

I Hate Nicolaitanism! (Part 2)

A Catholic *and* Protestant Heresy

Beware the Destructive Effect of Bancroft's Rule #3!

Are you one of the few who are able to read the Bible in its original languages? Probably not. You most likely have a favorite translation which speaks to your heart and which you hope is accurate. However, each group of translators of the various versions are directed by certain rules to guide their interpretive efforts.

For instance, the translators of the 1611 King James Version were required to follow *Bancroft's Rules to Be Observed in the Translation of the Bible*. Rule #3 states, "The **old Ecclesiastical Words** to be kept, viz. the Word *Church* not to be translated *Congregation*." (emphasis added)

An unfortunate result of applying this particular rule was that Nicolaitan-supported ecclesiastical positions were reinforced in the church. Bancroft's Rule #3 perpetuated a clergy class within the church that had been neither intended nor indicated in the New Testament.

The King James translators strengthened the Nicolaitan dominance by inserting the word "pastor" in both the Older and New Testaments instead of the more precise word "shepherd." By this act they nullified the biblically-Hebraic basis for *shepherding* in the context of caring for a flock of sheep. In its place has come an ecclesiastical position often called "pastor" or "clergy."

Consider what the King James version did to Jeremiah 2:8. The Hebrew word *raah* (raw-aw), meaning "to tend a flock" or "to pasture" a flock, is translated "pastor" instead of shepherd: "The priests said not,

The King James translators strengthened the Nicolaitan dominance by inserting the word "pastor" in both the Older and New Testaments instead of the more precise word "shepherd."

*Where is the Lord? and they that handle the law knew me not: the **pastors** also transgressed against me...*" Emphasis is placed here on a *position* rather than on the function of a caring, shepherd-leader.

The King James translators again substitute "pastor" for "shepherd" in Jeremiah 17:16: "As for me, I have not hastened from being a **pastor** to follow thee." From the time of the Greeks and Romans, the definition of "pastor" has placed undue emphasis on *title* and *position* rather than on the intimate and relational serving, caring, leading and protecting carried out by keepers of sheep.

From the time of the Greeks and Romans, the definition of "pastor" has placed undue emphasis on *title* and *position* rather than on the intimate and relational serving, caring, leading and protecting carried out by keepers of sheep.

Sadly, in many faith communities today, a pastor has little or no intimate knowledge or understanding of the flock supposedly in his care. Few if any clergy in the Nicolaitan system personally tend their flock. Laity with personal problems are outsourced to counselors for help. Few, if any, lay people interact on a personal level with the pastor and his family.

In other verses where *raah* or a derivative is used, it is most often translated "shepherd." In Psalm 23 the related Hebrew word *ro'iy* (roh'-ee), also translated "shepherd," vibrantly depicts the personal devotion of the herdsman: "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me **lie down** in green pastures, he **leads** me beside quiet waters, he **restores** my soul. He **guides** me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will **fear no evil**, for you are **with me**; your rod and

your staff, they comfort me" (Psalm 23:1-4).

Intimate knowledge and interaction with the flock are encompassed in this passage. Similar "shepherd" uses appear in Zechariah 10:2: "[T]herefore they went their way as a flock, they were troubled, because there was **no shepherd**," and Isaiah 40:11, "He shall feed his flock like a **shepherd**."

As a result of the deliberate and erroneous substitution of the word "pastor" for shepherd in certain select passages, a clergy class has unscripturally been preserved in Christianity. The true shepherds whom God has called to care for His children in the intimate manner He has prescribed are *older men of wisdom*. Regrettably, they are most often prevented from doing so by younger seminary-educated clergy who have no biblical basis for the position they occupy. As we have seen, the Nicolaitan spirit yields to no one. Our God is warring against it, and we older men must take our stand with Him to fulfill the biblical roles He has prescribed.

The true shepherds whom God has called to care for His children in the intimate manner He has prescribed are older men of wisdom. Regrettably, they are most often prevented from doing so by younger seminary-educated clergy who have no biblical basis for the position they occupy.

Consider this final infusion of Nicolaitan title emphasis: In order to undergird a clergy/laity distinction in the New Testament, translators of not only the King James Version but of virtually all commonly read translations used the word "pastor" in Ephesians 4:11: "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be **pastors** [shepherds] and teachers."

