

The Big Bright Target

by David A. Huston and Jim McKinley



IMMEDIATELY AFTER EXHORTING his fellow-elders to shepherd the flock with oversight and humility, Peter warned, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8). Certainly no church leader wants to be devoured by the devil; but if this were not a clear and present danger, why would Peter have felt it necessary to include the warning? We believe all leaders would do well to give careful attention to this warning from the Word of God.

Let’s look at two questions: First, what does it mean to be devoured by the devil? And second, how could a man, if he wanted to, make himself an easy target?

The word “devour” means to be consumed or eaten up. To be devoured by Satan means to be consumed by him —by his spirit, that is. And what is the spirit of Satan if not the spirit of pride and self-exaltation? It is the spirit that says, “I will ascend... I will exalt my throne” (Isaiah 14:13). This is clearly why Paul warned Timothy not to place oversight authority in the hands of a novice, lest he be lifted up with pride and fall into the same condemnation as the devil (1 Timothy 3:6). This is what it means to be devoured. Such a person may continue to operate in a recognized capacity in the assembly, but he has been eaten up by a prideful spirit.

We are certainly not proposing that anyone would want to intentionally make himself an easy target for the devil; but hypothetically, suppose a man did want to, what could he do? Clearly the adversary of the Church always makes his first target those who are weak and vulnerable. The little lambs that wander off from the flock are easy prey for the ravenous, blood-thirsty wolves. Similarly, the Hebrew babies of Goshen were easy prey for the pagan, demigod Pharaoh. And the Judean babies were easy prey for the heartless, self-absorbed Herod.

Satan knows the prophecy well that it is the seed of a woman that “shall bruise your head” (Genesis 3:15). And he knows that the best way for him to protect himself is by destroying as many babies as possible before they can enter the kingdom of God and reach a level of maturity where they can bruise him. It should therefore come as no surprise to us that the devil murders babies, which means that one way a man can set himself up as an easy target is by taking on oversight responsibilities in an assembly while he is still immature.

Removing the Target

How then can a man grow up and thereby remove the big bright target from his chest? One key way is by making himself accountable to other responsible men. Whenever a man operates independently, without up-close accountability, he is a sitting duck for the devil. So-called organizational coverings do not provide accountability as defined by the Scriptures and the devil knows it. What they do provide is an illusion of accountability, which enables men to say they are accountable when actually they are doing whatever they please. For accountability to be meaningful and effective, it must be up-close, which means it must be built into the structure of each local assembly.

From the very beginning God declared, It is NOT GOOD that man should be alone (Genesis 2:18). Everything else was good, but not this! He explained why it is not good in the book of Ecclesiastes: Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up.... Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12). A team of men working together is not easily overpowered by the devil.

When Jesus confronted a demon-possessed man in the synagogue of Capernaum, the spirit cried out, Let us alone! (Mark 1:24). Jesus identified this demonic attitude as an unclean spirit. There is nothing holy about aloneness. It is unclean. It is not good. It is not part of the divine plan and is therefore not the will of God. Furthermore, it is a perilous place to be, since it sets a man up as easy prey for the adversary.

To maintain a spirit of humility we must have people close enough to us to call us to account when we misstep and reel us in when we start to veer off in the wrong direction. This is why the Bible tells us, Where there is no counsel, the people fall; but in the multitude of counselors there is safety (Proverbs 11:14).

John revealed some other ways to get the big bright target off your chest when he wrote, I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the wicked one (1 John 2:14). He later wrote, He who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him (1 John 5:18).

What we see in these verses is that the ones protected from the devil are those who are strong and allowing the Word to live within them. This means they are doers of the Word and not just hearers. It also means that they have come to terms with the principle that true strength is found in being honest about our weaknesses. Paul

confessed, When I am weak, then I am strong (2 Corinthians 12:10). He also admonished the Ephesians concerning their struggle against the adversary, saying, Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might (Ephesians 6:10). Peter taught the same principle when he wrote, Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time (1 Peter 5:6). He explained how to do this when he wrote, Yes, all of you be in submission to one another, and be clothed with humility (1 Peter 5:4).

