

# I Hate Nicolaitanism! (Part 4)

## Priorities and Patterns of the Earliest Church

### Introduction

Think your kids are learning how relevant the Bible is to their daily lives? Then peruse the recent Barna Research survey we've included below to illustrate how ineffectual the Hellenist/Roman system has been for them. As the report cites, "The least common outcome among church-ed youngsters was "understanding enough of the Bible so that every decision you make is based on biblical principles."

This sad reality makes our recommendations in *I Hate Nicolaitanism* all the more important for you to consider. The poll substantiates a point we've repeatedly written about concerning the destructive trap of Nicolaitanism: Fathers and husbands *out-source* their wives and children for spiritual training rather than walking out that God-given responsibility themselves.

A recent study found that fewer than 23% of children raised in Christian homes follow in the faith of their parents. Keep in mind that God did *not* command the Hellenistic Church to teach our children — He commanded *fathers*.

### Barna Update: July 8, 2003

#### Teens Evaluate Church-Based Ministry

Ever wonder how well we're doing at raising spiritual champions among our children? One way of gaining insight on that matter is to ask teenagers what they experienced at church when they were younger. In this week's report we share such insights:

- Eight out of ten young people recall some important insight or category of lessons they gleaned from their church experience when younger. However, the substance of their recall was quite general.
- At least nine out of every ten church-ed-as-children teenagers said they had been exposed to Bible stories, lessons about the lives of great people in the Bible, and had

fun or positive experiences related to religion during their times at church.

- The least common outcome among church-ed youngsters was "understanding enough of the Bible so that every decision you make is based on biblical principles."

So, how do these statistics impact *you* as a husband and/or father? The following pages focus on the different issues that pertain to the exercise of Hebraic authority and leadership. Keep in mind that Hebraic-based authority is "home grown." As a man matures in his enactment of loving, sacrificial authority in his home, he may become an elder, a Hebrew *zaken*. In this role he may then exercise collective authority over our Father's children, along with other elders.

The *zakens*, or gray-bearded, were the shepherds of God's earliest faith communities. These are the men who would shepherd each male head-of-household, who in turn disciplined his own family.

The Hebraic system of family authority is at direct odds with Nicolaitanism. It boils down to husbands and fathers versus clergy. The former were losing spiritual influence in their families until our Father mercifully revealed the Hebraic pattern of the early Church. We can't say this strongly enough: Every husband or father or qualified elder who remains within Nicolaitanism is subjugating himself and his family to an ungodly system in which he himself is the biggest loser! Eighty-five per cent of all divorces in the United States are now instituted by women. It's time for us men to walk in our God-given roles and uphold the family responsibilities He demands of us as men.

**Every husband or father or qualified elder who remains within Hellenism is subjugating himself and his family to an ungodly system in which he himself is the biggest loser!**

# Hebraic Basis For Authority in the Home

## Position and Enactment of Authority

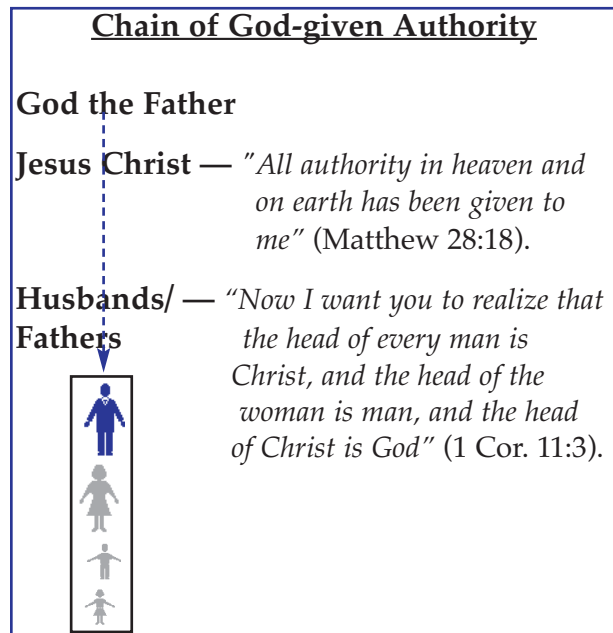
A man's authority for his wife and family is given to Him by God. To biblically understand authority we must separate the *position of authority* from the *enactment of authority*. A man's authority is given to him by our Father through Jesus Christ as both a responsibility and a privilege. As he walks uprightly in this role, he is mirroring Jesus in relation to His body, the Church.

*Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the **head of the wife** as Christ is the **head of the church**, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything* (Ephesians 5:22-24).

