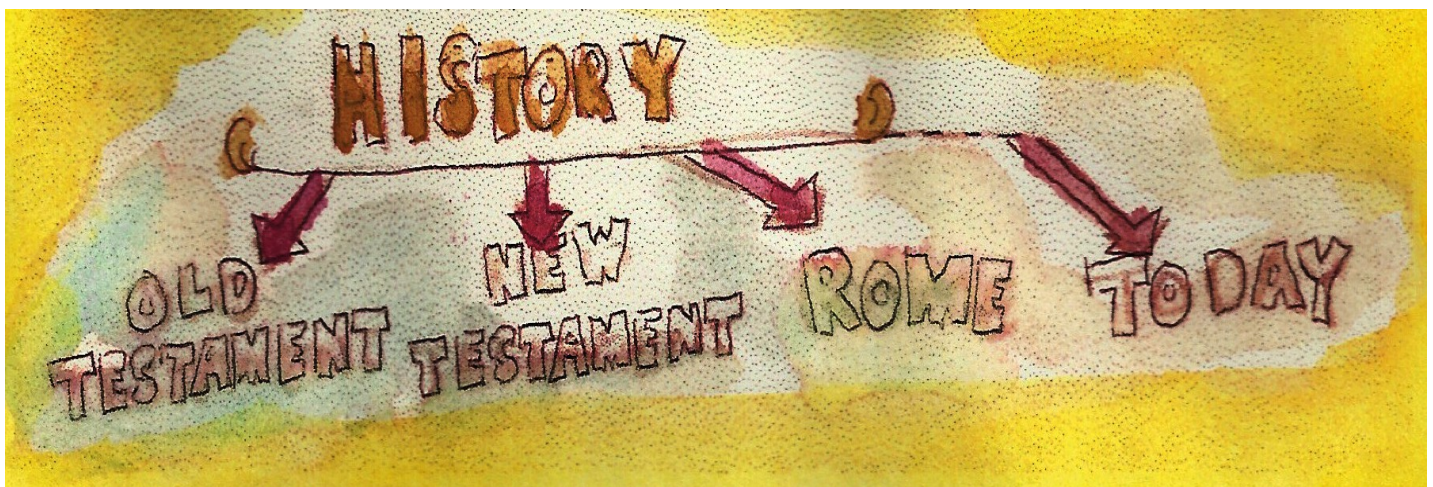


About History

The history of the Christian church is a very big subject of course, but what I would like to focus in on is the changes and aspects that have happened in Christianity with regard to ministry, authority and operational practices.

I'd like to start our study with a question: what did Israel have to do in the times of the Old Testament in order to have their sins forgiven?

So we'll start our study in the Old Testament and take a look at that question--I think it will be very revealing.



The 1st 5 books of the Bible are the Jewish law but there are many aspects to that law-- there are many different purposes behind the laws contained in these books. For example the 1st law in the Bible is "in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" It's a law that God created everything but this is not a law that shows us that we are sinners. I think that most people tend to think of law as the ideas expressed in the Bible that show us where we sin --and yes-- within these books of the Bible there are commandments-- Commandment law shows us where we sin--and I am sure you are familiar with many of these laws-- the Bible tells us thou shall not steal. thou shalt not murder thou shalt not covet etc. There are many many commandment laws within these books of the Bible.

So the 1st point is that Israel understood it had sin. The New Testament tells us that all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory...

Ro 3:23* For **all have sinned**, and come short of the glory of God;

but the old covenant says in the book of Proverbs says it is apparent that all have sinned...

9 ¶ Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin? (Proverbs 20:9)

So the question is: what did Israel have to do to make atonement or payment for this sin that these laws of God showed them?

I think most people might say "well they had to sacrifice an animal" and that is partly correct but it's not specific enough to what the laws required. In other words the sacrifice had to take place in a certain place, done by certain people, in certain ways, and a certain number of animals were sacrificed etc.

