



ONE LORD WITH ALL AUTHORITY

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Roger E. Dickson

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ONE LORD WITH ALL AUTHORITY

The Christ-centered life starts and continues throughout eternity with Jesus. The Christ-centered disciple understands that Jesus must be the King and Lord of his life in all things. In order for one to feel this way about life, he must first believe that there are no authorities, masters or lords of this earth that stand between him and Christ. When individuals feel that they are first subject to a spiritual lord, master or authority in this world, they can never fully appreciate the meaning of a Christ-centered life. When disciples of Christ must first feel the approval of someone on earth in their relationship with Christ, they will never fully feel the approval of Jesus. Christians must understand, therefore, that their approval by Jesus never depends on the approval of some man or group of men on earth. The truly Christ-centered life first begins by realizing that Jesus Christ is the one Lord of our lives as He is the one Lord over all things.

INTRODUCTION

*“You know that those who are recognized
as rulers over the Gentiles
exercise lordship over them.
And their great ones exercise
authority over them.
But it will not be so among you.”*

Jesus

(Mark 10:42,43)

These words of Jesus were the revelation of a surreal behavior in leadership that would turn the world upside down. It would be a leadership that would be characteristic of the nature of the ekklesia He would establish. At the time He spoke, He was in the process of changing the beliefs and behavior of those who had for so long been influenced by the religious world of an apostate Judaism. But regardless of their past, Jesus was

introducing to His disciples a concept of leadership that would change the world. It would change the world because it would be the reverse of what the world taught concerning leadership. Instead of leading by power and authority, His disciples would lead by servicing the needs of others. It is our challenge, therefore, to look into the pages of Scripture in order to discover this dynamic that changed the world in the 1st century.

Leadership among God's people during Jesus' ministry was in a paradigm shift of belief and behavior. A new and marvelous thing was in the process of being revealed to mankind. The servanthood leadership to which birth would be given from a community of loving servants would be a beautiful thing that the world had not experienced. The ekklesia would be a community with leaders who would be sparked into existence and sustained by the very nature of the incarnate God of love.

It was difficult for the early disciples at first to discover the magic of Jesus' concept of the ekklesia and her leadership. Through example and teaching, Jesus patiently worked with His early disciples in order to reveal what was so uncommon in the world in which they lived. But once they discovered the treasure of what He was bringing into the world, the community of first disciples, the ekkle-

sia, became a wonderful force of love that exploded into existence with nuclear results in the 1st century.

The phenomenal growth of the early ekklesia was based on the nature of the community of God that gave birth to a dynamic leadership that was a magnet to thirsting souls in a world of political turmoil and religious bondage. If we can only discover the seemingly secret of what Jesus was revealing concerning true leadership, then we will experience the same growth today. If we restore the magic of His principle of leadership, we will enjoy again the restoration of the community of God that was initiated by Jesus two millennia in the past. So we ask that you sit back and marvel with us as we delve into history and the didactic of the Holy Writ in order to discover the heart of a community of people who gave rise to leaders who were not defined by the standards of the secular world.

Chapter 1

Organize For Success

We live in religious world where "Christianity" has become well organized and structured. Some refer to "the church" as a well-organized institution that would equal the organizational structure of any corporation of the Western developed world. The modern business world has had a great impact on how the ekklesia (church) of disciples organize themselves for action. Being subjects of our corporate world, we cannot help ourselves. Whenever a proposal is made by the disciples to accomplish a certain feat,

we fret ourselves about who is in charge and how we are going to "plan" for success. We are cursed with our own corporate culture that regiments the troops into order in an effort to guarantee productivity, and thus, success. We have constructed committees, boards, councils and synods. And to efficiently run our religious structures, we have assigned administrators, directors and presidents. In order to guarantee the smooth operation of the organizations, we have invested the leaders with authority to dictate direction

and control in order to guarantee success and accomplishment. We have often credited ourselves with our accomplishments to the point of minimizing the work of God through the ekklesia. Effective organization has taken the place of faith. And since the industrial revolution, our understanding of the “organized” church was exported throughout the world by a vast missionary force who had been cloned after the theology of the Western church.

In order to fund our organizations we have adopted the latest marketing strategies. Those organizations that make the greatest noise, and portray before the public the flare of order, are given the funds for continuation. In order to be the successful church, we have obsessed ourselves with “organizationalism” to the point that we have left no room for God to operate. If Jesus came today, we wonder where He would fit in with some of the monstrous ecclesiastical organizations that we consider so dear for the function and outreach of His ekklesia.

What if we stripped ourselves of our institutional organizational culture, and then as objectively as possible, read the pages of the New Testament? With an open mind, could we discover the “organization” of the 1st century ekklesia as it functioned as an organism to carry out the mission of evangelizing the world? Could we do this? Though we might not be able to do this objectively because our organizational culture is such a part of our inner being, we must at least give it a try.

In order for the institutional organi-

zational culture of the modern world to exist, it must have structures of rank and command in its leadership. Someone must always be in charge in order to guarantee success. In the corporate and civic world, rank and command are necessary for the existence of governments and corporations. But when we come to the ekklesia, we must listen to Jesus’ mandate, *“But it will not be so among you.”*

But we are saturated in our culture with positions and authority. We plagiarize adjectives as pastor, apostles, elder, bishop, evangelist, and deacon from the pages of the New Testament in order to make them titles that set apart those we consider to have authority over us. If success is not accomplished, then someone must be blamed. Someone must be sued. In the religious world, if the church is not growing, it is the preacher who must go to court and be fired. This institutional behavior has been going on since the industrial revolution started to mold the organizational structure of the church of God. In order for the church organization to be successful, we assumed that structured organization with lords, authorities and masters would be necessary for the growth of the church. And in order to have a successful organizational structure, authority must be delegated to those we would hold accountable for either success or failure. In the modern institutional church, therefore, we have become obsessed with authority. Whenever we visit a group of disciples, we immediately search for “who is in charge.” “Who calls the shots in this church?” And when a church is not growing, we

assume that someone must be “sued” for lack of growth.

Our obsession with authority and success among the disciples always makes this a very colorful discussion. The humble servants of the ekklesia will have no problem. They seek only to serve, caring less about who gets the glory. But those who have determined to ignore Jesus’ mandate, “*But it will not be so among you,*” will certainly have difficulty remaining calm in the midst of this discussion. We have found this true in discussing this particular subject with the many lords, authorities and masters among us. When questioning any authority on earth among the disciples on earth, men groan in their souls because they often feel that their very manhood is being attacked. We would assume that those who have failed to understand the servant nature of the ekklesia would naturally react in such a manner. And it is thus for this reason that we must lay aside our business and political culture and turn again to the simplicity of the New Testament ekklesia in order to humble ourselves before the cross.

In order to understand the nature of the ekklesia it is imperative that we understand the nature of the leadership that Jesus mandated would be characteristic of those who would lead His flock. We do live in a world of political despots. It seems that this culture of the political world has in many cases made its way into the leadership structures of many churches. It is for this reason that we must take another look at the subject of leadership as it is revealed in the New

Testament.

The problem with despots is that they breed a culture of suspicion. Some despots in governments go to drastic measures in order to guarantee their control of the country. Some stockpile massive amounts of armament. Among their appointed officials, some regularly shift their cabinets around in order that no one person gain a following among those over whom they have authority. Some surround themselves with “yes men” who continually feed the ego of self-proclaimed saviors of their country. Others simply enrich their generals in order that they not be tempted to stage a coup. The culture of the autocratic leader in government is based on suspicion. The despot leader is suspicious of everyone. And for good reason. As soon as he lets his guard down, he’s gone.

Imagine religious despots who generate a culture of suspicion among the disciples of Jesus in order to maintain control. One-man-pastored churches are common in the religious world. This is particularly true among independent churches who have structured their organization after the religions around them. This one-man rule of churches creates suspicion among those who function as leaders. The single pastor is always afraid that someone is seeking “his flock.” He thus develops a mentality of suspicion. And when there is suspicion, there are no true relationships among brethren.

Autocratic leadership breeds suspicion.

We live in a world of Christendom

today where there has been in the last few decades a massive growth in house churches throughout the world. This exodus from the institutional church structure has not been without cause. Institutional Christianity became so structured with hierarchies of control, boards, synods and committees that were ruled by religious despots, that many members fled the bondage of such organizations in order to find freedom in small individual assemblies. Unfortunately, many of those who fled simply took with them a similar culture of despot religiosity to their homes. When fleeing out the back door of the institutional church, they did not “dechurch” sufficiently in order to avoid bringing with them the same concept of lordship leadership that they experienced in organized religion. Subsequently, they established small organized institutional churches that met in their homes.

We have visited many independent churches throughout the years. One of the characteristics of those who have started such churches that initially came out of institutional religions, is that they seem to construct again that from which they fled. Leadership is

Dysfunctional churches give birth to dysfunctional leaders.

still viewed as “taking control.” Suspicion is thus high among some newly established independent churches. They are suspicious of others taking control of their new institutionalized churches. Preachers take control of their churches in order to reassure themselves that their particular group will not be stolen by another religious despot similar to the one that they fled. Many small independent churches, therefore, are actually a spin off with minor authorities who ran into conflict with the greater authorities of the organized institutional church. They thus circle around and become that from which they fled. The process of building another authority base begins again, from which there will ultimately be other spin off groups who conflict with the established authorities. This has been an endless cycle of multiplication by division that has plagued churches for years.

But we are not interested in reforming dysfunctional interpretations of the New Testament ekklesia. It is our task to focus on what Jesus initiated 2,000 years ago. In order to understand the leadership He seeks to lead His people today, we must first understand the nature of the ekklesia He established that was based on the fact that He only is the One Lord who has all authority over all things.

Chapter 2

What Is The Ekklesia?

In the New Testament the English word “church” is used to translate the Greek word *ekklesia*. The word “ekkle-

sia” was a common Greek word that was used in the culture of the 1st century. It was a word that was used in the political

culture of the day, and thus, the word had many political connotations attached to it. We wonder, therefore, why Jesus, and then the Holy Spirit, would use this word in identifying the community of God's people. We think the answer to this question is understood by understanding the definition of the word as it was used in the society of the 1st century.

In the society of the 1st century the word "ekklesia" was used almost always in reference to political assemblies, though the word was also used in reference to a general assembly of businessmen in order to make a community decision. This was the case in Acts 19:23-41. The word is used in verses 32,39 & 41. The word ekklesia is translated "assembly" in these verses. The craftsmen had gathered in an ekklesia (assembly) in order to make a decision by consensus in reference to the effect the ekklesia of God was having on the local businesses. In this particular situation the ekklesia was a meeting of the local businessmen in order to make a decision concerning the endangerment of their business. The ekklesia, therefore, was a general meeting for the purpose of making a decision by all who were assembled.

The use of the word as illustrated by the Acts 19 meeting helps us understand why Jesus used the word in reference to His people (See Mt 16:13-20; 18:15-20). The purpose for the calling of an ekklesia was to have a community discussion in order to make a community deci-

**The ekklesia
comes together
to make
mutual
decisions.**

sion by consensus. The ekklesia in the secular world was a calling of the people to discuss a subject that affected all the people. All the people, therefore, were called together to make a mutual decision concerning the subject at hand. In reference to the ekklesia of God, emphasis is on two things: (1) the whole body of people are to be involved, and (2) the whole body of people must function as a group in order to make decisions as to what the whole body would do concerning the subject under discussion (See the examples of At 6:1-6; 15:6-21; compare 1 Co 14:23).

The ekklesia of God does not come together to make laws, but to carry out the work that is assigned to her by Jesus. The laws have already been given. It is the implementation of the laws in the lives of men that must be decided upon and carried out. The governing nature of the ekklesia, therefore, is not based on a body of leaders who make the decisions for the ekklesia, but a body of people who mutually decide for themselves what they will do. (Do not forget this point as we journey through the discussion of this book.)

If we can work our way through all the structures of organized religion that exist in the world today, it is possible to find our way to the central nature of the ekklesia that Jesus established. In order to do this, we must first focus on the subject of leadership. It is leadership that defines the nature of the church, for the nature of the church must be reflected in the nature of her leadership. Leadership that has given up a knowledge of the word

of God, invariably establishes churches that are patterned after the culture of the leader. We live in a biblically ignorant world in reference to Christendom. We would assume, therefore, that there is a very corrupted concept of leadership in the religious world that is patterned after the leadership that is common in the world. The result of a biblically ignorant and culturally defined leadership is a world of dysfunctional churches that are patterned after the institutional organizations of the world.

It is imperative that our understanding of the nature of the ekklesia be based on our understanding of the leadership that Jesus instituted. After the establishment of the ekklesia in Acts 2, the leadership of the ekklesia was defined in the epistles with reference to the fundamental principles that Jesus taught during His ministry. The Bible, therefore, must be used to define the ekklesia, and subsequently, the leadership that originates from the ekklesia.

Jesus came to set us free from the bondage of the world in which we live (Jn 8:32). Being set free indeed by Jesus meant more than freedom in reference to salvational matters. It meant being set free from a world of oppression. It meant being set free through love. Jesus said to His disciples, “*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another*” (Jn 13:34). He said that this love as He loved them would be the

signal of discipleship, and thus, the identity of the ekklesia (Jn 13:35).

We often interpret the “new love commandment” of Jesus to simply mean our benevolent concern for one another as brothers in Christ. But there is something more to love and mutual care for one another’s needs that must define our discipleship, and subsequently, the ekklesia. Being set free, and loving as He loved us, cannot be separated.

**Love sets us free
in order to be
drawn to Jesus.**

True love does not bring others into bondage. True love sets free the one who is loved. It is for this reason that a husband is to love his wife as Jesus also loved the church (Ep 5:25). A loving husband does not bring his wife into bondage. Jesus loved us, and thus, He set us free. We are set free by love in order to be drawn to Him. Because He has set us truly free, we voluntarily stay close to Him in response to His love. A wife will stay close to her husband, and thus submit to her husband, when she is set free by her husband’s love. Jesus’ leadership through love draws us to Him (Jn 6:44; 12:32). Herein is the beauty of the ekklesia. We are drawn to Jesus by love, not law. Law confines, but love sets free. And free men are drawn to the One who indeed has set them free.

Love and freedom are an inseparable foundation upon which the ekklesia and her leadership is based. Leaders love, and thus, they set those they lead free to serve. They do not bring others into bondage. Previous to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, Jesus spoke con-

cerning the rise of many false prophets who would deceive many. He spoke of a social context where *“the love of many will grow cold”* (Mt 24:11,12). When leaders grow cold in love of those they intend to lead, they will resort to authoritarian leadership. But those leaders who seek to set people free in Christ, will reach out with love. They will not command their leadership by exercising legal authority over the flock of God.

Love is the foundation upon which the ekklesia is led and sustained. As long as men and women seek freedom, there will always be a response to Jesus who seeks to set all men free. And as long as

leaders love the ekklesia as Jesus loved them, there will always be those who will follow their love.

This is the fundamental principle upon which the leadership of the ekklesia is defined. If one does not understand the “new commandment” of loving one another as Jesus loved us, then he will never understand those scriptures in the New Testament that speak of leaders among the disciples who led the early ekklesia by loving servanthood.

**Institutions
are held together
by law.
The ekklesia
is held together
by love.**

Chapter 3

The Ekklesia: A Community Of Free People

Jesus said, *“I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly”* (Jn 10:10). The abundant life to which Jesus referred was something in this life, not eternal life. He came to give us a fulfilled life, abundant in joy, peace and good works that results from our obedience to the gospel of grace. In the context of baptism in submission to the gospel, Paul referred to a new behavior in newness of life. *“... just as Christ was raised up from the dead through the glory of the Father, even so we also might walk in newness of life”* (Rm 6:4). Those who have the abundant life are walking in the newness of life that resulted from their obedience to the gospel. Those who walk in the newness of life are *“freed from sin”* (Rm 6:7).

And being freed from sin by the grace of God, Christians walk in thanksgiving of the grace of God (2 Co 4:15). Walking in the newness of life, therefore, is enjoying the fullest of life in the grace of God. This is the abundant life. *“We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works ...”* (Ep 2:10). By walking in newness of life, we work out our *“own salvation with fear and trembling”* (Ph 2:12). Walking the abundant life is based on walking in the freedom by which Christ has set us free by His love.

When Jesus said that His disciples would be known for their love of one another (Jn 13:34,35), He made the connection between the newness

**Love & freedom
result in the
abundant life.**

of life and abundant life in reference to God loving us through Jesus (Jn 3:16). Jesus set us free through His love that was manifested on the cross (Jn 8:32). And since Christians have been set free by the love of God, they set one another free through love. Jesus did not bring us into bondage. We no longer walk in bondage, and should refrain at all cost from returning to a life of bondage by submitting to man-made ordinances to which Paul referred when he said that we should not “touch, taste or handle” the restrictions of bondage (Cl 2:21; see Gl 5:1). When one has been set free, he can enjoy the fullness of life. One who lives in freedom is more abundant in his ministry than one who works under bondage.

It is our spirit that is set free. And free spirits thrive in the newness of their lives. The ekklesia is made up of all those throughout the world who have been set free because they know that they have been loved by God through Jesus. And because they have been set free through the love of God, they reciprocate the same to others. They “*love because He first loved us*” (1 Jn 4:19). Christians honor the freedom of one another in order that they enjoy the newness of life because of their obedience to the gospel by baptism.

So what does all this have to do with lords, authorities and masters? Simple! Lords, authorities and masters bring free spirits into bondage. The nature of bond-

**Denominationalism
brings people
into bondage.**

age works against all that Jesus did in order to bring us

to freedom that results in living the abundant life. Bondage deprives us of enjoying a new life that is abundant in manifesting love and service to others. Paul expressed the abundance of his own life when he was delivered by grace out of the bondage of legalistic Judaism into the freedom of Christ. “*But by the grace of God I am what I am. And His grace toward me was not*

in vain, but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of

God that was with me” (1 Co 15:10). God’s grace toward Paul was not wasted. He was moved to service. Grace moves one to work abundantly for God. God’s love and grace set us free to labor abundantly. Paul wrote, “*For all things are for your sakes, so that the grace that is reaching many people may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God*” (2 Co 4:15). Grace causes thanksgiving to abound. And because we seek others who would respond to grace to the glory of God, we preach the gospel of grace. Because of his grateful heart, Paul sought to set others free from those who sought to bind on them the bondage of legalistic codes of man-made religiosity.

