

I Hate Nicolaitanism!

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

(2 Corinthians 6:17a).

A Warning to Leave the Hellenist/Roman Church System



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I Hate Nicolaitanism! (Part 1)

The Power Behind the Hellenist/Roman Church System

Introduction

The issue of the Nicolaitans that's addressed in this article may be entirely new to you. It was difficult to envision who the reader might be.

- Perhaps you're inside Nicolaitanism, and have no idea that you are in a religious system that God hates and fights against.
- Or maybe you're one of the over 40 million born again believers who have fled Nicolaitanism but don't know what God has for you.

In any case we trust that this five-part article will be an encouraging confirmation to those who have fled a God-hated system, and a warning to those still in it to leave while you can.

I spent over 10 years as a counselor to clergy. In some circles I was known as "the enema" because I was often called on when a host of sins and cover-ups had brought an atmosphere of hopelessness. I was called on to operate in the background of many churches, Christian ministries, even colleges and seminaries to unclog spiritual and relational blockages. You might say I spent a lot of time in the bowels of Christianity.

Then in 1993, our Lord in His great kindness drew my wife Sue and me to Jerusalem. There we had the privilege to research the factors that enabled the the early Church to be so relationally intimate and spiritually powerful. Our Father told us to call the message He wanted us to share, "**The Hebraic Restoration.**"

The Hebraic Restoration is our Father's means of restoring to us Gentiles the missing facets of what was once part of the earliest Church. His restoration is His blessing to His people because, at the same time, He is restoring the Israelites back to their land,

fulfilling His promise to the Patriarchs.

As we got ready to leave Jerusalem to carry this prophetic message back to the United States, we were warned by our Israeli Christian friends, "You're going back to the hardest place on earth for this message to be received. Christians there don't *need* God and they don't *need* each other." Their words, the very definition of Hellenist thought and Roman organization in the western church today, have proved to be so true!

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They Defame the Name of My God

What got me started on this article was a recently forwarded copy of a working draft of a forthcoming book, sent to me by a friend. The author is one of the leaders of what is called, "The Protestant Papacy" here in Colorado Springs. This individual is among those who are bestowing "apostle-ships" on people, placing these apostles over different cities and regions of this country.

The author cites a local well-known clergyman as a prime example of men who are being recruited into the new apostolic ecclesiastical structure. My sadness was that several years ago I met with this "local apostle" minister for lunch. He was very threatened by the implications of our little pamphlet *Prodigal Church*, and dissuaded many other clergy in his sphere of influence from investigating our material.

Humble, servant-style leadership is fostered in the Hebraic Restoration and is found at the core of the earliest Church. This pattern stands in direct opposition to the Hellenistic ecclesiastical system which has become the norm for so much of the Church we see today.

When I received the book draft, I didn't know how or if our Father wanted me to respond. As I prayed, I discerned that our Lord wanted me to clarify the very real differences between the Hebraic-based understanding of authority in the early Church, and the Hellenistic/Roman ecclesiastical systems which became entrenched in the church during the 4th century. Today these adapted Hellenist practices and Roman organizational systems are the standard for most Christian communities.

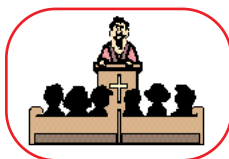
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We've previously discussed this topic in our books *Restoring the Early Church* and *Pastoring by Elders*. Our goal at the time that we wrote these books was to *inform* people of what our research in Israel on the early Church had uncovered. Now, however, *so much more* is being required of the followers of Jesus beyond just being informed. His people need to act!

Let's briefly review the elements of the Hellenist philosophical influence and the Roman organizational system that have so impacted western Christianity.

Hellenist (Greek) Influence on the Church

- humanism — places man, not God, at the center of everything
- God remains "out-there" rather than indwelling His own through His Spirit; religious practice designed to try to "reach Him"
- pagan temple worship with pews and pulpits satisfy soulish expression; repentance unnecessary or minimized
- dualism — material body is evil; only the spirit is good, so church rituals needed to make things holy;



- clergy class established to be "holier" than lay people
- clergy became intermediaries between God and man
- worship confined to steeped buildings—"God's House"
- theology – the study of God became cognitive and no longer a way of life; God's miraculous intervention of ongoing revelation of Himself now considered mostly historical
- virulent anti-Semitism; Older Testament disregarded as legalistic and irrelevant; Hebraic heritage totally ignored

Roman Organizational System

- efficiency of Roman Empire organization replaces personal leadership; Pontifex Maximus government office becomes Roman Pontiff church head
- ecclesiastical positions established at all levels of religious system; no longer a priesthood of all believers
- no longer a need to be "born again"; children "born into" Christianity and baptized as infants
- revisionists writings appear, transforming Peter into a Pope; history revised to fit new religious organizational pattern
- Bible confined to Latin for 1100 years; only educated clergy could interpret it; Church falls into the "Dark Ages"

I hope to encourage you through this article, *I Hate Nicolaitanism!*, to prayerfully take appropriate action in your own life and in your family's, especially as the Hellenist/Roman Church in the US is so rapidly disintegrating. Perhaps your loving trust in our Lord will stir you to begin to restore in your life the *personal responsibility* that which was an integral part of the earliest Church. May this article inspire you to make the biblical choice.

Perhaps your loving trust in our Lord will stir you to begin to restore in your life that which once was an integral part of the earliest Church.

The Hellenist/Roman Church Exposed

In the Introduction to our book *Restoring the Early Church* we included comments by many Christian leaders concerning the condition of the Church in the US. Since we wrote the book 8 years ago, other information keeps coming forth to reveal *the fall of the Hellenist/Roman Church system*.

For instance, the article below appeared in our local paper recently. From "Secular Jobs Tempting Clergy" [The Gazette, July 5, 2003]:

Among all denominations nationwide, **1,600 ministers per month are terminated or forced to resign their pulpit ...** The Southern Baptist Convention has reported that roughly 1,400 ministers per year call a toll-free crisis hot line. And nearly 100 Southern Baptist pastors leave their churches every month.

Some pastors step down after revelations of scandal, or stir up congregational conflict and division themselves. On the other hand, some are targeted by powerful factions in the churches that simply don't want them around. (emphasis added)

This article only added to a host of information that's come our way pointing to the rapid fall of the Hellenist/Roman church system. Destruction of pandemic proportions is impacting western Christianity, touching Protestants and Catholics alike. No denomination that we are aware of is free from this plague. [For related reading see our article, "*Impudence: Reflection of the Anti-Christ Spirit in Today's Church*", available on our website under "Hebraic Articles."]

