

COVENANT RENEWAL

Genesis 1:26-28

Matthew 28:18-20

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COVENANTAL HIERARCHY

I heard about an interesting video tape on the Church. It was explained to me by a pastor friend who had seen it at a Church growth seminar in St. Louis. He described it as the most accurate depiction of the failure of laity to participate in the work of the Church that he had ever seen. Let me explain.

Whoever made the video rented a giant football stadium to illustrate the problem of the work of the ministry in terms of a football contest. Not a bad choice seeing that (American) football is the most popular sport where the athletes approach the status of gods, even among evangelical Christians. I attended a church in seminary that actually moved the time of its services to accommodate the Super Bowl: so many of the members were going to be out that this action was required according to the church officers. I have repeatedly heard of this kind of situation in the modern Church. Yes, the football game is one image to which the average evangelical Christian can relate. Whoever made the video was, sad to say, right on target by picking this metaphor.

The video puts two teams on the field. They are called the world and the Church. The world lines up with eleven players on the field. The Church's team only has one, the pastor, because the Church commonly expects the pastor to play the game. So, the world pulverizes the Church team on every down. But where is the rest of the Church's team? They are standing on the sidelines, talking about fellowship groups and the latest that is happening in the church. In the mean time, the pastor is getting creamed by the world.

The message is clear. The Church tends to lose the battle against the world because essentially one person in the Church is doing the fighting: the pastor. Sometimes this is due to the pastor's unwillingness to release certain jobs into the hands of the laity. Maybe the minister is reluctant because he thinks the laity will not do as good of a job. Maybe he believes that the laity will do a better job.

On the other hand, sometimes the laity refuse to do the work of the Church. They might feel that they are not qualified; perhaps they are not. They also might have the attitude that they are not supposed to do the work. And so, they refuse to be actively involved in the ministry.

Yes, the video tape effectively captures on film a major problem in the Church. Whether the failure is on the part of the minister, the people, or both, the laity are generally not out on the field competing against the world. The pastor is not on the sidelines as a player/coach. He is fighting the world by attempting to do the work of eleven people. This will not work and if it does, in the case of an exceptional pastor with the ability of an entire team, either the pastor loses his family, or the Church rises and falls around the abilities of one man.

The words of the Apostle Paul correct the one-man-

show problem: "He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some-as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:11-12). These comments by the Apostle presume that the clergy is equipping and that the laity are allowing themselves to be trained. Moreover, they assume a certain understanding about the government of the people of God.

In this newsletter, I turn to Jethro's counsel to Moses, a situation where advice was given because one man was overloaded. Jethro's counsel was covenantal. It is recorded in the context of the statement of the covenant in Deuteronomy, falling within the hierarchical section. Everything that I say later about the nature of the Jethro hierarchy should be understood in this covenantal context. As such, I will not outline the five points of the covenant. I will expound the details, however, of this covenantal hierarchy.

A Royal Priesthood

Moses' father-in-law (Jethro) said to him (Moses), "The thing that you do is not good. Both you and these people who are with you will surely wear yourselves out. For this thing is too much for you; you are not able to perform it by yourself. Listen now to my voice; I will give you counsel, and God will be with you: Stand before God for the people, so that you may bring the difficulties to God. And you shall teach them the statutes and the laws, and show them the way in which they must walk and the work they must do. Moreover you shall select from all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them to be rulers [in the King James Version] of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. And let them judge the people at all times. Then it will be that every great matter they shall bring to you, but every small matter they themselves shall judge. So it will be easier for you, for they will bear the burden with you. If you do this thing, and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all this people will also go to their place in peace" (Exodus 18:18-23; see also, Deuteronomy 1:9-18).

