

Church Leadership

by
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{1950-2003}

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Introduction

For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and **appoint elders in every city as I commanded you** ... (Titus 1:5)

So **when they had appointed elders in every church**, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed. (Acts 14:23)

From Miletus **he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church**. And when they had come to him, he said to them: "You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you, serving the Lord with all humility...how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and **taught you publicly and from house to house**... (Acts 20:17-20)

The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: **Shepherd the flock of God** which is among you, **servicing as overseers**, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; **nor as being lords** over those entrusted to you, **but being examples to the flock**. (1 Pet. 5:1-4)

The following study examines the leadership model described in the New Testament. It reveals a change between what was practiced in the early church and what is generally practiced today. These modifications have both hindered the spiritual state of the church and slowed the growth of the kingdom of God. Although some of our traditions have been held for a long time, we need to be prepared to submit everything we do to the scrutiny of God's Word.

Functioning as a Body of Christ

We cannot intelligently discuss the role of church leaders without first defining what the church is and does. The church, as Christ's body in this world, has a function. The Lord intended to use His body to display His life and works. He wants to draw lost souls out of the darkness of this world and into the light of the kingdom of God.

Christ manifests Himself through His body as the members choose to walk by His Spirit. He has gifted each member to serve a specific purpose. "For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable." (Rom 11:29) His will is not optional. Every member is expected to submit to what the Lord has purposed to work out through their lives.

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, *which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them*. (Eph. 2:10)

Spiritual leaders are responsible for building up the members in their faith and leading them into a life that is both directed and empowered by Christ's Spirit. Only then can He actually manifest His life and works through His body.

If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. (Gal. 5:25)

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. (Eph. 4:11-13)

Not everyone who joins the church actually becomes a member of Christ's body. Many continue to direct their own steps through life. Those who are still living by their

own will are considered “tares.” (Matt. 13:38-40) The devil is the one who introduced this independent way of life to the world. It is evil in God’s sight. We become one of God’s children by entering into a Spirit-directed way of life. “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.” (Rom. 8:14) We become a member of Christ’s body, with Him as the Head, when we permit Him to direct our steps.

I know, O Lord, that a man’s life is not his own; it is not for man to direct his steps. (Jer. 10:23)

If a member of the human body does not respond to the instructions of the head it becomes paralyzed. It becomes lifeless and a hindrance. The body can only function properly when every member is receiving guidance from the head and is responding to what it is directed to do. This same principle applies to the members of Christ’s body.

The body of Christ, like the human body, can also have foreign elements within it. In the human body these uncontrolled elements are called free radicals. It is a source of sickness and disease. We are now speaking of people within the church who live by their own wills. And if this self-willed way of life is permitted to spread from one member to the next, it becomes like a cancer that eventually destroys the whole body.

Christ can only direct the members of His body when they choose to lay down their independent will and submit to the leading of His Spirit. As Jesus chose to lay down His will to do the will of His Father, we are to lay down our will so we may carry out His will. The Son remains the Head of the body as we respond to His voice.

My sheep hear My voice...and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life... (John 10:27)

The eternal life is more than a life that goes on forever. Jesus displayed the eternal life in bodily form. (1 John 1:2) This divine and everlasting life is what reveals God’s nature of holy love. The Son gives this divine life to everyone who actually walks in His Spirit. He is then able to manifest both His life and His works through His body.

And this is the promise that He has promised us—eternal life. (1 John 2:25)

And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. (1 John 5:11)

God created His human children to be more than an object of His love. He made human beings for the purpose of *displaying His life of holy love* in this world. Each member of Christ’s body is intended to serve as a vessel of His life. We were created to be a temple of the living God. Once the temple is fully consecrated to Him, He is able to fill the temple with His glory and reveal His life of holy love in the world. He empowers us with His Spirit to manifest His life as we live for His purposes.

That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you... {may} know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. (Eph 3:16-19)

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels {weak mortal bodies}, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us...that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. (2 Cor 4:7, 10)

Sadly, the vessel was misappropriated and put to a different use when man chose to live for his own will and serve his own purposes. “The whole world lies under the sway

of the wicked one” because fallen man was deceived into thinking that he could be his own god and direct his own steps. (1 John 5:18) Like the devil, he chose to have an independent life so that he may live for his own purposes and have his own glory.

The Son died to do much more than simply forgive man for being a sinner. He shed His blood on a cross to purchase back the vessel. The vessel is now His by both the right of creation and the right of purchase. Those who continue to misappropriate the vessel and use it for their own purposes will be held accountable on the Day of Judgment. They are thieves in God’s sight. And no thief will be permitted to inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Cor. 6:10)

Christ did not come to start another religion where people merely believe in certain words and conform to certain practices while basically living from themselves. He came to be the source of our life. There is only one Christian life. The Son refers to Himself as “the way, the truth, and the life.” (John 14:6) We enter into the Christian faith by choosing to live through Him. He becomes the source of our life as we walk in His Spirit. It is by permitting Him to manifest His life of holy love through us that we enter into a state where we can expect to stand before Him with boldness on the Day of Judgment.

In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him {by walking in His Spirit}... Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; *because as He is, so are we in this world.* (1 John 4:9, 17)

The Lord cannot manifest Himself—His glory—through someone who continues to direct their own steps through life. Neither can He forgive people for the sin of stealing His vessel when they refuse to give it back. Spiritual leaders should be making everyone aware of the absolute necessity of surrendering the vessel of their body to the Lord. He created it for a purpose. And He expects to have freedom to use it as He intended.

“But My people have changed their Glory {the divine life of holy love} for what does not profit {by turning to a self-directed form of life}. Be astonished, O heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid; Be very desolate,” says the Lord. “For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn themselves cisterns—broken cisterns that can hold no water.” (Jer. 2:11-13)

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you *present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.* And do not be conformed to this world {by living in self-will}, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind {by learning to live by the Spirit}, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. (Rom. 12:1-2)

Those who will surrender to a Spirit-directed way of life while looking to the shed blood of Jesus will receive the gift of His indwelling Spirit. The Spirit is given for the purpose of preparing the temple of the body to be filled with God’s glory. The objective is to enter into the kingdom of God where everyone shares with the Son in His Kingdom-life, which is “righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” (Rom. 14:17)

It is after becoming a Spirit-led disciple that we are expected to press into the fullness of this life of promise. Those who will honestly search the Scriptures will find that it is necessary to work out this salvation by responding to the Spirit after receiving this

precious gift. There is a life of promise where the Lord fully establishes His Kingdom-life of holy love within the heart.

But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory {to be a vessel of His life of holy love} by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while {in dying out to the old self-originated form of life}, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you {in His Kingdom-life}. (1 Pet. 5:10)

For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, *much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His {indwelling} life.* (Rom. 5:10)

That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith...that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. (Eph. 3:17, 19)

For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them..." Therefore "Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean {anything that is not wholly devoted to the Lord}, and I will receive you {into the Kingdom-life of promise}... Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. (2 Cor. 6:16-7:1)

For if you live according to the flesh {after receiving the gift of the Spirit} you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live {in the Kingdom-life of promise}. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. (Rom8:13-14)

And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconnium, and Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God." (Acts 14:21-22)

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. {It destroys the self-sufficient spirit and teaches you to live by the Holy Spirit.} But let patience have its perfect work {so you are living by the Spirit alone}, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. (Jam. 1:2-4)

For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one {Adam}, *much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness* {that establishes the Kingdom-life within the heart} *will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.* (Rom. 5:17)

The devil was originally created to be a vessel of God's life and glory. But he wanted to have his own glory. In order to have personal glory for himself he would need to live by his own resources independently of God. (John 8:44) He also led Adam and his lineage into the same form of life. Those who choose this independent way of life naturally live by their own sufficiency. Independence and self-sufficiency are inseparable. In effect, this is the inbred sin that Christ must remove from fallen man before He can fully establish His eternal Kingdom-life within the heart.

The way of the cross is intended to destroy this independence and self-sufficiency. God scourges every son He receives to take away their natural strength. In His heavenly kingdom He is the source of everything because everyone lives by His Spirit. And so He

must destroy the old independent man, with his self-sufficient spirit, before the new man can be lifted by the Spirit into the eternal kingdom of God.

Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted {completely changed} and become as {dependent} little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. (Matt. 18:3)

For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives {into the kingdom of God}...for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness {no longer living out from ourselves in our own resources}. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. (Heb. 12:6-11)

For the kingdom of God is...righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. (Rom. 14:17)

We enter the eternal rest of God by “ceasing” from our own works and living by Christ’s Spirit. (Heb. 4:9-10) Once the independent and self-sufficient spirit has been destroyed, and we have begun to walk in the power of the Spirit, we find that we “lack nothing.” (Jam. 1:4) In the resurrection life God is able to do whatever He pleases through the mortal body because the self-originated flesh-life has died. His power is perfected in weakness.