**The abundant life
is a life of
expressing
thanksgiving.**

Paul (Saul) was formerly zealous as a religious leader under a legal system of religious bondage. But when he was set free by the grace of God, he labored more abundantly. Freedom by grace, therefore, moves one to be more productive in life to the glory of God. The reason this happens in one’s life is because

after experiencing the freedom by grace that sets us free, we labor more abundantly in thanksgiving because of our salvation. And unless we labor for Jesus, we cannot experience the happiness that comes from serving others (Jn 13:17). If we would enjoy the abundant life, therefore, we must maintain our freedom that we received as a result of our obedience to the gospel of grace.

It is freedom that inspires. Freedom inspires self-initiative because one does not have to ask for permission to serve others spontaneously. Bondage confines. Freedom gives life to minister for Jesus, not to slave within the walls of organized institutionalism (denominationalism) that

**All glory
must go
to God.**

is controlled by lords, authorities and masters. This freedom that we enjoy in Christ is the “newness of life.” And when one walks in the newness of the abundant life, he is free to walk with Jesus in serving everyone with whom he makes contact everyday of his life. Lords, authorities and masters seek to confine the individual disciple’s freedom by a regimented system of organizational control by men in order that the organization receives the glory. But when one serves freely and individually through his submission to his one Lord Jesus, Jesus receives all the glory. Is this not what Paul meant when he wrote, “*And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him*” (Cl 3:17).

All those who walk in freedom to bring glory to Jesus through their service

of others make up the worldwide ekklesia of Christ. Being part of the ekklesia is the abundant life. It is walking in newness of life. It is a new life in reference to our former life of bondage. But if we bring lords, authorities and masters into the ekklesia, then the new returns to being the old. The bondage of denominational religiosity is that men seek to captivate free people under an umbrella of man-made creeds in order to take the glory of individual service away from Jesus.

The 21st century is clearly illustrating the preceding principle in reference to man’s desire to be free. After World War II countless dictators came onto the scene of world history. Africa has had its share. But the philosophy of dictatorial rule over groups of people works against the very nature of the God-created psychology of people to be free. The 21st century has witnessed the collapse of countless dictators throughout the world when the citizenship marched in protest against dictatorial regimes. Why?

**God created us
to be free
to serve.**

Jesus said to a community of religious people who were in the bondage of their own religiosity, “*And you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free*” (Jn 8:32). Jesus referred to this same principle when He was asked by Pilate if he were a king. “*Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice*” (Jn 18:37). Pilate did not understand Jesus’ concept of truth because he functioned as Rome’s symbol of oppression of the people. After WW II there were count-

less similar oppressive governments and their leadership throughout the world. But with “truth” comes freedom. Jesus came with truth that would set the minds and souls of men free from both religious and totalitarian oppression. In religion, He set men free from the domination of religious dictators who reigned over the minds of the people. In world governments, He set men’s minds free when they submitted to the King of kings and Lord of lords (1 Tm 6:15).

When we “know the truth,” we are set free. It is truth that sets us free from the propaganda of those who seek to keep us in bondage. As in the religious world, so in the world of dictatorial governments, knowledge (“truth”) of the free world has brought down countless dictatorial regimes in the last few decades. Through mass-media systems of communicating information men have been set free from political oppression. No longer can people be held in bondage by misinformation. Education released the desire of people to be free from authoritarian propaganda. The fax machine brought down the Berlin Wall and the Soviet Union, for “truth” could be communicated to the people. People could be informed outside the institutional communication systems of totalitarian propaganda. The Internet, through social programs as Facebook and Twitter, gave

**An ignorant people
can never
be a free people.**

people the opportunity to access the “truth.”

When the desire of men to be free is connected with the “truth,” revolutions are inspired. Informed people do not want to be held in bondage by dictatorial leaders who seek to confine them in bondage by their authoritarian rule. When those who seek to be free discover truth, they will revolt against lords, authorities and masters. In the spiritual world, Jesus truly did set us free. He set us free by revealing the truth that salvation is by grace through faith, not via the bondage of religious legalism. Paul cautioned, however, that we “*stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage*” (Gl 5:1). The context of Paul’s statement was in reference to those who sought to bind on the believers laws that God had not bound. The Galatians were threatened with the bondage of institutional Judaism. The Galatians had been set free from such religious legalism and were never to return.

**Christians
have been
set free
from religious
regimentation.**

The ekklesia is God’s community of people who have been set free from the confines of religious regimes. Our freedom in Christ, therefore, is a fundamental teaching that must never be compromised (See Gl 5:1-6).

Chapter 4

Free Men Seek To Be Free

There will always be those who seek to step up and step on our freedom. The world swarms with those who would be authorities over the faith of God's people. That we have been set free by the truth means that we also should be vigilant to keep ourselves out of bondage (Gl 5:1).

Among religious movements in Christendom there is almost always a shift in the leadership structure of the movements from Jesus in heaven to some man or group of men on earth. We find security in our leadership on earth who exercise authority over us. Such leaders give us destiny and direction. Our desire to have a visible authority among us is often too strong for us to remain alone with King Jesus in heaven who would

Earthly people call for earthly kings. have all authority over all things in heaven and on earth (Mt 28:18). The same

thing that happened in Israel with their call for a king, often happens among God's people today. Israel cried out for a king, an authority they could see and hear. We hear the same cries today. The drift away from Jesus to men is often unnoticed. It is not painful, nor is there discomfort among those who willingly give their allegiance to a pope or pastor on earth who would command them to do this or that. Our empirical senses to have someone or a group with whom we would identify ourselves reassures us of who we

are. Our "kings" make us feel that we belong when we pledge allegiance to his sovereignty over us. Any supposedly "abstract" authority that may be manifested from Someone we cannot see, touch or hug leaves us insecure. It is so natural for those who are earthly to construct earthly things in order to be identified among the earthly. We are cursed with a desire to have a hero among us who would fight our battles.

Our desire to be identified as distinct from others lends us to being institutionally structured to be identified as different from others. And in order to be different, we seek to identify and acclaim those among us who would tell us what to do and be. So as long as there are those among us who have a love for prominence, there will always be those who will set themselves forward as Diotrephetic leaders among the disciples in order to guarantee the existence and continuation of our heritage (3 Jn 9,10).

Those who love to be first will always seek to be first. As Diotrophes, they will unjustly slander competition with malicious words in order to guarantee their prominent leadership positions among the disciples. They will not receive evangelists who go about preaching the word of God, for those who preach the word of God threaten the positions of authority that Diotrephetic leaders assume among the disciples.

Diotrephetic leaders will thus intimidate the disciples to conform to their mandates. As Diotrephes, they will threaten to cast others from the fellowship of the “organization.” What we often do not understand, therefore, is that the very institutional nature after which we have organized the church to be, lends itself to develop and promote Diotrephetic leaders who command by the authority they are given. How we organize ourselves as the ekklesia becomes the mother who gives birth to the leaders we seek.

The preceding is the reason why we must have a clear understanding of the nature of the ekklesia of Christ. Christ set us free from the bondage of lords, authorities and masters. Therefore, the ekklesia is a community of free people who have been set free to serve only one Lord.

The ekklesia cannot give birth to something that is greater than herself. **If the ekklesia is a community of free servants, then she cannot give birth to lords, authorities and masters who would bring her into bondage.** If the ekklesia does give birth to lords, authorities and masters who would reign over her on earth, then the ekklesia has gone astray. She has become an institutional denomination patterned after the nations around her. She has become a denomination of people who are crying out for kings other than King Jesus.

We must always remember that Jesus

never commissioned His people to give birth to something greater than themselves as the ekklesia. He reigns in the hearts of His people (Lk 17:20,21). He is the only Lord of His people (Ep 4:5). He did not delegate to His people the authority to appoint any other lords, authorities and masters who would function as a board of directors to take control of His people. The ekklesia was never given the authority to give birth to something different and greater than the ekklesia herself. Since the ekklesia is a community of free people who have been set free indeed (Jn 8:32), then the true ekklesia can never give birth to those who would bring her into bondage. This is why Paul made the statement in Galatians 2:4 concerning brethren who were false, and thus came in among the free disciples in order to bring them again into bondage. *“But this happened because of false brethren secretly brought in, who sneaked in to spy out our liberty that we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage.”*

We must never forget that the community of God, the church, is a fellowship of free people. So free people who love Jesus and His word will not be brought into the bondage of those who would assume authority over the sheep of Jesus. Because they were delivered from the bondage of those who would imprison them through the dictates of men, they will heed the mandate of Paul to remain free (Gl 5:1). If a church is not giving birth to leaders who seek to guard our freedom, then we need to take another look at the nature of the church we are promoting.

**The ekklesia
of free people
gives birth
to leaders
who guard
the freedom
of free people.**

Being “entangled again with a yoke of bondage” means that there are those who would claim authority to mandate their decisions among the flock of God. Bondage means that authority is assumed by someone or a group of people. And in the context of Paul’s statement of Galatians 5:1, there were those who were seeking by their assumed authority to bind where God had not bound. But the fact that Paul made the command, “do not be entangled,” means that **no man on earth has authority to entangle the disciples with decisions that have not been bound by God.** If one cannot speak where the oracles of God speak, then he has no authority (1 Pt 4:11). Nowhere in the New Testament do we find it taught that men have authority to bind their decisions on the flock of God without the consent of the flock.

Fellowship of people (“churches”) that have never really understood the freedom by which Christians have been set free, can never produce leaders who teach freedom in Christ and behave as freedom leaders. Have you ever wondered how Diotrefes gained such dominant prominence among those over whom he exercised authority? He certainly could not have taken control of the church unless control had been relinquished to him by the church. He was evidently the product of a fellowship of disciples who, as the Galatians, were willing to be courted by those who would bring them again into bondage (Gl 4:17). The disciples who do not understand the freedom that we have in Christ will always seek kings to rule over them and

those who will keep them in bondage.

When men forget that leadership is through the example of loving service, they will seek to lead through mandates. And people who are in bondage will willingly have it so. **It is always easier to speak a command than to live an example.** But the disciples of God need shepherds among them, not authorities over them. The sheep need examples and models of obedience.

The sheep voluntarily became members of the flock in order to be set free from the imprisoning bondage of the dictates of men. The ekklesia, therefore, is a group of free volunteers. They have voluntarily surrendered their lives to the one Lord Jesus Christ. They then seek the care of those who would spiritually lead them through examples of godly behavior. **Free men seek to be led by those who would guard their freedom from the bondage of false brethren who would take them into bondage.**

Free people seek godly illustrations of submitted leaders.

Freedom leaders among us speak with the authority of the word of God. They lead by their spiritual examples and service of the flock. However, some have become confused in assuming that the authority of the word of God mandates that they personally, as the messengers of the word, have authority over those who submit to the word. But students of the kingship and lordship of Jesus know better. Godly freedom leaders function in a manner by which they guard the kingship and lordship of Jesus. They guard the fact that the ekklesia has only one

Lord (Ep 4:5). They believe that any authority they would assume over the flock of God would diminish the total lordship of Jesus over the flock. Lordship leaders in the church, therefore, are in an act of stealing the loyalty by which the sheep must give themselves totally to the one

Lord. Freedom leaders are in fear and trembling lest they become centers of reference for the flock, and thus, diminish the ownership of the Chief Shepherd who owns the sheep and seeks to serve His flock.

Chapter 5

Let Us Walk In Fear And Trembling

Many years ago we sat in an assembly where a funeral was being conducted by the preacher of the local church. The church numbered over one hundred in attendance. The building was filled to capacity for the funeral, for the brother who passed on was a very well respected person in the community. During the funeral lesson the preacher made the statement, "This is my church," when referring to the body of disciples who assembled in the building where the funeral was conducted. As the years went by, that preacher faced untold turmoil. The church divided over personalities, particularly his. Members scattered. The preacher himself divorced his wife, married another woman, and went to another religious group. What was left in the building was a small band of disciples of fifteen or twenty who tried to pick up the pieces and carry on.

What everyone did not seem to realize as this drama played itself out in history was that when one seeks to steal the flock of God, God is against that person. God will pun-

**God is
against
sheep
thieves.**

ish those who seek to take ownership of His sheep. We often forget that when Philip went to Samaria, Simon the sorcerer was dethroned from his position of influence among the Samaritans when he chose to obey the gospel (At 8:9,10). Those of the community who also obeyed the gospel left his control and seized the freedom that came with submission to the Chief Shepherd by obedience to the gospel (At 8:12,13).

In his obedience to the gospel, Simon had to give up his position of influence and control over the people. However, when Simon saw that the giving of the Holy Spirit came through the laying on of the hands of the two apostles, Peter and John, he thought that he could possibly regain his position of renown among the people. So he offered to buy from Peter and John the power to impart the Spirit, that is, lay his hands on people so that they receive the Holy Spirit. However, Peter severely rebuked him for trying to buy his way

**Leaders
should be
TERRIFIED
of craving
control over
God's heritage!**

back into a position of high esteem among the people of Samaria (At 8:20-23). Notice what Simon said in response to Peter's rebuke. *"Pray to the Lord for me so that none of these things that you have spoken come upon me"* (At 8:24). The text does not reveal what "these things" were. If as a Christ-sent apostle Paul could strike Elymas blind (At 13:11), deliver *"one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh"* (1 Co 5:5), take the rod of discipline to Corinth in order to unleash physical punishment on those who claimed authority among the Corinthians (1 Co 4:21), then certainly the Christ-sent apostles, Peter and John, could bring on Simon "these things" (physical punishment) because of his thirst for power and control. In view of how God looks on those who crave power and control over the disciples, we should fall to our knees in fear of God lest "these things" come upon us.

The apostle John meant to write a longer letter to Gaius. But because of Diotrephes' control over the disciples, he was coming to sort out the problem (3 Jn 13,14). We are sure he was not coming with a stern sermon. He was coming with the rod and the punishment of "these things" about which the Christ-sent apostles could unleash on those who would claim to seize control of the sheep of God.

When we discuss the subject of authority and control among the disciples of God, we must speak with fear and trembling. Moses was God's sole authority and lawgiver with Israel when God led the infant nation of Israel out of Egypt

and into tian bondage. Through Moses, God revealed the authority that would later come to His people, the church, through Jesus (At 3:22,23). When Aaron and Miriam challenged the authority of Moses, Miriam, who evidently led in the conspiracy, was punished with leprosy (Nm 12). When Kohath, Dathan and Abiram rebelled against the authority of Moses, God also punished them (Nm 16). Moses was a type of the Christ who was to come. Moses was the one through whom God gave the law of authority to Israel. Jesus is now the lawgiver with all authority for the church (Mt 28:18). He is the lawgiver before whom all men will give account (Jn 12:48; At 17:30,31; 2 Co 5:10). Would we be so bold as to question the authority that has now been given to Jesus, by which authority He will judge the world?

When men on earth assume some of the authority of Jesus, they need to be in fear and trembling. These are not matters where we argue our case for some authority among the disciples of Jesus. These are matters where we fall on our faces to our Lord and King Jesus who upholds all things by the word of His power (Hb 1:3). He is head over all things (Ep 1:22). He is Lord of lords and King of kings (1 Tm 6:15). Whoever would want to steal away some of the authority of King Jesus? Is it because we feel so insecure with the example of our own obedience that we seek to resort to autocratically commanding the flock into being "our church"?

Some have been so arrogant as to use the example of Aaron, Miriam, Kohath,

Dathan and Abiram as examples of rebelling against Moses' authority in representing God on earth. But the example of the preceding individuals is exactly what some are doing in opposing the sole authority of Jesus from heaven. They are challenging the authority of Jesus among His people. They are minimizing the "all authority" that Jesus has by claiming a percentage for themselves. They thus rebel against Jesus by setting themselves up as lords, authorities and masters among the disciples. In

Jesus now speaks with the authority of His word.

fact, some have gone so far as to claim to be the head of the church on earth, while Jesus is the head of the church in heaven. Some would claim to be authorities on earth, while Jesus is our only authority from heaven. In Jesus' physical absence on earth, therefore, they arrogantly assume that there must be a visible head or body of authority on earth to which people must submit. Remember these words? "*But it will not be so among you.*" We must continually remind ourselves to define our leadership on this foundation.

Chapter 6

Franchised Christianity

When discussing the subject of supposed lords, authorities and masters among the disciples, one thing is very clear. There is no consensus among Bible students concerning this matter. Some have claimed that there is absolute authority invested with the leaders of the church, and thus, the members are to submit to the mandates that are proclaimed by the leader or leaders as they would to Christ. Others have affirmed that there is inherent authority in the example by which the leaders seek to spiritually lead the flock of God. In a world where men thirst for the opportunity to be over someone, the ekklesia is often burdened with those who struggle to be great among the disciples, and thus have the authority to make the decisions. There are too many among us who seek to use the church as the opportunity to have someone under them.

In discussing this subject, most interpreters approach the subject from an institutional church prejudice that was born out of a Western business/industrial culture. By institutional we mean that the ekklesia is to be an organized institution much like businesses are structured in the corporate world. As businesses are autonomous from one another, so each group of disciples with their "bosses" and "owners" are autonomous from one another. If a leader seeks to "establish a church," he invests in a franchise, much like buying a franchise to establish a Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) restaurant. He subsequently assumes authority (a franchise) and he builds his KFC restaurant on Main Street with the

KFC churches often see one another as competitors.

assistance of the international KFC corporation. There are other franchised KFC “churches” across town, but each is autonomous from one another, for each has its owner and bosses, with promises to the employees that they too can advance in order to acquire a franchise if they manifest leadership. Advancement in the franchised KFC church means that the employees can look forward to being given authority over other employees (members) of the franchise. Thus each franchised KFC church is an independent institution that works under the guidelines of the international KFC corporation. The system works, for everyone wins souls (customers) directly for their franchise, but indirectly for the international KFC corporation throughout the world. Welcome to the franchised institutional church.

Since the church is supposed to be an institution with authorities at the top of some hierarchy of authority, then certainly there must be lords, authorities or masters among us who would call the shots in reference to decisions that are made within each franchised denomination. But we would challenge this view because it is not based on anything we read in the New Testament. The church was not organized into autonomous franchises within the cities wherein we discover the existence of Christians in the 1st century. There is no Bible student who would deny the fact that the early Christians met in the homes of the members,

which homes were scattered throughout the cities. There were leaders among these Christians, but the ministry of the leaders to the needs of the saints was not confined or defined by where either the leaders or members assembled. When Barsabbas and Silas were spoken of as leaders among the brethren, the meaning is that they were leaders among all the brethren in the entire city of Jerusalem (At 15:22). The assemblies of the disciples in Jerusalem did not denominate the disciples from one another, and thus, the ministry of the shepherds of the flock was not confined to those with whom they assembled on any particular Sunday. The shepherds ministered to the disciples of the entire city, not to any one particular assembly. They did not confine their service to denominated franchises.

