

GENTLE SHEPHERD MINISTRIES

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CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH ~ MAKING DISCIPLES ~ EQUIPPING THE SAINTS FOR MINISTRY

THE JUDGMENT OF VANITY (Facing Idolatry)

Part 2

By Rayola Kelley

Last month we considered the possible reasons our country is in its present condition. My attempt in September's Newsletter was to show our need as Christians to identify with and own the sins of this nation. As the Church, we may not have partaken of all the sins of this nation, but we must consider if we have truly committed the sin of omission because we have failed to stand for what is true and right. Have we clearly maintained a distinction between our high calling in Christ Jesus, and the world's pursuit for vanity, its decisive hatred towards Jesus, and the condemnation it is under?

Recently, a Christian from England shared how she sought God in prayer for this nation. The Lord showed her that like Israel, the people of this nation have been pursuing other gods because they thought these false idols could do better for their causes. For the people of Israel, the oppression in the midst of great idolatry often became so great for them that in desperation they finally humbled themselves and began to cry out to Jehovah God for mercy.

As I watch the news surrounding the tea parties and town hall meetings, I am seeing people's frustration beginning to boil over. As people lose their retirements, jobs, and possible health care, they are becoming uncertain, fearful and angry. After all, those in power who refer to them as being a "mob" are slanderously discrediting them. It is clear that some of the leadership is bent on carrying out their progressive (Communistic) agenda. Meanwhile a growing number of Americans are using their first amendment right to make their concerns known to those whom they have voted into office. Because of the fragile state of the

leadership in Washington D.C., these people are being demonized as a means to detour the light from shining on the real issues at hand.

In spite of the demonization being done by the White House, the leadership of Congress or the left media, Americans are voicing their opinions, but they are also finding out what it means to have their concerns fall on deaf ears of a government that feels it has a mandate to do as it pleases, regardless of who and what is sacrificed. Clearly, Americans are becoming desperate, but are we desperate enough to cry out to God for mercy and deliverance from the wicked pagan leadership in Washington D.C.? After all, God seems to be the last option most people turn to. And, if we did cry out to Him as a nation, would He hear us? After all, He, and His commandments, were the first to be sacrificed by the wretched courts of our society while others sat in silence.

It is apparent that the present cries of Americans seem to be falling on the biased, deaf ears of Washington D.C. We have to wonder how many cries of babies, violently extracted from their mother's wombs and discarded in trashcans, have fallen on what appears to be the deaf ears of a selfish, self-centered, indifferent American society. As a society, are we beginning to receive the same type of judgment we have been guilty of purporting by remaining quiet about the godless, idolatrous, immoral, and murderous practices of this nation?

Even though the words of this woman from England may seem harsh to some, we cannot deny their truth. Like the days of Elijah in *1 Kings 18*, people stood between two opinions. It is true they knew of Jehovah God, and they even had an altar dedicated to Him, but they pursued pagan idols.

Many people in America will tell you they know that there is a God, but they have allowed His commandments to be kicked out of public prop-

erty and buildings. They have supported various forms of entertainment that has shown contempt towards the righteousness of God and His ways. They have allowed an immoral minority to bully and influence the moral flavor of this country through the court system, the media and music industries. The general attitude of the American society has been simple; "As long as it does not affect me it is no big deal. After all, this is America. We have always been free and that will never change."

The truth is we are not free. We are first of all in bondage to the sin of indifference. This indifference points to a divided heart. People who stand between two opinions have a divided heart in regard to who and what they are serving. In other words, idolatry will always cause a divided heart.

Even though there was an altar of God among the other altars in Israel, it had become broken down while pagan altars had been in use. What about the idolatrous altars in America? Even though there are various religious institutions in American, there have been worldly altars established alongside of them. Upon these worldly altars families, unborn children, morality, and righteousness have been offered up to the various idols of this world as a means to keep peace with it as well as attract it.

The people in Israel faced the judgment on their idolatry when pagan nations who were crueller and more wicked than they, were allowed to humble them. Their idols remained silent, proving they could not save them from the judgment that exposed their idolatrous environment. Since their dependency was elsewhere, they were not in the habit of calling upon God until all other options were spent, forcing them to cry out in repentance for mercy to a God they had forsaken.

