

Discussing How To Restore The Early Church

Returning Intimacy and Power to the Father's Children

*"I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for,
it will be done for you by My Father in heaven.
For where two or three come together in My name, there am I with them."
(Matthew 18:19,20)*



SECTION 3 - LESSON 21

**Hellenism And Romanism Today:
*Roman Hierarchy And Corporate America***



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“They said to him... now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have.’ And the LORD told him: ‘Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected Me as their king’” (1 Samuel 8:5,7).

The underlying principles of government that you find throughout the Hebrew Scriptures impact the way that our Lord intends for His people to recognize *His sovereignty* in matters of state as well as in spiritual concerns.

Until the Israelites demanded that the prophet Samuel appoint for them a king to rule like the nations around them, they had been a Theocracy with a republic form of government, similar to the “republic” instituted by the US Constitution. But few today can articulate the difference between a republic and the current “democracy” which has deteriorated into personality preference and *self-gratification*: “What will this candidate do for ME?”

Keep in mind a distinctive pattern: As a republic the nation of Israel was administrated by respected elders. Those who were excellent family leaders became leaders of clans; qualified clan elders became leaders at the tribal level; and the best of those led at the national

level. Leadership was *collegial* in nature: no elder lorded over any other. The wisdom gained by life experience and proven character qualified each man, and their *combined* leadership effort afforded them great influence. Yet, the whole system emanated from the *rule of God* according to His Word.

[For more on the *republic* form of the government of ancient Israel, see [Pastoring by Elders, page 33, Elder: A Position of Honor in the Family and Faith Community.](#)]

Imagine the pain of God’s heart that the people He had called His “wife” were rejecting the love He had poured out on them. They lost sight that when they sought His face and walked according to His ways, their lives were blessed and protected. His sovereign rule had routed Israel’s enemies time and again. His power was awesome. What greater Commander-in-Chief could they have wanted?

Yet the continuing temptation to stray into the arms of other gods—commit *spiritual adultery*—enticed them away from trusting that their God’s purpose to *set them apart* among the nations was good. Ignoring His plan that they be a light to the nations (see Deuteronomy 4:6, for example) as a wise and understanding people who loved and obeyed their God, they instead lusted for the ways of the heathen nations around them.

Forsaking their trust in the God Who made His will clear through His

prophets, the people chose instead to depend on human strength—a man who could lead them into battle as their deliverer.

Knowing that the stubborn and rebellious nature of His people would not yield, God gave them that for which they clamored. However, as the very best Parent, He also forewarned of the consequences which would afflict generations to come through their willful distrust:

“This is what the king who will reign over you will do:

• He will take your sons and make them serve with his chariots and horses, and they will run in front of his chariots.

[An enforced draft will snatch sons away from their families and place them directly in harm’s way.]

• ...and others to plow his ground and reap his harvest,

[To support this vast army, fields will be appropriated by the king, and laborers forced to tend it.]

• and still others to make weapons of war and equipment for his chariots.

[The economy will be redirected toward military priorities, with far less consideration for the needs of the people.]

• He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers.

[The social stability will be impacted as women are conscripted to provide service for the royal household and court rather than devoting themselves to their own families.]

• He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves and give them to his attendants. He will take a tenth of your grain and of your vintage and give it to his officials and attendants.

[The stage is set for corruption as gov-

ernment officials are given the best land for their own use, even if it’s been part of a family’s heritage for generations. And, a tenth of the cash crops grown on the poorer land will also be demanded.]

• Your menservants and maidservants and the best of your cattle and donkeys he will take for his own use.

[Impoverishment will be the rule of the land as the best of the livestock, as well as personal servants, will be given over to support the king. A “class” mentality will quickly rise between the few “haves” and the overwhelming “have-nots”.]

• He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his slaves.

[In their quest to become like the nations around them, they will instead suffer oppression similar to that of captivity. They will have forsaken the freedoms they enjoyed under the reign of their God, and will suffer deprivation in the process.]