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If you have any doubts that the western church has become our decadent society's mirror, consider these heartbreaking statistics:

- One afternoon during the mid-1980's I talked with a church leader of one of the top three Protestant denominations in the world about the clergy in his denomination. He admitted that the adultery rate of the clergy was in excess of 50% — and this was nearly 20 years ago! He told me, "If the people in our denomination found out, they'd leave us in droves."

Over a decade later we met a couple who counseled adulterous clergy in that denomination. They confirmed that the adultery rate was still over 50%. Sadly, there seems to be a 50%+ clergy adultery rate across the board in Protestantism today.

- In the mid-80's an official Roman Catholic publication stated that up to that time, the Catholic Church had paid out over \$400,000,000 in out-of-court settlements for clergy sexual misconduct. Recently headlined cases of pedophilia will cost churchgoers much higher sums than that. (The same article addressed epidemic homosexuality rampant in seminaries.)
- For the past few years, Protestant clergy have been close to the top of the infamous list of occupations that lead this nation in divorce.
- The "Bible Belt" has a divorce rate 50% higher than those who don't attend church services. The divorce rate of the Hellenist/Roman Church at large is higher than that of people not attending church.
- One of the leading international evangelistic ministries reported that only 4% of those who go forward at their crusades are found to be following Jesus even a year later. 96% walked away from *something*. Were they inoculated against the true Gospel?
- A major campus ministry reported less than 5% of the students who were active in their ministry during college are still walking with Jesus 5 years later. 95% walked away from *something*. What did they receive?

- Church youth work in the US has been found to be less than 3% effective in training up young people who walk wholeheartedly for Jesus. The average stay of a youth pastor in a congregation today is about 9 months.

“If the people in our denomination found out, they’d leave us in droves.”

Patching the System Doesn’t Work

The deteriorating condition of the Hellenistic Church accelerated so rapidly during the past 60 years that the church itself failed to hear the warnings God was sending it. Like the Titanic, which turned off its radios so that they wouldn’t hear the warnings of icebergs ahead, the Hellenist/Roman system drove out the prophetic voices our Father sent to warn them.

In the mid-1980’s God stirred me to go find those in Southern New England who were gifted in prophecy. I looked for them in different congregations, and discovered that most had fled. They’d been driven away from the church system by clergy who feared the divine exposure that the prophets were sent to reveal. Many of these prophetically gifted were at home wallowing in bitterness.

During this same period there was an explosive increase in *para-church organizations*. These ministries tried to compensate for the failure of church systems to carry on their biblical mandates. The Hellenist-based para-church reaped no more success in raising up committed believers than do Hellenist/Roman religious communities. There is a key reason for this across-the-board failure of Hellenist Christianity...

We Are Under God’s Judgment!

The rapid moral decline of this nation prompted Billy Graham several years ago to prophetically state, “If God doesn’t judge the United States, then He’ll have to apologize to Sodom and Gomorrah.”

Something is terribly wrong in a society that finds 95% believing there is a god, but

so few living lives that evidence that belief. These painfully revealing statistics indicate a silence in which little power of the Holy Spirit is being made manifest. And what is being seen through personal excused sin and carnival-atmosphere “Christian” entertainment is tarnishing His Name!

Don’t Ezekiel’s words judge *us* today as well?

Her priests do violence to my law and profane my holy things; they do not distinguish between the holy and the common; they teach that there is no difference between the unclean and the clean; and they shut their eyes to the keeping of my Sabbaths, so that I am profaned among them (Ezekiel 22:26).

I believe that our Lord’s judgment is already taking place, and that people aren’t paying attention to the indicators such as those listed earlier. Know this: There are “dark days of chastisement” coming upon the US, and we have little time to align ourselves with our Father’s plan to save us from the misery that many are or will be experiencing. Only you can study the facets of the Hebraic Restoration for yourself and ask our Father if this message is for you.

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Your alignment with the Restoration our Father has ordained for His children is a lot like the alignment required of the Israelites in Egypt. Before the Destroying Spirit was sent forth, He ordered the Israelites to put blood on their door posts to protect their families on the night of the Passover. Embracing the Hebraic Restoration — the relational intimacy and trust-grounded spiritual power of our forefathers in the faith — is your protection today. You need to be walking now under the protection of the blood of Jesus as His *wholehearted follower* in order to stand firm in the coming days.

I'm saddened for the well-meaning people who keep trying to patch up the Hellenist/Roman clergy system. So many of these caring men and women have gone under themselves because they are operating *contrary to God's plan*. He is restoring the Hebraic foundations of the earliest Church which evidenced such spiritual intimacy and world-impacting power.

God is judging a hierarchical church system that has NO biblical foundation.

On the surface it appears as if the Hellenist/Roman system is beset by gross sexual misconduct at the root of its decline. But I firmly believe that something of a *Divine plan* is unfolding before our eyes.

God is judging a hierarchical church system that has NO biblical foundation. There were no clergy in the earliest centuries of the Church. The position of clergy was an adaptation from Hellenistic and Roman pagan practices. By Emperor Constantine's reign in the 4th century, clergy had become the only sanctioned leadership in the Church. God hated this system that had made inroads on the infant church, and vowed to war against the people who practice it.

Many well-intentioned people have perpetuated a system that has gone on with different adaptations for centuries. By the time you finish reading this article I hope you will be convinced that our God hates this system, and take action accordingly in your own life. If God hates and wars against those who practice an unscriptural approach to worship, wouldn't you want to let people know the truth so they could respond as well?

First, let me briefly review what we've already written in our book, *Pastoring By Elders*, that addresses this subject. Again, when we wrote the book, we were trying to be informative. Now it's time for the true followers of Jesus to *take action*. As Moses warned the Israelites who were about to enter the Land, *confirm* what you've heard to be truth by putting it into action! (Deuteronomy 27:26)

Updated Excerpts From Chapters 2 and 3 of *Pastoring By Elders*

God's Judgment on the Nicolaitans

In the letters written to the seven churches in the Book of Revelation, two churches are confronted with the issue of the Nicolaitans. The letter to the church at Ephesus states, "*But you have this in your favor: You hate the **practices** of the Nicolaitans, which **I also hate***" (Revelation 2:6). These are incredibly strong words. Can you imagine participating in something that God hates? What if you are but don't know it?

Again, to the church at Pergamum John writes, "*Likewise you also have those who hold to the **teaching** of the Nicolaitans. Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will **fight against them** with the sword of my mouth*" (Revelation 2:15,16). At least the Ephesians hated the Nicolaitan practices as God did. Some of the Pergamum residents, though, *embraced* that teaching. What an awful situation to be in. Would *you* like to be someone against whom God Himself must fight?

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This is exactly what our Lord is doing in the church today to expose and cast off that pernicious Nicolaitan influence that *exerts power* over the people. The church has become so proud in its tradition of Hellenistic practices and Roman organization that the Lord must oppose it. How else do you account for the immensity of clergy misconduct? For a divorce rate far beyond that of unbelievers?