Out of mercy God would often save them out of their misery, but sadly they would often go back into idolatry. The reason for such backsliding was because they quickly forgot the destructive path their idolatry would end in. They became self-sufficient in their time of

peace and prosperity. In the end, they always went with the ways of the pagan nations in order to fit in.

Like Israel, America has stood unique in the midst of the world, but apparently such a stand has become too burdensome for some of the people. It appears as if these individuals resent the burden of being a capitalist nation when most of Europe is socialist. Even though Europeans are beginning to realize the socialistic way is a complete failure, the leadership in America believes that it is an exception to the rule. In these people's minds, they will make it work regardless of what and whom they have to sacrifice along the way.

Sadly, like the people of Israel centuries ago, Americans are finding out that the leadership currently in power is proving that without true righteousness, there are no limits as to the wickedness and cruelty evil will go to get their way. For example, on September 11, 2001, a crisis of tremendous proportion challenged this country. From this premise some Americans fell to their knees, patriotism took center stage as many realized the strength of this country, and people became sober as they faced how fragile America was as a nation. That was less than ten years ago. Those who lost loved ones have not forgotten, but it seems that many Americans have. After all, life goes on and as long as harsh reality does not intrude into their world, they do not have to remain vigilant and sober about how fragile greatness can be if there is no character or resolve to uphold it. It is the foundation, or godly grass roots, that first raised this nation out of bondage from an indifferent kingdom ruling the people from a far distance. In addition, it is those same grass roots that will once again enable each of us to remember the sacrifice it requires for character and greatness to reign in a nation.

Americans voted a man into the highest office who not only clearly opposes the grass roots that made this country great, but obviously hates everything it stands for. As I consider this leader, I have to wonder how much he is a mirror to the visible leadership of the Church. How many leaders in the so-called

"Church" are ashamed of or hate the truth and righteousness clearly laid out in God's Word, and undermine it with lies, while many believers remain silent to such a show of contempt?

The leader in the White House also refuses to produce a legitimate birth certificate, along with other important documents, and openly admits in his writings that his preferred ideology is that of Marxism. How many leaders in the visible Church have refused to let concerned Christians test their heretical doctrines and ungodly stands without hiding behind the smoke-screen of, "Don't touch God's anointed?"

Unlike some Americans and Christians, this man who is now in the White House has remained true to his ideology. He has foolishly squandered all of America's wealth, and appointed Communists, radical opponents of the Constitution and Moslems to posts in the government. Why should this surprise us since this man gave himself away throughout his campaign? Is not this man a form of judgment when it comes to the visible Church? Consider some of the leaders in the visible Church. They have squandered their donor's money to build their own physical kingdoms, while many of God's unknown servants struggle to build up God's kingdom. These leaders deride the true servants of God and mock the principles clearly laid out in Scripture because it would expose them as imposters. Yet, how many people continue to support them?

The man in the White House showed his contempt towards America by refusing to salute the flag or wear its symbol on his lapel, and has used a smoke screen of lies to throw us off from his real intent to bring this nation down to its knees in total subjection to his dictatorial ideology. When he voiced his contempt on the international scene by apologizing for the pride of America, he was also letting the whole world know his contempt for this nation.

When it comes to the true Church, how many Christians have supported wolves even though they have been exposed by Scripture? These wolves have shown contempt towards God and His truth, yet people continue to flock after them and defend them in an idolatrous way.

What a slap in the face to those who voted for the man in the White House to change the rhetoric and stalemate of the political machine in Washington DC rather than to change the structure of America. But, what a slap in the face to God because of those who, while claiming to belong to Him, continue to support enemies of the cross in His name!

We must now come back to how God could allow this scenario to play out on the American scene. Is He putting a mirror up for, not only this nation to consider, but believers as well? Are those of us in the Church, along with the rest of America, being turned over to taste the vanity of our worldliness and idolatry? It is important to point out that it could have never come to this point if the environment was not ripe.

