

## 13.

# LEADERSHIP AND THE KINGDOM

We have been speaking about the Kingdom of God; both how to enter into it and how to live in it. While meditating upon these things and seeking to understand God's ways, there often arises in our minds, as it did in the minds of the disciples, a question about the subject of leadership. There is no doubt that in the church of God there is such a thing as leadership. Among God's people, there are those who are more mature, those who are more experienced, those who are more gifted and those who are called by God to lead. This is indisputable. However, in God's kingdom this leadership is exercised in a very unusual way. His way and the way of the world are completely contrary to one another. Therefore, if we wish to live in His supernatural Kingdom, we must learn how to do so. All our worldly understanding and definitions must be put aside and we must receive from God a new heavenly vision. Living in the Kingdom today it is essential for every believer to live in submission to the authority of the King. But how can we do this? How can we understand true Kingdom authority? This all-important subject cannot be overlooked as we seek to understand the Kingdom of God.

Perhaps the first and most basic tenet which we must understand is that Jesus is the King in this kingdom. He is the one who is ruling and He is the one who is sitting on the throne. No one else – ever – gets to usurp this position. Although He can and does use different men and women from time to time to transmit His authority, this authority

always is His and does not belong to the person through whom it flows. He is the head of the body (Col 1:18). He is "head over all things to the church" (Eph 1:22). In all things He is to have the preeminence (Col 1:18). This principle is of the utmost importance. Jesus is the head and no one else can fulfill this position. When the head of a human body loses control over the members, awful and undesirable results are seen. If another member of the body tried to fulfill the function of the head and direct all the activities of the body, you can imagine what sort of confusion would result. Only Jesus can and should be the head directing all the activities of His church.

It is true that today Jesus is invisible. We cannot see Him with our physical eyes. Although this is so, He is not handicapped by this. He is still able to lead every one of us in every aspect of our lives. It is therefore incumbent upon us to develop a real, deep, spiritual relationship with Him so that we can know and understand His leadership and authority. In this world the more we get to know another person intimately, the more we can sense their will. We can know when they are unhappy or wanting something, often even without them speaking. In a similar way, the more we come to know Jesus intimately through the Spirit, the more we can sense His leadership and follow Him. Through faith we can know His will and follow Him every day, in every aspect of our lives. There is no reason that every child of God cannot develop this intimacy with Him for themselves and learn to follow Him.

In God's kingdom, Jesus does not delegate His authority. He is perfectly capable of running things Himself. He is not so busy that He needs helpers. He has not gotten so old that He needs some assistance from men. The fact that He is invisible does not necessitate that He leave the real leadership to others who are more "tangible." The fact that He has ascended into heaven does not mean that He is so far away that He needs some representatives here take His place. Since He is infinite and omnipresent, our Lord is perfectly capable of directing the lives of every one of His children. There is absolutely no reason for Him to dole out portions of His authority to various men who would then act on His behalf in His absence. There is no necessity

whatsoever for others to “help” Him carry the burden of directing the functions of His body.

In the Kingdom of God, instead of “delegating” authority to others, Jesus sometimes uses various members of His body as conduits through whom His authority is transmitted. Naturally, those who are more mature and have a more intimate relationship with Him are more easily used by Him to reveal His will and direction. However, no matter how “spiritual” someone may be or no matter how often they may be used as a vessel to transmit God’s authority to others, they never, ever become this authority themselves. They themselves do not begin to have their own authority, but are always and only a lowly servant through whom the authority of God is flowing. God has not given them personal authority, but is using them to reveal His authority.

Although Jesus did give His followers authority over the demons, He did not give them authority over each other. Significantly, this very dispute often arose among the disciples. They were frequently imagining and even haggling among themselves about who was to be “in authority” in the coming Kingdom. They wanted to define who was to be in control. They wished to be the one who was to be running things and who was to be greater than the others. On one occasion, to answer this question, Jesus took a little child and set him down in front of them. Then He taught them that to enter the Kingdom, we must become like this little child (Mt 18:2-4).

This should be for us a very powerful illustration. Think about this carefully. Children run nothing. They are not in control of any grand schemes, great works for God or corporations. Instead, since they are young and innocent, they are completely dependent upon their fathers for guidance and direction. They have no authority and control over others, but are in constant need of protection and guidance themselves. In order to enter into the Kingdom of God, we too must become like this. This is how true authority in the Kingdom of God functions. No believer ever outgrows this great necessity to become like a little child. In fact, the more we mature, instead of progressing beyond this point, the more we arrive at exactly this con-

dition. Instead of becoming great and receiving authority over others, the more spiritual we become, the more child-like we feel and act.

