LEAVE OR STAY?

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Category: John Fifteen

Article # one: **Intro**

Leave or stay?

Leave the evangelical church system (be it denominational or inter- or non-), or stay and make the best of it.

Most likely you have never read a book dealing with this pointed question. (Perhaps such a book has yet to be invented.) Yet surely this issue, cautiously hidden in the hearts of many, should be confronted in print. Surely *every* issue must be brought under Bible light. And surely those who consider such a move as extreme should, in fairness, examine the rationale of those who do not.

Coming across a christian who does not attend a 'church' is becoming less rare, and perhaps will soon be commonplace. Every year hundreds of churches in North America are shutting down due to lack of attendance, and many of those no longer attending church-as-we-know-it are going deeper in the Lord, gathering in homes, having renounced traditional trappings.

The arguments for and against leaving and for and against staying are several, and weighing the matter just might bring to mind a play you have seen years ago:

T e v y e : *On the other hand.....* (Fiddler on the Roof)

Tevye the milkman was forced to arbitrate between Tevye the traditionalist and Tevye the unconventional father of three unconventional daughters. Just as he was about to come to a firm conclusion, a contrary but reasonable thought would upset his reasoning, and back and forth arguments flew across his distressed intellect. How would much practiced Tevye deal with *this* thorny issue? Hmmm.....

T r a d i t i o n a l T e v y e : *For many, leaving the church system is a first step to abandoning the faith altogether!..... On the other hand.....*

U n c o n v e n t i o n a l T e v y e : *There are some, admittedly few, who have never regularly attended a gospel church, or any church, and their attachment to Christ is far healthier than most. Community unbelief stuffing most evangelical church buildings is contagious and highly detrimental..... On the other hand.....*

T r a d i t i o n a l T e v y e : *We can take comfort there is enough faith and truth in evangelicalism to*

keep at least most on the straight and narrow and thus assure heaven. Most active apostles, prophets, evangelists, teachers and pastors as well as those with other gifts operate (admittedly only somewhat) within evangelicalism, and of course only those in attendance can benefit..... On the other hand.....

U n c o n v e n t i o n a l T e v y e : *Evangelicalism has little resemblance to New Testament writings. It is difficult to be an attendee and not compromise the truths of the Bible..... On the other hand.....*

T r a d i t i o n a l T e v y e : *It is* possible *to be an attendee and not compromise the truths of the Bible. The local church certainly helps keep one from losing faith altogether..... On the other hand.....*

U n c o n v e n t i o n a l T e v y e : *The local church is a hindrance to the one seeking a deeper life in Christ. Lack of fruit evident in most churches indicates a feeble relationship with Jesus..... On the other hand.....*

T r a d i t i o n a l T e v y e : *The local church* does have *some good fruit and there is no assurance leaving will bring more fruit..... On the other hand.....*

U n c o n v e n t i o n a l T e v y e : *Jesus reprimanded those choosing tradition over His words. Much, perhaps most, of evangelicalism is based on tradition..... On the other hand.....*

T r a d i t i o n a l T e v y e : *Sometimes Jesus shows up in the services..... On the other hand.....*

U n c o n v e n t i o n a l T e v y e : *Many eyes are being opened, even those who have been in church leadership, to the pitfalls of being attached to the evangelical system..... On the other hand.....*

T r a d i t i o n a l T e v y e : *Most recognized and respected names within evangelicalism strongly advocate staying..... On the other hand.....*

Well that was fun. We could go on and on. Perhaps it's suffice to say there are drawbacks and advantages, possibilities and dangers, to both leaving and staying. It *is* an issue of increasing relevance. It *is* a subject warranting study. It *is* the focus of this series of articles.

C h a l l e n g e : *Where you interact will help determine the person you will become. Do you remember what has been said in other articles about being submissive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit? Jesus has a personal path for your personal christianity. You will not find it without sensitivity to the Holy Spirit's guidance.*

P r a y e r : *Father, in His name, the precious name of Your Son and our Elder Brother, give us understanding on this most crucial issue,* Leave or Stay?. *May Your hand be upon this entire series. May only Your words come forth. Thank You, Father.* (And hopefully the reader says, "Amen!")

Article # two: **Words About Words**

Assuming you desire to accomplish the will of God in your life (your high calling), you would be wise to ask some serious questions:

Whose words reign in my heart?
Whom am I obeying?
Who is my lord?

If you have resemblance to Joe or Jill Average Evangelical your answers would be:
The words of Christ do not reign supreme in my heart.
I am obeying someone other than Christ.
Therefore someone other than Christ is my lord.

Most certainly the words of Jesus are in the heart of every believer. Somewhere. Maybe tucked in a corner or hidden behind words of custom and tradition. But the words of Jesus Christ simply do not reign (rule, have preeminence) in the hearts and minds of most.

Everyone is obeying someone (church, self, spouse, traditional decrees). Sadly, most are not walking in day-to-day submission to the "Spirit of Christ." The Holy Spirit is relationally distant because Christ is relationally distant. Once the Lord was more than a symbolic lord. Everyone, at one time, was on fire. Passionate. Consumed. The Holy Spirit burned within. But the fire has cooled and enthusiasm has shifted to another. That another has captured their obedience.

We must understand that which is so easy to understand: If we are not obeying Christ, Christ is simply not lord. Savior, yes. High Priest, yes. Lord, no.

