

The Day of the Lord

An Expository “Journey” Through the Prophecy of Joel

9- A “Magnificent Perplexity”; the End of the First Covenant and the Birth of the Church- Part 4

November 8, 2020

Joel 2:28-32

28 “It will come about after this That I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind; And your sons and daughters will prophesy, Your old men will dream dreams, Your young men will see visions.

29 “Even on the male and female servants I will pour out My Spirit in those days.

30 “I will display wonders in the sky and on the earth, Blood, fire and columns of smoke.

31 “The sun will be turned into darkness And the moon into blood Before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes.

32 “And it will come about that whoever calls on the name of the Lord Will be delivered; For on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem There will be those who escape, As the Lord has said, Even among the survivors whom the Lord calls.

To the Glory of God

Now last time, I told you that I wanted to make clear what I am proposing about the Prophecy of Joel. I am Teaching at least five things about **Joel 2:28-32**:

1. It was *completely* and *finally* fulfilled in Jerusalem; on *that* day (the Day of Pentecost); with *those* people.
2. There is NO further fulfillment to come at some point in *our* future
3. What God *did* at the Tower of Babel He *undid* at Pentecost through the fulfillment of Joel’s Prophecy
4. The fulfillment of Joel’s Prophecy (through the Life; Death; and Resurrection of Jesus) brought the Levitical Priesthood to an end- thus ending the Old Covenant
5. The fulfillment of Joel’s Prophecy (through Jesus) *birthed* the Church.

... and over the last two weeks, I covered #'s 1-3. And so, today, I want to finish this by looking closely at #'s 4&5.

4/5. The Fulfillment of Joel's Prophecy (through the Life, Death; and Resurrection of Jesus) brought the Levitical Priesthood to an End- thus forever ending the Old Covenant and caused the Church to be born

Now it is hard for us, who worship God in the 21st Century Church, to understand the great significance of the Levitical Priesthood, that thrived under the Old Covenant. The Priests are what made the Old Covenant work. Without the Priests- the entire structure of the Old Covenant would have fallen apart. But there were several Issues concerning the Levitical Priesthood that made this form of Priesthood *inferior*. Among them were:

- The Levitical Priesthood was Hereditary
- The Levitical Priesthood was based on human life-span

When God was dividing the Promised Land among the various Tribes of the Jews- He did NOT give the Levites their Inheritance in real estate. And that is because their Inheritance was the Temple and their service to God. But while all of the Priests came out from the Tribe of Levi- not all Levites were Priests.¹

So, the Priesthood, under the Old Covenant, was based on bloodline and what tribe you were from. But that meant that you could NOT hold that Office- no matter how much you loved God; no matter how much you wanted to serve in the Temple; and no matter how godly you might have been- unless you came from the Tribe of Levi. Conversely, if you came from the Tribe of Levi- you were a Priest- even if you didn't love God at all; even if you had no delight in serving in the Temple; and no matter how ungodly you were.

Also, the time people served in the Levitical Priesthood was based on human life span. Levites could only serve for 25 years. You began at age 25 and you served until you were 50. After that- you stepped aside and a whole new generation of Levites took your place. And that is because the Priests could NEVER stop offering sacrifices. They had to offer one animal right after another- the entire time they served.

Now the reason that animal sacrifices had to be continually offered- was because they did NOT forgive a single Sin. Not one Sin was ever "paid for" by animal sacrifices. Here is what the writer of **Hebrews** said about this in **Hebrews 10:1-4:**

¹ Some Levites were instrumentalists and did other things to support the Priests.

1 For the Law, since it has *only* a shadow of the good things to come *and* not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near.

2 Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins?

3 But in those *sacrifices* there is a reminder of sins year by year.

4 For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

Okay, but if that is true- then *why* did God, through Moses, *command* that the Priests offer animal sacrifices? What did they accomplish? Until Jesus came; and lived; and died; and rose again- animal sacrifices held the Wrath and the Judgment of God *away* from the people- just long enough- for them to offer the next animal. And so, those sacrifices had to be *ongoing*. Animal sacrifices could never stop. And that means that there *always* had to be Levitical Priests- to offer those continual sacrifices.

