



Systems Religion

For as far back as I can remember the Lord has been unveiling the competition He experiences with those things that oppose Him, and the story of my life is a journey from one exposure to another exposure of the religious systems that compete for centrality of life focus.

Let me make this as simple as I know how to. Either Jesus is going to be the focus of our lives or religious systems are, but you are never going to find a religious system that maintains the focus on Jesus He is due.

Way back in my believing beginning a teacher I admired said this “Religion is the Devil’s Ace trump.” It resonated with me then, and each passing year of my 35+ years as a believer in Jesus Christ, has only served to verify the accuracy of that statement. The problem is, we all interpret what this means differently. We don’t all agree what is “religion.” Preachers preach against it, and then unwittingly practice it in areas they don’t yet see partake of the same religious system they say they are rejecting.

The very fact that such a religious title as “Christianity” was ever able to be pinned on to that which we claim to be a part of, is a tragedy of unparalleled proportions. All by itself it is an evidence that we departed from Jesus, and developed something that championed a dead God, instead of worshipped a living Savior. Religions are about dead gods, or about those who were never gods in their lifetime but their fanatical followers converted them into gods after they died. Our faith is not in a dead god. Jesus is very much alive, very able to speak to His people and lead His Church, but by the way men have taken it over, you’d swear Jesus was dead.

Religion is man’s attempt to take over where God left off. Problem...God didn’t “leave off!” Jesus didn’t leave the scene as a dead historical figure. He is the only spiritual figure of history who ascended alive, right in front of those who followed Him, so they would never make a religion of His teachings. It was His way of saying, “Watch closely now, I’m transitioning into another dimension you can’t transition into right now, and I’m doing it right before your eyes so you will never think of me as being dead, just in another dimension, watching, listening, and communicating to you from that dimension. I’m going to continue to lead you, and form my kingdom on my earth through you. Don’t take my Church away from Me, and do with it whatever you please. I’m still here, I’m still watching, and I can still lead it just like I have for the last three and a half years.

His disciples caught the import of what He was doing. Jesus could have been crucified, laid in a tomb, ascended to heaven in His spirit, and left His body behind, just like every other ancient so called “god,” but He didn’t. His departure is unique, and it tells us so much about how we were to develop His approach to life and Church. Jesus obviously knew if that was how He was going to leave this world that His disciples would have gotten together, discussed among themselves what they thought was the core of His message,

what they thought He would have wanted them to do now that He was gone, and how He would have wanted them to understand His time on earth. But, Jesus didn't leave this way so that they would never do such things. Such things are the stuff of religions. Religion takes up where their god left off. Jesus didn't leave off. He didn't leave...He just changed dimensions of reality. He is still here. He can still see us, hear us, and talk to us. Our job isn't about taking up where He left off, and developing our spin on what we think He would have done if He had remained with us. Our job is to listen to Him today, to follow exactly and only what He tells us to do each day.

Listen to John 14 and Acts 1, and see if you don't see this. See if you don't catch the import of Jesus' words and how He was trying to help us avoid ever developing a religion out of His life.

John 14:16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, **John 14:17** even **the Spirit** of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.

John 14:18 **"I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.**

John 14:19 Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but **you will see me.** Because I live, you also will live.

John 14:20 In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.

John 14:21 Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and **I will love him and manifest myself to him."**

John 14:22 Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, "Lord, **how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?"**

John 14:23 Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and **we will come to him and make our home with him.**

Acts 1:4 And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me;

Acts 1:5 for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

Acts 1:6 So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"

Acts 1:7 He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.

Acts 1:8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

Acts 1:9 And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.

Acts 1:10 And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes,

Acts 1:11 and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

And what happened on the day this promise was fulfilled? Simply that Jesus, in the form of His invisible Spirit, came, and instead of manifesting physically and separate from them, came, and entered inside of them and manifested Himself to them within their spirit. And when this happened they exploded with hope, joy, and vision. For them...He was back...everything would now continue as when He was with them physically. They knew what had happened...Jesus had returned. It was His second coming, only this time it was a spiritual coming, but it was every bit as real as His physical presence. They also understood He would one day return in physical form, but for now there was much work to be done in preparation.

This, my friends, is how Jesus intended to avoid His person and teachings from becoming a religion. Religions are about dead gods...Jesus is alive. Religion is much more about men, and what they want to do with what their dead god said to them. We have not been given a religion by Jesus...we have been given a living relationship with a living Lord. If, for any reason, we are unable to hear Him and see Him, or we are immature in our spiritual skills in this area, we simply reveal our lack of qualification to accurately represent His current will on earth and lead His people. This should serve to humble us, rather than to convert His person into a dead religion and then move forward as if He wasn't alive, wasn't capable of guiding us, wasn't watching, wasn't capable of speaking and clarifying what He wanted done.

For far too much of historical Christianity's experience, we have allowed men, who either couldn't hear and see Jesus, or who did so poorly, to lead us, and step in as surrogate Jesus' (Vicar/Pope/Senior Pastor), as if Jesus were dead and incapable of leading His Church. Men have developed all kinds of religious systems, known as "systematic theologies," or "denominations," or "traditions of the elders," or "the doctrines of men." All of these nullify the Word of God.