Most likely the Galatians (who had turned from Christ to tradition and traditionalists) would be surprised and dismayed if told:
The words of Christ do not reign supreme in your hearts.
You are obeying someone other than Christ.
Therefore someone other than Christ is your lord.

The obvious escapes us when we don't want it, such the power of the deceitful heart. The words of another reign.... yet we deny the words of another reign. We follow man yet assume Christ to be our shepherd. We can even *verbalize* man as our shepherd ("Good morning, *Pastor* Whoever"), and yet suppose Christ to be our shepherd (pastor). Symbolically Jesus is lord, but a symbolic lord isn't.

J E S U S : *If you love Me, keep My commandments..... He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me.* (John 14:15,21)

Simple, simple, simple. Obedience reveals our love. We know whom we love by whom we obey. A teen disobeying her parents does not love her parents, not supremely, not in the sense Jesus was talking about. Someone else has captivated that teen's loyalty. She has become anchored to another. To be anchored to Christ we must be anchored to His words.

Christ's commands are in the Bible, not just the words in red but also in black. Those hundreds of thousands of words packaged between two black covers are God's gift to you. Allegiance to those words, as you understand them, is allegiance to Jesus Christ. The degree of allegiance is the degree

of love. Exactly.

And so you examine your allegiance. You check it out. You want to know where your allegiance is placed. If it is set on Jesus, you are living your life in agreement with the Bible as you understand its words. If you are not, your love is set upon someone or something else. Simple, simple, simple.

J E S U S : *Whoever hears these sayings of Mine and does them, I will liken him to a wise man….. everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man.* (Mat. 7:24,26)

Simple, simple, simple.

This series of articles, *Leave or Stay?*, is of little value to the one with little regard for the Bible. So hopefully this article, *Words About Words* (a discussion about assorted words in your life), will boost the respect you have for the word of God.

L a r r y J o n e s : *To build on the rock* (the sayings of Christ), *one must determine two things….. first, a total acceptance of the Word, and second, a complete rejection of everything that is not the Word. Such a decision would be the beginning of a closer walk with the Lord Jesus….. He will no longer be reading a book; he will be reading God's Word --- infallible, creative, living, authentic, prosperous, awesome, praiseworthy, complete, changeless, sharp, inspirational, sure, lively, warm, protective, sincere, powerful, faithful, knowledgeable, just, holy, satisfying, joyous, life-giving, secure, effective, wise, medicinal, pure, fruitful, prophetic, indestructible and divine.* (A Catholic No More)

C h a l l e n g e : *Be certain to build on God's word. Building your life on God's word will certainly lead into various complications and difficulties, but it will also bring you into adventures and good fruit.*

P r a y e r : *Help us, Jesus, to build upon the rock of Your sayings, to choose wisdom over foolishness, good fruit over bad. In Your name, Lord. And also, please anoint this article.* (And hopefully the reader says, "Amen!")

Article # three: **Words About Words (Part 2)**

This series of articles inspects the wisdom/folly of departing from the evangelical system (the system, not the people in the system).

Basing decisions on anything other than the Bible is disobedience to the One we call "Lord, Lord." Jesus defines wisdom and folly in Matthew chapter seven: Wisdom is building one's life on His words; folly is building one's life on the words of another. The words of Christ, as stated previously, are more than the red ones; they are the entire Bible.

What does the Bible mean to Joe and Jill Average Evangelical? In spite of Christ's definition of wisdom/foolishness, not much. As Joe and Jill Average retain a symbolic Christ, so do they hold to a symbolic authority…. the Bible.

Rare is the christian who embraces the Bible as sole authority. And rare is the christian who *realizes* he or she does not embrace the Bible as sole authority. Most don't, but assume they do. Or they obey another word and somehow conclude it is God they serve. Submitting to christian 'leadership' is equated to submitting to God. And more childish yet, it's okay to obey the words of another provided that person is nice.

Enough of that, let's talk about the Bible. How do we know this book is not just another book, though claimed to be extraordinary, even divine? Let's look at it:

Jesus responds to satan's temptations in the wilderness, "It is written, you shall worship the Lord your God and Him only you shall serve," a quote from Deuteronomy. There is much evidence the Deuteronomy of Christ's day is the same as our Deuteronomy (such as the Dead Sea Scrolls). Can you see Christ's quote is Christ's authentication of the book of Deuteronomy? Notice satan did not challenge Jesus. ("Come on now, we both know Deuteronomy is a fabrication!")

When satan quoted from Psalm 91 ("He shall give His angels charge concerning you") Jesus accepted his words as legitimate (though misapplied) because they were. This validates the Psalms. Now let's carry this further....

Since Jesus corroborates Deuteronomy and the Psalms, these books can be used to validate other books. (And these in turn can be used to validate others.)

L a r r y J o n e s : *Jesus is fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. He appeals to them as evidence that He is who He claims to be. That appeal must be considered His endorsement.* (A Catholic No More)

Jesus quotes from Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, and others.

