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THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH: DISTORTED AND DEFORMED

CHAPTER FIVE

AUTHORITY AND THE INSTITUTIONAL CHURCH

The Scriptures demonstrate over and over again that Truth has always been hated by the masses of mankind, but especially by those who hold so-called “*positions or offices of authority*” inside a religious system.

Men who would assume positions and titles abound in every sort of religious institution. There are many men who would receive acclaim without service. There are many men who become intoxicated with the lust for power. There are many men who would gladly earn a living pontificating on religious matters.

The picture of a drill sergeant barking orders to a marching platoon is nowhere to be found in Scripture, but IS found in the church organizations of men. Many “*church leaders*” of various institutions have thought that this is the kind of authority that they are

to possess in order for them to “rule” over God’s people. Their teachers, their seminaries, along with their carnal hearts told them to rule this way. This has caused untold hardship to many individuals and families in many institutional churches. The need to “*keep people in line*” by force or coercion is not a Scriptural principle, but IS seen all too often in an institutional/corporate church system.

Can we see why Jesus said that those in His kingdom are expected to reject titles and positions of rulership; even the title or position of guides?

You didn’t know He said that? Please read on to see that He most certainly did; in the clearest of terms as well!

Jesus took a group of social nobodies and endued them with the gospel message. They were a scruffy group to say the least. There was obviously a great contrast with the pomp and “*holy*” demeanor of the Scribes and Pharisees. Human nature, being what it is, seduced even the disciples with a desire to be greatest in the Kingdom.

Jesus, while continually challenging the narrow-mindedness and self-righteousness of the Jewish leaders, insisted that things were going to be different in his community. When His disciples came to Him and asked who would be greatest in the Kingdom, Jesus answered:

"Assuredly, I say to you, unless you turn and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven."(Matthew 18:3-4).

"Just a minute," He said. "You guys need to change your standards of operation. You are looking at things the wrong way. You need to change your attitude or you will not enter the kingdom at all."

Does this sound like the apostles were going to receive even a hint of position, title, and institutional rulership? If you're still not sure, then let’s proceed further.

In Matthew 20:20-28, Jesus was worked over by the mother of James and John wanting, what else, for her sons to be greatest in the kingdom.

"Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on your right hand and the other on the left, in your kingdom."

(verse 21)

Of course, the other disciples made a great show of indignation as though they had not wanted the same honor for themselves. So Jesus expounded on what His impending community structure is going to be like. The leadership in His assembly or community would be unlike worldly authority and the ecclesiastical system of things represented at that time by Jewish Scribes and Pharisees, the Jewish Sanhedrin (elders), and Roman secular rule.

Jesus rejected the authoritarian structure of his own religious heritage as well as anything that would approach the empires and kingdoms of men. Jesus explains this plainly as he continues.

*"You know that the rulers of the Gentiles are lords over them, and those who are great exercise authority (or are tyrants) over them. **YET IT WILL NOT BE SO AMONG YOU;** but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave, just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."*

"Greatness is attained through service, NOT positions or titles. You want to attain greatness in My kingdom then serve. Those desiring esteem in my assembly must set the example in serving! You will not exercise authority over my people!"

How utterly ironic that this is exactly the type of leadership style Christ specifically warned His disciples not to practice!

If that left the disciples in doubt about what positions they were to enjoy in the Lord's community, He certainly cleared it up by attacking the prevailing system of the religious leaders and their love of titles and position in Matthew 23.

"Then Jesus spoke to the multitude and to his disciples, saying: The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do. For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. But all their works they do to be seen by men. ..They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues, greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called by men, Rabbi, Rabbi. 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. But those who are great among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself will be humbled and the one who humbles himself will be exalted." Matthew 23:1-12

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. *"But you, do not be called Rabbi!"* They were not to assume the title or position of Rabbi (master, teacher).

As if this was not basic enough to persuade them, He continues in this vein by saying, *"And do not be called leaders ."* Even though the KJV translates the word "leader" master, the correct translation could actually render the Greek "guide". Vine gives it this definition:

"KathHgHtHs is properly a guide, to go before, to guide, translated master, a teacher, Matt. 23:10 (twice)."