• When that day comes, you will cry out for relief from the king you have chosen, and the LORD will not answer you in that day” (1 Samuel 8:11-18).

[Painful consequences are the price of self-will and unfaithfulness. The outcome has to be severe enough for the people to assume the weight of their guilt and recognize the cost of reaping what they’ve sown through distrust and disobedience.]

Now let’s examine the parallels within Christian history of “establishing a king/system” to supplant the personal responsibility found in a republic dependent on God.

The Nicolaitan system of church government firmly cemented itself into place as a result of Emperor Constantine’s

endorsement of Christianity in the early 4th century. The seemingly invincible Roman war machine had subdued the known world; what better “marriage of convenience” than for the institutional church to consolidate its power with government might? The common people, coerced through threat of hell or ex-communication by the church institution in Rome, were as much slaves of the religious establishment as Israel had been to its kings.

The theologians of the Reformation were aware from their studies of the Older Testament that God’s way of governing His people was the *restoration of biblical elders* in a collegial form of service. Yet they obstinately continued the pattern of the Nicolaitan system of clergy hierarchy.

The Reformers’ refusal to return to God’s design echoes the Israelite response to Samuel: “*But the people refused to listen to Samuel. ‘No!’ they said. ‘We want a king over us. Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles’*” (1 Samuel 8:19,20).

How costly for Israel was their rebellion against their God as they removed themselves from dependence on Him as Defender, Provider and Lord. Their insistence on having leadership like that of the pagans around them would rouse God’s jealous anger, bringing upon their heads the consequences of spurning His rule:

I will be your King; where is any other that he may save you in all your cities? And your judges to whom you said, ‘Give me a king and princes? I gave you a king in My anger, and took him away in My wrath (Hosea 13:10,11).

No prophetic warning could penetrate that hardened shell of mistrust they’d erected around their hearts—the same mistrust of God’s perfect direction that the Reformers fell into as well.

The Founding Fathers Sought Native Wisdom. Why Didn’t the Church?

Delve with us back into United States history. The Founding Fathers had warned repeatedly that the *government of the republic* should never become a democracy. As a republic, state legislators selected their finest to represent them at the federal level. Concern revolved around what benefited each representative’s section of the country as well as what was best for the nation as a whole.

With the advent of the *popular vote*—the cornerstone of democracy—politicians who appealed to the *self-interest of the individual* found themselves elected. The sense of connectedness with the rest of the nation’s needs and greater good was diminished as each man looked instead to how he might achieve his own special interest.

Those who were forming the foundations for colonial government had sought the wisdom of the Native people. The only form of government that the founders themselves had experienced was the rule of monarchy from Europe’s distant shores. Yet, among the Indians they saw a *republic* in action.

Noting the effectiveness of the Native governing system, Benjamin Franklin invited leaders of the Iroquois to explain their system of leadership to a gathering of representatives in Albany, New York. The Iroquois model guided a special delegation in their formation of “The Albany Plan of Union”, which would

serve later as a pattern for the Articles of Confederation and, ultimately, the Constitution.

Even though the drafters of our Constitution embraced the republic form of government as the most effective, the colonial church battled over various leadership traditions. Some promoted autocratic faith communities in which clergy ruled. Others became democracies in the Congregationalist tradition. Hellenistic *man-centered preconceptions* kept them from looking beyond man's systems to the biblical beauty of God ways which He had revealed among the Native tribes.

The Reformation hadn't occurred so far back in history that the European colonials would have forgotten the victory of *personal knowledge* of God's Word. Perhaps in His mercy God brought them to Native peoples who were already living out the *Hebraic relational framework* of the early Church. From that perspective, as the Word of Truth was brought to the Indians, they could *work together* with their European-heritage brothers and sisters to experience more of God's Kingdom here on earth.

[For more on the republic form of government, see our Hebraic Articles, [Men Of Issachar](#), and [The Unsteeped Church](#).]