What we see in these verses is that humility can only be worked out and maintained in a group setting where there are close, caring, and honest relationships. The danger of being alone is really the danger of being deceived into thinking that you can actually function effectively all on your own. This, by definition, is pride, the predecessor to falling (Proverbs 16:18). On the other hand, a mature man is protected by his humility and the power of the Lord. He recognizes that he needs other people around him, first for his own protection and second, because no one person can do it all.

The Biblical Model

In both the book of Acts and the Epistles, each local assembly was led by a collegial team of mature men called either elders or overseers (bishops). Look carefully at the following Scriptures:

When they had appointed elders in every church... (Acts 14:23).

He sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church (Acts 20:17).

Set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city... ” (Titus 1:5).

Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor ” (1 Timothy 5:17).

Recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you... (1 Thessalonians 5:12).

Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you... (Hebrews 13:7).

Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls (Hebrews 13:17).

Greet all those who rule over you, and all the saints (Hebrews 13:24).

Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray... (James 5:14).

From these verses we can see that during the early Christian era, each local assembly consisted of all the believers in a city and each had a team of men appointed as elders who provided the assembly with pastoral oversight. There is no indication that any one elder ruled over the others. Instead, the elders worked together as colleagues. Their responsibilities included ruling (or leading) the assembling, laboring among the people, admonishing the people, speaking the Word of God to the people, watching over the spiritual lives of the people, and praying for those who were sick.



God's plan calls for multiple shepherds working together.

Notice that in every one of these references, the words referring to the leaders are plural (elders, those who labor, those who rule, elders who rule, etc.), while the words city and church are singular. Apparently each city had one church led by a group of men called elders.

Today, to have a single assembly led by a single group of elders in a huge metropolis such as New York or Philadelphia is difficult to envision. Yet during the days of the apostles, Rome had a population of around one million people. The Bible, nevertheless, speaks of but one church in Rome.

In light of today's reality, it may be helpful to think of a local assembly as one body of believers in one geographical location. This is not to say that the lines defining the geographical area of a local assembly should be rigid and unyielding. In densely populated cities the lines probably need to be regarded as approximate, flexible, and even porous. History has shown that the spirit of territorialism is inevitably counter-productive. Instead, there needs to be mutual respect for the general spheres each assembly is responsible for evangelizing. Paul exemplified the right spirit when he wrote that he would labor only within the limits of the sphere which God appointed... (2 Corinthians 10:13).

He s'After the Head

The reason the early Christian assemblies were established with plural oversight is obvious: both the leaders and the led were afforded the best protection against the wiles of their adversary. It is also the only way to preserve the living, practical Headship of Jesus in a local assembly over the course of time. But when a man operates as the sole authority in an assembly, he makes himself the head and displaces the Headship of Jesus. After all, a body cannot have two heads!

We know from Scripture that in addition to attacking the weak and immature, the devil also has a strategy that involves separating heads from their bodies. For example, it was the spirit of Satan operating behind the scenes when Herod sent and had John beheaded in prison (Matthew 14:10). And the book of Revelation tells us that during the end-time period when the devil has great wrath, there will be many believers who are beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God (Revelation 12:12-13; 20:4).

If the devil is unable to destroy a local assembly in its infancy, then he will do his best to separate the body from its head, leaving it sightless, mindless, and without hearing. This is what he attempted to accomplish through the killing of Jesus. But the Lord thwarted that plan by means of His resurrection. Then, having failed to prevent Jesus from reigning as the living Head of the Church, he undertook a plan to prevent the local expressions of His body from actually functioning under the direct influence of His Headship.

Brethren, make no mistake: the devil is out to disconnect the Church from its Head. His problem is, he can't successfully attack Jesus personally and directly. In fact, Jesus has already triumphed over him and is now alive forevermore. So since he cannot destroy Jesus, his best alternative is to bring a separation between Jesus and His body. And one way of doing this is by placing a counterfeit headship over each local assembly. Today, the headship over most assemblies is a single individual normally called the pastor. ”

As we have said, when the devil goes into attack mode, he sets his sights on those who are weak and isolated. If he can find such a person who is also the head of a local church, a person who has no one to whom he can share his temptations and internal struggles, he has found a man with a big bright target on his chest. Such a man is, without realizing it, saying, “Come on, Satan. Devour me! ”