As a nation, we must consider whether we are being judged according to our own idolatrous environment. This brings us to another important aspect of this matter. We expect idolatry among the unbelievers, but the real matter is not with those who do not know God, but with those who claim to know Him. God was not upset with the pagan nations for their idolatry, but He was upset with the people of Israel for their idolatry because they knew who the real God was.

Perhaps we must consider whether the judgment upon this idolatrous environment is going to be used to humble the true Church of Jesus. God used the pagans to humble Israel and most likely the Church will be humbled in the same way.

When I speak of the visible or professing Church, I speak of the worldly religious system that is in place. Sadly, this system which claims knowledge of God does not necessarily represent the living Body that Jesus died for. However, whosoever lays claims to knowing God is going to be held responsible for how they have responded to the worldliness and idols of this present age.

This brings us back to the vanity of the world. People who pursue vanity of the world will be turned over to taste just how worthless such vanity is. There is no substance to any of it that can stand any type of judgment. In addition, everything of this world including its philosophies and idols will prove to

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CHRISTIAN SOLDIERS OR CHRISTIAN COWARDS?

By Jeannette Haley

Have you ever felt like the proverbial “sitting duck?” You know—sitting there, waiting to be shot out of the water? I have to admit, I have days like that, especially since the 2008 election. Some days I feel like the helpless duckie target for the commies and Feds, while at other times I want to run and hide. (Remember, I am human, just like you!) Usually, when more bad news comes in concerning another out-of-the-ball-park stupid stunt WA D.C. has pulled to suffocate, starve and enslave Americans, I want to stand up and fight back. Thankfully, however, going to the Lord in prayer, and His Word, brings the proper perspective.

We need to remind ourselves that none of this insanity catches the Lord by surprise. He not only knows all about it, but throughout the entire Bible, He forewarned us of the days in which we live. There is nothing new about the intense battle between Satan and his forces of evil and darkness against the God of heaven and His people. While it may all seem chaotic and out of control, God is still on the throne, He still knows the number of hairs on every head, His eye still sees the little sparrow when it falls, and not one of His promises will ever fail.

While knowing this brings comfort to our hearts, it does not mean that we can yawn, stretch and go back to sleep, ignoring current events. Edmund Burke is quoted as saying, “All that is necessary for evil to succeed is that good men do nothing.” Regardless of the origin of this famous quote, it is nevertheless true, as our current situation in America testifies. Moreover, “nothing” is what most of the sleepy church in America has done very well over the past half a century. Mark it well, “doing nothing” is the sin of omission. *“Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin” James 4:17.*

Now that our Constitution and very existence as a nation are being literally dismantled by the hour, what should the Christian “good men” (and

women) do? Some vehemently argue that Christians should never get involved “in politics” or in the affairs of a nation because their calling is solely to the spiritual harvest field, and to do otherwise is “idolatry.” Others firmly believe that Christians will not be required to suffer through the terrible times foretold by Jesus, and that He will usher them out of this world before it gets “too dreadful.” I sense in my own spirit, however, that the mainstream churchgoers are so entangled with the affairs of this world, their daily lives, and non-essential trivia that they couldn’t care less one way or the other. While their feathers may be ruffled from time to time by the winds of adversity, they firmly believe that it’ll all work itself out somehow because, after all, God has always blessed America in the past. Right?

I hate to write this, but nothing could be farther from the truth. Our way of life and the freedoms we have enjoyed as a nation since the Declaration of Independence are about to be yanked out from underneath us. The question is, if God knows all about the evil schemes of evil people in high places to destroy and silence conservatives, and Christians in particular, then why is He allowing this to happen? The answer is because *He is trying to wake up and prepare the Church.*

Wake up to what? Wake up and *repent.* Wake up to the fact that the professing church has been in bed with the world for decades, and, as such, she is not only guilty of fornication, but of losing her saltiness and light. This Laodicean, apostate church system has prostituted herself in her pursuit of worldly pleasures, riches, goods, and worldly acceptance. Her failure to remain steadfast and separate from the world in righteousness and holiness earns her the title of harlot and apostate. (See Revelation 17:5, 2 Thessalonians 2:3.) Unless the church repents for her lust and self-indulgence, compromise with sin, love for this present world, disobedience to God, and rebellion, America will continue to come under God’s judgment. *“For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?” (1 Peter 4:17)*

Suppose the church, as a whole, does come to a place of mourning and repentance. Then what? Will individual Christians truly consecrate their lives to Christ and go on to walk in humility and obedience? On the other hand, will they simply slide back into their comfort zone, living for themselves in vanity and pride?

