

THE TOP TEN GRACE KILLERS¹

Grace Killer #7 Religious Hierarchies

TRUTH: God gave His Son so that **He could be God to each one of us and so that we could equally have direct access to God.** God has appointed ministries within the body of Christ to serve as overseers and teachers.

ERROR: The error in this area is two-fold. One, some of those who have been given (or claim to have been given) a gift of ministry (apostle, prophet, evangelist, teacher, pastor) have taken it upon themselves **to be kings over God's people.** Secondly, many have set up others **to be their king** instead of God, even to the point of tolerating abuse.

THERE IS ONE GOD, ONE MEDIATOR, ONE MASTER, ONE HIGH-PRIEST, AND ONE FATHER.

1. GOD IS OUR GOD AND WE ARE HIS PEOPLE.

- Under the New Covenant, our relationship with God is contingent on the fact that we are forgiven and that He remembers our sin no more.²

Jeremiah 31:31-34

*“Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—³² not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord.³³ But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; **and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.**³⁴ No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”*

2. JESUS IS OUR HIGH PRIEST.

Hebrews 4:14

*Seeing then that **we have a great High Priest** who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.¹⁵ For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.*

3. JESUS IS OUR ONLY MEDIATOR.

1 Timothy 2:5-6a

*For there is one God and **one Mediator** between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus,⁶ who gave Himself a ransom for all.*

4. THERE ARE **NO CLASSES** BASED ON SOCIAL STATUS, GENDER, OR RACE.

¹ Unless otherwise stated all scripture is taken from the New King James Version (NKJV) Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Parenthesis not in the original text, boldface, and underlining were added for emphasis by the authors of these notes.

² **Under the Old Covenant, this relationship was contingent on obedience.**

Jeremiah 7:23

But this is what I commanded them, saying, ‘Obey My voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be My people. And walk in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well with you.’

Galatians 3:26-28

For you are all sons of God³ through faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁷ For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

5. JESUS WARNED THE DISCIPLES ABOUT CREATING RELIGIOUS HIERARCHIES.

Matthew 23:6-12

They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues, ⁷ greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called by men, 'Rabbi, Rabbi.' ⁸ But you, do not be called 'Rabbi'; for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren. ⁹ Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. ¹⁰ And do not be called teachers; for One is your Teacher, the Christ. ¹¹ But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. ¹² And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

• At first this might seem to negate the mention of teachers in Ephesians 4, but it is a different word. It is used only in the above passage (where underlined).

- kathēgētēs: Thayer Definition: 1) a guide, 2) a master, teacher
- Jesus is our Master and Guide.

Matthew 23:10

Amplified: And you must not be called masters (leaders), for you have one Master (Leader), the Christ.

Wuest NT: And do not be called Master and Guide, because one is your Master and Guide, the Christ.

IF THE CHURCH AND THE OVERSEERS OF THE CHURCH ARE NOT MEDIATORS, THEN WHAT IS THEIR FUNCTION?

1. The Scripture is very clear about what the role is of those who have been given a gift of ministry within the body of Christ.

Ephesians 4:11-16

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, ¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, ¹³ till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; ¹⁴ that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, ¹⁵ but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

- a. To equip the saints for the work of the ministry (through teaching sound doctrine).
- b. To build up the body of Christ
- c. To promote unity of the FAITH & KNOWLEDGE of Jesus
- d. To provide sound teaching (doctrine) to keep from deception
- e. To encourage mutual love and care for each member by each member

f. To gather together for worship, prayer, teaching, and fellowship

Matthew 18:19-20

³ Full sons and daughters

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“Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.”

Acts 2:42

They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

2. Because of much **spiritual abuse in the church, some of those teaching the gospel of grace have set aside completely the idea of church structure.** Yet, we cannot ignore the passages which indicate to us that there are overseers in the church today and that we are to submit to them.

Elders/Bishops/Presbyters

- **Elder:** presbuteros (*pres-boo'-ter-os*)

Thayer: 2b) among the Christians, those who presided over the assemblies (or churches) The NT uses the term bishop, elders, and presbyters interchangeably

Acts 14:21-23

*And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, ²² strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, “We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.” ²³ So when they **had appointed elders in every church**, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.*

- **Overseer/Bishop/Shepherd/Pastor:** episkopos (*ep-is'-kop-os*)

From G1909 and G4649 (in the sense of **G1983**); a superintendent, that is, Christian officer in general charge of a (or the) church (literally or figuratively): - bishop, overseer.

G1983- episkopeō (*ep-ee-skop-eh'-o*)-to oversee; by implication to beware:

look diligently, take the oversight.