• In what ways do you perceive that the change from republic to democracy as this country's form of government has been detrimental to you as both a citizen and a follower of Jesus?

The Roman organizational influence on Christendom was no less a disaster

than the Israelites ordering Samuel to appoint a king. Both nullified the rule of God according to His Word and His ways, and led to the demise of the republic form of leadership. The Roman hierarchy system invaded church government to sever the *personal interaction* between the leadership and the people.

A regime which **controls** and **directs**, but fails to **lead by role modeling**, sounds like the corporate systems of the world! The few at the top reap personal benefit from their power while the multitudes below scramble to survive.

The syncretistic influence which enabled the Roman Empire to conquer institutional Christendom still functions through worldly adaptation. Almost every Christian institution and congregation in the United States today is *incorporated*.

Before 1950 few congregations were incorporated. But after World War II lawyers went about the country inspiring fear in clergy that they might be sued for giving wrong counsel to people. By incorporating their congregation, clergy wouldn't be held personally responsible; the *corporation* would. Fear-based incorporation within the church became widespread.

Because a corporation is an *instrument of the state*, the states started to tax these "church corporations". Congress then stepped in during the mid-50's to pass a law for "state-churches" to be *tax-exempt*. Any separation that had previously existed between the entities of church and state were dissolved as the church chose to submit itself under state rule.

The implications of fear-based incorporation and tax-exemption status have been vast, and no less detrimental than when Constantine recognized Christianity as an acceptable religion.

“Then they said, “Come, let’s build ourselves a city with a tower that has its top reaching up into heaven, so that we can make a name for ourselves” (Genesis 11:4).

One of the recent sinister influences of incorporation is this: Denominations and congregations often look to *worldly corporations* as their model for success. The “health and wealth gospel” and “the church growth movement” which are so popular today in religious circles owe their goals and definitions of *success* to corporate America rather than to Jesus. At all levels within Christian institutions and congregations, management by **control** and **directing** which so dominate business structure are the primary means of leadership.

Realize from the Scriptures that when *personal responsibility* is eliminated from man’s relationship with God, the door is opened to a world of evil. Satan loves impersonal systems, especially religious organizations in which people can hide without personal responsibility. This method finds such demonic success because individuals lack relational accountability to anyone who can be a godly role model.

Management rather than **leadership by personal example** is the fertile ground for sin to prosper in individuals as well as congregations. Leadership protects its control by offering positions to people who will keep the system going. Once someone becomes a member of the elite within the system, *self-interest* will cause him or her to defend it.

Anchor for yourself without any doubt that our God looks for personal responsibility from each one who fol-

lows Jesus. He holds us all responsible for keeping His holy commands, both individually and collectively within our extended spiritual families. When we stumble, *repentance* is His only means of restoring fellowship.

At no time is personal accountability before our Lord eliminated. Beginning with Adam and Eve every human being has been held personally accountable to *confess* their wrongdoing and *turn from it*. God accepts no excuses for sin.

[For more on personal accountability, see [Pastoring by Elders, Chapter 7, Authority: God’s Training Device For Faith.](#)]

Satan purposes to create organizations and systems that people can control independent of God’s ways and design. Individuals can feel good about their religious activity even as they continue to violate God’s standards. They’re able to hide within the organization and not be held personally responsible to turn from sin.

But know this: Wherever religious systems exist, unconfessed sin and corruption will surface as well. *“Woe to you, [you religious leaders], 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” (Matthew 23:27).*

The news continues to be filled with the corruption that drives corporate America. But corruption has been going on in “incorporated Christendom” in epidemic proportions since the 1950’s. Much of the scandal stays hidden in cover-ups for the most part, but every so often spiritual pollution is exposed. “Christian” systems hide the truth so that the control mechanism can continue.

