

WHERE HAVE ALL THE LEVITES GONE?

A Leadership Crisis in Christendom

by Daniel Trygg

For a period of ten years, I dedicated myself to working with Christians in a parachurch setting, doing discipleship training. I was pretty critical of what I perceived to be a lack of clarity and dedication within the church with regard to its purpose and function. I had all but given up on the local church, at least as I had been exposed to it, and had developed my own approach to fulfilling the Great Commission (Mt. 28:18-20). These past several years, however, God has enlarged my vision and given me insight into His plan. As a result, I now have come to have a great love and appreciation for the Body of Christ. I have left my parachurch work, and have concentrated my energies in the direction of building up the local expression of Christ's Body that I am called to. It truly is the passion of my heart to see the Church be healthy, fruitful, and to truly fulfill the intended plan of the Lord for His people, as described in the scriptures. This study is not meant to be critical or negative. It is meant to turn our attention back to some truths that I believe were part of God's original design. These have become somewhat unfocused in our thinking, and have been largely abandoned in our practice. As a result, the entire Body has become malnourished and suffers from this loss. It is out of a deep love and passion for the Flock of God, the individual sheep as well as for the Good Shepherd Himself, that I was constrained to write and communicate this study.

One of the primary drives that motivated me to step out into full-time discipling ministry was the appalling lack of true spiritual maturity evidenced in those churches that I had had exposure to. By far, the vast majority of the saints that I encountered were somewhere between infancy and adolescence in their spiritual development. They knew only the elementary teachings of Christianity. They were aware of the "party line" of their particular church, but, being "milk drinkers", they exhibited virtually none of the vibrant reality of life that was the revolutionary mark of New Testament Christians. They were "unaccustomed to the word of righteousness" and they had developed no ability to discern the good from the evil, i.e., to prove or test out what the will of God is. The result of this lack of spiritual depth was the tragic fact that they walked "like mere men" (Heb. 5:11-14; I Cor. 3:1-3).

Let me ask you, what is the difference between your church and the V.F.W. club? Is there an obvious distinction that sets your life dynamically apart from that of the average non-Christian? So many of those believers that I have met in churches and in other Christian circles are distinguished only by a stricter set of moral rules which they fail to keep. Where is the power of the Holy Spirit? Where is that dynamic, infectious love that took the Roman empire by storm during that first generation of believers?

Of course, there are many factors that have had an impact on the quality of Christian experience in our day. I am going to address one area that I believe would profoundly affect this problem: the leadership crisis in Christianity. This is not another article commenting on the leadership scandals of the last couple of years. I am addressing a much broader problem than that of a few "shining stars" that have fallen to the ground. The scandal or tragedy that I hope to expose has permeated most of the Body of Christ today. It has become so commonplace, so widespread, so "normal", as to become, as it were, invisible to the eyes of most people. Yet, it has effected each one of us, frustrating us, stunting our growth, and starving us for spiritual nourishment, comfort, and stimulation. Furthermore, there are countless thousands who started well that, because of this problem, have become spiritual casualties lying alongside the "pilgrim way" as so much spiritual litter along the highway to life. Why? Because there was no one to tend them. Where are the undershepherds? Why is it that no one is there to strengthen the weak, heal the sick, bind up the broken, bring back the

scattered, or seek after those who have gone astray (Ezk. 34:4,5)? Why do they perish for lack of attention? Where are the undershepherds to ward off the beasts of prey?

God's Leadership Plan

What do you suppose God had in mind for leadership within His people? What was the proportion of people to their leaders? In the OT, He set aside an entire tribe, the Levites, to be consecrated to serve Him on a full time basis. One tribe out of twelve was supposed to be set apart from the normal means of employment so that they could serve God and His people. What responsibilities did they have? Aside from the priesthood, and the transporting of the tabernacle throughout the wilderness, the Levites were involved in teaching the Book of the Law to the people (II Chr. 17:9-11; 35:3), leading the music for worship (I Chr. 25:1-7), in performing songs for worship and in leading congregational singing (I Chr. 6:31-48). They were given the responsibility of not only declaring and explaining the Law to the people (Neh. 8:7,8), but also the authority to settle disputes among the people (II Chr. 19:5-11). God set aside one twelfth of the people of Israel from normal civilian pursuits to be wholly devoted to serve Him and to have a spiritual impact on the nation as a whole.