1 Peter 5:1-4

*The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: ² Shepherd ((poimainō-feed) the flock of God which is among you, **servicing as overseers** (episkopeō), not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; ³ nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; ⁴ and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.*

Acts 20:28

*Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made **you overseers** (episkopos), to **shepherd** (poimainō) the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.*

poimainō (*poy-mah'ee-no*)

To *tend* as a shepherd (or figuratively *supervisor*): - feed (cattle), rule.

John 21:16 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

*He said to him again a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me?” He *said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” He said to him, “Shepherd (poimainō) My sheep.”*

- **NOT AS BEING LORDS**

katakuriēuō (*kat-ak-oo-ree-yoo'-o*)

To lord against, that is, **control, subjugate: - exercise dominion over** (lordship), be lord over, overcome.

There is a huge difference between overSEEING the flock and overCOMING the flock.

- Understanding the above terms, we can better understand this passage.

Hebrews 13:17

Remember (think of and feel for) **those who rule over (govern, go before, lead) you, who have spoken the word of God to you**, whose **faith** follow, considering the outcome of their **conduct**.⁸ **Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.**⁹ **Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines.** For it is good that the heart be **established by grace**, not with foods which have not profited those who have been occupied with them.

¹⁰ We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat. ¹¹ For the bodies of those animals, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned outside the camp. ¹² Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate. ¹³ Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach. ¹⁴ For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come. ¹⁵ Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name. ¹⁶ But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.

¹⁷ **Obey** those who rule over (govern, go before, lead) you, and be **submissive** (yield), for they **watch out** (keep awake) for your souls, as **those who must give account**. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.

3. The word “obey” usually makes us uneasy principally because it has been used over the centuries to justify spiritual abuse⁴. Here is Thayer’s explanation. You will see it has a much broader meaning than “I command. You obey.”

peithō

Thayer Definition⁵:

1) persuade

1a) to persuade, i.e. to induce one by words to believe

1b) **to make friends of, to win one’s favour, gain one’s good will, or to seek to win one, strive to please one**

1c) to tranquillise

1d) to persuade unto, i.e. move or induce one to persuasion to do something

2) be persuaded

2a) to be persuaded, to suffer (allow) one’s self to be persuaded; to be induced to believe: **to have faith: in a thing**

2a1) to believe

2a2) to be persuaded of a thing concerning a person

2b) to listen to, obey, **yield to, comply with**

3) **to trust, have confidence, be confident**

4. **Overseers/shepherds/elders are necessary in the body of Christ because there will always be:**

- The need for someone or a counsel (Acts 15) to be sure that teaching is Biblical.

⁴ See The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse by Jeff VanVonderen.

⁵ Usually, underlining and boldface within Scripture and definitions and quotes has been added by the author of these notes.

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- A need for doctrinal correction.
- A need to facilitate the gathering of ourselves together, i.e. to provide a means by which we can fellowship/share with each other.
- New believers who need to be taught.
- Believers who have strayed in their understanding of the grace of God.
- Believers who have been spiritually abused and need restoration.
- Young men and women who need to learn from the godly experience and knowledge of more mature believers.
- Tares among the wheat (imposters).
- Wolves (those who seek to destroy sheep), for example, false prophets, false apostles, etc.
- Believers who have faults and need to be encouraged.
- Need for correction of doctrine or behavior that is affecting the body of believers
- Believers in need of counsel.
- Those in true financial need among us (those who are unable to support themselves and have no family to support them).
- Conflicts between believers that for some reason cannot be resolved without intervention.
- Legal requirements to being a church to which someone must be responsible to comply (modern day).
- A need to appropriately distribute funds collected and guard against inappropriate use of money.
- Someone to step into trivial disputes and make a final decision.

5. How we individually live our lives is between us and God as long as it does not disturb the health of the church.

We submit not out of fear nor because we are being bullied (manipulated) into submission. We don't submit just because "they love us" or because "we love them". That has actually led multitudes of people into deception. It is our responsibility to "prove all things and hold fast that which is good". We submit to the life of the church and the work of the church.

One of the hallmarks of the church is that of fellowship.

Jesus designed the church to work together. If someone is not gathering together with other believers, that is not good. If they are in a body, they need to submit to where that body is going as long as that body is teaching and living according to Scripture. If they are doing this correctly, don't worry about the color of the carpet. **Get in there and love each other.**

Jesus said that where two or more are gathered together in my name, He is in the midst with them.

Jesus lives in each one of us individually, but when we gather together in His name, He is also in our midst. The size of the gathering isn't as important as the doctrine that is being taught. Whether "two" or "more", He is in our midst.

