

## Chapter 3

### Undoing the Effects of Rule #3

Buoyed by the dualism of the Greek philosophers and the fourth century Roman government framework, the Church leaders replaced the priesthood of all believers with ecclesiastical dominance. The Empire that had conquered much of the world established a firmly fixed hierarchical system that put power in the hands of a very few. (See our *Restoring the Early Church* for further discussion of Greco/Roman intrusion.)

Because of the anti-Semitic stance taken by the Church in the second and third centuries, many of the Hebraic foundations readily built upon by the earliest believers were discarded. The functions listed in Ephesians 4:11 had been part of the *synagogue* prior to the advent of the Church. That the Holy Spirit had inspired the Church to keep these practices so that it might be unified and mature is evident in Paul's letter. Ponder the following verses in your heart to determine our Father's purposes for the *cooperative use* of each role:

*It was he who gave some to be **apostles**, some to be **prophets**, some to be **evangelists**, and some to be **shepherds** and **teachers**, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4:11-13).*

Paul had no need to define these functions since they were so well known among the first century Jewish followers of the Messiah. The *combination* of these anointed functions that had been established in the synagogue would enable God's people to serve Him, to mature in Him, and to attain the fullness of His Son.

- An *apostle* (Heb. *shaliach*/Gk. *apostolos*) was a person sent forth to an appointed place on a mission. This is not a position of dominance either through ecclesiastical position or anointing. An apostle is a person used by our Lord to complete a specific mission. The Twelve, then Paul, received special commissioning from Jesus. But note other believers referred to as apostles: Andronicus and Junias (Romans 16:7), Barnabas (Acts 14:14), Silvanus and Timothy (1 Thessalonians 2:7).
- An *evangelist* (Heb. *magid*/Gk. *euaggelistes*) was a synagogue planter and repairer. In the Church this person not only shares the Gospel, but gathers together a faith community which he will leave in the responsible care of the elders. Timothy and Titus were both evangelists and church planters: "*But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry*" (2 Timothy 4:5), and, "*The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you*" (Titus 1:5).
- A *prophet* (Heb. *nabi*/Gk. *prophetes*) was one to whom and through whom God spoke for the benefit of His people. Prophets generally functioned beyond the confines of the Hebrew synagogue while Paul expanded that function to include prophetic messages shared within worship gatherings.

- A *shepherd* (Heb. *zaken*/Gk. *poimen*) was a gray-haired man of leadership who imparted wisdom and counsel to a specific group of people.
- A *teacher* (Heb. *rab*/Gk. *didaskalos*) rightly divided the Word to bring clarity to others and to exhort them to action.

God wanted these functions to continue so that His purposes could be fulfilled. Notice that the association of shepherd and teacher is consistent with other biblical passages: “*Now the overseer must be. . .able to teach*”; “*The elders who direct the affairs of the congregation well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching*” (1 Timothy 3:2; 5:17).

Mike was a counselor to church leaders for many years in southern New England. Many of the men who occupied the position of “pastor” were really *evangelists*, church planters of the synagogue/ early Church variety. So many of these men experienced difficulties in their ministries because God’s call for them was to share the Gospel, plant the faith community, and move on to start another congregation. The care and training of each flock was to be left to the shepherds, the older men of wisdom in each established fellowship.

Because their seminaries had not understood the Hebraic basis for the distinct roles of evangelist and shepherd, these distressed men had been trained to fill the wrong role. The sad result was tragic burnout in men who were trying to fill the position of “pastor” because they felt that was what they were supposed to do. Their spiritual gifting and anointing, however, lay in other areas. Tens of thousands of today’s “pastors” are actually *administrators* rather than nurturing shepherds!

The *Hebraic understanding* of these roles has been lost to the Church for centuries. Remember, the disavowal of Hebraic practices and the severance of Hebraic roots occurred primarily after Greek philosophers converted to Christianity. The writings of such men as John Chrysostom, Justin Martyr, and Origen not only introduced Greek philosophical practices and thought into the Church, but their anti-Semitic vitriol also ripped away and buried the precious Hebraic relational fabric on which Jesus had founded the Gospel.