What about in the NT? First of all, Jesus followed a ratio of one to twelve in His work of discipling the future leaders for His church. We also see that of the 120 in the upper room, twelve were recognized as apostles (the original eleven plus Matthias, whom they elected to fill Judas' place (Acts 1:12-26). By chapter six of Acts, we observe these apostles as being totally overwhelmed with the various demands of a group that well exceeded 5,000 believers. They separated themselves to the full time task of prayer and the ministry of the Word, having appointed seven deacons to oversee the daily responsibility of distributing food to the poor. By chapter eleven, we read that elders had been ordained in addition to the apostles to oversee the congregation (11:30; cf. 15:4,6,22,23). Furthermore, since they were meeting in private homes, they experienced an entirely different shepherding dynamic than what we in America experience in our traditional churches. They shared a natural intimacy and accountability with a small group of people who were committed to growth, worship, intercession, and ministry to others (Acts 2:42-47). Those who had the appropriate gifts would rise to leadership in these home congregations (Acts 2:46; 5:42; 8:3; 12:12; 16:14,15; Rom. 16:3-5). Here recognition came not because of a pedigree of family ancestry, nor by virtue of educational credentials, but as the result of effectiveness in being a leader. A multiplicity of small groups, moreover, would have required a greater number of leaders to provide direction and oversight. From this constituency, those especially gifted with effective leadership skills and spiritual gifts would become apparent to all. These, then, would be granted greater responsibilities, as well as respect.

Another important aspect of this process of leadership development and mobilization was that the people had a healthy sense of responsibility to support those who labored in full time ministry. It is my belief that because we have lost their vision for financially supporting those who, by God's grace and calling, profit us spiritually we are experiencing a serious dearth of equippers and leaders in today's church. Like the Levites in Nehemiah's day, they have been forced to abandon their spiritual calling and have "gone away, each to his own field" (Neh. 13:10).

Giving and Leadership

Let us briefly review the teaching of Scripture in this important area. What is giving all about? What was the "tithe", and how was it to be spent? What principles are declared in Scripture which are profitable to teach us, reprove us, correct us, and train us to be wise and righteous in our financial stewardship as it relates to this area? Most of us have been giving where and how we have been told to give, or at least as we have independently determined to give, without ever searching out from the

Bible to see what God's mind is on the subject. I dare say we may indeed find ourselves, and our unquestioned traditions, to be far out of step with God's intentions.

"Wait a minute," you say, "I thought you were writing about leadership and now you've switched to a treatise on finances!"

Not at all. You see, the two are, and always have been, intimately related issues in the Scripture. Unfortunately, most of us have been raised within a religious tradition where this connection has been somewhat blurred. We have been taught from childhood, or from the beginnings of our Christian experience, that giving to God was basically equivalent to giving to the church. We have assumed that if we faithfully put something in the collection plate we have fulfilled the obligations of our financial stewardship. We have trusted that those in leadership in our churches must certainly have instituted a system which faithfully represents the principles of Scripture. We fail to consider that most of them also were raised within the same framework and that they never have questioned the way things were done either. I firmly believe that it is because of sloppy exegesis and poor thinking that we continue to propagate a theology and practice of giving that is a drastic departure from God's revealed intentions. The resources that God provides are being wastefully allocated in ways that are far removed from what God's heart is. Furthermore, it is my contention that this misuse of "God's money" has shattered the support base intended for the support of leadership. It is a major underlying factor that frustrates and hinders men and women who are gifted of God to inspire and shepherd His people from actually being about that task. We are supposed to be mobilizing an army to permeate society, but the strategy we have settled for is like spending the bulk of our resources on a few nice buildings scattered across the country and then having only enough left to support an overworked, overwhelmed "occupation force" to maintain a visible presence. We are not effectively recruiting or training new "soldiers". I believe we have not invested wisely so that our leaders, and potential leaders, can truly be freed up to do the work of teaching and training. Those we have are bogged down with non-essential busywork, while others who have the talents and abilities to train are often excluded at the budget level.

Now I am not just talking about starting a "Leadership Development Fund". This problem is bigger than just money. It is not going to go away by throwing a few dollars at it. (Too often the American solution to most problems!) What we are faced with is the need for a whole different mindset regarding giving. If we can obtain the proper mindset, policy changes will of necessity follow, but more importantly a different emphasis will begin to permeate the Church of Jesus Christ. This will provide more fertile ground in the form of encouragement, prayer, value, and freedom which the Holy Spirit can use to raise up the leaders of His choosing.

Stewards

Let's go back to the Scriptures to see if we can recapture the Biblical mindset regarding giving. What does the Bible have to say regarding our responsibility to give to others? What principles are revealed that can guide us in the expenditure of money set aside for the Lord's work? How much should be set aside? Is the tithe still binding upon Christians today? What promises have been given to us to encourage us to give freely? We will attempt to deal with these questions by examining pertinent passages from the Scriptures.