Our understanding of the responsibility of the leaders of the church, therefore, must be based on our understanding that the Christians in any area of the 1st century were meeting in the homes of the members. The shepherds worked among the sheep wherever they were throughout any city. As in Jerusalem, the shepherds possibly did not know all the estimated thirty to forty thousand disciples in the city by the time of the events of Acts 15, but the disciples knew all the shepherds. And all the shepherds knew one another.

**Assemblies
of the ekklesia
are not
autonomous
franchises.**

Chapter 7

Held Together By Authority

In the world, governments, businesses and institutionalized religions are held together because the officials or administrators are given authority to carry out the mandates of the government, business or man-made religious organization. In government, dictatorial officials often maintain their positions for the sake of plundering the riches of the nation or holding on to power. In business, the owner of the business has a right to maintain ownership of the company in order to make a profit. In man-made religions where there is little respect for the word of God, men also cling to their positions in order to plunder the riches of the adherents of their particular religious group, or simply to hold on to power.

Institutional religion is defined and maintained by those who claim to speak with authority in order to maintain the traditions (heritage) of the institution that validates their existence. Position, power, pomp and purse are very strong influences. If an institution exists on the

Religious authorities produce institutional churches.

foundation of leaders who have been given authority, then those leaders will often work at all costs in order to maintain their positions as leaders of the institution. If they do not, then the institution that rests upon their existence as leaders will cease to exist. This is a particularly insidious

problem with religious institutions that are built upon an individual, or a group of individuals around whom the institution functions. In fact, religious organizations are often started by those who either seek a position of authority over one's fellow man, power to control a group, thirst for recognition among men, or to establish a means by which one can financially support himself from the generous offerings of a submitted list of attendees. Religious groups that are centered around dominant personalities on earth are usually weak in their view of Jesus' control of their lives from heaven through His word. Religious groups that are led by dominant personalities usually have a low respect for the effectiveness of the authority of the word of God in the lives of individuals. They thus seek to keep their group of adherents loyal by their personality, not the adherents' submission to the word of God.

When dealing with the subject of authority, therefore, there is a great deal of conflict that often prevails among those who have been stricken with a thirst for position, power, pomp and purse. When dealing with the subject that Jesus has all authority among His disciples, some leaders are usually disturbed because Jesus' all authority attacks their credibility and position as leaders. Since their position as leaders is usually built upon the foundation of at least one or

more of the preceding four “P’s,” they feel uneasy when the foundation for their leadership position is questioned. When the leaders of a particular religious group are uncomfortable with the teaching that Jesus has all authority among His disciples, then one can conclude that that religious group is sustained by a leader or leaders who are promoting an institutional religion that validates their existence. They believe that the continuation of the group is under attack if their authority is attacked. They thus feel that the attack is personally against them, not against the organization in which they are considered leaders.

When disciples have been brought to the total lordship of Jesus who exercises authority in their lives by their submission to His word, then the leaders of these disciples who seek to give a moral example of Jesus’ authority in their lives are not threatened. They rejoice in the fact that their example has led people to make Jesus the Lord of their lives. When such leaders move away or die away, the

faith of the submitted continues. However, when leaders who have exercised authority over the flock go away or die away, the flock usually vanishes away, or at least suffers as members leave with the passing of the leaders. Churches that are built around those who built them are

**The church
is built
on the
foundation
of Jesus.**

no more stable than the builders. Their stability is built around the fallibility of man. If the man falls, the church of disciples falls. But disciples

who are led to Jesus, and subsequently given living examples of submission to the word of God, are disciples who continue with the passing of any leader. *“According to the grace of God that is given to me [Paul] as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation and another builds on it. **But let every man take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can man lay than what is laid, which is Jesus Christ**”* (1 Co 3:10,11).

Chapter 8

A Foundation For Slavery

Throughout His ministry, Jesus dealt with the attitudes of the disciples who sought to compete among themselves as to who was the greatest. Even to His final hours on earth, and immediately before the crucifixion in the upper room, *“there was also a dispute among them as to which one of them should be considered the greatest”* (Lk 22:24). The

disciples were no different than men today who seek to have prominence over their fellow man. If these men, who had walked for over three years with the greatest servant of all time, disputed among themselves as to who was the greatest, then certainly we should expect nothing less from those today who thirst for prominence among men.

At one time during His ministry, Jesus mandated the guiding principle upon which leadership among His people would be founded. The occasion was when the mother of James and John brought her two sons before Jesus in order to ask for special positions of authority for them. She asked that they “*sit, one on Your right hand and the other on Your left hand in Your glory*” (Mk 10:37; see Mt 20:20). James and John were not simply asking for positions through their mother. **They were asking for lordship and authority over the people.** Jesus responded to their request, “*You do not know what you ask*” (Mk 10:38). But they did know what they were asking in reference to worldly kingdoms. They knew what lords, authorities and masters were in their culture. Lords and authorities were a part of their religious and political background. But they did not know what they were asking in reference to leadership in the spiritual kingdom reign of Jesus in the hearts of men.

After Jesus’ personal encounter with the two ambitious young men, He said to all the apostles, “*You know that those who are recognized as rulers over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them. And their great ones exercise authority over them*” (Mk 10:42). We do not know a Bible interpreter who does not understand this statement. There are rulers among the nations who are lords. Great ones exercise authority over those they command. Lords and authorities exist in the political and business world. Such existed in the religious world in which James and John grew up. Lords and au-

thorities are placed at the top of a chain of command, and subsequently, instructions are handed down that must be obeyed. Those on top of the hierarchic ladder of authority make the decisions and the people must obey. The leaders on top are in charge and the citizens or followers must submit to their authority. That is how the world was during the time of the disciples. It is how the world functions today.

**Leadership
of the ekklesia
must not be
defined by the
leadership of
the world.**

However, Jesus said, “***But it will not be so among you. But whoever desires to be great among you, will be your servant***” (Mk 10:43). We do not know of any Bible interpreter who also does not understand this statement of Jesus. Unfortunately, many find it difficult to practice. Some religious leaders zealously contend for authority and lordship over the flock of God. But Jesus said there would be no authorities among His disciples. Some leaders will argue vehemently that they have authority, but Jesus said there would be no lords, authorities and masters in the ekklesia. Why is it that those who can understand the simplicity of what Jesus stated cannot at the same time be diligent in applying His principle of leadership to their lives? Why would leaders seek to be lords, authorities and masters among us when Jesus plainly said there would not be such among His disciples?

What Jesus said in Mark 10:42,43 **must be the foundation upon which we**

interpret every passage in the New Testament that speaks concerning the leadership of the church. We have found that interpreters will study and affirm the truth of Mark 10:42,43, but then argue for personal lordship and authority for leaders from statements that are in the epistles. Their inconsistency in this matter reveals their eagerness to be an authority over the disciples. And their eagerness to be an authority moves them to twist the Scriptures (See 2 Pt 3:15,16).

Jesus knew that men crave authority. After all, He created them to have dominion over the animals He also created (Cl 1:16). In the beginning, when God made man after His image. He created man to *“have dominion over ... every creeping thing that creeps on the earth”* (Gn 1:26). The problem is that some want to take their nature to have dominion beyond the creatures. They seek to have dominion over the disciples, ignoring the fact that Jesus has all authority in

heaven and **on earth**, which would certainly include all authority over His flock (Mt 28:18).

Jesus came to turn the world of lords and authorities upside down in reference to the governance of His disciples. He knew that He could not reign totally in the hearts of men if men exercised lordship and authority among His people. He knew that the more disciples submitted to men, the less they would submit to Him. In His personal absence, He knew that men would thirst to be lords, authorities and masters among His people. In order to emphasize His point with James and John, and the rest of the disciples throughout history, He concluded, *“And whoever of you desires to be the first will be the bondservant of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve ...”* (Mk 10:44,45). While on earth Jesus was a servant to the spiritual needs of man. We must go and do likewise.

Chapter 9

Jesus Claimed Authority

When Jesus stated that all authority in religious matters rested with Him, He revealed an axiomatic truth that needs no proof. Who would argue with Jesus, the Son of God. All authority to legislate law among the people of God has always rested with God. Before the ascension of Jesus, all authority rested with God, the Father. When Jesus ascended to the Ancient of Days, “glory, dominion, and kingdom reign” were given to Him (Dn

2:44; 7:13,14). Jesus is now Lord (At 2:36). God is the source of all authority, and now, this authority rests with God, the Son. Since His ascension to the right hand of the Father, He has given no authority to any person on earth to rule His people. It is for this reason that all authority in judgment rests

**Because
all authority
rests with Jesus,
He will be the
judge of all men.**

with the Son whom God the Father has appointed to be the final judge (At 17:30,31; 2 Co 5:10). Christians will not stand in judgment before any authority other than Jesus. Nowhere in the judgment scenes in the New Testament do we see Christians being judged for disobedience of any supposed authorities of the church on earth. Therefore, there is no man on earth who stands with authority between the individual believer and Jesus. And for this reason, there is no man on earth who has the right to arbitrarily judge another brother.

Throughout His ministry, Jesus knew that He was headed to the right hand of the Father to receive glory, dominion and kingdom reign (Dn 2:44: 7:13,14). He knew *“that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going back to God”* (Jn 13:3). He knew that He would be made Lord of all things (At 2:36; 1 Tm 6:15). This message was confirmed on the mount of transfiguration when the Father said from heaven, *“This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him”* (Mt 17:5). Statements as John 12:48 reconfirmed the submission that Jesus would command from men. *“He who rejects Me and does not receive My words, has one who judges him.”* In order to reaffirm the principle that He would be the only Lord, the only authority among His people, Jesus reminded the apostles prior to His ascension, *“All au-*

thority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth” (Mt 28:18). The Holy Spirit reemphasized this point many years later to the Colossians. *“And He [Jesus] is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that in all things He might have the preeminence”* (Cl 1:18). When it comes to discussing authority among the disciples of Jesus, there can be no question that Jesus has all authority, authority that is manifested through His authoritative word.

Matthew 28:18 states that Jesus has all authority in heaven. Most people have little trouble understanding this. He is at the right hand of God reigning as King of kings (1 Tm 6:15). However, some have trouble understanding the fact that Jesus also said that He has all authority on earth. If all angels are subject to Him in the heavenly realm, then we would assume that all men in the earthly realm should also be subservient to Him. Everyone on earth may not be submissive to His kingdom reign, but certainly He has all authority on earth. *“You [God the Father] have put all things in subjection under His feet. For in subjecting all things to Him, He left nothing that is not put under Him. But now we do not yet see all things put under Him”* (Hb 2:8). All men on earth do not submit to Jesus. However, this does not mean that He does not have all authority on earth (See Ph 2:5-11). He has all authority on earth regardless of the disobedience of those who will not submit to His lordship.

**All authority
on earth
negates any
other authority
on earth
among God’s
people.**

Chapter 10

Jesus Claimed All Authority

As previously stated, on different occasions during His ministry the disciples “*disputed among themselves who was the greatest*” (Mk 9:34). In the occasion recorded in Mark 10, James and John asserted themselves for positions before the other disciples had a chance to do the same. When the others found out what James and John did, “*they began to be greatly displeased*” with them (Mk 10:41). They were greatly displeased because James and John had simply asked for the positions before they could do the same.

In the upper room with the disciples before Jesus’ crucifixion, “*there was also a dispute among them as to which one of them should be considered the greatest*” (Lk 22:24). This was the occasion when Jesus took up a towel and washed their feet (Jn 13). It was an overwhelming demonstration of the Creator on His knees before those whom He had created (Cl 1:16). And still the disciples were disputing among themselves as to who was the greatest. Jesus responded to their dispute by saying, “*The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them. And those who exercise authority over them are called ‘benefactors.’ But you will not be this way*” (Lk 22:25,26). So what way would the disciples be among themselves? Jesus instructed, “*He who is the*

greatest among you, let him be as the youngest, and he who leads as he who serves” (Lk 22:26).

Jesus continued with His disciples about forty days after His resurrection. Knowing that they would go out into a world of men who seek to be lords, authorities and masters over anyone they could control, He made a specific and direct statement concerning His lordship over those who would have Him reign in their hearts. In Matthew 28:18, in His final words, He proclaimed, “*All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.*” Now according to some interpreters, this “all authority” is limited. It is limited to things in heaven. Jesus can have authority over the angels and unbelievers. He “*has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him*” (1 Pt 3:22). “*God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name [authority] that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven and those in earth and those under the earth*” (Ph 2:9,10). No problem. But all authority over every living thing that exists, and even the inanimate universe (Hb 1:3), means that Jesus left no authority to be exercised among His disciples except His alone. Jesus will allow authority to exist among governments of the world in order to prevent anarchy (Rm 13:1-7). But He is the authority over the

**Leadership
of the ekklesia
is identified
by service,
not lordship.**

appointed government authorities among men.

Now the argument is presented that since He has “delegated” authority to governments to rule over the people of nations, then certainly He has done the same with the church. Therefore, we should expect to find throughout the New Testament statements that refer to authorities in the church as there are authorities in government. But we have already discovered the fallacy of this argument. Jesus clearly stated that there would be no lords or authorities among His disciples as we see among men (Mk 10:42,43). At the same time, through His revealed word He clearly revealed that lords and authorities would exist in governments. Jesus simply did not contradict Himself. He did not deny authority among His disciples during His earthly ministry, and then change His mind by allowing the inspired epistles to instruct the church to “appoint” authorities after He had assumed all authority in heaven and on earth at the right hand of God.

Jesus gave authority to the heads of

the families on earth in order to rule well their

families. The wife is thus instructed to be in subjection to the husband as the head of the family (Ep 5:22,23). Keep in mind that the Holy Spirit used the word “head,” which would certainly include control and center of reference, as a metaphor in reference only to Jesus in His relationship with the church and the husband in his relationship to his wife. **The metaphor “head” is never used in reference to the leaders of the church in their relationship with the church.** The word “head” in reference to Jesus and the church can never be used by anyone on earth in reference to being the head of the church.

Since the body is one, there can be only one head.

Jesus has now gone into heaven and is now seated at the right hand of God as head over all things (Ep 1:22). He is there as King of kings and Lord of lords (1 Tm 6:15). He is reigning with dominion, glory and kingdom reign (Dn 7:13,14).

Chapter 11

Jesus Has All Authority In His Absence

It is a natural desire of men to have a visible sign of authority. One of the difficult things for people to do is to assign all authority to the One they cannot presently see. We thus assume that when Jesus ascended out of the sight of men, that He would invest authority in someone on earth that men could see. We

falsely assume, therefore, that Jesus invested authority in the apostles, and the apostles subsequently invested authority in other men. However, we would challenge this deduction to satisfy the desires of men to establish authorities on earth that would minimize or compete with the authority that Christ presently has, by

which authority He speaks among men through His word (See Jn 12:48).

Jesus had no intention of designating individuals as lords, authorities and masters on earth in His absence. If one would contend that He did, then one would have to take the position that Jesus is now absent from His church, and thus,

**Because He is God,
Jesus is present
in His absence.**

there must be visible authorities on earth to control His people. While personally with the disciples on earth, Jesus said that He would physically be taken from them (Jn 14:15-19). However, He would send the Holy Spirit to personally dwell in them. *“I will not leave you orphans. I will come to you”* (Jn 14:18). In the context of John 14 there is a very profound statement in reference to Jesus being spiritually with His disciples. *“After a little while the world will no longer see Me. But you see Me. Because I live, you will also live. On that day you will know that I am in My father and you in Me, and I in you”* (Jn 14:19,20). Immediately prior to His ascension, Jesus promised the apostles, *“And, lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age”* (Mt 28:20). We would correctly assume, therefore, that Jesus continues with His church as He personally continued with the apostles, though He is in heaven. He is absent only physically, not spiritually. And in His physical absence He is still dwelling with His people.

Jesus has now ascended to the right hand of the Father, having received all

authority (Mt 28:18). He has been made Lord over all things (At 2:36). When the message of the gospel is preached, people submit to the lordship of Jesus, and thus, they submit to His authority in their lives. Receiving Jesus, therefore, means that one accepts the lordship of Jesus in his life. Paul wrote to the Colossians, *“As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him ...”* (Cl 2:6). If one “receives” Jesus, he accepts the authority of Jesus in his life. Accepting the authority of Jesus in one’s life is “receiving” (obeying) the message of the gospel (1 Co 15:3). Jesus now reigns on earth in the hearts of the submitted (Lk 17:20,21).

**Receiving Jesus
means
obeying Jesus.**

The authority of Jesus on earth is manifested through the obedience of individuals to the gospel. We are baptized in His name (At 2:38). The authority is in the name of Jesus, not in the messengers of the gospel message. The authority of Jesus on earth is in His message that is proclaimed by His messengers. Paul wrote, *“Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ ...”* (2 Th 3:6). Paul’s command came from the authoritative name of Jesus, not from him as an apostle. In fact, Paul asked the Colossians, *“Therefore, if you died with Christ from the elementary principles of the world, why as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourselves to ordinances?”* (Cl 2:20). In other words, since they had “received” the lordship of Jesus in their lives by being obedient to the gospel, why would

they continue to seek to be submissive to the authority of man's ordinances? Paul's instructions concerning submission to religious authorities (man's ordinances) were expressed through the command, "*Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle*" (Cl 2:21). **Since Christians are not to touch, taste or handle the religious ordinances of any man, then we must assume that there is no man or group of men on earth who have the authority to command any ordinance for men to obey.**

The authority of the Lord's church is not visible. The kingdom of God is "*righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit*" (Rm 14:17). The ministry of elders, evangelists and teachers is very important to the function of the church and the proclamation of the gospel. However, the existence of the church is not visible through some authority that we would suppose the leaders have. As the kingdom of Jesus is spiritual, and within the hearts of men (Lk 17:20,21), so also is the authority of the kingdom. It is visible when we see the submitted people of the ekklesia.

Jesus is the authority figure of the church. He is the authority figure who has all authority (Mt 28:18). And it is through the authority of His word that He reigns in the hearts of submitted people. Those who are leaders in the church, therefore, work as servants of Jesus for the sake of the church (2 Co

Leaders manifest the ekklesia by their examples of submission.

4:5). They walk by the Spirit (Gl 5:16). They humbly walk in submission to the truth of the gospel they have obeyed (Gl 2:14). Their ministry in leading others, therefore, is not through lording over others, but in giving an example of submission. Paul explained, "*Not that we rule over your faith, but are fellow workers for your joy*" (2 Co 1:24). If the apostle Paul did not rule over the faith of the disciples, then certainly any who would should be cautioned by his humble statement. We are fellow workers with one another, not authorities, lords and masters over one another.