For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit {live through the Spirit}, rejoice in Christ Jesus {for what He is doing}, *and have no confidence in the flesh...* Yet indeed I also count all things loss {everything from the self-originated form of life} for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him...that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection... (Phil. 3:3, 8-10)

For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection. (Rom. 6:5)

It may be helpful to hear the words of A. W. Tozer on this subject. He was a spiritual leader who knew how to counsel believers as they sought out this life of promise.

Before all who wish to follow Christ the way lies clear. It is the way of death unto life... The truth is that God has never planned that His children should live forever stretched upon a cross. Christ Himself endured His cross for only six hours. When the cross had done its work life entered and took over. “Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him...” His joyful resurrection followed hard upon His joyless crucifixion... The man who takes his cross and follows Christ will soon find that his direction is away from the sepulcher. Death is behind him and a joyous and increasing life before. (*The Divine Conquest*)

True conversion takes place when there is a clear choice to follow Jesus. The various implications of this turning to the Lord are not fully understood in the beginning. But the Lord can see into the heart. He knows when a person is fully committed to becoming one of His disciples. This is when they receive the inner witness that they are a child of God.

For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, “Abba, Father.” The

Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. (Rom 8:15-17)

Everyone who submits to being a Spirit-led child of God will receive the gift of the indwelling Spirit. The Spirit comes to provide power over the desires of the flesh. There is a new seed of divine life planted within the heart. This presence of the Spirit produces a deep hunger and thirst after righteousness. (1 John 3:9; Matt. 5:6)

However, the “filling” of the soul with Christ’s Kingdom-life of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit can only take place after the seed has been planted in the ground. The outer covering must break down and be lost before the divine life can germinate and become fruitful. Following Christ through death into life will be painful to the old flesh-life. But we must suffer with Him if we want to be a vessel of His glory.

Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone {separated from the shared life of the Trinity}... If anyone serves Me {in the Spirit}, let him follow Me {through the cross}; and were I am {in the heavenly realms}, there My servant will be also {sharing in the Kingdom-life}. (John 12:24-26)

Today is the day to enter into the kingdom of God where everyone lives by the Spirit of God. We enter in by dying to the old independent and self-sufficient way of life. Jesus instructed us to deny ourselves and lose our old form of life by taking His way of the cross. We find the fullness of His divine life when the old self-originated form of life is dead. (Matt. 16:25) The Lord has only promised to manifest His heavenly life within those who have responded to His instructions.

He who has My commandments and keeps them {in this time of preparation for being filled with God’s glory}, it is he who loves Me...and I will love him and manifest Myself to him {as an indwelling life of holy love}. (John 14:21)

And of His fullness we have all received {we all have access to this heavenly life through yielded faith}, and grace for grace. (John 1:16)

If Jesus was still walking our streets and confronting “would-be” disciples, as He did in the first century, many of those in the church would discover they are not members of His body. They are not yet living by His Spirit.

The “tares” within the church are merely practicing a human religion. They have kept their minds on “earthly things” because they are still being led through life by their own desires. Although they may have given up gross sins to become respectable, they are still directing their own steps and trying to find life from the things of this world. The spiritual leaders of the church should be doing what Jesus did by making sure everyone knows what it means to be “fit for the kingdom of God.”

And another also said, “Lord, I will follow You, but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house.” But Jesus said to him, “No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back {to the old self-directed form of life}, is fit for the kingdom of God.” (Luke 9:61-62)

For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ {His way of dying to self-will}: *whose end is destruction...who set their mind on*

earthly things. For our citizenship {our place of life} is in heaven... (Phil. 3:18-19)

If then you were raised with Christ {through the new birth}, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things of the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. (Col. 3:1-3)

The objective of the church is to lead every member into this life of promise. We share with Christ in His heavenly life, becoming like Him in this world, as we live through His eternal Spirit.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love. (Eph. 1:3-4)

Baptized into the Body

For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body...and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. (1 Cor 12:12-14)

That they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us {sharing in the same life}, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory {the life of holy love} which You gave Me I have given them {providing access to the same heavenly life}, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one. (John 17:21-23)

Spiritual leaders must communicate this critical lesson to every member of Christ's body if it is to function as the Lord intended. A cancer is introduced to the body when people are permitted to think they can live independently of God by directing their own steps through life. These foreign elements will eventually destroy the whole body. It may still exist, but it will be like a body on a morgue table. Christ cannot live through it.

No one can come to this "unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man" (Eph. 4:13) until they have been taught how the Son lives in perfect harmony with His Father within the Trinity. Jesus came to show us how to share in this same eternal life. He emptied Himself of His own glory to live as a man. The Father then filled that empty vessel with the glory that resides within the Trinity. He chose to live as a mere vessel of His Father's life and will. In effect, perfect love chooses to lay down all rights to independence in order to remain in harmony with the divine will. The Son's willingness to lay down His own will and to live through the Father, which enabled Him to continue sharing in the eternal life of holy love, is what maintained the unity that exists within the Trinity.

The Son has now given His followers access to the same glory. "And the glory {the life of holy love} which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one." (John 17:22-23) Those who will lay down their own will to become one with God in His will can look to the Lord in faith to "fill" the temple of their body with this divine glory. This shared life within the Trinity is what enables every member of Christ's body to become "perfect in one" with both Him and each other.

He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things. (Eph. 4:10)

That they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You... That the {perfect} love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them. (John 17:21, 26)

That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you... {may} know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. (Eph. 3:17, 19)

We are baptized supernaturally into the true body of Christ when the Spirit comes to dwell within us. It takes place when we first choose to die to our old self-directed way of life. As a symbolic act, this conversion is acted out when the believer goes down into the *watery grave* of baptism. It reveals to the world that there has been a choice to die to self-will and become a follower of Jesus. Only then is it possible to rise up and begin walking by the Spirit in newness of life.

This choice to die to self-will in order to be led by the Spirit into all truth is the real meaning of “dying to sin.” There are many who have cleaned up their outward life by putting off outwards sins. As the Pharisees did, they conform to the laws of God to be approved by men. But their heart remains permeated with the inbred sin of self-will. They still have an independent life because they have not yet fully submitted to what the symbolic act of baptism depicts.

I know, O Lord, that a man’s life is not his own; it is not for man to direct his steps. (Jer. 10:23 NIV)

Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death {dying to our own will and ways}, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life {by walking in the Spirit}... For the death that He died, He died to sin {to self-will} once for all; *but the life that He lives, He lives to God.* {And this is the yielded life that He wants to share with His followers.} Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin {dying to your own will}, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 6:4, 10-11)

For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, *that those who live should live no longer for themselves* {for their own will}, but for Him who died for them and rose again. (2 Cor. 5:14-15)

The very essence of Christ’s way of the cross can be summed up in these simple words, “Not my will, but yours be done.” The Son established this eternal Kingdom-life in bodily form. He did it by dying to the sin of self-will “once for all.” Everyone who enters the kingdom of God lives for the divine will alone. And the Son is now in a position to share this overcoming life with everyone who will choose to die to their own will and live by His Spirit. They will receive the “abundance of grace” and “the gift of righteousness” that enables them to “reign in life through...Jesus Christ.” (Rom. 5:17) This is what makes everyone “perfect in one” as they share in the life of the Trinity.

For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity {the eternal life of holy love} *lives in bodily form*, and you have been given {access to} fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority. (Col. 2:9-10 NIV)

And of His fullness we have all received {we all have access to this heavenly life through faith}, and grace for grace. (John 1:16)

This turning from a self-directed way of life to a Spirit-directed way of life is what enables the Lord to carry out the work He has planned to do through His body. Our life is not our own. We enter into the true Christian faith when we submit to Christ as our Head and permit Him to direct our steps into the work He has planned for us to do. “For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.” (Rom. 11:29)

Those who will follow the Son in this way of the cross will also be enabled to share with Him in His “eternal life” both in this world and in the world to come. While we can only share in the firstfruits of His heavenly life at this point, we are to display His “light of life” to the world. He has established this life in “bodily form” so that we may begin revealing the love that exists within the Trinity. “That they may be one just as We are one: I in them and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one.”