## UNLESS YOU HUMBLE YOURSELVES

One of the most important secrets to entering into the Kingdom of God is that we must humble ourselves. In Mt 18:3,4 Jesus teaches us that unless you humble yourselves and “become like little children, you will by no means enter into the Kingdom of heaven.” God resists the proud (Js 4:6). His kingdom is in many ways exactly the opposite of the way things are in this world. Here, we have presidents, governors and kings who are often full of themselves and full of pride. Their minds are puffed up because of their position and power. They have luxurious wardrobes, houses and means of transportation to match their status in the eyes of the world. This is not the way into God’s Kingdom. His way is very different. Those who are living in submission to Him are not proud. They are not seeking recognition, a special position or their own “world-wide ministry.” They are not looking for fame or attention. These are lowly people who are willing to become like little children who have no fame or status in the eyes of the world. Unless you too arrive at this point, there is a great possibility that you will not enter the coming Kingdom of God.

Jesus Himself taught that “many who are first will be last, and the last first” (Mt 19:30) in the coming Kingdom. Why is this so? It is because, unfortunately, many believers are trying to use the things of God to benefit themselves. They are using worldly means and methods to elevate themselves in the eyes of other Christians. They use their gifts and ministries to accumulate wealth, power and status. They elevate themselves above the others and employ others to further their schemes and “ministries.” These are constantly bragging about how many “churches they have under them” or how many people attend their meetings. These poor brothers and sisters are not entering into the Kingdom of God. They have missed the mark and strayed off the path. As someone once said, “Every ministry serves to meet a need, but it is not the need of the ‘minister’ to

been seen and heard.”

A true servant of Jesus must be broken by God. His ambition and zeal to “do great things for God” must be crushed. His trust in his own abilities, intelligence and gifts must be brought to an end. Someone who has learned to live today in God’s kingdom is like a little child because he has learned to trust completely in the Father. He is no longer self motivated and full of human energy. He is not overflowing with his own plans and projects. Instead, he has learned through hard experience simply to do every day what he sees the Father doing. This is not to say that God cannot powerfully use a person. This is not even to say that God cannot raise up someone and give them a name and recognition. It is only to say that when a vessel is ready for the Master’s use, it has been prepared so that in humility and childlike simplicity, it can be used to express the Divine will. Such servants are no longer “doing a work for God” but God is doing His work through them.

## CHURCH GOVERNMENT

While we are speaking about God’s kingdom and what it is like, perhaps it would be useful here to speak briefly about “church government.” Many Christian groups and “churches” have a kind of pyramid authority structure. They have a leader at the top who holds most of the power. Then below them is another level of more people with lesser authority and so on down the line to the people in the audience. This kind of structure is just like worldly governments or business organizations. This, they believe, is an expression of divine authority. There are even others who go so far as to insist that to enter into the kingdom of God, you have to submit to them and their organization. They teach that you have to become their disciples because they have a unique revelation of the will of God.

As we have been seeing, Jesus taught us a completely different way. He said that it should not be among His people as it is in the world. In fact, it should be exactly the opposite way. Instead of those who are spiritual exercising authority “over” the others, they should become the servants or even the slaves. It goes without saying that ser-

vants and slaves do not command their masters or tell them what to do. We read: "Let it not be among you as it is among the gentiles where one man exercises authority over another and is called 'benefactor' " (Lk 22:25). You see, among the gentiles, one person rose up to exercise authority over another and insisted that they were doing this for their "benefit." They were a "benefactor." How many times in the church today we have this very thing. Men and women exercising authority "over" others and claiming to do this for the benefit of the others. However, this is clearly not the way of the Kingdom of God.