A *position* is always honored independently of its enactment. Whether or not you have (or are) ideal parents, God has endued mothers and fathers with the honor that's due them. "*Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honor your father and mother' — which is the first commandment with a promise*" (Ephesians 6:1,2).

Paul was unjustly struck at the order of the High Priest during his inquest before the Sanhedrin. Yet, following his rebuke of the priest, Paul then apologized, "*Brothers, I did not realize that he was the high priest; for it is written: 'Do not speak evil about the ruler of your people'*" (Acts 23:5). Paul respected the position of the high priest even if that individual's enactment was ungodly.

While the *position* of authority is given by God, you need to learn to exercise that authority in your home in a biblical manner. That is, the *enactment* of your authority is developed into godly maturity throughout your life journey. Ideally, you would have been prepared by your father or other godly men for this responsibility *before* you got married. Learning to correctly handle authority *after* marriage makes it all the tougher.



This is where intimate contact with older shepherds is so important. Without these helpful guides, great strain is placed on your marriage and family as they're subjected to your misuse or avoidance of godly leadership. (See diagram on page 32, "Relationally-Connected Men Produce Successors in Leadership", for more on the pattern of mentoring and discipleship used in the earliest Church.).

- If you're not old enough or mature enough to be an elder yet, who is helping you learn to enact authority in your home in a godly way?
- If you do have an older man in your life, is it emotionally easy for him to confront you if necessary? Does your wife have access as well with him and his wife?

## The Responsibility of Biblical Authority: *To Include or Exclude;* *To Commend or Correct*

Biblical authority can be defined as the privilege and responsibility of a man to:

- *include those people or things that contribute to peace and harmony in his home, or*

*exclude those people or things that rob his home of peace and harmony;*

• to **commend** those actions and attitudes that contribute to the peace and harmony of his home, or to **correct** those actions and attitudes that rob the peace and harmony of his home.

As revealed in the Bible, God gives authority to males. If those men are to progress to a greater realm of authority to benefit others, they must develop humility, wisdom, and a willing heart to serve God and others. Within the Bible a man finds resources to guide him to a God-pleasing lifestyle.

The motive of *justice* underlies the enactment of godly authority. Biblical justice is not as much a legal term as one of *equitable treatment* of people. Jesus proclaimed that all of life interaction is summed up in your just and equitable treatment of others: *“So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets”* (Matthew 7:12). Justice is the foundational standard upon which sacrificial leadership is based. *How you treat others* reveals your inner heart attitude.

- Justice produces peace.
- Peace is not only the absence of interpersonal tensions; it also nurtures an atmosphere in which love can grow.

Carrying out the responsibility to include, exclude, commend, or correct is a lot like standing sentry duty. It takes ongoing diligence to do what is required of you. When you fail, peace will be robbed from your home or home fellowship family.

Do you remember when Jesus sent out His disciples to the different villages? He told them that if they found a man who understood peace, they could stay there. If not, they were to shake the dust off their feet and leave. It is better for Sodom and Gomorrah than for the man who has authority but fails to maintain peace.

- Is your home peaceful? Probably not all the time, but when peace is lost, do you have good processes in place to restore it quickly?

- If you haven't yet discovered ways to maintain harmony in your home, ask your family or home fellowship, as appropriate, for suggestions. Participation of all your family members and advice from your home fellowship family is extremely helpful!

### **Success Without Successors is Failure**

Your success as a godly leader in your home extends far beyond any personal benefits you may attain. The overall purpose of biblical authority is to produce *successors in the faith* who follow the Bible-based lifestyle that *you model*.

The first Hebrew, Abraham, trusted in the God Who made him the father of all who put their trust in Jesus. This man and his trust are the source for why our Father told Sue and me in Israel to call this a *“Hebraic Restoration.”* Abraham's trust-filled way of life stirred God to enter with him into an eternal Covenant through which the whole world would be blessed.

Why did our Father choose Abraham to be our spiritual predecessor? *“For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him”* (Genesis 18:19). Abraham's spiritual sight stretched far beyond that which was apparent during his lifetime. *That's* trust!

The requirement to produce successors is repeated often in the Bible. Consider God's purpose for marriage, *“Has not the LORD made [a married couple] one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth”* (Malachi 2:15).

- Ask our Father to give you discernment about each person in your care, especially since you're representing Him. *Discernment* will help you guide them in fulfilling His purposes.

## Guidelines for Elders To Consider

### Elders: God's Agents for Leadership

You may not have noticed, but when God sent Moses back to free the Israelites, He sent him to the *elders*. All throughout Scripture, elders have always been the authorized shepherds of God's people whether in ancient Israel or in the early Church. To be an elder, that is, a *zaken* [*zah-KEN*], was the pinnacle of a wise man's life.