He {the Spirit} will bring glory to me {the Son} by taking from what is mine {the eternal life established in bodily form} and make it known to you. All that belongs to the Father {the shared life within the Trinity} is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you. (John 16:14-15 NIV)

Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. *And this is eternal life, that they may know You*, the only true God {the source of eternal life}, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. (John 17:1-3)

At that day {when you are filled with the glory} you will know that I am in My Father {receiving life from Him}, and you in Me {receiving the same life}, and I in you {manifesting the life to the world}. (John 14:21)

Church leaders who limit their teachings to Christ’s work of reconciliation are missing the whole point of why He came. Christ came as the Second Adam to restore the relationship that Adam lost. He came to both purchase back the vessel and to be the source of our life. But no one can be “saved by His life” while they are continuing to direct their own steps. (Rom. 5:10) He can only “dwell in” and “walk in” us as we choose to walk by His Spirit and do the work that He has planned to do through our lives.

For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, *I will dwell in them, and walk in them...* Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. (2 Cor. 6:16; 7:1 KJV)

Those who are attempting to rest in a “so-called” salvation that permits them to direct their own steps through life will never become like God in holy love. It makes it impossible for Christ’s Spirit to fill the temple of their body with His glory. This misappropriation of the vessel will cause them to die in “the sin” of self-will.

We receive credited righteousness from the moment we submit to God and are “fully convinced” that He will do what He has promised. (Rom. 4:20) Abraham was the father of this way of faith. After choosing to believe God, he set out for the life of promise based on God’s word. “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he

was going.” (Heb. 11:8) Believers must choose to set out on this same course expecting God to take them into the life of promise.

Like Abraham, many will mistakenly think it is necessary to help God produce the life of promise. Their heart will still be under the influence of the old self-sufficient spirit. And so they will naturally find themselves producing an Ishmael, with his carnal nature, during this stage of their journey.

The wilderness, with its limited wells of refreshment, is a place where God must do away with the old self-sufficient spirit. Even the best works of the flesh will be mixed with carnality. It was not until Abraham was “as good as dead” that he could rely on God alone to provide the life of promise. (Heb. 11:12) With no strength left in his flesh, he was in a place where he could come to know the God who “gives life to the dead.” (Rom. 4:17) Dying to our independent and self-sufficient spirit is a painful lesson that needs to be learned before it is possible to consistently share with Christ in His Kingdom-life of “righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”

Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead. (2 Cor. 1:9)

Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. (2 Cor 3:5-6)

For we are the circumcision {those who have had the flesh-life cut off}, who worship God in the Spirit {live through the Spirit}, rejoice in Christ Jesus {for what He is doing}, and have no confidence in the flesh, (Phil. 3:3)

It is possible to go to heaven without finding the fullness of the Son’s life of holy love in this world. There are earnest souls living for God in the light they have received. But all of Christianity points to the Christ who has come to share His life of perfect love with everyone who believes in Him. Those who have chosen to keep their minds on earthly things, rather than press into this life of promise, must expect to fall short of His eternal life both in this age and in the age to come.

My sheep hear My voice...and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life... (John 10:27-28)

Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called... (1 Tim 6:12)

The Function of Church Leaders

The Holy Spirit is the Executive Director of the Church. He carries out the work of the Lord as each member submits to His leading. But the body will not be prepared to function under His leadership when church leaders are operating on the natural plane using the same principles that businessmen use to run secular organizations. While business matters will need to be worked out wherever Christians assemble as a group, this aspect is not emphasized in God’s Word. The focus of the New Testament is on the spiritual growth of the members.

Spiritual leaders have the responsibility for teaching individual members how to live by the Spirit and respond to His leadings. The Spirit is the One who makes each member a properly functioning part of Christ’s body. He has the power to guide everyone into “all

truth.” (John 16:13) Once the members are living by the Spirit, Christ, as the Head, can then move His body according to His will.

God intended for the spiritual leaders of the church to remain focused on these spiritual matters. They are responsible for “equipping the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” (Eph. 4:12-13) And the only way to accomplish this God-ordained goal is by teaching each member how to live “through” Christ by walking in His Spirit.

Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. (Col. 1:28)

Unfortunately, much of the church today is functioning on the natural plane. Leaders tend to serve as program directors and business managers. They work very hard to keep everything running in a way that will attract the crowds. The emphasis is on the number of people filling the pews and on the size of the budget. It results in a neglect of the spiritual condition of the members.

The apostle Paul said, “If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.” (Gal. 6:25) But very few members of the body learn what this instruction implies. It is the reason why the body of Christ is not functioning as He intended. We must keep in mind that He died and was resurrected so “that we might live through Him.” (1 John 4:9)

The supernatural form of Christianity that is revealed in the Scriptures cannot be worked out through human programs. It will require leaders who have devoted themselves to prayer and teaching God’s Word to the people. In other words, every spiritual leader should be saying with the apostle Peter: “We will give ourselves *continually* to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” (Acts 6:4) Their primary emphasis should be on the spiritual growth of the members. The Spirit can only function as the Executive Director of the body and truly work supernaturally through the members when He is directing each of their steps.

But he who does the truth {by walking in the Spirit} comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God. (John 3:21)

In addition to teaching publicly, the apostle Paul went from “house to house” teaching individuals what they needed to know. This personal instruction would enable him to make sure everyone understood how to live as a member of Christ’s body. The church will never come to full spiritual maturity without this kind of individual instruction.

This personal ministry of the Word will be neglected when church leaders are functioning as corporate business managers and program directors. Christ called His leaders to live as lowly servants who pour out their lives in the spiritual development of the individual members of His body. The business matters can be assigned to the deacons. The spiritual leaders must “not cease in teaching and preaching” what Christ, as Messiah, has come to do.

Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, “It is not desirable that we {as the spiritual leaders} should leave the word of God and serve tables {to perform the routine business affairs of the church}. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may

appoint over this business; *but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.* (Acts 6:2-4)

You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you, serving the Lord with all humility...how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and *taught you publicly and from house to house...* (Acts 20:17-20)

But in all things we commend ourselves *as ministers of God*: in much patience, in tribulations...in labors, in sleeplessness, in fastings; by purity, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by sincere love... (2 Cor 6:4-6)

And daily in the temple, *and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching* Jesus as the Christ. (Acts 5:42)

Those who have assumed positions of spiritual leadership have taken on a great responsibility. The early leaders of the church revealed the kind of dedication and devotion that is needed to build up a spiritual body of Christians who actually believe that Christ is on the throne with all authority. Their function, whatever the cost, is to carry out this work of the ministry “till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man...” (Eph. 4:13) They need to lead each member into the life that Jesus has provided: “I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me.” (John 17:23)

The Leadership Structure in the Early Church

Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. This they also did, and **sent it to the elders** by the hands of Barnabas and Saul. (Acts 11:29-30)

In Acts 11:30 we learn that the Jerusalem relief fund was given to the “elders.” It was previously given to the apostles. This is our introduction to a form of church leadership other than the apostles. As the church develops from this point forward we learn how “elders” are appointed in “every church” to “shepherd” and “oversee” the members of Christ’s body.

For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and **appoint elders in every city as I commanded you** ... (Titus 1:5)

So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed. (Acts 14:23)

The leaders of the church in the New Testament consisted of a group of men known variously as elders, pastors, overseers or bishops. Each of these terms was used to describe the same function. These spiritual leaders were responsible for translating the theory of the gospel into the practical operation of an active church. Again, each member would need to learn how to live by the Spirit before the Lord could begin moving the body according to His plans. (Eph. 2:10)

We owe no allegiance to tradition. But we do owe the utmost fidelity, at whatever the cost, to the transcendent truth of God’s Word. Tradition, of itself, is neither right nor wrong. But we must never rely on it as our means for deciding truth. God’s Word alone must hold that position. With these thoughts in mind, we need to examine how God has

described the leadership function in the church. A close look at the terms He uses will help to reveal His plan.

ELDER (*presbuteros*)—This is the term that is most frequently used in referring to the leaders of a local church. Thayer says, “Among Christians, those who presided over the assemblies (or churches)...they did not differ at all from the (episkopoi) bishops or overseers... [It] is evident from the fact that the two words are used indiscriminately. The title episkopos (bishop) denotes the function...” The elders were responsible for the oversight of the church.

BISHOP (*episkopos*). This term refers to an “overseer.” W.E. Vine continues to point out the similarity between these various terms: “*Presbuteros*, an elder, is another term for the same person as bishop or overseer... The term ‘elder’ indicates the mature scriptural experience and understanding of those so described; the term ‘bishop,’ or ‘overseer,’ indicates the character of the work undertaken.”

