day. Those calling themselves Christians outdid their Jewish counterparts in the area of day-honoring legalism.

As is true with the tithe, so with the sabbath. One who observes comfortably a particular day as holy, then despises all others who do not observe such a day, has religion but not God. One who "observes" Sun-day, but lifts not a hand to heaven the rest of the week, is religious but lost.

Kingdom people, the true Body of the Lord Jesus Christ, have entered into a seven-day-a-week Sabbath Rest with the Rest-giver, Jesus. Not only so, they desire constant fellowship with God and His people, without which they feel slighted, hungry, cheated.

As I mentioned, the first Christians met daily, were added to daily. Away with the notion that "church" is a once or twice a week event. Away with the Pharisaical pride that boasts in a Sunday night service on the high HOLY day (Constantine's day of the Sun), but can't see its way clear to fellowship the rest of the week!

Yes, my Protestant friends and brothers, Babylon has moved into your midst, too. Any system which promotes partial giving of time or money as a religious habit is Babylonian in nature. Jesus' way is crucifixion. Total abandonment of self, property, and power. To settle for anything less is to be comfortably religious, but not to be gloriously saved.

FOOD

Let's face it. The church has entered the restaurant business. Warnings of Paul about not being able to concentrate on the Lord's supper because of the suppers of man are totally ignored today, explained away as a cultural "extra".

Worse than that. Men and women delivered from drugs and drink are being encouraged by their peers and even elders, to be re-captured by other body-destroyers, such as excessive sugar and salt. Gluttony is silently approved as persons with obvious eating problems hear not a word from the pulpit about self-control in this area. Then, "after church" they see otherwise godly men caving in to fleshly appetites, in the name of "fellowship."

The kitchen opens at Sunday School, then Junior Church, then the aforementioned "fellowships", plus an endless array of breakfasts, luncheons, and suppers. Persons who try to exercise self-control in this area are often pointed out by guilt-ridden eaters who feel uncomfortable around such restraint. Jokes are exchanged about how the diet will begin tomorrow, how fat is beautiful, and so on.

Those who have a problem with overeating, especially with junk food, either give in, to be sociable of course, or finally stay at home and have private devotions in place of the public feast.

These things ought not to be! Let's agree with God's apostle who reminded the people of his day to eat at home! Courageous leaders in our day will simply say, "The kitchen is closed!" and turn that room into a prayer area. Then turn that time into feeding on the Word and prayer, if the people will come to such things.

It is especially distressing to see the effect of this open refrigerator policy on the children. There is, perhaps, a need for a small (nutritional!) snack during a 9-12 time period or more on Sunday morning. Some children are not being fed properly at home.

But here, in the church's opportunity to speak to the world about how Christians care for the body God gave them, the church fills those children's faces with chocolates, soft drinks,

pretzels,
potato chips, cakes, candies, gum...

Those who live by the "candy-draws-kids" philosophy seem to be unaware of the fact that God has made some very good and tasty foods all by Himself, without the help of human processing. I know for a fact that good food, lovingly prepared, will be enjoyed by children. Parents tend to appreciate churches that care enough to take proper care of their children.

But we were speaking of adult "children", who need to keep the food at home, and come together to feed on Christ!

WOMEN, etc.

Let's imagine. Paul the apostle, happily with Jesus these past 1900 years, has not seen (we will say) the building of the church he helped Jesus begin in the first century. And, in the 1990's, our own day, let us suppose the Lord says to Paul, "Put on your old body, return to earth, just for a few weeks. Don't identify yourself. See if you feel what I feel about what's going on in My church, as you visit the congregations I show you."

Not without some pain of memory, Paul obeys. There are many scenes we could paint as we imagine the confrontation of first- and twentieth-century saints. I offer this one.

Paul, walking through the downtown area of a major city, is led to a church with a female pastor. As he walks in, he is greeted by friendly ushers who show him to a seat. A nice touch, Paul muses, "but hardly necessary."

There is placed in his hand a program that tells him how the Spirit of God is going to move today. (we will assume here that Paul is being given the gift of English, as the church I describe is so very American.) As he looks it over he wonders how they already know that the Spirit is going to have a particular teaching, and what will be the content of the praises. He begins to feel he is in one of the theaters he has passed on the way here, where signs and programs clearly spell out what will happen.