The structure behind the structure of New Testament Church polity is the royal priesthood of the Old Testament, the nation of Israel as a whole. The corporate body is a (Exodus 19:6), meaning the priesthood of all believers is not strictly speaking a New Testament concept. The Old Testament organization of this priesthood is provided by Jethro. Who was Jethro? He was himself tailed importantly, "The of Midian" (Exodus 3:1). The question is, "To what priesthood did Jethro belong?" He was not a Levite and the Aaronic priesthood had not been established. There is only one other priesthood within the Biblical framework to which he could have belonged the

Melchizedekkal priesthood (Genesis 14:18). This is significant for the New Testament because the Apostle Paul says that Christ was a priest after the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 7:21). Since He was, Jesus pulls forward the Melchizedekkal priesthood structure of Jethro to the New Testament Royal priesthood. The same priestly order described by Jethro to Moses is applied in the New Testament.

Some, however, have suggested that the Exodus 18 passage is only a *civil* organizational not to be applied to the Church in any sense to establish hierarchy among the presbyterate. But, the key is that Jethro was a of Melchizedek, providing a as well as *civil* structuring. It is interesting that most Modern New Testament scholars virtually fall all over themselves to emphasize the character of the Melchizedekkal ministry through Christ, almost totally neglecting the *kingly* ramifications of this great priesthood. Yet, when the actual Melchizedekkal order is considered in the Exodus 18 passage, suddenly the priestly character is left out.

Jethro's counsel, however, is kingly and meaning both institutional spheres will bear out the same kind of pattern. Indeed they should without confusing the two. I think the Bible calls for parallel patterns of government in the civil and the ecclesiastical as a *double* to society. For now, I only mention the dual priestly and civil paradigm counseled by Jethro, but Scripture mentions the Melchizedekkal priesthood in other places.

Let us not forget in further support of the priestly and kingly aspects of the Melchizedekkal order that the New Testament Church is called a *royal* Peter 2:9), the *royal* having to do with a *kingly* emphasis and the *priesthood* concerning a aspect of the Church. Peter assumes the same Melchizedekkal configuration of the Church, meaning Christians are made priests and kings through the work of Christ. Moreover, Peter confirms that the order of Melchizedek is the priestly model for the New Testament.

Thus, the Melchizedekkal priesthood transcends the priesthoods of the Old Testament, ordering and structuring them, and Christ applies this same priesthood in the New Covenant, requiring us to consider the seminal concepts of Exodus 18 for any study of New Testament Ecclesiastical (As well as Civil) government. Since our concerns are with the Church or priestly applications, we will not extend Jethro's instruction beyond the Church in this study. For now, however, Jethro's hierarchical-yet-representative system of government should be examined, isolating several points by beginning with their original context.

The context of Jethro's advice is an over-burdened leader, Moses, in the midst of a nation with many pastoral and judicial needs. He cannot do everything. He cannot hear all of the problems of his people. Jethro warns him, "The thing that you do is not good. Both you and these people who are with you will surely out" (Exodus 18:17-18). He is concerned that neither the leader nor the people perhaps what is popularly called, "burn out." What he calls for to prevent the burn out requires a massive number of an incredibly decentralized system of hierarchy. One Jewish commentator has estimated that Jethro's system, given the size of the nation at the time, would have had six hundred captains over thousands, six thousand captains over hundreds,

twelve thousand captains over fifties, and sixty thousand captains over tens.² Jethro prevented a bureaucracy with the great number of captains by keeping the leadership base from being too small, while at the same time allowing for a clearly defined hierarchy. His number of captains would also force new blood into the system as the quota would need to be filled when some captains were replaced because of retirement and so forth. With this many captains, there would bound to be a healthy turn over, keeping the system from becoming stagnant. Thus, Jethro provides an ingenious solution to the burn-out problem that can be developed under essentially four principles.

Pastoral Hierarchy

First, Jethro advises Moses to set up a hierarchical organization that is by setting up over smaller (tens) to larger units (Fifties, hundreds, and thousands). The King James uses the word whereas other translations have the word *ruler*. The original Hebrew (*sar*) means to *rule* referring to religious or political officers (Ezra 8:24; Judges 5:15). The translation *captain* is interesting because it conveys the idea of *military structure* which seems to fit best the idea of Jethro's model. This although organized in a military-like hierarchy, was *pastoral* in function.