In His Kingdom, no one is ever over or above the others. He says: "you are all brothers" (Mt 23:8). You are all on the same "level." There is no such thing as bigger or smaller, better or worse, higher or lower. Further, there are to be no titles such as "father," "leader" or "teacher" (Mt 23:8-12). Jesus' instructions are quite clear about this. No special titles or distinctions are permitted. In fact, this list could be expanded to include such things as "pastor," "bishop" or "elder" also. Here there is no hierarchy. Everyone is on the same plane, they are all simply brothers. There is only one Leader. Anyone who has the ambition to be great must learn to humble himself and become the servant of the others. He who desires to ascend to the top, must become the slave of all (Mk 10:44). (Although such words as "pastor," "elder," etc. do appear in the biblical text, they are never used as titles but only as descriptions of the type of service these people perform. For example, you never read of Pastor Peter, or Apostle Paul, but rather of Paul, "a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ" (Titus 1:1), and of Peter "a servant and apostle" (II Pet 1:1).)

Unfortunately, God's people are often very gullible. They are easily taken in by those exuding energy and "leadership." Just like people in the world, they are impressed with other people's charisma and personality. So they go along with such strong individuals' ambitions and plans. Paul, writing to the Corinthians about "false apostles" and "deceitful workers" who were self-motivated leaders says: "For you put up with it if one brings you into bondage [submission to human authority], if one

devours you [uses your love for Jesus to support them], if one takes from you [uses your time and money], if one exalts himself [becomes a “great spiritual leader”], if one strikes you on the face” (II Cor 11:13,20). Paul mentions “strikes you on the face” here not because people were actually hitting others physically but to show how much of an insult this kind of activity was and yet these brothers in Corinth did not realize it. They put up with it! Many of God’s children, who do not understand the way of the Kingdom and are still impressed by worldly things, are sucked into the wake of energetic, charismatic leaders and used by them. Many Christians want to be humble and submissive. They desire to please God. But because they do not recognize true authority and do not really know the ways of God’s Kingdom, they submit themselves to man and human authority and so waste much time, energy and money building up something that will not stand the test of that Day.

It can be very difficult to recognize true Kingdom authority. Since the servant of God is humble and does not exalt himself, the natural man does not easily respond to his leadership. In order to recognize true authority in an invisible Kingdom, we must have spiritual eyes and discernment. Paul himself experienced much rejection because he did not elevate and glorify himself. Later he spent an entire two chapters (II Cor 11 and 12), speaking to the brothers about this very thing. He insists that he had “betrothed” them “to Christ” but some were coming into their midst with another agenda. These others were preaching another message with another goal, namely to exalt themselves and secure personal followers. Paul had taught them how to follow Jesus, but these others were insisting that they follow them. They were using the message of Jesus to benefit themselves. Dear brothers, Jesus Himself exhorts us that we should let no man take our crown [referring to reigning in the Kingdom](Rev 3:11). No doubt here our Lord is speaking about exactly this type of situation.

No one in the universe is worthy to have followers except God. He is the one to whom we must submit and it is Him we must obey. Anyone else who elevates himself to

seek “members” or adherents must therefore enter into competition with God Himself. The first person in the universe who decided to seek for himself a group of followers was Satan. He carved out a little kingdom using subtlety and lies, drawing away others from God’s reign. This kind of activity is also common in the church today. Many men and women like to have authority and followers. Their soul thrives on the honor, titles and attention this brings them. They want to be seen and heard and so they use verses from the Bible, usually with a subtle twist, to justify what they are doing.

Paul warned the church that this would happen. He said that after his departure men would rise up from among them and “distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them” (Acts 20:30 NIV). The way that they distort the truth is this. They insist that man can attain or receive some kind of authority, perhaps even from God, and so act and speak for Him as if they were “over” the others in some way. They imagine that because of their gifts or abilities, they are worthy of having followers or disciples.

This kind of thinking and practice is in direct violation of the principles of the Kingdom of God. It is the work of antichrist. Interestingly, one of the principle meanings of the word “anti” in the Greek language is “in the place of” rather than simply “against.” Therefore an antichrist would be someone who is taking the place of Christ in the church. When a man or woman sets up their own authority, or their own “church” where they are the leaders and the rest are the “sheep” they establish a parallel kingdom to the Kingdom of God. They enter into competition with Jesus for authority and followers. While they use the Bible and the things of God, what they are building will not stand the test of that Day. These brothers and sisters are falling into error because they have not really seen or understood God’s Kingdom.