L a r r y J o n e s : *A friend…. scoffed at my suggestion that the Bible is to be taken literally. "You don't really think that Jonah was swallowed by a whale do you?" I replied that Jesus Himself made reference to the three days that Jonah spent inside the belly "of a great fish." "He did?" my friend replied. He had no more to say…. he knew Jesus would never authenticate a fabrication.* (A Catholic No More)

If one agrees New Testament writings are inspired, all reference by *New* writers to the *Old* must be considered verifications. There are many such references. But are *New* writings really inspired of God? Let's look at it:

New Testament writings are fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. It had been prophesied Jesus would be born of a virgin…. in Bethlehem…. a descendant of Isaac…. and David. He would be raised in Egypt…. and Nazareth…. proclaimed by John the Baptist. He would open blind eyes…. heal the deaf and the mute…. speak in parables. *Old* writings foretold Jesus would be betrayed by a friend…. for thirty pieces of silver. He would be spit upon…. and ridiculed. They would pull His beard. The soldiers, as was prophesied, cast lots for his clothing…. and gave Jesus vinegar to drink. His hands and feet were to be pierced. He was to be buried with the wealthy…. and resurrected. And then He was to ascend to heaven from where He came to reign as our High Priest.

All these fulfilled prophecies, recorded over many centuries, validate New Testament writings to all but the most unreasonable. The Old confirms the New and the New confirms the Old.

L a r r y J o n e s : *An exhaustive research would reveal literally thousands of evidences interweaving the Old Testament, each one doing its part to substantiate its trueness*. (A Catholic No More)

L a r r y J o n e s : *The very survival of New Testament writings is a further indication of its supernatural quality. What chance did they have? Why should the world listen to Jews? They seemed to be such a peculiar people. Logic cannot explain why the words of a Nazarene miracle worker whose life ended in shame two thousand years ago should have ever survived.* (A Catholic No More)

There are very good books detailing decades of exhaustive research authenticating the Bible and prove it to be in a caste of its own (such as, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict,* Josh McDowell). Perusing such material will dispel even stubborn doubts about the supernatural quality of the book we consider God's word to us. And there is greater evidence....

People, even many unsaved, *just know* the Bible is true. We know because the Spirit of God *bears witness* to its integrity (just like He bears witness to all that is true). That seems to be the only explanation why the Bible continually outsells all other books, why it is the most loved text, why many risk their lives by hiding it from authorities.

This series, *Leave or Stay?* is based primarily on the Bible. But that is only meaningful to those holding the Bible close to heart.

C h a l l e n g e : *In your heart are words that belong and words that don't. The Lord is not lord of your heart, you are. All words occupy by your acceptance. Time to do inventory? Time to sort? Time to do serious cleansing?*

P r a y e r : *Help us clean house, Lord! Pour Your Spirit upon our lives in greater measure. And anoint this message according to its truth and relevance. In Jesus' name.* (And hopefully the reader says, "Amen!")

Article # four: **Truth**

Truth is good. But truth can hurt. Truth sets free. But truth can bring trouble. Truth enriches. And truth costs.

Truth camouflaged is not truth. Nor truth distorted. Less than truth isn't truth. It just isn't. Truth avoided brings penalties. And truth embraced brings penalties. To run from truth is self-defeating. To embrace truth is to embrace adventures, not all pleasant.

Truth is for all, not some. Truth should be presented, not imposed. Truth is not only to be heard, but spoken. Truth is a weapon and a healing balm.

Everyone contains the amount of truth desired, not more, not less. To love God is to love truth. Truth rejected is Christ rejected. To abide, fully, in Christ one must abide, fully, in truth (that is, be

accepting of truth as it comes).

Most do not love God supremely and most do not love truth supremely. If truth doesn't reign, neither does Jesus. Idols displacing truth are idols displacing *the* Truth, and fathers sorrow in abundance.

Should I leave or stay? The very question is gutsy hopefully inspired by a love for truth. To refuse to determine a conclusion or even discuss the question, to hide in denial, even somewhat, is less than wise and less than courageous and less than loyalty to the Lord Jesus. Truth about evangelicalism cannot be ignored because it may hurt. Everything should be brought under Scripture's light. That's how we prove the faithfulness to Jesus we claim to have.

L a r r y J o n e s : *An assayer from the city came to our door and asked my wife if he could come in and check the addition to our house we had just built, and she obliged. After entering he gently chastised my wife, saying she should have asked for identification before allowing him entrance. How did she know he really was the authorized person he claimed to be? It was very good advise, and my wife acknowledged that it certainly is her responsibility to check for authorization. Likewise it is the Christian's responsibility to check for authorization regarding spiritual matters.* (The Way It Is)

Evangelicalism should be fully measured, inspected and weighed, its fruit, good and bad, scrutinized. Wisdom calls for daring appraisal of its effect on those under its influence. Truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. No denial, no exaggeration, no partial truth. Just truth - the good, the bad, and the ugly. This will require much courage from those leaning on, trusting in, and adhering to the evangelical way.

Having said all that, let's peer into evangelicalism:

The truth about the evangelical system will pain most in the evangelical system. Yet the obvious, or what should be obvious, must be said, even declared: *The simple truth is, evangelicalism is not true. It just isn't.*

Yes, it contains some truth, and within evangelicalism are honest people, and often truth is preached from its pulpits. But evangelicalism as we know it, as one would define it, is itself very far from truth. We know that because it is far from New Testament writings, its rudiments cannot be found in its pages. Simply said, if the New Testament is true, evangelicalism isn't.