So, what kept everything going under the First, inferior Covenant was that animal sacrifices were *constantly* being offered. And yet, only the Priests could offer certain sacrifices. So, without the Priests, there would be no sacrifices; and without the sacrifices, the entire Foundation of the Old Covenant would be dissolved.

We must understand, dear friends, that what God gave to Moses in the Old Covenant was “Holy”; “Righteous”; and “Good” (**Romans 7:12**). But the Old Covenant itself stated *repeatedly* that it was NOT permanent; and that *another* Covenant was coming that would *forever replace* the Covenant that God gave to Moses. And the Words that God gave to Moses; and that he wrote down in the first five Books of the Bible- are Inspired. They are fully Inerrant; and Infallible. And that means they are true. But they are also Incomplete. And what *completed* them was NOT technology- but Jesus, the Christ: in WHO He is; and in WHAT He did.

So, from the very moment that John the Baptist saw Jesus and said,

“Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29)

... every animal offered as a sacrifice- was an abomination- and God did NOT receive any of them. And this is *why* Jesus (nor His disciples) never offered an animal in sacrifice to God the entire time He was in His earthly Ministry.

Now from the time that God gave the Law to Moses until the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed in 70AD., there were literally *millions* of animals that were sacrificed by the Jews. In fact, there was an entire industry that had been created that kept the supply of animals available for sacrifice.

For example, the Bible tells us that shepherds were just outside of Bethlehem the night Jesus was born, “**keeping watch over their flock by night**” (**Luke 2:8**). And the reason they were there- was to raise and provide enough animals for sacrifice for the people in Jerusalem.

Now to illustrate the need for lots and lots of animals for sacrifice, when Solomon’s Temple was dedicated², the Bible says that 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep were slaughtered and offered to God as a sacrifice! (**1Kings 8:63**). Now before we just pass this by and go on to something else- think about this.

Assuming that there were at least 100 Priests available that day to conduct the Sacrifice (which we don’t know)- and *assuming* that the Dedication Service lasted 12 hours (which it may not have)- each of those 100 Priests had to slaughter and sacrifice 118 animals every single hour, without stopping, for 12 straight hours!

So, obviously, God had to do something miraculous here- because simply as a matter of the time it takes to slaughter and sacrifice an animal as large as oxen- it would be practically impossible in the time-frame. But then we must add to that impossibility the fact that this was all done- *without* any running water; or stainless steel; and seemingly without any regard to sanitary conditions. Also, it was done without any instruments to help kill the animals (besides a knife or a sword); or any easy or quick way to dispose of the carcasses. So, while people were worshipping God- 142,000 animal carcasses just piled up or somebody had to drag them outside.

The screaming of the animals had to be terrible; the blood ran like a river- with people slipping and falling down in it; and the noise; the filth; and the stench had to have been horrific. So, this was a very violent; and a very bloody; and a very loud mess. And yet it was all part of the Worship of God! Look what was written³ in **1Kings 8:10&11**:

It happened that when the priests came from the holy place, the cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord.

Now look again at what Joel said,

² Around the middle of the 10th Century, BC.

³ Many Biblical scholars suggest that the Prophet Jeremiah wrote **1Kings**. This is unlikely for several reasons- most notably that the final event recorded in **1Kings** occurred in Babylon in 561 BC. (when Jeremiah would have been 86 years old). More importantly, Jeremiah never went to Babylon. Instead, he went to Egypt (**Jeremiah 43:1-7**). So, we really don’t know who wrote **1Kings**.

Joel 2:28&29

28 “It will come about after this That I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind; And your sons and daughters will prophesy, Your old men will dream dreams, Your young men will see visions.

29 “Even on the male and female servants I will pour out My Spirit in those days.

So, the fulfillment of Joel’s Prophecy on the Day of Pentecost in **The Acts 2-** is what *caused* the Levitical Priesthood to come to an end. Or to put it in another way- the fulfillment of Joel’s Prophecy on the Day of Pentecost in **The Acts 2**, brought in a *superior* Priesthood that made the Levitical Priesthood completely obsolete.