If and when a person assumes a position of authority over others in God’s family (usually accompanied by some kind of title), they automatically rise up above the rest. It is impossible to be “over” and not be “above” at the same time. With this position comes automatically the honor

and respect which people give those who occupy these kinds of positions. A person may seek such honors for themselves or others may give it to them, yet the results are the same. It then becomes very difficult to be a true servant. A servant must be beneath the others and therefore below them. You cannot truly serve others from a position of superiority. The "service" done from being "over" others involves a kind of patronizing since the servant is pretending to be below, but is really considered superior. Even if we do not intend this to happen, it is an inevitable result. The solution to this is simply to not accept any position of authority over others. In this way, we can maintain a humble position. Jesus, the One who was worthy of honor and status fled any such suggestion. When they came to make Him King, He simply left (Jn 6:15). At another point, He said: "I do not receive honour from men" (Jn 5:41). Our Lord was never seeking an earthly position or human honor and glory. Certainly His example is worth imitating.

Another problem which enters in in such situations is pride. When we receive honor from men, it is almost inevitable that our ego begins to swell. If we accept a kind of position of authority, it is easy for our vanity to increase and our ego to be stroked. Over time, we may begin to believe that we are really worthy of the attention and admiration which we are being given. Sooner or later, whether we want it or not, this will have its effect on hearts and minds. No human being is immune from this kind of homage. This then is what gives rise to that aura of self-importance which some Christian leaders today exude. My dear brothers, this is the snare of the devil (I Tim 3:7). When our pride increases and our ego is massaged by constant honor and attention from other men, we have fallen prey to the enemy of our souls. The only way to avoid this is to not let yourself be put into such a false position. In the book of Ecclesiastes chapter 8, verse 9, we encounter an interesting truth. We read: "There is a time in which one man rules over another to his own hurt." When we assume a position in the church of being over others, we risk doing spiritual damage not only to them, but also to ourselves.

To be fair, it must be said that many people do these things out of ignorance. I do not believe that the majority who practice such things are doing so out of malice or deliberately trying to compete with God. Instead, it seems that so many lack revelation. They do not have a complete understanding of the ways of God's Kingdom. They do not really know how to let the Head lead and build up the body. They do not really see how the King can and will reign over His own Kingdom without so much help from them. They have much more confidence in themselves than in the invisible God. Many of these folks often want to serve God, but lacking a heavenly vision, they begin to build and act following the examples they see in the world around them and in others who appear to be successful. When "the church down the street" begins to grow and attract many members, the others rush to copy their ways and methods. When some practice or other begins to "work" for someone else, they immediately want to implant it in their group. Thus, the church of our day is saturated with many "wonderful works" of wood, hay and stubble (I Cor 3:12). But many of these "kingdoms" which are being constructed which seem so impressive to our natural eyes, lack something very fundamental. They cannot really be part of the Kingdom of God because they do not follow Jesus' clear principles.

Interestingly, our Lord is so humble, so all-powerful and so wise that He even uses things which are not right and even things which are in violation of His will. He will sometimes work through (or really around) the things which we do that are not in proper alignment with His Kingdom to accomplish His will. When and where He finds an opening for His authority, He sometimes uses people who are involved in works which are not really submitted to Him, to do His will. Although the parallel kingdoms which men establish in Jesus' name are a great hindrance to Him, He still finds ways to minister Himself to His people. Sometimes those involved imagine that since God is doing something, they are being greatly used by God. Since Jesus finds a way to work around and through their parallel kingdoms, they begin to imagine that they are really powerful. But many times, our effec-

tiveness is just a small fraction of what it could be and should be. How much better it would be and how much more potent our work would be if we could learn to live and work in harmony with God's Kingdom. I have said that God will even use things which are contrary to His will. However, the fact that God tolerates and uses our errors does not excuse or justify them. Ultimately He even uses the devil to further His purposes.

Often men justify the use of worldly methods and authority claiming that it is producing results. But what standards are they using to measure these successes? It is a great mistake to use worldly ways and methods and then use human standards to judge their value. If great numbers, large "temples," and worldly fame are the standards, then of course many are being "successful." However, the real question is: "How many people are really being brought into submission to the King and therefore entering the heavenly Kingdom?" "How many are truly learning to live under the government of God?" "Are they really coming to know Him intimately and hear His voice for themselves?" "Are they submitting every aspect of their lives to His inspection and rule?" "Are they becoming ever more humble and holy people?" Or are we simply filling up our buildings with those who have been convinced but not really converted and so have no real, deep-seated submission to God? Jesus states that many will be refused entrance into His Kingdom. When this happens they will argue their position saying, "Lord, Lord...have we not done many wonders in your name?" You already know His response. He said: "depart from me, you who work lawlessness" [independent works or rebellion] (Mt 7:22,23). They had to depart from His presence because they did not submit to His authority in what they were doing.