Notice, in Mark 7, how Jesus doesn't say man's religious traditions nullify, or make void, the Scriptures. He tells them it nullifies the "Word of God."

Mark 7:13 thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And many such things you do."

The Scriptures reflect the mind of the Living Word Himself. To tack on the religious ideas and traditions of man, as if they were equivalent to the Word of God, is to drain the life out of them, and create a dead letter from them. Out of honor to Christ, the Living Word, we owe it to Him to let Him speak from Scripture, rather than add on our own spin. Let Him speak from the Scriptures. Let Him reveal Himself there. As we release this dynamic in the body the traditions of man will fall away, and the life of God will explode in our midst.

Church leaders, i.e. disciples of Christ, kingdom workers, etc., were all to be distinguished by one primary element...they could both see and hear the living Word Jesus. If they couldn't do that then they were disqualified from leadership...period!

After the death of the apostles, (who were all men and women, and who could both see and hear Jesus), false apostles and false shepherds, or false teachers arose among us, and led us away from Jesus and to themselves. They were unable to hear Him and thus they developed "theologies" that reflected their inability to see and hear Him, and these theologies, over time, contributed to the development of a world religion known as Christianity.

Paul said it would happen:

Acts 20:29 I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock;

Acts 20:30 and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, **to draw away the disciples after them.**

Such a thing need never have taken place, and represents one of the greatest tragedies of human history. It represents a death of Christ that never took place, and made way for the rise of human will, the triumph of religion, and the centrality of man in the midst of

Jesus' Church.

Religion gives man the right to speak on behalf of a dead god, and to form His past teachings into cohesive elements for the formation of a world religion in the image of man. It gives man the right to become God in place of their dead god. It gives man the right to develop things as they see best. It gives them the right to say things like "Well, brethren, we know God meant for His Church to develop different expressions, different modes, and different approaches, than the early Church developed, because He never told us we couldn't, and because He didn't teach the apostles that the way they formed the early Church was the only valid form. We have the freedom to express the mode of Church to each culture and generation as we think is best, just so long as we continually reference it to Jesus." This amounts to nothing more than rubber stamping man's religious ideas with Jesus' name. This gave man the right to do with Jesus' Church whatever they wanted to, because Jesus was dead, gone, and left it all in our capable hands. Such thinking is baloney in the softest indictment and absolute heresy in the strongest indictment.

If Jesus were dead, or incapable of being seen and heard, or even if Jesus had implied we were to do the best we could with what He had taught the disciples, since He was now going to be absent, it would be one thing, but nothing of Jesus' final words to His disciples, in John 13 through 16, and Acts 1, can be construed to imply such a thing.

Brethren...!!!!...He's not dead!!!! Did you get that? He's not dead! We must not live or fool around with His Church as if He were. It's not ours to fool with. We didn't die for it and to create it. We didn't rise to develop it and lead it. He did! It is His, not ours!

Such things should be so incredibly obvious to us, but apparently it hasn't been for centuries. Men and women have acted as though, since they couldn't see and hear Jesus accurately, Jesus couldn't be seen and heard accurately, and thus took it as a license to do with His Church whatever they desired, and then told themselves this honored God. It didn't honor God. It dishonored Him! It stole His Church from Him and turned it into something He never intended for it.

You'd have thought we would have taken Jesus' warning in John 10, more to heart, and been fearful of projecting forward what had always been true of men preceding Jesus. Listen to Jesus' warning:

John 10:8 All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them.

Did you hear that? Does it not send tingles up and down your spine? Are you not the least bit concerned that this verse could be applied to you and me? If not, why not?

The whole point of John 10 is twofold. One - The sheep are, have been, and always will be MY SHEEP, and Two - My sheep do, always have, and always will be able to HEAR MY VOICE, and they will follow ME, not men. Men are only to be allowed to lead as they value, evidence skill in, and are true to MY VOICE. They must be men who fear themselves being wolves in sheep's clothing, as thieves and robbers, and as hirelings. They must be humble, contrite, and full of honor for their living Lord. Brethren...this is not the description of the majority of Church leaders down throughout Church history. If it had been then His Church would look a great deal different than it currently does. It wouldn't be the Madison Avenue center of entertainment, in bondage to a theology of emotional experience, the hierarchical control system, and the powerless impotent thing it has become. At least

impotent compared to the early Church, and compared to what the apostles envisioned it becoming. We have fallen from our first position and we have much to recover. It all begins with casting down the systems religion approach that has defined us.

Paul indirectly addresses the concern over systems religion, in the following verse:

2 Corinthians 10:5 Casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, ...

Would to God we would follow this verse's exhortation, but alas...we're we tend to be more committed to our own self interests than we are to Jesus'.

Over the last several years God has been setting tens of millions of believers in Jesus Christ free from Systems Religion (SR), to the great consternation of many in the modern Church.