Jesus emphasizes this very point while instructing those who would later be called apostles. "Don't even let someone ascribe to you or 'ordain' you with the position or title of leader or guide".

Don't be called Dr. Smith.

Don't be called Preacher Smith.

Don't be called Pastor Smith.

Don't be called Minister or Reverend or Elder or Deacon Smith.

Is this not a true application of what Jesus was saying? If not, why not?

Another example was before the feast of Passover. Jesus must go, but first, there was something He must do; something He desired very earnestly. He would draw away from the crowds, and gather the twelve to eat the "Last Supper," a meal filled with types and shadows, the fulfillment of which were only hours away. He longed to reveal the prophetic significance of this meal to His disciples, and it would soon be manifest before their eyes.

When the Supper was over, Jesus got up from the table, and the disciples, thinking He was performing the usual ceremonial hand washing, kept their seats. But something was wrong. Why was Jesus straying from the traditional format? Maybe He had grabbed that servant's apron by mistake. Why is He filling that water basin? Now what is He doing? Surely not!

He knelt before them one by one, until every dirty foot in the room was clean. Then He said, "*Do you know what I have done to you?*" They were speechless. Never before had they seen a King wash His servant's feet. They saw with their eyes what we can only imagine, "*God with us,*" washing human feet.

"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 reigning; barking out their demands of authority and 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

Let **THIS** example be before us like frontlets between our eyes!

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

This model from heaven, like oil, does not and will not mix well with the waters of a "*local church institutional*" rule of despotism. And many of these "*pastoral despots*" will spend large portions of their life seeing to it THAT IT WILL NEVER MIX WELL!

It is interesting to note all the instances in which Jesus avoided even the appearance of the ruling class. From his birth to his grave, he chose the most humble means.

He really was born in a barn. His baby clothes were swaddling clothes, mere rags wrapped about him. His crib was a feeding box for livestock. Common shepherds came to pay Him honor, while many others chose to ignore His lowly birth. At the Jerusalem dedication, His parents could only afford a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons, which was the offering of the poor. He grew up in the household of a working carpenter in the lowest of all the towns in lowly Galilee. He made himself of no reputation. Isaiah prophesied that He had no form nor comeliness, nor anything about Him that would attract carnal men. That final week of His life on earth, He chose to ride into Jerusalem on a donkey, not as a conquering king on a great horse. He washed the feet of His disciples that last night. He died in the most shameful way possible, the death of a criminal with two common thieves, although He was innocent. They even buried His body in a borrowed tomb!

Those who posture themselves to "*rule over God's people*" refuse to see Christ in this light, or if they do, pay the most pathetic, empty lip service imaginable, and then turn around next week and do just the opposite! The Lord's call to "let this mind be in you" falls upon deaf ears to the majority of those in "*leadership positions in the local church.*"

They possess absolutely nothing of "the mind of Christ." Historically, and indeed, right down to this very moment, the "*institutionalized local church*" of today has looked nothing like the Serving Christ. It has traded in the servant's towel long, long ago and has replaced it with a business suit and tie. Many today are above the washing of feet, as kneeling has become so far beneath the so-called "*Sacred Pastoral Office*" and the "*ministerial dignity*" of the professional clergy. How far we have fallen from the divine standard only God fully appreciates.

Instead of ever wanting to have the Lord Jesus as our example, our Divine mandate; instead of wanting to set before our eyes the image of the Lord of heaven on His knees serving, washing the road-weary feet of His disciples, what do we see? Do we see love constraining? Do we see love bowing low? Do we see love wrapped in a servant's towel?

No. This is what we see. We see men, ever looking to be as the world! We see men setting up and operating "*their churches*" along the lines of Fortune 500 companies! We

see men hollering and screaming with spittle flying out of their mouths: "*WHO ARE YOU TO QUESTION MY DIRECTION AND AUTHORITY?*"

We see men defying the Lord, commanding that ... "*You must address me as "Pastor."*"

We see men commanding submission unto themselves, teaching that "*...submitting to me is submitting to God...*"

We see men seizing upon, and then usurping "*the authority of Christ.*"

We see men operating their "*local church institutions*" like military bases; like slave camps; like mental hospitals.