Evangelicalism is thought by some to be a healthy *progression* of the New Testament. However such an assertion is acknowledgment that evangelicalism is *not* New Testament. (A progression from Scripture is not Scripture.)

We can understand complex evangelicalism by understanding the evangelical.

The evangelical contains a degree of truth, speaks some truth and has "the Spirit of truth" within. But he or she is not truth. She cannot be leaned on. He cannot be trusted for guidance. Put many evangelicals together, let them hire a professional evangelical to give leadership, purchase a

building and embellish it with a cross, appoint elders and deacons, create a sunday school program, hand out bulletins and mark *Pastor's Parking* on the stall closest to the door, and evangelicalism will be no more true than any singular evangelical. Contain more truth, possibly. But it is no more true. The local church and the denomination it represents is no more true than a home Bible-study/prayer-group, though much more complex.

A home group can be healthy. People gather to share their understanding of the Bible, encourage one another, point each other to (more of) Jesus. Or it could evolve into something nasty.

A gifted leader snatches the confidence of the group. Becomes the chief spokesperson. Organizes. Calls others to account. Usurps the Holy Spirit. Insists on commitment. This able director becomes a recognized official, a mediator of sorts between God and man, wrestling a degree of dependence from Jesus.

Evangelicalism must have begun in the home as a simple gathering of saints not long after Jesus returned to His Father. It was good at first, but soon evolved into what we have today and what it has been for centuries…. a highly structured and controlling organization under the lordship of man. When, at what specific moment in church history, did evangelicalism become true? If one cannot visualize such a moment perhaps it is a safe assumption there never was such a moment, and evangelicalism is no more true today than at its ancestral beginnings. And millions considering it to be true doesn't make it true.

L a r r y J o n e s : *If this spiritual veil could be lifted, if one could somehow see with spiritual eyesight into the world of the ministerial, would we see God? Would He be sitting in a recliner, perhaps at denominational headquarters, smiling a benevolent smile, giving directives, ruling the evangelical assemblies, blessing the multitudes on the other side of the veil through evangelical clergy?* (The Way It Is)

Since God never created evangelicalism, and since it is not true, it cannot be considered holy though it rules the lives of millions. Never will God endorse it. Permit it, yes. Tolerate it, yes. Endorse it, never. The evangelical is holy, made holy by a creative act of God at the moment of spiritual birth, and fully endorsed. But evangelicalism isn't holy and isn't endorsed and must never be considered to be so.

L a r r y J o n e s : *Suppose you had a servant, and you told that servant to deliver instructions to the bank manager to disperse certain funds in a certain manner. You can see that you are the authority, not the servant. You can see that the servant has no authority to add, alternate or remove any of your directives. Send this servant to university, give him a degree, dress him in a suit, and still he will not have the authority to change one word of your instructions. Now suppose you had a thousand servants, would they collectively have the authority to make changes? You can see they would not.* (The Way It Is)

Evangelicalism is sand and the house built upon it shall not stand. (Let it be understood, *attending* an evangelical church is not necessarily building upon evangelicalism, even though most who do, it

seems, do.) It is a false vine unable to nourish the millions of attached branches. (Attached branches, most thankfully, are also attached to the true vine, the Lord Jesus. It is *this* connection that is responsible for what fruit there is.)

In this series discrepancies between evangelicalism and the Bible will be revealed. But is that in itself reason to depart from the system? Your friends are not perfect, far from it (and neither are theirs), but should you forsake your friends? Well.... sometimes.

There should be a benefit to a friendship, if not mutual at least one party should be advantaged. Friendships take time and energy, and they should be fruit-bearing. Earthly time is precious because there is so little of it, and spending time on unproductive relationships is wasteful.

Some friendships are less than useless; they are harmful. One wants to control the other, to steer the other's life. Such friendship should be abandoned but often are not. Controllers know how to control inconspicuously, to capture the other's loyalty with compliments and smiles and approval and coercion. In christianity a controller replaces the lordship of Christ with himself.

If a friendship is drawing one relationally closer to Jesus Christ it should be preserved and enhanced. If a friendship is drawing one relationally *away from* Jesus Christ it should be abandoned. Now. Similarly, if the local church is drawing one relationally closer to Jesus one might be wise to stay. If one is being controlled, drawn from dependence on Christ alone, one should leave. Now.

Faithfulness, a fruit of the Holy Spirit, can be misplaced. Jesus does not smile upon the one faithful to friends or to church if that faithfulness devalues one's relationship with Him.

C h a l l e n g e : *The question is not,* Should I leave or stay? *The question is,* Does Jesus want me to leave or stay?

P r a y e r : *Guide us by Your Holy Spirit, Father, in this most crucial matter. And anoint these words in accordance to their wisdom. In Jesus' precious and matchless name.* (And hopefully the reader says, "Amen!")

Article # five: **Evangelicalism Examined**

A quote from the previous article (Truth): "*The simple truth is, evangelicalism is not true. It just isn't.*" This article will hopefully verify that statement.

Logic tells us the question of leaving or not leaving the evangelical system cannot be intelligently considered without evaluating the evangelical system. Is it really true that it isn't true? Only Scripture has the answer.

It is the duty of evangelicals to place the complexities of evangelicalism under the light of the Word. Unfortunately, average evangelical is so converted to evangelicalism he or she may feel pangs of disloyalty to question a system considered sacred.

