

5.

LEADERSHIP IN THE CHURCH

Now we come to one of the most important aspects of our discussion. It is perhaps the most misunderstood part of God's eternal building. Unless and until we have a clear comprehension of how the body of Christ is governed, much of our work will be in vain. Without such clarity of vision we are left with using human means. Lacking a heavenly revelation we have only earthly methods on which to depend. Without divine materials, we cannot build something in which He will be pleased to dwell.

This is a very difficult subject primarily because virtually everyone arrives at the discussion with many preconceived ideas. What is commonly accepted and practiced today in the church is thought of as the standard. Even unbelievers have strongly entrenched notions about what church leadership is all about. For example, if you mention the word "pastor" almost everyone thinks of someone who runs a church and preaches there every Sunday. The examples in the world around them have indoctrinated them. Consequently, it is very difficult to speak about something new or different.

In New Testament times, there was no such established pattern. There had never been such a thing as a church. They did not have thousands of examples to copy

and so their minds were in a kind of virginal state. What I would like to ask of all readers is that they attempt to arrive at this same kind of innocence concerning our subject of church leadership. Let us imagine that we too lived during the times of the book of Acts and that all the things which the Holy Spirit was doing were brand new and fresh. Perhaps in this way we can lay aside for a moment all the baggage of what we think we know, and open up to God. Through His mercy, it may be that a clearer vision of God's government of His house may be shown to us.

It cannot hurt to open up for one moment. You can always go back to what you thought and practiced before. If what you read does not speak to you, if the Holy Spirit reveals nothing new or different, you have lost nothing. No one else needs to know that you secretly took a little time to review your work for the Lord to see if in some way you might have missed something or if there may be some way to improve.

THE GOVERNING PRINCIPLE

In beginning our discussion, the first and foremost principle which we must come to understand is that Jesus Christ is the head of His body. This means that He is the one and only government. Isaiah 9:6 reads: "...and the government will be upon His shoulder." He is the one who is running everything. He is the one who is making the decisions. He is the one leader. He is the head. We read: "And He is the head of the body, the church" (Col 1:18). Further we are taught that He is the "head over all things to the church" (Eph 1:22). Also we see that He is to have the pre-eminence in all things (Col 1:18).

Let us pause here a moment and meditate on this analogy of the body. God uses this word "body" as a figure to reveal to us something about His will and authority. In a human body, the head runs everything. No other member gets to make decisions. No other part is qualified to guide the others. Although the body is extremely complex and has many different types of members and organs, the head

directs the functions of them all. The eye may be very keen, but it never gets to run the body. The heart may be healthy, but it never needs to make decisions. The legs may be strong, but they do not give direction to the other members. Although there is a system of nerves which transmit the will of the head to all the other parts, these nerves never become capable of thinking, reasoning and then making decisions on their own.

So it is in the body of Christ. Jesus has been placed by the Father as the head of everything. Until today, He still retains this position. It is God's intention that Jesus govern every movement of His body. Every work, every word, every facet of its being is supposed to be governed by the Head. No other member can substitute for Him. No one else gets to usurp or share part of this authority. Jesus Christ is perfectly capable of upholding every molecule of the universe. So also, He is able to function as the head of all things to the church.

Yet today, the church appears to be a kind of Hydra. Hydra was a mythological creature with very many heads. Everywhere one looks, there are many, many different men and women claiming to have authority. They are governing, running and directing some kind of church or other with abandon. Perhaps without realizing it, many believers are competing with Jesus to be the head of at least a part of His church.

Every day which passes, another "head" sprouts up to claim to have a mandate from the Lord to run a part of His operation. Many of them are insisting that believers submit to their authority since it has been received from God. But to which of them must we submit? Which of the thousands, or even tens of thousands, of authority figures which we see in the church today is really the right one?

THE PROBLEM OF INVISIBILITY

Perhaps a large part of the problem we have with understanding and following the government of the true Head is that He is invisible. We cannot see Him with our

physical eyes. But the natural man trusts in visible things. He likes things which are tangible, something he can see, taste, feel and hear. To him, these are real. The spiritual world, on the other hand, is a little too mystical and therefore unreliable.

However, according to the Bible, the spiritual things are in fact the most real. They are more “real” than the physical world in which we trust so much. II Corinthians 4:18 reads: “...for the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.” Here we need to readjust our thinking. Our reliance on the tangible and physical, must be replaced with our complete dependence on our invisible Lord.

Through our faith, we must develop an intimate relationship with Jesus. We must learn to know Him, to hear from Him and to follow Him. This is absolutely essential for every believer. No one else can do this for you. Each and every Christian needs to become a real follower of Christ.

It is not sufficient for anyone simply to conform to some biblical standards. It is not enough for someone just to fit into some kind of group, accepting their customs and goals. It is not God’s intention that we merely give our mental acceptance to some set of doctrines or practices. His thought is that we would come to know Him personally and intimately. Further, it is His intention that through this close, real relationship He would be able to guide us in all of our living.

In this way, He can be our head. As we know Him and follow Him, His government becomes ever more real in our lives. He can direct our daily activities and show us His will and His ways. Even more than this, He can begin to guide our thoughts and our emotions. His rulership can begin to affect our attitudes and our opinions. Our desires, our expectations and even our fears can begin to be subject to His authority.

Just as our human head guides not only our body, but every aspect of our psychological life, so too Jesus can reign over all of our living. In this way the life and nature

of God can be manifested in us and through us. This is real Christianity. This is the true house of God.

However, it is painfully obvious that not all believers are managing to live in this intimacy and obedience. It is sad but true that many who call themselves Christians have very little intimacy with the Lord and have almost no idea of how to hear from Him and follow Him. It is here that there arises a great temptation which manifests itself in two aspects which we will attempt to detail here.

Firstly, there are those who do have some relationship with Jesus. They have a measure of consecration and faith. They are succeeding to a greater or lesser degree to hear from God. So when they see others who are wandering around somewhat cluelessly without any direction from the Head, they want to help them.

But if they are not careful, while trying to help these others, they themselves become the head. Little by little, they begin to substitute for the Lord in the lives of these individuals. They begin to give counsel and guidance. They orient these others toward the goals which God has shown to them. They teach, they preach and they lead. Soon they have a whole group of followers.

The problem here is that often these followers have not been brought into an intimacy with Jesus. They have not succeeded in establishing a relationship with Him which is guiding their lives. Instead, they have begun to rely on and follow human leadership. As a result, they are not being transformed into the image of Christ but are simply being conformed to the image of the leader and/or group which they attend.

It is very possible that the counsel and guidance which they received has been both biblical and sound. It is hoped that the teaching they have heard has been well grounded in the word of God. However, all this can be done without bringing someone any closer to God. It is very possible that they have merely become dependent on another man.

It could be that these individuals even appear to have changed a little bit. Perhaps some of their grosser sins have disappeared or gone underground. It may be that their

clothing styles, haircuts and habits have been modified. In the eyes of the group they are now considered “good Christians.”

But if they have not developed the kind of communion with the invisible God which has become the source of their living and direction, all this change is in vain. If they have not arrived at a total submission of all of their being to the authority of the Head, they have missed the real goal. If they have not developed a daily, intimate walk with the invisible Savior, they have not really been helped at all. These folks have been conformed to some standard but not transformed into the image of Jesus.