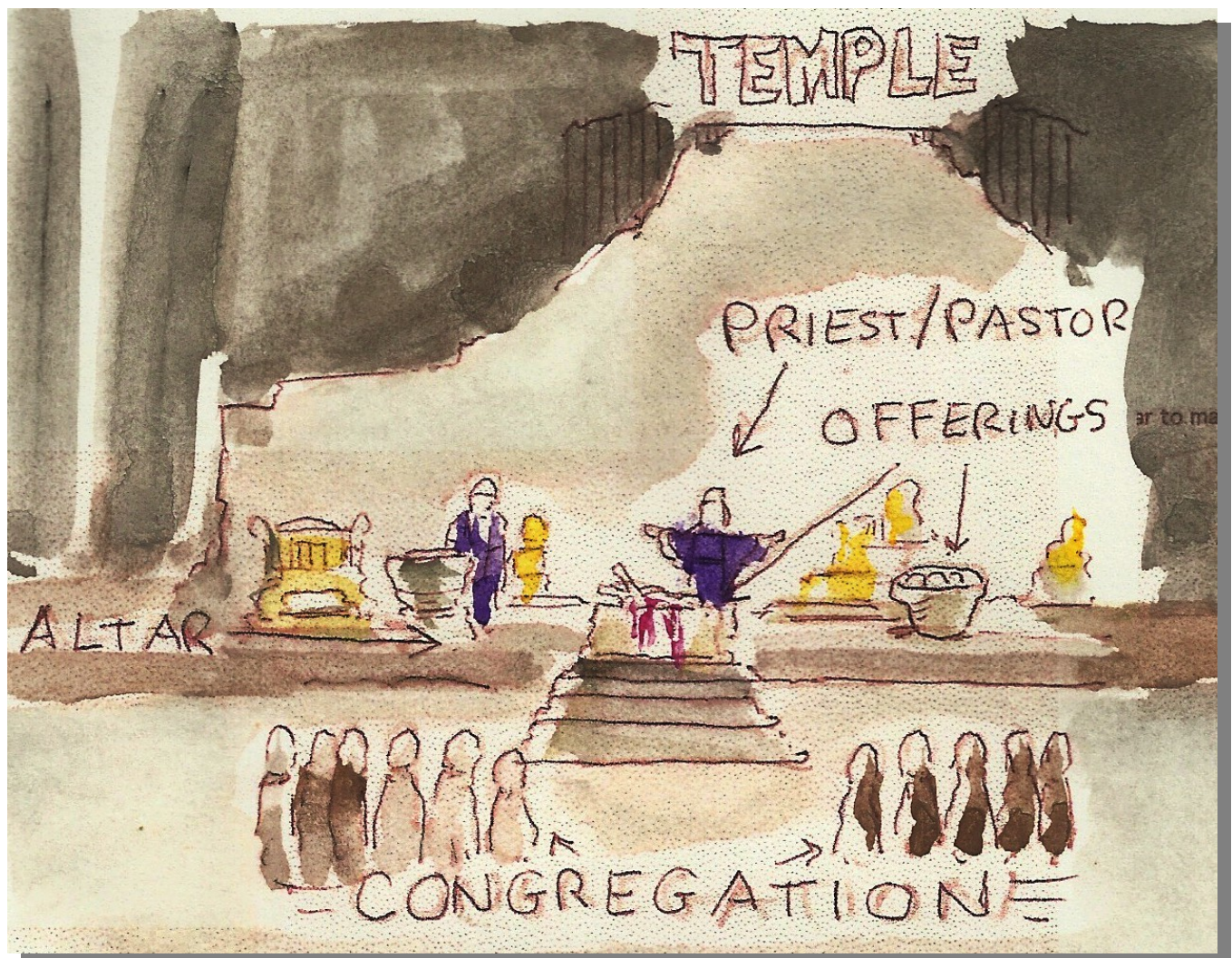
Here's what they had to do:

They had to build and maintain a big building --it was called the sanctuary --the house of God --the temple. When you enter the building there was a gate of praise and a court of worship so the format for meeting in this building was 1st you had praise and worship.



When you enter the building there was an altar, and on the altar was the delegated designated anointed appointed ordained authority who had the right to do the ministry in the Temple the altar ministers, the Levitical priests/pastors. In the old covenant, ministry was a birthright and you could only be a priest if you were born to the tribe of Levi. The other 11 tribes were called the congregation and they had a job, which was to work and bring in the offerings/tithes (tithe was simply the amount of certain offerings) and these offerings were of various herd animals and crops which were brought into the Temple and were partly used to support the ministry and maintain the building. But the central purpose of this system was to put blood upon the altar to make atonement for the soul....

“For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul.” (Leviticus 17:11)



Sounds familiar? When we study a bit of history we will find out how these temple practices became the framework for the Christian church service.