The wide-spread use of worldly programs and entertainment for "church growth" are all part of the delusion to which God has been forced to hand over the Church in the US. Isn't this what is really going on inside Hellenized Christianity? How can you account for so many "Christians" whom polls show have values

and lifestyles indistinguishable from those of the ungodly society around them?

A “Christian” can separate himself so far from the Lord and His ways that He is compelled to let him *live the lie* he embraces: “For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie” (2 Thessalonians 2:11).

Nicolaitanism: Repression of Our Father’s Children

Most Christians today are so accustomed to the clergy/laity arrangement in their congregations that they are amazed or even angered when it’s questioned. It’s important for you to know that *Nicolaitanism* is a religious system of *control and power*, an ecclesiastical system of suppression and subjugation. Perhaps you’re not familiar with the Nicolaitan system that is so odious to God. The Nicolaitan system places a human intermediary, a clergy person, between individual believers and their God.

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This insidious two-tiered system is recognized by the very definition of the name. The Greek word *nicolaitane* [NIK-oh-lay-it-TAH-nay] means “conquering the people.” The first part of the word refers to *nikos*, to conquer or have victory over. The middle of the word is derived from *laos*, which means “the people”. The commonly used term “laity” is derived from it.

The Nicolaitan system *subjugates the people* by making “laity” out of them through raising up others who act as intermediaries between God and them. It combines the Old Testament Levitical priesthood (which ended with Jesus’ atonement to end that system) with the pagan practices of the Greco-Roman priesthood.

The spiritual *predominance* of a priestly (or ministerial) system is the goal of the Nicolaitan spirit. Individuals with the most

personal charisma or the greatest natural abilities are elevated to leadership. Nicolaitanism relies heavily on young men with a seminary education. This practice is in direct opposition to the Hebraic leadership of the earliest Church: older men with years of life experience that was gained through trusting and growing in relationship with the Lord. The criteria for leadership in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 requires that a man *prove* his maturity and abilities by his *way of life*.

Hebraic — *emphasizes personal character and Godly wisdom that was gained from life experience.*

Nicolaitanism — *personal character is incidental; tremendous emphasis on cognitive knowledge.*

Under Nicolaitanism the “laity” remain as spiritually immature children, dependent on their clergy for Bible explanation and creedal position. In this system few ever learn to live out as a *way of life* the Word of God as they are guided by the Spirit. With little or no personal contact with the “clergy”, the “laity” have no means to interact with the one they presume is a role model of godliness. No one can role model a holy lifestyle that’s pleasing to God from behind a pulpit. Pulpit sermonizing isn’t transferrable to daily life situations!



Nicolaitanism replaces role modeling as a *holy way of life* with Hellenistic-cherished *piety*. Airs of piety can make you assume a person is more spiritual than interpersonal contact might reveal. Ecclesiastic robes and other religious paraphernalia create a certain pietistic aura, but piety can cover up a person’s inner darkness.

Jesus criticized the shroud of appearances in His day: “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like **whitewashed tombs**, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men’s bones and everything unclean. **In the**

same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness" (Matthew 23:27,28).

Great spiritual destruction lies in wait for those who complacently abide in the clergy-laity arrangement. So great a dependence on the clergy person diminishes the sense of *personal responsibility* for *obedient trust* and the *love relationship with our Lord* that Scripture commands each follower of Jesus. And grievously, the laity like it this way.

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Nicolaitan Intimidation Holds Power

From the book: *"None Dare Call It Deception"*

by Clast Sonomore

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Nicolaitanism

Revelation 2:6

"But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate."

As footnoted in the Scofield Bible, 1967

Nicolaitanism — from *nikao*, "to conquer;" and *laos*, "the people" or "laity." There is no ancient authority for a [geographic] sect of the Nicolaitans. This [term] is [therefore] symbolic, referring to the earliest forms of the notion to provide a "priestly order" or "clergy" which later divided [what can be] an equal brotherhood (Matt. 23:8) into "priests"

and "laity." What in Ephesus was "deeds" (Rev. 2:6) had become a doctrine in Pergamus (Rev. 2:15).

From good authority, I was told that the Southern Baptist convention, at this time representing nearly 10,000,000 members, demanded of the publisher that this footnote be deleted or they would withdraw their support of the Scofield Bible.

It takes no expertise to see the obvious reasons (financial and otherwise) behind the demand of a self-perpetuating hierarchical "*clergy class*" of "*controllers*." This overwhelming desire to hide this Constantinian invention that replaced "a kingdom of priests" with an Old Testament division of these same "priests" into two bodies, "*clergy*" and "*laity*," is basic to Christendom's declining walk "...in the revelation of Him." For whatever reason or reasons, or demands, or threats (to Scofield's publisher or to others), it is needful to record that this very illuminating footnote (along with other comments) has been eliminated from the current volumes. Presumably that little word, "Nicolaitanism, which I [God] also hate" (Rev. 2:6) is currently felt in the contemporary church to be so unimportant that it does not need to be even considered, defined, studied, understood, much less "*hated*" by man ... though it is very much "*hated*" by God.

It's interesting to me that the Scofield Bible is probably the most widely used translation in the "Bible Belt." The most predominant denomination in that region is the Southern Baptists. Could there be a connection between the enforced Nicolaitan agenda by the Southern Baptists and the 50% higher-than-national-average divorce rate in the Bible Belt? I believe there is.

Similarly with the Catholics. In the 1980's the Pope reaffirmed the Nicolaitan

hierarchy to the Catholic clergy worldwide. Today, clergy sexual misconduct headlines the news. Is there a connection? I believe there is.

Sexual misconduct is a surface symptom of a deeper spiritual adultery in which God's Word has been altered to keep a particular class in power, lording over His people. Jesus's criterion for the leadership of His people, however, is a servant's heart of humility. Nicolaitanism prizes personal charisma and cognitive knowledge, not life experience of faithful obedient trust.

Can the curse on Protestant clergy be the 50%+ adultery rate, and on the the Catholic priesthood the pedophilia/ homosexuality? Is the divorce rate of church attendees that exceeds that of the unchurched an accursed outcome of giving in to the unauthorized Nicolaitan power structure? I believe these are all signs of the unfolding judgment on the Nicolaitan system which uses Hellenist practices and Roman organization to maintain dominance.