Think about this: Might the loss of our Hebraic heritage be a direct result of the arrogant *conceit* shown by the Church toward the Jews? Meditate on Romans 11, especially verses 1 and 25: “*I ask then: Did God reject his people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. . .I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in.*”

Our Father has given the Jews numerous irrevocable promises that He will never reject them. Consider the word spoken through the prophet Jeremiah:

*This is what the Lord says, he who appoints the sun to shine by day, who decrees the moon and stars to shine by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar—the Lord Almighty is his name: “Only if these decrees vanish from my sight,” declares the Lord, “will the descendants of Israel ever cease to be a nation before me.” This is what the Lord says: “Only if the heavens above can be measured and the foundations of the earth below be searched out will I reject all the descendants of Israel because of all they have done,” declares the Lord (Jeremiah 31:35-37).*

History bears witness to the centuries of the Church’s persecution of the Jews. (See *Restoring the Early Church* for more on this.) Only in the last 40 years have several Christian denominations repented for branding the Jews as “Christ-killers.” It is difficult for

Christians today to believe that God could relegate the Church to centuries of Greek and Roman domination because of its disdain toward the Jews. But consider this: How would the Jewish people respond if they fully realized that God had hardened the hearts of their people for centuries until the full number of Gentiles might enter the faith? Might they wonder, “Why have you Gentiles waited so long?”

For Jew and Gentile alike, our Father is vividly displaying His sovereignty and mercy: “For God has bound **all** men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all” (Romans 11:32). It is evident that God is in the process of restoring the Jewish people back to Israel. Since the fall of the USSR, 750,000 Russian Jews have returned to the land of their forefathers! (That’s one-sixth of Israel’s current population. To put it in perspective, imagine if a flood of forty million immigrants poured into the US in less than a decade!) The Lord promised this restoration through the prophets:

*See, I will bring them from the land of the north and gather them from the ends of the earth. Among them will be the blind and the lame, expectant mothers and women in labor; a great throng will return. They will come with weeping; they will pray as I bring them back. I will lead them beside streams of water on a level path where they will not stumble, because I am Israel’s father, and Ephraim is my firstborn son. “Hear the word of the Lord, O nations; proclaim it in distant coastlands: ‘He who scattered Israel will gather them and will watch over his flock like a shepherd’” (Jeremiah 31:8-10).*

At the same time, our Father is pouring out on the Gentiles an awakening of the Hebraic components that made the early Church intimate and powerful. An important part of this quickening will be that qualified older men will serve in their rightful place of shepherding in their faith communities.

## **Apperceive the Word, Don’t Revise It!**

That which God is restoring today has not been experienced by the vast majority of the Church since the early centuries. Relational intimacy and spiritual power seem almost alien to believers today but not to those who authored the Scriptures.

Since the role of elder in the New Testament follows the pattern of the shepherding elder in the Hebrew Bible, let’s review the part played by wise seniors in the Jewish society of the Old Testament. We propose that the pastoring role of elders was God’s plan for His Church just as it had been for the Jewish people.

In order to undo the influence of the Nicolaitan spirit we must apperceive the Scriptures as our Hebraic forefathers did. You might not be familiar with apperception. To *apperceive* is to return to the original framework of understanding that God gave the scripture author as he wrote. Only by apperceiving can you fully grasp the background and intent of particular verses and passages.

Consider this example: “Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true” (Acts 17:11). The Bereans were commended for studying the Scriptures by apperceiving Paul’s new teachings in light of Hebraic scriptural truths. So important were the Hebrew Scriptures as a basis for the gospel message that they were quoted apperceptively all throughout the gospels, the epistles, and the Revelation.