Chapter 12

Jesus Rules Through His Word

In reference to spiritual and eternal matters, we must walk by some authority that is outside our own invention. God did not create us with the ability to determine our own moral laws. "*It is not in man who walks to direct his steps*" (Jr 10:23). "*There is a way that seems right*

to man, but its end is the way of death" (Pv 14:12; see 16:25). We may think that we can determine our own moral laws. But history has proved that we cannot make any consistent moral

Only God can establish eternal moral standards.

laws that will preserve society. Since God states that it is not possible for us to direct our own ways, then we must assume that God is right. What is within us is the ability to direct our own ways that lead to death. It is for this reason that we must have an eternal source of moral authority that is the standard that directs our behavior.

God has always established His authority among men by revelation of His law. Men are messengers of this moral authority, but the authority is in the word of God, not in the messengers. The authority of the word of God in the lives of men is in the fact that God's word is delivered from an eternal God. God is eternal, and thus, His word abides forever (1 Pt 1:23,25). That which God would consider the final authority in the lives of men, therefore, must be eternal.

Throughout the Bible there are warnings that men do not have the authority to add to God's authority (Dt 4:2). *"If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book. If anyone will take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part out of the tree of life"* (Rv 22:18,19).

The eternal word assumes its eternal authority.

"Whoever goes ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God" (2 Jn 9). The authority of the word of God is established in the proclamation that it is not to be added to or subtracted from throughout history. God's word is inherently authoritative in the lives of all men in the fact that it is eter-

nal, and thus, needs no additions or subtractions.

Since it is not within man to make eternal laws, then we must assume that only an eternal God can do such. Men are not the same today and forever. And thus, because society is constantly changing, it is not within men to establish eternal moral laws. Establishing the authority of law in the lives of men, therefore, is the business of God, not man. And since it is God's business, then we have no right to change God's law by adding to or subtracting from it.

When people lose their respect for the authority of God's word in their religious behavior, they look to authority from some other source. They look to men who would have authority over them, and thus validate the existence of their religiosity. This has been the problem among religious groups for centuries. It will not change as long as people have little concern for the word of God, and thus, seek to continue their "Christianity" with the authority of man, rather than the authority of God.

Religious behavior does not validate one to be a Christian.

Simply because one claims to be a Christian, therefore, does not mean that his life is in submission to the authority of Jesus. Many have confused their submission to their own religious experiences as submission to the lordship of Jesus through His word. It would be a truism that anyone who is not a student of the word of Christ cannot claim to be a Christian. He may be religious, but this

does not prove that he is allowing his life to be directed by Jesus Christ, who has all authority over His people through His word. Why do we say this? It is because of what Jesus said in the following state-

ment: “*Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven*” (Mt 7:21).

Chapter 13

Leaders Are Responsible Stewards

When discussing the leadership of the ekklesia, there are two very important words that we must clearly understand in order to help us determine whether we are following the authority of man or the authority of the word of God. These are the words “authority” and “responsibility.” According to *Webster’s Dictionary*, the word “authority” means “**the power or a right to command, act, enforce obedience, or make final decisions; jurisdiction**” [Emphasis mine, R.E.D.]. Webster even quotes Matthew 21:23 where the chief priests and elders asked, “*By what au-*

Authority means the right to make rules and demand obedience.

thority doest thou these things?” In the context of this question, the chief priests and elders were asking Jesus who gave Him the “power or right to command, act, enforce obedience” concerning the casting out of the money changers from the temple. They understood that only one with authority had the power to command what He did, and thus demand obedience to what He commanded. When one is invested with authority, as government and military ul-

ers, then they are invested with a mandate to dictate the rules. They have the right to command obedience of those rules. Our question is did God give any man on earth the authority to command such things among Christians?

Another word that we must clearly understand in this discussion is the word “responsibility.” *Webster’s Dictionary* defines this word to mean “expected or obligated to account (*for* something, to someone); answerable; accountable; as, he is responsible for the car.” The word involves “accountability, obligation, or duties; as, he has a *responsible* position.”

Webster also gives the definition, “... able to distinguish between right and wrong and to think

Responsibility means being obligated to another.

and act rationally, and hence accountable for one’s behavior.” This definition seems to sum up the concept of the passages in the New Testament that picture the leadership of the ekklesia. By basing their behavior on the direction of the word of God, the leaders among the disciples are those who have determined what is right and wrong according to the word of God. Their lives are controlled

by the word of God, and thus, they seek to lead others by living and teaching the word of God. By enacting the word of God in their lives, they give themselves as an example to others. This is the meaning that Paul wanted the Corinthians to understand in 1 Corinthians 11:1. “*Be imitators of me even as I also am of Christ.*” It is not that there is authority in the example of how one carries out the word of God in his life, for no man can live the perfect life. It is following the example of how Christ would want one to behave, and at the same time, realize the fallibility of all men to live perfectly before God.

According to the dictionary definition of “authority” and “responsibility,” it would seem advisable according to the word of God, to focus on the word “responsibility” in reference to the leadership of the ekklesia. God gave all authority to Jesus (Mt 28:18). Jesus only has the right to mandate rules and demand obedience. Jesus in turn gave responsibility to those whom the ekklesia would designate to carry out ministries among the disciples (See At 6:1-6; 1 Pt 5:1-5). When those who have been given responsibility to serve, desire to rule by authority, then men start lording over the flock of God.

True servant leaders do not seek authority in order to fulfill their responsibilities. They know that they have received their gifts of leadership and ministry from the Lord, and thus, they seek to fulfill their destiny by serving the needs of others (Ep 4:7-13; 1 Pt 4:10,11). When one recognizes his gift from the

Lord, he feels responsible. His sense of responsibility for the gift moves him to serve. He does not assume he has authority over others because of this gift to minister to the needs of others. He does not command others to submit to the administration of his gift. He simply seeks to use his gift to the glory of God in service to others. And knowing that all disciples have received gifts from God, then “church” is defined as a group of servants who seek opportunities to minister to the needs of others. Because everyone has submitted to the lordship of Jesus, then Christians in fellowship with one another seek to submit to one another in order that each member of the body might have an opportunity to serve. This is “church.” “Church” is not an institutional organization that is controlled and maintained by a chain of authorities or appointed board of directors.

The preceding concept is clearly understood from what the apostles said concerning the designation of special servants to care for the needy widows in Jerusalem. They instructed the church, “*Brethren, look out from among you seven men ...*” (At 6:3). They then gave the church three qualities to look for in the men they would choose (At 6:3). The church as a whole, therefore, has the responsibility of looking out among the disciples in order to find those who have the gifts to serve in a particular capacity of ministry. The same is true of designating shepherds of the flock. With the guideline qualities that Paul mentioned in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9, Timothy and Titus were to lead the church in

looking out among the members in order to find those men who had the gift of shepherding. Once these men were noted among the disciples, then the disciples simply notify everyone that these men are to focus on shepherding the flock of God.

The administration of one's gift does not put him in an "office," nor give him "authority." When loving and caring people recognize their gifts of service, they search for people to serve. When one discovers that he has the gift of washing feet, he looks for dirty feet. If I have dirty feet, then I look for the footwasher. I submit to his ministry to wash my feet. Remember this passage? *"I urge you, brethren, you know the household of Stephanas ... that they have dedicated themselves to the ministry of the saints, that you submit yourselves to such, and to everyone who works ..."* (1 Co 16:15,16). We should not be too proud to have our feet washed by one who has assumed the responsibility of his gift to wash feet.

Recognition of our gift simply means that we assume responsibility to serve with our gift. **People who say they can do nothing are actually saying that they do not want the responsibility of doing anything.** It is the responsibility of leadership, therefore, to spur disciples on to loving others, and thus, get to work serving the needs of others with their gifts (See Hb 10:24,25). When the members assume their responsibilities to serve, then the ekklesia as a whole has

Christians assume the responsibility of ministering with their gift.

the responsibility of submitting to the service of everyone. There is no authority needed in this function of the body of Christ. **The ekklesia functions as an organism of a people who have assumed their responsibility of ministering to others with their God-given gifts.**

Now in washing feet there are decisions to be made, especially if there are others who have the same gift. There can be the "footwashing committee." This committee can meet together in order to determine how they can orderly wash everyone's feet. This is exactly what happened in reference to the feeding of the widows in Acts 6:1-7. But we must keep in mind that it was the power of the word of God that moved men and women to wash feet and feed widows. It is the power of the word that develops hearts that want to serve. It is the power of the word that develops a spirit of cooperation among all those who seek to have all things in common and to serve in unity.

All footwashers have a right to work together.

The power is not in men, nor is it with authority that men may assume. If the footwashers work together as a group, this does not mean that they inherit some authority because they have chosen to work as a group. It simply means that they have decided to organize their efforts in order that every foot is washed. If they inherently had authority because they organized as a committee, then they could barge into houses, find dirty feet, and then force people to submit to their ministry. Nothing could be further from

the truth of Christian service. The functioning organism of the body simply sends healing to those parts of the body that are wounded. No wounded member should seek to rebel against healing.

We must also keep in mind that the less we focus on the word of God as the catalyst for healing wounds and nurturing spiritual growth among members, the more emphasis we place on men and methodologies. The less emphasis that is placed on the power of the word to change hearts, the more emphasis we place on the ability of men to organize and manipulate the troops into organized programs. And the more we focus on men, the more strife and envying that is developed among the fellowship of the brothers (1 Co 3:3-4; 2 Co 10:3,4). The strife and envy comes when we focus on placing our “ministry” in the methodology (program) of the organized institution, give it authority, and then muster the membership into obedience of the

committee. In order to prevent the strife and envy, some churches have resorted to designated authorities to organize and control the committees. The leaders then become the authorities or masters who control the organized committees within the institution.

**Authority
is not inherent
in organization.**

But would it not be less complicated and conflicting to understand that our “ministry” (gift) is the result of our submission to the Lord Jesus Christ? When we recognize this spiritual growth in ourselves, then we became responsible servants to everyone for Jesus’ sake (2 Co 4:5). We do not seek to exercise authority with our ministry, neither do we seek authorities to control our ministry. We are simply servants looking for opportunities to fulfil our responsibility. This is the ekklesia. It is the ekklesia functioning as an organism.

Chapter 14

The Apostles Were Messengers

If there were any authority to dictate decisions for and to the church outside the authority of Jesus through His word, then we would assume that the first “committee” of twelve would have exercised such authority among the early churches. But the apostles did not function in this manner with the newly established churches in the 1st century. They were given the responsibility to submit to receive the word of God by inspiration of the Holy Spirit (Jn 14:26; 16:13). They were given

the responsibility of speaking the word with authority, and in this way, they were set as judges over Israel with the authority of the word of God (Lk 22:30). And, they were given the authority to exercise the discipline of a Christ-sent apostle for the edification of the early church (2 Co 10:8). But outside this authority, and the responsibility that they received from Jesus as Christ-sent apostles, the apostles refrained from making decisions in reference to the function of the church.

Jesus promised the apostles that the Holy Spirit would deliver to them the word of truth (Jn 14:26; 16:13). But He never established them as personal lords, authorities or masters among the disciples in order to make decisions concerning the function of the disciples. Paul was very careful not to present himself as a man of authority in reference to his personal choices. He emphasized the fact that he, as well as all the apostles, were only messengers of the authoritative word of God. As Christ-sent apostles, he reminded them that as an apostle he could exercise the “rod” of discipline in delivering the rebellious unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh (1 Co 4:21). But in reference to their local function as disciples in the community, the apostles did not work to organize the churches.

For example, to a church in which there were those who were consumed with a thirst for authority among the disciples, Paul wrote, ***“For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus’ sake”*** (2 Co 4:5). If Jesus had given personal authority to the apostles to organize the local disciples, then they could have considered themselves as authorities among the disciples. But they did not. They proclaimed to the church that they were only bondservants of Jesus. ***“Who then is Paul and who is Apollos, but servants by whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one”*** (1 Co 3:5).

It is the Lord who gives every disciple the opportunity to serve.

There was no authority in Paul or Apollos to “call the shots.” Jesus only was the Lord, and it was He only who “gave opportunity to each one” (See Ep 4:8). Paul and Apollos were as any other disciple who ministered the word of God. They had no authority over the disciples. They only preached the authority of the word of God. In doing this they maintained the lordship of Jesus in the lives of those to whom they preached. It was the Lord who “gave opportunity” to serve, not Paul or Apollos. It was the Lord who “called the shots.”

Paul taught that there was only one Lord Jesus (Ep 4:4-6). And since there is only one Lord to whom all must submit, then there can be no other lords with authority among the disciples. During His earthly ministry, Jesus forewarned the apostles, ***“Do not be called masters, for one is your Master, the Christ”*** (Mt 23:10). The apostles were not established as masters among the people. Jesus admonished them, ***“But he who is greatest among you will be your servant”*** (Mt 23:11). The apostles, therefore, were sent forth by Jesus, not as masters over the people, but as servants to minister the authoritative word of God to the people. The authority was in the message, not in the messengers as masters. Paul reminded the Corinthians, ***“For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel ...”*** (1 Co 1:17). The authority was in the gospel, not in Paul as one with authority to baptize. To assume that he,

No leader of the ekklesia is to function as a lord.

Apollos and Peter went forth as masters from Christ, would be thinking carnally (See 1 Co 3:3,4). They did not go forth as authorities, lords or masters, but as bondservants of the one Lord Jesus Christ (Mt 23:10; Mk 10:42,43).

Chapter 15

Using Our “Bible Dictionary”

When the subject of responsibility among God’s people is discussed, the discussion must include the leadership that God instituted which should exist among free people. And when discussing leadership, we are usually discussing either the teachers or the designated shepherds of the flock of God.

This has always been a tempestuous area of theological study, especially in the industrial/business cultures of the West and the tribal cultures where such exists in the world today. These cultures flourish with societies of lords, masters and authorities. Success in the industrial/business cultures of the West depends on management. And management is determined by personnel who maintain quality control.

The ekklesia does not exist because of organization.

Western culture is based on productivity that is the result of good management that controls and directs the factory output. In Western theological camps, therefore, we would expect that the concepts of lords, masters and authorities would saturate the thinking of the Western citizen. He cannot help but be what his culture dictates. Unfortunately, much of his cultural thinking and behavior has influenced his in-

terpretation and application of the Scriptures, especially when discussing his attempts to exercise authority and control among the ekklesia of free people.

The Western Christian has often allowed his Western culture of productivity that is based on management to determine the “organization” and “productivity” of the servants of the ekklesia. What has subsequently happened is that the church has been formed into an institutional organization that is governed with a management structure that is characteristic of the best of the corporations of the West. Throw a copy of the Scriptures into a Western society and you will have debates and struggles over who is in charge. Throw a copy of the Scriptures into a camp of slaves and everyone will just go to work, not arguing over who calls the shots or gets the glory. It is like one brother prayed at a men’s breakfast, “Father, why do we men always struggle over who is in control, when the women just do the job, and then ask, ‘What’s next?’”

It would be good here to briefly study the Greek words that are used in the New Testament in reference to the designated leaders of those who have been set free. These would be the leaders that God gave the ekklesia the right to designate in or-

der to inspire the community of free people to excel in enjoying the abundant life.

We must first, however, caution ourselves with a few fundamental principles in reference to the use of words from our secular dictionaries and Greek lexicons. When determining the definition of words that were used by the Holy Spirit in order to convey the message of the will of God, we must always keep in mind that the original definitions of the words were taken from a secular dictionary of the times. The *koine* Greek word definitions, therefore, were determined by their use in the secular environment of the times when the New Testament was written. We would expect, therefore, that the words would have a flavor of “worldly thinking” because of their common use in the political, business and pagan religious society of the 1st century. When defining these words in the context of the Scriptures, therefore, we must allow the New Testament, and specifically the context in which the words were used in the New Testament, to be the final dictionary of the words. The Holy Spirit used commonly spoken words of secular society in order to convey spiritual truths in the Bible. He had to use the words of the 1st century dictionary in order to reveal the word of God. He did not have a “holy dictionary” in order to inscribe the word of God. Bible interpreters, therefore, must always be cautioned concerning the Hebrew and

The final dictionary of Bible words is the biblical context.

Greek lexicon definitions of the words that are used in the Bible, **for the person who produced the Hebrew or Greek lexicons determined the definition of the words by how those words were commonly used in secular society at the time the Holy Spirit chose them to inscribe Holy Scriptures.**

An example of the preceding would be words in reference to rule and submission that were used in a business or political context of the 1st century. It is interesting to note that the Greek word for “authority” (*exousia*) **is never used in the New Testament in reference to the leaders of the church in their relationship with the church.**

Some feel that we should assume that authority is inherent in the function of the leaders of the ekklesia. But such an assumption seems to contravene Jesus’ statement that there be no authorities, lords or masters among His people (Mt 23:10; Mk 10:42,43). Since the word “authority” carries with it the meaning that one can dictate mandates that must be obeyed, we would suggest that

Authority means that obedience is required.

this word not be used in reference to the leaders’ relationship to the church of free people. Since the word is not used in the New Testament in reference to the leaders’ relationship with the church, then it would be reasonable to conclude that if we are seeking to use Bible words to explain the function of the ekklesia, it is a word that should not be used today. As stated before, the use of the word “responsibility” seems more in harmony

with the function of the leaders as defined and demonstrated by Jesus (See Jn 13:1-17).

We will discover in the following definitions words as “oversee,” “submit,” and “obey.” However, we must be cautious about assuming that worldly definitions of these words are the foundation upon which they are used in the New Testament. As previously stated, it is the function of the leadership of the church to serve and inspire a community of free people to enjoy their abundant life in Christ (Mk 10:44,45). It is thus the responsibility of the church to submit to the leaders’ service and inspirational leadership (See 1 Co 16:15,16; Hb 13:17). Our understanding of the following words in reference to the leaders, therefore, is consistently understood without violating the mandate of Jesus that there be no lords, authorities or masters among us who would seek to bring free people into the bondage of the dictates of men.