I believe that the vast majority of such leaders begin with the best of intentions. They want to help the people of God. They feel sympathy for those who do not enjoy the relationship with Jesus which they have. And so they set about working to help them. But if they are not careful it is extremely easy, whether they want to or not, to induce in others a dependence upon themselves.

It is very simple to begin to substitute themselves in the place of Jesus in the lives of others. Although we may think we see some changes in their lives, if they are not becoming intimate with Jesus and learning to really follow Him, all this is useless. Unless we have received a heavenly vision, it is very easy to build something which will not endure the test. It is all too possible to expend much time and effort constructing a house in which God will not live.

THE PROBLEM OF PRIDE

Sometimes things which are done with the best of intentions do not end well. We may mean to do the right thing but end up erring. If we begin building without a heavenly revelation, this can easily occur. Within the heart of every man and woman lurks one sinister sin – pride.

This is something of which we may not be aware, yet it is there just the same. So when others begin to look to us, when we are honored with titles and positions, when prestige and respect begin to come our way, we are in a very

dangerous position. If and when we accept such things, we have fallen into the "same condemnation as the devil" (I Tim 3:6). (Another translation is that we have fallen into the same snare as the devil did.)

Jesus did not accept honor from men (Jn 5:41). He took no position of authority. He refused to be made king (Jn 6:15). He avoided fame, telling those whom He cured to keep quiet about it (Mt 8:4; 9:30; Mk 7:36; 8:26). His is an example we do well to follow.

If we too do not refuse all such attention from men, we will stray from God's path. If we do not learn to avoid getting into positions where men look to us instead of to Jesus, we will fall into serious error. As we begin to understand the importance of the headship of Christ over His body, this truth will become more and more evident to us. If we exalt ourselves or allow other people to exalt us, this demonstrates that we have not yet understood how to build up the house of God.

In the New Testament we encounter an interesting concept. It is the idea of an "antichrist." In the Greek language, this prefix "anti" has two meanings. The one with which we are most familiar today is the meaning "against." Today we think of an antichrist as being someone who is against Christ. But in the days of the early church this word had an even more prominent meaning. This meaning is: "instead of" or "in the place of."

Therefore, an antichrist would be someone who was taking the place of Christ. Instead of Jesus being the head and source of our living, an antichrist would be someone who was substituting for Him in this relationship. A modern antichrist would be someone to whom others look for their guidance and direction instead of Christ.

In the future someone called "antichrist" will sit "in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God" (II Thess 2:4), in other words taking God's rightful place. So today many are, wittingly or unwittingly, taking the place of Jesus in His church. Instead of Him being the Head over everything and everyone, they have become the leaders.

MEN TEND TOWARDS A HUMAN DEPENDENCE

Secondly, many of God's people like to have a human leader. In Jeremiah 5:31 we read: "The priests rule by their own power; and My people love to have it so." As we have seen before, people trust their physical senses. Therefore, a human head or leader may seem like a wonderful thing for them. They can see him, hear him and then obey him (or her). This is a natural tendency of mankind. Since the fall of Adam and Eve, this has been so. Following someone invisible is a little difficult. Following a human leader is much easier.

So it is very common for such individuals to look for and look to those who have a relationship with Jesus. They set up for themselves a kind of intermediary who hears from God for them and then passes along the instructions. This person seeks the Lord for them, gives them counsel and advice, takes care of problems for them and even marries them and buries them.

Thus, instead of learning to know and follow Jesus, these men and women are joined to another head. Their dependence is placed upon someone else. Their focus is upon some kind of leader or other to whom they look for their spiritual food and guidance. This is not the plan of God. This is not His bride. This is not His house. This is not His body. It is a human substitute for all the wonderful spiritual things which He has in His heart.

These two tendencies – the one in which someone with some spiritual life wants to help others and the one in which the human being prefers to depend on someone tangible – work together to create an unhealthy spiritual situation. Instead of really helping others, we may instead be hindering them. Without a deep understanding of how to build, it is possible to be constructing something which is blocking the work of God instead of advancing it. It may even be that what we think is a great work for the Lord is really a substitute for what He would really like to do. Let us investigate this possibility further.

God's thought is to establish an intimate relationship with every believer resulting in their being able to sense and follow His leadership in every aspect of their living. Therefore, when we wish to minister to others, this too must be our goal. Our objective must be to help expose and eliminate in every believer's life anything and everything which is hindering their relationship with Jesus.

Also, we must encourage them in every way to obey Him, to know Him and to love Him. We must foster within them the idea of total consecration to His will and work. We must constantly pray and consider how to stir up one another to seek His face more and more. It is our privilege to exhibit through our life, words and works the nature of Jesus in such a way that it will draw others into an intimacy with Himself. This is true ministry.

ANOTHER GOAL

But it is possible for us to have another goal. It could be that our vision is faulty and that we are trying to put together some kind of group which is dependent on our gifts and ministry. It may be that the devil has succeeded in subtly deviating us from God's path and we have begun building an earthly organization instead of the house of God.

When this occurs, our motives change. Wishing to attract members, we modify our message. Instead of seeking deep (and probably uncomfortable) conviction of sinners, we want folks to feel welcome. In the place of exposing where believers are not right with God, we want them to come back and become regular members. In place of the ministry of the Holy Spirit whose main job is to convict the world of sin (Jn 16:8), we have various entertainments and inoffensive oratory. When our vision is deficient, then we begin to act and work in ways which are in conflict with the eternal purposes of God.

Jesus never modified His message to make people feel welcome and comfortable. He always spoke the truth regardless of the reactions and results. When our only goal

is to bring others into a relationship with Him, when we do not have our own pet projects and plans, then we too are free to speak His word without fear. If we are only building up individuals and not trying to put together some kind of group, then we can minister Jesus with great liberty. When we have only the house of God in view and not some kind of earthly success, we can more easily be led by the Spirit of God. We can speak the truth in love (Eph 4:15).

THE WORDS OF JESUS

As we are trying to understand the government of God in His body, we must constantly keep in mind the teachings of Jesus. When we read the book of Acts and the epistles and see what was taught and done in those days, we must remember to filter all this through the words of our Lord recorded in the gospels. Without this balance, it is possible to think that we perceive some practice or teaching which is out of line with what Jesus taught.

In fact, much of what is taught and practiced today in the church goes directly against His words. Part of the reason for this is that many people are coming to the scriptures with a certain point of view, a basketful of preconceived ideas, which they have gained from the practice of modern Christianity. Therefore, they take certain phrases and passages from the epistles and twist them to conform to their already entrenched notions.

The early apostles did not have this extra baggage. They had spent years walking together with the Lord and His instructions to them guided the things that they did and taught. These brothers were not modifying His teachings. They were not improving upon them as they went along. They were not putting into practice things which violated what they had learned from their Lord.

Therefore, we too must understand all that they said or did in this light. It is essential for us to alter our way of understanding this subject to conform to the gospel record. This is much safer than trying to alter God's word to fit or justify our practices.

Jesus' teachings laid the foundation for the exercise of all authority in His church. Anything which was said or done later on which was a violation of His instructions was a mistake. Further, anything which is being taught or practiced today which also is in violation of His teachings is a serious error. This point must be very clear to us. What our Lord taught was not simply some kind of suggestion. No one is or was free to modify this later according to their own desires or whims.