Had the Greek word used here, *poimen* (poy-men), meaning "shepherd," been translated as such, this passage would have kept continuity with the other Old and New Testament passages that refer to the shepherding role of the elder, *presbuteros* (prez-boo-tair-oss). The

inaccurate translation creates a false distinction between the Hellenist/Roman ecclesiastical position of "pastor" and the Hebraic biblical function of "shepherding by elders."



The elders were the shepherds of God's people in the earliest Church. No young man qualifies to shepherd our Father's children since he himself is still operating from a young man's

perspective. Beginning at around age 50, much happens to a man emotionally and physically that makes him a better representative of our Father in caring for His children.

For instance, around age 50 the frontal lobe of a man's brain shrinks. As a result, he becomes more *affective* in his thinking, more attuned to his emotional as well as his cognitive abilities. Thus he is better able to represent our Father's compassion, mercy, and love for people, and can better understand doctrine more as *a way of life* than a commitment to creed.

Protestants and Catholics — Clones

The Nicolaitan heresy is embedded in both Protestant and Catholic systems. On the surface the denominations may look different, but both are driven by "vassals of lord Nicolaitan," Hellenist practices and Roman organization. The difference between Catholic and Protestant is no more than that between scarlet and magenta.

I was a devote Catholic for 31 years. Just as Paul calls himself "a Hebrew of Hebrews", I was a "Catholic of Catholics". My religious practice was the cornerstone of my life. I was also prejudiced, believing all Protestants were going to hell. In 1977, when I put my trust in the Lord Jesus, our Father told me, "Leave the Catholic Church and find where all my children are."

I've spent the past 26 years "finding our Father's children" — my brothers and sisters in Jesus. My search has led to an observation for both Catholics and Protestants to ponder:

One of the demonic pits of Catholicism is that the laity hold their priests and nuns up to a *holier standard* than the laity want to live themselves. Devout Catholics want *vicarious* access to people they consider holier or more pious than themselves. Attendance at Mass or participating in committees puts them in proximity with people they consider holy. But they don't want these people as friends in their homes because that would expose them to a *greater accountability* for personal holiness. *Relational distance* permits laity to go on with their pet sins. A Catholic is a Catholic in a church service, but a worldly person in the world.

What do you think I found out in my years among Protestants? Devout Protestants want *vicarious* access to people they consider holier or more pious than themselves. Attendance at services and participation in programs and activities puts them in proximity with people they consider holy. But they don't want these people as friends in their homes because that would expose them to a *greater accountability* for personal holiness. *Relational distance* permits laity to go on with their pet sins. A Protestant is a Protestant in a church service, but a worldly person in the world.

[Christian pollster George Barna's research substantiates my observations.]

A Catholic is a Catholic in a church service, but a worldly person in the world.

A Protestant is a Protestant in a church service, but a worldly person in the world.

Clergy Enjoy Their Dominance.

Laity Live With Unconfronted Sins.

Thrusting responsibility for personal holiness onto someone else who will stand in the gap between you and God is nothing new. Jeremiah bemoaned this sinful state of affairs: *"A horrible and shocking thing has happened in the land: The prophets prophesy lies,*

the priests rule by their own authority, and my people love it this way" (Jeremiah 5:30, 31). Of course, the people themselves are part of the problem. By hiring an intermediary to represent them before God, they believe they can hide behind their clergy's "pietism." And what pressure that puts on the clergyman and his family to "look good"!



The Nicolaitan system requires congregants to meet at a neutral place, a "church building" separate from their homes and their pet sins. This "safe place" for religious practice reduces accountability — and accountability to live righteously is a fearful specter to avoid at all cost.

The "safe place" offers services, prayer meetings, and Bible studies, but *unrepentance* reigns insidiously. Participants continue to walk in darkness and feel good about themselves, but *God doesn't hear their prayers*. (See 1 Peter 3:12.) The miraculous intervention of our Father in answer to the prayers of the righteous as seen in the Book of Acts is nonexistent in most of Nicolaitanism. Sadly, few even *expect* God to answer their prayers. As Buddhists pray without expecting the Buddha to answer, many Christians lack confidence that their prayers will be answered. There's good reason for this, which we'll cover in a later section of this article.