What have we done? We have gone back to the weak and beggarly elements. We act as if the life of Jesus and His example was a myth and the cross at Calvary a fantasy. We are not the family for which God planned. We are an organization of our own design.

What else do we find concerning "*duly authorized*" men having the "*upper hand*" when we read the rest of the New Testament?

Paul warned that this human tendency was right around the corner as well. Speaking to the "elders" (literally, old people. See the explanation that follows) of the Ephesian community of believers, he warned:

"Pay attention to yourselves and to the flock in which the Holy Spirit placed you, to feed the assembly of God which he has purchased with his own blood. For I know that after my departure, fierce wolves will come in among you who will not spare the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking distortions, to draw away students after themselves."(Acts 20:28-30)

Notice the specific nature of these people who would draw disciples away from the Lord. They would "*rise up*" among you. They wouldn't appear from outside their ranks. They would speak perverse things. They would draw away disciples after themselves. The focus was going to be removed from Jesus and be placed upon themselves.

Diotrephes was a great example of this kind of mentality. He rejected the apostle John and others that he didn't approve. John describes the arrogance of this man in his third epistle.

"I wrote to the assembly, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us." (3 John 9)

In this body, there are to be no positions or titles given or accepted, either theologically or in practice. Diotrephes didn't hold a gun to anybody's head when he assumed a

position of eminence. He had his band of followers. They may have followed him for a variety of reasons but they followed him just the same. John describes the situation further.

"Therefore if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, talking trash against us with evil words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and casts (from the assembly) those who wish to receive them."(3 John 10)

Where did Diotrephes get this authority to exclude believers from their fellowship; even John? Think about it! He didn't get this authority from Jesus even though he may well have claimed so. He assumed it for himself and the people believed and accepted it!

His authority came from all those who allowed it to happen; those who had no Scriptural right to do so. The people may not have *"called him Rabbi"* or *"teacher"* in theology, but did so in PRACTICE. Just as the Israelites failed to listen to Samuel, these believers failed to listen to Jesus and the apostles. They preferred instead to select *"church officers"* to mediate their discipleship and then, after all was said and done, they were tyrannized by them. They failed to obey Jesus' warnings of appointing clergy.

Nowhere do we read anything whatsoever in the New Testament about some *"local church"* selecting and appointing men to be *"Elders"* or *"Church Officials!"* Why is that?

Where was any Church told to do such a thing? Where do you read of a Church installing men into the office of Elder? Where is the necessary inference that a Church was ever told to do such or actually did it? Look for yourself! It isn't there. Yet preachers and other church leaders teach this idea just like the Lord or His apostles gave such direction. Ask your preacher or *The Elders* to show you the book, chapter and verse for this practice. They won't because they can't!

Dear reader, if you think I am misrepresenting or exaggerating the practices of the current institutional/local church system, you need to open your eyes as to what has been happening.

What is being presented is the teaching and its fruit, of a controlling clergy. Again, if it is true, as most institutional/organized churches teach:

- that the Board of Elders or The Session is in charge of all the affairs of "the local church" and
- that the Eldership, etc., is to make all of the final decisions, with the final, authoritative word; and
- that the sole role of the *"members"* is to obey The Eldership's rules, plans, and programs, as if in so doing *they are obeying Jesus Christ and that to be un-submissive to the Elders is to be un-submissive to Christ Himself;*

...then why is there not even one letter in the New Testament addressed to *The Eldership*, or to *the Board*, or *the Session*, or to an institution, at any place, at any time, in any letter, **about anything?** Why?

The Corinthian saints had a wide variety of problems that needed to be resolved. Paul addressed a long letter to *"the church (ecclesia) of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling..."* (1:2). This letter was written to the saints and they were to execute Paul's instructions relative to all their problems.