If the Spirit has already moved, what is the point of the meeting? No time to think of that, for someone has climbed up on the platform that divides a certain group of people from the other group, seated in chairs facing the platform. (But why do I want to watch them? Paul asks himself.)

Somehow he sits through the announcements, the "preliminaries," the strange-sounding music, the half-hearted worship. The one leading the meeting thus far interjects a joke to help "warm" the audience, but the humor of it is lost on Paul, who begins deeply to grieve at the flippant ways of these people calling themselves followers of his Jesus. Something very familiar begins to rise within Paul, and he hopes he will be able to control an almost certain outburst.

Then she stands, opens the pages of a Bible, and begins to teach the men and women assembled some of Paul's own words to the Corinthian church, about love. Since she has been introduced as the pastor, Paul knows that she has violated his specific apostolic teaching about allowing women to teach, and take authority over, men.

His standing and speaking is something he did as a matter of course in old Jewish

synagogues. Here it seems out of place, but he reminds himself that it is this "church" that is doing the interrupting, for they have interrupted the plan of God for local assemblies. Boldly he rises to his feet.

"Men and brothers!" Oh no. The same sexist phrase recorded in Scripture. Definitely won't please this crowd. "Don't you recall the warnings given you about women teaching men in the public assembly?"

The sleepy congregation is suddenly quickened. Of course, the first impulse after awakening is to throw out the one who has intruded upon your sleep. But the learned pastor decides to use this interruption as a teaching event. She has had to study this issue intently, since so many men have come against her through the years. She is prepared.

"And sir, don't you recall that 2000 years have passed since then? Don't you know that the one who spoke those words was culturally biased, and probably hated women himself?"

Paul confesses that he didn't know that, and questions "pastor" as to why she would use the words of a woman-hater to preach love to her congregation this morning. After all, he points out, the teaching concerning love and the teaching concerning women are only inches apart in his letter. He counters her argument by pointing out that "culture" or even a man's personality does not change the Word of the living God, which had been given to Paul. "When God speaks, He means what He says," Paul concludes.

Sensing trouble, at this point she terminates the discussion and asks Paul to leave. I will veil the rest of the proceedings. But if Paul is still Paul, a riot probably follows...

Denomination after denomination and congregation after congregation is succumbing to the pressure of the day to exalt females to leadership.

Now if indeed God has called a woman to pastor, I will step aside, and say with Paul, "Nevertheless Christ is preached." But God would have to give me a vision greater than He gave Peter to shake me loose from the clearly written words of the apostle, and attend such a church!

I've read the pro-female leadership literature, and found it to be nothing more than "explaining away" the Scriptures. I've read similar works explaining away the first chapters of Genesis, the book of Jonah, the resurrection. It's the old, "Did God really say that?" echo of Satan in the Garden.

And, as I say, short of that vision, I'm not buying. For when we add to or take from the Scriptures, we enter Satan's ground, the ground known as Babylon the Great.

CHURCH GOVERNMENT

If Paul were to visit other American congregations, he might be just as appalled at the male leadership as at the female. He would see that, in the main, congregations are built around one man. And with sorrow he would note that the size of the congregation is in direct proportion to the strength or weakness of that one man. He would realize quickly that the program of church-planting that he began has been almost totally abandoned.

For, when Paul visited new territories in the first century, and preached the Gospel in power, souls were saved. Those souls assembled for edification immediately and

constantly. After awhile, at least long enough to see who in the fellowship was growing the fastest, Paul would lay hands on certain men whom he called "elders." Sometimes he had to move on before the process was complete, so he would leave a Timothy or a Titus (both apostolic men) behind long enough for them to ordain elders.

But wasn't Timothy the pastor at Ephesus? No. In fact, the words "the pastor" are never used in Scripture. Tracing Timothy's "career" through the book of Acts and the epistles of Paul is revealing:

- 16:1, meets Paul in Derbe
- 17:14, remains in Berea
- 18:5, joins Paul
- 19:22, goes back to Macedonia
- 20:4, joins Paul
- I Corinthians 4:17, is sent to Corinth
- Philippians 2:19, is sent to Philippi
- I Thessalonians 3:2, is sent to Thessalonica
- I Timothy 1:3, is sent to Ephesus
- Hebrews 13:23, is arrested and set free

This hardly seems like the life of "the pastor" of a church, as we have it defined for us in modern terms.