We should also note that the verb form of *episkopos* (bishop) is used in a general sense to describe a duty that all Christians have to one another. We are to “watch over” each other as a body working together in this matter of building up the members until we are all revealing the life of Christ.

PASTOR (*poimen*). This term is defined by Vine as follows: “A shepherd... this was the service committed to elders (overseers or bishops)... this involves tender care and vigilant superintendence.” Thayer adds: “A herdsman, especially a shepherd; the overseers of the Christian assemblies. (Eph. 4:11)”

By looking at a number of these different definitions together we can begin to see what is involved in church leadership: “To have the spiritual care of,” “to exercise oversight,” a “guardian of souls, one who watches over their welfare,” and one who “guides and feeds the flock.” These terms describe a function. They are like the terms doctor, attorney and accountant. The common element is that they all provide a service to others. In reality, it is a position of helping others rather than an “office” to rule over them. If the overseers are serving as Christ intended, those who are receiving the service will gladly submit to their guidance and leadership.

Both Scripture and history attests to the fact that God provided several leaders within each congregation to shepherd the flock. We do not find a case where God appointed a singular “elder.” Sometimes special church planters were used until elders were appointed. But the goal was multiple elders.

For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint **elders** in every city as I commanded you ... (Titus 1:5)

So when they had appointed **elders in every church**, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed. (Acts 14:23)

From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the **elders of the church**. (Acts 20:17)

The **elders** who are among you I exhort... (1 Pet. 5:1)

To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, **with the bishops and deacons**... (Phil. 1:1)

Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. This they also did, and **sent it to the elders** by the hands of Barnabas and Saul. (Acts 11:29-30)

An honest reading of God's Word reveals the use of multiple elders. The historians also tell us that this form of leadership was practiced throughout the first century. When we fully acknowledge God as the One with true wisdom, we can begin to see how foolish it becomes to change His revealed plans in order to implement our own "good ideas."

The Service Provided by Church Leaders

God created human beings to live as vessels. A vessel exists for one purpose. It is intended to hold something. The glorious truth of the Gospel reveals how God's children were designed and created to live as vessels of His divine life. His purpose is to use the vessel to display His glory—His life of holy love—to the world. The elders are to teach this lesson to the members of Christ's body and exhort them to enter into the fullness of this life of promise.

Christ can only manifest Himself through a mortal body after the believer has fully surrendered His whole being to be led solely by His Spirit for time and eternity. Working out this transition from the old way of living by the flesh to the new way of living by the Spirit alone is often a slow and painful process. The vessel must first be emptied of the old self-originated form of life before it can be filled with Christ's heavenly life.

The leaders of the church are responsible for guiding the members through this transition that separates them from the influence of the "spirit of the world." There is no place for independent and self-sufficient ways of this world in the eternal kingdom of God. "Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean {anything that does not have its source in God}, and I will receive you." (2 Cor. 6:17) "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven." (John 3:27) The Lord will supply an abundant entrance into His Kingdom-life of promise when we have died to self-will and are prepared to live through Christ's Spirit by faith.

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God. (Gal. 2:20)

Living by the Spirit in the kingdom of God involves a way of life that is radically different than how people live on the natural plane of this world. In fact, if someone still has their mind on "the things of men," they will naturally live contrary to the ways of God. His ways, as revealed through the mind of Christ, and the ways of this world are radically different from each other. Christ emptied Himself of His own glory, made Himself of no reputation, and became the lowest form of slave. And not stopping there, He pressed the point by coming to the complete end of Himself on a cross where there was absolutely no strength left in His flesh. (Phil. 2:5-8) It was from that point of absolute weakness that He could be highly exalted to the place of greatest usefulness. But those who have their minds on "the things of men" think in terms of trying to work out matters in the strength of the flesh. God's ways are radically different than man's ways.

For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God. (Luke 16:15)

You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men. (Matt. 16:23)

Jesus went on to describe how His disciples would need to deny their old self-life and follow Him through the cross. Those who died to their own will and self-sufficiency would find His life. He would come to put within their heart the Kingdom-life He established in bodily form. They would then be able to live in the power of the Spirit and do His will here on earth with the same kind of submissiveness that it is done in heaven. (Luke 11:2)

There is a way to determine when people are truly dead to their own will and living by Christ's Spirit alone. The Spirit is one. Given time, He will bring everyone into harmony with each other. This is the sign of a mature body of believers. As the members of a human body work together in harmony under the direction of one mind, the members of Christ's body may also work together as "one" when everyone is living by His Spirit. The effectiveness of the elders is measured by how well the body is working together in this unity of life.

Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ {if Christ's Spirit is working in your heart}, if any comfort of {divine} love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love {the love shared in the life of the Trinity}, being of one accord, of one mind. (Phil. 2:1-2)

That they may be one just as We are one {sharing in the same life and will}: I in them, and You in Me; *that they may be made perfect in one*...that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them. (John 17:22-23, 26)

Now the multitude of those who believed were of *one heart and one soul*... And great grace was upon them all. (Acts 4:32-33)

It was not God's purpose to use the elders to control the church. The Spirit of Christ must be permitted to remain in full control of the body. He is the only One who can work out this heavenly unity where everyone is "perfect in one." The elders are to lead the members into this unity of the Spirit by teaching everyone how to live by the Spirit.

Not only does the Spirit direct the affairs of the church, He also places each member in the body according to His plans. The Lord has already planned the work He wants done. The members are responsible for discovering their gifts and then submitting to the calling He has planned to work out through their lives. (Rom. 11:29)

There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit {operating with one divine will}. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord {coordinating these different functions to work together with one mind and one heart}. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all... But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills. (1 Cor. 12:4-11)

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. (Eph. 2:10)

The Lord gifts each individual for a different function in the body. Even the elders have different functions assigned to them. For example, Peter was an elder in the church. "The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder." (1 Pet. 5:1) But his "function" was to serve as an apostle. Each elder will have his own gifts. As they each function together doing what God has gifted them to do there is a synergism produced that is not possible with only one leader.

Many of the gifts will not be properly represented when only one man is “in charge.” The single leader inevitably operates from the perspective of his personal gifting. After becoming the “head,” he begins to operate the church according to his preferences. The work of the church becomes distorted as other members are pressed into his way of doing things.

This should help us to understand why God chose to use multiple elders. He intended for each of the members of His body to be “perfect in one” as they all use their different gifts to function according to His will. And if this heavenly harmony does not exist we can know that self-will has been permitted to live on within the church body.

Again, the Scriptures emphasize a plurality of elders in every church. It was not until after the first century that we find hierarchical control structures being set up where individuals took on positions that permitted them to “rule over” the body. It was this movement away from the New Testament beginnings that eventually led to a Pope serving in the position of the Holy Spirit. During the dark ages very little was known or taught about the need for everyone to be “perfect in one” by living in the Spirit.

Although the leaders of the Reformation went a long way in turning the church back to the priesthood of all believers, they brought the hierarchical leadership style with them from the Catholic Church. We seldom see a plurality of elders living under the direct guidance of the Holy Spirit.

There is another reason for having a plurality of elders. It makes it easier to discern the will of God. We need to remember there is only one Spirit. “There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.” The Spirit of Christ has only one will. The objective of the body of Christ is to learn His will. The human will has only one purpose, and that is to remain fully submitted to the divine will. With several elders working together, each dead to their own will and fully submitted to God’s will, it becomes easier to discern what Christ is attempting to work out through His body. The Spirit of Christ remains in charge.

The elders are expected to pray and fast until there is complete harmony in the Spirit. They are to function as well-tuned “receivers.” And then, performing like the transmitting apparatus of the brain, they are to make known to the members of the body how the Lord is moving.

Once the body is truly working in harmony with the will of God’s Spirit, it then becomes possible to pray in the Spirit. This is one of the reasons why the church was so effective in the early years. As they were led by the Spirit and prayed in the Spirit they could depend on God to use His power to accomplish His preordained plans.

If you abide in Me {where you share in the divine life and will}, and
My words abide in you {as you continue to submit to all revealed truth},
you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My
Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples
{living as a fruitful body}. (John 15:7-8)

It has always been the Lord’s intention to bring together a body of believers who live in harmony with Him and with each other. This is how He would prove that He was the true Savior of the world. “That they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.” (John 17:21) The fruitfulness that comes out of this unity of life is what would both reveal Him as a supernatural Savior and glorify the Father.

It was not in the Lord's plan to work through individuals independently of the body. He is able to carry out His work most effectively through a body of believers living in harmony with His will. The objective of the body is to discover His will and become one with each other in united prayer. Because this kind of prayer never fails, Christ's body today can be as effective as the first century church in furthering the kingdom of God.