I [Mike] was a follower of Jesus for two years when the events I’ll share

began to occur. As you read this detailed account, please keep in mind that shortly after I gave my life to follow Jesus, I was anointed with the gift of prophecy. In light of this, the chaplains aboard my ship gave me this particular call to fulfill:

*Son of man, I have made you a **watchman**; so **hear** the word I speak and **give them warning** from Me. When I say to the wicked, ‘O wicked man, you will surely die,’ and you do not speak out to **dissuade him from his ways**, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will **hold you accountable** for his blood. But if you **do warn** the wicked man to **turn from his ways** and he does not do so, he will die for his sin, but you will have saved yourself” (Ezekiel 33:7-9).*

The events that follow were God’s assignment for me to fulfill His purposes—to expose sin so that the perpetrators might repent. Don’t think that the wrongdoings exposed here are confined to just these institutions. Just as with mice, if you see one in your house, there are plenty more you haven’t seen!

After a year of seminary I was hired to be the Controller of what was then “The #1 Christian college in the country” according to *Money Magazine*. After I’d been on the job a month, the Chairman of the Board of Trustees took me out for lunch. He’d been the CEO of one of the largest corporations in the nearby metro area.

When he asked how I was doing, I told him I planned to submit my resignation. I explained that the pay scale at the college, which included 150 faculty and staff, was unjust, and filled with favoritism and nepotism. The top 5 administrators, the only ones who knew

the pay scale of everyone else, made up 25% of the payroll budget.

Many at the bottom of the pay scale, believing they were serving God by working at the college even at low wages, were grossly underpaid and treated as expendable. I told the Chairman that as I administered the payroll, I felt like a Nazi guard directing someone to a shower when in fact it was a gas chamber.

That godly older gentleman had been unaware of the pay situation and was grieved in his heart. He pleaded with me to stay on, and forced the administration to establish a more just payroll system. Within a few months I was using this experience to help other Christian colleges and seminaries establish a halakhic basis to their financial practices.

Right before our audit by an internationally known firm, I uncovered over \$400,000 in misuse of endowment funds. The money had been donated over the decades and *restricted* to funding only those students whose goal was to spread the Gospel. Any other use was forbidden unless changed through legal process, which the school hadn’t done.

The college administration had been dipping into this money to cover shortfalls in its general budget. Naively, I brought this up to my boss, believing it was somehow an oversight. Two days later I was fired without cause.

In God’s wonderful plan, my successor was a close friend who’d been a financial officer at another Christian school. He came to me privately: “I know you, and you uncovered sin. They’re trying to cover it up by getting rid of you.” When we finished talking, I directed him to the drawer in which I’d placed the incriminating evidence. He took that material straight to the Board of Trustees, threatening to resign if they

didn't act justly. The Board intervened immediately, fearing the public consequences of losing two Controllers in a row in such a short time.

My Controller friend, another seminarian who was a Christian financial auditor and I became a close trio. We gradually realized that our Lord had brought the three of us together for divine purposes. The seminary had once been part of the college I'd worked at, and had moved to its own campus 10 years earlier. God was going to show us firsthand how syncretism and Roman hierarchy lead to sin and cover-up.

After leaving the college job I returned to the seminary to complete my courses. When I graduated I was hired as a consultant in finance and personnel by the seminary's Vice President of Finance, who was also the Chief Financial Officer. The seminary was set up as a corporation; both the Chief Financial Officer and the President, who was Chief Executive Officer, *separately reported* directly to the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees. That these two men shared *equal ranking* will play into my story.

Because of my time there as a seminarian, I knew a lot of staff and faculty. (You may recall the reaction of some of the professors from the Master of Divinity program to my initial academic project...)

A few weeks after I began my consulting work my boss, the Vice President for Finance, asked me into his office. He said, "I want you to develop some documentation so that I can fire the Payroll Clerk."

I left his office without responding and walked straight into the office of the Payroll Clerk, whom I'd known for a few years. I asked, "What do you know that would cause our boss to want to get rid

of you? He asked me to develop documentation so he can fire you!" She burst into tears. "Please come back tomorrow and I'll have it for you."