L a r r y J o n e s : *We assume the way something is done, is done because it is the right thing to do. Were it not right we wouldn't be doing it that way. We do not question, we do not check it out with (Scripture). We sin the sin of presumption.* (The Way It Is)

There are books and websites dealing adequately with this issue. Yet only a true student of the Word will be impacted by truths presented.

L a r r y J o n e s : *Not every Christian is a student of the Word, though each should be. I define a student of the Word as:* a serious inquisitor into the ways of God by the study of the Bible for the purpose of embracing those ways into his or her life in a determined effort to obey the Lord Jesus Christ. *The student of the Word does not study that he might know, but that he might do. He not only says, "Your word have I hid in my heart," but he says, "Your word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against you." He is not on a head trip. He is not a hearer only.* (Financing the Great Commission)

Now let's get into it. Where do we begin? Let's start at the top of the system, denominational headquarters. This might consist of a superintendent, an assistant super, and a board of elders selected from several cities in the area they govern. (Not all evangelical churches are affiliated with a denomination, but most are attached to some type of governing system.)

It should be most significant (to the student of the Word) that the super cannot be found in the Bible. He simply isn't there. Paul was not a super, nor John or Peter or James or Timothy; their role in their christianity is far from the superintendent's function in our christianity.

Where did our superintendent come from? When we look into the world system we find superintendents of schools, clubs, charitable organizations, etc. *The office of superintendent comes from the world system.*

Also, it is most significant the district board of elders is not to be found in New Testament pages. Elders, yes. Board of elders, no. The word *board* is not a Bible word except in reference to lumber. A long time ago someone decided since *elders* are in the Bible it would be okay to create a *board* of elders. The fact there is no biblical precedent whereby an elder exercised authority over believers must have been an insignificant detail.

Also, the word *denomination* is absent from God's words to us. Way back, a group assumed they had authority to create something non-biblical. They were wrong. And a lengthy history does not make wrong less wrong. History's church mistakenly created denominations, and today's church mistakenly sustains them.

Now let's focus on the local church - the pastor, the board of elders (or board of whatever), and the congregation.

First, the pastor. Three dissimilarities place the pastor far above the rest: He is licensed, he is titled, and he is salaried. Since none of the three have biblical precedent they should impress no one. A license, a title and a salary add nothing to a man's spirituality - they often have a negative effect,

puffing up and making it difficult to consider himself the least of the brethren.

Evangelicals might dare to ask: “How significant is the actuality Jesus was not licensed or salaried?" Or, “How relevant is the fact the twelve were not licensed, titled or salaried?” Perhaps it’s fair to say the degree of relevance to these questions equals the degree of respect for the Word.

L a r r y J o n e s : *If “The Lord is my shepherd” (my pastor) how can I call a man my shepherd? How could the church have degenerated to the place where one brother calls another his pastor? Where a wife calls another man her pastor?* (The Way It Is)

It is a huge mistake to consider the pastor the man most loyal to God. It was his proven faithfulness to the men he illicitly bows to that procured him his position. Actually, the congregation is a fair assessment of his spirituality; they are shaped by him more than any other. “Like priest, like people.”

F r a n k A. V i o l a : *The commonly accepted notion of “sola pastora” (single pastor) is at odds with the NT notion of plural, functional elders. The NT knows nothing of a person who stands at the helm of a local assembly, directs its affairs, preaches to it every Sunday, conducts its baptisms, and officiates its Eucharistic services.* (Who Is Your Covering?)

Second, the elders. In the New Testament elders gave spiritual oversight to those wanting it. They did not exert authority because they didn’t possess authority. (Officialdom came years later, and that led to the miserable complexities governing Mr. and Mrs. Evangelical.)

Elders are to be more than *yes* men, supporting the pastor as he governs the church. They are to teach, admonish, encourage, always pointing to the one shepherd, Jesus Christ, not in an official capacity, but simply doing what mature and selfless christians are inclined to do, and what the apostle Peter encouraged them to do in his letters. An elder under a pastor is not under Christ. *It is an issue of lordship.*

If evangelicals were to remove "official” from their mindset, they would have the mind of the earliest church. The notion of “official” interferes with the (quite official) lordship of Christ as High Priest and "head of the church."

And now the congregation. Congregations under Paul’s influence would be *amazed* at our evangelical system, especially after learning evangelicals somehow assume there is similarity. Many think it sinful to not “go to church,” yet no early church person attended church as we know it.

F r a n k A. V i o l a : *Throughout the entire Corinthian correspondence, Paul never chastises the elders, nor commends obedience to them. In fact, he doesn’t even mention them! Instead, Paul appeals solely to the saints and reminds them of their responsibility to deal with the church’s own self-inflicted wounds. Paul charges and implored “the brethren” over thirty times in his first epistle to Corinth, and he writes as if no officers exist.* (Who Is Your Covering?)

F r a n k A. V i o l a : *Ministerial responsibility is never to be closeted among a few. That is why the word*

adelphoi, *translated "brethren", appears 346 times in the NT and 134 times in Paul's epistles alone. In most places, this word is Paul's shorthand way of referring to all the believers in the church, both men and women…. by contrast, "elders", "overseers", and "pastors" only appear in Paul's' letters five times, four times, and once respectively!* (Who Is Your Covering?)