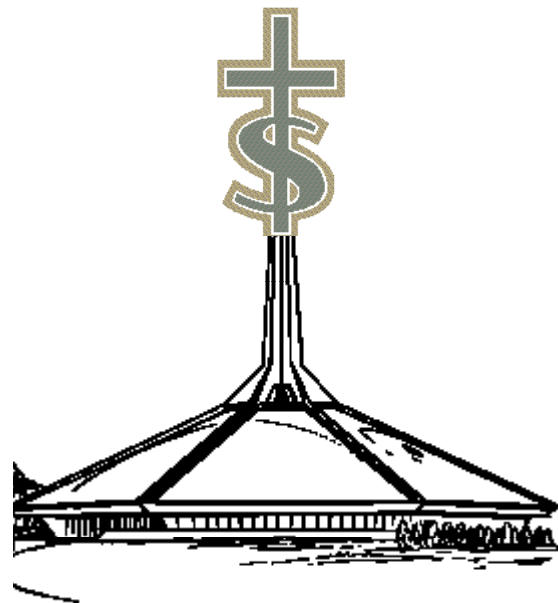
The Hebraic Restoration is having no more success changing Nicolaitanism than Jesus did in changing the power structure of the High Priest or the Sanhedrin. Vested interests of the men who seek prestige in the Nicolaitan system keep it from being changed. It must always intimidate and falsely accuse those who embrace the Hebraic foundations our Father established for His children.

To those who are enamored with the Nicolaitan system, weigh this paraphrase of Gamaliel's warning to the Sanhedrin as you try to discredit those who proclaim the freedom due the priesthood of **all** believers: *"Therefore, in the present case I advise you:*

Leave these men alone! Let them go! Their purpose or activity is not of human origin, and it will not fail. It is from God, and you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God" (Acts 5:38,39).

"It is from God, and you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God."

Clergy Rule
Satan's Bullseye



The Nicolaitan Steeple

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.

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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 Christendom. 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.

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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.

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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).

I Hate Nicolaitanism! (Part 3)

Living Out God's Word: A Hebraic-Hellenist Comparison

This chart contrasts the different emphases and methods of ministry used by Hebraic and Hellenist Christianity. The dissimilarity in the fruit each produces is substantial. Go down each list and put a check mark next to each item that describes your religious experience to date.

Take some time to discuss this chart with others who are close to you in your faith pilgrimage, and who will go on with you to incorporate the biblical Hebraic foundations into your faith practice.

In the Hebraic pattern of the earliest church, *discussion leading to application* is the effective way to learn. Lectures and reading bring about little or no change in men. Their minds may get filled, but they themselves are *not changed*. Recent studies have supported the importance of both discussion *and* role modeling in training men to be changed into Christlikeness. Both are vital if we are to restore what once was normal for our forefathers in the faith as they led our Father's children.

Hebraic Active—*Appeals to the heart* [right side of the male brain]

Motive

- Love for God and others
- Life viewed as a pilgrimage leading to an ultimate culmination in heaven
- Suffering seen as necessary for development of Christ-like character

Process Oriented

- Stresses direct participation
- Emphasizes age and wisdom
- Role modeling, mentoring, and discipleship indispensable
- Leadership by personal example
- Character of leader essential
- Personal relationships imperative

Biblical Application

- Doers of the Word
- Bible: reality that must be confronted
- Goal: to develop Christlikeness

Ministry Activity

- Small intimate groups
- Leader as facilitator
- Cooperative, participatory planning
- Spiritual gifts shared
- Frequent scheduled and unscheduled gatherings

Fruit

- Love, acceptance, forgiveness
- Transparency encouraged
- Active participation
- "How you serve" vital
- Each believer trained to serve
- Produces mature believers**

—Total

Hellenism Cognitive—*appeals to the intellect* [left side of the male brain]

Motive

- Pursuit of self-interest and knowledge
- Life viewed in circular terms, to some day achieve a higher state of existence
- Suffering to be avoided; people and activities weighed for self-gratification: "How does this person/event benefit *me*?"

Program Oriented

- Heavy program prominence
- Emphasizes education and knowledge
- Relies on speaking skills, oratory, programmed materials, information conveyance
- Leader's personal life immaterial
- Personal relationships optional

Biblical Application

- Belief without personal cost
- Bible: data that must be taught
- Focus on rules—do's and don'ts
- Emphasizes distinct denominations

Ministry Activity

- Large impersonal groups
- Leader-directed and controlled
- Organizational roles important
- Acquisition of knowledge emphasized
- Reliance on scheduled gatherings

Fruit

- Mutual toleration
- Transparency discouraged
- Passivity and lethargy
- "What you know" vital
- Trained professionals utilized
- Produces spectators**

—Total

Hebraic: *Gathering of Home Fellowships* [a fellowship of homes based on righteous relationships]

A home fellowship is really a fellowship of committed families and individuals who meet in homes. These followers of Jesus are extended spiritual family! It's not their meeting together in their homes that makes them strong, but the determination of each member to *live* the righteousness of Jesus every day.

Hebraic Home Fellowships

Factors that distinguish a Hebraic home fellowship are:

- Primarily concerned with glorifying our Father
- Communal righteousness is paramount
- Prayers are answered, yielding powerful testimonies
- Committed 24/7 relationships
- One-anothering of extended spiritual family
- Biblical authority is exercised
- Intergenerational connectedness
- Scheduled and unscheduled meetings
- Recreational pastimes shared

Righteousness:

You Have NO Fellowship Without It

Chapters 11 and 12 of *Restoring the Early Church* and Chapter 13 of *Pastoring By Elders* deal thoroughly with the cornerstone of fellowship in a home group — upholding communal righteousness. God ordained meeting in homes because He was aware of man's inclination to sin and reluctance to repent. Relational accountability in a small intimate group helps people stay repentant so the fellowship experiences answered prayers.

By His own limitation, our Father refuses to hear the prayers of those who refuse to repent, and choose instead to hold on to

A home fellowship is really a fellowship of committed families and individuals who meet in homes. These followers of Jesus are extended spiritual family!



their wickedness: *“For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against the wicked”* (1 Peter 3:12).

Our earliest forefathers in the faith were conscious of their responsibility for *communal righteousness*. They knew from examples such as Achan in the Hebrew Bible that one person's unrepentance hinders the prayers of everyone else.

The first issue for all family heads and elders of fellowships was the maintenance of righteousness within their respective homes and fellowship of homes. Without communal righteousness, prayers go unanswered and our Father receives no glory. But with repentance comes powerful response!

Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops (James 5:16-18).

Elijah-sized results are powerful testimonies to encourage believers and catch the attention of unbelievers! The Book of Acts cites examples of the need for answered prayer. Followers of Jesus gathered in homes

rather than the Temple to pray for those needs. Peter's miraculous release from prison is one of many examples of our Father answering the prayers of righteous people who got together in homes as spiritual family. Remember, it was answered prayer and changed lives that got the early Church noticed!