And with the end of the Levitical Priesthood- came the end of the need for both the Temple and the Sanhedrin Court. And with the end of the Levitical Priesthood; the Temple; and the Sanhedrin Court- came the *end* of the Old Covenant and the *birth* of the Church. Because they cannot both exist on earth at the same time. Either we have the auspices of the Old Covenant in force OR we have the Church, under the superior New Covenant- but we cannot have both. The Church exists *only* in the New Covenant; and the New Covenant completely *replaced* the Old Covenant. So, the *fulfillment* of Joel’s Prophecy on the Day of Pentecost, in **The Acts 2-** brought to an end- the Old Covenant and allowed the Church to be born! And this is an amazing transformation that did NOT happen easily.

And this is why Joel used what is called, “Hebraic Apocalyptic Hyperbole” in verses 30&31, when he said,

30 “I will display wonders in the sky and on the earth, Blood, fire and columns of smoke.

31 “The sun will be turned into darkness And the moon into blood Before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes.

Joel saw a titanic event in the future; a radical departure from what the Jew already had that would change everything. Yet the average Jew would categorically reject the idea that God would abolish the very Covenant that He initiated and bring in an infinitely better one. Truly it was a Magnificent Perplexity and Joel describes it in the form of this “Apocalyptic Hyperbole”.

So, the “Coming” of the Lord that Joel describes here is NOT the 2nd Coming of Jesus to the earth- but rather God “coming” in Judgment against the

unbelieving Jews; and about Him “Coming” in violent and breathtaking and amazing ways- to usher in the glorious New Covenant!

Now how do I know that too be true? Because the Apostle Peter quoted this section of **Joel 2** in his Sermon on the Day of Pentecost in **The Acts 2** and said that what was going on- on *that* day; in *that* Upper Room was the complete and total fulfillment of all that Joel prophesied here. And then he linked EVERYTHING to Jesus.

And then Peter warned those Jews, who heard the Gospel preached on that day in their own language- that they better get on board with what God was obviously doing in ending the Old Covenant and in birthing the Church, when he said,

The Acts 2:40b

... Be saved from this perverse generation!

... because it was *that* generation of Jews, who would witness the Magnificent Perplexity and the cataclysmic transformation of God Himself *ending* the inferior Old Covenant and birthing the Church through the Life, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus, the Christ!

But how do we know that the fulfillment of Joel’s Prophecy in **The Acts 2**- brought about the end of the Levitical Priesthood? Joel says that God will pour out His Spirit on all mankind. And this is what is called, a “proof text” for the Pentecostal Movement. These people teach that Joel was saying that God the Holy Spirit is going to fall on all sorts of people and give them the ability to predict the future (Prophecy). And it is that wayward Teaching that has given rise to all the “personal prophecies” and the supposed *restoration* of the Offices of both Prophet and Apostle that typifies many groups within that Movement.

But the Reality is that the meaning of Joel’s terminology in this Prophecy began way back in **Numbers 11:24-29**, which says,

24 So Moses went out and told the people the words of the Lord. Also, he gathered seventy men of the elders of the people, and stationed them around the tent.

25 Then the Lord came down in the cloud and spoke to him; and He took of the Spirit who was upon him and placed *Him* upon the seventy elders. And when the Spirit rested upon them, they prophesied. But they did not do *it* again.

26 But two men had remained in the camp; the name of one was Eldad and the name of the other Medad. And the Spirit rested upon them (now they were

among those who had been registered, but had not gone out to the tent), and they prophesied in the camp.

27 So a young man ran and told Moses and said, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp."

28 Then Joshua the son of Nun, the attendant of Moses from his youth, said, "Moses, my lord, restrain them."

29 But Moses said to him, "Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put His Spirit upon them!"

Here, God the Father took God the Holy Spirit (that was upon Moses ONLY) and placed Him upon the 70 Elders. So, now Moses and the 70 were "endued with Power from on High". And Moses wrote that when the Spirit was upon the 70 Elders- they "prophesied"- which is simply another way of saying that they were authorized and equipped to be used by God in Ministry.

Now this Passage also verifies that, under the inferior Old Covenant, the Holy Spirit did NOT remain on the people- but He came and went, because Moses also said about the 70:

And when the Spirit rested upon them, they prophesied. But they did not do it again.