The foundation which Jesus clearly laid out concerning the exercise of authority is absolute. We must work in accordance with His instructions or we will be found to be acting in disobedience.

It is unfortunate but true that many Bible translators have arrived at their work with some modern-day preconceptions. They have understood leadership and authority as though looking through the lenses of the practices of their day and time. Consequently, in many versions of the Bible, some key verses about authority in the epistles have a kind of emphasis or slant which does not harmonize with Jesus' teachings.

As every writer knows, the way words are used is very important. The very same words, put in different order or used with a different emphasis can convey quite different ideas. Therefore, as part of our investigation, we will examine some of these verses to see if there are some other translations which give a more cohesive understanding of this important subject.

SOME BASIC PRINCIPLES

When Jesus taught His disciples, He laid down some very basic principles concerning authority in His kingdom. We will take each of these items individually and see how they apply to our situation today. Yet we must do so with the following understanding firmly in mind. No teaching or practice which we think that we find in the New Testament will ever contradict or supersede the teachings of Jesus. All things which came after His earthly ministry,

including the book of Acts and the writings of the epistles, must be interpreted and understood in the light of what He had already said.

Perhaps the first principle which draws our attention is that Jesus prohibited the use of courteous or honorary titles among His people. This means that we are not to use any special names, designations or terms to single out individuals as being special. We are never supposed to separate any one brother or sister for special reverence, respect or courtesy, which is effected by the use of titles.

We read in Matthew 23: 8-10: "But you, do not be called 'Rabbi'." According to Vine's dictionary of New Testament words, this word is derived from the word "rab" which is literally "master" which is in contrast to a slave. Adding the suffix "ei" then means "my master" indicating the reverent subjection of the speaker. Such titles or labels, including the accompanying elevation of those so designated, were and are absolutely forbidden among God's people.

Further on in this passage Jesus prohibits the title "Father." Calling someone "father" is an indication of special respect and esteem. This means that we are not to single out any individuals for this kind of earthly honor. Then He goes on to exclude the special designation of "Teacher" among His people. This is the Greek word "didaskalos" which means master or teacher thus indicating some form of superiority of those so titled. Some ancient Greek texts use the word "kathegetes" here which means "discipler," "guide" or "leader." Clearly the use of such titles is in direct opposition to the clear teachings of Jesus.

(Some have tried to argue against this most obvious truth by citing the verse in Romans 13:7 where we are taught to give honor to whom honor is due. But when we read the clear context of this verse, we easily understand that this is referring to our attitudes toward earthly, governmental authorities such as kings, presidents, etc. [vs 1-6] and not to our relationships in the church. Once again, nothing which appears in the epistles can be understood to contradict the teachings of Jesus.)

This truth which we have been investigating also applies to all other religious titles as well. The prohibition against titles must include words such as "Pastor," "Reverend," "Bishop" and many other such terms which are in common use in today's church.

When we think about this rationally, it cannot be that Jesus had some kind of prejudice against only a few such terms. Surely He was teaching also against the practice of using any and all special titles to indicate some kind of superiority. He was showing us that only He is worthy of such respect. He completes His thought by saying: "For One is your Teacher, the Christ," "for One is your Father, He who is in heaven" (Matt 23:8,9,10). He explains that we are all on the same plane. No one is to be elevated above the other in any way. In conclusion, He says: "You are all brethren" (vs 8). Therefore, we cannot honor any other man or woman by using such respectful or courteous titles for them. This practice is clearly outside the will of God.

But what is the reason for this? Why is our God teaching us not to do these things? It is because elevating someone above the rest, in whatever manner and for whatever reason, creates another head in the body. It creates another font of authority. It bestows upon such a person the aura of being more able to communicate with the Lord than the rest.

Consequently, those who are not so endowed begin to look to that special person instead of to Jesus for their direction and spiritual food. Little by little a kind of "priesthood" or barrier is established between the Lord and His people. This is exactly what Jesus does not want to ever happen in His body.

AUTHORITY OVER ONE ANOTHER IS PROHIBITED

It may be surprising for some of you readers to learn that Jesus also prohibited any one of His followers from exercising authority over another. Although this is common practice in the church today, it is something which

Jesus forbids. He says: "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you" (Mt 20:25,26).

Essentially He is saying, "The world does things in this way, but you cannot." The earthly way is for one human being to exercise authority over another, but in the church, this is forbidden. "It shall not be so among you!" Here Jesus is not merely banning abusive authority, but *all* authority over one another.

In Christ's body there is no room for any other authority figure beside Jesus. He is the one and only head. Only He is authorized by the Father to lead, direct and command His people. No one, absolutely no one else ever gets to take up some kind of position of authority over the others whether it be small or large.

This truth is repeated in Mark 10:42,43 where we read: "You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you." If you do not understand this most basic truth then you will have a lot of trouble constructing the true house of God.

It may be that you are already thinking about the apostles, prophets, pastors and teachers in the rest of the New Testament. Quite possibly many questions about this are popping into your mind. But please be patient. We will get to these questions as we go along with our subject. First, we must establish very firmly Jesus' principles. Then we can go on to see how they were worked out in the early church and how they can be put into practice today.

Not only is the exercise of authority over one another prohibited, it is even forbidden for the best of motives. I like to believe that most of those who are acting this way in the church today have good intentions. They believe that they are using their authority for the benefit of others. They are trying to help them. They are benevolently exercising authority over the others for their good and well-being. Interestingly, this attitude and motive also is expressly forbidden by Jesus.

In Luke 22:25,26 we read: "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them and those who exercise authority over them are called 'benefactors.'" You see a benefactor is someone who is doing something for your benefit. Supposedly you are profiting from their actions. Their exercise of authority is doing you some good and bringing you some benefit.

But concerning this activity this Jesus states: "But not so among you." We must not do this. This practice should never be found among the people of God. Instead of really being beneficial, it is impeding the flow of supernatural authority. It becomes a substitute for the true headship of Christ. Again we remember His words: "You are all brethren" (Mt 23:8).

There can be no other head or source of authority in the body of Christ even if it is done with good intentions. When we allow this, it creates a confusing situation. Believers then do not know to whom to look for guidance. Should they seek Jesus directly, or simply rely on their authority figure? Since human authority is more tangible, the tendency is for this source to become the prominent one. Therefore, we must always guard against these tendencies. Rising up to take authority over others or looking to human sources, both must be avoided.

BECOME LIKE LITTLE CHILDREN

When Jesus was on the earth with His disciples, there often arose among them a discussion. It seems that this was a frequent theme of their conversations among themselves. They were always trying to decide who was to be the greatest. Who was going to be above the rest? Who was going to rise up to be the most recognized, the most important or the most respected?

Jesus answered this discussion with a powerful illustration. He took a little child and put him in their midst. Then He said: "Unless you...become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 18:3). Further He says: "Therefore, whoever humbles himself as

this little child is the greatest" (Mt 18:4). Here we find a most important principle which must govern our thoughts and actions concerning the government of God's house.

Here we see that we must humble ourselves. This is absolutely essential. If we do not, we will find ourselves in opposition to the will of God. This is in direct contrast to exalting ourselves or letting others exalt us. Humbling ourselves means that we do not accept praise. We do not look for accolades and respect. We are not seeking recognition, power or control over others.