Load-bearing:

Personal Loving-care to One Another

We are told that the fellowships of the earliest church "*had all things in common.*" Their mutual regard for each other and their desire to serve was of greater importance than personal ownership of property. This loving interconnectedness wasn't meant for just the earliest Church, but was a hallmark of all followers of Jesus toward one another. Loving commitment as extended spiritual family is all day, every day!

The intergenerational connectedness brought together the *wisdom* of the older men and women with the *needs* of the younger to deal with life's problems. To be a *zaken*, a respected elder, was a high aspiration for every young man who diligently sought wisdom by applying God's Word to his life. Within the home fellowship, the council of the wise was readily available to those who sought wisdom.

Older women taught the younger ones how to love their husbands and families, and encouraged the younger women to grow into the example of the Proverbs 31 older woman.

Outreach

If you're a dedicated follower of Jesus, you are personally representing His love to all mankind. The eternal destiny of everyone the Messiah died for is probably weighing heavy on your heart.

Fulfilling that goal with others in your fellowship family begins with each home establishing relationships in their neighborhood, workplace, school, and social sphere. It's through *personal relationships* that unbelievers are reached as friends and opened up to understand who Jesus really is. By walking alongside them as a friend and bearing in prayer the burdens they reveal to you, you'll be mirroring Jesus to them.

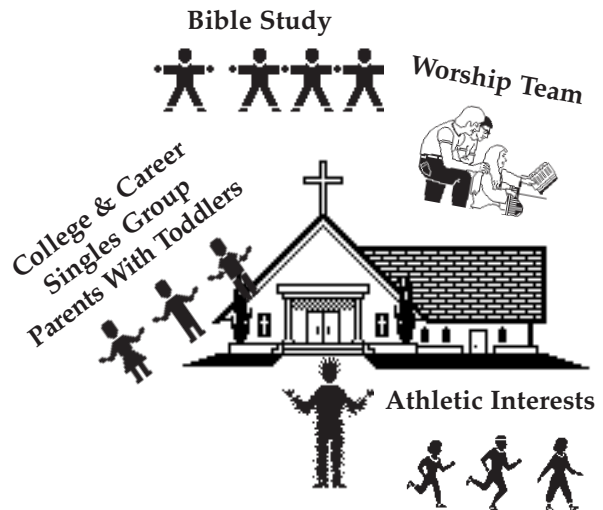
Many home groups make the mistake of inviting unbelievers into their worship gatherings. This unintentionally allows wolves of worldly values in! Instead, invite some of your extended spiritual family over on a casual basis to interact with your unbelieving friends. Let them see your joyous one-anothering in action and be "jealous" for that relationship with God that moves them closer to repentance!

If and when your unbelieving friend turns to our Lord as one of His own, that's the time to incorporate him into the home fellowship family to be nurtured and disciplined. That way, your faith family grows naturally by new births rather than opening the door to drifters from other congregations who are looking to appease self-interest.

Hellenism: *Congregation with Small Groups* [reliance on activity-based religious forms]

Nicolaitanism Isn't About Love, But Religious Activities

Since so many of us are products of Hellenist Christianity, let's remind ourselves of what we're leaving behind. It's sometimes difficult to adjust from an *activity-based system* into an *extended spiritual family* that's built upon relationships with both God and each other. Frequently a time of isolation faces those courageous enough to make the transition. Perhaps this is our Lord's way of testing whether you're convinced of His all-sufficiency or if you miss the religious crowds.



Show Up For the Scheduled Event

Activity-based systems always leave a hollowness in your soul. Initially, everything seems okay because of the crowds of worshipers and your proximity to others in the pews or chairs next to you. But you hunger for something more intimate, with both God and other people.

Factors that distinguish Hellenist Christianity:

- People are concerned more with having their own needs met than with fulfilling God's will
- Religious practice is disconnected from the rest of your life
- Activities are paramount, while strong relationships are optional
- Relies heavily on scheduled meetings
- Control rather than biblical authority is exercised
- Homogeneous and Affinity Groups of like interests are extremely common
- Any small group gatherings focus on a topic rather than on relational growth as family in Jesus

An Efficient System

Hellenist Christianity provides the means for one or a few to dominate and control a large number of people. It requires NO per-

sonal knowledge of, or ongoing contact with, the ones you're leading. You just schedule an event that meets their desires and the people come. This system reflects management and control, not personal role modeling and interconnectedness.

The recent growth of affinity groups rather than intergenerational relationships has missed one of the greatest needs facing Americans today. Affinity programs group you with others who have similar tastes or characteristics, such as College and Career, Divorced, Seniors, Parents of Teens, Recovering Alcoholics.

The Nicolaitan domination brings efficient management, but does nothing to develop personal maturity in Christlikeness.

A Sad Heritage

The most painful part of this reality is that the "laity" like it this way! "Church" has more to do with pleasing *them* than with pleasing God. Hellenist church attendees have little or no desire to touch the world for Jesus. Given the estimated 600,000 Hellenist congregations in this nation and the deplorable moral state we find it in, my assertion is borne out. George Barna's surveys corroborate: the moral convictions of churchgoers match those who do not attend services.

The Hellenist Church experience is like going to a movie. After the entertainment is done, you have no further responsibility to fulfill the purposes our Father would like to accomplish through each believer. The “safe place” church-building gatherings diminish any opportunity for personal accountability and one-anothering.

Consider the possibility that on any given Sunday morning in Protestantism, over 50% of the clergy standing in front have been or are actively involved in an adulterous affair.



In Catholicism an untold number of pedophiles and homosexuals are leading worship. So many laity would like to believe it is not *their* pastor or priest. Why? Because it permits them to go on with the same lack of accountability that the adulterer or pedophile in front of them has. Yet no one grieves that our Father is being violated as His Name is brought down by those who say they're “Christian.”

Over 40 million born-again believers have left the Hellenistic system. Some are still wandering, trying to find the truth. We trust that they and you will take a strong look, and prayerfully ask our Lord if He is restoring the opportunity for you to be part of the Church that Jesus says He is building.

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

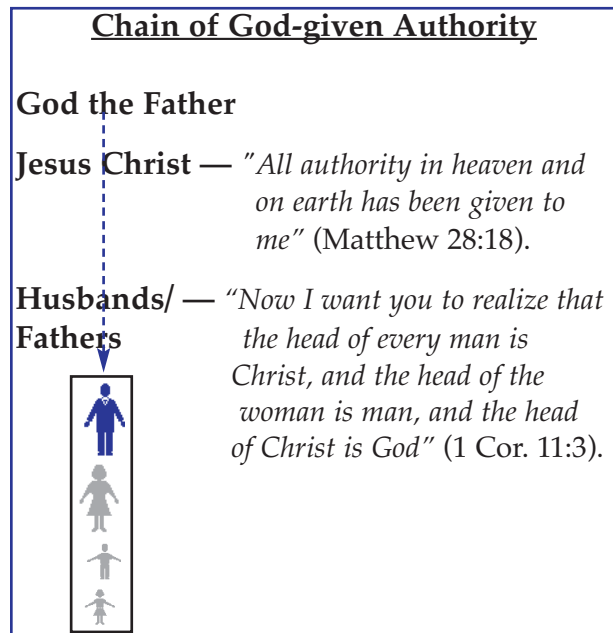
A man's authority for his wife and family is given to Him by God. To biblically understand authority we must separate the *position of authority* from the *enactment of authority*. A man's authority is given to him by our Father through Jesus Christ as both a responsibility and a privilege. As he walks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

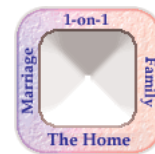
Implication for Leadership

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.