So, only when the Spirit "rested upon them" did they prophesy- meaning that the Spirit did not ALWAYS rest on them. But now look what happened:

But two men had remained in the camp; the name of one was Eldad and the name of the other Medad. And the Spirit rested upon them (now they were among those who had been registered, but had not gone out to the tent), and they prophesied in the camp.

Now the first thing we need to agree on is that God is Sovereign- and so, He knows what He is doing. And if God the Father allowed God the Holy Spirit to rest on these two men- it was because He *wanted* Him to. So, this was not an accident. This was purposeful. God *intended* to allow these two men to have a taste of the Holy Spirit and to be used by God. But now look at the response to this amazing Miracle:

27 So a young man ran and told Moses and said, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp."

28 Then Joshua the son of Nun, the attendant of Moses from his youth, said, "Moses, my lord, restrain them."

"Moses, these rank and file people are NOT supposed to hear from God; they aren't supposed to be used by God; they aren't in Ministry; they aren't even Levites! Moses- restrain them!" And what was Moses' response?

But Moses said to him, "Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put His Spirit upon them!"

Here is a Prophecy about what the New Covenant was going to bring in. It was Moses' desire that God the Father would allow God the Spirit to be on ALL of God's people; and that EVERY believer would be authorized by God to be used by God. In other words, Moses is saying that ALL of God's people should be Priests (Prophets).

So, Moses is talking about a time when ALL of God's people would be "Priests/Prophets of God" which is simply another way of saying that this will be a time when ALL of God's people would be filled with God's Spirit. Now this is an amazing Statement- coming from the man that God just used to establish both the Old Covenant and the Levitical Priesthood. But Moses is seeing a day when what God used him to create- would be done away with- and ALL of the Lord's people would be Prophets or Priests! Well, that is *exactly* what has happened in the glorious New Covenant. God used the Apostle John to say,

The Revelation 1:4-6

4 John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne,

5 and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood —

6 and He has made us *to be* a kingdom, priests to His God and Father — to Him *be* the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

The Revelation 5:7-10

7 And He came and took the book out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne.

8 When He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.

9 And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood *men* from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.

10 "You have made them *to be* a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth."

The Revelation 20:6

Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.

These Passages (and many others) teach that EVERY genuine believer is "in Christ". Now how did wicked sinners get, "in Christ"? Because God poured out His Spirit on them. And by virtue of God's Spirit being poured out on them- they are now saved. And because they are truly saved- they are "in Christ". And because they are "in Christ"- they are Priests of God. And all of these Priests have but one High Priest- Who lives forever- Jesus, the Christ. This is what Joel was talking about.

Now the reason we believe this, is because *nobody* can be saved unless God the Holy Spirit comes to that chosen vessel FIRST- *while* they are still lost; *before* they pray for this or even *want* this. And God the Spirit *sovereignly* and *powerfully* and *effectually* gives that individual "new, spiritual Life". This is what being "born again" is all about- the sovereign giving of new, spiritual Life- to God's chosen people. And since God is absolutely Sovereign (over everything- all the time)- this was no accident. It was purposeful. But it is NOT caused (brought about) by the individual's own decision or choice. No, being born again is a sovereign Act of God- alone.

And with those new eyes (that God has sovereignly opened) that person's mind and eyes are now unveiled; and he now sees the "Glory of God in the Face of Jesus Christ". And with those new ears (that God has sovereignly unstopped) that person now can hear the glorious Good News of the Gospel. And with that new, soft heart (that God sovereignly gave him) that individual has both the desire and the ability to believe the Gospel and hate his own Sin.

All of this is what God the Holy Spirit does "for"; "in"; and "through" those, who are chosen for Salvation- but who are yet unsaved. In other words, this is how God saves sinners: By *sovereignly* giving them new, spiritual Life- FIRST. And

everything else that happens “to” or “with” or “through” that individual- is based on God doing this.

And so, that individual not only sees Jesus as the “Treasure of the Universe”- but he also loves what he sees; and he is being changed into what he sees. And that is what Paul talks about in **2Corinthians 3:18-4:6**

And so, that individual simply *responds* to all that God has *already done for him*; and *in him*; and *through him- sovereignly*- in the Miracle of the New Birth. And part of that Response- is that he *joyfully* repents and turns from his Sins; and he *eagerly* puts all his Hope and Trust and Faith in Jesus- personally and in His finished Work.