Ours must be a lowly way. Do not look at the world around you. Do not pay attention to what other Christians are doing. We must look into God's word and follow the instructions which we find there. Only in this way will we receive praise from God on that Day.

A little child is humble because he does not know much. He does not have great power. He is very dependent on his father and mother. He runs nothing. He controls no one. His is a lowly position where he has no great respect.

Please let me state this emphatically and clearly. Unless you also arrive at and stay in this very same position, you cannot be living under the government of God. You cannot be thought of as entering into and living in His kingdom. These are Jesus' own words. This is exactly what He has taught us. There is just no way to get around this clear fact. This was our Lord's response to His disciples' ambition for authority and control. It is still His response today. If you have arrived at or let others put you in an elevated position with respect to others in the body of Christ, in a very essential way you have strayed from the kingdom of God.

Further Jesus stated repeatedly, "He who is greatest among you shall be your servant" (Mt 23:11). And, "...let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves" (Lk 22:26 RSV).

This clearly means that instead of wanting to or trying to ascend in some kind of hierarchy, assuming command and control of any group of believers, we must do exactly

the opposite. We must descend to become their slaves. Our objective must be to lift others up even to the point where they become “greater” than ourselves. Instead of becoming the greatest, we must become the least.

Jesus Himself showed us this example at the last supper. There He took off His robes and put on a towel. Then He began to perform the function of the lowliest kind of servant. He washed the disciples’ feet. God incarnate did not insist on a position of respect or authority. He humbled Himself before His Father and before His disciples. He became a servant. This position is where we also must find ourselves.

Without a doubt, most Christian leaders know this principle. They read their Bibles. This is no new idea or secret teaching. What seems to be lacking is the way to put it into practice. To begin, we must have a firm grasp on one idea. It is impossible to be “over” someone else – this means to have a position of authority over them – and be a slave at the same time. It is absurd to think that you can be over and under simultaneously. These two positions, the one of authority and the one of a slave, are opposite one another. You cannot be both things at the same time. To become one, you must abandon the other. To be under, you must stop being over.

To become a servant or slave, you must lay aside your garments. You must renounce your position of being above or over. You must let go of all your titles and importance. You must humble yourself in a way which will challenge your ego, your education and even your income. You must be willing to act and live in a way which others will not understand or approve.

Building up the house of God in His way may possibly challenge your faith at the deepest level. But as your brother, I would like to encourage you that the rewards are great. The spiritual treasures which can be gained in obedience to our Lord are beyond description.

How then might such a ministry manifest itself? How shall we act? What should we do? Let us imagine that among those with whom you have fellowship, you become

a slave and they are your masters. How might this work?

To begin, we know that a slave does not run the household. He is not the one in authority. He is not telling the master what to do. He is not organizing the life of his master or controlling any of his activities. He does not receive more esteem than his master. He does not earn more than his master. He does not have any authority whatsoever over his master, to discipline him, direct his life, control his family or marriage. His position is very humble.

HOW THIS MIGHT WORK

Let us suppose that this slave has a relationship with Jesus that makes his life an example. He is not only humble, but also full of love. He spends time in God's word and so is full of revelation. He is honest, obedient, faithful, kind and full of the many other virtues of Christ.

Therefore, his master(s), who are the other Christians, become curious. They want to know what makes him like that. They are hungry for more light and God uses him to share with them. His life is such an example of purity and truth that the master(s) want to be like him. From observing his life, the master(s) begins to trust the slave and ask his advice and counsel.

Due to his relationship of trust with his master, this slave might even occasionally offer his opinion or advice, if the master is willing to hear it. Thus, the slave becomes a source of God's light and nourishment for his master. Yet he never leaves that position of being a humble slave to assume a position of authority or control.

Here we must stop for a moment and analyze a Bible verse. No doubt there are some readers who are remembering I Thessalonians 5:12 where we read in the NKJV: "We urge you, brethren, to recognize those who...are over you in the Lord and admonish you."

This is one of those occasions where a Bible translator might have arrived at his work with a preconception and could easily convey a wrong sort of idea. Here we must apply the principle of filtering everything through Jesus'

teachings. So when we read about someone being “over” someone else, this does not fit with what we have already studied. Therefore, somehow we must arrive at a new understanding of this verse.

The Greek word translated “over” here is “proistemi” which means “to stand before” hence “to lead.” “Over” is a very poor and misleading translation. Here there is no thought of being “over” but simply out in front in the spiritual walk. Thus, the translation here gives a wrong and unscriptural impression to the reader. The true meaning here is that someone is showing by their life an outstanding example of intimacy with Christ for others to follow. Such “leadership” should never in any way be construed to be being “over” or dominating anyone.

NEW TESTAMENT LEADERSHIP IS BY EXAMPLE

Certainly there is leadership in the Christian life and among believers. But how is this done? This must be a different kind of leadership than we see in the world, since it must follow all the principles of Jesus which we have been studying. New Testament leadership is by example. Those who might be considered “leaders” are those who have an intimacy with Christ which is obvious. It is changing their lives. It is impacting their families. Those around them are aware of the character of Jesus which is being manifested through them.

These then become examples which the others follow. They want to be like them. They become imitators of them (I Cor 11:1) in that they too want to have that same intimacy with Jesus. Thus, these believers are considered “leaders” because they are “out in front” in this race to gain Christ. They are demonstrating to others how to grow in Jesus. On the other hand, they are not leaders because they are “up in front” of a group of believers exercising authority over them.

Naturally, when someone has such an exemplary life, others will be curious. They will want to know how these humble people have come to such a wonderful place. If the

others are really in search of righteousness, they will want to understand the things which God has revealed to such a person.

It may be that they will ask questions. They will want advice and counsel. They will open themselves up to receive from that individual all the things that God has put within them. So then this slave can serve these others by teaching, advising, loving and admonishing. However, all this is done from a position of lowliness and humility. Their attitude is as being the “younger.” Nothing is done from a position of power, authority, control or in any way being “over” the others. This is true New Testament ministry.

Further, nothing which this slave does violates the will of his master(s), who are the other believers. He does not insist on his will or way. He does not order anyone to do anything about which the other is not fully convinced (Rm 14:5). He is not organizing their lives. He is not running their meetings, planning their activities or in any way exercising authority over them. His remains a lowly position. He does not receive praise and accolades from men. He does not let anyone put him in a position of authority. His emphasis is always upon Jesus and never upon himself. He is not dissatisfied with lack of attention or when others do not recognize his words and work. Since he has no other goal than to glorify Christ, he is satisfied only when his Lord is pleased.

JUDGES AND KINGS

The judges in the Old Testament were an institution from God. The kings were set up by man – a worldly institution. In fact, when the children of Israel petitioned Samuel for a king, they specifically stated that they wanted to be like the other nations – like the world around them (I Sam 8:5). In contrast to this, the government of God was manifested through the judges.

From the judges then, we can extract some important revelation. To begin, we notice that the people who sought

out the judges for counsel or judgment came of their own free will. They were never coerced or forced. They came because they wanted to hear from God. The judges were anointed and used by God and so people sought them out.

