

## THE MODERN "PASTOR"

A common mistake generally made by our sectarian friends is the failure to distinguish between God's intent for His people who lived prior to the coming of Jesus and those who live afterward. Before the creation of time and this present world, God recognized the necessity of sending His Son for the salvation of those who would accept Him (Ephesians 1:4, 1 Peter 1:19-20). The first four thousand years was preparatory for that one grand event which distinctly marked the past from that which was intended to follow – and which was clearly stated in Galatians 4:4, "When the fullness of time was come, God sent forth His Son."

The old consisted in part of animal sacrifices, burning of incense, holy places such as the tabernacle and temple in which God dwelt (Exodus 25:8-9, 1 Kings 8:12), and a special priesthood (the Levites) who served between God and His people.

Of these things the writer of Hebrews stated that they were, "a figure for the time then present" (9:9), but "now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away" (8:13). Hebrews 10:9 further states, "He taketh away the first that He may establish the second." While there are some similarities in type to the old, the Lord's church exists as God's "eternal purpose" fulfilled and completed (Ephesians 3:9-11).

In God's perfected kingdom, His church, we are to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1), our prayers serve the purpose of incense (Revelation 5:8), God dwells within His people rather than in a material temple (1 Corinthians 3:16), and the special Levitical priesthood has been replaced by "an holy priesthood" of all God's children who compose His "spiritual house" (1 Peter 2:5, 9).

But our sectarian friends fail to fully recognize that distinction and regularly refer to Old Testament regulations and provisions. One of their most evident faults is the continuation of a priest to serve each congregation and to whom they refer as their "pastor" or clergyman. This is such a commonly accepted and traditional practice that to call it in question would be considered by many unreasonable. But we must if we are to accomplish a return to the Bible pattern.

The early Jewish Christians were very familiar with the priesthood of

the Old Testament, where the priests served the people in their approach to God: there were the sacrifices, burnt offerings, and cleansings to be made for the individuals by the priests. There was a superior known as the high priest. This was all abolished, however, when Jesus, the perfect offering, was sacrificed for us all (Hebrews 8:1). He became our High Priest and we individually serve under Him as our own priest, with no other intercessor between us and God.

2

A survey of the early churches reveal no position comparable to the modern "pastor." Apostles such as Peter and Paul circulated among the various congregations accompanied by Silas and Barnabas and evangelists named Timothy and Titus. Priscilla and Aquila were referred to by Paul as "my helpers" (Romans 16:3), Urbane as "our helper in Christ" (v. 9), and Tryphena, Tryphosa, and Persis as those "who labour in the Lord" (v. 12). Timotheus is called by Paul, "my yokefellow" (v. 21). Although some did preach, none carried the term of "preacher" and a title distinct from any other disciple.

Paul spent some three years at Ephesus (Acts 19:8-10, 20:31) and he left Titus on the island of Crete for the purpose of setting "in order the things that are wanting [lacking, needed], and ordain elders in every city, as I have appointed thee" (Titus 1:5). In no passage do we ever find reference to the preacher or "pastor" of these congregations. When Paul or the others moved on to another location there was never a search to find a suitable preacher to take over the pulpit of Paul or Titus or Timothy. On the contrary there were permanent elders appointed to assume leadership among the disciples. Acts 14:23 informs us that Barnabas and Paul, "Ordained them elders in every city." The collection at Antioch was sent "to the elders [in Judea] by the hands of Barnabas and Saul" (Acts 11:30). "From Miletus he [Paul] sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church" (Acts 20:17). 1 Timothy 5:17 speaks of the "elders that rule well." Those in need were to "call for the elders" (James 5:14). Elders in 1 Peter 5:1-4 are exhorted as to their leading the "flock of God." The "bishops [elders] and deacons," not the local preacher, were addressed in Paul's letter to the Philippians (1:1). Never in the New Testament writings do we find such admonition addressed to the "preacher, minister, or local pastor" who was recognized as are our present-day clergymen. They simply did not exist!

This practice of a clergyman in each congregation emerged from an attitude which early arose and sadly continued through the ages – the

desire for preeminence. This was strongly condemned by Jesus when James and John sought to have preeminence among the disciples (Mark 10:35-45). It was clearly evident in Diotrephes (3 John 9-10). It grew rapidly in the development of the desire for ecclesiastical prominence, the rise of bishops over designated territories, and the papacy which became full bloom in 533 A.D. Priests over every congregation had<sup>3</sup> become an accepted practice. Upon the rise of opposition to the papacy, the reformers who founded the sectarian churches readily accepted this error of the Roman Catholics. It became a profession, even as one would become a fisherman, a construction worker, a doctor, or a farmer – a position never intended or provided for by our Lord.

We do not question the commendable desire of those who serve as a preacher located over a specific congregation – but we do sincerely question the position which they hold. No such position was found among our forefathers in the early church. The elders and deacons are God's appointed leaders in local congregations. If you would do the will of the Lord in His appointed way: develop the congregation to function on it's own, develop Scriptural elders who can teach and lead the congregation, impress upon all the need to become involved in taking part in the assembly and in teaching their neighbors, friends, and fellow-employees – and work yourself out of a job! If you desire to remain with that congregation, then secure a job for your income and become an influential member, but no longer an unscriptural clergyman.

Brethren are responsible for the well-being and progress of the congregation where they live and where their families assemble. They should not expect to be paid for doing that which is their responsibility inherent in being a member of God's family. Evident among many has been the desire and expectation to receive pay for teaching the congregation and assuming a role leadership. What naturally develops from this is a system of hirelings – precisely the practice of the denominations and our liberal American brethren.

Those engaged in true evangelism understandably require funds to pursue their travels, transportation, and necessities. But these men are not confined to a local congregation and are rather active in a much broader field of work. It is such men as these that we find Scriptural authority to support and not the local brother who preaches as His responsibility to the local congregation. This is the pattern found in

Scripture. Such was the support sent to Paul and others as they labored widely among the various congregations (Philippines 4:16, 2 Cor 10:9). To call a local preacher an evangelist, however, does not change his status and make his unscriptural position correct

4

Promoting the clergy, where each congregation employs a preacher (located minister) who serves in exactly the same role as the Methodist or Baptist "pastor" or Catholic priest is contrary to the practice of the early church of our Lord. If one is presently situated in such an arrangement, the solution is to "work himself out of a job" by developing men of the congregation in becoming elders and deacons – God's arrangement. Everyone needs a place to live and we have responsibility to the congregation with whom we assemble, but the early church knew nothing of a located preacher (clergyman) who was paid a stipulated salary for his services. They looked at their service a "calling" and not as a job.

Establishing "preacher schools" are for very purpose of developing clergymen who will graduate and seek employment at a local congregation (just as the Methodist and Baptist do) as their "profession." Our service in the Lord's vineyard is not to be viewed as a job where we are paid a salary, but as a matter of commitment and dedication to the Saviour.

How long a preacher lives at a certain place or rather he receives any financial support in his service for the Lord are really not the crucial considerations. The primary error is in the establishment of a position in the Lord's church other than that of elder and deacon – the office of the preacher.

We are acutely aware of the errors among the Roman Catholics and the denominations. Let us not fail to recognize this departure from God's pattern which exist also with some among us. Let us instead recognize and promote the priesthood of all those who would follow the Lord acceptably.