F r a n k A. V i o l a : *The stress of the NT, then, is upon corporate responsibility. It is the believing community that is called to organize itself (1Cor. 11:33-34; 14:39-40; 16:2-3); discipline fallen members (1Cor. 5:3-5; 6:1-6); warn the unruly (1Thess. 5:14); comfort the feeble (1Thess. 5:14); support the weak (1Thess. 5:21); abound in the work of the Lord (1Cor. 15:58); admonish one another (Gal. 5:13); bear one another's burdens (Gal. 6:2); care for one another (1Cor. 12:25); wash one another's feet (John 13:14); love one another (John 13:34-35; 15:12,17, Rom. 13:8; 1Thess. 4:9); be devoted to one another (Rom. 12:10); show kindness and compassion to one another (Eph. 4:32); edify one another (Rom. 12:19, 1Thess. 5:11b); bear with one another (Eph. 4:2; Col. 3:13); exhort one another (Heb. 3:13; 10:25); incite one another to love and good works (Heb. 10:24); encourage one another (1Thess. 5:11a); pray for one another (Jas. 5:16); offer hospitality to one another (1Pet. 4:9); fellowship with one another (1John 1:7); and confess sins to one another (Jas. 5:16)*(Who Is Your Covering?)

The congregation is taught to finance evangelicalism by means of the tithe. The tithe was God's way of supporting the old covenant system, and many years ago someone decided it should be used to finance the evangelical way, this in spite of the fact there is is no New Testament reinforcement for such a practice. Its pages do not report a single precedent of a new covenant person tithing or prodded to tithe.

This article is supposed to verify the statement, "The truth is, evangelicalism is not true. It just isn't," and it seems this has been done adequately. For the reader requiring added convincing, let's look at one more foundational feature of evangelicalism.

Evangelicalism has been divided into two groups, the ministerial (or clergy) and the laity (laymen). The ministerial of the local church might consist of the senior pastor, associate or assistant pastors, and a youth pastor. (Not even elders are included.) This small group assumes spiritual responsibility over the large group of laymen.

Where are the Scriptural references justifying the very existence of the clergy? There is none. And the laity? Ditto. The words clergy, ministerial and laymen are not in the Bible. The New Testament does not infer a dividing of the local assembly or the universal church into two groups. Such must be a revulsion to the "*head of the church*," the Lord Jesus. Ephesians 4:11 seems to be the only premise used to validate the two-tier system. So let's look at it:

P a u l : *And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors*

and teachers. (Eph. 4:11)

The logic seems to be since only some are given these administrative gifts, they must have a distinctive status in the body of Christ. This special and salaried group is ordained to do the work of ministry by implementing their administrative gifts, and this faction assumes the role of leadership of the masses.

There is another perspective on Ephesians 4:11 that suggests every believer has been given one of the five administrative gifts. (Read The Way It Is, chapter 3). But how can everyone have a gift when the verse uses the word some four times? Easy.

Vegetarians are having a party. You are told some brought lettuce, some brought carrots, some radishes, and some peppers and celery. Having been thus informed, can you conclude only a few brought one of the five vegetables? You can see that you cannot. It is possible that not all in the group brought a vegetable, and it is equally possible everyone brought something. You can see the use of the word some four times does not verify one way or the other. To know, you need more information.

A study of verses preceding and following verse eleven of Ephesians gives us the required added information, implying all in the body of Christ, and not a few, are included in verse eleven. Such language as "*each one*" and "*the saints*" and "*we all*" and "*the whole body*" and "*every joint supplies*" and "*every part does its share*" strongly suggests everyone has been given one of the five administrative gifts.

J E S U S : *He who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also.* (John 14:12)

Jesus not only did the miraculous, He preached, taught, and discipled. The criterion for all these good works was simply to believe in Him. You can see this is whosoever. Whosoever believes are to preach, teach, disciple.

So that is evangelicalism (briefly) examined. Hopefully it will lead to a deeper study.

Truth may be painful to most, yet it must always be honored, never concealed, freely declared. Evangelicalism is simply not true, it is not Bible, it is a false authority, and its fruit is not plentiful.

A congregation obeying man's traditions is bowing to man, most certainly not bowing to the Holy Spirit. Unfaithfulness to the Holy Spirit is unfaithfulness to Jesus Christ. And that means Christ is much less than lord. Yes, the real issue is lordship.

C h a l l e n g e : *If the group is not going the right way you cannot go with them, no matter how strong the social bonds. Others are influenced by you. As you are an epistle to the unbeliever, so are you to the church. You are a sign.*

P r a y e r : *Father, sometimes truth hurts. Grace, my Lord, in Jesus' name. And anoint these words to the degree You want them to impact. May Your hand be upon each and every reader.* (And hopefully the reader says, "Amen!")

Article # six: **Guidance Required**

For every evangelical the real issue is not departing from, or remaining in, the evangelical system, but obeying the leading of the Holy Spirit. Submitting to the "Spirit of Jesus" is submitting to Jesus.

It is difficult to overstate the importance of being sensitive to the Spirit in all matters, the more serious the issue, greater the need for sensitivity. Relying on logic and reason alone is admission logic and reason are lord.