In contrast to the kings, the judges ran nothing. They did not govern the country. They did not organize a standing army, raise taxes, initiate public works, etc. With few exceptions due to times of national emergency (perhaps once in 20 years when they did call God's people together to battle), their normal way was to simply make themselves available to the populace. Thus they could serve the people if and when they were needed.

Gideon and others merely seemed to stay at home most of the time. If and when people needed them they had to go and seek them out. Another judge, Jair, appears to have had a kind of route around the country to be more accessible (Jud 10:4). Deborah had a tree under which she sat, probably in a public place, where she was available to those who sought the Lord for direction (Jud 4:5). In the daily life of the population, they organized nothing. They controlled no one. They were servants not rulers. These things should speak to us today.

When Gideon was used by God to work a great deliverance, the people were really impressed. Following the natural human tendency to want a leader, they tried to make him their king. They said to him: "Rule over us, both you and your son, and your grandson also; for you have delivered us from the hand of Midian" (Judges 8:22).

But Gideon wisely refused this kind of elevation. He understood at least a little about the ways of the Lord. So he replied: "I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you; the Lord shall rule over you" (vs 23). Gideon refused to be elevated to a position where he would substitute for the government of God in the lives of these people. How does this compare with what you are doing today?

MORE CONFUSING VERSES

Another verse which many will remember that seems

to suggest some kind of authority “over” others is found in Hebrews 13:7 where we read in the NKJV: “Remember those who rule over you...whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct.” The Greek word translated “rule” here is “hegeomai” which means, according to Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, “to lead.” Again, what this really means is “to be out in front spiritually.”

As we have been seeing, biblical leadership does not involve any kind of “ruling over.” It functions exactly as the end of the above verse states, ie. “whose faith follow” and “considering...their conduct.” Leaders have an exemplary faith which we should imitate. How they live their lives, their “conduct,” is something worthy of our consideration. (The same Greek word is encountered in Hebrews 13:24 and should be understood in the same light.)

So we see that the phrase, “those who rule over you” is not really the correct translation. In fact, it conveys an idea which contradicts the teachings of Jesus. Therefore, it must be rejected. New Testament leadership is by example, not by “rule.” There is no thought here of assuming command or control over others. There is never to be any substitution for the direct headship of Christ over every man (I Cor 11:3).

Instead, there are some whose walk with the Lord and faith are worthy of imitation. These are those who are living in communion with God. Therefore, they can be sought for advice and counsel when and if anyone wishes.

In Hebrews 13:17 we find an even more confusing kind of Bible translation. Here it seems as if the writer is teaching us something completely contrary to Jesus’ words. We read in the NKJV: “Obey those who rule over you.” Again the word for “rule over” is “hegeomai” which we have already discussed. But here an even more aggressive idea is put forward by the translation.

Supposedly we are required by God to “obey” someone else. It seems as if the writer is insisting that there are some human beings who, because of their position, are worthy of our absolute obedience. Some have even sug-

gested that we should obey without question the directions of various Christian leaders. If we must obey someone, then logically they must be in a position of authority over us. But in the light of Jesus' clear words, how could such a thing be?

Here again Vine's dictionary helps us with a better translation. The Greek word for "obey" is "peitho." Vine says that this means, "to persuade, to win over," "to be persuaded, to listen to" and then as a consequence of this, "to obey." He further clarifies this saying, "The 'obedience' suggested is not by submission to authority, but resulting from persuasion."

You see, when someone has a life which exhibits Christ, we are urged to listen to what they say and allow ourselves to be persuaded by them. This is because we respect their life and character. This does not mean that we obey anyone blindly. It does not mean that we simply do what they say. Instead this indicates that we carefully consider the words of someone who is really intimate with God. If and when they are speaking from God, we will do well to follow their advice.

If we are not fully persuaded but yet blindly obey someone speaking from God, then our obedience is something superficial. When our heart is not completely in agreement, but we obey out of some kind of religious duty, this is a violation of our will. Such "obedience" does nothing to further the purposes of God or to change our life.

You see, even if we are doing what is right, yet our mind is not persuaded, this cannot be pleasing to the Lord. When our obedience is superficial, we are not being transformed inwardly. With this kind of practice, we are only being conformed to some kind of standard. When our submission is not from the heart, it cannot yield spiritual fruit.

Therefore, these verses do not indicate some kind of authority or power structure which is contrary to Jesus' teachings. Instead, it must be seen in harmony with them. In this way, a slave who walks in intimacy with God might make a suggestion or might give some counsel when someone has sought it. This servant does not have to leave

his position of being lowly and beneath someone else. He never must change to being “over” them.

When this servant obviously has a relationship with the Lord, we should pay careful attention to his words. We must consider prayerfully what has been said. This is because there is a greater possibility that his words are from God Himself. Therefore, we should be very open to be “persuaded” by them. But this in no way indicates that we must obey a man. Unless and until we have been persuaded that it is indeed our Lord who is speaking through this particular servant, we cannot be expected to obey.

This same attitude of simply being a servant to others was expressed by Paul. In II Corinthians 1:24 he insists that he and the other apostles did not have any kind of “dominion over [their] faith,” but were merely “helpers of [their] joy” (KJV). Pay careful attention to this. They did not have dominion over these brothers and sisters. They were not rulers, governors or authority figures. They were not controlling these others, either their lives or their meetings. Instead, they were lowly “helpers.”

Further, they did not behave pompously with an air of self-importance. They were only lowly servants. In fact, Paul confesses that his presence was very unspectacular. When he was with these believers he seemed “weak” and his speech appeared “contemptible” (II Cor 10:10). He was very humble and unpretentious. He was with them “in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling” (I Cor 2:3).

Paul was not commanding and authoritative. He describes his attitude as being “lowly among you” (II Cor 10:1). Perhaps we imagine that Paul was a sort of swaggering, compelling, forceful authority figure whom everyone respected and obeyed. Yet a careful reading of the scriptures reveals something very different.

Peter also echoes these same sentiments. He urges those who are being used by God to lead, not to do so as “being lords over God’s heritage.” Instead, they were to do so by “being examples to the flock” (I Pet 5:3 KJV).

These were not to exalt themselves. They were not to get themselves in any false position of being above the oth-

ers. They were not even supposed look to receive any money (vs 2). They were simply to do their work by feeding the others the supernatural bread which is Jesus Christ. Their leadership was to be by example and humble service rather than by some kind of position of authority, ie. being "lords."

CONDUITS OF AUTHORITY

It is clear that in the universe, God is the source of all authority. Any human beings or even any creatures which have authority have received it from God. He has allowed them to have authority or even put them in positions of power. Without His permission, they would have no power whatsoever.

In our world, we have many different kinds of authority figures. These include presidents, governors, judges, policemen, parents, etc. The scriptures clearly teach us that these authority figures are established by God and that we should obey them (I Pet 2:13,14).

Since the world is in rebellion against the Lord, He uses these individuals to act in His stead to somewhat subdue the rebellious and sinful tendencies of mankind. At the moment He has not yet returned to govern this world personally, so He delegates His authority to others to rule in His absence. Men or women who have received this authority from God are often called "delegated authorities."

In the church however, God has designed a different way of governing His people. As we have been seeing, He is the Head. He is the One who is to lead, organize and control everything. Although His physical presence is absent from the world, His spiritual presence is (or should be) very real in the church.