Let's move forward in history. Let's go to the New Testament times. What were the New Testament Christians doing? How are they meeting what was their definition of ministry and authority and church function? The New Testament Christians were imitating what they saw Jesus do. They most often met in small groups but there is no rule about this because there is a new Temple. The Temple is in the believer...

1Co 3:16* Know ye not that ye are the **temple of** God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?

The priesthood is no longer a birthright or something that only can be done on an altar rather the priesthood is in all believers....

Re 1:6* And hath made us **kings and priests** unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

The new purpose that the Christian church had was to spread the gospel. They had direct communication with God through prayer and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, words of wisdom and knowledge and prophecy direct from the Heavenly command post. They could now pray, all of them, directly to God, and receive instructions. to function in His kingdom. There was ministry by individuals but there also was collective ministry. We could call this apostleship, and this is how the church in the New Testament worked.

As history goes forward it seems that the Christians in the 2nd and 3rd century were continuing to more or less follow the apostleship that the church in the New Testament had done. However they were being severely persecuted by the Roman Empire.

There is a warning that Jesus had given to those who follow Him. It relates directly to how things should be "among us". It is contained in 3 places in the New Testament....

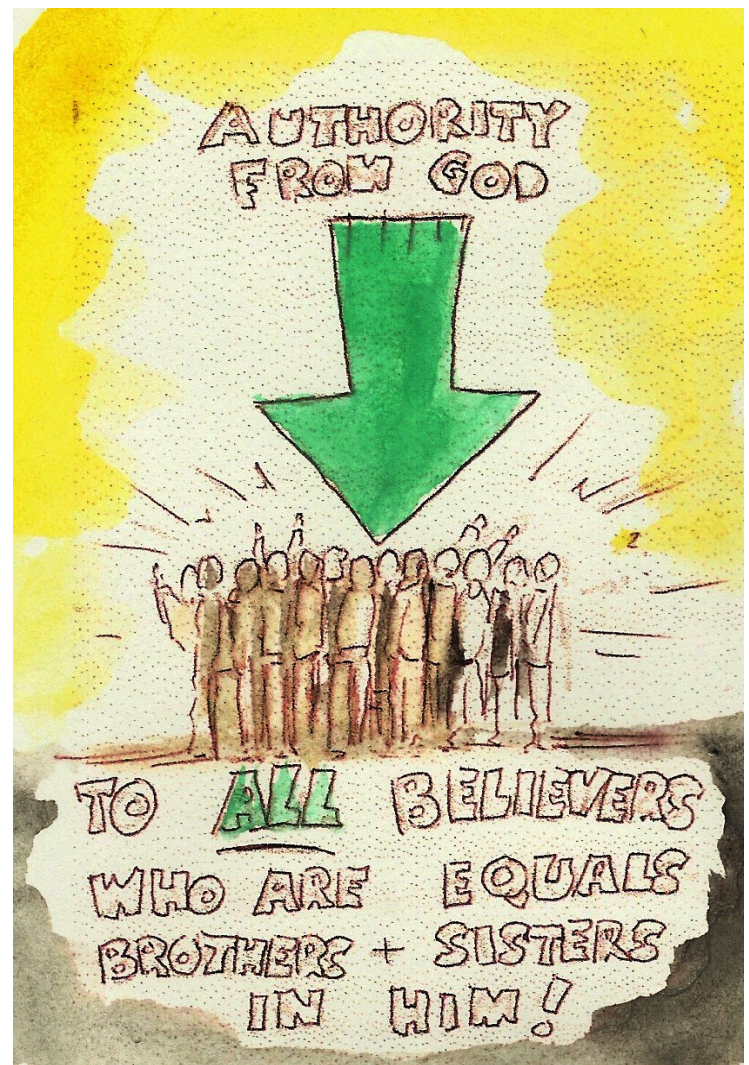
“And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve. For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? is not he that sitteth at meat? But I am among you as he that serveth. (Luke 22: 25-27) (see also Matthew 23: 23-26, Mark 10: 42-45)