Before we proceed any farther, however, it is important to remind ourselves of our real relationship to what we have in the way of wealth and possessions. Read I Chr. 29:1-18 and take note in particular of vs. 10-16. To whom does all that we have really belong? Is it not God's? Instead of owners, does not Scripture teach that we are stewards or managers of what really belongs to Another (Lk. 12:42; 16:1f)? With our relationship to what possessions are within our control clarified, the issue of giving is put within the proper perspective. Our money is not ours to do with as we will. Rather, we are to manage our Master's money according to His heart and desire. Giving is not only an obedient admission of God's ownership, it is also to be an expression of His desires.

Old Testament Plan and Practice

This was, in fact, a concept that was fundamental to both the practice of the tithe (Lev. 27:30-32) and that of the offering of first fruits to the Lord (Ex. 23:19; Lev. 23:9-14). In either case, the thought was that the presentation of this representative portion signified a consecration of one's entire income or wealth (cf. Rom. 11:16). It was an admission of dependence upon God's provision. Further, it was an acknowledgement that everything, not merely the tenth, belonged to God. It was an act of worship, an act exalting or honoring God (Prov. 3:9).

What is the tithe? The word "tithe" means "a tenth". We first see it in Gen. 14:20 where Abraham, after returning from delivering Lot and others captured by the four kings of Mesopotamia, gave a tenth of the spoils to Melchizedek, king of Salem and priest of God Most High. Again in Gen. 28:22, Jacob makes a promise to the Lord that if He will keep him safe and return him to Canaan, then he would serve God and give Him a tenth of all.

In the legislation that God gave through Moses, three distinct tithes were expected from the Israelites: 1.) the tithe for the Levites; 2.) the tithe for festive celebration; and 3.) the tithe for the poor. Let us examine each one:

1.) The tithe for the Levites -- Read Num. 18:21-31.

Why were the Levites to receive a tithe from the rest of the Israelites? Vss. 21,23,24,25.

What did the Levites do with their tithe? Vss. 26-28.

Look up Neh. 10:34-39. What was the practice described in vss. 37-39? Note any new information. Where were tithes received? What was the storehouse?

Compare with 12:44-47.

What were the consequences of abandoning the Levitical tithe? Neh. 13:10-14.

Study II Chr. 31:2-19 to see how King Hezekiah provided in this regard. Note his purpose for the Levites in vs. 4.

It is very important to see that the purpose of this tithe was to support people, the Levites, who were doing the work of the Lord by assisting the priests, by teaching the people, and leading them in worship (Num. 8:19; Dt. 10:8; II Chr. 17:7-9; Neh. 8:2,3,7-9; I Chr. 6:31-48; Neh. 12:46). The money from tithes was not used to construct or maintain buildings (e.g., Ex. 35:1-36:7; I Chr. 29; II Kg. 12:4-16; Ex. 30:11). This tithe was wholly dedicated to these men who were set apart for the things of God. The need for their service was clearly perceived by godly leaders. That the neglect of their financial needs drove the Levites to other occupations, with a resulting spiritual loss to the people of God, was readily apparent in Israel's history. It was concerning the neglect of this tithe that Mal. 3:7-12 was written. By this passage we can see that God demanded the tithe as His portion. Those who withheld their tithe were counted as thieves, and the devourer consumed the wealth of those who tried to get ahead in this manner. A corresponding blessing followed those who were faithful.

2.) Tithe for Feasts -- Dt. 14:22-27. What was to be done with this tithe?

Why was it necessary to have such a "forced savings plan"? Ex. 23:14-17.

What was the purpose of such feasts? Dt. 14:23.

Where were such feasts to be observed? Dt. 12:4-19.

Why do you suppose it was necessary to include the warnings of Dt. 12:19 and 14:27?

Should this tithe be observed today? Why or why not?

3.) Tithe for the poor -- Dt. 14:28,29; 26:12-15. How often was this to be observed?

Where was the money to go? Who were the beneficiaries?

What other provisions were made for the poor? Dt. 15:1-18; Lev. 19:9,10; 25:1-55.

Is this tithe binding upon Christians today? Why or why not?

Applications of Old Testament Principles

The question remains concerning whether and/or how these teachings on tithing apply to the believer under the New Covenant. As you think over the various tithes, what observations can you make that help bring out the significance of these practices? You may wish to meditate on the practices themselves, or how the practices apply to today, to your situation. You may find II Tim. 3:16,17; I Cor. 10:6,11; or Rom. 15:4 provide helpful perspectives from which to approach this question.

Let me suggest the following:

1.) The tithes were for people, not for the construction or maintenance of buildings. With regard to the Levitical tithe, it was in God's plan that there should be workers who could be wholly devoted to the Law. They were to be supported by the tithe of the rest of the congregation. The quality of the spiritual life of God's people depended upon their faithfulness in supporting these full-time workers. Economically speaking, God provided for a ratio of one full-time worker for every ten households. I wonder how much the Church today suffers in quality and depth of life because she has vastly departed from supporting such a ratio of those freed up to pursue full-time service?