God's true church is not governed by any delegated authority. There are several reasons that a person in charge of some work or other might delegate his authority. One is that perhaps he cannot be present at some particular time. Another is that he might be too busy to attend to all the

needs of the organization. A third reason might be that he has no interest in some of the details of the work.

But Jesus has none of these deficiencies. He has risen from the dead. He is alive! And He is living and moving here today among His people. Our Lord is omnipresent. This means that He can be everywhere all the time. So He needs no substitutes. Also, He is all-powerful. Consequently He needs no help from others to govern His people. Further, He has a tremendous interest in every detail and aspect of His church and the lives of those in it.

Therefore, Jesus has no need to delegate His authority in the church. There is no necessity for others to act for Him in His absence or to compensate for His inability. Since He is alive, well and present, He is perfectly capable of directing everything Himself.

Naturally, since He lives in the "living stones" of His temple, which are men and women, He will sometimes express Himself through these vessels. He will use them as conduits through which to manifest His authority. Since Jesus dwells in His body, He often speaks through the different members of His body.

When someone is frequently used by God in this way, they then become known as "leaders." Their intimate relationship with Jesus makes them useful to Him to reveal His will. Their transformed lives provide a clear pathway for Him to express His headship. These people are the vessels He often uses to speak to and lead His people. They become channels of God's authority.

However, one point must be very, very clear in our minds. No matter how often God uses someone as a vessel to manifest His authority, that person never becomes this authority. He never gets to have any authority himself. The authority never belongs to him. He or she remains always and only a humble servant through which the will of God is manifested.

This is the only biblical understanding which can possibly harmonize the teachings of Jesus and the practice of the New Testament church. It is the only way in which anyone can continue to be a slave or servant and yet manifest

authority. This can only be when the authority does not belong to those through whom it is being manifested.

If someone could receive or have their own position of authority over the others, this automatically puts them in a unscriptural situation. Any kind of position of authority must by definition be over some or all of the others. Again, it is impossible to be “over” and “under” at the same time.

Many have seen that the exercise of authority in the church today often goes wrong. They see many harmful, erroneous and even ridiculous things being done in the name of leadership. Yet they have supposed that the problem is with the men and women who are exercising this authority.

They imagine if these leaders were only a little more transformed or better equipped or trained, or even better supervised by other even more spiritual leaders, they would do things right. If these leaders only had some long years of experiences and trials, if they only had the preparation needed, then they would act differently. Perhaps then they could handle being in authority over others.

But when we think about this logically, we quickly understand that this idea will never work. As we have stated, there are literally hundreds, if not thousands of Christian groups springing up around the world every day.

So where could we find so many prepared leaders? Where could we possibly find that number of believers who are so mature, so completely transformed, that they could be trusted with their own authority and yet exercise it in a godly way? If we were to need just one authority figure for each group, where could we find a supply of so many broken, humble people? Further, how could we get them to where they need to be?

The answer must be that we leave the leadership of the church just where it belongs – with the Lord. We must teach one another how to submit to Him. We must help each other enter into and maintain an intimate relationship with Jesus. We must work to establish His authority in each other’s lives.

Thus, people will be able to hear His commands. They will be able to sense His directions. Since such people are truly submitted to Jesus in their hearts, they will be able to hear His voice, even when He is speaking through other brothers or sisters. Whether it be through a leader, through a lowly, unspectacular and unrecognized member of Christ's body or even through a donkey, they will hear His voice and obey.

The authority of the Head often flows through the members of His body. For example, when Paul the apostle taught, exhorted or admonished others in his writings, we know that this was the Spirit of God speaking through him. He was being anointed to write these words. Therefore, the authority manifested here was not his. It did not belong to him but was simply an exhibition of the authority of the Head. In the same way, today Jesus speaks through His people. His authority is often manifested through others for those who have ears to hear.

Perhaps it would be worthwhile here to examine a word found in the some English translations of II Thessalonians chapter 3, verses 4,6,10, and 12. It is the word "command." Here it seems as if Paul is using some kind of personal authority to "command" the disciples to do something or other. The Greek word here is "parangello." According to W. E. Vine in his *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, this literally means: "To hand on [or pass on] an announcement from one to another."

Here there is no thought of commanding as if he had his own authority. Instead, he was simply passing on instructions which he had received from Jesus. He was a vessel through which the authority of God was flowing, not someone with personal authority which he was exercising. This Greek word, instead of contradicting what we have been seeing, confirms this new understanding.

THE EXAMPLE OF MOSES

Moses was a good example of such a conduit of authority. He walked in such intimacy with God that he

spoke with Him “face to face, as a man speaks to his friend” (Ex 33:11). When God revealed His will to Moses, then he acted. When His word came to him, he spoke. He was a vessel which was very much, and very often used by God to express His plans and His will. Moses was initiating nothing himself. He was not planning and leading on his own. When others challenged him, he tried to explain to them that it was really God who was acting and speaking through him. He said, “You and all your company are gathered together against the Lord” (Num 16:11,28).

However just once, Moses took this authority upon himself. One time only he assumed a position of authority above the rest and acted from this position. Instead of allowing God to work through him, he acted as an authority figure himself. He struck the rock in anger instead of obeying God. Due to the situation, God honored him and permitted him success. Yet this act cost him his entrance into the promised land. Just this one instance of acting like God’s delegated authority instead of a vessel of transmitted authority came with the highest cost.

Perhaps we should carefully consider this example today. How important it must be to our Lord that He be the One who is leading His people! How critical it is to Him that His authority be maintained. Seeing what this one act of positional authority cost Moses, we should examine our own lives and activities today.

It is possible that many have become deceived. They are acting and speaking from a position of authority over God’s people. They are planning, organizing and leading the others. Yet no visible judgment has fallen on them. So they assume that everything must be O.K. God must be approving of what they are doing. But these dear brothers and sisters are failing to see the future.

Today is the age of grace. Much of the time, Jesus is allowing us to make our own choices and go our own way. He is waiting to judge His people until He comes again. It is then we will have to give an answer for behaving in ways which contradicted His clear instructions. It is then that our works will be tested by His fire.

Significantly, we are told that on that Day, "Many who are first will be last" (Mt 19:30). You see there are very many today who are assuming positions of authority over others. They are putting themselves in first place. They are gaining popularity and followers. They are up in front leading congregations of God's people. Perhaps they imagine that they are having success. Apparently they are "first."

But when Jesus comes all these things will be exposed in the light of His countenance. The word which He has spoken will judge us (Jn 12:48). This means that His clear teachings which we have been studying – which most already know but are not following – will judge them. For "many" all their importance and position will be seen for what it really is – something earthly and human. All ambition, striving to be the greatest and ugly pride will stand out with the utmost clarity. All craving for attention, power and even money will be exposed as having been the lusts of the fallen flesh.

It may be that God uses you from time to time to manifest His authority. Perhaps you are a vessel which He can use to transmit His will to others. Hopefully, you have learned to be a humble servant and are not lording it over anyone else. Yet there is one additional thing which we must understand.