Let's flesh out this concept [see the chart below]. Israelite men who showed exceptional wisdom as they enacted authority were promoted to positions of greater leadership. Exceptionally wise heads of families became elders of their clan; exceptionally wise clan leaders became tribal leaders. A handful of these went on to advise kings for the good of the whole nation. *Wisdom* was a key element in their advancement.

Leadership at each level was *personal*. Those who were led were in close contact with the men who were in authority at each level. Each elder was conscious of the fact that he was raising up his own successors. (In today's Nicolaitan system, an outside clergy person is called by a committee, even though *no one* had any prior personal relationship with him!)

The early Church was much more *tribal* in its thinking than it was organizational. The organization that so predominates Nicolaitanism came into being during and after Constantine, and was adapted from the Roman Empire structure. [For more on the tribal mentality of the Bible, see our series entitled *He Has Showed You*, under "Hebraic Articles" on our website.]

### God's Government for His People: *Bible-based Republics*

The biblical process of leadership progression among proven elders is the basis to the *republic* form of government that's supported by both the Bible and the Founders of the United States. A republic entails *collegial rule* by the oldest and wisest. Each elder represents his family, clan, and tribe.

In the biblical republic form of government, some elders served a judiciary role as did those elders chosen by Moses in Exodus 18 or those found at the city gates in Deuteronomy 21:19, Joshua 20:4 and elsewhere. Others executed the decisions made by the legislative action of the elders. Again, wisdom and character were paramount qualities for leadership. (See 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 for continuity of Hebraic qualifications for elders in authority.)

Until a change altered the US Constitution years ago, state legislatures chose the wisest among them to represent their state at the federal level. That alteration in the fabric of the Constitution provided for *popular* vote to elect whomever they wanted in the Federal legislative branches.

How does that affect today's government? This nation is no longer a republic, but has devolved into a democracy. Now policy is controlled by public opinion polls and by popular vote. Popularity rather than wisdom has become the criterion for advancement. (Images of Bill Clinton and his saxophone appealing to screaming throngs of young voters still fill my thoughts with sadness.)

### Progressional Development of Authority Authority Advancement

<u>ISRAEL</u>	<u>Authority</u>	<u>EARLY CHURCH</u>
• individual belongs to a family	<i>Husband</i>	• individual belongs to a spiritual family
• family belongs to a clan	<i>Elder</i>	• spiritual families belong to a home fellowship
• clans comprise a tribe	<i>Elder</i>	• neighborhood home fellowships comprise a congregation
• tribes comprise a nation	<i>Elder</i>	• congregations of home fellowships comprise the citywide church

Many expressions of the Hellenist Church have become a democracy. Early New England Congregationalism is the pattern of government for much of Protestantism. Clergy and other leaders are chosen by popular vote of the congregation. Over time, the biblical “one anothers” of confrontation and admonishment, along with the role of biblical authority to *include or exclude* and to *commend or correct*, are discarded as offensive.

Too many of today’s congregations attract and hold parishioners through entertaining services that give no thought to personal or communal righteousness. Souls are titillated rather than convicted, and prayers languish unanswered.

**Spiritual Leaders:  
Interrelational Servants**

When you think about spiritual leadership, does a relational gap arise in your mind between you and someone else who holds power? A *personal relationship* with those who lead is critical to the *relational interconnectedness* at each level of progression. The clan or neighborhood home fellowship of families represented *extended-family* relationships that provided immediate care and support for both families and individuals.

The extended family of those who fellowshiped in home gatherings offered a deeper relational awareness of strengths and weaknesses. And, through the leadership of the home fellowships, the whole extended family was connected to other congregations in the area. As we mentioned earlier, the home fellowship family was also the forum in which the *collective* responsibility for upholding righteousness was carried out. Congregations are too large for individuals to personally come alongside to help one another walk in righteousness.

So often the Bible parallels caregiving of people with that of sheep. Leaders among our Father’s flocks are urged, “*Be sure you know the condition of your flocks, give careful attention to your herds*” (Proverbs 27:23).

Personal knowledge of each individual is critical if elders in God’s faith communities are ever to fulfill their purpose as outlined in Ephesians 4:11-16, and Hebrews 13:17.

A shepherd knows his flock is healthy when they procreate and multiply. So do the shepherds of our Father’s children! As we discussed earlier, the two key facets of fellowship in homes are to uphold righteousness and to develop load-bearing relationships. Both of these elements of our walk require a 7-day-a-week commitment to one another in Jesus, and meaningful personal contact with the shepherds who elder the flock.