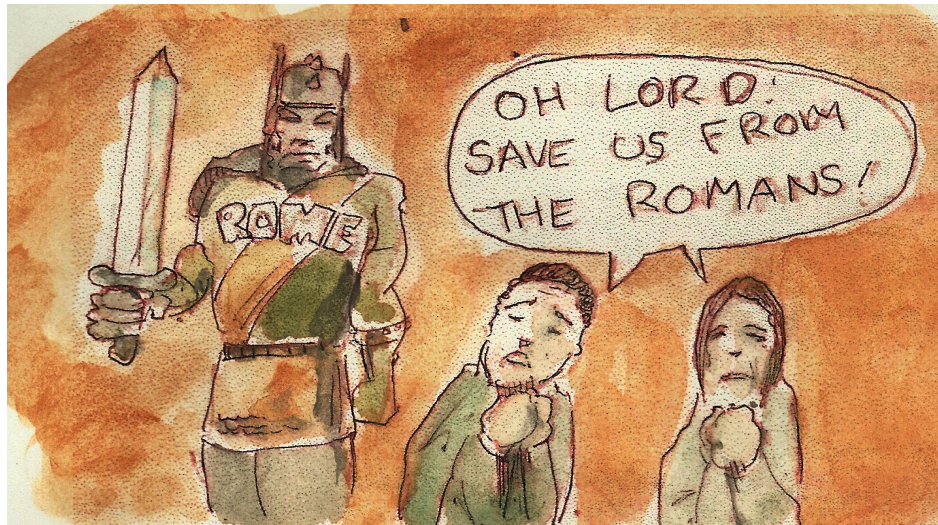


In these verses Jesus warned of the rulers of the Gentiles who exercise authority one over another among themselves. When Jesus spoke those words the Gentile rulers who ruled over Israel at that time were of course the Romans. And it's a very accurate description of the Empire that the Romans operated. One person exercising authority over others. Jesus clearly stated and warned Christians "not so among you".



Jesus is explaining that in the new covenant God is meant to lead Christians directly. We are not supposed to set up human governments with human authority. We are supposed to function directly under God's authority (the kingdom of God/heaven) and so He demonstrated how to do this through the small groups of apostleship.





One can imagine the Christians of the 4th century who were generally meeting in their homes, in the catacombs perhaps in Rome, under extreme persecution and yet at the same time using the incredible system of apostleship that Jesus had shown them. They were spreading their faith like wildfire throughout the Roman Empire. The Romans literally threw everything they could at them! This was the era of feeding Christians to the lions, crucifying believers, and throwing anyone who claimed faith in Christ into jail. One could imagine that those people were praying: "Oh Lord please set us free from this persecution"!

What happened next must've been amazing to them and seemed to be a miracle from God. There was an Emperor name Constantine who suddenly reversed the policy of the Roman Empire and made Christianity legal in Rome. At last they could practice their faith without the fear of death.



However, at the same time he then sat down in counsel with a group of Christians and started to re-create and reform Christian practice.



Shortly after Constantine another Roman Emperor, Theodosius by name, put forth what some have called the worst catastrophe to ever happen to the Christian church. He declared everyone in Rome a Christian. We need to understand that he as Roman Emperor was considered to be the God above all gods so therefore he had the right to proclaim the people under his authority to be whatever he wanted them to be. Of course you can't proclaim people Christians, you can't force people to be Christians. Being a Christian is a decision of faith in the heart and repentance toward God but that didn't seem to matter to the Roman emperors. They were now in control of Christianity or at least were influencing Christianity and reforming it.

Now think back to the warning that Jesus gave, about these "Gentile kings". They operate under a system by which one person exercises authority over another....and Jesus said "not so among you." God would lead everything in the new covenant, A God who can lead and direct 100 billion billion Christians at the same moment of time. A God who can lead every believer, Christ who is the Head of the church, the only Potentate.