The "safe place" for religious practice reduces accountability — and accountability to live righteously is a fearful specter to avoid at all cost.

Certain clues are evident when the Nicolaitan system is in operation:

- You discover that you're looking up to someone you perceive is more pious than yourself to intervene between you and God. Just keep in mind that their mediation role keeps you from having to mature in the relational intimacy and accompanying responsibility that your

Father desires. You can never really experience His love when another person assumes an intermediary role between you and your heavenly Father. Your unbiblical dependency on clergy keeps you from maturing and fulfilling our Father's purposes for you. Be careful that this isn't the way you like it!

- Perhaps ecclesiastical positions in your faith community are reinforcing your spiritual infancy and irresponsibility — a “Care Pastor” who visits the sick on behalf of (and maybe *instead* of) other congregants. Or, a Youth Pastor or Christian Doctrine Class which supplant the responsibility of *fathers* to teach moral and spiritual standards to their children.



- You begin to recognize that people you don't know personally have established certain practices of faith and creed with which you are pressed to agree, or face ostracism. For example, the Roman Catholic community is facing the heresy of whether to proclaim Mary, the mother of Jesus, as co-redemptrix with Him. While some are rising up to confront this outrage to our Lord, many others are either oblivious or complacent.
- Maybe some in your congregation claim personal preeminence based upon “special spiritual anointing.” You encounter individuals who proclaim or introduce themselves by an honorific title, such as, “I am Apostle (or Bishop, Reverend, Father, Prophet) Smith,” rather than as simply, “I'm Joe Smith.”

These indicators should warn you that someone is stepping into a position that *removes you* from personal intimacy and responsibility before your Father. You are part of the Nicolaitanism which God hates and wars against. Do you want to continue

plodding along in this system? Do you have enough love for our Father to flee Nicolaitanism?

Do you have enough love for our Father to flee Nicolaitanism?

The Israelites' Return: A Banner to the Nations

How could God permit this judgment to go on against the Church over these centuries? To answer that, we must fully grasp the critical factor of His promise to the patriarch, Abraham:

I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you (Gen. 12:2,3).

God promised Abraham that He would curse anyone who cursed the Patriarch's descendants. The Nicolaitan Church has been an extremely anti-Semitic force in the world. No one has committed as many atrocities against the descendants of Abraham as Nicolaitanism has.

The disavowal of Hebraic practices and the severance of Hebraic roots occurred primarily after Greek philosophers converted to Christianity in the 2nd and 3rd centuries. The writings of such “Church Fathers” as John Chrysostom, Justin Martyr, and Origen not only introduced Hellenist practices and thought into the Church, but their anti-Semitic vitriol ripped away and buried the precious Hebraic relational fabric on which Jesus had founded the Gospel. The ecclesiastical system destroyed God's “cisterns” of humility and love-grounded obedient trust, and created their own cisterns of self-righteous, fear-grounded control.

History bears witness to the centuries of Church persecution of the Jews. (See *Restoring the Early Church* for more on this.) Consider this: Might the loss of our Hebraic

heritage be a direct result of the arrogant *conceit* shown by the Church toward the Jews? Has our curse on them left a curse on us over the centuries?

Consider this: Might the loss of our Hebraic heritage be a direct result of the arrogant *conceit* shown by the Church toward the Jews? Has our curse on them left a curse on us over the centuries?

Only in the last 40 years have several Christian denominations repented for branding the Jews as “Christ-killers.” It wasn't until 1963 that the Roman Catholic Church excised from its Good Friday liturgy the prayer that cursed the Jews for killing Jesus. Only in recent decades have certain Protestant denominations followed the Catholic lead by asking forgiveness for atrocities committed against the Jews.

It's difficult for Christians today to believe that God could relegate the Church to centuries of Hellenist and Roman domination because of its disdain toward the Jews. But consider this: How would the Jewish people respond if they fully realized, as Paul wrote, that God had hardened the hearts of the Jewish people for centuries until the full number of Gentiles might enter the faith? Might they wonder, “How could God be so unjust to our people for so long?”