Why do people directly or indirectly support SR? Because, for the most part, they are simply the products of the conditioning of Church history! I.e. this is the way we've always done it... In some cases, but I suspect not the majority of cases, it is due to knowing to do good, but choosing not to.

There you have it...in it's rawest terms. If you are in any way connected with the institutional Church or systems religion you are because you have either been sent into those environments as a missionary of Christ, to help folks come out, or you are yourself conditioned to follow cunningly devised systems of religion, or you know to come out but refuse. You can take your choice. There is no fourth option I'm aware of.

SR is responsible for every act of persecution, every Church movement, every false apostle, hierarchical Church leadership, the false teaching of the tithe under the New Covenant, countless false doctrines, and on and on...

Jesus Christ had no part in initiating the IC or systems religion, and He never has and never will. He is completely opposed to everything those two concepts stand for and promote. Both of them deny His lordship, usurp His authority, and steal His glory. Yet, He is actively involved with, and loves, those who are connected with these systems. His gracious heart reaches us wherever we are.

These systems are primarily about the lordship, authority, and glory of man, yet with Jesus' precious name stamped on them.

Let's come back, for a moment, to Paul's words to the Corinthians, because SR and IC folks hate His words being applied to the systems they support, without realizing they do. His words tell them exactly what to do with SR and IC thinking, but they refuse to do it because it offends them too much, or they lack the light to see it from His perspective.

Casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ,

There you have it. Cast SR and IC thinking to the ground. Bring them into captivity to the obedience of Christ. What do we cast to the ground? Not people! Ideas! Have you ever been walking through a forest and found a spider or a tick on your shirt? Do you pick it off

your shirt and pet it, and set it on your shoulder, and give it a ride with you while you continue your journey through the forest? Not likely! But when it comes to SR and IC thinking this is exactly what the Church has done for centuries, and thought they were doing Jesus a favor by doing so.

We aren't to tolerate, molly coddle, or support these things. We are to reject, repudiate, deny, cast off, and force them out of our thinking and into obedience to Christ, but instead we either refuse to do so, or don't realize we need to.

I'm constantly amazed at how foolish we are when it comes to this area of our walk with the Lord. We'll tell ourselves all kinds of silliness, to justify remaining in or supporting SR, because we think to do otherwise is to be unkind to our brethren. We tell ourselves "To reject SR is to reject those who support SR, to reject SR is to be unkind to SR supporters, to expose SR is to wound our friends." Let me ask it this way. If you saw a tarantula drop on to your friends shoulder would you think yourself unkind to warn them? Of course not! If you saw them about to ingest some fresh spinach that you had cause to believe was tainted with ecoli would you be unkind to warn your friend? Of course not! Yet, when it comes to exposing and warning about SR we have trained ourselves into thinking that because they believe they are supporting these things for Jesus' sake we should not touch these things lest we offend the Jesus within them.

Now, I grant you, there is a good way and a bad way of approaching those in the SR and IC, but to say nothing is to be complicit before that which is sapping the very life of Christ out of them. At first they won't agree with this evaluation, but when they see the reality of these words they will be appalled that they could so long remain in a system that was doing that to them.

So what is Systems Religion, and how does it work, and why is it so wrong?

Systems Religion is an approach to faith in Christ and His Kingdom, that leaves room for, tolerates, and even supports man's fleshly ideas of things, as if they were the mind of Christ. It is subtly all about man building his own kingdom right along side Jesus' but does so by draping Jesus terms, concepts, and paraphernalia over it, so as to hide the fact that it is really primarily about man and only secondarily about Jesus. It's as much about man's glory, as Jesus'. It canonizes man's ideas, thoughts, ways, and practices, as if they were directly from Jesus, when upon deeper analysis prove to be opposed to Jesus and His kingdom, and make room for man to do his own thing and stamp Jesus' name on it.

SR is at the root of what creates the doctrines and traditions of men and elders. It disguises these traditions in such a way that the unsuspecting will not recognize they are what they are and reject them. The body inherently knows it's supposed to be all about Jesus, but they think SR promotes this, when it really doesn't.

The people who do these things are often very genuine believers in Christ. From my experience the majority of these folks, myself included, did and do what we did and are doing, from a belief that we are pleasing the Lord in the doing of them. This is what deception is all about. We think what we are doing is from the Lord, because someone we respect has told us we are. We know scores of godly people who are firmly locked within SR and the IC, and it is nearly impossible for us to separate them from the way they practice their religion, so we refuse to work through what we sense to be error, because we conclude we would have to reject people we love if we did. This is indeed a dilemma.

And before you draw the conclusion that I've just jumped into bed with all the house churchers, and am blind to the dangers there, I haven't, and I'm not. I disavow the entire house church movement, as a movement. I'm not promoting it, nor building it. I hope the only thing I'm doing is expressing my singular desire for Jesus, and my awareness that SR is a great tragedy in the midst of His Church. It's not about the style of Church we do, per se, as where Jesus figures into it. Some approaches to Church block Jesus' approach, and others are more conducive to His active involvement. I simply want to support an approach that gives Jesus the most glory and access to and through His people.