These pastoral captains are representative leaders, extending the of God and His people. They represent God at each level, reminding the people that God is with the lowest to the highest person, and the smallest as well as the largest group. As these captains are woven all through society, so God is with His people at every point. They receive this empowerment to represent the presence of the Lord through the ordination of Moses (Deuteronomy 1:13), the laying on of hands (Deuteronomy 34:9); authority is given by God and not the people. No one is allowed to be a captain who has not been duly authorized, making the ordination process linear and historical. These captains should not even be removed, if necessary, by the people but only by their superiors (or equals), who ordained them.

The captains also represent the people before Moses. They serve as comforters. They are selected from among their equals to be made captains, not to rule but to serve. They are ordained to meet the needs of the people under their charge. They are to offer counsel of all types and to hear problems that may or may not be of an adjudicable nature, but that are definitely of a nature that individuals cannot work them out among themselves. The captains are fewer in number at the top of the hierarchy and greater in number at the bottom. The ones over greater numbers deal more and more with captains only. Yet, every person is part of a smaller unit, meaning all have direct access to a captain who is personal and familiar to them.

As part of the pastoral aspect, we see the principle of the *identifiable* leader who is near and yet distinct. He imparts the vision of Moses at a lower and practical level. The captain himself does not interfere with nor is he necessary for access to God. He does, however, convey the ministry of Moses to the people and they learn Moses' teaching through him. Perhaps this explains why every organization must have an leader. People receive mixed signals if a confederation leads or if the captains are working at cross purposes with Moses. Thus, the hierarchy prescribed by Jethro is first pastors are chosen first and then their courts are next established.

Legal Hierarchy

Second, the hierarchy is each unit under a cap-

1. Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and Independents have denied the application of Jethro's counsel to the Church on this basis. Geddes MacGregor, a presbyterian, argues for a hierarchy among presbyters, nevertheless, on the basis of *Biblical warrant*. He would not oppose the Jethro modal as being applicable to the Church, maintaining that Episcopacy and Presbyterianism are not mutually exclusive: *Corpus Christi* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1958). no. 197-226.

2. Chumash with Targum Onkelos, Haphtaroth and Rashi's Commentary, translated by Rabbi A. M. Silbermann (Jerusalem: Published by the Silbermann Family), p. 95.

tain functioning as a court. Hopefully people will allow the pastoral function of their captains to lead them into greater conformity to Christ. The spirit of Scripture is that the people of God should avoid legal disputes, because they are provoked to resolve their problems at the altar/table (communion) before situations move into the juridical (Matthew 5:23-26). But sometimes, preferably not very often, the people of God require the availability of a legal process where the pastor serves as a judge in matters, helping to resolve conflicts between parties. The pastoral role of the captain is not always enough to resolve problems. Concerns become conflicts and differences become disputes. More than the pastoral is needed because man is sinful and self-deceived. People need objective rulings sometimes to come to their senses, to solve their problems, or generally to arrive at workable solutions. As such, they turn their captain into a judge who must make an official judgment, requiring a complete judicial process that has become known in history as

How does the legal process of Jethro work? In principle, the concept of _____ that is so much a part of the pastoral appears in another dimension, the judicial. Just as the captain pastorally represented the presence of the Lord, so he and the court under him judicially represent the justice of God. When the captain/judge makes a ruling, Moses says, "The judgment is _____ (Deuteronomy 1:17). The captain over his court stands for the Lord in his decisions, bringing God's standards to bear. He is not to show partiality or be prejudiced for this reason (Deuteronomy 1:17). The effect is supposed to be sanctifying. The people of God are reminded of judgment both in the here and now that they might be better prepared for the judgment of the distant and far away, the great and final

At the end of history, God directly judges all people. In the course of history, He provides _____ captains and courts who function on His behalf to prepare the people of God for the judgment at the end of time. To this end, He instructs His courts how to operate as His agent.