The Clergy System

Any man who sits as the sole oversight authority of a local assembly is actually

making himself a double target of the devil: First, his isolation and lack of close accountability leave him weaker and more vulnerable than he may realize; and second, as the head (and perhaps unwittingly a counterfeit head), the devil wants to cut him off from the rest of the body. The classic result of this Satanic strategy during the first three centuries of the New Testament era was the division that formed between the professional ministers called the clergy and the general membership called the laity. This structure is now known as the clergy laity split. ”

Having established this structure as the pattern for all Catholic and Protestant assemblies, the devil continues his work today by striving to keep even the Spirit-filled, truth-believing apostolic churches bound under this paralyzing system.

Many assemblies today are decapitated bodies, disconnected from the true Head due to the substitution of a pseudo-head. And in many cases they are also disconnected from the pseudo-head: the aloof, unapproachable, elevated clergyman —the Reverend.

In the modern Apostolic movement, we usually don't describe our leaders as the clergy. Instead, we call them the ministry. But let's be honest; we mean the same thing. How many times have we heard that so-and-so was called into the ministry. But the truth is, all born-again believers are called to minister. The Bible does not speak of an anointing for ministry that comes only upon certain men. There is only one anointing —and that is the anointing a person receives when he is filled with the Holy Spirit. There may be a wide variety of gifts the Holy Spirit disperses among the body as He wills, but there is only one anointing.

According to the Bible, every believer is called into the ministry, every believer is part of the royal priesthood, every believer is anointed to preach the gospel. It is true that some have been given gifts by which they equip the other believers for their works of ministry (Ephesians 4:11-12). But this is not a separate class of ministers, it is merely the specific way in which some men function in the body. From God's perspective, As we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them (Romans 12:4-6). Neither this passage nor any other acknowledges or establishes a special class of believers called the ministry. ”

It was only in the third century that the word clergy began to be used to designate a limited number of men who occupied leadership offices in the various congregations. One of the worst outcomes of this structure was that it propagated the notion that without a minister present, there was no church. Yet Jesus said,

Where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them (Matthew 18:20).

Since the New Testament makes no mention of either the clergy or the ministry, the fact that titles such as reverend, bishop, and pastor permeate the vocabulary and practice of most church groups reveals a strong tendency to elevate church traditions over New Testament doctrine. Not only that, the very concept of a separate caste of ordained ministers clashes with the New Testament declaration of the priesthood of all believers and contradicts the egalitarian social structure of Jesus' body, which He established when He declared, "You are all brethren" (Matthew 23:8). Furthermore, since the clergy system is a tradition of men, it nullifies the Word of God and cheats God's people out of their understanding of the fullness of the Godhead in Christ (Mark 7:13; Colossians 2:8-9).

Today we see an assortment of schools and Bible colleges established to produce a continual flow of trained men for the clergy profession. We also see a plethora of ministerial conferences designed to supply the clergy with the support and encouragement the so-called laity cannot give. And we see an endless stream of tapes, books, and magazines published to provide an array of tips, insights, and keys to ministerial success. Taken together, these creations of man provide an elaborate system for preserving and perpetuating a position that the New Testament knows nothing about.

The Ministry of Dominance

Paul wrote to the believers in Corinth that he did not have dominion over their faith (2 Corinthians 2:24). Yet as we look back over the history of the New Testament Church, we can see that even in Paul's lifetime, prideful men began to arise and attempt to lead God's people by lording it over them. The fact that they did this in spite of Jesus' clear admonition that "it shall not be so among His disciples" tells us that these men were not Spirit-led leaders (Mark 10:42). They may have appeared to be highly gifted speakers and ministers, but from God's perspective they were hirelings who did not care about the sheep (John 10:12-13); savage wolves who drew away disciples after themselves (Acts 20:29-30); false apostles who transformed themselves into apostles of Christ (2 Corinthians 11:13); and false teachers who exploited the people with deceptive words (2 Peter 2:1-3).