The only way for a diverse group of people to live together with "one mind and one heart" is for everyone to live by the Spirit. The church will become effective in direct proportion to how the leaders have facilitated this oneness of life in the members.

Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment {by dying to your own will and living through Christ's Spirit}. (1 Cor. 1:10)

Divisions can only occur in the body when individuals are choosing to be led by the flesh (their own will) rather than by the Spirit (God's will). Wherever you find contentions and divisions you can know that someone is still living by the flesh. The members will need to die to this carnal nature before there can be the kind of unity that permits the Spirit of God to work mightily through the body of Christ.

For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and *behaving like mere men*? (1 Cor. 3:3)

The elders are to live together in perfect unity. Their function is to be a model to the other members. They are to "shepherd the flock...serving as overseers" by "being examples to the flock." (1 Pet. 5:1-3) The members must be able to see how God intended for His children to live in this unity of the Spirit.

The Nature of Christian Leadership

When the mother of James and John asked Jesus to give her sons special positions in His kingdom, Jesus reprovved her saying, "You do not know what you are asking." This carnal mother, having been deeply influenced by the spirit of the world, supposed that Christ's kingdom would be like other earthly kingdoms and governments where there are offices and special places of power and authority. But these positions of prestige and power are completely foreign to the kingdom of God.

Yes, God uses earthly forms of government to constrain the sin that naturally rises out of the flesh-life in fallen man. This system of outward laws where rulers exercise authority will be needed as long as people are still being led by their selfish desires. "Knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous person {those who are living by the Spirit}, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners." (1 Tim 1:9) Later on we will look at how Christians are to live by the Spirit rather than by the letter of the law. (Rom. 7:6; 2 Cor. 3:5-6) But at this point it is necessary to see how the nature of leadership in God's kingdom is contrary to the form of leadership used by the organizations of this world.

The other disciples, being still under the power of their carnal nature, became indignant when they heard how James and John had sought special positions of power and prestige through their mother. Envy and jealousy surfaced. They assumed they were entitled to as much position, power and honor in the coming kingdom as the two brothers. The Lord then addressed this issue by describing how His kingdom operates on a

principle that is diametrically opposed to the system used by worldly leaders. He then taught the doctrine that is to be used as the model of true leadership in His kingdom.

You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great *exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you*; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And *whoever desires to be first* (a true leader) *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. (Matt. 20:25-28)

Jesus has explicitly laid down the foundation for the nature of authority in His kingdom. In His kingdom there are no authoritarian offices, no ruling and subordinate positions, such as is typical in civil governments and human organizations. This is a focal passage in the New Testament for interpreting all other passages that discuss positions of authority in the kingdom of Christ. The Lord here clearly defines the nature of these things. We must be prepared to use this model, rather than the models of this world, to interpret what the Bible says about church leadership.

What did Jesus mean when He said, “the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them”? He had a purpose for teaching this spiritual principle. And those who honestly open their hearts to Him, and who have ears to hear, will soon understand why authoritarian forms of power must not be used. The Spirit will lead everyone into the same truth.

God can only change the heart as we yield our will to Him and look to Him to put the nature of His life within our heart. If we truly want to be a disciple of Jesus Christ and find the fullness of His life, it will be necessary to yield to the principles of life found in His kingdom. Those who honestly follow this course will quickly discover how His way of life is totally contrary to what is highly valued by the men of this world. Conforming to His mind will take us in a completely different direction.

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who...made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant... (Phil. 2:5-7)

Our Lord used great care in His teachings. He did not want anyone to be deceived. He has explained in detail how His true disciples would live. Since the leaders are to be an example of this character, which would entail modeling this Kingdom-life to the flock, everyone who takes on a leadership position should already possess these character traits.

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 {sacrificing Himself} for many. (Matt. 20:27-28)

If anyone desires to be first {and become a true leader in the kingdom of God}, *he shall be last of all* and servant of all. (Mark 9:35)

So the last will be first, and the first last. For many are called, but few chosen. {Many are called out by God through the new birth, but few are chosen to be lifted into His heavenly life of promise because they do not actually submit to Christ’s way of life.} (Matt. 20:16)

For *he who is least* among you all will be great. (Luke 9:48)

For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted. (Luke 14:11)

Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you {lift you into the life of promise} in due time. (1 Peter 5:6)

It is not difficult to see how far our thought processes will need to change if we are to be honored by God. Those who are lifted the highest spiritually by God's power are those who sink down to the lowest place of servanthood. They are willing to be last in all matters and serve others sacrificially as slaves, expecting nothing for their service. God sees this yieldedness within the heart and pours out an abundant measure of His grace to enable these consecrated believers to reign in His heavenly Kingdom-life through Jesus Christ. (Rom. 5:17)

Jesus practiced what He preached. He set the example and instructed His disciples to follow Him. He expects everyone to have the same "mind" that was in Him. (Phil 2:5-9) This is the life that spiritual leaders must display if they are to fulfill their role and lead others into the Son's "light of life." (John 8:12) "Shepherd the flock of God which is among you...*not... as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.*"

The Spirit of God raises individuals into positions where He can use them to further the true kingdom of God after they have the mind that was revealed by Jesus. It entails being emptied of all self-glory, becoming nothing in self, and choosing to live as the lowest of servants. Those who have risen into positions of leadership without this nature being deeply imbedded within their heart by the Spirit have probably achieved their goals through a self-exalting spirit.

Those who desire to be leaders among you "let him be your slave." The word translated slave in Matthew 20:27 is the Greek word *doulos*, which means bondservant. Jesus used a word that depicts the most degrading and lowest position one could occupy. Slaves of that time were considered as mere property. They were owned like animals. They had no rights of their own. They were in positions at the extreme opposite end of those who were held in high esteem for having power over others. And Jesus used this term so there could not be any mistake about which direction His true leaders would take. These two extremes make it very easy for Him to judge individuals based on what is in their heart.

Every church leader should resolve this issue before it is too late. Those who have taken the way that is highly esteemed among men are in serious trouble. They may think they are serving Christ and doing many great works in His name, but if their nature remains wrong and they are following the self-exalting ways of the devil, the Lord will insist that He does not know them.

You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God. (Luke 16:15)

Not everyone who says to Me, "Lord, Lord," shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?" And then I will declare to them, "I never knew you {your nature remained wrong}; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!" (Matt. 7:21-23)

When Jesus made Himself of "no reputation," he effectively made himself "nothing." This is how the New International Version interprets this word. He "made himself nothing," taking the very nature of a bond slave. (Phil. 2:7) Do you honestly have the mind of Christ? Each one of us needs to discover what is in our heart before it is too late.

If you find a spirit in you that is contrary to Christ's life and nature, and find that you cannot destroy it, remember that Christ came to do away with it. He established the eternal Kingdom-life in bodily form. Within Him is a nature that is both self-emptying and absolutely submissive. This nature actually finds its greatest joy in being nothing so that God may be all in all. And He can now manifest this established life within everyone who dies to their own will so that He may live through them with His will.

I am the light of the world. He who follows Me {through the cross}
shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life. (John 8:12)

The Son chose to be nothing in Himself and to live as a mere vessel of His Father's life and works. It permitted His Father to have all the glory for the work He was doing. He then instructed His disciples to follow Him. We are to live as mere vessels of His life and His works. He will then naturally receive all the glory.

The Lord has promised to manifest His "light of life" through everyone who has fully submitted to His ways. (Matt. 14:21) And He can see into every heart. If He has not manifested His life and nature within the heart, so that His way of life becomes a part of the inner nature, there is still a need to enter into His life of promise. It is in this sense that we are expected to examine ourselves to see if we have permitted Christ to establish this same form of life within our heart.

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me... (Gal. 2:20)

Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you {with His life and nature}?—unless indeed you are disqualified. (2 Cor. 13:5)

Christ's instruction to live as a slave goes against the very heart of the fallen nature. Fallen man naturally desires to exalt himself. Following the devil's independent way of life, he lives by his own resources so he can produce his own works. These works are done for the purpose of being seen and honored by men. He assumes that spiritual fulfillment will be found by making himself great. But those who seek to exalt themselves will find that their spiritual life continues to be brought low regardless of their accomplishments. The reason is simple: "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." (1 Pet. 5:5) He only lifts those who have the mind of Christ.

Those who will follow Jesus by consistently choosing to be the least, the last and the lowest can depend upon God to lift them spiritually into a heavenly life that nothing from this world can touch. It is by living through Christ in the heavenly realms and sharing with Him in His nature of perfect love that it becomes possible to actually enjoy living in this self-emptying and self-sacrificing way of life.