The second reason God is bringing judgment upon this nation is to prepare His Church for the end days, and the second coming of Christ. God, in His mercy, will not thrust the pampered American church directly into the hot ovens of persecution without preparation. Hence, the great shaking that is taking place on every level. Jesus said, *“As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.” (Revelation 3:19.)* We are also told, *“Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong” 1 Corinthians 16:13.* What? You mean I have to be alert, keep the faith no matter what, grow up and be strong? You better believe it! Our battle as soldiers of the cross is both physical, and spiritual as long as Satan is the “god of this world.” He is out to destroy God’s people, both physically and spiritually. Therefore, beware of falling into the trap of thinking that our battle is always limited to one realm or the other.

Oh American Christian! Do you not realize that you are, at this very moment, sitting on a sinking ship? It is important to point out that we cannot save this nation, but we can implore God to spare it. We can stand for what is right in order to bring contrast and create an environment in which God is able to intervene on our behalf in order to confirm the ways of righteousness. Are you going to turn a blind eye, ignore the signs of the times, and continue in your delusion and self-centered, self-serving life? On the other hand, are you one who will justify your refusal to take a stand for what is right and just in defending our Constitution because it’s “not what we are called to do?” If you are a Christian indeed, then everything within you should desire to be upright, to stand for what is right. As a Christian, you will choose righteousness. You will instinctively fight for righteousness. You will seek *“first the kingdom of God, and his righteous-*

ness". You will choose the righteousness of Christ for your own soul's sake. You will love what God loves, and hate what God hates. (See *Psalm 139:21, 22.*)

God loves freedom for people, so that they can freely choose to love Him. God loves life, truth and light. On the other hand, He hates bondage, tyranny, death, wickedness, and all that thrives in darkness. You may protest: "But, Christians are not here to get involved in 'politics.' Our job is to preach the Gospel and make disciples." That is true. However, have we as believers really fulfilled our mission? If so, why is the Church so much like the world as far as sins and statistics? How many Christians possess the attitude that it is the pastor or leadership's responsibility to preach the Gospel and make disciples? One must also wonder, if the Church was really doing its job as the salt of the earth and the light of the world, would our nation be at such a place of corruption and self-destruction?

This brings us back to our responsibility, not to our nation, but to righteousness. Is it not true that God calls His people to different positions and places in order to accomplish His work in the earth? Many of His servants have been placed in governmental positions to intercede on behalf of His people. Where does it say in the Bible that we are to be so "heavenly minded" that we are "no earthly good?" After all, we do live in this world, and God does have a plan for it. Even though we know that one day, this physical world will be purged by fire, this is no excuse for us to sit on our duffs and let evil prevail.

Let's think this through. Didn't God allow Joseph to be sold into Egypt so that he could rise to power in order to save Jacob and his family? Didn't God choose Moses to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt, followed by Joshua and Caleb? Didn't God choose Judge Deborah to go out to battle against the enemies of Israel? Didn't God choose David to be King over Israel? Didn't God also choose Solomon as David's successor and give him wisdom? Wasn't Queen Esther chosen by God to save the nation of Israel? The list is endless of the different places and positions in which God placed His people through

whom He could show Himself strong. Were any of them less "spiritual" because they stood and fought for what was right in this world?

Let me ask those who believe it is not a Christian's place to stand up and fight for what is right this: Is it righteous to expect our military (many of whom are Christians) to lay down their lives for your freedom and mine outside our borders while you refuse to fight for what is right inside our borders? Now, I realize that people on both sides of this argument can use any number of Scriptures taken out of context to prove their point. As I pondered this dilemma over a period of days, the Lord reminded me of Nehemiah.