**Living and Teaching Relational Priorities**

What does leadership of our Father’s children look like in practice? Let’s break this down using the Restoration Priority Diagram which summarizes the relational priorities of the early Church. The focus for husbands and elders is to make the center of the diagram the most vital relationship, then work out toward the outer ring as the least priority. In other words, a husband or elder must focus, in order of priority, on Jesus, The Home, and Fellowship in Homes, both in his own life and in helping those in his care to do likewise.

**Restoration Priority Diagram**



Obviously, the values of the world are at odds with biblical priorities. Nicolaitanism also minimizes the inner priorities in the diagram, pulling you outward to serve the system through meetings, programs and services. This tension to walk on the side of Jesus or on the world's side goes on day-in and day-out. The Holy Spirit, however, strengthens you to walk with Jesus as your Lord, to live your marriage in a loving manner that represents His love, and to raise up your children to see the living power of your way of life in Him.

### **Confront Your Ego, Die to Recognition**

The tension you face as a leader in your home and your home fellowship family can be visualized using the diagram at the bottom of the previous page. Nicolaitanism, as well as the temptations of the world, draw men in particular to the *outer rings* where his ego and desire for recognition can best be fulfilled. The private arena of your spiritual walk or home life provides little to feed your ego. When Nicolaitanism and the world cooperate to *deprioritize* the spiritual growth and home life of so many men, families suffer until they are fractured beyond repair.

While living in Atlanta several years ago we worked with an internationally recognized ministry that helped Christian businessmen. Their focus was mentoring business owners to overcome their business problems by using wise business solutions. Armed with the Restoration Priority Diagram, we showed them that "Business" was on the *outer ring* of God's priorities. Because of our own experience with business owners, I proposed something for them to look into:

"When our Lord can't reach a business owner's heart to keep His priorities of Jesus and his Home, He'll allow the man to have business problems in order to get his attention. Instead of trying to fix his business, why don't you see if he's having *marriage problems* and help him restore the greater priority, his relationship with his wife?"

After several months of surveying the business owners the ministry was working with, they found that **every man** who had business problems had serious marriage problems as well. Yet, when they tried to help him with his marital situation, they encountered great resistance. It was easier to help the man with his business because that's where his ego got stroked.

But to help him love his wife as God would have him love her took more humility than many of these business owners were willing to sacrifice. Finally, in order to keep their own financial support coming in, the ministry gave up on helping men with their marriages.

The ego problem applies to more than just business owners. Whatever element in the world or in the Nicolaitan system that strokes a man's ego and provides him the recognition he seeks will be the competition that wars against the humility he needs in affirming Jesus and his home. This one factor, *humility*, is why far more men than women resist the Hebraic foundations. And the failure of husbands to humble themselves in relational priorities is why so many wives are out in the world seeking careers to meet their own ego needs.

**Every man who had business problems had serious marriage problems as well.**

- Are problems happening to you now outside your home that may be your Father's attempt to get your attention?
- When you think of your wife and/or children versus your career, which gives you the greatest satisfaction? Does your response align with God's?

### **Reinforcing the Restoration Relational Priorities**

Let's review these priorities from our diagram one at a time. The relational priorities are like a layer cake. The higher the relational priority, beginning with Jesus, the more

<u>Priority</u>	<u>Focus</u>
1	<b>Jesus</b>
2	The Home
3	Fellowship in Homes
4	Gathering of Home Fellowships
5	Gatherings Throughout a City

important that it be kept intact and not be robbed by lower priorities. Captivity to Nicolaitanism makes the lower priorities more important, and plunders intimacy with Jesus, with family, and with others in close fellowship.

### Jesus

In our Hebraic Article entitled, *“The Gospel of the Covenant is the Gospel of Salvation”* [available at our website], we write about the Gospel that Jesus preached. He refers to this Good News when He proclaims, *“Whoever trusts in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.”* By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified” (John 7:38,39).



For over 200 years before the coming of Jesus, the Hebraic stream of rabbis had been teaching that *“you must be born again.”* That’s why Jesus was so surprised by Nicodemus’s lack of knowledge of “spiritual rebirth” in John 3: *“You are Israel’s teacher, and you do not understand these things?”* (v.10).

The Gospel embraced by the earliest Church, the Good News that so powerfully changed their lives through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, is found in the Older Testament. Few, if any “so-called gospels” peddled in the Nicolaitan system even mention the Older Testament, that is, the Hebrew Bible. But without an understanding of the Gospel to which Jesus was referring, you’ll succumb to a manmade lie: People may declare you “saved”, but God hasn’t.