The principle holds true for the other tithes, as well. Money and goods for the poor were stored and distributed to those people who were in need, not tied up in low-cost housing or other "facilities for the poor". Provision was made for people who were in a crisis, but the assumption was that they would not subsist at that level indefinitely. Rather, they would come to be self-sufficient in some way.

The feast tithe was to be spent in thankful celebration before the Lord. It bought meat, wine, bread, and other consumables which were to be enjoyed, as well as sacrifices with which to honor and worship God. Because none was to be taken home, there would also have been great freedom to share

generously with those who had not been so fortunate. This would bind people together, as well as provide experience of the blessedness of giving to others.

2.) The laws regarding tithing, though not strictly binding on Christians, do reveal to us the heart of God. Besides being for the support of those who are set apart to serve God by full-time vocational service, we also see God's heart for the poor and dispossessed. His special provision every third year reveals a compassion that is very practical. Funds were collected locally and distributed locally. Thus, the people knew how the money was used. They had the satisfaction of seeing the benefits of their sacrifice. It also had the effect of exalting the poor as equals for whom all should be concerned. The principle of equality later expounded by Paul was at the heart of this tithe (II Cor. 8:13-15). We see also God's desire to bind families together and build their perception of Him around memories of joyful feasting and worship. There is tremendous precedent here for investing in experiences, memorable occasions, and family traditions that instruct about the goodness and worthiness of God. Raising a godly heritage is an act of service and worship that pleases God.

3.) The effectiveness of God's plan was conditioned by the faithfulness of the people to do their part. The social and spiritual state of the nation was affected by the responses of the individuals therein. When they valued the spiritual ministry (or the needs of people), they gave. When they did not, the spiritual leaders/ministers/facilitators became distracted with survival needs, and spiritual leadership was severely crippled.

4.) God has repeatedly called His people back to His plan. Through prophetic voices at various times of revival, the Lord directed Israel to once again put into effect His plan of leadership by calling them to repentance and recommitment to the principles of giving contained in the Law.

New Testament Plan and Practice

Jesus' Teaching on Tithing

Jesus had much to say about giving, but not much to say about tithing. There are only two references where He mentions the practice at all:

Mt. 23:23,24 -- What was the practice of the scribes and Pharisees?

What was the problem?

Does He recommend the practice of tithing?

Notice the context (vss. 1-36). Is Jesus speaking to believers as a New Testament Lawgiver? I think not. Rather, His purpose is to show the hypocrisy and spiritual blindness of these religious legalists. He measures them not by a New Covenant standard, but by the truth of the Old Covenant which they profess to follow so diligently. He does not, however, attack the principles of the tithe.

Lk. 18:9-14 -- Once again, while Jesus does not reject tithing, He exposes how legalism can lead to self-righteousness. Jesus' point was that God was unimpressed with a mere outward fulfillment of tithing, when the heart exalts itself in pride because of its "righteousness". The practice of tithing is not rejected or commended *per se*, but was recognized as an old Covenant obligation that the righteous would fulfill. The error made by the Pharisees was that they thought that obedience to the Law itself

produced righteousness, rather than that the righteous heart was necessary to produce righteous behavior.

Jesus came not to abolish the Law, or set it aside, but to fulfill it (Mt. 5:17-20). Thus, the teachings regarding tithing are not to simply be set aside as irrelevant. There must be a fulfillment, either in Christ's atoning work or in the lives of believers, whereby the righteousness of the New Covenant greatly outshines that of the old. The liberating influence of the Holy Spirit will produce a righteousness that "surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees" (Mt. 5:20), those most careful and exact adherents of Law. The spontaneous generosity evidenced in the Church rightly went far beyond that of the tithe. What the tithe was meant to represent, i.e., a symbolic recognition that all belonged to God, came to be expressed and fulfilled in actuality in these first believers in Jesus (Acts 2:44,45; 4:32-37; II Cor. 8:1-5).

Does this, then, give us license to be selfish, or give less than the Old Testament Law? May it never be! The issue, Jesus revealed, is man's heart. If man's heart be transformed, the fruit of his life will naturally be wonderfully changed (Mt. 7:16-20; 12:33-35; Prov. 4:23; cf. Mt. 15:10-20). In Jesus' mind such a transformation would produce a greater righteousness, something that would fulfill, and far exceed, that dictated by Old Testament law.

A Heart to Give

What does the remainder of the New Testament teach about tithing? What do the following passages have to say about keeping laws under the New Covenant?