I Hate Nicolaitanism! (Part 5)

Hebraic Home Fellowships

Relationally-Connected Men Produce Successors in Leadership

In the earliest Church, men in authority mentored their successors to replace them at each level. They shared their lives with those in their care and role modeled a God-fearing lifestyle. These men walked in relational closeness. Each home fellowship of extended spiritual family looked like a “formation” of close relationships that were designed to produce successors in leadership. Each future successor “flew from” on someone else with whom they were relationally connected. There was no central “control” person. The council of men brought about wise, biblically-based decisions, and the elders carried out those decisions.

In our illustration, each man in the formation is helping the one immediately behind him. Just like the bomber squadrons of World War II, if the leader gets hit, someone else picks up the leadership. This type of leadership replacement is being carried out dramatically among our persecuted family in Christ in other parts of the world. It will probably be needed in the US sooner than most want to believe.

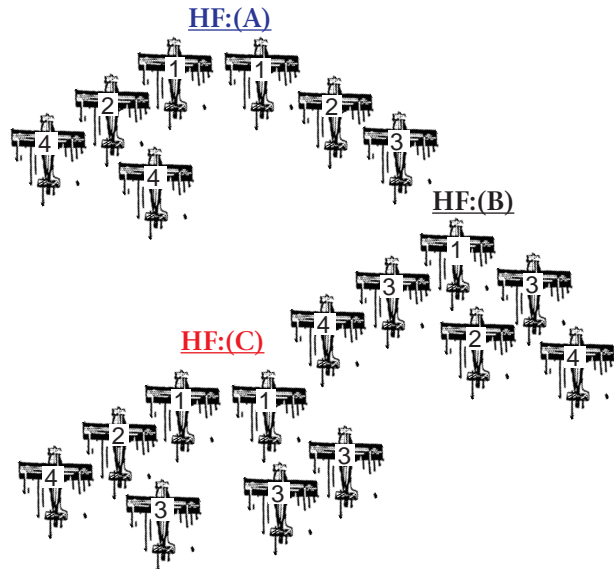
Discipleship: *Connected Relationships*

Use this key to identify the maturity of the men in each fellowship of families.

Home Fellowship — HF:()

- 1: Qualified Elder
- 2: Almost Qualified; mature in years, but needs more character development
- 3: Man nearing maturity; needs more life experience and character development
- 4: Younger man; needs many more years of experience and character development

Remember the chart we discussed earlier regarding the Authority Advancement? A



man is given authority by God as the head of his household. What promotes him to higher positions of authority is based upon his *enactment* of his current role.

An elder’s position is not ecclesiastical, but one of *earned respect*. He, like the men in his care, began his authority as a husband. Because of his years of life experience and acquired wisdom, he has authority as an elder to both role model a way of life that pleases God, and to teach biblical principles as a way of life. This involves far more than leading a Bible study or using a prepared curriculum to impart knowledge. The elders’ very lives are exposed their home fellowship family!

The illustration indicates a variety of ways that men in home fellowships can form their relational accountability. For instance, in Home Fellowship A, two elders have men “flying formation” on each of them, respectively. If the group became too large for them to meet together conveniently, they could easily divide and form two home fellowships that could meet “congregationally” for worship or social gatherings.

Size Limit

The size of a home fellowship is limited by the elder(s)' ability to render account to our Father for the men who "fly formation" on his leadership. This is crucial! "*Obey your leaders and submit to them. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you*" (Hebrews 13:17).

The personal ability of the elder(s) and the time available to fulfill their responsibility limits the size of the fellowship. They are leading and mentoring men with whom they have personal, ongoing contact, not detached management of a group of people.

I personally have found that I can't render account to my Father for more than 5 or 6 men in a loadbearing capacity as brothers. Beyond this number something personal starts to disappear, and the loss can be felt by everyone.

Practical Considerations for Elders

[The information in this section augments the recommendations we've included in *Restoring the Early Church* and *Pastoring by Elders*.]

Several years ago the first home fellowship I eldered grew too large, and I found myself *managing* a group. Our 24/7 commitment with each other became shallow. One weekend we all went away on a retreat together. As we sought the Lord for guidance in prayer, a woman stood up and asked permission to subdivide the group.

As we gathered into two groups, all of us felt a witness in our spirits that this was God's will for us in order to continue one-anothering and to bring in new disciples. The second home fellowship was led by a man who had been flying closely with me for some time and was ready to elder.

Just a note: Our gathering of home fellowships congregated weekly at a rented gym with other home fellowships. Our own home fellowship family met an hour early because we wanted to spend time with each

other. Our kids played and we talked or prayed together. It wasn't unusual for us to spend our entire Sabbath together. We also had a lot of personal and phone contact throughout the week, as well as spontaneous encounters with each other.

I also like to meet with the men once a week, usually on Friday at 5AM. This proved to be the best time for not interfering with family life, and provided opportunity to gain wise counsel through discussion with each other. A rule of thumb for us was a wise saying we had heard:

- **If you spend 2 hours or less with a person, you have an *event*;**
- **If you spend over 2 hours with a person, you have an *experience*.**

We all wanted to *experience* each other, and we achieved it by getting together at 5AM instead of a time that was more convenient for the flesh but less conducive for our purposes!

What about men who have controlling or manipulative wives? Our weekly men's gathering helped considerably to support their biblical position as well as their enactment in their families. "Getting together for an experience" for the wives each week gave them access to encouragement by the other wives and opportunity to talk with the wives of the elders. "*Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children*" (Titus 2:3,4). Frequent phone contact and stop-bys also deepened the discipling relationships.

Gender Learning Differences

Because men and women differ in so many ways, it's no surprise that our learning styles are also unique. The diagram on the next page depicts how each gender is influenced *to change*. Role modeling is a vital component for both genders. Confrontation, however, provokes men to change

Effecting Change in Males and Females

<u>Men:</u>	<u>Effect</u>	<u>Women:</u>	<u>Effect</u>
Role models	Very Positive	Role models	Very Positive
Confrontation	Very Positive	Education	Very Positive
Education	No Effect	Confrontation	Minimal

their ideas or direction, but generally adversely affects women. Women tend to react to the *emotion* of the confrontation and overlook the content of the encounter.