Apparently, Paul thought that they, the saints themselves, as individuals and working together, could handle everything. Paul does not even mention such a corporate body as The Eldership or the Elders! Isn't that interesting? They had no Church Officials or Church Officers. Paul wrote to "the saints," told them what to do, and they did it! In the second letter, he wrote to the saints again commending them for their obedience to his instructions.

Yet today it is so different, as you can imagine. Today, the saints have no responsibility in the church institution except (1) to be taught (2) to pay, and (3) to obey.

Were there any elders at Corinth? There is no specific mention of such. Were there any elders at all in the New Testament? Certainly there were "elders" in the New Testament sense of that word. I am not talking about *"duly selected and appointed Church Officers,"* because there was none of these anywhere among God's people until the last of the apostles had died and Satan with his great deception got underway.

Today, "elder" has been made into a title, exactly the thing that Jesus has forbidden! As mentioned before, Jesus explicitly forbade titles, both the giving and the receiving of them in Matthew 23. "Elder" comes from the Greek word *presbuteros*, which simply refers to an older person. Within their culture, they were worthy of respect and deferment simply because of their age. In Leviticus 19:32, the Scriptural background is given for this respect.

"You shall rise before the gray headed and honor the presence of an old person, and fear your God: I am the LORD."

Concerning elders in general, the term was only used to describe elderly people. In the cultural usage in the time of Jesus, it meant people who are at least (about) age 60. The Hebrew word (*zaqen*) refers to those who were able to grow beards which were fully white. The "beard" stipulation was contingent on having Jewish racial stock, but the age stipulation was not.

The Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament says that the term *"always refers to old men (once to an old woman)"* or to a subgroup of those elderly people. The Greek term *"prebus", "presbutes", "presbuteros"* was used in the Septuagint as a rendering of

the Hebrew term (zaqen) given above. These are the terms which are used in the New Testament.

The old person was not only revered in Jewish culture, but with this respect came grave responsibilities. Because of their age and assumed wisdom, they were expected to **guide** those who were younger. This leadership was not something they could relinquish since they never asked for it. They received it because they grew old. The same principles could be applied to fathers. Fathers have the responsibility to raise their children in the training and discipline of the Lord. This is not a responsibility they have any right to shirk. They have no right to give this responsibility to others. This responsibility was not earned or asked for but came through the natural process of parenthood.

As old people, the presbuteroi or the elders became the prime group to guide the brethren. This was their responsibility. They were guides! The weight of age coupled with an exemplary life was worthy of emulation. These were the "elders" mentioned in the New Testament.

There was nothing of "rulership," nothing of being "duly authorized," nothing of an "eldership board," nothing of "exercising authority", nothing of "ministerial dignity," nothing of "occupying a scared office," **ABSOLUTELY NOTHING OF THIS!**

Power hungry, lust-filled, greedy men are the ones who have designed this system for "appointing and installing officers" over the people whom they can now control. As we have learned, these diabolical seeds were sown centuries ago and is totally contrary to the teaching of Jesus and the rest of the New Testament.

The Lord has never intended any man, or group of men, to hold a position "OVER" others, and to exercise special authority by which to "RULE" them. Elders were to GUIDE and SERVE others, being EXAMPLES.

According to Jesus, not even the apostles would "exercise authority" over the people of God. "Ye know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. NOT SO SHALL IT BE AMONG YOU" (Matt. 20:25-26).

This is very significant. If Jesus emphatically withheld "divine authority" from the apostles, surely, He did not delegate it to elders.

The example of Jesus is the most powerful argument against the idea of a ruling clergy. Did He model one thing, only to build another? Did He come serving, only to elevate His people's status later down the road? We think not!

It is the "spirit of antichrist" which speaks, not only of anything that replaces Christ, but also who practices things which He explicitly forbade! Christ's likeness in a thing determines its legitimacy. Does it reflect Him in what He has said or not? If not, it is

none of His. It is NOT of His doing. It is NOT of His workmanship. It is NOT reflecting His image or His character. And neither is it His "*Church!*"

Behold the anti-Christ in all his glory before men, and shame before God.

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