Although there are some verses in the New Testament which seem to speak of something like the human authority structure which we see so often today among God's people, a careful examination of these verses reveals something else. Far too often, the Bible translators have arrived at their work with preconceived notions drawn from their experience and common practice. For example, we read in

(I Tim 3:1,10,13) that “those who desire the office of a bishop, desire a good thing” (KJV) thus implying that there is an “office” or “position of authority” within the church. But this word “office” represents no word in the original Greek. Also, we read about submitting to those who are “over you in the Lord” (I Thess 5 :12, Heb 13: 17,24). This word “over” in Greek is *proistemi* which means literally “to stand before” and therefore means “to lead.” There is no sense of being “over” or “in control of.” The same is true of the word “rule” found in Heb 13:7,17, 24. Here the word is “*hegeomai*” which means literally “to lead.” New Testament leadership is to lead by example, not by commandment or control, not by position of authority or being “over” someone else. Peter confirms this insisting that the “leaders” do so “not as being lords over” but rather examples to the flock (I Pet 5:3). A humble servant of God has a life which is worth imitating. Paul says to the Corinthians that he did not have “dominion over” their faith, but that he and the others were simply “fellow workers for [their] joy” (II Cor 1:24). What a difference this is!

Another example is the word “obey.” In (Heb 13:17) we read that we are to “obey” those who “rule” over us. This kind of translation gives the impression that there is indeed a hierarchy of authority to which we must submit almost unquestioningly. But the Greek word here is “*peitho*” which means “to be persuaded” or “to listen to,” and as a consequence of being convinced, to obey. W. E. Vine in his Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words says: “The “obedience” suggested is not by submission to authority, but resulting from persuasion.” Nothing in God’s word contradicts itself. So when we read translations which seem to be recommending an authority structure like that of the world, we must know there is some misunderstanding. None of the writings found in the New Testament epistles teach something contrary to Jesus’ instructions concerning the Kingdom of God. If we do not see this, then we are not really understanding what is being taught. Any puffed-up believer who is self-seeking and feels it is his calling to dominate or give direction to the lives of others should be avoided.

One passage in particular that has been often misconstrued is the one in which the Centurion whose daughter Jesus cured says: "I also am a man under authority having soldiers under me. And I say to one 'Go' and he goes; and to another 'Come,' and he comes" (Mt 8:9). From this some have determined that there should be this kind of authority apparatus in the church. But in no way was this dear Roman intending to give a lesson on church government. Only by twisting this scripture out of all plausible context can we imagine that this passage has anything to do with how believers should interact with one another in the church today. This man's statement is merely a recognition of the absolute authority of God Most High, something which we too must recognize.

Jesus' clear teaching and example must always prevail in our understanding of authority. He fled "kingship" (Jn 6:15). He constantly humbled Himself. After many miracles He told people to keep quiet about it. He was never looking for recognition and accolades. He was never seeking crowds so that He could be admired and heard. One of my favorite verses says: "Now when Jesus saw great multitudes about Him, He gave a command to depart" (Mt 8:18). Instead of seeing the multitudes as His chance to be seen and heard and then jumping up on a rock and beginning to preach, He turned and left. How about you? What are you seeking? Whose glory and honor are at the forefront of your efforts "for God?" When the disciples asked about who was the greatest, He got up from the table, took off His outer garments, put on a towel and proceeded to perform the role of the most humble servant. Can we not hear what He is saying? Can we not see from His example how His Kingdom is to be?

No doubt there are those in the church who are used by God as vessels to transmit His authority. Since some are often used by God in this way, they become known as "leaders." It is not wrong to seek counsel and guidance from such servants of God. He can and does use men and women who are mature and wise to help us. However, we must never come to the place where we are looking to them instead of to God. Our gaze must never shift from the

King to one or more of His servants. When we begin to depend upon other men for direction, it is a sure sign that we are not really living in submission to our King. Somewhere or somehow, we have lost contact with our spiritual Head and so are seeking human direction and advice. King Saul eventually came to this position. God had stopped speaking to him because of his rebellion against Him. So Saul began to seek counsel from human sources and even tried to contact the dead for help. How many of God's children are in this state. They are not living in true submission to Jesus and so they are always looking to some "leader" or other "covering" or "head" for direction.