It is assumed by Paul that the elders upon whom hands were laid by him or his co-workers, these elders who are always mentioned in the plural, could do the work that needed to be done! After the original apostolic work is done in a church, you will not find any New Testament congregation governed by a "pastor" (singular), but always by "elders" (plural)

And look at this: Peter, though an apostle, calls himself an elder, and tells his fellow-elders to "feed the flock." Now this is the job we normally assign to "the pastor." But it is the elders' job. Could elders and pastors be the same persons?

Did you know that "pastors" are only mentioned ONE TIME by this name in the New Testament, as a part of the ministry gifts given to the church? Since we know that pastors FEED, and ELDERS are told to FEED, yes, they could well be the same!

More! Paul, in his letter to Titus, equates elders with BISHOPS, too, and gives qualifications for them! Can you show me a place where a pastor's qualifications are given? That's right, that's what Scripture is saying, pastors-bishops-elders are ALL THE SAME, simply the spiritually mature men of the congregation passing on their faith to the younger.

I hear a collective groan..."If the church has a PLURALITY of leadership, who will be in charge?" Now, that is the question asked by those in Babylonian circles. Jesus even said that the Gentiles do things a certain way, but His people were going to be different. Just how do the Gentiles do it? One man is in charge, under him are his personal representatives, absolutely loyal to him or else, and then, under this hierarchy, "the people." That's how communism works. That's how Roman Catholicism works. That's how big business works. That's how the military works. Most Protestant churches work this way too. But Kingdom churches, Kingdom people, don't operate that way! No, the world's

methods will produce the world. Flesh produces flesh. Jesus did not start a business or an empire. He began a fellowship.

But who makes the decisions? People who believe in the gifts of the Spirit, the unity of the Spirit, the essential one-ness of the Body of Christ, know the answer to that one: The Holy Spirit makes the decisions.

And how? Through His gifts. Apostles, prophets, pastor-teachers. Tongues and interpretation.

Words of wisdom and knowledge. Some will be gifted to lead a meeting. But leadership of a meeting must not be confused with leadership of the church.

The church has long assumed that "talented," "gifted" people are called to be "pastors." Not! They are simply called, like the rest of us, to exercise their gift!

Whenever the Body assembles and calls on the name of Jesus and believes God is leading, that which is necessary will be spoken and done.

Hence, let it be said of Christ's Church that Christ and not any man leads it. May a plurality of leaders be forced into leaning upon GOD for answers. May the lacking of a central figure in the church cause all to find their gifts!

We call Jesus, Lord. And so He is. We give lip-service to the "unity of the Body," the equalizing gifts of the Spirit. But in fact, the following scenario is more what we are about in this generation:

A church is born. The apostle (westerners use the term "missionary" which corresponds in Latin to the Greek word apostle) who began the work moves on, and leadership is needed. (or sometimes the missionary gets secure and stays on as "founder-pastor")

Rather than looking to the Holy Spirit to raise up men within, it is assumed automatically that leadership can be found somewhere else. The product of a "Bible College" or the pastor of an already-successful congregation is looked upon as the best "prospect." (all of which sounds more like corporate America than born-again America.)

So someone is "called in." He preaches a sermon or two, upon which his whole life is judged. If the sermons were particularly pleasing (let not a "prospective pastor" tell his true heart in a "trial sermon.") varying sums of money, often exorbitant, are offered, "prayed about", and more often than not, accepted. He is in fact, hired. Because he is now the church's paid professional, he becomes THE worker of the church. He teaches, he organizes, he prays, he does it all...after all, we paid him to do this, didn't we? And the body begins to shrivel up, often in the midst of external success.

Supposing the man to be extraordinarily talented, the group grows in number. But it is still a shrivelled, dry, thirsty group that knows "something" is missing...If the man turns out to be a "dud", the group drops off in spirit and in numbers.

Such is the American approach to church government.

Very early there was a major departure from the Scriptural way. And, loving status quo as we do, Christians everywhere feel that they are viewing the norm when they look at their particular way of doing things.

Well, God is merciful. Israel wanted a king, and God, after protesting, gave them one. Eventually this decision led to great men like David, Hezekiah and Josiah, far from lightweights in God's eyes. God has blessed our system too, and produced many "men of

God" in spite of our fear of being humanly leaderless (which echoes Israel's fear.)