6. We see that church leadership is ordained of God, but we also know that religious hierarchies KILL this grace. This happens in two major ways:

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- 1) **Those called into positions of oversight set themselves above the rest of the church.** Instead of shepherding the people in a godly way, they begin to “lord over”, subjugate, the people. Instead of motivating the flock, they manipulate. Instead of feeding the flock the good news, they feed them bad news, or simply fodder (nothing of any value). They begin to threaten and use fear tactics warning them “not to touch God’s anointed”.
- 2) **The sheep ask for a king.** We are busy, and it seems easier to let others tell us what the Bible says. We read books. We take notes on sermons. Yet we seldom open the Bible and read it for ourselves. Maybe some don’t think they are qualified or as qualified as the pastor, so they let Him do all of their thinking for them. Or they think he/she is more anointed, or somehow closer to God. So, they stand in lines to “hear from God” from those who resemble more a fortune teller than a prophet, never using discernment, just receiving everything they are told. We may be sheep, but Jesus said that His sheep hear his voice.
- 3) Attached is a teaching we did on this topic previously. It covers some of the information above, but we felt you would like to have it in its entirety.⁶ This is followed by some closing comments.

⁶ The teaching “Give Us a King” is downloadable at: <http://graceandfaithministries.org/stand-alone-teachings/>

“Give Us a King” 1 Samuel 8:4-21

Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah, ⁵ and said to him, “Look, you are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations.”

*⁶ But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, “Give us a king to judge us.” So Samuel prayed to the LORD. ⁷ And the LORD said to Samuel, “Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for **they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them.** ⁸ According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt, even to this day—with which **they have forsaken Me** and served other gods—so they are doing to you also. ⁹ Now therefore, heed their voice. However, you shall **solemnly forewarn them,** and show them the behavior of the king who will reign over them.”*

¹⁰ So Samuel told all the words of the LORD to the people who asked him for a king. ¹¹ And he said, “This will be the behavior of the king who will reign over you:

- 1. He will take your sons and appoint them for his own chariots and to be his horsemen, and some will run before his chariots.*
- 2. ¹² He will appoint captains over his thousands and captains over his fifties, will set some to plow his ground and reap his harvest, and some to make his weapons of war and equipment for his chariots.*
- 3. ¹³ He will take your daughters to be perfumers, cooks, and bakers.*
- 4. ¹⁴ And he will take the best of your fields, your vineyards, and your olive groves, and give them to his servants.*
- 5. ¹⁵ He will take a tenth of your grain and your vintage, and give it to his officers and servants.*
- 6. ¹⁶ And he will take your male servants, your female servants, your finest young men, and your donkeys, and put them to his work.*
- 7. ¹⁷ He will take a tenth of your sheep.*
- 8. And you will be his servants.*

18 And you will cry out in that day because of your king whom you have chosen for yourselves, and the Lord will not hear you in that day.”

¹⁹ Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said,

- “No, but we will have a king over us,*
- ²⁰ that we also may be like all the nations,*
- and that our king may judge us*
- and go out before us and fight our battles.”*

²¹ And Samuel heard all the words of the people, and he repeated them in the hearing of the LORD. ²² So the LORD said to Samuel, “Heed their voice, and make them a king.”

1 Timothy 2:5

*For there is one God and **one Mediator** between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, ⁶ who gave Himself a ransom for all.*

- 1. There is NO THING that can mediate between you and God.**

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Yet, WE come up with ways to get closer to God such as prayer formulas and religious exercises. We are saying that OUR efforts bring us closer to God, but God declares:

**There is ONE God and ONE Mediator between God and men,
the Man Christ Jesus, who GAVE HIMSELF A RANSOM FOR ALL.**

It is not possible for our spiritual disciplines to bring us closer to God. Jesus already shed His blood so that we are now close to Him. We don't need any steps or practices to reach Him. God has brought us to Himself through the blood of Jesus.

2. There is NO ONE who can mediate between you and God.

A pastor seeking to regain control over his congregation said, "THIS is a *theocracy*, and I am the spiritual authority here!"

Webster's dictionary defines "theocracy" as a "government of a state by immediate divine guidance or by officials who are regarded as divinely guided". The church is not a theocracy because EVERYONE in the church is divinely guided by God, not just one figure head. In a theocracy, the divinely inspired leader serves as a mediator.

**There is ONE God and ONE Mediator between God and men,
the Man Christ Jesus, who GAVE HIMSELF A RANSOM FOR ALL.**

3. Give Us a King!

a. Yet, sadly, **many people today see the church and the pastors as their MEDIATORS**. They turn over the religious education of their most valued resource, their children, to the church and the pastors. Few even bother to find out what is being taught to their children. Many of them are afraid to make the simplest of a life decision without consulting their spiritual leaders, and we are sad to say that many pastors are insulted if a church member makes a big decision without first consulting them. Now, it isn't wrong to ask for prayer within the body of Christ, but there are many believers today who would prefer to have someone else pray for them as if their prayers aren't as effective.