The next morning she sat with me and passed into my hands a dossier of criminal activity. For instance,

- In order to avoid paying taxes, the Vice-President directed that members of the Administration receive pay through journal entries. That way there would be no way to track these funds for payroll taxes.
- The school would buy vehicles for the Administrators using its non-profit tax status, then sell the cars to them using hidden accounts.
- The seminary purchased expensive gifts for those who made substantial donations to the seminary. I remember one person from Florida was given a Rolls Royce in return for a large sum.

The manager of the seminary bookstore was a close friend. His son had been in Sue's kindergarten class at a nearby Christian school. He revealed with painful concern that the accounting records he kept for his department and the financial reports put out by the VP for Finance never matched.

The bookstore records showed him making hundreds of thousands of dollars more than the VP reported at the end of the year. I followed the trail—and found *more* embezzlement and misappropriation of funds!

As I investigated the Office of the Dean of Students, I discovered that students who lived in campus housing were being over-charged for rent so that the funds could be used to cover short-falls in other areas. The woman who administered the dorms didn't even realize the

way the VP for Finance was ripping off the students. I remember her bitter tears when she found out.

I also unearthed evidence of the same favoritism and nepotism in payroll and hiring as I had uncovered at the college. The top administrators, the only ones who knew the pay scale of everyone else, comprised an exorbitant proportion of the payroll budget.

I was baffled how the Board of Trustees and the internationally known audit firm had never detected these blatant crimes. When I asked the audit firm about this, they replied that having this account with a prestigious seminary opened the door for accounts with other Christian institutions. Talk about lack of integrity!

Not knowing what reputable organization I could turn to, I anonymously contacted four government agencies to ask for guidance as I explained all these discrepancies and falsification. They told me that if they knew the institution I was calling about, they'd remove its non-profit tax status and pursue a criminal investigation. Since I had initiated the contact, however, they were willing to do nothing if I could get the seminary to reform.

I shared my findings with the VP. He responded disdainfully, "There's nobody big enough to stop me in what I want to do!" For some reason, though, he was afraid of firing me. But he did send a memo to all the staff at the seminary: *No one* was to have anything to do with me, or even talk to me.

That afternoon, Sue walked into my small office to meet me for lunch. Fifteen staff members were crowded in there to express their reaction to the memo! I'd mentioned nothing of my work prob-

lems to her, so she asked everyone why they were there. They showed her the memo and answered, "We know Mike is working here for righteousness' sake. We're going to the cafeteria with him for lunch, even though the cafeteria manager won't even sell him coffee. But we want the rest of the staff to know we're with him."

I cried for joy. You can see how ludicrous this was becoming. Here I was, a graduate of an institution in which I couldn't even buy a cup of coffee! Yet, I couldn't reveal to anyone anything about my investigation.

Yet, our Lord was faithful to carry out His plan. It was purely miraculous how so much that had been well-hidden was exposed. In some ways I felt I was along for the ride as the Holy Spirit orchestrated my life. My internal battle, though, was to not give way to resentment or bitterness. I spent a lot of time on my knees lining up my attitude with our Lord's.

After the memo was sent I went to the President of the seminary with what I'd uncovered. He couldn't believe the extent of corruption occurring right under his nose through his VP counterpart. He knew he couldn't stop the VP because both of them reported independently to the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees. So he hired me to work *for him* so I could complete my investigation before the VP could fire me.

He placed one condition on my work: that I share everything I found with the VP of Finance. The President wanted to give him a chance to repent before the President went to the Board.

I approached the VP, but he only bragged again about how untouchable he was. In a way our relationship evolved into a sort of Saul and David sce-

nario. He was doing all he could to destroy my reputation and keep things hidden, while with the Spirit's help I was doing more than that of which I was humanly capable.

I continued to be haunted by how this type of criminal activity could have gone on for so long—and in a “Christian” institution. Surely someone on the Board of Trustees must know. A considerable amount of what I was uncovering was similar to what I'd found at the college. Then I discovered an interesting connection. The VP of Finance at the seminary had once held the same position at the college. When the seminary separated from the college, this man went with the seminary in the same capacity.