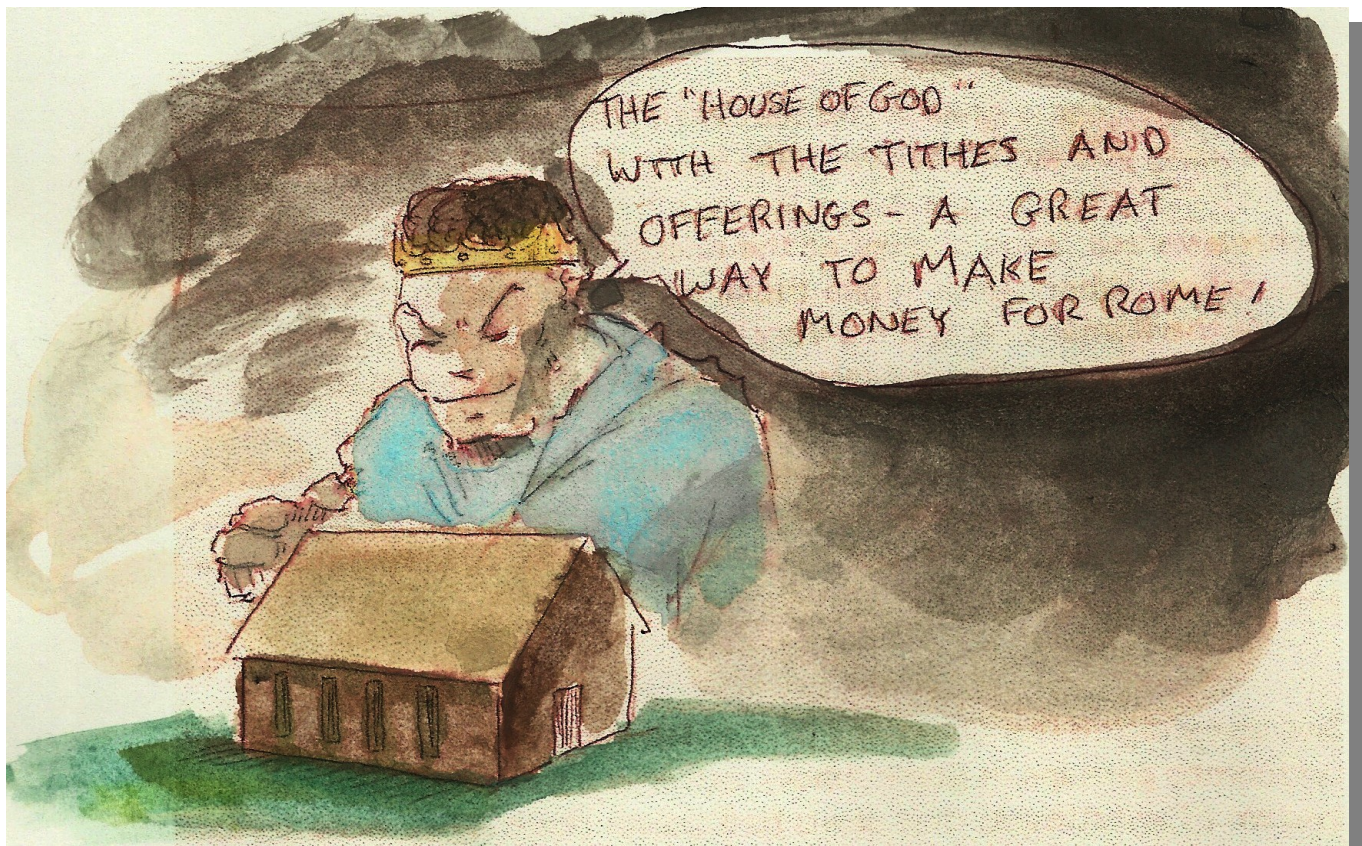
So let's consider the situation. Imagine that everyone is now supposedly a Christian, what would you do? A Catholic history book gave a very interesting quote about this pivotal point of history...