1. *Episkopos*: This word is translated with various English words, such as, “bishop,” “overseer,” “oversight,” or “seeing over” (At 20:28, Ph 1:1; 1 Tm 3:1,2; Ti 1:7; 1 Pet 5:2). *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* defines this word to mean “an overseer, a man charged with the duty of seeing that things to be done by others are done rightly; any curator, guardian or superintendent; hence **in the N.T. a guardian of souls, one who watches over their welfare**” [Emphasis mine, R.E.D.]. In a New Testament context, the word would

refer to one who has been designated with the responsibility of seeing after others with the purpose of encouraging their commitment to the work they have voluntarily chosen to do. Since one has voluntarily committed himself to serve Jesus, then it would be the responsibility of the *episkopos* to encourage by example and teaching those who have committed themselves to serve the Lord. It is the responsibility of the *episkopos* to look out over the flock in order to see if there are those who are falling short of their commitment to Jesus. If they find someone who is falling short, it is the responsibility of the *episkopos* to encourage the weak to maintain their commitment. The *episcopos* does this by their godly example and teaching the word of God.

2. *Oikonomos*: This word is used in the New Testament in reference to the function of the *episkopos*. The *oikonomos* are God’s stewards who minister the flock of God. The contemporary use of the word in the 1st century was of one who functioned as “the manager of a household or of household af-

The oikonomos functions through teaching and example.

fairs: especially a steward, manager, superintendent ... to whom the head of the house or proprietor has entrusted the management of his affairs, the care of receipts and expenditures ...” (*Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Tes-*

The *episkopos* looks over the *ekklelesia* in search of needs to service.

tament). Designated leaders of the household of God, therefore, are entrusted with the responsibility of being stewards of God’s house. It is for this reason that Paul asked in the midst of giving Timothy instructions concerning the qualities of those who would serve as elders, “*If a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?*” (1 Tm 3:5). Through the teaching of the word of God, the *oikonomos* as a group of designated men manage the direction of the house of God in order that it go in the right direction. They have been entrusted with the responsibility of being shepherd/teachers in order to guide the house of God according to God’s will. The only way they can guide the flock according to God’s will, therefore, is by teaching the word of God and living godly examples of how that word should be implemented in the lives of the believers. They can thus carry out their responsibility as the *oikonomos* only through the authority of the word of God and the example of their behavior.

3. *Poimaino*: This word is commonly translated “pastor” or “shepherd” (Ep 4:11; 1 Pt 2:25; 5:1,2). Thayer’s definition of the word is in reference to the work of a shepherd with a flock. “To feed, to tend a flock, keep sheep; ... to rule, govern ... to furnish pasturage or food; to nourish.” It is the responsibility of the *poimaino* to feed the flock. In the New Testament context, feeding is in reference to pasturing the flock on the food of God’s word. When the church designates pastors of the flock, therefore, they

are designating teachers who have the responsibility of teaching the flock and manifesting living examples of the teaching. It is for this reason that one of the qualifications of a pastor is his ability to teach “so that he may be able by sound teaching both to exhort and refute those who contradict” (Ti 1:9; see 1 Tm 3:2). A person may live a godly example before others. However, if he does not have a knowledge of the word of God, and the ability to teach it to others, then he cannot function as a shepherd of the flock.

The *poimaino* manifests their teaching in the examples of their lives.

In the secular definition of this word there is the meaning “to rule, govern.” The use of the word in the political and business world of the 1st century carried this definition. But if we bring this definition into the context of the *ekklesia*, then the leaders would be appointed to be autocratic leaders of the flock of God as officials in government. Such would be contrary to Jesus’ mandate that there be no lords, authorities or masters among His people (Mt 23:10; Mk 10:42,43). We must keep in mind that the Greek words that are used in the New Testament were also used in the business and political world of 1st century. Therefore, the New Testament must be the final dictionary as to the meaning of the words in reference to God’s people.

4. *Presbuteros*: This is one of the most common words used in the New Testament in reference to the designated leaders of the church. This word is often

translated “elder” or “presbyter” (At 11:30; 14:23; 20:28; Ti 1:5,7). *Presbuteros* is an adjective which literally refers to one who is older in age. In 1 Timothy 5:1,2, the word is used in reference to both men and women.

The presbuteros are those who are older in age.

In 1 Timothy 5:1 the word is used in the masculine gender, but in verse 2 it is *presbuteras*, the feminine gender. Reference is to older women who were to be given great respect.

The leaders as the *episcopos* are to function as those who see over the flock of God in order to direct and care for the flock through example and teaching. They are to be given great respect because of their age. The word *presbuteros* focuses thus on the dignity of the leaders, both of the elder men and elder women. Older men and women have responsibilities in reference to nurturing the flock of God.

Though the feminine of *presbuteros* (*presbuteras*) is used in reference to older women, we must not assume that the older women have an officiating capacity among the disciples. Some would conclude that *presbuteros* would mean that the men have an officiating capacity in the church because of some secular connotations in the definition of the word. But if we follow this logic, then we would have to contend that there is an officiating capacity of the older women. If we would assume that there is authority in the definition with reference to the older men (*presbuteros*), then to be consistent we would have to assume

that there is authority with the older women (*presbuteras*). However, it must be noted that nothing is stated in the New Testament concerning elders (*presbuteros*) who would function in an officiating capacity in managing the affairs of the church because of the Spirit’s use of the word *presbuteros*. The *presbuteros* functioned in seeing over the needs of the disciples, tending the flock of God, caring for the needs of the church, and setting godly examples for the sheep to follow. Older women (*presbuteras*) are to function in the same manner in reference to the younger sisters. This does not mean that the older women have authority to command the younger women.

5. Proistameno: This Greek word is translated “direct well,” “over you,” or “leader.” Paul wrote, “*Let the elders who direct well be counted worthy of double honor ...*” (1 Tm 5:17). Also, “*... know those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord ...*” (1 Th 5:12).

Thayer defines the word to mean “to set or place before; to set over; to be over, to superintend, preside over, rule.” This is the one who “manages well” his own household (1 Tm 3:4).

The proistameno direct the ekklesia by the word of God.

These are leaders who assume their responsibility to make sure that the organic function of the body is going according to the directions of God. Because of their knowledge of and obedience to the word of God, they direct the body to function according to the will of God. As a father maintains the spiritual direction of his family, so the elders

as a group manage the spiritual direction of the church.

It must be noted in conclusion to this point that none of the preceding words were ever used in the New Testament as titles. They were used as adjectives to define the nature and ministry of these men in reference to the body of disciples. When we refer to someone as an “elder of the church,” we are not giving the person a title. We are simply identifying

what he is or his ministry among the disciples. Unfortunately, in our efforts to set ourselves forward in some assumed office, we want to be known as “The Pastor” or “The Bishop.” But we must be careful with the use of titles among ourselves lest we seek to exalt ourselves above one another. Jesus had this thought in mind when He said, *“And call no one your father on earth, for One is your Father, He who is in heaven”* (Mt 23:9).

Chapter 16

Elders Are Servants To Whom We Submit

When discussing the responsibility of leadership among the disciples, the subject of elders (pastors, shepherds, presbyters) is often the center of focus. The discussion concerning the leadership of the elder must center around the qualities of life these men manifest, which qualities are given in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. Paul delivers in these two texts qualities or attributes that must be possessed by those who would be designated as shepherds of the flock. Paul does not give a checklist of characteristics by which one would be qualified or disqualified as a candidate for a political party. He was simply giving Timothy and Titus a description of the spiritual nature and behavior of those who would be set forth before the church to function as leading disciples. Their leadership among the sheep is based on **what** they are in behavior, not **who** they are. The validation of the proposed elder, therefore, is based on the type of person he is among the

sheep of God before he is considered for the function as a designated shepherd.

The fact that those who qualify to be shepherds must be behaving in the function of a shepherd before their designation indicates that there is little life change in their designation as a shepherd. Their behavior as a shepherd before their designation qualifies them to be set forward by the church to be shepherds.

Since such men functioned in the work of shepherding without authority before their “official appointment,” assumes that they can function as

shepherds without authority after they are designated. Their designation, therefore, is not for the purpose of giving them authority, but to notify the church that they are the ones to whom they must go for spiritual guidance. The only difference in the life of an individual after he is des-

A shepherd is identified as a shepherd before he is designated a shepherd.

igned to be a shepherd is that he is to continue to focus his attention primarily on the flock, and the flock is to look to him for spiritual guidance.

Though a person may have a natural disposition for leadership among men, shepherds of the flock must be continually fine-tuned by the word of God as they grow as designated shepherds. The attributes of their disposition must be molded by God through His word. Unless a prospective elder is of a submissive disposition to the word of God, he has disqualified himself from any designation to be a shepherd. One of the first indications by which the church can thus determine if one has the attributes to function as an elder is that he must be an obedient student of the word of God before his designation. It is through submission to the word of God that the Holy Spirit prepares individuals to be shepherds of the flock of God. The flock thus accepts the leadership of the elders because of their example of submission to the word of God.

The word of God, therefore, is the standard by which men are determined to be shepherds of the flock. Their submission to the word of God manifests their character, and thus, draws those who have obeyed the word to submit to their leadership. In this way, the elders are first servants of the Lord Jesus Christ, and then, servants of the body of Christ. They are servants be-

**The character
of the shepherds
is identified
by their
submission to
the word of God.**

cause the word of God is working in their lives. They are not masters because they have assumed an officiating position to which the church must submit in obedience. Those who are not thorough students of the word of God find it easy to become lords of the flock. When they cannot instruct by word and godly example, they resort to leadership by command.

It is for the preceding reasons that true elders would never resort to rule by command. They do not see themselves in official positions of authority, but with opportunities to service the needs of others. Their leadership is not by compulsion, but by the influential example of their submitted lives to the word of God. **Those who do not have such influence among the flock of God cannot serve as elders.** This is the concept that Jesus taught in Mark 10:44. *“But whoever desires to be great among you, will be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first will be the bondservant of all”* (Mk 10:43,44). If one would lead among God’s people, he must lead through service and example, not position. The leadership of the shepherds, therefore, is not because of a supposed position, **but because those who need their service seek out their service.** The submission of the church in reference to the shepherds is based on the willingness of the church to be served by their shepherds.

Instead of being the “high authorities” among the disciples, Paul instructed both Timothy and Titus that elders were to be rebuked when in error (1 Tm 5:20). They were to be rebuked publicly by the

church. If the elders assumed the position of being officiating lords over the flock of God, then the flock is under no obligation to submit to such lordship (1 Pt 5:3). Nowhere in the New Testament is it stated that the church should submit herself to those who would function as officiating officials of church affairs. The fact that the ekklesia has the right to bring elders to account for disobedience teaches that the elders are accountable to the ekklesia in reference to their behavior.

The fact that Paul instructed Timothy to correct those elders who sinned reveals that there is no autonomous authority in the example of the elders. The elders are to lead by example (1 Pt 5:3), but their living examples are not directly inspired by God. The church is to follow their examples only as they follow Jesus (1 Co 11:1). The fact that men are fallible in their obedience to the word of God is evidence that the example of any man is worthy to be followed only insofar as the example complies with the word of God.

If the shepherds of the flock are not to lord over the flock, and thus do not have the authority to dictate laws for the church, then they must serve under the authority of Christ. They must serve by the consent of the flock. By consent of the flock they are not allowed to make decisions that are contrary to the wishes of the church. This does not mean that the shepherds cannot make decisions contrary to all wishes of the flock. It is

The church has the right to bring sinning elders to account.

the responsibility of the shepherds to lead according to the word of God. If the majority of the flock seeks to walk contrary to the word of God, then with the word of God the shepherds must rebuke the wayward by the authority of the word. *“Therefore, rebuke them [the wayward] sharply so that they may be sound in the faith”* (Ti 1:13). As the evangelist who exhorts with the word of God, so must the elders. *“These things speak and exhort and rebuke with all authority”* (Ti 2:15).

We must always keep in mind that every member of the church has a right to be heard in every matter of the church. No individual or group of individuals was ever given the right to function as a governing board of the church with arbitrary authority. The leaders of the church have no authority to bind where God has not bound. The definition of denominationalism rests in the fact that men have taken it upon themselves to make official binding decisions for the church to obey. Some groups have written their official decisions in books of law, and thus defined their particular denomination by the official decisions that have been made by their leaders of the past or present. But God never gave any man the authority on earth to bind decisions of men on the church (Rv 22:18,19; 2 Jn 9,10).

Good leaders do not focus in some supposed official authority, but on their responsibility to lead the flock of God

A denomination is started when men exercise authority in the lives of the people.

according to the word of God and their godly example of obedience (1 Pt 5:1-5). And in leading, they assume their responsibility to teach the word of God to the flock. Those leaders who have little knowledge of the word of God, or are simply lazy in study of the word, find it easier to command the church as a master. In their willful ignorance of the word

of God, those leaders of religious groups who seek a following will always resort to lordship, rather than leading people to the word of God by their obedient example. It is easier to command than to lead by example. Unfortunately, many leaders take the easy way in leadership. It is much easier to be a lord and a servant.

Chapter 17

Shepherds Serve The Flock

Paul informed the Ephesian elders that the Holy Spirit had made them “overseers” (*presbuteros*) of the flock (At 20:28). The English word “overseer” in this context simply means that the elders were to **see over** the needs of the people. Those who would assume that authority is inherent in the word “overseer” believe that the term indicates an officiating office of power. But consider the fact that the English word “over” in the definition of the *presbuteros* is not used in reference to “authority over,” but in reference to shepherds “looking over” the flock. “Looking over” assumes responsibility of the flock, not authority over the flock. In Acts 20:28, Paul reminded the elders of Ephesus that the Holy Spirit had made them responsible for the flock.

Peter exhorted elders to “*feed the flock of God that is among you*” (1 Pt 5:2). The term “among” is used over one hundred times in the New Testament in reference to the relationship that the disciples have with one another. In the context of 1 Peter 5, it is used in reference to the relationship that the shepherds have

with the sheep. The words “fellowship” and “among” do not denote any official rank or hierarchy of authority among the disciples. These words do not portray that a certain group of individuals have

The ekklesia is a relational community of individual disciples.

officiating authority over other disciples or groups of disciples. The words “fellowship” and “among” define a relationship wherein everyone has all things in common. The ekklesia is a relational group of fellow workers who have all things in common. The ekklesia is a fellowship of servants who work as an organism with mutual concern for the needs of one another.

It is often heard that some have arbitrary authority to make the decisions for the flock of God. It is true that decisions must be made in our efforts to accomplish the work of God. But would it not be better to refer to the making of decisions as a responsibility of those who would lead? These decisions would not be mandates, but simply the result of dis-

cussions by the entire ekklesia as to what could or could not be done in reference to the work of God. Some have assumed that the leaders have autonomous authority to make arbitrary decisions outside the consent of the body, and thus, they have the right to function parallel to the body. **But has anyone ever considered the fact that there is no case in the New Testament where the elders arbitrarily made any decisions for the church as an autonomous officiating body of men?** When decisions were made, such decisions, as in the case of Acts 15, were made with the consent of the apostles, elders and the whole church (At 15:22). When Paul wrote to the Corinthians about taking up a contribution for the famine victims in Judea, nowhere in either 1 or 2 Corinthians did he ever speak of elders making the decisions. In fact, in all the problems that faced the Corinthian church there is never a call on the elders to make the decisions for the church. This would be true of all the epistles. There are no instructions in the epistles where the elders are called on to make decisions on behalf of the church. The writers of the New Testament wrote inspired instructions to the whole church in the epistles in order that the whole church assume the responsibility to correct the problems among them.

We can assume, however, that the elders had to make decisions. A case in point would be when famine relief funds

There are no New Testament examples of elders working as a separate group from the ekklesia.

were delivered to the elders of the church in Judea (At 11:28-30). When the funds were delivered to the elders, we can assume that the elders had to make decisions concerning how the funds were to be distributed. We would also assume, however, that this great responsibility was carried out by the consent of the church, for the funds were meant for all the church. But nothing is said concerning how the funds were distributed among the needy. In the silence of the Scriptures on this matter, the Holy Spirit is saying that we have the right to determine for ourselves as to how we would accomplish such things.

We have observed that most elders (shepherds) make decisions according to how they have observed that other elders make decisions in other churches. A group of men (the elders) assemble in a room by themselves. They proceed through an agenda of points that gives an outline of what discussions and decisions are to be made for the day. The decisions are made and recorded in the minutes of the meeting. The decisions are then announced from the pulpit on Sunday morning as, "The elders have decided"

We must keep in mind that there is no description of this sort of function among the elders in the New Testament. We might rightly assume that such meetings took place, but we would have to fill in the blanks concerning the existence of such meetings, as well as what was discussed during such meetings and the decisions that were made. But remember, we are "filling in the blanks." And

it is truly unwise to base one's argument on "blanks."

If we would restore the function of the body of the New Testament ekklesia, then it is imperative that we take another look at how decisions were made in the New Testament by the disciples. It is never stated that the elders of the church made any arbitrary decisions for the church. Neither is it stated that the evangelists exercised some supposed "evangelistic authority" in making decisions for the church. Even in the apostle Paul's relationship with Apollos, Paul never commanded Apollos to work against his will. On one occasion he "strongly encouraged" Apollos to go to the Corinthian church, but he never commanded him (1 Co 16:12). There is no such thing as "evangelistic authority" in the New Testament.

What we do see in the New Testament is the consensus of the ekklesia making decisions. When the New Testament writers wrote their inspired letters to the church, the whole church was called on to make decisions to correct the problems about which the writers wrote. There is no information concerning the function of elders for about the first fifteen years of the existence of the church.

We find them participating in making the decisions that were made in Acts 15. When Paul and Barnabas were sent from Antioch to attend the Jerusalem meeting of Acts 15, they were sent by the church, not by the elders, though the elders in Antioch were a part of the church (At 15:2,3). Before this time, when a decision had to be made, the apostles instructed the church to make their own decisions (At 6:1-7). When it came to sending out Paul and Barnabas in Acts 13:1-3, the whole church gathered in order to send them out. We never see in the New Testament a picture of the elders functioning in an officiating relationship with the church in order to make arbitrary decisions for the church. The organizational function of all the ekklesia is manifested in the following statement by Paul: "... *from whom the whole body being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working of each part, causes growth of the body to the edifying of itself in love*" (Ep 4:16).

The ekklesia functions with the consensus of every member.

Chapter 18

Submit To Loving Service

The Greek word for authority is *exousia*. **This word is never used in reference to the relationship of any preacher or elder with the body of believers.** It is never used in reference to the function of elders or any board of

members making decisions for the church. Neither is it used in reference to the members' attitude toward those who function as leaders among the disciples. If the leadership of the church has been invested with some type of authority over

the church, then we would certainly question such because the obvious Greek word *exousia* (authority) that would be used to explain this relationship is never used in reference to the leadership of the church.