Scripture indicates that various forms of administration may be permissible. But I think I have fairly described both the Scriptural pattern and the American pattern, shown that there is a difference, and I hope, whetted someone's appetite to try to do it His way.

It seems to me that a huge anointing would be released to the people of God if the leadership of a local congregation were shared. If the elders would take their place. If the gifts of the Spirit were taught, sought, and encouraged.

While I'm speaking of "the anointing", let me say a word about "touching God's anointed". This is a Biblical phrase that originated from the mouth of God in reference to His chosen people Israel. As to "the anointing" itself, in the Old Testament a whole host of things were said to be anointed: the tabernacle, all its furniture, the priests, all the priests' clothing, etc. For, far from being a holy word in itself, to "anoint" merely means to rub with oil.

Of course we Christians understand that oil is a symbol of the Holy Spirit. And in the Greek word "cristos" from which we derive the word "Christ", we understand the Holy Spirit's purpose is to rub us all with Himself through the man Jesus.

Did you know that after Christ came into the world, that is, in all the New Testament writings, no other individual is called anointed again? The church, yes. "Special" members of the church? No!

II Corinthians 1:21, God has anointed US in Christ.

I John 2:27, you (plural) have an anointing. That anointing teaches you everything ...

The deceiver can't deceive us, because when a teacher teaches, the anointing tells us whether he is teaching the truth. A true teacher can only confirm what we already know in Christ.

So let's be careful of singling certain people out, saying "Wow! What an anointing!" The anointing is in Jesus, Jesus is in YOU! And the same Spirit in you, God will release in abundance to His Church when they recognize without hypocrisy the headship of Jesus.

Yes, there is only one "Anointed One" we need to worry about touching today. His name is Jesus, but He lives in all those who are His. Don't touch God's anointed.

No man has a monopoly on that anointing. Never is submission to one man mentioned in the New Testament. This one-man thing was created by human tradition and sustained by strong men. Since God did not ordain such, I cannot recognize the preeminence of one man in the congregation, though I might recognize his position in Christ and respect him as a brother.

Paul tells me that the head of every man is Christ. Does that relationship stop when I leave my home, the context of which Paul speaks, and enter the assembly of the believers? Absolutely not! Christ is still my head, and I filter all commands and directives and teachings through that Lordship of Christ. I do NOT suddenly turn Christ off so I can turn a mere man on.

There must indeed be leadership in the church. The leaders are a group of men submerged in the Holy Ghost, who call others to obey Jesus, not themselves. They are men who are laying their lives down for the flock, not beating it. They are near-invisible men who are most honored by all.

God has already shown His people that His system of plural leadership works. It's

recorded. Recorded also is the sad history of churches totally controlled by the "clergy", a group separate and apart from the "laity." In these churches is great pain. It is the pain of a wife who has been ridiculed, or ignored, or abused in some other way.

When wives sense that the marriage relationship is not being honored properly, reactions can

be violent. That violence can be suppressed by the husband with anger and demands for obedience and questioning of loyalty, or...silenced with an understanding hug.

The church, with all its faults, seems to be awaiting a hug. Submission is much easier after the leaders make the people realize they truly understand, and that they are one with us, not "a cut above."

Suppressed Christians who have gifts from God are liable to be looking for other fellowships where their gift can be expressed. When all the "gifted"ones go, the "remnant" is a group fiercely loyal to a man. Very little fruit can be produced in a situation like this, yet this scene is repeated throughout our land.

How can you tell if your church is controlled by a dictatorial clergy-laity philosophy? A former pastor of the Philadelphia Church in Chicago has come up with a description of the dictator spirit.

1. attitude of lording (as opposed to leading)
2. gains "dominion" over people's lives
3. strong-willed and unyielding (instead of gentle, open-minded)
4. spreads "awe" or fear of himself among the people
5. non-submissive to other leadership
6. overconfidence in himself
7. looks for private "words" to direct flock, ignores Spirit in other leaders
8. makes major decisions without seeking and hearing counsel
9. uses elders as "sounding board" to make up his mind, rather than seeking the mind of God through the collective leadership
10. forces final decisions before the answer is generally clear
11. requires weakness under him. must be "man on top"
12. intimidates others, suppresses body ministry
13. over-disciplinarian tendencies, instead of love and patience

To this wise pastor's list, I add my own . Here are some tell-tale signs of a church in the process of being "taken over."