It is never up to us to enforce God's authority. We are not responsible to try to make people do what He says. Perhaps you are certain that God used you to speak some direction or revelation to someone else. Your part ends there. Whether they hear or not, whether they obey or not is not your responsibility. You did what God wanted you to do, now it is in His hands. He is the one who has spoken, therefore, He is the one who must take charge of the results.

APPOINTING ELDERS

But some will no doubt say, "But Paul and others appointed or ordained elders in every church. Therefore,

don't we too need to appoint such authority figures" (Tit 1:5)? Once again Vine's dictionary gives us important insight. The Greek word "appoint" here is "cheirotoneo." This means literally, "to stretch out the hand." Vine writes: "Not a formal ecclesiastical ordination is in view, but the "appointment" [or the pointing out], for the recognition of the churches, of those who had already been raised up and qualified by the Holy Spirit, and had given evidence of this in their life and service."

To understand this clearly, we must realize the context in which this direction was given. In the early church, there was a situation much different from what we see today. There had never been churches in these different cities. The idea of church was a brand new thing. Further, there were very many new believers who needed care, advice and attention.

In Jerusalem, new converts could easily know where to look for direction and counsel. The twelve apostles had walked with Jesus. But in these other cities where the idea of church was a more recent thing, who were the ones whom God was using? Who was walking in intimacy with God and therefore could be sought out for counsel and advice?

Since many of these believers were in spiritual infancy, they did not have the discernment to perceive those who had more spiritual maturity. Therefore, Paul felt it necessary to point this out for them. He was not "appointing" these men to positions of authority, instead he was "pointing out" (stretching forth the hand to point out [cheirotoneo]) for the benefit of the others, those who were in communion with Jesus. These were people whose lives were a testimony of their growth and gifting. Therefore, they were most likely to be used by God as examples to the flock.

Another verse which causes some confusion because of the translation is found in I Timothy 3:1. Here the KJV reads: "If a man desire the office of a bishop." This would lead the reader to think that there is indeed some kind of standing or rank of being an overseer. The NKJV follows

this error reading: "If a man desires the position of a bishop."

Yet this word "office" or "position" represents no word in the original Greek language. It is simply not present in the text. The addition of this word, without any basis, produces a completely erroneous understanding, one that is conflict with Jesus' clear teachings. A better reading would be, "If any man desires to serve as an overseer." (This same situation is found also in I Timothy 3:10,13 KJV).

BIBLICAL TERMINOLOGY

In the New Testament we encounter many different words which today have turned into titles and positions in the church. We read about pastors, teachers, elders, prophets, deacons and so forth. How then are we to understand them in the light of our present discussion?

Firstly, we must understand that such terms are never used in the Bible as titles. We never read about "Pastor" Peter, the "Apostle" Paul or "Elder" James. Instead they are descriptions of the service functions, gifts and callings of these particular men. They are words used to indicate what kind of servants these men were, not the sort of position they had obtained. We find for example Paul, "a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ" (Titus 1:1) and Peter, "a servant and apostle" (II Pet 1:1).

How then can we understand these terms? As an example we can look at the world around us. In our society we have many different kinds of trades. We have carpenters, masons, plumbers, millwrights, programmers, etc. These words are a description of the kind of work which these people do. They are not positions of authority over the rest of society. Each one of them has some special skill and ability in their area of service. In their work, they no doubt have some expertise which might qualify them to even give advice to others trying to do the same job. But these are not titles or positions, they are merely descriptions of what sort of service these folks provide.

Throughout the years since the New Testament was written, these descriptive words, such as pastor, elder, etc. have been twisted out of all context. They have come to mean something different and in many cases completely opposite to what they meant 2,000 years ago.

One example of this is the word "minister." Today, we think of this as someone who runs a church. However, the scriptural revelation of what being a "minister" means is much different. There are three different Greek words which are translated into this one English word "minister." The first one is DIAKONOS. It means "servant" or "attendant." This would indicate a simple household servant. Frequently, this word is translated "deacon."

The second word LEITOURGOS refers to someone who served the public in a special capacity at his own expense. The third word HUPERTES originally meant "under rower" which was a lower order of seaman. It later came to mean any subordinate acting under direction from another. Certainly this kind of "minister" did not run the ship.

Some other words which are used to speak of those who are spiritual servants are: DOULOS, "a bond slave;" OIKETES, "a household servant;" MISTHOIS, "a hired servant;" and PAIS, "a servant boy." (Definitions from Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words.) There is nothing in any of these terms which indicates a position of authority or control over others. Exactly the opposite is true. We see here that the Bible often uses terminology for the servants of God which refer to the least esteemed members of society. They were the lowly servants of the household.

Other terms which bear investigation are "elder," "overseer" or "bishop." Elders were something which even the Old Testament people of God had. These were men of advanced age and much experience. They had no such idea that there could be, for example, such a thing as a 20 year old "elder." They would have thought this ridiculous. Such men, because they had lived exemplary lives and were known to have wisdom, were sought for counsel

and advice. They did not govern the people. The New Testament elders function in much the same way.

Another term "overseer" comes from the Greek "EPISKEPOS" which means "to look over" or "to watch over." It is the second half of this word "SKOPEO" which has been taken and transformed into an English word "bishop."

The true meaning here seems quite straightforward. Those who are mature, have much experience and are walking in intimacy with Jesus have a responsibility. They are sort of watchmen or "overseers." When things begin to go wrong in some believers' lives, they are the ones who notice it. They then have a responsibility before God to pray and see what the Lord would want them to say or do to serve in this situation.

This does not mean that they have authority to run someone else's life. They know that only God can change someone or their situation. Yet, they can in all humility give counsel, warnings or suggestions. Again, this has nothing to do with demanding compliance from others but simply serving them in this capacity of watching out for their well-being.

Also we might consider what it is that these brothers are or were overseeing. Does this word indicate that they were running a religious organization? Were they overseeing the activities of some church? Were they the ones deciding where and when everyone should meet and what part each member should play in the organization? Were they planning and directing all the activities of the group? No! Such an idea is never found the New Testament. There was never a group of men running the church. Such direction is the work of the Head.

Instead, the "overseers" were simply watchful for the individual lives of the other believers. They were always attentive to see that everyone was doing well with their relationship with the Lord. If and when any problem occurred, if and when anyone was in physical or spiritual need, they could then seek God for how to minister His life into this situation.

Still another word which we might discuss is "apostle." This means someone who is sent by another to do a job. For example, you might send a plumber to your house to fix a leak. You might send the neighbor boy on an errand. In this case, it is God Himself who has sent out some men with a heavenly vision. It is their task to impart this revelation to any and all who are open and hungry to receive it.

The fact that God has sent these people certainly lends weight to what they have to say. Assuming that they are genuine and not false apostles, we should pay careful attention to their message. But they were not and are not sent by the Lord to run the church. They are not authorized to assume a position of control or importance. They are merely lowly servants of the other brothers and sisters. Those claiming to be apostles who do not understand this truth cannot be genuine.

The great majority of the church and even the world understands these terms in ways which do not harmonize with the message of Jesus. Therefore, it is my practice to avoid them. Even though they are in the Bible and therefore legitimate terms, they are almost universally misunderstood. If we use them, therefore, we run a great risk of conveying a wrong idea or impression. I have found it virtually impossible to reeducate everyone about the real significance of such words.