Two quite dissimilar worlds are determined by this spiritual fork-in-the-road, to leave or stay. You must get it right. The Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth, was sent to bring you to the knowledge of the will of Him who is pleased to be your King. It must be declared: *Only the Holy Spirit knows.* And: *Jesus will only guide you by His Spirit if you choose to be guided.*

Now let's look at another issue momentarily. When you stand before Jesus at His judgment seat you will want to know you had finished your course, you had fulfilled the high calling of God on your life on earth. Nothing else will matter except hearing those words, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

You will not hear that commendation if you are not empowered by the Holy Spirit. And you will not be empowered if you are not relationally attached to Christ. To be attached to Christ you must be in a state of readiness to obey. "To obey is better than sacrifice." His voice must be heeded over all voices.

There is only one reason for you to remain in the evangelical way - you believe it to be the will of Jesus for you to be there. There is likewise only one reason to depart.

And this, dear reader, is where this writer stumbles. I have written and rewritten this article, and here I am again. I have the notion my keyboard has compromised truth.

I began with this theme: *Some would be wise to stay within the evangelical system, others should have left decades ago.* From there to: *Some should stay for a time, others should leave immediately.* But I still had no peace. It seems I was compromising truths taught by the Holy Spirit years ago. Yes, this thirty-five year old christian should heed the words of the five-year old christian. Bear with me,

brothers and sisters in the Lord, as I give you a sampling of that youngster in Christ:

L a r r y J o n e s : *Traditionalism, like drinking and sexual immorality, is not an overwhelming temptation as long as occasions of temptation are avoided. Making a decision to enshroud oneself in tradition frequently leads to a decision to accept those traditions as master and god.* (A Catholic No More)

L a r r y J o n e s : *A Christian who dabbles in tradition can be compared to a child who happens upon a cave. The child can see that the mouth of the cave is almost as bright as it is outside in the direct sunlight. After he enters the cave his eyes begin to adjust to the dimmer light and soon he can see deeper into the cave. From this new perspective the cave doesn't seem so dark after all because now he is relating to it from where he stands, not the sunlight outside. As he enters deeper his eyes continue to adjust to the darkness. Soon he is so deep in the cave he may never find his way out.* (A Catholic No More)

L a r r y J o n e s : *Compromise insults God. Compromise is a return ticket to the old yokes of slavery. Compromise may momentarily stop the lion from roaring but only long enough for him to have a real good laugh. Compromise is his weapon. Dabbling in compromise is fighting the enemy on his turf and eventually brings frightening results.* (A Catholic No More)

L a r r y J o n e s : *A believer has no one but himself to protect his freedom in Christ. He must guard it like the wary soldier Christ called him to be because there are many who would snatch it from him. There are many who would bind him to the same yoke to which they themselves have been captivated. There are many who would want to claim him as theirs, to be sovereign over him. A simple frown of disapproval from pastor or priest can activate much peer pressure to bring a young Christian to conformity.* (A Catholic No More)

L a r r y J o n e s : *It is difficult to remain free. It really is. There are many who would feel it an obligation to 'protect' you. Man has a tendency to try to gain sovereignty over man. Man will try to usher you into one of his programs, to impose his vision upon you, to make you dependent on him. In turn he will expect you to call him 'pastor', 'reverend', 'doctor', 'teacher', and give financial support to his programs.* (A Catholic No More)

Having been reproved by myself, I present (what I believe to be) a more worthy perspective:

I am certain many, even most, should depart from the evangelical way. I am not equally sure that there are some who should remain, even a young believer, even for a short time. Yet I will not suggest a young christian leave the system unless he has a viable option.

Evangelicalism may have a symbolic Jesus as lord, but Jesus as savior is *actual*. Joe and Jill Average may have a blurred perspective regarding the lordship of Christ, but are not confused concerning their salvation; they depend on Christ alone to get them to heaven. Evangelicalism is rather proficient at keeping the saved saved. Leaving one's church without a viable alternative could cause

a person to return to "*the way that leads to destruction*." (This is of little concern for those holding to the "once saved, always saved" concept of eternal security, but understandably scary for those who do not.)

Nor will I suggest he or she should stay. Years of association with evangelicalism has convinced me it is improbable most in this system will attain much "gold, silver, precious stones" to lay at the feet of Jesus. A young believer entering evangelicalism's cave of tradition may never find her way out.

A word to those remaining in evangelicalism: It must be understood, a decision to stay in the system is not permission to compromise. The only alternative to obedience is disobedience. The standard for those remaining is the same as those departing - the Bible.

A determination to remain true to the Bible might upset the lives of those who stay. While one church may tolerate the one remaining in the perimeter of church society – benefiting from congregational praise and worship as well as pulpit ministry, but refusing to get "plugged in" to the system – the church down the street may coerce everyone to commit themselves to the assembly. They will not allow you to decide for yourself to tithe to them or not tithe. The pastor will insist you call him *Pastor*. You will be expected to parrot their understanding of Scripture. They insist you get their okay to do ministry outside church walls. You will be coerced to become a member. (Don't ever become a member!!!)

A word to those longing to leave: You will be misunderstood and persecuted. Friends will leave you and then criticize you for being a loner. Though you proclaim your love for Christ, still your salvation will be held in doubt, your christianity in derision.

P a u l : *All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.* (2Tim. 3:12)

All includes you. Your leaving the system is an insult and threat to the majority. You are a bad example, and you will be pitied for your deception. But the rewards will far outweigh the cost. And you will make it easier for others to come out. You really do influence. Your life is a statement.