And, at that moment- this individual is now “Justified” in that God the Father (for the Sake of Christ) has forgiven him of all his Sins (past, present, and future). And God then takes the spotless Righteousness of Jesus (that He earned by living a perfectly sinless Life) and God “credits” or “imputes” that Righteousness to the now justified individual- and makes him “fit for Heaven”.

But we must understand that God the Holy Spirit entered into that individual BEFORE any of that happened. He was born again or God gave him new, spiritual Life- BEFORE he repented and trusted in Jesus. Saying it another way- God filled that individual with the Holy Spirit BEFORE he was saved- and while he was still lost.

The only reason that lost individual was convicted of sin; the only reason he was able to hear the Gospel; the only reason he was empowered to believe the Gospel; the only reason he understood the depth of his own depravity and the seriousness of his own wickedness; the only reason he cried out to God in Repentance; the only reason he trusted in Jesus personally and in His finished Work; and the only reason he follows Jesus today- is because of what God the Holy Spirit already did “in” him and “for” him in the Miracle of the New Birth.

So, it is this *infilling* of God the Spirit (that Joel prophesied) that *causes* an elected sinner to be Born Again. And it is him being sovereignly given that new spiritual Life- that *causes* him to repent and believe- so he can be Justified. And *that* is what Joel was talking about.

So, when Joel said,

... it will come about that whoever calls on the name of the Lord Will be delivered...

... he was saying that the initiating factor that begins Salvation is NOT Human Self-Determination. It is NOT our “wanting” Jesus. It is NOT us “crying out to God for Salvation”. It is NOT us seeking after God. It is NOT a “choice or a decision” that we make. The Bible does NOT teach that. The Bible has NEVER

taught that. No, we “cry out”; we “call on the Name of the Lord”- precisely because God the Holy Spirit has ALREADY done His marvelous Work in us!

So, the initiating factor that begins Salvation- is God the Holy Spirit sovereignly and powerfully coming inside that chosen vessel- BEFORE THEY ARE SAVED- and sovereignly opening his eyes; and sovereignly unstopping his ears; and sovereignly taking out of him that hard, rebellious, stony heart and sovereignly giving him a heart of flesh- that is both able and willing to believe.

And *everything* we do after that- from repenting of our Sins; to trusting in Jesus; to continuing to pursue Holiness; and striving to obey the Bible- is merely a human *response* to the Eternal Work that God the Holy Spirit has already done in us. And that is why God gets all the Glory for this- even though we are doing it.

Now *why* does God the Holy Spirit come to people BEFORE they are saved and do all this amazing Work? Because He already knows that God the Father has “set His Love” upon that individual from before the foundation of the world. And He already knows that Jesus died and rose again to actually purchase the Salvation of all of those that God chose to save. But He also does all this before we are saved- because unless God the Spirit does all of this- we will remain lost.

And so, it is Salvation itself, that was initiated by God the Father choosing us; and by Jesus living and dying and rising again; and by God the Holy Spirit giving us that new, spiritual Life- that makes every single genuine believer- a Priest of God. And since ALL of God’s people are now Priests- the Levitical Priesthood is now obsolete.

Therefore, any religious “system” that has; and that maintains; and that promotes a hierarchal system of Priests- is fighting *against* God; and is in rebellion to the primary and foundational Concepts of the New Covenant!

Now the Roman religious system did their best to hide the fact that all of God’s people are Priests of God. But God was faithful; and 503 years ago, God raised up a very unlikely man (Martin Luther) to *initiate* the Protestant Reformation- where the Biblical Concept of the “Priesthood of all Believers” was *re-established*⁴ and is now a primary Doctrine that we Believe and Teach. John Stott points out in his book, “*One People*” that,

“... there had developed within the church (as today) a division between ‘clergy’ and ‘laity’ in which the clergy were supposed to lead and do the work of Christian ministry while the people (which is what the word ‘laity’ means) were to follow docily—and, of course, give money to support the

⁴ It is important to understand that the Protestant Reformation did not create a single new Doctrine. All it did was to re-enforced; re-emphasize; or to re-establish Doctrines that existed before the Roman system ignored; hid; or minimized them.

clergy's work. This is not what the church is to be, and where this view prevails the church and its ministry suffer. They suffer by the loss of the exercise of those gifts given to the laity. The Spirit is to help each serve others. The laity serve the church and the world. The clergy serve the laity, particularly in helping them to develop and use their gifts (**Eph 4:11-13**)."