How do we walk out of SR and the IC without communicating rejection to our brethren? How do we expose the error of these things without implying that the majority of our friends who still choose to remain in these are bad people? How do we communicate that we HATE the system but we love God's people? This is not easy, will not be easy, and it isn't because the Church is so deeply entrenched and committed to the errors of SR that they can't hardly see it.

Someone will say, "So, what are some of the evidences of a false systems religion approach, that we have fallen into over the centuries?" Thank you for asking. Here are some prime examples:

1. **Failure to acknowledge a living Lord.** Men and women diminishing the hope and reality of hearing and seeing Jesus, and thus letting a living Lord guide the development of His Church at every point. When leaders act as if Jesus were dead, and left the whole thing in their hands, they discourage the whole body from believing they can hear and see Jesus. The end result...they become open to a religion developing.
2. **Replacement activity.** A replacement of the living Lord principle, with systematic theology, denominations, doctrines of men, and traditions of the elders. Let me take this a little further. Paul, a man of the "truth," whose entire life was lived out furthering, defining, and suffering, for the "truth," gives us the greatest definition of truth, in one little phrase in Ephesians 4:

Ephesians 4:20 "But that is not the way you learned Christ!-- 21 assuming that you have heard about him and were taught ***in him, as the truth is in Jesus...***"

We all know the world, and the Church, has espoused a great many so called "truths," down throughout history, that in the end turn out to be nothing more than the ideas or theology of man. We need to settle that truth, as relates to God, is found in only one place, and that place is One Person - The Lord Jesus. If we develop truth about Him, outside of Him, we will lose our way, and this my friends is what defines much of Church history...i.e. so called truths "about" Christ, developed by man, to further man's personal agenda, and displace the real Jesus.

If we are to know the truth, we must derive it from within Him. Thus, throughout Paul's writings we see him reference "In Him, by Him, to Him, through Him, etc." Paul knew to be suspicious of religious knowledge outside of Christ. Paul's "in'ness" theology, is far more than just a philosophical axiom of proximity. For Paul, the revelation that more characterized him than any other, was the intimacy of relationship with Jesus, and could best be described by the use of the word "In." We don't stand next to Him and evaluate Him. We don't stand above Him and judge Him. We don't stand beneath Him and hope to rise up to Him. We are in spiritual/literal terms, "In Him," and from this place of

immediateness of relationship we come to know what is truth, Who is truth, and we do it in experiential connection with this truth, rather than something we stand at a distance from and evaluate. We touch, hear, smell, see, and taste truth, In Christ. In other words, I don't just intellectually know something about Him, I experience what I know "In Him," and when this happens it is a far deeper "knowing" than just some philosophical or intellectual concept. It is a person.

John said it this way:

John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. 4 In him was life, and the life was the light of men.

And later in his life, still grappling with how to describe this Word, he does so by utilizing "sense" oriented language...i.e. the language of connected intimate relationship;

1John 1:1 That which was from the beginning, which we have **heard**, which we have **seen** with our eyes, which we **looked upon** and have **touched** with our hands, concerning the word of life— 2 the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—

Do you see it? He references 3 of the 5 senses. Why? Because truth was a person, not just an idea. When it is a person, and you discover it "In Him," then you are less likely to do with it whatever you please. The intimacy of your knowledge with the Person of Christ, inhibits you from taking that truth and doing "your own thing with it," because the truth isn't an "it," it is a "Person." We don't just drag persons around and make them conform to whatever we desire of them, for our own self centered ends. If we do, it means we are evil, or sick, and thus demented. Church history all too often resembles a dementia, in the way it has handled the truth. If you separate the truth in Christ, from Christ, you move towards dementia, and distortion of divine reality. The result is something "non-truth," dishonoring to the Person of Jesus, and destructive to the lives of mankind. This is the history of religion.

If we would become disconnected from systems religion we will most especially do this by reconnecting with the Person of Jesus, in Jesus.

3. **Christianity.** From a development of a living relationship with Jesus to a worldwide religion known as "Christianity." Our faith in a living Jesus was never supposed to become an "ianity." It becoming an "ianity" is simply symbolic of it becoming a man centered religion. The very suffixing of "ianity" evidences it being something that man could add to Christ, thus encompass, define on his terms, control, and further. This is not of God. The Church isn't man's...it was bought by the blood of Christ, and forever owned by Him. The very fact that so much has been done with faith in the person of Christ reflects poorly on Jesus, is a testimony to it becoming an "ianity" rather than His. The very suffix "ianity" implies that Who and What Jesus is, can be confined to a system of religious pursuits and practices, Who can easily be defined and managed. Such is simply not the case, and never will be.
4. **Titles.** A replacement of Jesus as the Chief/Senior Pastor/Shepherd, with man