As you may recall, Nehemiah was King Artaxerxes' cupbearer in Shushan the palace. One day he received this news: "*The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire*" *Nehemiah 1:3*. What did Nehemiah do? Did he brush off this bad news with some pious platitude that exempted him from any concern or responsibility in this matter? Did he cast his eyes up to the sky and declare that it wasn't his place to get involved with such matters, that God would take care of it by Himself? What would you do? Would you carry on in your comfort zone as so many Christians in America do with the excuse that we are called exclusively to the "harvest field," so let the chips fall where they may?

I am going to make a statement. You may or may not agree, but here it is. Our response should be the same as Nehemiah's as recorded in verse 4. Let this sink into your heart: "*And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven.*" Have you stopped, sat down, wept and mourned over the plight of America? Have you fasted and prayed before the God of heaven? Look at how Nehemiah began his prayer: "*I beseech thee, O LORD God of heaven, the great and terrible God, that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love him and observe his commandments: Let thine*

ear now be attentive, and thine eyes open, that thou mayest hear the prayer of thy servant, which I pray before thee now, day and night, for the children of Israel thy servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against thee: both I and my father's house have sinned."

Have you prayed thus for America? Do you even understand how to approach the God of heaven and earth in this manner? God has not changed. He still keeps his covenant and shows mercy for them that love Him and keep His commandments. Yes, commandments. Somehow, an insidious, heretical belief has crept into the church that we don't have to obey God because we are "New Testament" Christians. Oh really? Show me one verse in the New Testament that declares that we can live any old way we want, hang on to our sins, pamper our moods, fuel our evil dispositions, feed the lusts of the flesh, ignore the holiness of God, do our "own thing" and "tack" Jesus on to our lives, and still make it to heaven. There is no such teaching by word or precept in the entire Bible. God never changes. He is the same God today as He was in the Old Testament. God is still holy, God still hates sin, and God will not forgive or pardon anyone who mocks Him and His Word, lives for self, sin and the devil. Hell is still real, the Day of Judgment is still coming "*To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him. These are murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts; and their mouth speaketh great swelling words, having men's persons in admiration, because of advantage.*" (See *Jude 15, 16.*) This certainly describes certain people in "high places" today does it not?

Nehemiah's prayer continued to outline their sins, followed by declaring God's promises if they would but repent and obey Him. We then read the events leading up to Nehemiah's return to Jerusalem to rebuild the wall. Obviously, walled cities were protected cities. How does that apply to

be vain and useless when it comes to judgment. As the nations before it, America is being exposed as a fragile house of cards, because God’s presence is missing from much of the Church. His blessings no longer reside upon America because His commandments are not considered the bedrock of this nation. God’s sheep are finding themselves scattered in the midst of confusion because they cannot hear the real voice of Jesus coming from many of the pulpits.

Next month we are going to discuss how an environment of idolatry will produce the lost, and often the last, generation of any great nation.

What about you? Are you one of the sheep who is ready to bolt from the toxic “religious food,” laced with the poison of heretical doctrine, or from the coffin of your dead pew to find some semblance of truth in the midst of this insanity? On the other hand, are you hiding in Christ, tightly clinging to the Rock and seeking His face in humility to find mercy, obtain grace and deliverance through this tremulous time? †

ONWARD CHRISTIAN SOLDIERS

1. “Onward, Christian soldiers! Marching as to war. With the cross of Jesus Going on before. Christ, the royal master, Leads against the foe; Forward into battle, See, His banners go! (Refrain) Onward, Christian soldiers! Marching as to war, With the cross of Jesus Going on before. 2. Like a mighty army Moves the Church of God. Brothers, we are treading Where the saints have trod. We are not divided; All one body we; One in hope and doctrine, One in charity. (Refrain)

3. Crowns and thrones may perish, Kingdoms rise and wane; But the Church of Jesus Constant will remain. Gates of hell can never ‘Gainst that Church prevail; We have Christ’s own promise, Which can never fail. (Refrain)

4. Onward, then, ye people! Join our happy throng; Blend with ours your voices. In the triumph song. Glory, laud, and honor, Unto Christ, the King; This thro’ countless ages Men and angels sing. (Refrain)

American Christians in these perilous times? First, we need Christian intercessors who will “build the wall” in prayer. America has become an unwalled nation because of her idolatry and fornications (both spiritual and physical), her blood guiltiness (shedding the blood of the innocents), her greed, lust, perversion, pride, self-confidence, pleasure seeking, ungodly dealings with Israel, and much more. There must be genuine repentance!