As such men began to divide the local assemblies and form their own groups from among the vulnerable sheep, they took upon themselves an elevated position as the sole authority in the church, displacing the oversight of the collegial elderships. We don't know how he acquired his place of preeminence, but clearly Diotrephes, who

prated against John with malicious words, was just such a man (3 John 9-10). We do well to remember that Diotrephes was a tongue-talking believer in the fundamental doctrines of the Apostolic Faith (i.e. oneness of God, baptism in the name of Jesus, baptism of the Holy Ghost). His error was not in his fundamental doctrine (so far as we know); it was in his loving to have the preeminence over the rest of the flock.

As the number of local assemblies under the leadership of a lone man increased, undoubtedly many others who were honest and sincere followed this pattern out of ignorance, not realizing that they were putting a big bright target on their chest.

The historical record of this period is rather sketchy, but we do have the writings of a man called Ignatius of Antioch, who lived around the end of the first century and beginning of the second. He wrote, "Let no one do anything touching the Church, apart from the bishop. Where the bishop appears, there let the people be.... It is not permitted without authorization from the bishop either to baptize or to hold an agape, but whatever he approves is also pleasing to God. He who does anything without the knowledge of the bishop worships the devil. These statements (and others) indicate that Ignatius held the bishop in a position of authority far surpassing anything taught by Jesus or the apostles.

The writings of Ignatius are probably the earliest that make reference (in a positive light) to a single authority in a local assembly. Paul, on the other hand, addressed his Phillipian letter to "all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons. Notice that there were multiple bishops (overseers) in the assembly at Philippi. Paul made no mention of a senior pastor, a preeminent bishop, or any other position of ultimate authority. In fact, he declared that in all things pertaining to the Church, Jesus Christ should have the preeminence (Colossians 1:18). Ignatius disagreed with Paul's teaching. Not only was he a strong advocate of the Nicolaitans, but he was himself a Nicolaitan.

The Nicolaitans

In the book of Revelation, Jesus spoke of both the doctrine and the deeds of those called the Nicolaitans (2:6, 15). He went on to declare that He hates them both. He hates what they do and He hates what they teach. And if He hated them then, then He hates them just as much today. The question is: Who are these detested people?

The word *nicolaitan* is a compound of two Greek words: *nike* meaning to conquer or triumph and *laos* meaning the people (*laos* is the root of our English word *laity*)." The title Nicolaitan is applied to those who have conquered

the people of God. John's description of Diotrephes suggests that he was a Nicolaitan.

What were the deeds and teachings of the Nicolaitans? In his letter to the church in Pergamos, Jesus connected the Nicolaitans with Balaam, the false prophet who put a stumbling block before the people of God. According to this letter, the doctrine of Balaam consists of teaching the people to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality (Revelation 2:14). Since the doctrine of Balaam leads directly to the doctrine and practices of the Nicolaitans, this was apparently the means by which the Nicolaitans conquered the people, thus enabling them to dominate the local assemblies.

To use the Lord's term, the Nicolaitans were hirelings. They sought out positions of power in local churches for what they could get out of it: money, esteem, the intoxicating pleasure of dominating other people. In contrast, Paul cautioned Timothy that an elder must not be greedy for money, but must instead be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior (1 Timothy 3:2-3). In light of what we know about the Nicolaitans, it is obvious why Paul was concerned about this. Similarly, Peter exhorted the elders to shepherd the flock of God not for dishonest gain but eagerly (1 Peter 5:2). The NIV reads, Not greedy for money, but eager to serve. Jesus said that the hireling fails to protect the flock because he does not care about the sheep (John 10:13). He only cares about what he can get from the sheep.

The prophet Micah had stern words for the leaders of Israel who occupied their positions of authority for personal gain. In Micah 3:1-3, the Lord asked, Is it not for you to know justice? You who hate good and love evil; who strip the skin from My people, and the flesh from their bones; who also eat the flesh of My people, flay their skin from them, break their bones, and chop them in pieces like meat for the pot, like flesh in the caldron. In verse 11 He said, Her heads judge for a bribe, her priests teach for pay, and her prophets divine for money. Yet they lean on the LORD, and say, Is not the LORD among us? No harm can come upon us. ”

These leaders were completely deceived. They had convinced themselves that everything was fine between them and God while at the same time they destroyed the people of God for their own personal enrichment.