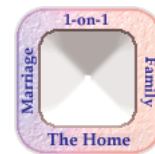
### Implication for Leadership

If you aspire to be a family leader or shepherd in the faith communities our Father is restoring, you can’t operate without the empowerment of the Holy Spirit — the stream of living water! Trying to walk with people who *call* themselves “brother” or “sister” but evidence no abiding presence of the Holy Spirit will be letting wolves into your midst. Instead, meet with them individually to guide them into a right relationship with Jesus. Keep them outside of the fellowship family until they embrace the Gospel that brings spiritual power and life!

Any husband or elder who doesn’t make Jesus his foremost priority each morning through prayer and Bible study is no leader at all. If Jesus is truly Lord for any man, then that man will be eager to begin his day by seeking His guidance and direction for both himself and those under his authority.

### Your Home

Just how important is your marriage covenant in God’s sight? Three statements representative of the earliest Church capture that essence.



#### 1. “The highest gift God ever gives a man is a wife.”

Proverbs 18:22 assures us that *“He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favor from the Lord.”* Through the humility it takes to sacrificially love (*agape*) your wife as our Lord commands, your character becomes increasingly conformed to that of Jesus. Marriage is a mutually dependent relationship requiring a lifetime of humility and personal sacrifice. Every man who marries goes to his ego’s death in order to *be* more of Jesus first to his wife and then to all who know him.

#### 2. “If you want to know a man’s love for Jesus, watch it in how he loves his wife.”

The *agape* love you are to have for God is the same love required of you for your wife:

“Husbands, love [agape] your wives just as the Messiah loved the [Church], indeed, gave himself up on its behalf” (Ephesians 5:26, JNT).

3. **“A marriage covenant should be the physical representation of the Covenant you embrace with your Father through Jesus Christ.”**

Both covenants carry sacredness in the heavenlies. The word “covenant” means that you live in union with someone. The *agape* love that binds your marriage covenant physically displays the loving strength of your Covenant with your heavenly Father.

**Implication for Leadership**

If your marriage isn’t one that others can esteem and desire to emulate, then don’t lead. As an elder you minister out of your marriage and that which has been accomplished in your covenant with your spouse. *Both* you and she are cast into the arena of role modeling and mentoring. It isn’t that your marriage is problem-free, but that the processes of love and forgiveness epitomize the life of two people who are following Jesus together. That’s important to those who turn to you to see loving forgiveness in action!

**Fellowship Families in Homes**

We described the importance of fellowship in homes among extended spiritual family in an earlier section, Hebraic: *Congregation of Home Fellowships*. It’s important to recognize that the home gatherings seen throughout the Book of Acts both in Jerusalem and in the Gentile Church were part of the Hebraic stream of Judaism *before* the coming of Jesus.

**Implication for Leadership**

It’s within the 24/7 relational commitment in a fellowship of families that your wife’s and your years of gaining wisdom really begin to count. Your leadership is more analogous to *parenting* than to leading. If you commit yourself with passion to both your



Lord and to the people in your care, this can be the finest and most fruitful season of your life.

- One of the criteria for elder is *hospitality*. Do you have people in your care in your home for purely social reasons — not for a meeting, but just because you care for them?

**Gathering of Home Fellowships and Gatherings Throughout a City**



If the inner three priorities are in order as our Lord desires, these last two priorities just fall into place. Even as an elder at this level, a man is still part of a family and home fellowship which are his primary relationships. He doesn’t abdicate his responsibilities to them in order to lead at the congregation or city-wide level. Instead, he represents them and still belongs to them.

Spiritually healthy congregations of home fellowships, even throughout a city, are grounded on the combined strength of ongoing relationships with our Lord Jesus. Spiritually healthy marriages and families are the building block for everything else to fulfill our Father’s purposes.



Unlike Nicolaitanism in which men exercise impersonal control over people, the Hebraic pattern begins with personal relationships which continue no matter how high the responsibility level in which a man serves. Even an elder in a citywide congregation is still part of the same family and home fellowship family in which he learned the enactment of his authority.

This interconnectedness of personal relationships is vital to get hold of because it’s so *unlike* Nicolaitanism or corporate America. Maintaining the Restoration priorities for

yourself and helping those in your care to mature as they live them out is at the forefront of leadership at all levels. Beginning in his home, a husband or father is instilling *a way of life in following Jesus*. What a tremendous difference from the passive, Sunday-morning only reputation that the name

“Christian” has come to connote. Following Jesus is a way of life! It requires role modeling, mentoring, biblical teaching to application, and when needed, confrontation. This pattern is the same no matter where a man finds himself in the progression of authority.