Parents who leave must find an alternative to sunday school or transport the kids. (The congregation would be healthier if all went downstairs to listen to the sunday school teacher tell the kids about Jesus. Upstairs the emphasis is rarely on Him.) Your children must be taught Christ. Parents are accountable.

Before closing, I emphasize again the importance of submitting the matter to Jesus Christ, and waiting on Him to direct and instruct. After all, He *is* the "head of the church."

There is an alternative to the evangelical system, the subject of the next article.

C h a l l e n g e : *Willingness to obey reaps rewards. Enthusiasm to obey reaps richer rewards. Negligence causes loss of rewards. Repentances changes meager into much. Meager or much, rewards are eternal. And so are losses.*

P r a y e r : *Lord Jesus, prepare reader and writer for that day of account. And empower this message, for it is most inadequate.* (And hopefully the reader says, "Amen!")

Article # seven: **An Alternative**

Evangelical services are not authorized by New Testament writings. One exception (somewhat) comes to mind. It occurred about thirty years ago.

The assistant pastor announced the sunday evening services would be entirely different; it will be open to whosoever “just like the early church.” Those having something to contribute would be free to express themselves; the entire service was open to the congregation. Inadvertently, the assistant was admitting all other services were *not* in harmony with Scripture. And of course they were not, and thirty years later little has changed.

There is a superior alternative to the evangelical system, more aligned to New Testament writings: a house church.

A house church is an evangelical church minus, minus, minus. Minus all the stuff. Minus the collection plate. Minus the bulletin. Minus the pastor. Minus the board of whatever. Minus the hierarchy. Minus the building. Minus, minus, minus.

But a house church is only as good as the participants make it. Therefore you should not attach yourself to one just because one is available. Check it out.

What is missing in the evangelical system, in a word, is Jesus; He is not lord there. A home church whose theme is less than Jesus should be avoided; you want to make up for lost time, not lose more. Perhaps the Lord would have you start your own. However, a word of caution:

S o l o m o n : *Unless the Lord builds the house, they labour in vain who build it.* (Ps. 127:1)

It could be presumptuous to start a house church just because you see a need. It is a serious matter, a decision to be placed under the lordship of the Holy Spirit (which is placing it under the lordship of Jesus).

It's easy to get into something, hard to get out. Starting a work is simple; terminating it can be hurtful to many. And between the getting in and getting out is much wasted energy and much frustration. You can think of instances in your life when you made decisions based solely on logic and you were stuck with the sad consequences for a long time. You will waste much time and energy building a “house” the Lord has not ordained.

On the other hand, if the Lord gives the green light you could be in for a Jesus-adventure. A beautiful song can be created, one that will glorify “the Lamb who was slain” and bring about His purposes.

Jesus taught the house (in this case the house church) built upon His sayings would not fall,

regardless the ferocity of the storms pounding against it. Building upon His words does not mean all house churches are to be exactly the same; there is latitude. But God's principles must be observed.

Important, *very important*, question: *Can individuals gain more of Christ relationally by coming together rather than each remaining on his/her own?*

A *no* answer considerably lessens the advantages of gathering. Fortunately the answer is yes, yes an individual can better grow in Christ with the help of others, and, in turn, cause the others to benefit. Two hungry hearts increase the hunger of each. As enthusiasm, hunger is contagious. Two hot coals burst into a flame; many coals are a fire hard to put out; two together more than doubles the heat of each.

M o s e s : *How could one chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight?* (Deut. 32:30)

J E S U S : *I say to you if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven.* (Mat. 18:19)

Imagine, just imagine, the outcome of each person's christianity if each had the backing of the collective prayer power of the group.

Imagine the power in the meetings if all were determined to exalt the Lord Jesus Christ, if all agreed to submit to the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

Imagine how a person would blossom and mature as a minister if he and she were given opportunity to articulate insights attained privately in "the secret place of the Most High," and how everyone would be enriched.

Imagine how children would be affected in an atmosphere of enthusiasm toward Jesus, to see and hear dad and mom proclaim truths of Christ, and minister life to others.

Each should be afforded opportunity to be challenged and to challenge, to be inspired and to inspire, to be taught and to teach, to be led and to lead, to receive and to give. (Always under the direction of Pastor Holy Spirit.)

It must also be said as a warning, coming together can have the *opposite* effect, drawing each other *away from* intimacy with Christ. Perhaps it happens more often than not. The focus switches to something other than Jesus. For example, the group could obsess on the negative, spending most meetings consoling each other from wounds and bondages and injustices from evangelicalism, riveted on what is wrong instead of pursuing the right. The solution is not to switch from negative to positive, but to become Christ-focused once more.

The next series of articles is titled, *So You Want To Start a House Church*.

C h a l l e n g e : *The challenge for a group is the same challenge for each individual: One, to become increasingly enamoured with Jesus. And two, to come under the governorship of the Holy Spirit (who will*

bring you into deeper intimacy with Jesus).

P r a y e r : *Lord, cause us to acknowledge You in all our ways, that You would direct our paths. Cause us to be faithful, loyal, and trustworthy. And anoint this article. In Your name, Lord, in Your name.* (And hopefully the reader says, “Amen!”)