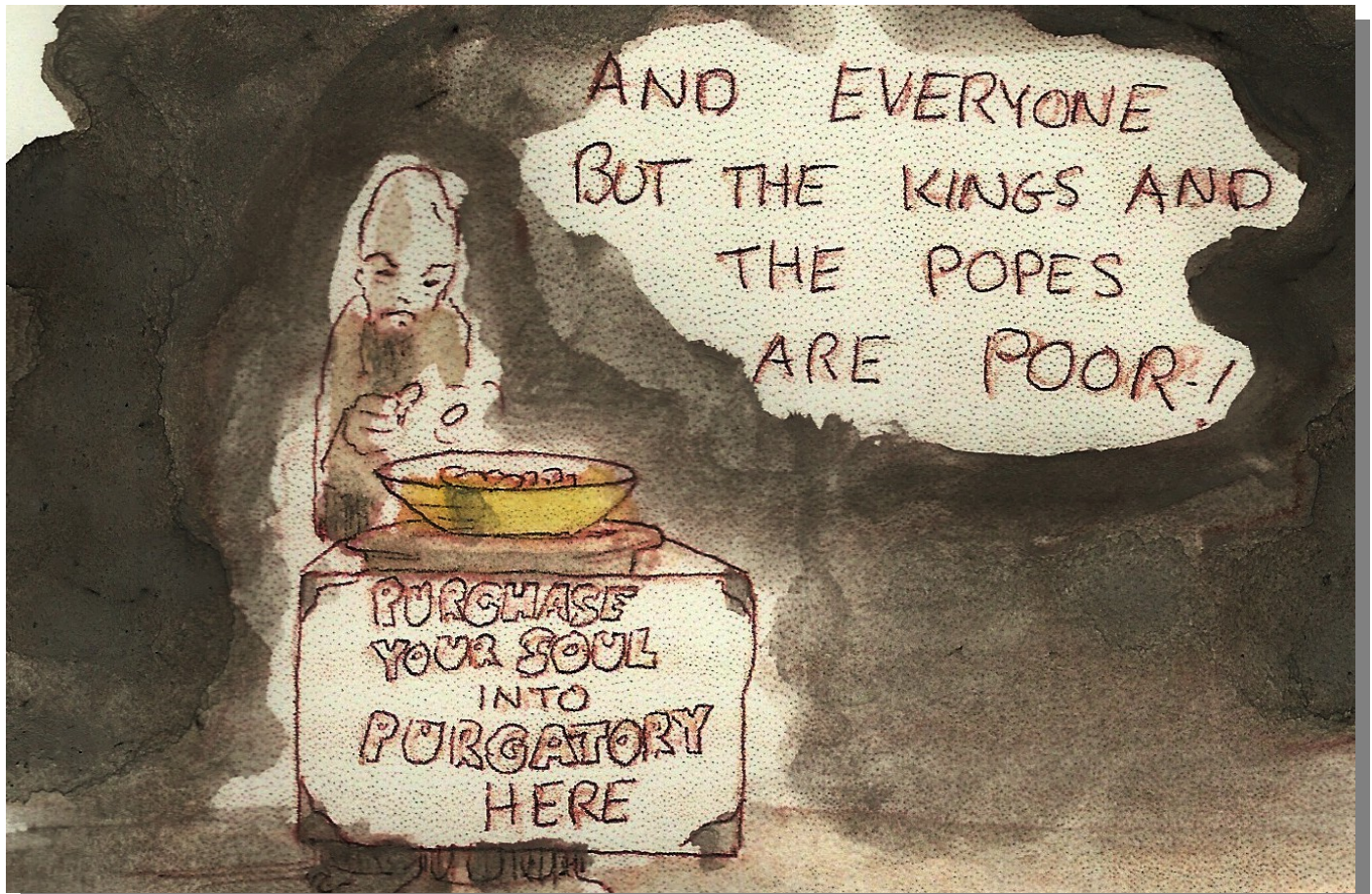
"new forms of ministry had to be invented the care and registration of all these new church members had to be taken care of. Simple apostleship was no longer needed."



Again it sort of makes sense in a backwards, dark ages sensibility--if everyone's a Christian then we don't need to work in apostleship anymore. And how did they reform the church? They created the church service which, as we saw, was based on the practices of the old testament Jewish Temple.

Now let's move forward in history. For over 1000 years the Catholic Church was the one universal Church in Europe. It was extremely influential, very much like a human government. They collected tithes from literally everyone in Europe and built giant cathedrals. The system of the Jewish Temple was highly reinforced upon people. and at the same time the Bible was hidden away in a monastery and very few people were free to read it. Scriptures were just said once a week at church meeting and even then were spoken in the Latin language, that hardly anyone understood!





So we need to really fully understand that the tradition of the church service is highly implanted into Christian practice and experience. Perhaps we need to look at how we practice Christianity today. Are our goals centered on a "temple"? Does the leadership have authority over others? When we say that term "exercise authority over"--it sounds as if the Bible is speaking about harsh evil leadership, and I think the truth is that today there are wonderful good people who are in Christian leadership. But what I am talking about is our actual practice of Christianity. Does the leader have a right to step into an "amen pulpit" a position from which everything said can only be responded to by "yes-- amen"?

That is a huge, gigantic, humongous authority! It is an authority that human governments have been enlightened to. The amen pulpit is a powerful remnant of the Dark Ages among Christian believers.