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).*

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, over 850,000 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).*

As He is fulfilling His promises to Israel, our Father is pouring out on the Gentiles an awakening of the Hebraic foundations that

made the early Church relationally intimate and spiritually powerful. A vital part of this Hebraic Restoration is the return of qualified older men to serve in their rightful place of shepherding faith communities. The restoration of older men to shepherd God's children, and the eradication of anti-Semitism from the church, may finally dispel the curse of Hellenist-Roman Christianity.

A vital part of this Hebraic Restoration is the return of qualified older men to serve in their rightful place of shepherding faith communities. The restoration of older men to shepherd God's children, and the eradication of anti-Semitism from the church, may finally dispel the curse of Hellenist-Roman Christianity.

Undoing the Effects of Nicolaitanism

Before we take steps to restore what was once part of the Church that Jesus is building on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, let's review what has been handed down to us through Nicolaitanism:

Buoyed by the dualism of the Greek philosophers and the fourth century Roman government framework, Nicolaitanism supplanted the priesthood of all believers with ecclesiastical dominance. The Roman Empire that had conquered much of the world became the pattern for the Church hierarchical organization that invested power in the hands of a very few. Pontifex Maximus, the title of the Roman Emperor, became the Roman Pontiff, the Pope, and soon thereafter the Church plunged into the Dark Ages. The Bible was hidden in Latin for 1,100 years. (See our book *Restoring the Early Church* for further discussion of Greco/Roman intrusion.)

Because of the anti-Semitic stance begun by the Church in the second and third centuries, many of the Hebraic foundations that had been readily built upon by the earliest believers were discarded. Followers of Jesus need to begin the process of restoring that which was lost. We must go

back past all the Hellenist/Roman adaptations which support Nicolaitanism. The Bible and the practices that were part of the early Church must be our only guide: "*Your people will rebuild the ancient ways and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called **Repairer of Broken Walls***" (Isaiah 58:12).

Followers of Jesus need to begin the process of restoring that which was lost. We must go back past all the Hellenist/Roman adaptations which support Nicolaitanism. The Bible and the practices that were part of the early Church must be our only guide.

To begin our understanding of what needs to be restored, let's explore the spiritual anointings listed in Ephesians 4:11. These gifts had been part of the *Hebraic-based 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 grow in maturity is evident in Paul's letters. Prayerfully ponder the following verses in your heart, asking our Father for wisdom as to the 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).*

The *cooperative* endeavor of the anointings listed above had a tremendous effect on the unified effort of the Body of Christ. Paul had no need to define these functions since they were so well known among the first century Hebraic 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. That is, he is man sent to complete a specified assignment. Service as an apostle never gave an individual dominance over anyone else; either through ecclesiastical position or spiritual anointing. If you meet an "apostle", ask him what his assignment from God is. It's certainly not to hold office over others!

Remember, the Twelve, then Paul, received special commissioning from Jesus, "*Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*" (Matthew 28:19). Also, note other believers who were 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 proclaims the Gospel, but gathers together a faith community which he will leave in the responsible care of the elders, that is, the spiritual shepherds who are already known for their wisdom and faith. 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 anoint elders in every town, as I directed you*" (Titus 1:5).

The early Church evangelist-church planter/repairer is a far cry from the "dog-and-pony" evangelistic crusades of today that find only 4% of those who "go forward" continuing onward to fol-

low Jesus. Tragically, these mass crusades are drive-by's in which hurting people are inoculated against the Lordship of Jesus. So few understand the need to *repent* — to purpose to *turn away from sin* and to come to our Father through Jesus to receive His forgiveness.

True evangelists stay on, as Paul, Timothy, and Titus did, until disciples are raised up to sufficient maturity, and elder-shepherds are anointed.

- A *prophet* (Heb. *nabi*/Gk. *prophetes*) was one to whom and *through* whom God spoke for the benefit of His people. Prophets generally served beyond the confines of the Hebrew synagogue, whereas Paul expanded that function to include prophetic messages shared within worship gatherings. Prophets encouraged the obedient, often confirming God's will. They also brought messages of warning and impending judgment to the disobedient.
- A *shepherd* (Heb. *zaken*/Gk. *poimen*) was a gray-haired man of leadership who imparted wisdom and counsel to a specific group of people. The Father entrusted shepherd responsibility to older men who had, through a lifetime of experience, acquired the wisdom and character qualities needed to compassionately reflect the Father to His children.