becoming the Senior Pastor/Shepherd. Such a thing is an abomination nearly beyond description, as far as its capacity to steal the glory and control from Jesus. The very fact that Jesus has tolerated such a development, rather than leading man to think He approves of it, should teach all of us of the magnificent grace of God. All too often we tell ourselves His tolerance equals His approval. Nothing could be further from the truth. His tolerance tells us He understands our tendency towards self deception, due to our fall in Adam, our loss of confidence that we could see and hear Him, our emotional bondage to the need for significance, and our nature that is prone to the idolatry of self worship. This title, office, and function must come to a complete and final end if we ever hope to discover Jesus' true intent for His Church and true leadership. I want to be careful to say, that not every Senior Pastor, manifests the attitude of a thief or control freak, and disregard for the present living authority of Christ in His Church. Most, who take on this title, do so from historical tradition, rather than to dishonor Christ. Nevertheless, this title will one day be universally abandoned as dishonoring to Him.

We pass out titles like Pope, Bishop, Elder, Senior Pastor, as if these titles have biblical connection or authority. Pope is no where in scripture. Bishop, Elder, and Pastor, are not titles...they are FUNCTIONS, and there is a HUGE difference between a title and a function. Functions become full of themselves when given titles. Men serve so as to obtain titles. Titles often get used to control and manipulate people. They use titles to mandate their goals and ideas for things. Titles easily puff men and women up into people they ought not to be, and wound the body by their pontifical authority. There is absolutely no value in giving a man or a woman a religious title, so the very giving of them sets them up to become people they wouldn't otherwise become if we didn't give them these titles. Titles are things that engender pride, and when it comes to ministry the last thing we want to inject into our ministry is something that we will have to continually war against becoming sources of pride. Titles don't honor people...they set them up for pride falls. Titles lead to lordship and lording it over God's heritage. They are unnecessary and often very hurtful.

Matthew 23: 6 "They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues, 7 "greetings in the marketplaces, **and to be called by men**, 'Rabbi, Rabbi.' 8 "But you, do not be called 'Rabbi'; for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren. 9 "**Do not call anyone on earth** your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. 10 "**And do not be called** teachers; for One is your Teacher, the Christ. 11 "But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. 12 "And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

5. **Clergy / Laity.** A development of a separation of Clergy and Laity. By giving exalted titles, by allowing men to exalt themselves over other men, by virtue of their intellect, their skill, their charisma, or their talents, we have allowed for this separation, which when it finally boils down to what it really communicates, and has always taught the Church to look to, leaders to guide them, rather than Jesus,... to distrust their ability to know Him as He is, and be sheep that follow His voice, thus giving men the right to replace Jesus.
6. **Hierarchy.** A development of hierarchical leadership. Nothing of Jesus' or the apostles teaching, on leadership in His Church, gives even the slightest permission for the development of a "Top Down" approach to controlling the Church. Jesus alone is said to be the Head of His Church. Leaders are to care for, be examples to, to love, and serve the body of Christ. They are not given to the Church to be its managers, CEO's, administrators, or controllers. In every passage, where translators have translated the apostles teachings on the role of leadership and given the concept of "rulership," they

have distorted the historical meaning of the words the apostles chose to communicate true leadership with, and rendered their words in ways that gave their Church leaders the right to develop a form of leadership Jesus, in Matthew 20, said was never to develop. Believers today can hardly even imagine a form of leadership that is not pyramidal in formation, that is not control oriented, that is not CEO patterned and driven. To them, any other form of leadership would be a lack of leadership and would result in them floundering aimlessly with no one to tell them what to think, to do, and how to live. Such a state of being is sadder than words can pen. It is an admission that Jesus can't teach them, speak to them, lead and guide them, and flies in the face of Jeremiah 31's promise of the New Covenant we all live under. It is a testimony to the lazy, self deceived nature of fallen man, rather than the leading of the Holy Spirit. We'd rather let some ecclesiastical figure tell us what the Bible means, than read it ourselves. We'd rather let some Senior Pastor tell us how the Church should function than ourselves to pray and hear the voice of Christ. Such an approach has placed undue stress upon its leaders, and many have fallen due to it.

There is no NT biblical justification for a leadership that sets itself up as the people's lords. Those who lead in Jesus' Church are not "in charge of," the flock they oversee. They are not permitted to set doctrine and drive people away who disagree with their doctrinal positions. They are not policy setters, agenda developers, vision casters, or missions staters, on behalf of the Church. They are not the boss of staffs, or the congregation. They are not "driving the bus," "drawing the lines," or "calling the shots." This is not the calling of leaders, and it is an abomination that such things ever became accepted in Jesus' Church, but accepted they became, and most believers can't imagine Church without these forms of leadership. Leaders are not those who "decide" and "control" what a given gathering is going to discuss, what is going to be done, and what is acceptable or not acceptable for the gathering.

1 Peter 5:1The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: 2Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; **3nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock;** 4and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.