So now today we place the nicest, kindest, smartest, best person we can find behind that pulpit. Sounds great--and yes the spirit of that person is conveyed to some degree. But there are 2 things wrong with the amen pulpit. One is that as wonderful as that leader may be, their sin is also in authority over us--they are not perfect! And we should realize, there is a perfect leader for Christianity, (Jesus!!) and that is the other reason the amen pulpit is wrong. It leaves out the direct leadership of Jesus Christ!

But wasn't there a Reformation? About 500 years ago the printing press was invented and that is what drove the Reformation because for the 1st time the Bible started to be printed and distributed in common languages (with some extreme resistance from the Catholic Church).

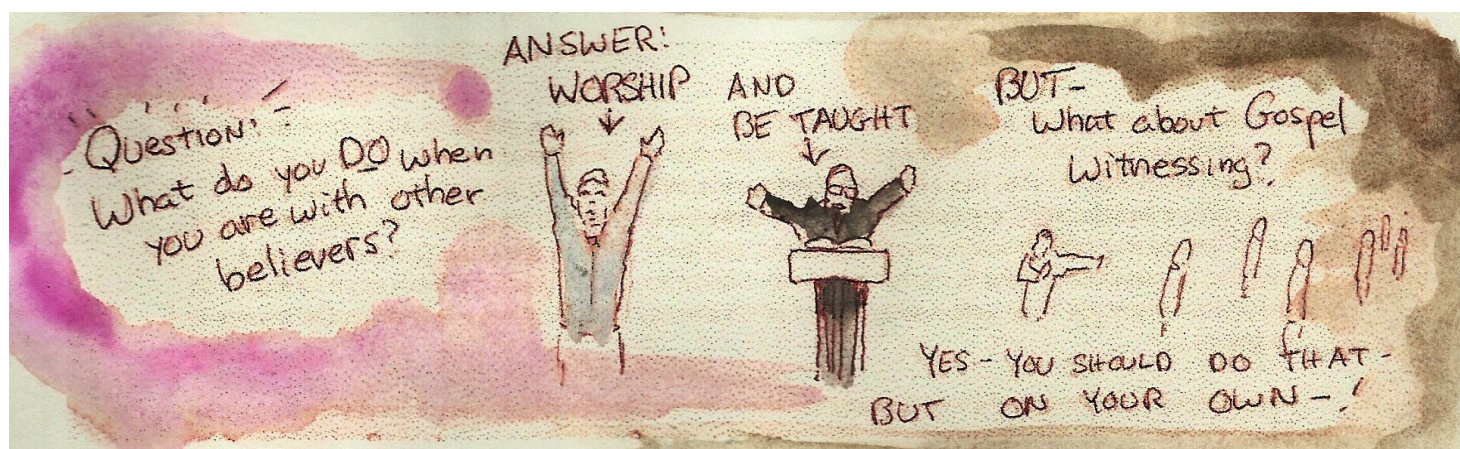
The process of Protestantism was beginning which is simply this: people keep reading the Bible, looking at what Christians were doing in the Bible, and saying "hey were not doing what the Bible says!". Then they go off and found a church. Very often at that stage God can do some wonderful things, But the problem is that the traditional system, the Catholic system, the Temple system is still to this day extremely well- known and popular as the official Christian practice.

This tradition tends to overshadow what the New Testament says about apostleship and about witnessing the gospel and about meeting in small groups, ministry for everyone and equity among believers. These are ideas that get lost in the shuffle of "big-time church".



The answer Biblically is found in understanding the Kingdom of God/Kingdom of Heaven.

I think that most Protestants probably don't realize where their church practices came from. I often ask Christians the question what do you do when you meet together with other believers? I get some strange looks because the answer is usually "everyone knows what we do!"