The legal process of the Bible reflects the justice of God by upholding His standard of righteousness, the Law of God. It also images God by showing impartiality which means remaining objective. It must be "removed" just as God is totally objective to the situation: distinct and being not bound up in prejudices, yet this does not mean that He is not near or present; He is the perfection of being objective. Impartiality, however, does not mean

_____ and their courts are to presume _____ The Biblical system is a society in covenant with God, not implying that every person is converted or obedient but meaning the culture is legally declared right with God. On this basis, all people in the Biblical society are supposed to be legally innocent until proven guilty. The captains and courts are to presume innocence because their tendency is to presume guilt, and often simply because of accusation. Isn't this what happens all the time? We hear that someone has done something wrong and our natural inclination is to think, "I know he is guilty," and not to doubt the guilt. Thus, Biblical objectivity calls for means that will be most likely to prevent impartiality: witnesses, juries, and courts of appeal.

_____ are part of the Biblical mandate for courts (Deuteronomy 19:15). They have to be twofold or threefold in number because one person may lie, misinterpret what he has seen, or simply not remember. Multiple witnesses increase the possibility of the judge and the court being _____ from the situation, bringing greater

_____ involve the court in the decision making process. They in effect are a double witness to the judge or captain. Initially, and certainly at the lower levels of the

hierarchy, juries were not needed. The captain simply made a decision. Later in Old Testament Biblical history, however, the basis of a jury system was developed. The laity helped make the decision under the oversight of the captain (II Chronicles 19:8).

Courts offer further objectivity to the system by adding checks and balances to decisions. Some problems may turn into legal disputes as opposed to simple differences or personal counsel. If they cannot be resolved at one level, they can be appealed to the next; no one person or group has absolute authority. They also move from the bottom-up as opposed to the top down, preventing a bureaucracy. But, they are worked through individual captains, preventing anarchy.

Even though not preferred, disputes among God's people are not altogether bad. They are allowed by God to provide the congregation opportunity to face some sense of judgment early in life, before the end of their lives or all of time comes. They are permitted critical moments to sanctify and become more like Christ. When they do, they need courts as well as captains, a legal as well as a pastoral system.

Symmetrical Hierarchy

Third, Jethro's hierarchy is _____ Each level is a microcosm of the next, creating a symmetry among the units: each has a group with a captain in charge. What happens at one level happens in principle at all levels. So what? First, a symmetrical system prevents *elitism*. one can rightfully say that he (she) is not part of Israel because he is not part of one of the larger groupings. Everyone is part of the larger. And more importantly, all of the groupings function in principle the same way. The higher grouping of a thousand people does not work different from the one that only has

Second, a symmetrical hierarchy prevents _____ The microcosmic principle means that the smaller units are just as much a part of the "Church in the wilderness" as the larger ones. Being in a smaller cell does not mean a person is any less a part of the priesthood of all believers. Indeed, the captains who are all elected and ordained by the same process and same standards are more accessible at the lower levels. The opposite is also true. The captains of larger groupings can also be accessible. No one therefore is excluded from the hierarchy at any level, especially in the smaller groupings. Being a member of a larger unit does not infer a greater membership because the larger is made up of the smaller.

Third, a symmetrical hierarchy creates true *localism*, meaning the lower levels of the system truly represent the nation as a whole, guaranteeing that one level is not inferior to the other. A person does not have a greater voice because he is in the larger group. In fact, the larger voice is in the smaller group, virtually forcing the people to function more intensely at the smaller unit level, a built in motivation for a grass-roots system.

Thus, the symmetry of the system with each level being organized the same is absolutely necessary to prevent a multitude of organizational sins. Most often as we shall see when we compare various Ecclesiastical systems, the lack of symmetry causes a breakdown precisely where one level starts to operate on a different principle from the others. The only way to prevent this is to maintain a captains/courts balance from top to bottom; or, perhaps it would be better to say, "From bottom to top."