If then you were raised with Christ {through the new birth}, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. (Col. 3:1-3)

For the kingdom of God is... {a constant source of} righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. (Rom. 14:17)

As the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water. (John 7:38)

Those with even a little bit of spiritual wisdom should be able to recognize how it is impossible for God to be everything in their life—their all in all—while they are still

trying to be “something.” We ask you to honestly consider how these Scriptural truths square with those who seek positions of power and prestige so they may be honored by men? This way of life that is highly esteemed among men is in direct conflict with the life of Jesus. How can someone actually insist they believe in Christ when they are following the devil’s self-exalting ways of life?

I do not receive honor from men... How can you believe {in the revealed Christ}, who receive honor from one another, and do not seek the honor that comes from the only God? (John 5:41, 44)

We must choose to plant the seed in the ground before it is possible to be lifted spiritually by the power of God. (John 12:24-26) The way up is down. Jesus said it would be necessary to hate that old flesh-life that wants to have its own glory if we hoped to share with Him in His eternal life in the heavenly realms. (v. 25) We must be willing to become the least and the last if we hope to be great in His kingdom.

Christ categorically rejected any hierarchical structure in His kingdom. Jesus assures us that only the governments of the Gentiles—those who are separated from the life of Christ and the kingdom of God—practice such means of leadership. If they are serving as church leaders, they may be honestly deceived. But they are still influenced by the devil.

We know that we are of God {because we have the mind of Christ}, and *the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one.* (1 John 5:19)

These divinely inspired truths do not imply that church leaders are without authority. The seven men commissioned by the Jerusalem church to deal with the grievances of the Grecian widows would need some form of authority if the problem was to be resolved. But we need to realize that these men, because they were “full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom,” would have possessed a Christ-like nature. And we know that Jesus leads people into truth with love rather than forcing His will on them.

And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will. (2 Tim. 2:24-26)

We can force our will on people and cause them to conform to our standards. But it does not change their heart. They will go their own way as soon as they are free from the “lordship” that forces the law on them. It is the reason why the church loses so many young people to the world. Not many are being led into a Spirit-empowered way of life where there is a constant flow of “righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”

The Equality of the Saints

The principle of the equality of every Spirit-directed child of God is based on the priesthood of all believers. We do not need earthly Priests and Popes making decisions for us. In the kingdom of God everyone is to be led by the Spirit. “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.” (Rom. 8:14) Of course, this implies that self-will has died and the Spirit is in full control of every aspect of the person’s life.

But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true...you will abide in Him {finding your will, wisdom and life in Him}. (1 John 2:27)

It is in this sense that the Holy Spirit becomes the Executive Director of the church. He is the Leader who has been sent by Christ to manage every function of His body. The elders of the flock—the human leaders—are responsible for leading the members into this Spirit-directed way of life. The Spirit will teach them all things once they have learned how to walk in the Spirit.

The Biblical view of the equality of saints must be rejected when the authoritarian view is accepted. Those who follow this practice of asserting their authority to control the activities of the organization will end up with a structure built on the wrong foundation. It will inevitably result in contentions and divisions. It is a “worldview” of leadership. It removes the Spirit from the position of Executive Director. And He is the only One who has the power to keep everyone “perfect in one.”

Wherever there is envy you can know there are people still wanting to elevate themselves. They behave like mere men because they are still living by their own will. And where self-will is still alive and active, you can expect to find strife and divisions. “For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?” (1 Cor. 3:3)

Many have tried to justify climbing into an elevated position of authority on a few chosen words from the Scriptures. This is precisely how the Catholics were able to justify the placement of priests and cardinals and popes in “offices” with power over the people.

There are two different authority structures in this world. One is true and the other is false. One is of God and one is of the devil. The devil, as the prince of this world, has set up his structure as a means for placing the antichrist at the top of his one world order. He wants to be in charge. No one can afford to be a part of this system. We are responsible for making sure we have followed Christ. And there can be no question about which way we have taken because they are diametrically opposed to each other. And yet, there are going to many bewildered church leaders coming before the Lord only to discover they did not submit to Christ’s instructions. (Matt. 7:21-23)

The early church was much different than the modern church. It was much simpler then. People assembled to learn how to live through the life of Jesus. It was not made up of an array of programs that need to be controlled by business managers. True worship involved presenting the whole being to the Lord to be a vessel of His life and works. It was really quite simple.

But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ {including the mind that was in Him}. (2 Cor 11:3)

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices...*this is your spiritual act of worship.* (Rom. 12:1 NIV)

Because the leaders of the early church did not have “confidence in the flesh,” they did not try to organize the church into a system of programs. Yes, human programs can be very effective in attracting crowds to an organization. But most of these people end up living on a natural plane of life. Human structures simply do not have the needed power to lead people into the life that is shared with Christ through the Spirit.

Some may question how this supernatural spiritual body can function in a modern world. But we must remember that our Lord still possess all power and all authority in heaven and on earth. He is also the same yesterday, today and forever. His ways always

work when we are fully submitted to His truth. “If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine...” (John 7:17) God never fails in carrying out His plans where His people are living by His Spirit according to His will. Furthermore, it will become obvious how God is the One doing the work when His children are truly walking in the light of His truth. “But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.” (John 3:21)

The Apostle’s Example of Leadership

The apostles revealed through their lives the leadership model established by Jesus. Their government was a labor of meekness and love, of self-denial and of devotion to the eternal welfare of the people. They displayed the life of righteousness that comes from God by faith. Their leadership function was to draw others into the same light of life.

We can find the apostle Paul specifically describing how the apostles remained the “last,” the least, and without honor, just as their Master had instructed. In contrast, he also spoke of leaders who were trying to “take charge” of the Corinthian church with a worldly mindset. Even though they claimed to represent God, they were modeling a self-exalting form of life that was leading the members away from Christ’s way of life.

You are already full {from feeding on the things of this world}! You are already rich {by living for your own gain}! You have reigned as kings without us {by living according to the principles of this world}—and indeed I could wish you did reign {by becoming the last and the least}, that we also might reign with you {so the local church might share with Christ in the power of His throne}! *For I think that God has displayed us, the apostles, last...* You are distinguished, but we are dishonored! (1 Cor. 4:8-10)

For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself {with His self-exalting spirit} transforms himself into an angel of light {and makes this form of life appear to be innocent}. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness {producing their own righteousness through the works of the flesh}, whose end will be according to their works. (2 Cor. 11:13-15)

Walking according to their own lusts...they mouth great swelling words, flattering people to gain advantage... These are sensual persons, who cause divisions {separating others from the mind of Christ}, not having the Spirit. (Jude 16, 19)

The true apostles did not seek to impress people with their words or seek out distinguished positions among men so they could have personal power and prestige. This is what worldly-minded men do to receive honor from each other. And this was not the kind of honor the apostles wanted. They preferred to be honored by God with the power of His Spirit. It was by planting the “seed” in the ground and becoming nothing in self that God was able to raise them with the resurrection power of His Spirit and reveal His life and works through them.

If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me {in the same self-emptying way of life}; and where I am {in the heavenly realms at the right hand of God}, there My servant will be also {sharing in the power of the throne}.

If anyone serves Me {by taking the position of a bond slave}, him My Father will honor. (John 12:24-26)

For the message of the cross {Christ's self-emptying way of life} is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent." (1 Cor. 1:18-19)

But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen {the self-emptying way of life}, *and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence.* (1 Cor. 1:27-29)

And my speech and my preaching *were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power*, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, *nor the rulers of this age* {with their self-exalting spirit}, *who are coming to nothing.* (1 Cor. 2:4-5)

The wisdom of God is not understood by people who follow the spirit of this world. It is in this sense that Jesus said, "I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to the babes." (Matt. 11:25) To be buried in the ground and become nothing in self goes against everything this world teaches. Secular humanism is all about lifting up self and doing things that bring glory to self. May we all see how these humanistic thought processes are in direct conflict with the Spirit of our Lord before it is too late!

Every leader, if they are to ever bring the body into the fullness of Christ, will need to understand how Jesus, while living as the Second Adam, did not do anything "out from" Himself. Everything He did had its source in the Father. Even the words He spoke were given to Him by the Father as He listened to the leading of the Spirit. Those who follow Him, and especially those who become leaders of His flock, will also need to cease from their own works and begin living by the Spirit as He did.