Men can attain volumes of educational information but not make any change at all based on what they learned. On the other hand, women can read a book or hear a lecture and, based on that input, immediately make changes in their lives. Unfortunately, education rather than role modeling or confrontation is the method of choice in Hellenist Christianity, negating the training that is needed to produce mature men. Education just doesn't teach a man a *way of life*.

Two important elements are absent from Hellenist Christianity: *confrontation and admonishment*. Two passages emphasize this point. One connects confrontation with teaching. The other correlates confrontation as a responsibility of biblical leaders.

*“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you **teach and admonish** one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God”* (Colossians 3:16).

*“We ask you, brothers, to respect those who are working hard among you, those who are **guiding you in the Lord and confronting you in order to help you change**”* (1 Thessalonians 5:12, JNT).

- Do you have a difficult time confronting people who need to be admonished? Most people do, but don't let that be an excuse. It's part of loving one another!

Keep Bitterness Out!

Do you wonder why so many prayers go unanswered? Think about this: People who cling to their idols of pet sin are *walking in wickedness!* How many who call themselves “Christian” are blatantly entertaining sinful

actions and attitudes yet presumptuously believing God doesn't mind—after all, those sins are all “under the blood!”

Hard to believe? Sadly, sins of the heart are as rampant among the church as among the worldly. As Barna's research reveals, there is no difference!

You'll probably discover that the most common hindrance to answered prayer among Christians is *bitterness*. If you allow it to go unchallenged, bitterness will send out shoots of unforgiveness that will defile the hearts of all those in your extended spiritual family.

In *Pastoring By Elders* we discussed the importance of confronting bitterness. Because of the insidious and widespread nature of this sin, a review is helpful.

As an elder in your fellowship of families, you are a *gatekeeper*. You're responsible to keep out wolves in sheep's clothing and anything else that might destroy your fellowship or hinder your prayers. A bitter person who refuses to repent remains unforgiven by our heavenly Father: *“But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins”* (Matthew 6:15). Sympathy for the bitter helps no one.

Bitterness is like the sin of pride, and a proud person is resisted by our Father (1 Peter 5:5). A person's bitterness is a strong indicator that they have no appreciation of their own huge sin burden for which our Father is offering to forgive *them*. Their arrogance to cling to their bitterness nullifies Jesus' sacrifice for them on the cross.

Bitterness in your midst is a destroyer as well: *“See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to **cause trouble and defile many**”* (Hebrews 12:15). Bitter people influence others to hold on to their own resentment, unforgiveness and begrudging attitudes. If you don't confront

bitterness, your whole extended spiritual family will be defiled by it.

Before you ever welcome someone into your home fellowship family, check them out spiritually. In *Pastoring By Elders* we recount the woe we went through with our sheep flock when we failed to fully examine a ewe we'd been given. She had highly contagious foot rot. It took months with many hurting sheep before we finally eradicated that disease.

Gatekeeping: A Lost Responsibility

If a man wants to join your fellowship family, the elder(s) should meet with him as often as need be before he becomes part of the fellowship. Find out about his relationship with his father — the most common source of bitterness. If he has unresolved bitterness, ask him to deal with it biblically before he joins your extended spiritual family. A bitter man:

- will never come under biblical authority as God commands.
- will never properly exercise authority as God intends.
- will never let other men get close enough to him to exercise relational accountability.
- will make a mess of his marriage, repeatedly depending on you to pull him out of one marital impasse after another.

If a woman wants to join your fellowship family, the elder(s) and their wives should meet with her as often as need be before she joins in fellowship. Find out about her relationship with her father — the most common source of bitterness. If she has unresolved bitterness, ask her to deal with it biblically before she joins your extended spiritual family. A bitter woman:

- will never come under biblical authority as God commands.
- will resort to control and manipulation to get her way, agitating others in the family.
- will never let other women get close enough to her to exercise relational accountability.

- will make a mess of her marriage, repeatedly depending on you to pull her out of one marital impasse after another.

Your fellowship family will never press on into all our Father desires if bitterness is camped in your midst. As a leader it will wear on you, perhaps even driving you into discouragement or depression.

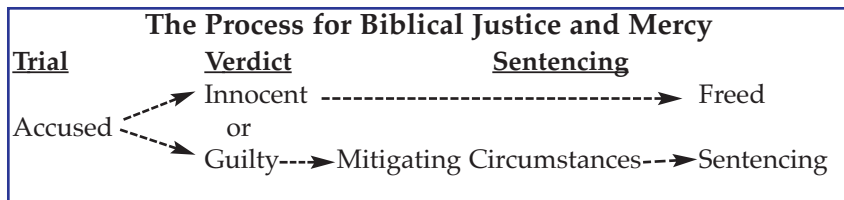
Confront the Hellenistic Perversion of Grace

One of the children of Hellenism is psychology. In the last 60 years psychology has replaced the Bible as the method of choice in helping people throughout the Nicolaitan system. In many segments of Nicolaitanism, people are more concerned with their *feelings* than they are with picking up their cross and following Jesus. In the last half century it's become increasingly more difficult to convey the need for *repentance* so that believers can leave their sins behind, especially when it comes to bitterness.

Psychology has given us words like "abused", "victim", and "dysfunctional family" as brands that minimize personal responsibility to repent and to forgive. An underlying sense of "victimization" makes it all the harder for followers of Jesus to mature in the full responsibility that walking in Jesus calls for.

I've taken several law courses over the years, both at the undergraduate and graduate level. I began to see the inroads that psychology was making in the Justice System. People who committed crimes were no longer regarded as "guilty" but rather as *victims of poor upbringing*. The penitentiaries which were supposed to mete out the penalty for crimes against society have been renamed "Correctional Institutions". However, without the recognition of personal guilt, little gets "corrected".

Police officers today admit their underlying fear of young felons because they have *no remorse for their crimes!* How do you change a person who has no sense of guilt



your guilt with a myriad of excuses, you never grasp how great a sin burden you have brought to the cross. Consequently, you never live in gratefulness for the

for the pain they've inflicted on another human being? Until sin becomes utterly sinful in your heart, you experience no guilt.

About 30 years ago I was following closely the trial of a doctor who had murdered his wife. For the first time I saw mitigating circumstances being introduced into the trial phase of the proceedings. Up until that time the trial phase had solely involved introduction of evidence to determine the guilt or innocence of the defendant.