Speaking through Micah the prophet, the Lord called his people to remembrance, saying, For I brought you up from the land of Egypt, I redeemed you from the house of bondage; and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. O My people, remember now what Balak king of Moab counseled, and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him... (6:4-5). Jesus is extremely concerned about those He has saved from bondage coming under the destructive influence of the doctrines of

Balaam. When Israel came under this influence, twenty-four thousand people died in the wilderness in one day.

Jude warned, "Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit, and perished in the rebellion of Korah" (v.11). Cain was the murderer of his brother, Korah the rebel against Moses, and Balaam the prophet who sold the lives of God's people in exchange for a handful of shekels. Sounds like the spirit of Judas. Interestingly, the name Balaam is a compound word meaning "consumer of the people," virtually the same meaning as the Greek word *nicolaitan*.

Idolatry and Immorality

In Ezekiel 34:2-4 the Lord warned the leaders of His people, "Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks? You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool; you slaughter the fatlings, but you do not feed the flock. The weak you have not strengthened, nor have you healed those who were sick, nor bound up the broken, nor brought back what was driven away, nor sought what was lost; but with force and cruelty you have ruled them. The word *force* is a Hebrew word meaning "vehemence or sharpness" (2394, *chozqah*). The word "cruelty" comes from a word that means "to break apart or to fracture" (6531, *perek*). No wonder the word "ruled" comes from a word that means "to tread down or subjugate." The Hebrew word is *radah* (7287).

This is hardly the leadership style of the Lord Jesus, who described Himself as meek and lowly in heart. In contrast, when God told Eve that Adam would rule over her, He did not use the word *radah*; instead He used the word *mashal* (4910). The connotation of this word is ministry, not domination. In fact, within its meaning is the idea of two things being parallel. This word suggests the idea of two people walking together, side-by-side, one leading the way for the benefit and blessing of the other. It suggests the yoking together of the leader with the ones he is leading.

This style of leadership is diametrically opposed to that of the Nicolaitans, whose two-pronged teaching and practice consists of sexual immorality and idolatry, which is spiritual immorality. These are the ones who turn "the grace of our God into lewdness" (Jude 4). In the ancient world, sexual immorality and idolatry went hand-in-hand. Hence we read in Numbers 25:1-3, "Now Israel remained in Acacia Grove, and the people began to commit harlotry with the women of Moab. They invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. So Israel was joined to Baal of Peor, and the anger of the LORD was aroused against Israel." "

Today, many would say that eating things sacrificed to idols is an ancient practice that may continue in a few foreign lands, but certainly not here in America. Yet Paul stated that covetousness is idolatry, linking it with fornication, uncleanness, and evil desires (Colossians 3:5). The root meaning of the word translated covetousness is the desire for more. It does not matter more of what —more money, more stature, more good feelings, more entertainment, more material things, more whatever! It is the opposite of contentment, which when combined with godliness is said to be great gain. ”

There are many forms of idolatry in the world today, but covetousness is certainly a pervasive one here in America. And for church leaders to teach, either by word or deed, that it is perfectly all right for believers in Jesus Christ to indulge their covetous appetites is equal to teaching that it is okay to eat things sacrificed to idols. Yet Paul told the Corinthians, “Rather, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord’s table and of the table of demons ” (1 Corinthians 10:20-21).

Participating in idolatry in any way is sacrificing to demons. It is fellowshiping with demons, drinking from their cup and eating from their table. Little wonder so many today are giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons ” (1 Timothy 4:1).

We are not suggesting that every solo church leader is greedy for money or manipulative and controlling; neither are we saying that they are all destined to be unfaithful to their wives. But without question the doctrine of Balaam harmonizes with the frequent linkage we see today between sexual sin and those who exalt themselves by lording it over the body in clergy offices. In some cases the sexual issues may not have been acted out, but they are persistently present in the heart and are often revealed in the person’s words and demeanor. As Peter wrote when describing the characteristics of false teachers, they have eyes full of adultery and a heart trained in covetous practices.... They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness (1 Peter 2:14-15).