Rom. 6:14; 7:1-6

Gal. 2:19-3:5

Gal. 5:1-6, 13-24

Acts 15:1-29

What was the issue? Vss. 1,2,5

What were Gentiles exhorted to follow? Vss. 19, 20, 28, 29.

Why? Vs. 21

Note that tithing is conspicuously absent from this list, which was the consensus both of the Church (vs. 25) and the Holy Spirit (vs. 28).

It seems quite clear from these Scriptures that tithing was not required under the New Covenant in the sense of a law to be followed. There is a different law at work in those who are of Christ, i.e., a law written upon the heart (Jer. 31:31-33; Ezk. 11:19-20; II Cor. 3:2-8). We are not under a legalistic system, but we enjoy a relationship built upon grace. Rom. 7:1-6 speaks of our united death with Christ that freed us from the law's demands. In Acts 15, when the issue of whether Christians had to keep the Jewish laws in order to really be saved, or in order to be righteous (vs. 5), it was recognized that any Christian, whether of Jewish or Gentile upbringing, was saved by the grace of God in Christ, not by any merit derived by their attempts to keep the Law (vss. 10,11). Of those practices recommended by the Jerusalem Council (vss. 19-21), the concern was to avoid offending Jewish inquisitors, not to promote righteousness by observance of law. All recognized the futility of self-produced righteousness. Tithing was not mentioned as one of the essential practices encouraged here. This is not because the early church had ceased to think that giving was important. Rather, the motivation, purpose, and level of giving was to arise not from duty or obligation but out of the spontaneity of the liberated heart as it interacts with the life-giving Holy Spirit.

Is this borne out in the rest of the New Testament? Yes! We are never commanded to tithe, but are exhorted to give, instruction being given in the particulars of where and how to be giving. Look up Acts 2:41-47 and 4:32-37 to see how new hearts spontaneously produced a new generosity.

Again, in II Cor. 8:1-5, we have another incredible example of giving freely, even at great personal cost. What was the underlying cause for their open hand, identified by Paul in vs. 5?

What guiding principles or instructions are to be found regarding giving in the New Testament? We can identify several:

1.) Give materially where you are blessed spiritually.

I Cor. 9:3-14 --

Note that in vss. 4, 5, and 12, Paul calls this a "right". Who instituted such a system? Vs. 14; cf. Lk. 10:1-7.

Besides providing for basic needs, why is this an important practice? Vs. 10; cf. Heb. 13:17.

I Tim. 5:17,18 -- According to vs. 18, what does the word "honor" include?

How does the principle of II Tim. 2:6 compare?

Gal. 6:6-10 -- What is the particular focus?

Vs. 6.

Vss. 7,8 -- The principle of investment and return.

Vss. 9,10 -- The broader application of vss. 7,8

Rom. 15:26,27 --

2.) Giving to support ministry to others.

III Jn. 5-8 --

Rom. 10:14,15 --

Rom. 15:18-24 --

3.) Giving to help the poor.

Acts 2:44-47; 4:31-37 --

Gal. 2:7-10 --

Acts 11:27-30 --

Acts 20:35; Eph. 4:28 --

I Cor. 16:1,2; II Cor. 8,9; Rom. 15:25-28 --

Rom. 12:9,13; Jas. 1:27; I Jn. 3:16-18 --

4.) Giving in secret -- Mt. 6:1-4.

5.) Giving sacrificially.

Mk. 12:41-44 --

Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-37 --

II Cor. 8:1-15 (esp. vss. 1-5) --

6.) Giving in faith.

With eternal vision -- Mt. 6:19-21; 19:21; Phil. 4:17; Acts 20:35.

Trusting in God's provision -- Lk. 6:38; II Cor. 8:1-3; 9:6-11.

7.) Giving with joy -- II Cor. 8:1-5; 9:6-12.

Applications of New Testament Principles

Are Christians to tithe? Strictly speaking, the answer is no, since we are not to live by the Law at all. Rather, we are to live by the Holy Spirit, who will lead us to do as much as, and more than, the Law required. The Law is valuable, however, to point out to us when we are not following the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, we know that the tithe is a minimum amount that we can confidently give, trusting in the promise of God to meet our needs as we seek to honor Him (Prov. 3:9,10; Mal. 3:10; Mt. 6:33). As faith grows, and we learn to discern and trust the Spirit's leading, we will find ourselves going beyond this minimum.

The expressions in Spirit-led giving are manifold. They are as unique in particulars as are human faces or fingerprints. Nevertheless, there are some distinctives that mark true Spirit-led giving:

1.) The Spirit's leading comes as a natural by-product of our relationship to God. It is an offering presented to God, along with ourselves, in worship and praise. The danger of a mixed focus, an impure heart, is very real. The Spirit will lead us away from exalting ourselves or impressing people. Through secrecy and humility in our giving, God will receive the proper glory.