By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked. (1 John 2:5-6)

I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear {from the Spirit}, I judge {make decisions and act}; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me. (John 5:30)

For I have not spoken on My own authority... Therefore, whatever I speak, just as the Father has told Me, so I speak. (John 12:49-50)

A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven. (John 3:27)

There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works... (Heb. 4:9-10)

Jesus lived as a man. He too had to receive everything from above. Living as the Second Adam in order to reestablish the way that God intended for man to live, He set a clear example for His disciples to follow. Those who will truly die to their own will and learn to depend on the Spirit in childlike faith to lead them into all truth can expect Him

to direct their steps. They will live as mere instruments that the God of heaven is able to use to express His life and will.

Why does the devil and fallen man want to live independently of God? It is because they want to do their own works. It is the only way they can have their own glory. They love to glory in what they do through their self-originated form of life. In contrast, the way that God intended for His children to live, which entails ceasing from these flesh-originated works and living by His Spirit, removes the possibility of glorying in the works of the flesh. In the reality of eternal truth, He chose “the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence.”

People who are caught up in the devil’s self-exalting form of life seldom recognize the evil of their ways. They have been deceived by him. Many of them started out with a sincere desire to pour out their lives in service to God. But over time the devil has gradually turned them back to His self-seeking and self-exalting way of life.

But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent’s cunning, *your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.* For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached {a message that reveals the “mind” of Christ}, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it {and are led astray}... (2 Cor 11:3-4 NIV)

The Error Revealed by History

History provides a record of the great apostasy that took place when church leaders began to seek out elevated positions of power and prestige. By the beginning of the second century there was a move away from having a plurality of elders serving as the leaders of the local church. Bishops began to rise up into positions where they could reign over the church with hierarchical authority. These men, using their own power, are the ones who led the church into the dark ages. Carnal darkness will inevitably prevail over the church wherever leaders have been exalting themselves.

This is how Lightfoot expressed it, “The episcopate was formed, not out of the apostolic order by localization, but out of the presbyterial *by elevation*; and the title [bishop], which originally was common to all [to all the elders], came at length to be appropriated to *the chief among them.*” Unfortunately, when men seek to be “chief among them” they no longer have “the mind” that was in Christ. (Phil. 2:5-9) Because they are going in a direction contrary to Christ, they end up separating themselves and their flocks from the eternal life that Christ wants to share with His disciples. It leads the church into darkness rather than light.

Beware of false prophets... You will know them by their fruits... A good tree cannot bear bad fruit... (Matt. 7:15-18)

Church historians continually point to the fact there were only two kinds of leadership in the local congregation. One writes, “In the New Testament, as we have seen, there were two classes of officers in the church, elders or bishops, and deacons.” But he went on to say, “After we cross the limit of the first century we find that with each board of elders is a person to whom the name ‘bishop’ is especially applied.” This elevated bishop became superior to the local elders. By the end of the second century these bishops had become the high priests and judges of the church.

Richards and Hoeldtke explain how God intended for authority to be used: “God gives human leaders authority. But it is unique authority. It does not rest on power in any way. Most importantly, it does not imply the right to control the behavior of others. The authority of Christian leaders is an authority granted to build up brothers and sisters so they will be able to live out the will, not of men, but of God.”

Jesus said to those who would be His leaders, “He who hears you hears Me.” (Luke 10:16) Again, there is only one Spirit. If people will honestly open their hearts to the leading of the Spirit, and if leaders will truly speak through the Spirit, the Spirit will open up the reality of the truth to the flock. They will hear from Christ and begin to understand Him and His way of life. And as they continue to humbly yield to all revealed light, He is able to draw them into the reality of His heavenly life.

Neither Jesus nor His apostles ever forced their will on others. The “authority” that is to be exercised in the church is to be done by speaking the words of God. We are then dependent upon the Spirit to use our words to reveal the meaning within the heart. It is granted from heaven based on the humility that God sees. (1 Pet. 5:5) As Jesus said, “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him.” (John 6:44)

When Paul was not speaking with the known mind of Christ, he could only give advice through recommendations. He never tried to impose his own will on anyone. In contrast, many church leaders have become like the Pharisees in trying to help God by making up lists of rules that everyone is expected to obey. They begin to weigh people down with laws that turn souls away from Christ. Christ did not intend for this kind of authority to be used in His church. The function of the leaders is to show believers how to enter into a life that is under the control and power of the Holy Spirit. Everyone needs to find Christ’s Kingdom-life of “righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”

The Greek word *exousia* is used when speaking of a “position” of power and authority. It means “the right to exercise power...the power of one whose will and commands must be obeyed by others.” It is a term that is used in reference to the power of civil rulers. (Rom. 13:1-3; Titus 3:1). But this is the very kind of authority that Jesus said would not exist in His kingdom. (Matt. 20:25-26) This particular term for authority is not used in the New Testament to describe the position of church leaders.

Paul admonished Titus: “Encourage and rebuke with all authority.” (Titus 2:15) The word used for this kind of leadership “authority” is *epitage*. This term is more like an “injunction.” It makes God’s will known and then leaves it with the hearer to choose his personal response. William Barclay defines it in this way, “The preacher’s message is a divine command. When he is really preaching, he is speaking for God. He brings to men, not his own opinions, but the direct commands of God.” Similarly, J.W. Shepherd says, “He must speak with the authority which comes from a knowledge of the divine will and of the saving purposes of God.” He makes people aware of God’s will and then relies on the Holy Spirit to reveal the reality within the heart. The turning must come from within.

This is precisely how Jesus spoke while living as a man. He did not do anything from His own authority. He set the example for His disciples to follow. “For I have not spoken on My own authority... Therefore, whatever I speak, just as the Father has told Me, so I speak.” (John 12:49) Jesus spoke the words that came from His Father and relied on the Father to draw people with His Spirit. “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him.” (John 6:44) God makes His decision based on whether or not the individual has chosen to yield to all truth in childlike humility and dependence.

I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes. (Matt. 11:25)

Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as {dependent and trusting} little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. (Matt. 18:3)

The elders of the flock are to speak the words of God to the people. In contrast to having their own authority and ruling over the people with their own will, they are to speak the truth that has its source in God. The Lord is the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, when it comes to possessing authority. And He is the one who will decide who is eligible for hearing the truth and being drawn into His heavenly life of promise.

As we speak the truth in love we are to make sure people know where they stand with God based on their relationship to His revealed truth. Each individual then needs to make their own choice as to what they intend to do with it. Everyone will one day stand before the Lord as either a fully submissive servant or as someone who chose in their own pride to resist the light of truth at some point.

For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment... (Heb. 10:26-27)

A Function—Not an Office

In the King James Version the apostle Paul says, “If a man desires the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work.” (1 Tim. 3:1) This statement has often left the impression that a bishop holds a special “office,” which would include power and authority over others. While this word “office” may have been appropriate in 1611 England, it does not have the same meaning today. Using the same KJV term, Paul also says, “For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office.” (Rom. 12:4) When this word was translated in the New King James Version, it states, “For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function.” It shows how the term refers to a “function” rather than an “office.” Similarly, elders or bishops in the church are called to fulfill a function rather than to hold an “office” of ruling power.

The leaders of the church are to reveal the spiritual principles that lead to divine life. It does little good in the long run to simply try to conform to the words of truth. We do not have the power to make ourselves like Jesus. We will need the Living Word revealing Himself within our heart before we can actually walk as He did. It is by submitting to His spiritual principles that we are lifted by the power of the Spirit into the heavenly life that enables us to fulfill all the righteous requirements of the law.

For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son...that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh {in our own strength} but according to the Spirit. (Rom. 8:3-4)

The essence of the Son’s nature is absolute submissiveness. When we are truly sharing with Him in the wisdom found in His life we begin to share with Him in His submissive nature. “But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield {NIV—submissive}...” (Jam. 3:17) We also become submissive

to one another when Christ has become our life and our wisdom. Although the people of this world require authoritarian rulers to keep them in order, it is not necessary in the kingdom of God. In God's kingdom everyone manifests the fruit of Christ's Spirit.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. *Against such there is no law.* (Gal. 5:22-23)

Christians are commanded to be submissive to each other. "Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for 'God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.'" (1 Pet. 5:5) We are to teach people to submit to the commands so that God may lift them into Christ's heavenly life.

Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you {lift you spiritually into the life of promise} in due time... But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while {in dying out to your old self-originated form of life}, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you {in the Kingdom-life of promise} (1 Pet. 5:6)

There would be more people willing to yield to all truth if they were being taught by their leaders of the possibility of entering into the firstfruits of the life of heaven. This is where the leaders have been failing. They try to rule over people with law rather than instructing them to submit to God so He may lift them with His power and establish His Kingdom-life of perfect love within their heart.