The wall not only represents protection, but it serves as a dividing line between right and wrong. What this means is that we must “draw the line” as to whom we will serve. There can be no more compromise between that which is holy and that which is profane. There can be no more “mugwumps” if we are to gain the victory. (For those of you who have never heard of a mugwump, it is a person sitting on the fence with their mug on one side, and their wump on the other.) Get off the fence! Choose either life, or choose death, but quit trying to live with one foot in the world, and the other in Christ. You are either in or you are out. You are either saved, sold out to God, or you are unsaved and living for yourself. Either you are dead in your sins, or you are a new creation in Christ. You are either a Christian soldier who will fight for the right, or a “Christian” coward. You cannot serve two masters!

The wall also serves as a place of identification. If you are building, maintaining and defending the wall against the enemy, then you are making a statement as to with whom you are identified. You are declaring that you are willing to live, and die, for what you believe—for what is right. There are no mugwumps, wimps, and half-hearted workers in this place. This is where the soldiers of the cross are found, men and women who make no apology for rolling up their sleeves and working to defend life and liberty against the evil works of darkness.

This wall is a testimony of faith, love, and hope. Faith because the builders believe in God’s promises to establish His kingdom in the hearts of men, and His future, physical kingdom on earth. Building this wall is an act of faith that regardless of what the enemy

throws at us, the victory is ours in Christ. Nehemiah had his enemies, Sanbalat and Tobiah, but try as they might, they could not destroy him or the work God appointed to him.

This wall requires sacrifice, the kind of sacrifice that only love can offer. Love places the well-being of others above self, and pours itself out to insure security and protection. Building the wall for the sake of others is more than a “worldly” pursuit, but is an act of deep devotion and commitment. It is evidence of practical Christianity, which is the example our Lord left for us. (See John 13.)

Finally, the wall represents hope. While the physical wall itself may in time crumble, hope remains. The spirit of those who gave of themselves to build and defend the wall, their faith, love and hope, will remain as a beacon to help guide future generations through the darkness. We have such a beacon today, shining forth from the pages of both Scripture and history, left for us by those brave and righteous souls who have prayed, and fought and died for us that we might follow their example.

Christian, read, study and pray over the Book of Nehemiah and let the Spirit of God reveal His heart to you in this matter. Here is the key: “*They which builded on the wall, and they that bare burdens, with those that laded, every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon. For the builders, every one had his sword girded by his side, and so builded. And he that sounded the trumpet was by me . . . our God shall fight for us*” Nehemiah 4:17, 18, 20b.

Are you up to the challenge? Will you be a Christian soldier, or will you choose to bear the final reproach of a coward. †

OUR CHRISTIAN HERITAGE

“It is impossible to govern the world without God and the Bible. . . . Bless, O Lord, the whole race of mankind and let the world be filled with the knowledge of thy son, Jesus Christ.” - George Washington’s Farewell Address, September 19, 1796

“Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.” - John Adams, Second VP

RAYOLA'S Q & A CORNER

WHY HAVE LEADERS?

Q: *There is a growing movement among some believers that there should be no real leaders overseeing the local fellowships. To me this is confusing. Could you clarify this matter?*

A: I have been aware of this movement for a while, and have even met people who advocate it. Like all movements, you meet those who are using it for their own self-serving agendas and those who are sincerely convinced they are on the right track. I even understand the premise from which this movement has gained its momentum: that of abusive power within the Church.