Now this is simply a very nice way of saying that Christianity is NOT a "spectator sport". Every believer is a Priest to God. And that is wonderful. But that also means that every believer is to be doing something. No such thing as a group of "professional ministers" being observed by "professional pew-sitters". *Everybody* in the Church is to be engaged in the Work of the Gospel.

So, there is no such thing in genuine Christianity of people sitting on a pew watching other people "perform". No, since we are all Priests- all are in Ministry to some extent- and all should have at least, three characteristics:

1. Faithful to Jesus
2. Fruitful
3. Busy in the Work of the Lord

Now there is much to say about the Doctrine of the "Priesthood of all Believers"- as this biblical Truth has been warped and perverted by many. But I want to concentrate on just two:

1. No Need for ANY Ministry
2. Pride

Some wrongly teach today that, because all genuine believers are Priests of God- that there is no need for any Ministry at all. In other words, because it is true that all genuine believers are Priests of God- therefore- we are our own Teachers; our own Elders; our own Pastors; our own Leaders; and we are accountable to no one but God.

Now nobody can read the New Testament with any degree of honesty for any length of time- and come to that conclusion. And yet this Teaching exists. And it is growing and deceiving more and more people every year. But it isn't a sign of spiritual maturity. It is simply another manifestation of human rebellion and is, therefore, dishonoring to God and destructive to people.

The humiliating Truth of Scripture is that we need each other. No born-again believer is an "island unto himself". We are not saved by ourselves; we do not grow in Christ by ourselves; we do not learn the Bible by ourselves; and we do

not walk with God by ourselves. Every genuine believer is a part of the Christian Church; and not a single saved person lives or exists or operates alone.

The notion that some are being led by God directly- *apart* from other saved people; and *apart* from the larger Church- is a myth. It doesn't exist. The notion that some "follow God" directly and therefore are somehow *exempt* from following other believers- is a myth. The notion that some are being taught directly by God- apart from other believers and apart from 2,000 years of Christian Teachers- is a myth. The notion that some are "accountable only to God" and are somehow exempt from being accountable to other believers and to the Church- is a myth. These things are all lies; they are symbolic of basic human rebellion; and they indicate that the individuals, who buy into these things- is deceived.

God did NOT set up the New Testament Church to be optional or to simply be where people, who live and operate "individualistically" all week long, can gather together for a couple of hours on Sunday. No, we are God's people. We belong to God. But we also belong to each other- as well. And hence all the many, "one another" verses that we find scattered all through the New Testament. God sovereignly put us all together. And therefore, what you do; what you believe; and how you conduct your life- affects me. It either edifies me or it casts me down. But it isn't neutral.

Now the Banner that flies over the New Testament Church- is Love. Love for God, yes. But also love for one another. And so, we are to weep with those who weep; we are to grieve with those who grieve. We are to pray one for another and to manifest this amazing love- so much so- that the lost world will look on and marvel.

But the Reality is that I have no idea how to pray for you; or what your weaknesses are; or the areas that constitute your biggest struggle- unless we spend time together so I can get to know you. And so, without this closeness- at best- we are only guessing. But at worst- we really are NOT even praying for each other.

And there is only one chair at the Head of the Table of the Church. And there is only one Person, Who sits in that Chair- Jesus Christ. So, *everything* that is preached or taught or sung or discussed in the Church- is to be to the Praise and the Glory and the Honor of Jesus. Not me and not you.

We are lifted up; we are edified; we are made strong; we are equipped; and we are empowered- when we become small; and Jesus becomes large. The Church has been bought and paid for by Jesus. So, Jesus owns the Church- outright. It is His Church. It belongs to Him. And so, it MUST be carried out according to His written Instructions and to His Benefit.