1. the search for a scapegoat for all the church's ills
2. relatively new members being placed in all key positions. members even called from other cities for specific jobs
3. decisions all made by one man or those few under his influence
4. total write-off of all ideas not emanating from the top
5. suggestive comments and accusations about other church members, threats of "exposing" them
6. insisting on titles, respect
7. money controlled by an inner circle

8. members forbidden to complain to others viewed as leaders

I ask simply, was one man ever supposed to have preeminence in the church? And as simply I answer: YES! The man Christ Jesus, Head Pastor of the church, is that man!

Have humans ever tried to have such preeminence? In III John we are introduced to such a man. Somehow he had seized the reins of the church. He came against other ministries. Those who tried to bypass him and receive the ones he rejected, were thrown out of the church by him. His name was Diotrephes.

John, who introduces us to this man, also is given a vision of the Throne Room of Jesus. Surrounding Him in that glorious place were 24 elders! No one stood out in that crowd but Jesus. Let it be so in the church today. Jesus is not threatened by several men receiving their instructions from Christ and passing them on to the church. But when one man assumes this responsibility...Well, for one, John would tell us:

One man should never rule the church!

Consider the Ephesian church, later blessed by John's presence, but founded by Paul. In Acts 20, we read of Paul's farewell to them. You will note that he did not call for "the pastor." There was no such individual! He called for the elders, and reminded them that they are called to be overseers (also translated bishops). And he says they are to SHEPHERD (pastor) the church!

Paul, furthermore, is seen in the book of Acts appointing elders (plural) in every church that he founds. (See chapter 14). I think that it's fair to say that Paul would tell us:

One man should never rule the church!

What about the churches addressed by the apostle Peter? (I Peter 5) His comments also are addressed to elders(plural), whom he likewise calls overseers, and whom he, also, commands to shepherd, or feed, the flock. Now Peter and Paul didn't agree on everything, but they agree on this:

One man should never rule the church!

Much has been made by the Roman Institution of the "successors of Peter." Well, here they are, tucked away in I Peter 5: the elders of the church.Plural.

No, neither John, Paul, or Peter seem to have anything to offer in the way of monarchy- style church government. After these apostles, or their representatives (also apostles) like Timothy or Titus, had laid the foundation in a new area, their first task was to appoint elders who would teach others in a self-propagating manner until the return of Christ.

Interesting to note is that these apostles almost always address their letters to the "saints", not exclusively to the leaders. Even Jesus, dictating letters in the Book of Revelation, addressed only the "messengers" of the churches, that is, those who would deliver Jesus' message.

Something went wrong with the simplicity of those early churches, and the specific commands of the apostles. The evolution toward a pyramid structure , superimposed on the Body,

with a "Holy Father" at its top was slow but deliberate through the centuries. The Roman system that evolved was nothing more than the pagan system that had already existed in Rome, Greece, Babylonia, etc.

This is, in fact, Satan's way of doing business.

Man needs a visible "high priest" at the top of his religion, lesser priests surrounding the high priest, then the "people."

Well, Israel had it that way didn't they? But they were commanded to! This structure is indeed a copy of the true, and was meant to show on earth the pattern of things in Heaven. But in Christ it is not so! In Christ we have our high priest, our head. He is invisibly but really the chief governor of the true church! All under Him are His Royal Priesthood. Now, we fought our way out of Rome to have that, but we've allowed ourselves time and again to be brought back under one-man rule.

But is there no authority structure in the church at all? Yes, that which flows out of God's needs, not ours. In I Corinthians 12, we are told that FIRST are the apostles, the ones sent out to lay the foundation in a new area. SECOND are prophets. Their job is not clearly spelled out, but it seems that they were to establish the fledgling church by utterances directly from God. Their work, also, seems to have been temporary and itinerant.

THIRD was the teaching class. This is the generic name given to ALL who feed the flock. In I Peter 5 and Acts 20, elders, called overseers, are told to do this feeding, which we know to be "pastoring". Though it is usually what we "pay the pastor" to do, it is in fact the work of ANY who are gifted in this area.