To answer this question properly, one must understand the purpose for leadership. God clearly established leadership in the Church to ensure its proper function. There must always be leadership in place to ensure order and purpose. There cannot be order without proper authority to ensure power to carry out the commission or responsibility. All authority comes from God, and our main responsibility is to build up the Body into the head, Christ. However, it is not unusual for people to abuse authority by misusing the power they have been entrusted with, thereby, changing the intent and purpose behind such leadership positions.

God established five positions that are necessary for establishing and building (edifying) the universal Church, as well as a leadership that would serve the local bodies to ensure sound judgment and proper growth. The five positions that have been put in place to ensure edification of the Body as a whole are apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers (*Ephesians 4:11-13*). The apostles are sent out to establish local bodies on the foundation of Christ; the prophets are to warn, exhort and watch over the Church to ensure that it lines up to the cornerstone (Jesus); the evangelists are to challenge and revive the vision of the Church; the pastors are to lead the congregations to the Chief Shepherd by their exam-

ple, and the teachers are to establish the Church in sound doctrine. We clearly have examples of how this leadership was instrumental in the establishment of the new Church. The Apostle Paul was an apostle who established local churches in Asia Minor and Europe on sound teachings and doctrines. There was the prophet Agabus who warned Paul, as well as the traveling evangelist Philip, who had five daughters who also traveled and operated in the gift of prophesy (*Acts 21:8-12*). Peter, who was an apostle, was also clearly called to be a pastor, and we know that Aquila and Pricilla were teachers (*John 21:15-17; Acts 18:24-28*).

Elders and deacons have been established to ensure the well-being of the local bodies. Elders are to serve as pastors and teachers, while deacons are to serve the needs of the local bodies (*Acts 6;1 Timothy 3; Titus 1:1-16*). James, the half-brother of Jesus, served as an elder to the Church in Jerusalem and the first martyr of the Church, Stephen, was a deacon.

We know God does all things well. In God's kingdom, true leaders were and are to be marked by submission towards Him, and humility and servitude towards His people. I do not see in the Bible where God has changed His mind about the leadership He has devised, nor has He instructed that these positions cease due to abuse. The problem does not rest with God's design of leadership; rather, it rests with man's perversion of it. When misguided or wicked men become part of the equation, they will pervert what God has done well to fit their own agendas. This is where the abuse of godly leadership has wounded many people and caused many of God's sheep to scatter, often seeking other means to hear the real voice of the Shepherd.

Let me give you an example of this abuse. The so-called "apostles" have replaced Jesus as the foundation; "prophets" have redefined the cornerstone to fit their own agendas; "evangelists" have been forced to become entertainers; "pastors" are establishing worldly kingdoms, and "teachers" are often pushing worldly philosophies, popular teachings, and lifeless facts, instead of the Bible. Eld-

ers and deacons make up Church boards instead of being leaders, teachers and servants. As a result, there is chaos, which causes dissatisfaction and disillusionment.

The problem with such chaos is that instead of people coming back to the center of truth and realizing that man is the culprit as to the abuse in God's kingdom, many of them go to the other extreme, thereby rejecting the leadership that God has put into place. Granted, there is greater damnation on those who abuse what God has ordained, but to reject God's ordained plan and teach contrary to His Word is also a grave offense. Jesus said it best in *Matthew 5:19*: "*Whosoever, therefore, shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven; but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.*"

We do not have to submit to erroneous leadership, but we do have to recognize God's design and be prepared to take our rightful position in His kingdom or discern and submit to godly leadership when we encounter it. We must be careful not to throw out what God has designated because man has perverted it. If you would like to know more about this subject, you can obtain my e-book entitled: *FOR THE PURPOSE OF EDIFICATION*.

FEELING SATISFIED

"Ministers seem often satisfied with having freedom to speak, and seeing many hearing them with attention and delight; but alas! without experiencing the effects of the power promised to attend the ministry of the gospel, the power necessary to produce a saving change in the sinner. The ministry neither alarms, terrifies nor disturbs ungodly persons who sit under it.... No experimental, thoughtful Christian can deny that God has withdrawn Himself from us, as to the particular operations of His Spirit and the especial manifestation of His grace."

-- John Elias (1774-1841) was one of the eminent preachers of Wales, greatly used by God.