Those who insist on having authoritarian positions frequently use Hebrews 13:17 for their support. It reads, "Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account." When interpreting this verse we need to remember that it must remain in harmony with Matthew 20:26. The truth will not be served and the Scriptures will be distorted if we do not consider this principle. Every truth needs to remain in harmony with all other Scriptures.

The Greek word translated here as "obey" is not what is ordinarily used when demanding strict obedience. For example, God requires *hupakouo*, which is strict obedience from His children. But the Hebrew writer in this case uses the word *peitho*. It has a different meaning. It means "to persuade, to win over...to listen to, to obey... The obedience suggested is not by submission to authority, but a response resulting from being persuaded of the need." Christians, as they choose to be submissive to each other, become willing learners who listen to the truth and submit to whatever God has instructed them to do through His word. They gladly listen to anyone who can help them better understand the truth. They are to especially look to the elders as being the facilitators of this learning process.

Elders are charged with the responsibility of seeing that the will of God is faithfully followed in the congregation. (Acts 20:28-31) Their work is to exhort, admonish and provide examples of what it means to live by the Spirit. They are to live as slaves of God and permit Him to use them to draw others into the Son's "light of life."

When elders wield the "sword of the Spirit" in preaching truth and denouncing error, they are merely enjoining upon the flock what God has commanded. They do not legislate anything of themselves. They are not imposing anything that God has not required. Their actions will not be construed as the arbitrary enforcement of their own

“authority” upon the will of others if they are doing their work properly. The members will see the truth and want to respond so they too may find life from above.

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Tim 3:16-17)

The New Way of the Spirit

Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; *for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.* (2 Cor 3:5-6)

Spiritual leaders will need to distinguish between the old way of trying to conform people to certain written laws and the new way of living by the Spirit. The way of “the letter” is powerless and ineffective in the long run.

In spite of what many may think, we do not become Christians by accepting a list of orthodox beliefs and then conforming to a set of standards. Christ expects much more from His disciples. He died for the purpose of sharing His life with everyone who will follow Him in His way of the cross. (Matt. 16:24-25; Rom. 6:5; John 10:10) It entails dying to our own will and sufficiency and living through His Spirit by faith. It is the only way for His body to come “to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” (Eph. 4:13)

The laws of God can only reveal in a limited sense certain standards of behavior. But even the best of laws cannot change the inner nature. A close study of God’s Word will reveal how He now requires a standard of behavior—true righteousness—that exceeds anything that can be worked out through our human efforts under law. We are required to manifest a life of love that “passes knowledge.” (Eph. 3:19; Matt. 5:48) The sufficiency for this must come from God. Without Christ revealing Himself as the Living Word within our inner being we will find ourselves powerless to do what God requires. Even the most earnest disciples of Christ will find themselves periodically falling short of the following requirements when they are attempting to live in their own strength.

But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, *that you may be sons of your Father in heaven...* Therefore *you shall be perfect* {in holy love}, just as your Father in heaven is perfect. (Matt. 5:44-45, 48)

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything gives thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. (1 Thess. 5:16-18)

Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say rejoice! Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. *Be anxious for nothing*, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. (Phil. 4:4-7)

The written laws are intended to reveal what God expects from His children. God uses His commands to expose the corruption within the heart. But the law does not have

the power to do away with the fallen nature that periodically rises up into wrong actions. Our only hope is in receiving the “abundance of grace” and “the gift of righteousness” that makes it possible to “reign in life through...Christ.” (Rom. 5:17) We are dependent upon the Spirit to reveal the shared life of the Trinity within our inner being.

He {the Spirit} will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine {the eternal Kingdom-life} and *making it known to you*. All that belongs to the Father is mine. {The Father and Son share in this same life.} That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known {as an indwelling life} to you. (John 16:14-15 NIV)

At that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you. (John 14:20)

To “know Christ” is to know the eternal life He shares with His Father. When He makes His everlasting life known within our inner being He comes as an endless source of Living Water. This “higher life” takes us beyond the periodic “wells” of refreshment He uses to sustain us through the wilderness testing period. There is now a “pure river of water of life” flowing ceaselessly from under His throne. When our old self-originated form of life has died and His throne of power is established within the heart this ever-flowing fountain of life begins to rise out of our inner being.

And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. (Rev. 22:1)

As the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water. (John 7:38)

But whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into {a display of} everlasting life. (John 4:14)

The apostle Paul, in order to “know” Christ, had to count “as loss” his religious heritage, his religious education, his human zeal for serving God, and even the righteousness he had established by obeying the Old Testament laws. He chose to die to the natural plane of life, which includes everything that has its source in self-sufficiency. “A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven.” (John 3:27) In exchange for this loss of everything from the natural plane he was able to “gain Christ” and the “righteousness which is from God by faith.” This heavenly form of righteousness is much more glorious than the human form of righteousness that is developed by conforming to laws through the works of the flesh.

For we are the circumcision, who...*have no confidence in the flesh...* If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so... But what things were gain to me {on the natural plane of life}, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, *that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith;* that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection. (Phil. 3:3-10)

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh {in a mortal body} I

live by faith in the Son of God... *For if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain.* (Gal. 2:20-21)

Paul is not merely speaking about the Old Testament ceremonial law. He is speaking about God's written commandments. It includes everything spelled out with letters. Everyone who tries to live by "the letter" will find themselves falling short of the requirements for living in His kingdom. We are simply insufficient when it comes to making ourselves like God in holy love. "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life."

We are not speaking of an antinomianism that simply ignores the requirements found in God's laws. Jesus said, "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill." (Matt. 5:17) He came to enable us to fulfill what He requires of us. And He expects us to yield to all His commands. But rather than trying to simply conform to written standards, we are to look to Christ in faith to put within our heart a new form of life that enables us to do by nature what the law requires. The eternal Kingdom-life He established in bodily form has the capacity to live as God requires both in this world and in the age to come. His indwelling life does what the law could not do.

Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not! For if there had been a law {any written law} given which could have given life {the divine life of God}, truly righteousness would have been by the law... But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law... Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ {to the Source of this divine life}... (Gal. 3:21, 23)

For what the {written} law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son...that the righteous requirements of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. (Rom. 8:3-4)

For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. {This includes both the Jews of old and many earnest souls in the church today.} For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness {trying to make themselves right by keeping certain laws}, *have not submitted to the righteousness of God.* For Christ is the end of the law of righteousness to everyone who believes. (Rom. 10:2-4)

I say then: Walk in the Spirit and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh... Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are...contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissension...and the like... {Written laws are unable to completely overcome these works of the flesh.} But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. (Gal. 5:16, 19-23)

Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect {in holy love} by the flesh {through your own efforts}? Have you suffered so many things {to break your self-sufficient spirit} in vain—if indeed it was in vain? (Gal. 3:3)

Everyone lives by one of two ways. We can either live by the flesh in our own strength or by the Spirit in the power of God. Sadly, we are afraid that much of the church today is still living on the natural plane of life. They are trying to make themselves right by seeking to conform to a personally prioritized list of laws. It is the reason why we still see the works of the flesh, such as “contentions, jealousies...selfish ambitions, dissension...and the like.”

Everyone who will choose to die to their own will and sufficiency can expect Christ to come to them in the power of an “endless life.” His life alone can perfect the heart in holy love and make it possible to live in the righteousness that comes from God by faith.

There arises another Priest who has come, not according to the law of a fleshly commandment, but according to the power of an endless life...
For on the one hand there is an annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness, for the law {the written instructions} made nothing perfect... (Heb. 7:15-16, 19)

Today is the day for Christians to become “perfect in one” with both God and each other. The members of the body are to enter into the life that is shared by the Father and the Son within the Trinity—“that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; *that they may be made perfect in one...*” (John 17:22-23) This is not a figure of speech. As a body of believers we are required to seek out the reality of this promise through faith.

Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but *that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.* (1 Cor. 1:10)

The elders are expected to display this heavenly life to the members of the body. They must work together in harmony, each utilizing their unique God-given gifts, in the work of building up the church into all the fullness of Christ. They have a responsibility for leading each of the members into Christ’s life of divine love. It is the only sure hope of standing before Him with boldness on the Day of Judgment. (1 John 4:17) Let us therefore pray for the Lord to raise up leaders who will know what is needed to make the church a functioning body of Christ.

But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life...*hating even the garment defiled by the flesh. Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy...be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever.* (Jude 20-25)

How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him...? (Heb. 2:1-3)