FOURTH in God's plan are the REST of His gifts, given now to this person, now to that. They are no less important to the authority structure, for God can speak a certain word to a church through the lowliest of handmaidens. Although these people are often immature, new babes in Christ, and cannot be counted on for consistent regular "leadership", when God speaks through one of them, let the people of God listen.

These were and are the ways God builds the church, and receives His glory. NO MAN is to assume that because He is used in this or that gift, that he is now "in charge." No man should consider himself "clergy," as opposed to the "laity" somehow "below" him. Those who stress such division need to be noted. "Mark those who cause division among you."

An even stronger statement is made by Paul in I Corinthians 12. He claims that division (schism) comes when one member is exalted above another, or abased below another. The out-of-place member draws members to himself, even as white blood cells rush to the aid of a diseased member of the human body.

Mark those which cause such division. Do not mark those who speak truth which is not pleasant. Elijah was accused of causing trouble in Israel, but Elijah was correct and all Israel was wrong. He was not the one troubling Israel...he had the solution!

The reformers who finally broke with Rome came as far as they dared. There are, I am told, even a few churches today that practice plurality of leadership. But most Protestants have been content to keep this Babylonian element in the church, and are paying dearly for it.

In order for one man to rule, the entire church must be in agreement with him. If they are not, one by one they will be asked to leave, to find a ministry with which they are more

"comfortable." Thus, those who continue to patronize the original church only strengthen this one

man's rule. There seem to be some who have a need to conform...

In order for plurality to work...well, humanly speaking, it cannot. That's the point. Leaders are forced to get together, listen to the Lord, listen to the bleating of the sheep, lay their lives down. As a group, they say to Jesus, this is your church. Lead us! Rule your people!

Then the ideas begin to flow. The creative urges of the Holy Spirit produce a program that is unique to that fellowship. The question of who will do this and that from week to week will be resolved in these sessions before God. Yearly plans are not worried about. Rules, regulations, constitutions, are all kept at a bare minimum, as the men of God seek the face of God together and often.

It may surface that a certain group of men, maybe even one man, has a gift for teaching, and is being asked to teach regularly. Good. But the gift of teaching is not the gift of headship. Headship has not been given to the Body! Let the brother teach, but let another who is gifted in administration, administer. And so on.

Our western problem seems to be money. When we pay someone to exercise his gift, we create a professional ministry. A tremendous pressure is placed on a brother who is given all his earthly needs by a fellowship. If he doesn't have every imaginable gift necessary to "run" a church, he'll start manufacturing them. Under the guilt of making himself look busy and useful, he begins to assume that a true "pastor" must be able to do everything! And while he dashes around trying to do everything, the Body is suffering. The "gifts" he is exercising could well be exercised by other members of the Body who really have those gifts! But no, all of this is theory..."that's what we pay 'the pastor' to do."

It will forever be easier to pay one man to do it all than to take seriously the gifts and calling of ALL the members of the Body. But just imagine! Erase the need for all salaries of all American pastors, who could find a good job and still exercise their gifts, take that money and send a man to a part of the world where Jesus has never been named!

Am I hallucinating? Or am I speaking sound words, based on the Words of God Himself?

In the civilized progressive west we seem to have forgotten the lessons we learned in Rome. The clergy-laity distinctions we were taught there simply cannot be tolerated in God's church. The anointing of the Head, Jesus, trickles down to His Body, every cell of it, even the least of us. That anointing must be expressed. May no one come against, or quench, what God wants to do in each of His own!

Some day we will have serious questions to answer about the way "church" is conducted here. Where have we gotten all our strangeness?

Whence the promise of the "Bible College" that in four short years a candidate will be a "man of God", ordainable to the work of the ministry, ready to be set down in the midst of men far his spiritual superiors, and called their "pastor."?

Whence the "royal family" concept, whereby we call in a pastor from some other city, essentially without knowing who he is, and promise to meet all his material needs?

Whence the corporate America tactic of bypassing faithful church members to fill all key positions with personal friends, also from other cities, also unknown to the people?

Whence the wearing of titles? Not that we all do not have one. But what of Jesus' caution not to make a big deal of it? Now Jesus knew there would be fathers and teachers aplenty in the church, but they are told never to be addressed this way. He knew that the wearing of a title, which ultimately belongs to God, is too heavy a responsibility for his people, and drags them into pride and arrogance.