Participatory Hierarchy

Four, the hierarchy is designed to be _____ Every individual is a _____ of God in the royal or general sense. He (she) has personal responsibility to a captain

and court. He (she) is to use his (her) talents and gifts to serve the larger body by functioning within the smaller unit. If the individuals do not function within their personal cell, their particular smaller group risks a decline in its functions. Then the whole body can be placed in jeopardy. Any group, therefore, is able to participate as a group only to the degree that the individuals become involved. The system demands lively participation not passive spectatorship.

We should not fail to see, however, that is based on the in the Old Testament. Everyone in Israel was a member of it, even the Levitical priesthood as a sub-group (priesthood) within the larger nation, meaning its organization is imprinted on all other structures of the nation: what is true of the larger is true of the smaller.³ Thus, each person was allowed to participate in certain activities because he (she) was a priest of God in the royal sense.

What are royal priesthood activities? We have already seen some of the aspects. Laymen could rise to be captains and serve a pastoral function. Remember, Jethro's captains over thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens demanded a multitude of captains. The layman was given many opportunities to work into some kind of responsible leadership through this.

Also, Any member of Israel could be a testifying in a legal context. They could even serve on what were precursors to juries. In regard to the preservation of the royal priesthood, they had special mechanisms in their society. These practices were priestly in character. The primary responsibility of the priest was to the holiness of the Lord. Adam and Eve were asked to guard (*shamar*) the garden, a Hebrew word that is later used to describe the

responsibilities of the Aaronic priesthood (cf. Genesis 2:15 and Leviticus 8:35). Certain laws protected the larger royal priesthood of Israel, but especially the Messianic line that was to come from the priesthood. For example, the blood avenger laws allowed the nearest of kin to avenge his family member's murder by killing the murderer. This law protected the family line and in close connection with

3. As a matter of fact, the royal priesthood establishes the basis for other priesthoods. It does not nullify them such that to take them away is tantamount to the removal of the royal priesthood. Nor on the other hand does the presence of the royal priesthood negate the existence of or conflict with the other (special) priesthoods; they only exist to serve and minister to the larger,

it was the kinsman redeemer law where the nearest of kin could marry the spouse of his deceased brother, who was without heir, preventing the man's family line from dying off.

Thus, the royal priesthood was obligated to participate in society because of the Law of God, the Ten Commandments. They were bound by God's Law, which even though stated in the negative, placed a requirement to protect the life and possessions of their neighbor. For example, they had responsibility for their possessions. They were not allowed to let their animals roam around, endangering the lives of the community. Laws such as this one forced participation, until that is, they no longer believed in the Law of God. Then they became inactive and passive, not caring what happened to their neighbor. Such was the case in the story of the Good Samaritan that Jesus told (Luke 10:30-37).

Finally, every member of the royal priesthood of Israel was allowed to participate in the sacrifices, even being permitted to eat a sacrifice with the priest and his household. For example, one of the sacrifices is called the

representing restored fellowship with God and the covenant community. After sacrificing the animal, the person and his family got to eat with the priest and his family the remains of the sacrifice. Once again, when Israel obeyed God and sacrificed for their sins, they participated in society.

In each of these actions, the key is the priesthood of all believers. As long as Israel viewed itself as a priesthood, they participated in the life of the community. When they failed to act as the royal priesthood, they became passive. They did not participate. And when they became passive, the Jethro hierarchy began to shut down. The people did not deal with the problems because they did not offer sacrifices and obey God's Law. Thus, Jethro's counsel to Moses required faithfulness for it to work, especially

in the system. One can have the greatest system in the world but if he doesn't involve himself, the system will not work.

In summary, the four principles of hierarchy of the royal priesthood are foundational for every aspect of life in the "Church in the wilderness" (Acts 7:38), as we have already seen. Here is the link to the New Covenant Church. The royal priesthood of all believers carries forward to the New Covenant through the Melchizedekal priesthood that Christ applies to the Church. Jethro's counsel forms the background as we move from the Old to the New. I further

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