2.) Since this giving is a natural outflow of a much larger spiritual perspective, true generosity will be accompanied with freedom (not compulsion!) and joy. As citizens of an eternal kingdom, the Spirit leads us to value things in their proper place. We see what we have as a valuable tool to promote a far more significant other-worldly reality. As value is more and more clearly placed upon the Kingdom of God, there is a consequent freedom to use what we have for eternity, rather than spend it on ourselves here.

3.) As ones called to serve others for Christ's sake, the Spirit will lead us to choose their needs before our own. Sacrifice is part and parcel of the Spirit of Jesus.

4.) The intensity, freedom, and radical expression of Spirit-led giving will cause the world to sit up and take notice. They will know that we are Christians by our love. Thus the Spirit will lead us to a radical lifestyle that will be readily apparent to the worldlings around us who have no hope beyond this life.

5.) The Spirit will never lead us to fulfill the desires of the flesh, i.e., the selfish nature, but will lead us to do what is the heart and intention of God for us, for others, and for His Kingdom (Gal. 5:13f.). The Spirit knows the thoughts of God (I Cor. 2:10,11) and operates according to His will (Rom. 8:26,27; Jn. 16:13,14).

The Levitical Principle in the New Testament

Both Jesus' teaching and example support the OT vision that spiritual leadership ought to be free from temporal concerns and be wholly dedicated to Kingdom business. Did not He Himself leave His carpenter shop to begin His public ministry? Was that not significant aspect of His call to His disciples? Were they not expected to leave their employment to follow Him (Mt.4:18-20; 9:9)? In fact, we read in Lk. 5:1-11 that Peter, James, and John had returned to their former employment. The import of the miraculous catch of fish was the place it played in challenging them to leave their nets behind and trust God to provide for them. This is evident by Jesus' words and their reaction in vss. 10,11.

You see, it was Jesus' expectation that the laborer was worth His wages (Lk. 10:7). God put it on the hearts of individuals who valued Jesus' ministry to contribute to His support from their own private means (Lk. 8:1-3). Furthermore, when He sent out the twelve (Mt. 10:5-15), and later the seventy (Lk. 10:1-16), He specifically instructed them to not take any money with them, but to expect people to receive them and meet their needs. Those people who would take them in were called "worthy" people (Mt. 10:11-13) or "son[s] of peace" (Lk. 10:6). A blessing was given to such a house. To those who would not receive them or their message, however, the blessing would be removed and a warning would be given in its place.

From this background, we can understand Paul's words that affirm the support of full-time ministers of the Word. He reminds the Corinthians that it was the Lord's direction that those who proclaim the gospel should be supported so that they could get their living from the gospel (I Cor. 9:14). The idea did not originate with him, or any of the other apostles. It was a command from the Lord. It was a principle that was clearly understood, however, and was practiced by all the apostles and the brothers of Jesus. If there was any question as to what that meant, he refers to this as a "right to refrain from working" at other employment. He likens it to being a soldier. An army will not be very effective if they cannot dedicate themselves fully to the business of fighting. If they must work full days to survive, and then only train on a part-time basis, how well trained will they be? But, more importantly, if they are at war, and their countrymen will not provide supplies so that they can fight, how long will they last on the front lines? How long will they be motivated to fight if they get no food, clothes, or other support? Or again, who would work a vineyard day in and day out never expecting any reward for their effort? What vegetarian would spend his time raising a flock of sheep, if he gets no reward for his labor? Paul says that there ought to be an expectation or hope that those who invest in people spiritually would receive material support (I Cor. 9:9-11). Six times in this chapter Paul uses the Greek word *exousia*, meaning "right" or "authority", to refer to the support of those who labor in the gospel (vss. 4,5,6,12,18). This means that to be supported for ministry is more than a privilege, it is a "right" which God Himself has given such people. They have authority from God to expect to be supported by those they minister to. Furthermore, in Rom.15:27, Paul states the general principle that those who receive spiritual blessings from someone are obligated to share with them what they might need materially. Finally, in his admonition to the Galatians, Paul reminds them of their obligation to share all good things with those who teach them. He warns them that God will not be mocked. The way in which they value spiritual things will return to them. If they spurn the things of the Spirit by their selfish covetousness, a corresponding rottenness will come into their lives.

If, on the other hand, they are generous, and invest in spiritual things (The focus being sharing all good things with their teachers!), then God's blessing of life and reward will return to them.

A Levitical Link?