And Jesus has already caused men to infallibly write down how He desires that His Church be run. And it is with chosen; set a-side; called out; and anointed men- who are qualified to lead. And that group includes Elders and Deacons and

Pastors and Teachers and Evangelists. And those people are to lead with various Gifts and special Anointings that honor God; glorify Jesus; and help people.

And the Bible is crystal clear about how individual believers are to relate to the Leadership of the Church:

Hebrews 13:17

Obey your leaders and submit *to them*, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.

Now we can slice this and dice this till Jesus comes back- but the Command is clear:

Obey your leaders and submit *to them*...

... but why should I obey and submit to other human beings? I know how to run my own life. Why can't I serve God by myself- on my own terms?

... **for [because] they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account...**

So, in His great Wisdom, God has created permanent Leadership positions (Offices) in the Church for, at least, two reasons:

1. God wants us free from Deception
2. God knows that we are NOT qualified to assess our own spiritual condition

Deception exists. It is real. And by definition, nobody, who has been deceived, thought they were deceived. Every single person, who has had their minds blinded; or their eyes closed; or their ears made dull; or their consciences seared- saw it coming. They never thought it would happen to them. They never dreamed it would be true about themselves. That is the very nature of Deception. We don't see it. We don't realize it has happened to us- until after we are ensnared.

And being deceived has nothing to do with the level of education we have; or the degree of personal strength we possess; or the amount of Scripture we know. Satan knows and understands the Bible better than any human on earth. His Knowledge of Truth is impeccable; his theology- right as rain. But Satan doesn't love God. He *can't* love God- neither can he repent. He is lost and will always remain so. And so, he is angry. And since he can't get at God- his anger is turned

toward us. And his weapons are many- but his biggest weapon is to deceive people.

So, how do we avoid being deceived? One way:

James 5:16

Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.

Now there are only two reasons why saved people, who say they believe the Bible, don't do this:

1. Pride
2. Gossip

... we arrogantly think we can handle our own problems and struggles; or we are afraid that what we confess to our brothers and sisters in Church will appear on the front page of the paper tomorrow and then people will think less about us. But God gave this as a "Means" to help us to not be deceived. And this speaks to the need that we have to assemble together; and to get to know each other; and to pray for one another. Another way:

Obey your leaders and submit *to them*, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account...

So, rather than allow Pride or Gossip or anything else to hinder God's Desire that we be not deceived- may we all avail ourselves of the various Means of Grace like:

- Prayer
- Bible Study
- Fellowship
- The Sacraments
- Fasting
- Service to Others

... and to obey and submit to our Leaders- who watch and guard our souls.

Another humiliating aspect of Christianity and the Church that illustrates our great need each other and for full-time Leaders- is that we are not qualified to assess our own spiritual condition. Smart people don't pay good money to doctors

in order to tell the doctor what is wrong with them. We simply convey our symptoms- and then we allow the doctor to diagnose us. Why? Because a *pain* in our leg may not be caused by a *problem* in our leg- even though our leg is hurting. It may be caused by something wrong in our back- but we don't know that- because when it came time to attend medical school- we took a history class.

The point is that we usually don't go to people, who change our tires to get information about whether we need brain surgery. And because we are not gifted at everything- we sub- out some things to those who are *qualified* to help us. And the same is true spiritually. God has called some saved people to be Teachers or Pastors or Evangelists or Deacons or Elders. And God didn't call *everybody* to fill those Offices. Now Deacons and Pastors aren't any more saved than we are- but they are specially called; and they are specially chosen; and they are specially equipped to help us. And God has visited them with various Gifts and Abilities that complement the Office they hold. So, it is to our advantage to use them. And it is foolish not to.

Joel lived and heralded the Word of God around 800-900 years before Jesus was born. But what he said in this Passage- is as current to us as today's news. The way in which God the Holy Spirit now relates to each individual believer is truly a marvel. And the way that God the Holy Spirit relates to every believer brought about both the end of the Old Covenant and the bringing in of the New. It made the Levitical Priesthood to be obsolete and it allowed the Church of Jesus to be born! And that was truly a Magnificent Perplexity.

Amen. Let's pray.

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.