Jesus is Lord, Savior, Wonderful Counsellor, but quite often I call Him just, "Jesus." Please, sir, don't demand that I call you by some elevated title. I have titles too, you know. Child of the living God. Heir of salvation. Future assistant ruler of the world! But you can call me "Bob".

I know, Paul called himself an apostle, but 1) he did not demand that others call him that,

2) the historian -Luke - who writes of him calls him by his name, 3) he also called himself a prisoner and a bond-slave.

So, again I ask, whence the demand for titles?

Oh, people of the Lord, if we are not diligent, a clerical hierarchy is put in place that is in fact a roof on the church. It is a roof that blocks the fullness of God from falling there! Now, the Scripture mentions foundation and walls in describing the called out ones, but never a roof. Reason: God himself wants to be our covering.

What if we could go back to the original pattern? Sure, sure, your church is a "good" church, with a "good" pastor. He even works with the "rest" of the leaders. But I ask, in the light of Scriptures I have shared, what if we tried it God's way?

What if every "head pastor" in America would step down, become ONE of the pastors, and truly listen to the heart-cries of the people?

What if all leadership were raised up from within, and money was simply not a factor, except for the most tried and gifted of the elders?

What if 20-year-olds were not suddenly called SENIOR PASTOR over men who have loved Jesus longer than they have lived?

What if leaders were produced in prayer meetings, and not in college?

What if holy living, as outlined by Paul to Timothy and Titus were the only criteria for leadership?

What if the anointing were allowed to flow directly from Jesus to the whole BODY, and not forced through some imaginary funnel roughly the size of the one called "the pastor"?

What if the gifts of ALL the people of God counted equally in the Body?

What if there were no "roof" on the Church, and we were totally freed from all relics of Babylonian priesthood?

Oh what a glorious church that would be! Could not God move even more in such a structure?

A call needs to go forth to all the men of God, to lay their heavy burden down, to discover the exquisite simplicity of the BODY of CHRIST. They need to be invited to come off the throne, be men of men, let Jesus demonstrate HIS leadership in a church they have come to think of as their personal domain.

Then let the church be the church again! Let us have our "psalm", our "tongue", our "teaching." Set us free!

Shepherds, we will know who you are, not by your title or position, but because you are ahead of us, truly ahead of us. If you love us, we can submit to your corrections. If you take charge, you may scare us away. We'll probably not follow your every dictate, nor meet your every need. But show us the Father, feed us the Word, lead us by still waters. Die for us. We'll know you. We'll honor you. Because we honor the Head Pastor, Who lives in you.

THE FINAL THREAD

Time fails me to tell of other Protestant traditions that we hail as the godly "norm": the strange combination of hating abortion while condoning contraception, when neither practice is supported by Scripture ; the worship of Christian rock & roll artists, knowing that the very term "rock and roll" has grossly immoral origins and the music itself is sending millions to hell; the over-doing of movies, drama, and other entertainment for spiritually fat Christians whose ears ever itch ; the near-total acceptance of Babylon's calendar of events (Easter, Hallowe'en, Christmas) and the traditional celebrations of such...

But enough of the negative aspects of Christendom. Is there nothing right with the organized structure we call "the church"? Yes, there is a thread running through the midst of this confusion that is pleasing to God. It's the blood-washed, called-out thread.

Kaleo in Greek means "to call." In the form ekklesia found in Scripture it means, "the called." This is the word translated "church" in most passages dealing with the subject. Today the word "church" is tossed about so freely as to have had its original meaning lost. But the true church knows who she is. She is a special group constantly being called away from that which displeases God.

Our calling is not to "be somebody" or to aspire to a particular ministry or career. It is merely to a relationship with the Father through Jesus the Son. This relatedness immediately places us in proper association with others who have the same call. From those associations flows the rest of our life.

Are you a part of the called? Where is the inner call of God summoning you? Leave Babylon and follow that call. Yes, if you can hear His Voice, do it today.

This ends the chronicles of Babylon known as the "Scarlet Threads". I trust the Holy Spirit will prick you with those things that are clearly from His Word.

I am free to come to your church to share any or all of the above. And/or I can send you regular information about my research and writings.

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