The word *exousia* is used in 2 Corinthians 10:8, but it is used in reference to a Christ-sent apostles' authority to exercise miraculous power to discipline the church. Paul was about to exercise this authority (power) in Corinth upon those who had denied his apostleship by doing that about which we now speak, that is, the assuming of authority by some over the flock of God. Paul wrote to the Corinthians so he would not have to come to them with the rod of discipline. He would, however, if the arrogant false teachers did not repent before he arrived.

We do find the use of the word *exousia* in the context of those who exercise official authority to command and demand obedience. In reference to his former life, Paul wrote, "*And many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority [exousia] from the chief priests*" (At 26:10). "*As I went to Damascus with authority [exousia] and commission from the chief priests*" (At 26:12). Is this the authority that we want our leaders to exercise in reference to their relationship with the church? Jesus said that this is the authority that is among those of the world. But it would not be so among His people (Mk 10:43,44).

**The authority
of the word of God
is the foundation
for leadership.**

Because some unfortunately assume that authority to dictate orders to the church is inherent in specific commands to submit to the leadership, it would be good

**Worldly rulers
exercise authority,
but servants
exercise service.**

to focus on those passages where most of the controversy lies in reference to such supposed authority. These would be the statements of Paul in 1 Timothy 5:17 and the Hebrew writer in Hebrews 13:17.

In 1 Timothy 5:17 Paul instructed, "*Let the elders who **direct well** be counted worthy of double honor.*" Some of the older versions use the word "rule" for the Greek word *proistemi* that is used in this verse. Hebrews 13:17 states, "*Obey those who **lead** you and be submissive ...*" (See also vss 7,24). Again, the word "lead" is sometimes translated "rule" by some translations. The rendition is from the Greek word *hegeomai*. In view of the Church of England's influence in the translation of the *King James Version*, we can understand why their translators favored the secular definition "rule" in these two passages. The Church of England, and other religious groups that participated in the translation of the *King James Version*, consisted of a hierarchy of authorities in their churches. In the Church of England, King James I was at the top of the hierarchy. Since the institutional structure of authority in the Church of England was established by the time the *King James Version* was released in 1611, we would

assume that in reference to any passages that would refer to “church government,” there would be the flavor of authoritarian rule sprinkled throughout the version. Since the Church of England wanted to maintain a hierarchy of authority in the church, it would have been only natural for the translators to focus more on the secular definition of the words *proistemi* and *hegeomai*, rather than the New Testament foundation principle of servant-hood leadership that was defined by Jesus in Mark 10:35-45.

In order to understand the statements of 1 Timothy 5:17 and Hebrews 13:17, our foundation upon which we would interpret what is meant must be Jesus’ mandate that there be no lords, authorities or masters among His disciples (Mt 23:10; Mk 10:42,43). The numerous scriptures that emphasize the mutual servanthood of the disciples to one another must be the guiding principle by which we would understand these and other passages on the subject of church leadership.

The context of 1 Timothy 5:17 is in reference to the elders. However, we do not necessarily need to assume this of the Hebrews 13:17 passage. The subject of elders is not in the entire chapter of Hebrews 13, and thus, as interpreters we would only assume that the passage would include the function of the elders of the church.

We would, however, assume that the passage is also discussing leadership beyond the elders. It would be better to simply

follow the context of the passage by understanding it in the context of the leaders of the church. 1 Corinthians 16:15,16 would be a context where Stephanas and his household had dedicated themselves

**All who would
be served,
must submit.**

to the service of the disciples. We are not told that Stephanas was an elder. Nevertheless, the church is instructed to “*submit yourselves to such, and to everyone who works with us and labors.*” Assuming that the “household of Stephanas” included sister Stephanas, then we would conclude that Paul exhorted the Corinthians to submit also to her service. It was not that Paul’s call for their submission assumed that sister Stephanas was given authority in the church. His call for submission was that people submit to the service of the entire household of Stephanas who had dedicated themselves to minister to the saints. The same thought is in the meaning of Hebrews 13:17. The Hebrews 13:17 instructions would fall into the context of “everyone who works” in reference to the leadership of the church. This does not mean, therefore, that we would assume that reference would only be to the elders of the church in Hebrews 13:17.

The Greek word for “direct well” in 1 Timothy 5:17 is different from the word that is translated “lead” in Hebrews 13:17, though the word “rule” is used by some translations to render the words of both texts. The Greek word that is used in Hebrews 13:17 is also used in Acts 15:22 in reference to Barsabbas and Silas who were “*leading men among the breth-*

**Submission
to another
does not mean
that submission
is to authority.**

ren.” No one would argue that Barsabbas and Silas were “ruling” men among the brethren. They were leading through the example of their teaching and service, not because they possessed some official position, and thus ruled over the brethren.

**Leading in serving
does not assume
that one
has authority.**

There is no teaching in the New Testament that would infer evangelistic authority among some who would appoint themselves as pastors of a particular church. This concept is simply foreign to the teachings of the New Testament. However, if we understand that the word *hegeomai* that is used in Hebrews 13:17 should be translated “rule,” then we could say that both Barsabbas and Silas had evangelistic authority among the brethren in Jerusalem. But in the context of the Acts 15 passage, there were elders who were present in the Jerusalem church. Would both the elders and men as Barsabbas and Silas have officiating authority? And if so, who had the most authority? Could leading men as Barsabbas and Silas step up and assume more authority than the elders, men who had fulfilled qualities and qualifications to be designated as elders?

The Jewish readers to whom the Hebrew writer wrote would have understood the meaning of Hebrews 13:17. Though the passage was written in Greek, they would have understood the concept of a shepherd that is inherent in the word *hegeomai*. The Hebrew word *ra-ah* (rule) meant “to feed,” “shepherd,” “care for,” or “rule.” The noun form of the

word, *ro-eh*, means “a shepherd.” If we used the example of Barsabbas and Silas as “leading men” among the brethren in Jerusalem, then we would conclude that they were leading through teaching and ministry. Elders are to feed the flock and watch over the flock. Their function is not a legal mandate to demand obedience of the flock to their official decisions. They are to nurture the flock by teaching the word of God. They are to be examples to the believers (1 Pt 5:3), shepherds of the flock (At 20:28; 1 Pt 5:2), teachers of the word (1 Tm 3:2; Ti 1:9), ministers to the sick (Js 5:14), and be those who watch over the flock (At 20:28). Elders are servants. They are not members of an executive board of directors.

In order to understand the meaning of Hebrews 13:17, consider the passage itself. It interprets its meaning. “*Obey those who lead you and be submissive, for they watch for your souls as those who must give account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.*” When a servant leader approaches one who is falling short of his commitment to Jesus, and he is turned away or rejected by the backslider, the servant leader suffers grief in his heart. He is discouraged. However, when a lord with presumed authority approaches the same backslider and is turned away, he does not suffer grief, but frustration, and possibly anger. Those who think that they have authority respond with frustration and anger

**Submission
brings joy
to faithful
servants.**

when their “authority” is rejected. But the rejected servant leader suffers grief because he cannot carry out his responsibility to shepherd the wayward disciple. It is for this reason that we must submit to the efforts of “those who watch for our souls” in order to spare them grief. If our lack of submission to their godly examples of work causes them grief, then we could possibly discourage them from ministering to our needs, and thus, we would cheat ourselves in discouraging the caring leader from approaching us again. We submit to the service of the leaders, therefore, for our own benefit.

We want the leaders to watch out for our souls. We need their encouragement. They need ours. And because we need one another’s encouragement, we submit to their service in order that they not be discouraged.

If we take the concept of authority out of the context of Hebrews 13:17, we can understand the passage upon the foundation of what Jesus said in Mark 10:35-45. When free men submit to the loving service of those who are looking out for their souls, then they experience the abundant life. This is the organic nature of the ekklesia.

Chapter 19

Effective Leadership Is Based On Submission

In reference to servanthood leadership, we would place an interlude here concerning the effectiveness of servant leaders. Instead of focussing our attention on the leadership styles of the world—Jesus told us not to do that—we can understand the nature of the leadership of the ekklesia by constantly reminding ourselves that leadership among the disciples is always based on the willingness of one disciple to submit to the loving service of another (Ep 5:21).

The effectiveness of the servant leader depends on the submission of those he seeks to serve. This is a world turned upside down in reference to leadership. This is why it is often so difficult for carnally minded men to understand the nature of the leadership that Jesus intended for His people. In the world, effective leadership is almost entirely de-

pendent on the ability of the leader. But Jesus came with a different concept of leadership. The effectiveness of the leader among His disciples would depend on the loving concern and godly behavior of the leaders and the spirit of submission of those who are served.

Now consider the preceding in view of the nature of the leadership that Jesus lived before His disciples. He came to serve (Mk 10:44,45).

However, His service was useless in the lives of the rebellious. Jesus did not unconditionally mandate the salvation of all men. Repentant believers had to submit humbly to what He had to offer in reference to their salvation. If there is no submission, then there would be no salvation.

It is the same in reference to the lead-

**Submission
is the key
to effective
leadership.**

ers of His disciples. Their leadership is effective only when others submit to their service, just as Jesus. Leaders among the disciples, therefore, can do nothing for the people unless the people submit to their service. The leaders can work in response to their own salvation (2 Co 4:15; Ph 2:12), but they cannot lead the people unless the people submit to their example of work and service of their needs.

It would be good here, therefore, to remind ourselves of what the Holy Spirit said in reference to our spirit of submission. The ekklesia is a community of the submitted. It is a community of those who have humbly submitted to the kingdom reign of Jesus in their hearts.

1. Christians have submitted to the righteousness of God (Rm 10:3).
2. All Christians are to submit to those who give themselves to ministry (1 Co 16:16).
3. Christians are to submit to one another in the fear of the Lord (Ep 5:21).
4. Christians have submitted to God (Js 4:7).
5. Christians have submitted to every ordinance of man (1 Pt 2:13,14).
6. The younger are to submit to the older (1 Pt 5:5).
7. Christians have humbled themselves as children (Mt 18:4).
8. Christians are exalted by God because they have humbled themselves (Mt 23:12).
9. Christians associate with those of humble positions (Rm 12:16).

10. God gives grace to the humble (Js 4:6).
11. Christians are those who have humbled themselves in the sight of the Lord (Js 4:10).
12. Therefore, Christians are to be submissive (Hb 13:17).

The ekklesia is defined by her nature of submission. Now take this character of submission to the context of Hebrews 13:17 and similar passages. The disciples are to submit to servant leaders because these leaders have dedicated themselves to submit to the needs of the saints (1 Co 16:15,16).

Suppose two leaders, as Barsabbas and Silas, sought to lead the disciples by organizing a local evangelistic campaign (See At 15:22). They go to work in order to involve the church in the effort. They persuade through their zeal and teaching that it is the responsibility of the church to preach the gospel to the lost. They manifest an example in their lives of reaching out to the lost. However, no one seeks to follow their zeal and enthusiasm to be involved in an evangelistic campaign. Barsabbas and Silas are grieved because others have not submitted to their leadership. They are simply discouraged in trying to lead the church to do what it is supposed to do. They may be grieved to the point that they cancel the effort, and subsequently plan no future outreaches to involve the church in what it should

**The nature
of the ekklesia
is the submission
of the members.**

be doing, that is, taking the gospel to the world. This would not be profitable to the church. It would not be profitable because the church would be in rebellion against what they should be doing.

Every disciple must be cautious about maintaining a spirit of submission to good works that are offered by leaders who seek to step up and reach out with ministries that the church is to be doing. This is the meaning the Hebrew writer had in mind in Hebrews 13:17 when discussing our submission to those who lead

us. We are led by the example of their lives (1 Pt 5:3), not by the command of their dictates. If we were led by the command of their dictates, then they would be frustrated with us if we did not follow their example. Our obedience to follow their example, therefore, encourages our leaders to continue to lead us. This is profitable for our souls. **The effectiveness of their leadership depends on our willingness to submit to their example of good works.**

Chapter 20

Serving With Church Consent

In a religious world of “single-pastor” churches, it is sometimes difficult to see how some can miss the point that when elders (pastors) are mentioned in the New Testament, they are always mentioned in the context of a group, or plurality. There was never a one-man-band pastor (elder) of any particular group of disciples in the New Testament. For example, when Paul and Barnabas revisited some newly established disciples in the cities of Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, they “designated **elders** in every church” (At 14:23). The same was true in the city of Ephesus. “And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the **presbyters** of the church” (At 20:17). There was also a plurality of elders in the city of Philippi. Paul wrote “to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Phil-

Pastors always serve as a group, and never alone.

ippi, with the overseers and menservants” (Ph 1:1). When Paul left Titus in Crete, one of the ministries he was to accomplish was to designate **elders** in every city (Ti 1:5). And then there was the plurality of elders in Jerusalem who functioned with the entire church and the apostles in dealing with problems that were affecting the new Gentile converts (At 15:2,4,6,22). Paul and Barnabas delivered famine funds to the elders of the church in Jerusalem (At 11:30). And finally, the Greek word *presbuterion* is used in 1 Timothy 4:14 to refer to a group of men. “Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the **presbytery**.”

There was never one elder (pastor) designated for an independent group of disciples. Pastors (shepherds) always worked together to shepherd the many

assemblies of the disciples that were scattered throughout the 1st century cities. Their work as a group of shepherds was a guard against any one person who might assume a position of authority over any particular group of disciples, a situation that is so prevalent today. **It is impossible to find any statement in the New Testament that remotely states that one pastor (shepherd) ever had specific authority within himself to control or mandate decisions for a particular group of disciples.** When elders functioned as a group, they are to be submissive to one another, as well as to the needs of the church. They are even accountable to the church in reference to their behavior (1 Tm 5:19,20). They are responsible to the spiritual needs of the church, and thus, they must function as a group in making any decisions in reference to their ministry to serve the church as a whole.

1 Timothy 4:14 is a case where the elders worked as a group in conjunction with the church in sending forth an evangelist. Paul wrote to Timothy that he must not neglect the gift that he received from Paul at the time he was sent forth “with the laying on of the hands of the *presbytery* [presbuteros].” The

The shepherds function as a group in harmony with the whole church.

presbuteros (plural) would be a body, or group of elders. They would be

a group of pastors who worked among the disciples, which group gave a commission to the young Timothy when he was initially sent forth with Paul. How-

ever, not by any stretch of the imagination would we conclude that these elders functioned as an officiating “board” who gave Timothy permission to go with Paul in his mission travels. Paul made the decision that Timothy go with him (At 16:1-3). He did not ask for the permission of the elders. Neither did Timothy ask for permission. The “laying on of the hands of the *presbuteros*” was simply the elders functioning as a group to send Timothy forth from among his fellow disciples, as Paul and Barnabas also had hands laid on them in Antioch in order that they be sent forth by the disciples of Antioch (At 13:1-3). The elders functioned as a group to give their blessing that Timothy go forth as an evangelist. In the Acts 13 case, it was the “prophets and teachers,” with the whole church, who fasted and prayed, and then gave their blessing when they “*laid their hands on them*” (At 13:3).

Some have assumed that the elders as a group should have the officiating authority to mandate decisions for the church. The elders as a group are viewed by these to be a corporate board of directors who hand down dictates to the church, which dictates must be obeyed by the church. For example, one writer strongly asserted, “The authority of the eldership in the church is the authority of Christ. To rebel against the scriptural eldership is to rebel against Christ.” This is an extreme statement, but it does reveal the view of some concerning the official position and authority of elders. Holding such a view, however, is void of any support from the Scriptures and is

contrary to the instructions of Jesus that there be no lords, authorities and masters among His people. It is a view that lays the foundation for apostasy. It is a belief that led to the early departure of the saints from the total lordship of Jesus over the individual believer, which apostasy eventually led to the development of the Roman Catholic Church. Lordship is claimed by the Catholic Church, which church has a hierarchy of authorities, lords and masters.

The fact is that **there is no Scripture throughout the entire New Testament where any clearly stated decision-making took place on the part of the elders as an exclusive and autonomous group.** We do see examples where the elders worked with the church in making decisions (At 15), and for blessing decisions that were already made (1 Tm 4:14). But there are no cases in the New Testament where a group of elders acted as an autonomous group to mandate decisions for the church.

Elders as a group, however, must make decisions. There is no question about this. In order for them to function as shepherds of the flock, decisions must be made among themselves in reference to fulfill their responsibilities to see over the flock of God. However, they must make their decisions with the consent of the church. The whole church cannot at all times be involved with making all the minor decisions that must be made in reference to

Decisions become mandates when there is no consent of the ekklesia.

the function of the shepherds to fulfill their responsibilities. However, elders who function without the general consensus, or mandate of the church, are taking the church down the road to dictatorial lordship and apostasy. We must remember that the church follows its leadership because of their persuasion and influence, not in obedience to dictates they may make as a group of autocratic lords, authorities and masters.

We must keep in mind that if any group of men, or any individual among the flock of God, assumes the authority to mandate policies for the flock, then the flock has become institutional in structure, and thus, equal with the Catholic Church apostasy. If only one decision is mandated that is based on the supposed authority of a leader or group of leaders, then that one decision has established the basis upon which others will follow. Eventually the church will end up with a book of mandates (creed book).

Binding decisions outside the authority of the Scriptures is the foundation for establishing a denomination.

Religious groups have existed for centuries with the authority of books of mandates (creed books) that validate their existence as a unique denomination. These creed books originated from groups of men who enforced their decisions on men. The Roman Catholic Church believes in the authority of the Bible, but also in the authority of papal mandates and church traditions. Churches that have given their leaders the authority to

mandate decisions have set themselves on a course of moving away from the authority and lordship of Jesus. They are in violation of the

If Jesus has all authority, then church doctrine has no authority.

principle of Mark 10:42,43 where Jesus specifically said, “*Not so among you.*” One way to determine if one is not a Christ-centered leader is if he assumes the authority of Christ.

Chapter 21

Designation Assumes Decision-Making

A lot more is revealed in Acts 6:1-6 than simple historical facts concerning the feeding of widows. In this historical incident, we have the opportunity to revisit a situation where we can discover how the apostles functioned in relation to the church. If we could use this case to deduct some wisdom concerning leadership, we would do well. It is significant to assume that this event took place about five years after the establishment of the church. Could we assume that elders were present in the Jerusalem church at this time? We think so. Compare the historical event when Paul and Barnabas returned to the Gentile cities of Lystra, Iconium and Antioch after being gone for only a few months. When they returned, “*they designated elders in every church*” (At 14:23). If elders would have been designated within only a few months after the establishment of the church in the Gentile cities of Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, then we could certainly assume that elders existed in the Jewish church in Jerusalem after five years and by the time of the events of Acts 6:1-6.