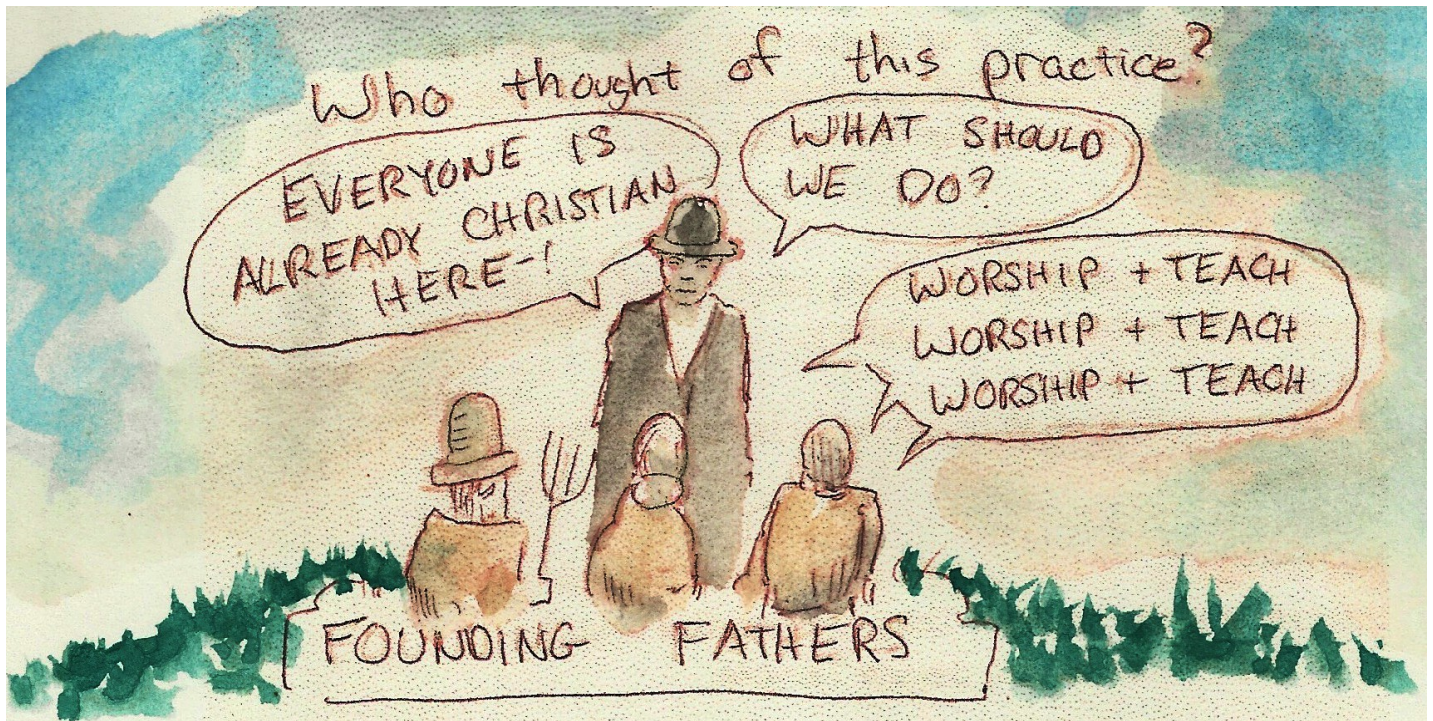
Then I would ask the person what if we went back in time. What did your church do 50 years ago? The answer is --well probably the same stuff --worship and teaching. What about the gospel--and they say something to the effect that people are supposed to go do that on their own.

So is it right that 100% of the time, effort, and money that Christians have, is meant to go into their own worship and teaching and no time together is meant to be spent witnessing the gospel?

Is it right that no organizational time is spent in gospel witnessing?

Are no resources supposed to be directed toward the gospel?

So finally I asked them will who decided this is? Who decided what the Christians in your church are supposed to be doing? The answer will come down to "founding fathers". Very often these decisions of church practice were "set in stone" by people who lived a long time ago.



Here is an example: Perhaps a church was founded in Europe, say 150 years ago. Do we realize that in that day and age travel and communication were extremely limited compared to today? No smart phones, no internet, it may have taken 3 days to travel 50 miles. And in Europe in those days, probably 95% of the people were Christian. So when those founding fathers made their decision about church practice, they had very limited communication, and almost everyone around them that they could reach was already a Christian. So--what to do? It just seems logical to focus almost completely on worship and teaching. Perhaps they had the notion of sending a missionary to Africa or India or China, and that was a good thing. But if we still carry these ideas around with us today we are missing so many many people that we can easily reach with the Gospel and have lost touch with what is around us.

We do not live in a Christian nation any more folks!

Our neighbors need the Gospel. And if we practice a Gospel that includes healing and deliverance and caring for the needy, homeless and poor--the needs are great--the harvest is plenteous but the laborers are few! Sitting week after week in a tradition that only benefits ourselves brings about a cult-like blindness.

We first need knowledge and understanding of what we are doing and where it came from. As someone once said "those who do not know history, are destined to repeat it".