Keep in mind that my background for all this was extremely limited. I had only a minor in accounting, and I was into areas of law and finance that were way over my head. Due to the complexities of what I was uncovering, God enabled me to use my successor at the college and the Christian auditor I mentioned earlier for counsel and confirmation.

My auditor friend was doing consulting work at the college, having been hired by my successor to make sure everything was squeaky clean. As I shared what I was finding at the seminary, they would take a closer look in the same areas at the college. They came across a lot more criminal activity that I hadn't uncovered during my stint as Controller!

My auditor friend happened to be in the metro area one day standing at the train station. He had a Christian emblem on his briefcase. A stranger walked up to him and asked if he was a “Christian”. When my friend nodded, the man asked what he did for a living. He responded that he was working for the Controller of the college.

To his amazement the man responded, “Oh, I remember that account. I used to work for such-and-such audit firm 15 years ago. We threw that account out because they wouldn't heed our warnings about the misuse of funds and embezzlement!” What a divine appointment for confirmation!

As my auditor friend shared this with me, the Holy Spirit impressed on us to compare the members of the Executive Committee of the combined college/ seminary 15 years ago with the *current* membership of the seminary's Executive Committee. Three men were on both lists. By digging a little further we discovered these men were being paid off through journal entries; they had supported and covered up the illegal activities for both institutions. Vested interest kept them from repenting.

You need to know one more point concerning how difficult this whole situation was for me. I shared an office right next to the President Emeritus who had founded the seminary. We talked a lot together, but I never let this godly old man know the sin and cover-up had been going on around him. I do remember his one great emphasis: “The duty of this seminary is to develop *great preaching*. Preaching is *all that counts!*”

If fact, his protege, one of the most famous preachers at that time, was Chairman of the Board of Trustees. I'd never encountered such a difficult system to deal with. Cover-ups, lies and character assassinations followed anyone they perceived to be a “whistle blower”. I camped out in Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, identifying with their pain over the anger and resistance these prophets faced as they tried to expose sin and restore righteousness.

Because all of the seminary's various Vice Presidents were in one way or another involved in the illegal activity, I asked to meet with them as a group to give them a chance to repent and pay back what they'd misappropriated. As I went over the different documentation against them, a fear fell over them—but not a fear of God. Fearful of *exposure*, they turned violently against me.

“How can you do this? If this gets out you'll bring down the Name of Jesus!” “What will happen to the seminary?” “Don't you realize who the Chairman of our Board is? What will this do to his ministry if this gets out?” Not one repented, nor did anyone offer to pay back what they'd stolen.

“Then the glory of the LORD departed...” (Ezekiel 10:18).

After that meeting I was so distraught that I walked out on the campus grounds to be alone. As I approached a hill that had a beautiful flower garden, I saw a young woman I knew well walking toward me in tears. Her devotion to Jesus was an inspiration to both Sue and me. She'd just returned a few weeks earlier from working with Mother Teresa in Calcutta.

When I asked why she was crying she lamented, “I've just watched the *shekinah* glory of God leave this seminary. God is no longer with this place!” I walked into the garden and cried myself.

A few days later on a Saturday I was in prayer. The Holy Spirit directed me to go to the President on Monday and resign my position. I was to go to my ailing father's home and care for him. The Spirit told me he'd die soon and I was to be with him when it happened.

I met with the President and went over all the documentation. He agreed

that there was nothing more I could do. I was released by him and went to care for my Dad, who died with me holding his hand in prayer a few weeks later.

You'd probably like to know the steps the President took. I can tell you that the three longstanding culprits on the Executive Committee were forced to resign. Two of their successors spent time with me several months later, and one became my friend.

The VP for Finance was removed, but the President kept him on staff for several months to give him opportunity to repent. As far as I can ascertain from witnesses, he didn't. I later visited many staff members who held bitterness toward the VP to encourage them to forgive, and most did. Those who didn't suffered chastisement by God, which some later reported to me.

