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## **"THE EARLY CHURCH FATHERS"**

People always bring up the matter of the "early Church Fathers."

Really? So what's that supposed to mean?

They will say, "...Look at the early church fathers. None of them believed and taught what you teach about the church and about men not having authority over others in the church!"

(At this point, I could easily play along with them and bring up some of "their church fathers" who did believe these things. But I refrain)

Instead, I show them the greatest of all "church fathers" who did believe and teach it.

1) JESUS: In Matthew. 20:25-28, Mark 10:42-44, Luke 22:24-27, Jesus is recorded saying in regards to exercising authority over God's people: "NOT SO SHALL IT BE AMONG YOU." Jesus could not have been more clear on this issue. If there is a direct command in the Scriptures, this is one of them. The apostles followed this command.

2) JESUS: Matthew 23:1-12: "But you, do not be called Rabbi, for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers. Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, who is in heaven. And do not be called leaders; for One is your leader, even the Christ." Jesus, in these few sentences, is making it very plain what the nature of leadership in His community was going to be. His leaders would NOT assume titles or positions of authority. "But you, do not be called Rabbi"! They were not to assume the title or position of Rabbi (master, teacher).

3) JESUS: John 13:1-17: Jesus washes His disciples feet and then says, "...Do you know what I have done to you?...If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them...." John 13:17. AGAIN, we see that the model of leadership in God's ecclesia is not the CEO Business Exec; it's not the "Chairman/Pastor" sitting on the Board of Elders; it's not a group of men ruling and exercising authority, barking out their demands of authority, headship, and submission to every beck and call. No, it's the household slave!

For from His knees in the upper room, Jesus said, "For I have given you an example that you also should do as I have done to you." John 13:15

Yes, Jesus did leave us an example to follow - one that stands in stark and total antithesis to the current notion of "authority in the church!"

I also would give them examples of other church fathers, like Paul, Peter, and John.

But of course, after giving them examples of these particular "church fathers," I usually never hear back from them because this is not what they wanted to hear.

It's interesting that people will disregard what Jesus says....what John, Peter, and Paul say.....but as soon as a "Calvin" or other "Reformers" talk about "church authority" or "pastoral rule," or "the office of the bishop," they will all say, "...Look how clear this is. Why can't you see it? The early church fathers believed and taught it!"

There is no verse in the Bible where God commands that you "must go to church," let alone, to form some kind of an organization called "the church," or "local church."

There is not one hint from God that He requires Christians to "place membership in," "become a member of," "join," "support," and/or "attend" any one of these organizations and/or institutions.

There is not one hint whatsoever from God that He requires Christians to be under the pastoral rulership or the pastoral control and authority of someone who is exercising rule over you IN HIS ASSEMBLY! NOT ONE!!

This whole concept is a contrivance of man, dating back many centuries. The idea behind it is, and has always been, for complete control of the masses. I repeat, THE CONCEPT IS FROM MAN, NOT GOD!

If there were such Scriptures, it would be the FIRST VERSE that these people would use to defend their distortions. But since they don't have any Scriptures like that, they all go to the backup plan, which always includes, "...Well, the Church Fathers said and practiced...." or many times, this as well "...Well, the great creeds and Confessions of Faith say in question such and such..."

Really?

And then, to add insult to injury, they all turn around and say, "...The New Testament is our sufficient guide for the church's faith and practice..." and yet gather together in ways that contradict its patterns!

Fervent love for Jesus Christ and a desire to discern and act the mind and example of Christ in the Scriptures must flow among all of the brethren. If it doesn't, sorrow and heartache will always result.

Deep humility, along with an open and teachable spirit must also be present. Taking up our cross daily and following Jesus is not easy, but it is the only way of true blessedness.

False teachings and practices have always blocked us from pursuing the gathering of saints in the naturalness and simplicity which is revealed in the New Testament. It is very easy to be self-deceived. Genuine Christians need to be on constant guard and to stand firm because the fiercest opposition they will often encounter will come from the men who say they are "God's chosen;" "Called by God to exercise rule over His people."

The proponents of exercising authority over God's saints will always paint their critics as either being backslidden, heretics, or miserable prodigals who live in rebellion to God's authority. How untrue this is! Many believers wholeheartedly support authority, accountability, and submission but at the same time, realize that wolves inside local institutional churches actually subvert and DESTROY life giving fellowship.

If you continue to exalt that which He hasn't, aren't you going to be the worse for it?

Within His Assembly, there are no hierarchical positions of men. There is only a hierarchy of One. Everyone and everything is directly subordinate to Jesus Christ! "And God placed all things under His feet and appointed Him to be head over all things for the Ecclesia." Ephesians 1:22

There are no managerial positions in His Assembly, for each Christian is a priest who reports directly to the Head, Jesus Christ. Ezekiel 34:23, John 10:16, 1 Corinthians 11:3, 1 Peter 2:5; 2:9

"For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." 1 Timothy 2:5

No one in the Ecclesia is required to report to any intermediate position, for each person is directly accountable to God and God alone. Matthew 12:36, Romans 14:12, 1 Corinthians 7:24, Hebrews 4:13

There is only one position of authority in the Church and it is held exclusively by Jesus Christ.

If you believe yourself to be a Christian, herein are your marching orders from your Lord and Master Himself!

Remember Jesus' words, "If you love me, keep my commandments."

If you refuse to follow the directions that He has given in the passages of Scripture that have been set before you, then Jesus says, to you, "And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" Luke 6:46

Why wouldn't you want to devote your zeal to what He has shown us in the Scriptures?

Is it really beneficial for deep-rooted human traditions and other men's fantasy's to continue its reign over church life?

"If you know these things, happy are you if you do them." John 13:12-17

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