Is there a direct carryover of the Levitical system from the Old Testament? Clearly not. Nor am I advocating that we reestablish a legalistic interpretation of the tithe. What I am concerned with is that I believe we have not clearly and sufficiently understood God's OT model of stewardship to accurately perceive what it is that He truly values and what His expectations are. I think that we have been too quick to "throw out" the Old Testament plan as irrelevant. We have not appreciated the careful design of that system to see what values are engendered by it, and what practical wisdom is built into it. We have thrown out a system of stewardship which has been carefully, systematically, even laboriously laid out for us in the record of God's dealing with His people. We have unthinkingly rejected the counsel of God concerning what He has considered important to do with the resources offered to Him (Num. 18:24). Are we really going to tell Him, "I've got a better idea!"?

The New Testament lays out some very clear parameters for interpreting the Old Testament revelation and applying it to ourselves. Jesus Himself clearly stated that He did not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets. He came to fulfill them. He said that "not the smallest letter or stroke" from the Law will pass away without fulfillment. He said that we could expect this to be true as long as the heaven and earth remain. Furthermore, anyone who would set aside or annul any of these OT commands, and so teaches others, will be called least in the Kingdom of Heaven. On the other hand, those who keep and teach them will be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven (Mt. 5:17-20). This should serve as a warning to us not to be too hasty in regards to tossing out as irrelevant even the old covenant teaching. From the learned apostle Paul we have several additional admonitions regarding the Old Testament revelation. In Rom. 15:4, he writes, "for whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction". This is reinforced by I Cor. 10:6, where we are told that the Old Testament accounts provide real life examples which are "written for our instruction". Again, in II Tim. 3:16,17, Paul informs us that all scripture, which for most NT believers was primarily exposure to the Old Testament writings, remains profitable to instruct us, to reprove us when we have wandered from God's plan, to point out the true way once again, and to train us in righteous living so that we might be able and ready to do every good work. Thus, we are admonished to rely on the Old Testament writings for instruction and guidance regarding God's strategy. A dramatic shift from OT teaching had better be well warranted, carefully thought out, and established solidly upon the work of Jesus Christ. Someone has said that nothing of the old covenant was to be just thrown out. It was either fulfilled by Jesus' life, superceded by His sacrificial death and powerful resurrection, or will be expressed pragmatically in the believer's life through the leading of the Holy Spirit. Some things remain to be fulfilled, and are restated prophetically in the New Testament revelation. Nothing, however, is simply arbitrarily set aside.

Well, what about this entire Levitical system? How are we to make sense of it for this present time? There are two passages in the New Testament that offer some significant insight into this entire question. The first is found in Hebrews 7, regarding the change in priesthood from the family of Levi to Christ Jesus, who was physically a descendant of the tribe of Judah. Notice that the writer's argument is not that Jesus' work simply set aside or abolished the priesthood of Aaron. He carefully establishes Biblical precedents to show that Scripture revealed that there was a priesthood that was greater, more ancient, and of a higher authority which was not dependent upon physical lineage from Aaron as a qualifying factor. This was made apparent by the interaction of Abraham with Melchizedek, king of Salem and priest of God Most High, in Genesis 14. In addition, there were many indications of the imperfections and incompleteness of the Levitical priesthood, and the sacrificial system itself. Most significantly, the scriptures, in Psa. 110:4, indicated that God intended to establish

a higher, permanent priesthood, after the Melchizedek pattern. The writer goes on to argue that Jesus is the fulfillment of these OT prophetic snapshots. His higher priesthood and completed work have completely fulfilled in actuality the largely symbolic and repetitive work of the sacrificial system and of the old Aaronic priesthood. Even here, however, note that the promises to Aaron and his sons that they would be priests forever (e.g., Ex. 29:9) are not just cut off, but remain open within the confines of Jesus' priesthood. In fact, in the Kingdom of God, all believers are to be priests (I Pet. 2:4-10; Rev. 5:10).

The critical verse in Hebrews 7 that relates to the question of the Levites is verse 12, "for when the priesthood is changed, of necessity there takes place a change of law also." This statement clearly implies two things. First, we are totally set free from the old system under the Aaronic priesthood. Thus, as mentioned above, we are not advocating something based upon a legalistic tie-in to the OT law. Secondly, however, we ought to pay heed to discover what is the new "law", or the procedures which are advocated under the new priest, Jesus.