If a person was found guilty, then mitigating circumstances could be introduced in the sentencing phase. For example, say two men are found guilty of stealing from a grocery store in two unrelated trials. The first is found to have 4 starving children because he's been out of work for 2 years on disability. The other stole to support his drug habit. In sentencing, should these circumstances be taken into consideration? By all means! Our Lord does that with us too. But first, guilt or innocence must be established.

Bear with me a moment, because the truth of what I'm sharing will make all the difference in your ability to help people in your care truly repent when God requires it.

Last week in the news a girl was found innocent of murdering her father. Oh, she admitted killing him! Why was she declared innocent? Because she convinced the jury that he was "abusive." Brothers and sisters, that girl is guilty of murdering her father. She's not innocent of the deed! But after she's been found guilty, mitigating circumstances that affected her actions can be introduced so that she might not even receive punishment.

How does this impact Christians? Throughout the Nicolaitan church system, people consider mitigating circumstances before they come to grips with their own personal guilt for their sins. If you cover over

punishment Jesus took on your behalf. If your sin is not utterly sinful to you, then your appreciation of His forgiveness is never utterly grateful!

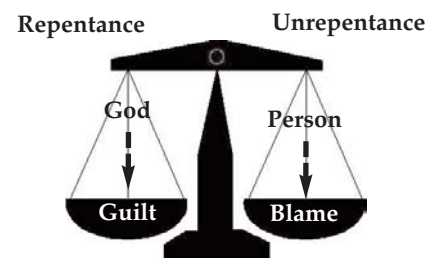
Let's go back to the bitter person who is trying to join your home fellowship family. As you talk with him about his bitterness, he tells you, "My Dad was an angry alcoholic." That statement may very well be true, but he's been harboring sinful unforgiveness in his own heart! He has deliberately chosen to hold onto bitterness rather than to forgive from his heart. For the protection of the sheep and for this man's own well-being in relationship with God, you need to gatekeep unless he repents. You can offer to help him man to man, but his bitterness would poison the true fellowship that is shared in your faith family.

No one likes to face the guilt of their own sin. Every one of us will try to balance our guilt for what we've done with blame. Blame excuses self and puts someone else at fault. Adam blamed Eve, and your kids blame each other: "I socked her because she wouldn't share her ice cream with me."

If the brothers and sisters in your care refuse to repent from the sins they're entertaining, your prayers as a faith community will go unanswered by our Father.

It doesn't matter if someone's father was Adolf Hitler! Help them

to see the guilt of their sins without any blame or excuse on their part. This process is vital, especially if you're going to help divorced people in particular live free from the sting of divorce.



Using mitigation before guilt is established is a sinister barrier to your mandate in one-anothering to “confront in order to help those in your care to change.” The propensity to *blame others* has led to the broadly accepted teaching in Nicolaitanism of “greasy grace” — “My husband (elder, parents, family in Jesus) has no right to confront me about my sins. I don’t *feel bad* about what I’m doing. The *Holy Spirit* will change me.”

The Holy Spirit give us grace, the *desire and power to do God’s will*. But He does this *after* we repent. The Bible teaches that one child of God holds another accountable to repent when that person refuses to hear the convicting voice of the Spirit. Isn’t that what Matthew 18:15-20 is all about? “*If your brother sins, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over...*” Restoration of fellowship in Jesus should be a great enough motivation for us to go to our brother!

Interrelational Discipleship

An elder is *not* the hub of a wheel with **all the spokes** leading to him! There is no biblical justification for one-man rule, nor is any elder more preeminent than the next. Preeminence opens a man up to satanic attack — he’s in Satan’s cross-hairs!

In the Hebraic understanding of God-given authority, each man gives each man respect because he is the head of a household. Elders never supplant a man’s home authority, because his authority comes from God. Their *own* authority in the faith community was gained through wise enactment of their authority in their own families. By teaching the biblical applications that guided their own lives, elders help other men to walk more maturely in Christlikeness.

One of the prime ways you can help is assisting each man to establish appropriate application of God’s Word to all areas of his life. These biblically-based life applications are called “*halakhahs*.” [For more on this subject and how to develop your own *halakhahs*, see our book, *Christian Hala-*

khahs. Biblical applications are like rocks in a fortress wall protecting your family and faith community.]

Final Exhortation

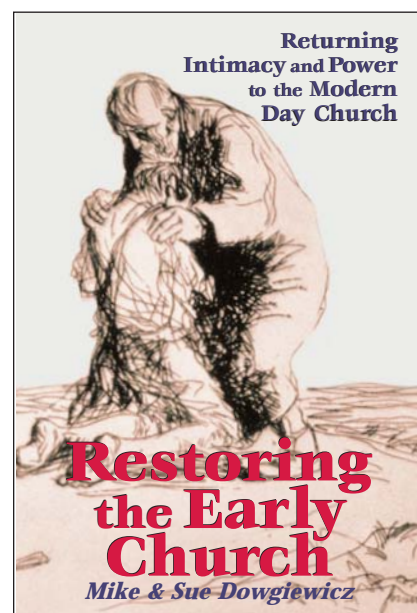
If you yearn to join our Father in what He is restoring to His people, you must flee what He hates and wars against — Nicolaitanism! Prayerfully seek Him and discern for yourself if what we have written in this article is the truth He wants you to live by. We firmly believe that as our Father keeps His promise to the Patriarchs and restores the Israelites back to their land, He is showing His mercy to us Gentiles by revealing what the true Church that Jesus is building looks like.

My wife and I recognize the divine way in which we were drawn to Israel, and the revelation our Father gave us to come back to the US with a prophetic message. As we finished our research on the early Church, we could feel our Father’s sorrow, especially over the children of divorce in the Nicolaitan Church in the US. Their pain and tears were hurting His heart.

After we arrived back in the United States with what He told us to share, we discovered a painting by Forain that depicted the return of the Prodigal Son. It captured the sense of longing our Father has to embrace His children. He told us to call our prophetic mes-

sage the Hebraic Restoration. It represents His means to enable each of us to live in intimacy with Him.

Yes, you are going to find increased responsibility both to your heavenly Father and



to other people. Nicolaitanism demands no more of you than attending a baseball game. Now you are embarking on a *way of life* that pleases our Father. This requires spiritual intimacy with Him and others in a home fellowship of connected family in Jesus. You'll need the empowerment of the Holy Spirit to be able to live in a manner that reflects the love of Jesus to all you meet.

Our Lord warned Lot to get out of Sodom and Gomorrah, and He is warning you now to get out of Nicolaitanism. Leave, and don't

look back with regret. Thank our Father for revealing His will to you, and ask for the Holy Spirit to guide you in acquiring that which once made your spiritual forefathers who first trusted Jesus relationally intimate and spiritually powerful.

This is the only way you're going to hear a "Well done!" as you hear your name proclaimed in front of the Hosts of Heaven!

"Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord" (2 Corinthians 6:17a).