“For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness”
(2 Thessalonians 2:11,12).

When sin is tolerated and protected through cover-up in any religious system, God-given delusion is poured out on it. Sue and I were privileged to take a missions class taught by a woman at the seminary whose husband had been martyred 25 years earlier. After her husband's death she had lived with the very people who had killed her husband, earnest to bring life in Jesus to them.

This woman took you down a path of utter humility if you had any perceived sense of self-importance. Some of the students were offended by her reminders that we were only “clay pots”. It was the

Spirit of Christ in us as we represented Him to others that was important, not we ourselves—“You are nothing more than clay pots!”

Her department head had been my advisor when I was first a student. While I was still doing consulting work for the President, he came to me to ask advice. A major denomination had written the seminary to demand this woman’s dismissal because of her conservative views on God’s Word and on marriage in particular. If the seminary didn’t remove her, they wouldn’t send any further students.

I told him emphatically, “Don’t give in to this! That woman has touched the face of God. You’ll bring His judgment on this place!” The administration terminated her. The Lord to Whom she’d been faithful made her ministry even greater afterward!

You may be wondering about the seminary today. I feel confident in saying the *shekinah* never came back. The Board and administration acted a lot like the theologians of the Reformation. If you remember in our previous lesson, the Reformers fell short of restoring everything that had been lost through Greco/Roman intrusion. *Vested interests* kept full restoration from occurring, the same vested interests I encountered at the seminary and college.

In the interim since I left the seminary in 1982, I’ve been in contact with other Christian institutions in which the same illegalities are going on with the same cover-ups. A few years ago Sue and I met with the leadership of a number of mission agencies. Even in our brief meetings it was obvious that vested interests were keeping sin covered up. Can you see how far-reaching the effect of Roman

hierarchy and organization continues to be in western Christianity?

Following the death of my Dad, God guided us to take over a small farm/retreat center in eastern Connecticut. This would be our deeper training ground in the impact of Hellenism and Romanism at the denominational and congregational levels.

***“Besides everything else,
I face daily the pressure of my concern
for all the [called out ones]”***
(2 Corinthians 11:28).

A few months after we arrived at the retreat center I was asked to be a counselor to clergy and church leaders in our region. Over time this expanded to much of New England as well as New York and New Jersey.

The vast majority of situations I found myself dealing with among clergy and denominational leaders were cover-ups for sin. These activities ranged from adultery in the clergy or their spouse, to embezzlement, to intentional manipulation for personal gain. One clergyman even offered his daughters to men in his congregation for immoral purposes.

You’re probably reeling at this point, finding it difficult to believe the dark and sinister cover-ups that lurk behind the closed doors of religious leaders and organizations. Just know that wherever syncretism and religious hierarchy exist, sin is perpetuated because personal accountability is spurned. Vested interests spur many to do whatever it takes to avoid exposure and maintain their sin.

As I counseled church leaders I was emotionally overwhelmed by the extent of tolerated sin in their own lives as well as in their congregations. My fence post

in the pasture where I would often go to cry became my close friend. I lasted 10 years counseling church leadership and aged 100. I can still hear the words of one Superintendent of a denomination telling me after he retired, “I realize that after 30 years of ministry, I’ve never known Jesus Christ. You don’t get to the top of my denomination by waiting on Jesus to act. You need to *control and direct people*.”

Perhaps you feel that the grievous experiences I’ve shared here are isolated instances. Tragically, they aren’t. Let me offer a little overview of much of westernized Christendom today. The murky influence of Hellenism and Romanism can’t be missed.

If the leadership of religious systems tolerate sin, what effect do you think this has on the so-called “lay” people? *Tolerated sin* permeates so many who call themselves “Christian”. Sunday morning messages are focused more on entertaining rather than bringing conviction.