Perhaps instead we should revert to what John the Baptist said of himself. "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness" (Jn 1:22,23). Here was John, of whom it was said that no greater prophet had ever lived (Mt 11:11). But when the people came questioning him about just who and what he was, he refused to exalt himself. Instead of insisting that he was somebody or something, he described himself as merely a lone voice, crying in the wilderness. He took a very humble position. In our case then, to humble ourselves and to glorify Jesus can never go wrong.

Further on in this book we will be discussing how some of these service functions work. We will try to speak about how the genuine church can be experienced. But for

now, we must move on to further questions about authority.

A TRUE SERVANT IS HUMBLE

A true servant of God and of the body of Christ can often be hard to recognize. This is because such a servant is humble. He does not exalt himself. He is not pushing himself and his ministry forward. He is not looking for opportunities to show off his gifts to others. He is not seeking recognition. He has no title or prestigious position. Therefore, he does not stand out as someone special. Unless we have spiritual eyes, it will be easy for us to miss this vessel of God.

This must be exactly the reason that the writer of Hebrews wrote about the necessity for us to recognize such people (Heb 13:7,17). He essentially urges us to pay careful attention to what they say. Since they were humble, they were not insisting on their own authority. Since they were servants, it was easy for others to neglect their warnings or counsel.

Therefore, it was natural for the others not to recognize the authority of the Lord being manifested in their lives. Coming from a worldly background, where people look to and admire those who have titles, fame, positions and exude an air of importance, they had trouble recognizing those humble servants whom God was using.

It is possible that the situation in those days was almost the opposite of what we know today. The true spiritual leaders were often not recognized or listened to. People did not have the spiritual discernment to realize that it was the Lord who was speaking through them. So, the writers of the scriptures needed to urge people to see and hear the Lord speaking through the others. Well, on second thought, perhaps this is not so different from today after all.

DIOTREPES

This brings us to the example of Diotrephes. Here was

a man who loved to have a position. He enjoyed controlling others. He reveled in the attention and power which such a situation conveyed upon him. He loved "to have the preeminence among them" (III Jn 9).

Therefore, he had risen up to take control of the church. He became the leader. He was the man in charge. A consequence of this was that Diotrephes had to begin protecting the territory over which he had assumed control. When others came around – anyone who was walking in "truth" (vs 12) i.e. someone who might expose his selfish ambition – he had to get rid of them (including John). He had to protect his flock from such "bad" influences.

It is almost inevitable that when someone assumes such a position of power, they enter into contention with others to protect their position. When you have no position or power, you have nothing to defend. But once you assume control over others, sooner or later someone else with a powerful gift or ministry will appear on the scene. They then might be seen as a threat.

In the case of Diotrephes, he used some age-old methods to defend his territory. His defense tactics were the same as many use today. He tried to undermine the testimony of any apparent threat to his position with criticism, backbiting and faultfinding. He even ranted against John with "malicious words" (vs 10). No doubt, he maligned the others' character, their practices and their doctrines.

Further, he would not receive anyone who disagreed with him. No one could have fellowship with his group unless they conformed to his ideas. Also, if anyone already in the congregation began to find fault with his ways, he threw them out (vs 10). Perhaps things in the church have changed very little since those times. Such ugly disputes for power and control are not unknown among the people of God today.

THE RESTORATION OF THE CHURCH

In this century there has arisen a new theological idea. This thought is that the genuine practice of the church

needs to be “restored.” This would mean that we would return to practicing Christianity – including our daily life, ministry and style of meetings – as they did in the New Testament. One of the originators of this movement was Watchman Nee. Since that time, many others have risen up to claim to be the standard bearers for such a restoration. Each one believes that they have understood the “New Testament pattern” more precisely and are working to conform the churches under their influence to this pattern.

For some, this pattern is the recognition of and submission to some apostles. They insist that by submitting to their authority, we will arrive at an early church experience. Part of their idea is that the church today is lacking apostolic authority and by restoring our submission to these apostles, the real church will be experienced.

Countless such apostles are roving the world, seeking groups who are vulnerable to their ideas and then conforming them to their particular emphasis. Their thought is that the more groups they have “under” them, the more the true church has been restored. Although the formula varies depending on the individuals, the general idea is that only through submission to their ministry can people really, genuinely be pleasing to God.

Others have a doctrinal basis. Some think, for example, that if we will only meet under the umbrella of being “the church in some particular city” (the “church in New York” for example), we would be meeting in the correct way. They think the secret is in the name we use to identify our meetings. The New Testament churches, they insist, had no name but were only identified by the name of their locality. So if they could just persuade everyone to drop their individual names and meet with them under the banner of being “the church in the city,” the unity of the church would be restored. This then would be the real New Testament experience.

More recently there has been a movement to meet in homes. It is thought that the problem with today’s church is where we meet. The construction of cathedrals etc. is obviously unbiblical. The format of a leader on the plat-

form and the rest in the pews inhibits the proper function of the body. Therefore, if we would return to the New Testament practice of meeting in homes, this would change everything. This would please God.

So now we have the "home church movement" being put forward as the answer to the restoration of the church. Books are being written and conferences held to propagate this essential practice.

The basic idea behind these and many other such efforts is this: If we could somehow return to the exact pattern and practice of the New Testament believers, God would be so pleased, He would rush down from heaven and bless us. If we could somehow get everything "set in order," this would be just what Jesus is anxiously waiting for and a revival would begin. If we could finally just imitate what the Christians did in the book of Acts, then we would be filled with the Spirit and power. What could God desire more than an exact reproduction of New Testament Christianity?

My advice to these dear brothers is: Forget about it. We will never arrive where God wants us to be in this way. We can never restore the church. It simply is not our job. Only He can do it. If we imagine that we can cause the church to return to the New Testament pattern and practice and that this will somehow please God, we are mistaken.

WE MUST RESTORE THE HEAD

The problem with this idea is that we are putting the cart in front of the horse. We cannot restore the church. Jesus is the only One who can restore anything. Therefore, we must instead restore Him to His rightful place among us. We must restore the Head. When He is the head over all the things to our Christian experience, then, and only then, will the church be restored. As long as we have competing "heads" and other authority figures among us, we will always fall short of the goal.

Why do we not have the New Testament experience today? It is because we have lost our Head. We have

replaced Him with men who have uniforms, titles and positions. We have looked to authority figures who are earthly, human and fallible instead of to the One who is supposed to lead all things.

We have put our trust in mere human beings in the place of our divine leader. Instead of the invisible God being the one who is in charge of our lives, our ministries and our meetings, we have mere human beings as our guides. We have thought that we could relegate Jesus to the place of a kind of spectator while we go about doing biblical things to please Him.

If we want revival, we must restore Jesus to His rightful place among us. If we wish to experience what the early believers did, we must remove any and all replacement "authorities." The only way for the body of Christ to function normally, is for the true Head to be governing every attitude and action. It is time for the men and women of God to rise up and refuse all earthly authority.

The hour has come for believers to repent of the dependence upon human leadership. It is also time for us to repent if we have been guilty of taking Jesus' place among His people. Today is the time for us to return to our true King and enthrone Him as the author and finisher of all our church meetings and relationships. Now is the time to restore the government of God among us. We can depend upon Him to return us to the genuine New Testament pattern. In fact, this is the New Testament pattern.