Certainly the NT encourages leaders to teach right doctrine, but it is not their place to decide who is welcome in their Churches, based on agreement or disagreement with their doctrinal perspectives. These are things for the body to work on together, to spend time before Christ for His will in these matters, and to walk in agreement together based on what they see in Him. Pastors have no right to set doctrine, and communicate people aren't welcome in "their" Churches if they don't agree with these doctrines. A sort of "Well...if you don't agree with these things there's the door," approach to things. SR sets the rules for acceptance in a given religious organization, and as long as those rules are carefully adhered to the adherents receive the blessing, but begin to question or challenge the rules of the organization and you will soon discover you have touched the sacred stone and all hell begins to be unleashed on you. You become a leper in a leper colony, a pariah in the midst of those who demand agreement with their policies, practices, beliefs, and leadership.

7. **Professional Leadership.** Turning functions of leadership into evidences of a hireling system of professional religion, replete with salaries, staffs, policies, mission statements, Church names, and titles of authority. There is no indication the apostles

ever envisioned anything like a consistent full or part time salary for the kingdom workers. Certainly they believed these workers were worthy of financial support, but staff positions with regular salary had nothing to do with their simple approach to being a minister. In fact, if one will simply read the “Teachings of the Apostles,” a document supposedly written just after the time of the apostles, the obvious prevailing opinion, among all the apostles, was that any apostle/prophet/teacher who hung around any one given location for a long period of time, was to be viewed with suspicion as being a hireling, and one using the ministry as a means of financial gain, greed, and laziness.

In Chapter 11 (Concerning Teachers, Apostles, and Prophets) notice their comments:

“But concerning the apostles and prophets, act according to the decree of the Gospel. Let every apostle who comes to you be received as the Lord. But he shall not remain more than one day; or two days, if there's a need. But if he remains three days, he is a false prophet. And when the apostle goes away, let him take nothing but bread until he lodges. If he asks for money, he is a false prophet.”

In Chapter 13 (Support of Prophets) we note additional comments:

But every true prophet who wants to live among you is worthy of his support. So also a true teacher is himself worthy, as the workman, of his support. Every first-fruit, therefore, of the products of wine-press and threshing-floor, of oxen and of sheep, you shall take and give to the prophets, for they are your high priests. But if you have no prophet, give it to the poor. If you make a batch of dough, take the first-fruit and give according to the commandment. So also when you open a jar of wine or of oil, take the first-fruit and give it to the prophets; and of money (silver) and clothing and every possession, take the first-fruit, as it may seem good to you, and give according to the commandment.

From this we understand the believing community's sense of responsibility to regularly provide for their ministers, but what we don't see is ministers “contracting” for a set salary, forming a professional ministry, and becoming subject to the hireling attitude. The early Church, led by the Spirit, took good care of their leaders, and gave directly to those who fed them the Word of God.

The development of religious titles had no genesis in the apostles. Jesus specifically warned against the use of titles. You once give men religious titles and you authorize them to develop their own agendas for the Church, along with policies, accepted doctrines, legalistic rules and standards, the drawing of lines acceptable for its “church members,” etc. etc. You allow them to think of a given gathering of believers as being “The leader's Church.” This is referenced in statements such as “I don't allow my Church to do...”

- 8. A Business.** Developing the concept of Church, from pure bonded relationships between believers, into a business, either for political, monetary, or power oriented reasons. The Church is not a business. Nothing about it is patterned off of a business model. It doesn't need CEOs, CFOs, and a business plan for growth and development.

There is no NT biblical justification for the Church becoming a business. No one is to receive a professional negotiated salary. No one is to be in charge of another. No one is to be hired or fired from Church labors. Nobody is allowed to set policy or agenda for the Church, as someone's boss. We are not promoting a system of religion. We are a living organism made up of living souls woven together in Christ. We are to completely disavow every worldly approach to the Kingdom, that the world puts upon businesses. We are not a business. We are a people. We are not a thing. We are a living being. We don't have business positions, with titles, and salaries connected to

them. We serve freely, without title or recognition, as unto the Lord, for His glory, and not the glory of our business. Mega Churches are about building mega corporations...big business, and everyone in the world knows that's exactly what it's all about. They aren't fooled. Only the Church is fooled by these things.

1 Peter 2: 2Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, **not for dishonest gain but eagerly**; 3nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock;

1 Peter 2:4Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, 5you also, **as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house**, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 2:20having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, 21in whom the whole building, **being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord**,

9. **A Building.** Turning the simple gathering of believers into a place/building, called "A Church," replete with Church titles, Church advertisements, Church programs, Church placards, developed to increase attendance and thus a larger pool of money from which to further its religious goals. There is no indication the apostles ever envisioned the Church becoming a place or a building, and in fact there is ample evidence, given the "temple orientation," of every major religion of the day, that the apostles considered that mode of gathering and completely rejected it. It was not as though they couldn't have built religious buildings. Every other religion was allowed to do so. In fact, had they gone that route they would undoubtedly have gained a dimension of legitimacy they never gained. They were suspicioned to be a cult, cannibals, and wackos, just because they were so undefined by the buildings, and religious practices of the day.