For instance, God commanded the people, “Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain” (Deuteronomy 25:4). Paul, apperceiving that command, teaches a new application:

*For it is written in the Law of Moses: "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain." Is it about oxen that God is concerned? Surely he says this for us, doesn't he? Yes, this was written for us, because when the plowman plows and the thresher threshes, they ought to do so in the hope of sharing in the harvest. If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you? (1 Corinthians 9:9-11).*

Paul looked back to the *intent* of the original writer and then brought forward a specific application of its truth. The apostle warns, "***Do not go beyond what is written.***' Then you will not take pride in one man over against another" (1 Corinthians 4:6). That admonition is especially apt today, when so much of what is said or written is affected by "political correctness" or appeasement of unbiblical agendas.

Paul also cautions the Colossians, "*See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ*" (Colossians 2:8). Today, the Greek and Roman practices that the Church has inherited must be addressed in light of biblical precedents. If you do not perceive and define your faith practices through the Scriptures, how can you be sure that you are not operating out of a framework of revisionism?

*Revisionism* restates historical truth and facts to manipulate them to fit current social or cultural standards. A major attempt at revision in the Church occurred late in the second century. Irenaeus, the Bishop of Lyons in Gaul, claimed that the apostle Peter was the "rock" upon which his successors could claim church primacy as the Bishop of Rome. In so doing Irenaeus ascribed ecclesiastical power to Peter which the Bible did not support.

Revisionist writings and councils convinced the Church to adapt the autocratic system of the Roman government with which it became enmeshed. Revisionism within the church has had a profound effect down through the centuries, reflecting customs, practices, and organization far different from what had been intended by our Lord.

Revisionism is by no means a problem of the past. Many current history books have been revised to downplay the quest for spiritual freedom sought by America's Founding Fathers. These texts instead reflect a lust for greater economic prosperity in the New World.

Another current example of revisionism comes from across the Atlantic. In order to appease the Arab countries that provide them oil, several European universities are teaching from revised history books which claim that the Jewish Holocaust never took place. (An ancient proverb says, "Lies written in ink can never replace facts written in blood.") And to appease feminists, the Bible has recently been revised into a version that promotes a genderless God!

Followers of Jesus who want to be true to the Word of God must be willing to leave behind certain church practices and traditions that may seem "sacred" yet have no biblical foundation. Appropriate the nobility of the Bereans and investigate the Bible yourself to apply what God has said. Like the Bereans, you, too, may yearn to share in the practices of faith that "*do not go beyond what is written.*"

A simple illustration of apperception and revisionism was shared by Dr. John Garr of Restoration Foundation. A man sets about to build a house. He carefully measures out a pattern for a roof joist and cuts it, then uses that joist as the pattern for the second one. For each and every joist, he uses his original as the pattern. This describes apperception—going back to the pattern of the Word for every application and religious practice.

The revisionist carefully measures out and cuts the first roof joist, then makes a second one from that. But instead of using the original joist as his pattern, he uses the second joist as a pattern for the third, the third joist to make the fourth, and so on. By the time he fin-

ishes cutting his last joist and lays it against the original one, he discovers that the measurements are way off. What started as minor deviations added up to major differences. So too with revisionism. As God's Word was subtly altered to accommodate ever-changing cultural standards, the original pattern of God's intent was lost.

Consider this: Suppose that in conjunction with restoring the Jewish people to Israel, our Father *is* restoring to the Church the shepherding by elders which blessed our Hebraic forefathers. Shouldn't followers of Christ clearly grasp how shepherding people was understood in the Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament? Ask yourself:

- How was the function of elder understood by Paul and the other Jewish believers of the first century Church?
- Was it really God's intent that pastoring by elders evolve into the clergy hierarchy so prevalent in the western Church today?
- Did God turn the Church over to pagan practices adapted from the Greeks and Romans because of its arrogance toward the Jews?
- Is the current system of clergy dominance a direct result of the *Nicolaitan spirit* warned about in the Book of Revelation?