Such people are the modern-day Nicolaitans, followers of the way of Balaam. They practice idolatry by pampering their lust for material things and indulging in sexual fantasy, either mentally or in actual practice. Furthermore, they put a stumbling block before the people of God, causing them to fall into these same practices, keeping them in a broken and dependent condition.

The Open Door to Doctrinal Error

Because the hierarchical form of church structure is not the divine pattern, those who operate in it are easy prey for the adversary. How many sincere men must fall before we admit this? The corruption may be subtle and barely perceptible to some, but it is there. The corrosive effects of isolation and autonomy are virtually irresistible. When it comes to humanity, history has demonstrated over and over again that power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

During the second and third centuries, the solo leaders of local churches fell like dominoes into false doctrine and corruption. And how could they not? They did not have the biblically mandated protection of a group of close confidants to whom they were held accountable. As the adversary relentlessly attacked the single leaders of the congregations, the believers became increasingly discouraged and defeated, many giving up because they no longer believed they could overcome. Over time, it became increasingly difficult to comprehend that the reason for the church's decline in power was its unbiblical structure, which prevented it from functioning as a living expression of the body of Christ. If the tabernacle isn't built according to the pattern, God won't live in it!

When a man is not held to close accountability by other spiritual men, deception and doctrinal error are right around the corner. It was obviously single leaders such as Diotrephes and Ignatius who welcomed the Greek philosophers to their pulpits, men such as Justin Martyr, who around 133 A.D. became one of the first to describe a sharp distinction between the Deity of the Father and that of Christ. *The New Catholic Encyclopedia* says this of Justin:

As a Christian philosopher, Justin adopted the philosopher's cloak. He described his conversion from Platonism to Christianity in such a way as to imply that there is no sharp distinction between them: Christianity fulfills the highest aspirations of Plato. Justin regarded both the Bible and Plato as agreed (Vol. VIII, p.94).

Over the next two to three hundred years, philosophers (now called theologians) dominated the world of single-leader, priest-ruled Christendom. The most notable and influential of all was Augustine (354-430), who wrote that his revelation of the Divine Trinity came to him as he read certain Platonic books (Vol. I, p.1043).

It is interesting that the men who exerted the most influence in dragging Christendom into the Dark Ages were admirers of the Greek philosopher Plato. It has been said of Origen that he used the philosophy of the Greeks as the vestibule through which to admit his hearers into the temple of the gospel (John Fletcher

Hurst, *History of the Christian Church*, p. 304). In his much-read work *The Republic*, Plato espoused his belief that most men were incapable of governing themselves and should therefore be governed by rulers he called philosopher-kings. These rulers were to be granted absolute power due to their superior wisdom and heart-felt concern for the well-being of the people. The idea was that the masses would become dependent upon their gracious, caring leaders (who were actually mostly interested in holding onto their power so they wouldn't have to become part of the masses). This was the theoretical model used by the Communists in establishing their totalitarian governments and was likewise the philosophical underpinnings of the unbiblical Catholic hierarchy—a Greek term meaning *rule by the priest*. ”

The end result of this corruption of polity and doctrine was that no longer did we have one God leading a local assembly through a plurality of leaders; instead we had a plurality of divine beings leading a local assembly through one man. The final and most egregious form of this false satanic system is the papacy.

As followers of the apostles' doctrine, we must realize that even if we eliminate the plurality of divine beings and restore the one God to His rightful place (this is admittedly a poor way of expressing this), we are still not fully apostolic as long as we continue with the single leader at the helm of the local assembly. As long as this system is embraced, we will continue to have many assemblies run by localized popes!

The Dependency Model

One of the most difficult things for many solo leaders to realize is that God has not called them to dominate the affairs of the local assembly and the gatherings of God's people, certainly not to the point of being virtually the only one who teaches or ministers. This kind of dominance fosters a spectator mentality and clergy dependence among the people. This is why some people worship God when the pastor is around but mysteriously lose their enthusiasm when he is not. This is the root of what is sometimes called *preacher religion*—the practice of those who stay home from church when the pastor is out of town. The level of spiritual commitment of these people is dependent on the presence of their pastor.