Acts 2:46So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from **house to house**, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart,

Acts 20: 20"how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and **from house to house**,

1 Corinthians 16:19The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Priscilla greet you heartily in the Lord, with **the church that is in their house**.

Colossians 4:14Luke the beloved physician and Demas greet you. 15Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea, and Nymphas and **the church that is in his house**.

10. **Passive Audience.** Creating a passive audience, sitting in pews, and thus completely voiding the teachings of group participation of the gathered saints. One only needs to read 1 Corinthians 12 through 14 to understand Paul's concept of the gathered Church included all believers being available for and given the opportunity to manifest the presence of the Spirit of Jesus and His Word in their times of gathering. This obviously necessitated small gatherings, since large gatherings would hinder such participation, so, since the apostles knew that Jesus wanted the freedom to express Himself through each member of the body, He led the apostles to develop a gathering concept that fit within small homes. The average home gathering would have been between 10 and 20, with some of the large gatherings being up to 40, and archeological evidence indicates that the very largest of places the early believers gathered would have held

no more than 120, and we have no historical evidence that such large gatherings regularly took place. They favored small, intimate, personal involvement, and the notion of passive pew sitters didn't develop until long after the apostles passed on.

11. **Evangelism Confusion.** Creating a concept of evangelism, that more nearly approximates promoting some worldly venture, than sharing the simple life of Jesus with those who showed interest. While the apostles received a mission call, to spread the gospel far and wide, and while others heard similar calls, though not specifically designated as apostles, the majority of the body was simply taught to live out the loving life of Jesus in the presence of those they lived near and worked with, and to be ready to share with the interested the wonderful love of Christ. They pursued no quotas, had no vision of "Church growth," in the sense of bigger and more elaborate gatherings. They didn't feel pressure to "get people saved." They trusted in the sovereign callings of God upon the lost and positioned themselves in society as those with the good news for those who desired it. Even the apostles never used any of the techniques of modern evangelism, replete with training Churches to prepare for city wide evangelism thrusts, local advertising, exciting music, flamboyant preaching, and Madison Avenue techniques of salesmanship. Preaching was simple, much more conversational in style, and had nothing to do with voice modulation, emotional appeals, and techniques of salesmanship to convince the resistant. The modern "altar call," had no equivalent in the early Church. They didn't perceive of faith in Christ as a "moment of decision," but rather as many moments, strung together, leading one closer and closer to intimacy with Jesus. Salvation was less of a moment and much more of a heart transformation. They cared little for words of commitment and looked primarily for the fruit of faith, as evidence of true conversion. Things such as changed character, love for God and others, humility, brokenness, and an unquenchable hunger to know Him.
12. **Tithes & Offerings.** Once again...there is no NT biblical authority for pressing either of these things on the flock. They are a means of supporting "Church as a Business," and once you reject this approach to Church you will quickly see these false teachings fall away. There is no justification for putting these things on God's people. We are not Israel as a nation. Tithes were a Jewish form of taxation to support the religious systems of Israel. When Jesus rose from the dead, at that very moment, everything to do with the Jewish systems of religion were done. Thus, the local Church is not God's storehouse. Leaders are not Levitical priests deserving of the people's tithes. God's people are to give 100% of all they have and are to Jesus, for His use in whatever way He leads, and no Church or individual is allowed to lay claim to any part of a believer's time, life, or money. The Church did not develop the notion of tithing out of honor to the Lord Jesus, but men of corrupt minds developed this doctrine for the Church because they love power, want financial security, find their significance in their clergy status, and want people to fund their rise to stardom, religious heritage, and legacy.

Our course giving is good, and of the five basic categories for the Old Testament tithe - Priesthood, Temple, Feasts, Poor & Strangers, Widows and Orphans, we see the apostles encouraging giving towards - Teaching leadership, taking care of your family, sharing in the Lord's Supper as a full meal together, caring for the poor and strangers, and providing for widows and orphans.

1 Corinthians 9:14 Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel. 15 But **I have used none of these things**, nor have I written these things that it should be done so to me; for it would be better for me to die than that anyone should make my boasting void. 16 For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not

preach the gospel! 17For if **I do this willingly**, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have been entrusted with a stewardship. 18What is my reward then? That when I preach the gospel, **I may present the gospel of Christ without charge**, that I may not abuse my authority in the gospel.

1 Corinthians 9:16For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel! 17For if I do this willingly, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have been entrusted with a stewardship. 18What is my reward then? That when I preach the gospel, **I may present the gospel of Christ without charge**, that I may not abuse my authority in the gospel.

2 Corinthians 11:7Did I commit sin in humbling myself that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you **free of charge**?

1Th 2:9 For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil: **we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you**, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.

These and many other similar, and unnecessary elements of Christianity, developed as replacements for the simple approach of followers of the living Jesus. They led the body away from centrality in Christ, towards the energy of the flesh, which has led to a Church that is mocked by the world for valid reasons, a church people that move from one form of church entertainment to another, experiencing disillusionments and hurts, and a leadership who live on a treadmill of creating ever evolving methods of keeping the people coming, giving, and serving. Church as a business is just plain too costly in every way, the greatest cost being distraction from first things - I.e. Focus on Jesus.