In the historical events of what transpired in Acts 6:1-6, however, there is no

mention of the elders, though we would assume that there were elders this early in the Jerusalem church. Since the apostles were still in Jerusalem at this time—they remained in Jerusalem for about fifteen years after the establishment of the church—then we would assume that they were the ones to whom the disciples primarily went for teaching (At 2:42). So when a situation arose where some widows were being neglected, then it was only natural for the disciples to come to the apostles to make a decision to settle the dispute.

When the church approached the apostles concerning the neglect of certain widows, the apostles answered that it would not be right for them to leave their teaching the word in order to serve tables (At 6:2). As Christ-sent apostles, it was their responsibility to preach and teach the word of God. It was the responsibility of the disciples to care for one another’s needs. It was the responsibility of the church to choose “committees” in order to

When the whole church works together, the whole church is edified.

service the needs of the church. The church was thus free to choose those who would focus their energies on specific needs of the church. And thus, what the apostles advised “*pleased the whole multitude*” (At 6:5). It was the whole church that brought the matter to the attention of the apostles. It was the whole church to whom the apostles gave advice. And it was the whole church that looked out among the disciples in order to designate a group of men to service the needs of the widows.

Once the seven men were chosen, they were set before the apostles, not elders. The apostles prayed for them and laid hands on them in order to set them forth in their ministry. Now when the seven worked in order to care for the needs of the widows, decisions had to be made. What the church did in this case was to choose seven disciples to make the necessary decisions concerning the administration of the collected provisions for the widows. The church has the right to designate certain disciples for specific ministries, and subsequently, give those disciples the responsibility to make decisions in accordance with the consent of the desires of the church. If the seven men failed to function by the consent of the church, that is, neglect the responsibilities for which they were designated, then the church had the right to terminate their function, either as a group or individually. The seven men, therefore, could work only on the foundation of the consent of the church. They were not an autonomous group who had authority to function outside the will of the church to

care for the widows. If they had such authority, then they could make a decision to do something other than what they were mandated to do by the church. If they had such autonomy, then they could have distributed the provisions for the widows to something else. But they could not do this simply because they had no officiating authority to misappropriate the provisions that were designated for the widows.

It would not be working outside the wisdom of the apostles to understand the same example of the seven in reference to the designation of a group of shepherds to function in

**Committees
of servants
work in consensus
with the
whole church.**

God has given the right to the church to designate shepherds. However, these shepherds (elders) must function on the foundation of the mandate of the church to shepherd the flock. They are to be servants to the flock of God. If they begin functioning outside the mandate of the church in reference to the biblical duties of a shepherd, then they have given up their right to function as designated shepherds.

Decisions must be made in order for the shepherds to carry out their mandate that was given to them by the church. However, these decisions can never be considered authority over the church who designated them as shepherds. When shepherds function outside the consent of the church, then they are either lording over the flock or functioning outside

their mandate to shepherd the flock. Lordship by elders is defined by the actions of those who would mandate decisions for the flock that are not by the consent of the flock who designated them. There is no other definition for lordship. This is exactly what Diotrephes did, even to the point of threatening to excommunicate those who would not submit to his decisions (3 Jn 9,10).

When shepherds cease to function as shepherds, then they lose their mandate from the church to be shepherds of the church. Shepherds are not appointed to an office wherein they are established in officiating positions, and thus, they be-

come a self-perpetuating autonomous council that can function parallel to the decision-making of the whole ekklesia. They are given the responsibility by the ekklesia to function in the ministry of watching out for the souls of the ekklesia. When they cease to carry out this responsibility, then they are no longer functioning as shepherds, and thus, they are not shepherds to the flock.

The designation of shepherds by the church restricts the mandate of the Scriptures.

Chapter 22

Unity Without Lords And Masters

Jesus said, “*Do not be called ‘Rabbi,’ for One is your Teacher; and all of you are brothers*” (Mt 23:8). The ekklesia is a brotherhood of believers. The members are brothers and sisters in Christ who walk in submission to one another as servants to one another’s needs (Ep 5:21). They walk in unity that is based on their common belief and obedience to the gospel. If there were lords and masters among the brothers, then they could be commanded into unity by the authority of their leaders. This was the unity system of Diotrephes, for he threatened to cast out of the fellowship those who did not conform to his wishes (3 Jn 9,10). However, the unity of the believers is not

Unity is based on our common obedience to the gospel.

commanded by authoritative leaders, but by the common submission of each believer to the lordship of Jesus. The disciples have all things in common because they have a common salvation in Christ (Jd 3). Nowhere throughout the New Testament are the believers called into unity by authoritative councils, synods or “official” meetings of the church. The call for unity is always based on a call to submit to the authority of the word of God.

Sometimes things are understood better if they are interpreted with common sense. For example, the executive of a corporation has the authority to make his employees do this or that. If they do not, then they can be fired. If two employees cannot get along with one another, one can be fired in order to restore unity to

the company. But such authority can never exist among the disciples. The church has no bosses who can fire members. The leaders cannot make the members do anything. They cannot make them attend the assemblies. They cannot make them study their Bibles or pray. They cannot make them attend crusades or gospel meetings. If the leaders were invested with authority, they could “fire” those members who did not perform according to the wishes of the leaders. As previously stated, Diotrephes assumed authority over the disciples in 3 John 9,10. And, when there were those who did not obey his mandates, they were “fired.” They were cast out of the church (3 Jn 10). Leaders who want to assume authority over the disciples want to “fire” idle and disloyal members.

So wherein is the leadership of the leaders? It is restricted to persuasion, the example of their godly behavior, and their ministry of the word of God. The leaders lead by persuading the disciples to cooperate and follow the will of God. But this persuasion must be understood in the

Members cannot be fired for their disloyalty to the leadership of the church.

context of the responsibility of the leaders to teach the authority of the one Lord Jesus in the lives of the disciples. “*Those who continue in sin, rebuke before all so that others also may fear*” (1 Tm 5:20). As evangelists like Timothy, the leaders of the church have the responsibility to teach the word of God in order to persuade and encourage the members to con-

form to the will of God. The shepherd must know the word of God “*so that he may be able by sound teaching both to exhort and refute those who contradict*” (Ti 1:9).

So if persuasion and instruction by the word of God are the means by which the leaders direct the church to worship and serve, then in order for one to be persuaded and taught, he must have a submissive spirit. And this would bring us to the fundamental principle for leadership among the disciples of Jesus. As previously

Disciples of Jesus submit to the teaching of the word of God.

s t a t e d , Christians are to submit to one

another (Ep 5:21). They are to submit to the service of others (1 Co 16:15,16). They are to submit to the shepherding of those who have dedicated themselves to watch over the needs of the saints (Hb 13:17). If one has a submissive spirit, then he is easily persuaded by the teaching of the word of God. This again brings us back to the authority of the word of God, not to a supposed authority that is personally invested in those who preach and teach the word. The teaching of the message reaffirms the authority of our one Lord who has all authority over all things. Authority, therefore, is not inherent in the messenger because he preaches, but in the message of our Lord he preaches. The messenger has every right to proclaim the message because all authority rests with Jesus. This is why Paul said to Titus, “*These things speak and exhort and rebuke with all authority*” (Ti 2:15).

It is imperative, therefore, that Christians be very sensitive about maintaining their character of submission. Israel went astray because the people became dull of hearing (Mt 13:15). The Hebrew Christians were on the verge of apostasy because they were dull of hearing (Hb 5:11). When men become dull of hearing, they have become rebellious and desensitized to the power of the word of God. The problem with those who have become dull of hearing is not that they are refusing to submit to the teaching of the leaders. They are not submitting because they have become insensitive (dull) to the word of God. The backslider is indifferent to the lordship of Jesus, not rebellious to the leadership of the church.

In the context of this discussion, 1 Corinthians 12:25 is interesting. “... *so that there should be no division in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another.*” Notice that avoidance of division is not based on submission to lords, authorities and masters among the brethren. Unity is maintained by the care of servants for one another. Unity in the church can never be based on the authoritative mandates of dictatorial despots. Unity is preserved when members submit to one another’s needs. It is for this reason that the ekklesia is an organism of functioning servants. It is a body of servants who are fitly framed and knitted together for the purpose of building up one another (Ep

**Those who
are dull of hearing
are rebelling
against the
lordship of Jesus.**

4:16). Members are individual stones in the temple of God that are fitted together in their service of one another (Ep 2:21; 1 Pt 2:5). No member, therefore, can function outside the existence of other members. In order for each member to carry out his responsibilities of service toward his brother or sister in Christ, he must of necessity associate with his brother and sister. There is no such thing as “free-lance” Christians.

What has caused a great deal of division among the disciples is the persistent claim of individuals who feel that the church for which they preach belongs to them. They steal the sheep of God by claiming dictatorial authority over their group of sheep. They divide their group of adherents from other sheep, and thus, make their group an autonomous denomination that is controlled by the leader. We see nothing as this practiced in the New Testament. When leaders claim authority over the sheep, only division results in separating groups of sheep from one another.

There is a unique irony in the personality of those who crave to be authorities among the sheep of God. These vehemently assume that they are the authority, and thus, demand submission on the part of the flock. But at the same time, these lordship leaders are the least submissive among the flock. Lordship leaders do not have a heart of submission, though they demand that others submit to their leadership.

**Unity is the result
of members
functioning as
servants of
one another.**

Chapter 23

Responsibility In The Absence Of Lords

In discussing the work of elders, we must always wonder who has the authority when there are no elders? Most of the single-assembly churches throughout the world today have no elders. Are they cheated from some authority because they have no designated authorities on earth? Is it not possible that the individual's submission to the lordship of Jesus is able to carry him through life and into eternal life, even though he may never live in the presence of a designated elder?

Because we have failed to understand the concept of elders in the cities, as was characteristic with the New Testament church, we have assemblies with elders and others without elders within the same city. If elders are assumed to have authority to make arbitrary decisions among a group of disciples, then we wonder who has the right to make such decisions when there are no elders. In answer to this supposed dilemma, some have assumed the practice of "evangelistic authority." In other words, authority rests with the single "pastor/preacher" if there is no designated plurality of pastors. One misunderstanding has thus led to a second.

Because of the misunderstanding concerning the nature of the ekklesia to lead herself as a whole in carrying on with her work, another scenario has developed concerning the lack of leadership. Those preachers who do not want any competition in making decisions do

not lead churches toward designating elders among the disciples. If the elders have authority—so they assume—and the preacher designates elders, then who has more authority, the preacher or the elders? If the preacher designates elders who supposedly have mandate authority

The disciples of Jesus were wrong to dispute concerning who was the greatest.

to bind where God has not bound, then they could fire the preacher once they were designated. When the preacher is supported by a foreign source to preach for a particular group of disciples, then he is very apprehensive about growing individuals in the church for which he preaches to the point that the church designates elders. If the church does designate elders, he assumes that they would have more authority than he has, and thus, they could dismiss him as the preacher.

If a preacher sees the church for which he preaches as a source of income, then he will possibly discourage that church from designating elders if he believes that the elders would be in competition with his authority. If elders are designated, then they could fire him as the preacher. He would then have no source of income. Western churches who support their own preachers with great sums of money have little understanding concerning these matters in the developing

world. It is easy for them to hire and fire preachers, for the preachers can go somewhere else and “get a job.” But in the developing world, the preacher who has worked hard to build a church that financially supports him cannot do this. It is for this reason that many preachers will not designate elders if they have been taught that elders function with the official authority to fire the preacher.

There seems to be some confusion here, especially in view of the fact that Jesus is to have all authority and headship over His body and all things. He is the sole head of the body, the church. In their efforts to set forward some with authority among the disciples, men leave themselves in a very precarious doctrinal dilemma. If there are men on earth who have the authority to bind where God has not bound, then we would question the total headship of Jesus over the body. Because we assume that there is authority on earth in the church, we leave ourselves with difficulty concerning the development of leadership among the disciples. The difficulty is when men with assumed authority (“evangelistic authority”) are not motivated to appoint any other authorities of the church.

Some have proposed that elders at least rule by “example authority.” In Peter’s exhortation that elders be “*examples to the flock*,” it is assumed that there is authority in their example (1 Pt 5:3). Though we should follow the example of all godly men, we would be cautious about making the example of any man on earth the authority by which we would direct our lives. We should note

the life of Peter. When Peter wrote the exhortation of 1 Peter 5, he identified himself as a “fellow elder” (1 Pt 5:1). We are not told when Peter was designated to be a shepherd of the flock. The apostles spent almost fifteen years of their ministry in Jerusalem after the establishment of the church, receiving and teaching those Jews who came to the annual Passover/Pentecost feasts. The apostles, including Peter, were in Jerusalem in Acts 15 for a great meeting concerning legalism that was being preached by some Judaistic teachers. Had Peter been designated an elder of the church by this time? We are not told. The conference that was held in Jerusalem in Acts 15 was possibly conducted around A.D. 45. 1 Peter 5 was written around A.D. 65.

Now sometime after A.D. 45, Peter went to Antioch of Syria. He was having a good time in fellowship with the Gentiles in Antioch. But when some Jewish brethren of Judea came to Antioch, he withdrew and separated himself from the Gentiles. Paul “*opposed him to his face because he stood condemned*” (Gl 2:11). Barnabas and the other Jews in Antioch followed the example of Peter (Gl 2:13). Did this example of Peter have authority? Was he an elder at this time, and thus, his example was authorized to be followed by the church? We must be very cautious about saying that the example of elders has authority. No man is perfect. No man can live a perfect life according to the word of God, even Peter.

**The living examples
of godly men
are not inspired.**

Chapter 24

Only One Lord

In 1 Peter 5:3 Peter instructed that the elders among his readers must serve with eagerness, “*not being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.*” The translation “being lords” comes from the word *katakuriuo*, meaning “to hold in subject,” “to be master of,” or “exercise lordship over.” The fact that Peter gave this exhortation so early to the church indicates that lords, authorities and masters would be a difficult problem throughout the history of the church. If men in Peter’s time misunderstood the servanthood leader-

Lording leaders disqualify themselves as leaders of the ekklesia.

ship that was explained and illustrated by Jesus throughout His ministry, then certainly we would assume that this would always be a challenge to some in the leadership of the church. In correcting the problem among Peter’s readers, he stated that leadership among the disciples would always be by “*being examples to the flock.*” Leadership would be manifested by those who submitted to the lordship of Jesus, and thus, they would be guarded from being lords over the flock by focusing on their godly behavior. In fact, those who would lead by lordship have disqualified themselves simply because they have failed to understand the servanthood by which the

flock is to be led.

Lordship leadership can be defined by certain characteristics that may prevail among the leaders, as well as those over whom they lord.

1. If leaders have a difficult time encouraging others to assume responsibility for specific works among the disciples, then it is possible that those they seek to encourage to assume responsibility of ministries are being intimidated by the leaders.
2. If members of the body feel that they must ask permission before they can serve, then they are being intimidated by the aura of authority that has been assumed by the leaders.
3. If the leaders think too highly of their own opinions and judgments, then they have exalted themselves above the members.
4. If a particular leader cannot let go of special programs or ministries he seems to control, then he is functioning in a manner of discouraging others from stepping up to assume the responsibility of ministry. (Leadership involves either calling on the help of others to minister in certain areas, or finding someone to take ownership of a ministry.)
5. Leaders who have to ask for recognition have assumed that they are in a position or office, not in a ministry

No Christian ever asked for permission to submit to Jesus in service.

- to serve others. (Announcements concerning the elders are made to let it be known to the church that they are there to serve, not to make it known what they are doing.)
6. If elders find themselves making decisions concerning the physical matters of church property, then they are micro controlling the physical affairs of the church.
 7. If members are afraid to initiate a ministry without the approval of the leaders, then the leaders are lording over the flock.
 8. If the leaders have difficulty in getting the people to do anything, it is possible that the members have been cowed into inactivity because of the dominant leadership of the leaders.

Chapter 25

Not Minimizing The Lordship Of Jesus

We need to take another look at 2 Corinthians 4:5. *“For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus’ sake.”* Those who would have authority would have every right to assert themselves as official spokesmen for Christ. But Paul teaches the opposite. He was

Paul preached the lordship of Jesus to those who were arguing over being lords.

writing to a church wherein there were those who questioned his apostleship, and thus, they were preaching themselves as having authority over Paul. They were calling the church to submit to their leadership, and at the same time, rejecting the leadership of God through Paul. Paul countered their attitudes and arguments. He did not assert some apostolic authority, but preached “Jesus Christ as Lord.” When we stand against those who would seek to be lords over us, then we reaffirm that Jesus is the only Lord of our

lives. It is as Paul said, *“Not that we are adequate in ourselves to think anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God”* (2 Co 3:5). The adequacy is not in the messenger, but in God who has given the message. We are thus only the messengers “for Jesus’ sake” (2 Co 4:5). Preachers are only *“servants by whom you believed”* (1 Co 3:5). So Paul rebutted the authorities among the Corinthians by saying, *“So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase”* (1 Co 3:7). Paul had planted. Apollos had watered in Corinth. But neither Paul nor Apollos were anything special, though the Corinthians had made them to be something special (1 Co 1:11,12). Paul and Apollos, as well as all evangelists, were only servants of the Lord to preach the message of the gospel (See Mt 23:8-12). Preachers too often think too much of themselves. We are nothing but slaves proclaiming a glorious message.

What some leaders do not realize is

that they minimize the authority of the word of Christ and the lordship of Christ by assuming to be lords, authorities and masters to subject the disciples to their mandates. When leaders focus on a supposed personal authority that they have as God's messengers, then they minimize the authority of the word of Christ. What happens in the lives of the leaders is only natural. They assert themselves over the word of God, and thus, they pay less attention to what the Bible says. This was the problem with the Pharisees and scribes of Jesus' day. They first laid aside the word of God in order to maintain their heritage of religious dictates (Mk 7:7,8). They then rejected the word of God in order that they might maintain the authority of their own dictates (Mk 7:9). Those who have little knowledge of the word of God have little fear of asserting themselves to be authorities, lords and masters over God's heritage, the church.

When leaders have little knowledge of the word of God, they will assert their positions as authoritative among the disciples in order to maintain their followers. Biblically ignorant men often claim authority in order to maintain their leadership positions. The opposite is true of those who truly love the authority of the word of God in their own lives. The more one respects and depends on the word of God, the less he looks to himself as a figure of authority. When we exalt the word of God, we minimize ourselves.

The more one claims to be a lord, the less he focuses to the lordship of Jesus.

When others can see that we are students of the word of God, they will follow.

When we exalt the lordship of Jesus, the less we seek to be lords. When we exalt Jesus as Lord, we are in fear of competing with His lordship lest we be found to be standing between a disciple and his Lord. If Jesus is truly exalted as Lord, then one is in fear of exalting himself.