I remember a particular men’s retreat from an evangelical congregation. Over 25% of the men confessed they were actively involved in adultery—and *not one* thought he was sinning! Surely the *searing of conscience* that blocks out the imperative to repent before a holy God is the barren fruit of a system which has lost sight of the God of the Bible:

***“There is no one righteous,
not even one! No one understands,
no one seeks God ...There is no fear
of God before their eyes”***
(Romans 3:10,11,18).

Protestant clergy, including evangelicals, have been among the foremost occupations for divorce in the United States for some time now. Tragically, for several years they were at the top.

One of the top three evangelical denominations has a documented adultery rate among its clergy of over 50%. And, don't think this situation is confined to just one denomination!

I remember a leader of one the three largest Protestant denominations telling me, “If our people knew about the rampant clergy adultery, they’d leave us in droves.”

Ponder this thought with sorrow. Why has the divorce rate among clergy skyrocketed? Perhaps because the wives of these men can no longer abide that which the religious hierarchy has covered up. A Nicolaitan individual is a “god” unto himself, isolated and incapable of loving his wife to the depth Jesus calls for. He has been set up on a pedestal of expectation on which no person was intended to be placed, and our Lord shares His glory with no one.

As go the leaders, so follow the sheep. It’s no surprise that the divorce rate among churchgoers in general is far higher than among those who don’t attend services. The **divorce rate** in the Bible Belt, the stronghold of evangelicalism, is 50% higher than among the unchurched in this nation.

Why is divorce so hateful to our Lord (see Malachi 2:13-16)? Because He intended *from the beginning* that the marriage covenant would represent the loving intimacy He wants with His people through His Spirit. Having lost sight of the seriousness of breaking covenants, contemporary Christians have rationalized that God’s grace excuses their pursuit of “happiness”, even if that means shattering marriages and families.

I experienced the Vietnam conflict through three shipboard deployments as

a helicopter pilot. As my walk with Jesus has deepened, I've recognized the reality of the unseen world in the *spiritual warfare* that surrounds each follower of Jesus. And, I've recognized how important *humility of heart* is in order to lead others to be victorious in Jesus.

From watching numerous war movies I developed a little scenario to test the heart motive of people. Were they humble and dead to themselves? Or, were they self-preservationist at any cost?

With different groups who came to our retreat center during our almost-11 years there, I'd simulate dropping a hand grenade in their midst.



I'd tell the gathering that they had 3 seconds to respond, and I'd count off: "1...2...3...BOOM!!!"

- Over half of the teenagers and women would jump on the hand grenade to save others.
- About 1 out of 10 men would jump on the hand grenade.
- NOT ONE clergyman ever jumped on the hand grenade. Every one of them fled, leaping over sofas and tables!

I was sickened by what I saw. I really questioned if these men were able to apply Jesus's words to themselves: "**Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends**" (John 15:13). What sinister, self-seeking motivation controls a man's heart when he sees himself as indispensable?

Do Hellenist seminaries mold prospective clergy to fit into the Nicolaitan system? Yes, they do!

For over 10 years we worked with church leaders trying to help not only them but the individuals and families in their congregations who came to our retreat center. Looking back at it now, we

can see that our Father wanted to make sure that we had *no doubt* about the tragic and insidious effects of **syncretism, Hellenism, Romanism, or Nicolaitanism** before He showed us the Hebraic truths He is restoring. As you can infer from our writing, we have no doubts...

When you press on into Section 4, you'll recognize that our Father's relational priorities begin with individuals, marriages and families, and extended spiritual families in home fellowships—each of which is *personal* at all levels. Organization and hierarchy are non-existent in these three crucial relational priorities.

But first, you need to scrutinize your own faith practices, and that's what we'll be helping you to do in the next lesson.

Describe what went through your mind as you read Mike's experiences within two Christian institutions, both of which had been established to produce Christian leaders.

How do you think Roman organizational hierarchy and influence have contributed to the disintegration of marriages and the proliferation of tolerated sin within westernized Christianity?