Systems Religion is taking what was meant to be incredibly simple, and all about Jesus, and making it complicated, expensive, controlling, and man centered. In some places this is true to greater or lesser degrees, but in every IC where SR rules to any degree these things show up, and they lead the flock of God away from Jesus and into religious practices and ideas that either marginalize or obliterate Jesus' active involvement among them all together.

I find it so humorous how someone will tell me, as they are beginning to attend a new Church, "Oh Tom, our pastor's not like that. He's a truly humble and gentle man. He's not full of himself. He's not into building his own kingdom at the expense of Jesus and His people. He's a true servant of the Lord. You are wrong to judge him this way!" Then let 3 to 5 years go by, and almost every single time one of two things will evolve. Either they themselves will become systemites, supporting the very thing they should oppose, and become the ones who support the pastor in becoming one who usurps Jesus' authority, or they wake up and realize that somewhere along the way, over those last 3 to 5 years their pastor changed and let his role as "Senior Pastor" go to his head, and now he is doing things and preaching things and demanding things they never thought he would. Why? Because the entire SR approach to Church tends to eventually lead people away from Jesus' lordship, and into the lordship of man. If you think you've found an exception either you're deceived, a part of the system yourself, or you have found the rare pastor who, while still manifesting historical religious conditioning, genuinely loves Jesus and just doesn't see the error of these things yet. Praise God for him! However, mark these words, most traditional Churches will fall into one or more of these categories and you will one day awaken to it and find yourself very disillusioned and wondering how it happened to you.

Jesus will never do any of these things to you. His Church is not about any of this stuff.

Are all the people who are involved in SR and the IC evil people? Absolutely not! Most are genuinely deceived, well meaning, thinking they are serving Christ in purity, and don't

realize how they have been conditioned, by nearly 2000 years of Church history, into accepting and promoting an approach to Jesus and His Kingdom that is only remotely about Him and His Kingdom. They don't realize the error of their ways. They love Jesus, as best as they know Him. They believe they are pleasing Him, and do what they do because they believe it is exactly what He wants done. This is the nature of religious deception - People doing religious things for Jesus that Jesus never called for.

Why does Jesus tolerate it? The same reason He tolerates every other sin in the world. We asked for a sinful world, when we (in Adam and Eve) ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and we ended up with a world that constantly struggles to know God as He is, to develop pure doctrine, and walk with Him outside the camps of man. He has limited Himself to working with sin in the world. Sure, He could remove it in a moment, but then He'd also have to obliterate almost every believer and unbeliever on the planet. Instead, His way is the way of revelation out of the errors and sins we walk in. We should thank Him for His grace in this regard.

If we would once get a glimpse at how deceived and deceivable we are, as people, we'd never again be so certain we had everything right. Believe me, even though some of my articles would seem to imply I think I have arrived at pure doctrine, I am very aware there will yet be further purification, and I look forward to it.

Listen folks, I've written very directly here, and I can just hear someone saying, "Well Tom, you sound to me to be just as full of your self as you condemn the IC for!" Perhaps so, but here's how I pray, and I hope my brethren in the SR and IC pray similarly, "Lord Jesus, we are altogether turned away from You in our hearts, by our fallen condition, and thus prone to being deceived and to deceive, please open my eyes, soften my heart, bring as many crosses into my life as are needed, to cause me to know You in truth, and not in tradition, and walk with You as You call for, and not according to my own making. I'm desperate for Your revelation, and I totally distrust everything I think and believe. I'm pressed into You for direction, clarity, and accuracy of understanding, and need You at every point to guide my steps and form my beliefs."

If this is our prayer, then all we can do beyond that is wait for the grace of God to appear to us and walk in that grace. If He leaves us in error for a season, then that is up to Him. We are called to hunger and thirst for righteousness, but God has His timing for bringing any of us out of error and into His light. We wait for Him on high, and do the best we can with what we see of Him. I'm confident that the majority of my brothers and sisters in SR and the IC are walking in the integrity of their heart. This doesn't mean their walk is what it could be or should be, but their failures are not necessarily due to purposeful sin or rebellion. None of us can see until He touches our eyes, and He doesn't touch everyone's eyes in exactly the same way at exactly the same time. This is a mystery, but it is the mystery of iniquity, and we are subject to it until He delivers us from it.

God bless the body of Christ, as they work through Systems Religion and come out of the Babylonian Institutional Churches of this world.

If you see yourself in the above list, as I have myself, then rather than shoot this messenger, you would be far better advantaged by taking things up with Jesus. If He bears witness to you of the truthfulness of the above concerns, then fine. If He doesn't then do what you would do with any other teaching you don't like...reject it. In the final analysis it's not about agreeing with me. Your task, as well as mine, is to go to Jesus and ask Him for whether He agrees with what has been written here. If He does, and you are not aligned

with it, then you know what you must do. If He doesn't then arguing with me won't help much. Just pray...just pray saints...pray lots!