Greg Ogden explains why the dependency model continues to plague many local assemblies:

A chief reason why the dependency model of ministry is still dominant is that many pastors' sense of worth and value is derived from being a benevolent lord reigning over the little fiefdom. From a psychological view

we would be appalled at parents who assert their authority by keeping their children dependent upon them even though they are adults. Yet we do not evidence the same disgust at anemic churches made up of perennial spiritual children who are not allowed by their parent pastors to grow up. Underlying the dependency model of ministry is a distorted and unhealthy means of seeking value. Pastor and people are co-conspirators denying the addiction and fostering the sickness (*The New Reformation: Returning the Ministry to the People of God* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990], p.89).

In deploring the dependency model we are not proposing that elder-overseers do not exercise certain authority and should not lead with courage and strength. We are simply making the point that their job is to lead, not lord; to equip, not dominate; to persuade, not manipulate; and to liberate for meaningful ministry as opposed to perpetuating a system that keeps the sheep in an infantile state.

When the Devil Hits the Target

Whether we like it or not, the clergy role ends up requiring a virtual omniscience from those behind the pulpit. Those in the clergy are paid to perform whatever is necessary to keep the spiritual machinery going, and the expectations are very high for those who wear the many hats this profession demands.

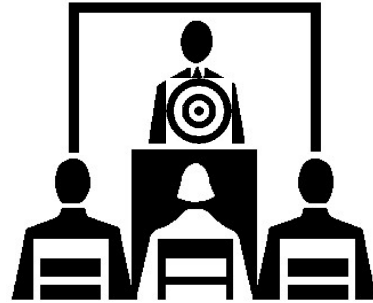
The deadly problem with this unscriptural system is that it eats up those within its pale. Burn-out, moral lapse, and divorce are very high among the clergy. Is it any wonder such repeated tragedies occur in light of what is expected of one person? The Lord Jesus never intended that any one person would, or could, fill such a role. In light of Paul's declaration that the body is not one member but many, we ought to be able to discern that the clergy position is neither healthy for those in it, nor is it beneficial for the body being led by it.

Those who make themselves vulnerable to the Nicolaitan spirit by operating as an isolated, autonomous leader without up-close accountability are making themselves unnecessarily susceptible to the following conditions:

1. Becoming entrapped in pornography and/or sexual sin.
2. Becoming excessively affluent.
3. Compromising (and/or being deceived) in doctrine and holiness.
4. Becoming increasingly domineering and impatient with people.
5. Getting burned out on ministry.

Perhaps this is why Paul warned the elders of Ephesus, Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock (Acts 20:28). The words take heed are from a Greek word which means to hold the mind towards, to pay attention to, to be cautious about, to apply oneself (prosecho, 4337). This is extremely wise counsel from the apostle. Today's church leaders better pay attention to themselves or they just might find themselves the main course in the devil's next banquet.

The devil desperately wants apostolic men to reject the biblical concept of plural, collegial oversight in the local assemblies. Why? Because those who reject it have plastered a big bright target on their chest, one that the devil can hardly help but hit!



A note from the authors...

We have published this article for the primary purpose of inspiring thought. We believe the matters we have addressed need to be brought up, discussed, and considered in the light of God's purpose for the Church. It is not our intention to attack or insult any person who is presently serving in a leadership role; neither is it our desire to stir up any believers against their spiritual leaders. Believers who are convinced that change is in order need to take their petitions to the Lord Jesus and approach their leaders with humility and grace.

We recognize that there is no quick and simple process for transforming an established assembly from the single leader model to the multiple leader model. For those who desire to move in that direction, we encourage a prayerful, careful, and thoughtful approach, keeping in mind that the structure of oversight is not the only consideration. An assembly under the leadership of immature, proud, biblically unqualified men is in danger of shipwreck.

This is not to imply that we are free to choose whatever form of oversight structure we want, as though one is just as good as another. It is simply to affirm the present reality and to emphasize that for profound change to take place without endangering the flock, many deeply ingrained concepts will need to change within the hearts of both the leaders and the led. This will require patience and the Holy Spirit. To pour new wine into old wineskins accomplishes nothing of value.

May the love and peace of Jesus be multiplied to all who read this.

Note to the reader:

If you would like to comment on the contents of this paper, please contact us through our website at www.GloriousChurch.com. We welcome and appreciate all honest comments, questions, and criticisms.

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