

CLERGY AND LAITY

October is "Clergy Appreciation Month". It is a godly thing to remember our spiritual leaders. In Heb. 13:7 we are told to "remember" them. In Heb. 13:17 we are told to "obey" them. In 1 Tim. 5:17 - 20; Gal. 6:6; 1 Cor. 9:7 - 14, etc. we are told that such workers are worthy of being paid. In Phil. 2:29 we are told to honor men like Epaphroditus who risked his life to serve Christ. Thank you for honoring the spiritual leaders of our church. This is a godly thing to do.

It is important to remember, however, that the Bible NEVER uses the terms "clergy" and "laity" as they are generally used in the world today. We need to be diligent to use Bible words correctly for words represent ideas. If we use a word incorrectly this may indicate that we have an incorrect idea. Remember, the very essence of Christianity is to totally surrender to God. Our goal should be for His mind to become our mind. We therefore ought to strive to think as God thinks, and to use words as He uses them.

The word "church", for example, is a good Bible word. In Scripture it always refers to an assembly of people. Jesus is building His church, that is, He is assembling His people. Someday He will return for His church. Most people today, however, refer to the church as a building where religious people meet. While most people understand the difference, this distinction is not irrelevant. It is foundational to a correct understanding of Christianity. The church of Jesus Christ existed for some two hundred years without special church buildings, and still does so in many parts of the world.

Having said this, let us consider what the Bible says about clergy and laity. The word **clergy** is not found in our English Bible. It comes from the Greek word "kleros" which is found 13 times in the N. T. Scriptures. It is translated 1 time as heritage, 2 times as inheritance, 3 times as lot, 5 times as lots, and 2 times as part. The word involves the idea of casting lots and indicates that certain people are "chosen" by God. God chosen people, however, are not just a few leaders robed in priestly garments. Every Christian has been chosen by God and is therefore a part of God's clergy. This is made plain in in 1 Pet. 5:3 where elders are told not to "Lord it over God's heritage". The word translated "heritage" is "kleros". The people being shepherded by the elders were called God's clergy. All of Gods' people are His chosen ones.

The word **laity** is not found in our English Bibles either. It comes from the Greek word "laos" which is found over 140 times in the N.T. Scriptures. Every time the word is found it is translated as "people". A careful reading of Scripture reveals that the Bible words kleros and laos both refer to the same group of people. The people are God are called His clergy and the clergy of God are called His people.

HOW AND WHEN DID THESE WORDS GET CORRUPTED?

In Old Testament times there was only one place on earth where the people of God could come to worship (Deut. 12:5 - 14) This is why Jews from all over the world had to journey to Jerusalem. Further, only one tribe could minister at the Temple. This was the Tribe of Levi. Only one family in that tribe could be priests. That was the family of Aaron. Not even all of Aaron's sons could be priests for anyone with a physical blemish could not serve (Lev. 21 17 ff.) These priests wore special hats and robes.

Jesus changed all this! He made it possible for people to worship God everywhere and not just in Jerusalem (John 4:21 - 24). Further, He ordained that everyone of His followers would be a priest (1 Pet. 2:5 - 10). It is no longer necessary to journey to Jerusalem and petition a special priest for help. You can go directly to God through Jesus Christ all by yourself from any spot on earth.

The beauty of God's Royal Priesthood was not tarnished immediately. It took several centuries. Ultimately, however, men drifted so far from the truth that God's people were again enslaved to a system where they had to journey to some special building and seek out a special priest. If you are a Christian, you are also a royal priest. Right where you are, you can pray directly to the Father through Christ. Never let any man or system of men rob you of this privilege!