As we have examined the record, we saw Jesus calling out His twelve men, telling them to leave their secular callings, modeling for them a faith ministry model, and sending them out under this model with the instruction that they should expect to be provided for because the laborer is worth His wages (Lk. 10:7). As mentioned above, the apostle Paul built upon this foundation in I Cor. 9, and it is in this context that we find the other key passage that I believe indicates the relationship of the OT Levitical system to the NT model. Of eight word pictures that Paul uses to illustrate his argument for supporting those who preach the gospel, the last two (vs. 13) are about those who perform sacred (temple) service (i.e. the Levites) and those who attend to the altar (i.e. the priesthood). Paul then makes a side-by-side comparison with those who preach the gospel. Literally verse 14 says, "Thus/in the same way, also the Lord commanded/instructed to the ones proclaiming the gospel out from the gospel to live." There can be no mistaking Paul's intention. He is purposely directing our attention to the OT model of support for those set aside for full-time ministry. This provides a precedent and example for what is now to be available to the ones who preach the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Returning to the argument in Hebrews, under this new Melchizedek-style priest, Jesus, the high priesthood has been bestowed upon One who is not from the family of Aaron, nor from the tribe of Levi, at all (Heb. 7:14). The priesthood came to him not because He sought it for Himself, but because God called Him (Heb. 5:1-6). In the same way, under this new priesthood of Jesus there is what I consider to be a "Levitical calling" that is also no longer limited to those physically descended from Levi. These also, like their high priest and forerunner (Heb. 6:20), are identified not by physical pedigree, but by virtue of a calling of God on their lives. They, like their OT prototypes, are to be ones who are fully dedicated to serve the new temple of God, the Body of Christ (cf. Eph. 2:19-22) without the hindrance of secular employment.

Mobilizing Ministers

The real issue here, as in every other area of life, is discipleship. Are we willing to follow Jesus with a whole heart? Are we willing to do things God's way? Do we have a Kingdom focus, or is our vision of Christianity just a segmented part of our lives? Are we citizens of this world who have a "purchase option" on a heavenly dwelling, or are we really citizens of a heavenly city who are just passing through this world as "aliens and strangers" (I Pet. 2:11; Heb. 11:8-16)? What are we here for? Did not Jesus give us one major task to accomplish ...to make disciples? Are we centering our hearts with single purpose to finish that task? Are we putting our shoulders to the wheel, our resources to back up our commitment? Are we being wise and shrewd in the use of our time, strength, and resources, or are we being foolish, "unthinking", and "sense-less"? Are we listening to the instructions of the King through modern day prophetic voices that call us back to His plan and to personal responsibility?

I believe that we as a church have lost sight of God's way of doing things. We have bought into a crusty religious system that helps to lull us into a self-complacency of thinking we have done our duty, while it at the same time strangles and oppresses the vitality of upcoming spiritual leaders. Eventually the entire church is affected because there are so few shepherds to watch over the sheep. The sheep are hungry because there is no food. No one cares for the downtrodden and sickly. Beasts of prey ravage the flock because they are vulnerable and unprotected. This present system does not work. God's plan produces a radical fighting force that is lean, disciplined, and ready for action. We can see its vitality in the pages of the NT and in early church history. The Church of Jesus Christ turned the world upside down! By contrast, our current human system is like a weighted down bureaucracy that stifles action and strangles growth. Church members are largely spectators, not participants.

What is God's plan? We are all to be participants! All are to be trained, fitted, and mobilized into ministry. All of us are to be directly responsible to God for our spiritual growth and activity. Most of us are to be tentmakers, supporting ourselves by our employment in normal jobs within secular society. Tentmakers, yes, but not tentmakers only. We are to be tentmaking *ministers*. Our jobs are to provide us not only with the necessities of life, but they also will provide the setting for our own spiritual ministry. We need to set ourselves in that ministry capacity and be actively moving to fulfill our responsibilities as Christ's ambassadors in the world of our everyday affairs. On the other hand, God *has* ordained that some of us be set aside from regular employment in order to be free to serve Him in a different way, ...one which requires more time in study, prayer, or meditation, one which may require the flexibility of a different schedule than would be possible otherwise, or may require a greater freedom to travel. It is up to all of us to see that the opportunity for this kind of service continues to exist for such people. God wants them to be freed up to fulfill their calling. How many sense the call, but "go back to their fields" because there is no support for them? It is time we face up to our own responsibility to carry out God's plan. On the one hand, we are all to be ministers, all participants in the work. On the other hand, we are all to be team players, partners with those who need our help in order to fulfill their work assignments in the Body of Christ.

I believe that the Church of Jesus Christ has widely departed from the radical focus of the Kingdom. We are not effectively mobilizing our people. We are not effectively freeing up the shepherds and leaders to be working among the sheep. God is calling us to repent of our ways, to turn from our plans for building our own little independent domains, and to return to Him for renewal and reinvigoration. He is calling us to rethink and reevaluate how we support ministry. The Kingdom of God is radical. Those who would align themselves with the King must be willing to walk as He walks, to value what He values, to think as He thinks.

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