The shepherd was also a *teacher* (Heb. *rab*/Gk. *didaskalos*) who lived what he taught. He role-modeled his teachings so that other men could emulate him. Out of his life choices and experiences he taught others the Word and exhorted them to a way of life which glorified God.

God intended that these spiritual anointings continue so that His purposes could be fulfilled. Notice that the association of *shepherd* with *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).

[If you'd like to pursue this further, see our book *God's Instruments For War: Discovering and Coordinating Spiritual Gifts as Weapons of Warfare.*]

Are Evangelists Shepherds?

As I mentioned earlier, I was a counselor to church leaders for many years in southern New England. I found many of the young men who occupied the position of "pastor" were really *evangelists*, church planters and repairers of the early Church variety. So many of these men experienced difficulties in their ministries because God's call for them was to *proclaim* the Gospel, *plant* the faith community, then *move on* to start another one.

Only if there was a problem would they return to offer help. For instance, Paul penned 1 Corinthians because "...some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you" (1 Corinthians 1:11). The ongoing care and training of each flock was to be left to the shepherds, the older men of wisdom in each established fellowship.

Today, Hellenist-influenced seminaries don't recognize the Hebraic basis for the *distinct roles* of evangelist and shepherd. Thus, multitudes of distressed Hellenist-trained clergy have been trained to fill the wrong role. A sea of men in burnout are struggling to fulfill the position of "pastor" because they thought that was what they were supposed to do. Their spiritual gifting and anointing, however, lay in other areas.

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.

Followers of Jesus have had access to the Bible in English for only 400 years. It had been locked away from the laity in Latin, a

language unknown to the common people. Rampant anti-Semitism in the church has hindered our understanding of the practices of the earliest Church. Our research in Israel showed that every practice of the earliest Church was already part of the Hebraic stream of Judaism *before* the coming of Jesus.

Anti-Semitic, Hellenistic seminaries have avoided Jewish writings that predated Jesus' incarnation, opting instead to focus on interpreting ancient Greek words to fit their anti-Hebraic bias. So much that would have illuminated the Church which *Jesus* is building has been lost by ignorance of the writings that underpin the Hebraic framework out of which Christianity was birthed. Today, 22,000 competing Hellenist denominations and sects vie with one another. Let's regain the biblical anointings that unified and matured the earliest Church.

Rampant anti-Semitism in the church has hindered our understanding of the practices of the earliest Church. Our research in Israel showed that every practice of the earliest Church was already part of the Hebraic stream of Judaism before the coming of Jesus.

Needed: Courageous Cooperation to Restore the Priesthood of Believers

Have you ever considered why more first century Jews didn't devote their lives to the Messiah? Picture for yourself how hard it was for them to give up centuries of dependence on the annual Day of Atonement. At that time the blood of an unblemished goat was offered for their sins. Commitment to Jesus meant giving up centuries of religious practice and putting their trust in *His* shed blood alone, once and for all time.

How does God change centuries of tradition? We have an example in the Jewish people who initially refused to put their trust in Jesus. After the ascension of Jesus, God allowed the Romans to destroy the Temple in AD 70 so that the Jews wouldn't have a place to offer their Atonement sacrifice.

Believers in Jesus have now had access to the Bible in English for more than four centuries. Why hasn't the *priesthood* of all the followers of Jesus occurred before now? The answer is simple: **Centuries of Nicolaitan subjugation!** This spirit's widespread control keeps the religious system from changing and carrying out God's plan.

Today, our Lord may not be destroying a Temple, but He is certainly warring against anyone who serves the Nicolaitan spirit and system which He so hates. His hand of judgment is being seen throughout Nicolaitanism.

Now is the time for wholehearted followers of Jesus to clothe themselves with courage to walk in truth! We can no longer be part of what our Father hates and wars against. Fear of reprisal by the Nicolaitan system can't stop us. It won't give up its

grasp easily, but we can only encourage you: Let nothing hinder you from restoring what our God ordained for His Church!

It's time for wholehearted followers of Jesus to clothe themselves with courage to walk in truth! We can no longer fear the reprisal of the Nicolaitan system as it tries to hinder us from restoring what our God ordained for His Church.

Please heed the warning:

"Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord"

(2 Corinthians 6:17a).