**ARE WE ASKING FOR A KING AND REJECTING THE KING OF KINGS?
SHALL WE DESPISE GOD'S GRACE AND LOVE TOWARD US AND APPROACH HIM INDIRECTLY
VIA A MEDIATOR INSTEAD OF THROUGH JESUS????**

b. The church and your pastor were NEVER meant to be your mediators. You have direct communication with God as good as and as close as your pastors.

**There is ONE God and ONE Mediator between God and men,
the Man Christ Jesus, who GAVE HIMSELF A RANSOM FOR ALL.**

4. The warning to the children of Israel about asking for a King is a warning to all who seek a different mediator besides the King of kings, Jesus.

- a. The pastors begin to see themselves as kings and the laity as subjects.
- b. The laity begin to see themselves as subjects and the pastors as kings.

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- c. The professionals are trained to do ministry, not the people. So, the people aren't allowed or are discouraged from having an opinion about what is taught and what happens. "You wouldn't tell your brain surgeon how to do brain surgery would you?"
- d. The spiritual leaders are seen as a little more spiritual, a little closer to God, more able to hear from God, and wiser than the laity.
- e. The warnings God gave the people can come true.
 - 1) "He will take your children for himself."
Children start to see the pastor as more spiritual than their parents. Parents willingly give the teaching and training of their children to the church.
 - 2) V 16: "He will also take your male servants and your female servants and your best young men and your donkeys and use them for his work."
Sadly, in many churches, the clergy begin to see the people as only being valuable based on the "work" they can get out of a person. When the person rebels or is no longer productive, he/she is often ignored leaving the person feeling used and discarded.
 - 3) V 15: "He will take a tenth of your seed and of your vineyards and give to his officers and to his servants...17 He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his servants.
Many churches today REQUIRE than you tithe if you want to be a member. That money will be used to pay the employees of the church
 - 4) In some churches there are discipleship programs which end up being a form of mediation between the believer and God. They will influence such decisions as:
 - i. Whether or not and even whom you date
 - ii. Whom you marry
 - iii. If you should get a higher education or not (often seen as self-serving)
 - iv. What ministries you should be involved in
 - v. What decisions you should make

HEY, WHO NEEDS JESUS WHEN YOU HAVE A MENTOR?

Please don't take this wrong, but...

- I don't want to be your king. Jesus is your king.
- I cannot be your mediator between you and God. That job is only open to ONE PERSON, Jesus Christ.
- YOU can hear from God as well as your pastor can. You can go DIRECTLY TO GOD through Jesus.

John 16:26-27

In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you; ²⁷ for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God.

- The pastor should not be telling you what to do. God wants to do that! HE can direct you and speak to you.

Romans 8:14

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

- There is NO ONE more qualified to teach your children than you. God gave them to YOU to raise. He will show you what is right for your own child.

Ephesian 6:4

And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.

- **The job of every pastor and teacher and minister in the body of Christ is NOT to take over your life, but to set an example; to teach you the TRUTH so that YOU will have confidence in Jesus as YOUR mediator.**

1 Peter 5:1-4

The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: 2 Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; 3 nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; 4 and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.⁷

DO YOU LOVE ME? (The bad leadership keeps the sheep from being His friend)

John 21:15-17

*15 So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus *said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love (agape) Me more than these?” He *said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love (Phileo) You.” He *said to him, “Tend My lambs.”¹⁶ He said to him again a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love (agape) Me?” He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love (phileo) You.” He *said to him, “Shepherd My sheep.”¹⁷ He *said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love (phileo) Me?” Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, “Do you love (phileo) Me?” And he said to Him, “Lord, You know all things; You know that I love (phileo) You.” Jesus *said to him, “Tend My sheep.*

**phileo
fil-eh'-o**

From G5384; to be a friend to (fond of [an individual or an object]), that is, have affection for (denoting personal attachment, as a matter of sentiment or feeling; while G25 (agapao) is wider, embracing especially the judgment and the deliberate assent of the will as a matter of principle, duty and propriety: the two thus stand related very much as G2309 and G1014, or as G2372 and G3563 respectively; the former being chiefly of the heart and the latter of the head); specifically to kiss (as a mark of tenderness): - kiss, love.

John 5:20

20 For the Father loves (phileo) the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does; and He will show Him greater works than these, that you may marvel.

John 16:27

27 for the Father Himself loves (phileo) you, because you have loved (phileo) Me, and have believed that I came forth from God.

The relationship that God wants with you is the Father/child relationship, and the adult Friend/friend relationship.

⁷ End of “Give Us A King!”

Philos Friend

fee'-los

Properly dear, that is, a friend; actively fond, that is, friendly (still as a noun, an associate, neighbor, etc

John 15:12-15

“This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴ You are My friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵ No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you.

1 Corinthians 16:22

If anyone does not love (phileo) the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed. O Lord, come!

Religion/law wants you to agape the Lord, love Him as a matter of command or willful choice, Grace wants you to phileo the Lord, love Him as your friend and brother.