The point is that one cannot exalt Jesus as Lord unless he humbles himself before God. In 1 Peter 5:1-4 Peter rebuked some elders for lordship over the flock of God. Notice the interesting statement that he made in concluding this rebuke: "*Yes, all of you be submissive to one another and be clothed with humility, for God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble. Therefore, humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God so that He may exalt you at the proper time*" (1 Pt 5:5,6). What a worthy note to be placed as a concluding statement for those who would exalt themselves with personal lordship over the flock of God!

Apostasy always starts when men assert their own positions as leaders, and then, claim authority to mandate decisions that are binding on the church. When Paul met for his last time with the elders of the city of Ephesus he saw this apostasy coming. "*Also from your own selves will men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves*" (At 20:30). A few years later Peter realized that apostasy had set in among some of those to whom he

wrote, for he chastised some elders for lording over the flock (1 Pt 5:1-3). We would assume that this apostasy was in the mind of Jesus when in His final words He stated that all authority rested with Him alone (Mt 28:18).

Those who humbly throw themselves before the lordship of Jesus will not seek to lead by arbitrary mandates. They will not seek to endanger or minimize the lordship of Jesus in the lives of others by placing themselves between the humble believer and his Lord Jesus. However, those leaders who are insecure in their knowledge of the word of God will seek to maintain their positions by asserting themselves before the people. It is a truism in apostasy that religious leaders who have little respect for and knowledge of the word of God, will assume to be lords, authorities and masters in order to validate and sustain their leadership positions. They will assume that the existence of the church depends on their existence as leaders.

A successful leader directs people to the lordship of Jesus. It was for this reason that Paul instructed Titus to preach and apply the message “*with all authority.*” “*These things speak and exhort and rebuke with all authority*” (Ti 2:15). The word “speak” in this verse is from the Greek word *epitage*, meaning “command.” Paul did not exhort Titus to rely on some supposed “evangelistic authority.” He exhorted him to confidently speak the commands

We have the right to speak the authority of the word of God.

of the word of God. The authority was in the message, not in the messenger. And because the authority was in the message, Titus, as all Christians, had the responsibility to speak the commands of the message. Many people miss this point. The messenger has the responsibility to speak. He does not speak because he has personal authority, and thus, what he personally says is the command of God. That which changes people’s lives is the message.

When there are those who rebel against the message in the midst of the audience, the messenger does not “pull rank” on them with authority. The messenger must gently instruct those who oppose the message, emphasizing the authority of the word of God (2 Tm 2:25; 4:2). If the messenger asserts authority over the rebellious, then the messenger has himself manifested a spirit of rebellion against the lordship of Jesus and the authority of His message.

The leadership of evangelists and shepherds rests in their responsibility to minister the word of God to the people. There is authority in the word, not in the administrators of the word. The New Testament is absolutely silent concerning the shepherds overseeing the work of the church as a corporate manager oversees a corporation. They are portrayed as shepherds, not corporate board administrators who “call the shots” in directing the church. The same holds true of

No disciple has the authority to dictate the obedience of any other disciple.

the evangelists. Neither the evangelist, nor the elders, are to rule by official mandates that they would pass down to the church. We see such administration of the disciples nowhere in the New Testament. What has caused a great deal of trouble among the disciples are those who would assume official power because of their thirst to be first among the disciples (See 3 Jn 9,10). Whenever one person

or a group of people would set themselves forward as appointed officials of the church, and thus, seek to exercise official authority over the body of Christ, they are to be resisted. Such people should be resisted even if it means division. If such people are not resisted, then the church is headed toward a Catholic apostasy.

Chapter 26

Anointed Or Appointed

The independent church movement throughout the world has resulted in an explosion of churches scattered throughout communities from Burma to Boston. The leaders of these groups often find themselves in competition with one another in order to gain or retain adherents to their particular group. An interesting development of this movement is the effort of the preachers of the churches to compete with one another in reference to validating their right to be the leader of their group. In these efforts to validate their position, a word has been coined in order to assume some divine mandate that they lead their group. It is the word “anoint.” If one claims to be personally “anointed,” then his ministry is validated, and thus, he has the right to be the leader.

In reference to leadership among independent churches, some people often confuse the anointing of leadership among God’s people in the Old Testament with the designated leadership of the church. It is assumed that the church

has specific “anointed leaders” today, and thus, these leaders have special ministries among the disciples. But this is an indication that some are confused concerning the kingdom of Israel in the Old Testament and the kingdom of Jesus that is now in existence.

The word “anoint” is used in the New Testament only in reference to Jesus and the church as a whole. In reference to His ministry, Jesus said that the Holy Spirit was upon Him to anoint Him to preach the gospel (Lk 4:18). “*God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power*” (At 10:38; see Hb 1:9). In 2 Corinthians 1:21 Paul stated that we as the church have been anointed (See 1 Jn 2:20,27). **There is no specific anointing of individuals in the church to do specific ministries.** Anointing for special ministries is found nowhere in the New Testament.

In the Old Testament, the word “anoint” is used in reference to the anointing of priests (Ex 28:41), kings (1 Sm 15:1) and prophets (1 Ch 16:22). The

anointed priests functioned in an official capacity of offering sacrifices for the people. The anointed kings functioned to maintain order among the people. The anointed prophets functioned to speak of the coming Messiah who would be the Anointed One over all things (Ps 2:2; Dn 9:24; At 4:25-27). Because believers have been baptized into Christ (Gl 3:26,27), they are the “anointed ones” as the ekklesia (2 Co 1:21,22; 1 Jn 2:20,27). John stated that the baptized believers did not need spe-

God’s anointing in the Old Testament set people apart for special ministry.

cial anointed individuals to teach them because they had been anointed as the ekklesia by the Holy Spirit. They were taught through inspired teachers in the absence of the written word of God (1 Jn 2:26,27; see At 13:1; Ep 4:11; Js 3:1). John’s encouragement concerning anointing was to all the disciples. The supposed anointing of one disciple to exalt himself over other disciples did not exist in the early church. All the disciples had been anointed, and thus there was no need for any one disciple to receive a special anointing to be set apart from the ministry of all the disciples. The teaching of special anointings discriminates disciples from one another.

Chapter 27

Cry For An Earthly “King”

Moses, the prophets and the kings of Israel lived in a different world than those of the church. Through Moses, God established a nation. Through the prophets, He guided the nation. And through the kings for whom the people cried out, God sought to preserve a remnant of the nation. God subsequently spoke with authority through these leaders as His spokesmen for the preservation of national Israel. To revert to these examples of officiating authority in the Old Testament in reference to God’s relationship with national Israel, is to revert to the Old Testament law.

Authority was given to different men in the birth and history of national Israel in order to accomplish the purpose of

bringing national Israel to the fulfillment of God’s promises to the fathers (See Gn 12:1-4). The fulfillment of the promises was in Christ, the Messiah. But now that the Christ has come, we are no longer under the Old Testament law (Gl 3). Moses was God’s anointed lawgiver to national Israel (Jn 1:17). If one rebelled against Moses as the lawgiver, he rebelled against God (Nm 16). When the Israelites rejected the theocratic authority of God directly from heaven, and subsequently sought for a king on earth, God allowed them to have a king over them-

God intended that He be the only King of Israel, reigning from heaven.

selves (1 Sm 8; 9:15-17). However, it was God who chose and anointed the king. God's authority was thus invested in the anointed king of Israel to reign over Israel. In their request for an authority (king) on earth, they were rejecting the direct authority of God from heaven in their covenant with God. They sought for a king who would speak with authority and lead them as the other nations that had kings who led them (1 Sm 8:5).

The presence of the earthly king in Israel was a manifestation that Israel had rejected the authority of God from heaven that was manifested on earth through the giving of the Old Testament law. The people wanted a human figure of authority they could see. Recognition of God's authority manifested through the word of the law was not sufficient. We can study the Old Testament and discover the end of this story. Israel's desire to have a king on earth to lead them with authority led them further away

**God knew
that earthly
kings
would
eventually
go bad
in Israel.**

from God, and eventually, into apostasy and destruction. When the kings went bad, so did the nation. Such was the exact thing that God told Samuel to tell the people when they first asked for a king (1 Sm 8:9-18). The historical lesson is that when men cry out for a visible authority on earth in kingdom matters, the authorities will lead them away from God. This is the foundation upon which Jesus made the proclamation, "*You know that those who are recognized as rulers over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them. And their great ones exercise authority over them. **But it will not be so among you***" (Mk 10:42,43).

When the church cries out for visible authorities, we can know that apostasy is in the wind. Worse yet, when men cry out that they are the authority for the church, then we can know that a cold wind has blown through the church, taking with it the lordship of Jesus out of the hearts of men. When men on earth dispute about who is the greatest, or who is in authority, then we know that the winds of apostasy are growing.

Chapter 28

Designating Leadership

Jesus gave the church the right to appoint (designate) men for certain ministries. The word "appoint," however, is loaded with a great deal of politics and the struggles of men to assume control over others. In the political world, we appoint ministers and governors, lords and masters. With this appointment, authority is assumed, for the authorities are

appointed in order to assume control of a body of people. If we are not careful, we will want to bring this meaning into the fellowship of the family of God. But Jesus said, "Not so among you."

In the religious world the word "ordain" is used, which word also has a great deal of ecclesiastical baggage. But in the New Testament, the word "ordain" sim-

ply means to “cause to stand” or “to set.” In the Acts 6:1-6 event the disciples appointed (ordained) seven men to work with the distribution of provisions to widows. In Acts 14:23 Paul and Barnabas set forth (appointed, or ordained) elders in every church. Titus was to set forth elders in every city (Ti 1:5). The appointment, or ordination, was for the sake of the church, not the men appointed. It was a public announcement that certain men were to function in a designated ministry of service for the spiritual welfare of the church. In reference to the widows in Jerusalem, the appointment made it possible for the widows to know who to approach in order to have their needs fulfilled. The designation of the seven men, therefore, was for the purpose of identifying before the church the ones who had the responsibility to minister to the wid-

There are no ceremonies in the New Testament for the appointment of elders.

ows. In reference to elders, ordination was an announcement to the church concerning those men to whom they could direct their needs. There were no ceremonies of ordination. In fact, the more ceremony that is built around the designation of elders, the more some elders feel that they have been placed into a political office.

The ordination or appointment did not make the men function as elders. They were functioning as shepherds before their designation. Their designation, therefore, only redirected the men to focus on the mandate of the church to continue to fulfill certain needs that the church had as a whole. If one is not functioning in the ministry of caring for the spiritual needs of the church, then he has disqualified himself from being designated to be a shepherd. If one is designated to be something he is not in behavior and character, then he will often feel that he is being designated to an office to officiate the business of the church.

Chapter 29

The Need For Servants

If we changed servant leaders into figures of authority, we destroy the spirit of voluntary submission that should be characteristic of the church as a whole. If we transfer the lordship of Jesus to men, then we minimize the total submission of the church to the lordship of Jesus. In such a transfer the church would become a corporate system of management, control, with focus on productivity. If

we transfer the authority of the message to the messengers of the message, then we are minimizing the authority of the message in the lives of men. When we make such transfers, inevitably, because of the weakness of the flesh, men become lords of the flock, and subsequently, function as dictators over God’s heritage. We cease being imitators of our Lord and Teacher (Jn 13:14), forgetting that our

Lord and Teacher “*did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many*” (Mk 10:45).

In His physical absence, Jesus did not need to delegate authority to men on earth. He simply delegated an example of servanthood that the leaders “*should do as I have done to you*” (Jn 13:15). If we would identify our leaders among us, therefore, we should look for the person who has the dirtiest towel from washing so many feet.

The plea of God’s word is for those who will humble themselves under the mighty hand of God (1 Pt 5:5-7). “*Draw*

near to God and He will draw near to you” (Js 4:8). “*And whoever of you desires to be the first will*

be the bondservant of all” (Mk 10:44).

“*Whoever will humble himself as this little child, the same is great-*

est in the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 18:4).

“*Let the little children come to Me and do not forbid them, **for of such is the kingdom of heaven***” (Mt 19:14). These

statements of Scripture need no explanation in reference to defining the character of our leaders among us.

Leaders are identified by their dirty towels.

Chapter 30

Little Catholic Churches

History reveals many truths. Before his death, Paul saw an apostasy coming. It was an apostasy that would be led by men who sought to command the following of the disciples. In his discussion with the Ephesian elders, he said that grievous wolves would enter the flock of God (At 20:29). He warned these leaders that from among them men would arise “*to draw away the disciples after themselves*” (At 20:30). Peter evidently experienced the rise of some of these men, for he exhorted that those elders to whom he was writing not to lord over the flock (1 Pt 5:1-5). It may have been that John wrote at a time when some lords had already arisen among the flock, and thus were commanding with authority the submission of the flock to their dictates (3 Jn 9,10).

History teaches that an apostasy of men seeking authority and lordship had already risen among the disciples before the close of the 1st century. A few centuries later, this apostasy of men thirsting to be lords and masters became full blown in the apostasy of the Roman Catholic Church. Popes became the head of “the church.” Bishops and archbishops were established over regions with the authority to mandate the orders of the head. The Catholic Church became a dominant religious government of the world. In the Reformation Movement of the 16th century there was a general rebellion and call for freedom from the bondage of religious despots. Another call for freedom in the religious world is happening today as men and women throughout the world seek to be free from

the lords, authorities and masters that are so prevalent in the world of Christendom.

Reformers and Restorationists have rightly reacted to the heresy of religious bondage that Paul said would be born out of those who would seek to exercise authoritative lordship over the disciples. People have rightly rebelled against those lords who have with Diotrephetic preeminence sought to reign as lords and masters over the flock of God. We live in a world today wherein there is a paradigm shift from the rule of men back to the lordship of Jesus. People of faith throughout the world have discovered that when Jesus is totally lord of one's life, He can totally work in our lives to His glory.

When Christianity became organized, institutionalized and structured after the business plans of Western business/industrial cultures, a new theology developed. In our reaction to the hierarchy of authority that was promoted by the Catholic Church for fifteen hundred years, which hierarchy continues today, we developed a new theology that would supposedly be a safeguard against the Catholic heresy ever developing again among us. We searched for scriptures that would teach a theology of assembly independence that would guard ourselves against one another. But instead of having lords and masters seeking rule over clusters of groups, we formulated a plan to bottle up the lords into isolated groups. We assumed the right for a group of disciples to exclude themselves from the authorities and masters that existed in other groups. Each group of disciples, there-

fore, could maintain their own authorities, lords and masters to mandate the affairs of the local autonomous group of adherents. So we become "little Catholic churches" spread across the world.

These little Catholic churches often have their authorities, lords and masters. The "pastor/preacher" is often the head of the hierarchy of authority. The elders become the "bishops" who carry out the desires of the pope/pastor whose wishes are weekly dictated from the pulpit. If the pope/pastor feels threatened by any other emerging "popites" among the disciples, he will quickly subjugate such aspiring young men, or encourage them to move on and start their own little Catholic church. The pope/pastor will reign over the appointed bishops, reaffirming that his authority in his little Catholic church is greater than the bishops. When the Diotrephetic pastor ordains bishops, it is emphasized that they are under him. Deacons become the archbishops, and thus, they are given rule over specific duties of the little Catholic church. From the top down to the humble laity, there is a rank and reign of authorities, lords and masters. In fact, the existence of the concept of the "laity" assumes that there are authorities above and over the people. But are we not all one man in Christ (Gal 3:28)?

So we end up today with what we assume is a guard against a Catholic heresy. Autonomous little Catholic churches have their own authority structures and territorial limits of reign. And because they are autonomous, there is no danger of two or three of these little Catholic

churches making decisions together in order to carry out a particular work. They are anti-cooperation in their relationship with one another, separating disciples in the same city from one another lest the little Catholic churches grow into a big Catholic church, and thus claim authority over the entire city. As long as each little Catholic church remains introverted with its own authorities, lords and masters, we assume that we have guarded ourselves against becoming a worldwide Catholic Church. This structure seems to preserve the right of those who thirst for power and the right to rule over one's fellow man. The system restricts their lordship to a small group of disciples. The one body of Christ is thus divided up into many little Catholic churches. In all this autonomous institutional confusion, we keep hearing the one Lord with all authority over all things saying, "*But it will not be so among you.*"

RESTORATION IS IN THE WIND

If one is not completely clueless concerning the present paradigm shift in Christendom, then he can understand that there is a restoration to the lordship of Jesus that is taking place throughout the world. After centuries of being burdened with the ecclesiastical structures of organized churchianity, millions throughout the world have turned to a breath of refreshing air in freedom of Christ. There is a renewed search for a personal relationship with Jesus that is not bound by the strings of institutional religiosity. There is a thirst to discover Jesus who can reign in the hearts of the individual

believer, and thus, motivate the individual to bear fruit in his or her life to the glory of God.

This paradigm shift is usually manifested in the phenomenal return of believers to meeting in small groups in houses, schools, under trees, in coffee shops, or wherever it is convenient. Even large assembly churches have caught a breath of the refreshing wind of restoration as they encourage their members to meet in small groups in order to reconnect with one another. Regardless of where people are meeting, there is a phenomenal desire to manifest one's growing relationship with Jesus by reconnecting with others. Organized churchianity took people so far away from one another, and strangled them with the mechanics of church organization, that individuals have discovered that they can have a personal relationship with Jesus apart from the structure of the institutional church. Individual believers have made the wonderful discovery that they can have a relationship directly with Jesus every day of the week. Instead of being suffocated with the politics of the organized church, individual disciples have discovered that they can wake up everyday as if it were "Sunday." This is a tremendous opportunity to preach the freedom that we have in Christ.

One elder once told us, "I resigned from the eldership so I could do the work of an elder." There is a weakening among elders who want to be shepherds again. We have heard of entire groups of elders standing up before the flock who designated them. They repented, and then re-

minded the flock that they wanted to be shepherds again, not members of a corporate board of directors for the church. Instead of managing the affairs of the deacons, they resigned from such and then found themselves among the people. They started smelling like sheep again.

These are indeed times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord. They are exciting times as leaders reaffirm their biblical mandate to lead humbly the flock of God. What is exciting is the fact that

this change is coming from our shepherds. They have lived long enough to discover that we had moved away from the biblical nature of the ekklesia. We moved to a corporate church that was patterned after the “spreadsheet” culture of the Western business/industrial world. But now it is time to return to our roots, to our desire to have all things in common with one another, where we are all servants of Jesus who seek to serve one another until He comes again.