In the book of Judges, we have the principle of spiritual authority illustrated for us in a very remarkable way through the person of Gideon. Gideon was a man who was used by God to lead His people and effect a great deliverance for them from their oppressors. Consequently, the masses wanted to elevate him to a position of authority over them. They wanted to "officialize" the situation by setting him up as their king. This would then give them the feeling of some kind of earthly security and leadership. It would give them a tangible leader in whom they could confide. These men said: "Rule over us, both you and your son and your grandson also; for you have delivered us from the hand of Midian" (Judg. 8:22). However, Gideon knew something about God's heart and His ways and so he wisely refused this offer of power and position. He responded to them by saying: "I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you; the Lord shall rule over you" (Judg. 8:23). This has always been God's intention, that He Himself would be our head and King.

Later on in this story, after the death of Gideon, one of his sons named Abimelech made his own move for power. Sensing the desires of the people for a king and seeing this as his opportunity, he killed the rest of Gideon's sons and had himself set up as their king. However, one of the other sons escaped the slaughter. As he was fleeing for his life, he stopped on a nearby hill and made the following statements to his brother and the crowd. Perhaps they may still speak to us today. He shouted to them saying:

“The trees once went forth to anoint a king over them. And they said to the olive tree, ‘Reign over us!’ But the olive tree said to them, ‘Should I cease giving my oil, with which they honor God and men, and go to sway over the trees?’

Then the trees said to the fig tree, “You come and reign over us!” But the fig tree said to them, ‘Should I cease my sweetness and my good fruit, and go to sway over the trees?’

Then the trees said to the vine, ‘You come and reign over us!’ But the vine said to them, ‘Should I cease my new wine, which cheers both God and men, and go to sway over the trees?’

Then all the trees said to the bramble, ‘You come and reign over us!’ And the bramble said to the trees, ‘If in truth you anoint me as king over you, then come and take shelter in my shade’ ” (Judg. 9:8-15).

The reaction of these “trees” to the offer of power and position revealed what was in their hearts.

## LIZARDS AND FISH

The human being was constructed with an important limitation. Although he has two eyes, he can look in only one direction at one time. There are creatures such as lizards, fish and perhaps many others who can swivel their eyes to look in two directions at once. But man cannot. If and when we shift our gaze to a new view, we must at the same time stop looking in the direction in which we were before. This fact has spiritual implications. Inwardly we were also constructed with this limitation. Spiritually, we can look towards only one leader at a time. Today our Head and King is Jesus. Our gaze must be fixed on Him. We should be “looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith” (Heb 12:2). If we shift our gaze to another leader, discipler, pastor or other authority figure, we automatically must take our eyes off of our King. In doing so, we leave the Kingdom of God and so will suffer the many pitfalls and consequences of this action.

In order to enter into God's Kingdom, we must submit ourselves completely to God. As we do this, we will recognize Him expressing Himself through other brothers and sisters. We will hear His voice and obey. This submission "to one another" (Eph 5:21) is a sign that we are really living in the Kingdom. It is an evidence that we are really submitted to God. But if we are not, no amount of human authority structure, leadership and/or "submission" to man will resolve our problems. There is no substitute for true, thorough submission to the Father.

Many times men will encourage us to submit ourselves to them or other leaders as a means to "resolve some of our problems" or because they insist that it is the right way. However, such submission to man does nothing to subdue a rebellious heart. On the contrary, many times submission to human authority only serves to hide our inner rebellion against God. "False [or "voluntary"] humility" (Col 2:18), in other words submitting to human leadership, will never get you into God's kingdom. In fact, it will do just the opposite. Paul explicitly states that it will rob you of your reward, which in this case is entering into the Kingdom. Those who know how to live in the Kingdom are submissive people, but they can and must discern when supposed authority is from God and when it is merely a human substitute.

Throughout the years, I have often encountered believers who are involved in some kind of group that emphasizes submission to man. Almost invariably, these dear brothers and sisters seem to lack spiritual maturity. Their studious dependence upon man has turned their attention from God. They become afraid to seek God for themselves, hear His direction and follow Him. They don't want to appear to be "independent" or "rebellious" and so instead they become completely dependent on human sources. They are reluctant to act or speak without "permission" and so can be used by God very little. Thus their growth is stunted and their work for God is ineffective. Although this submission to human leadership may be able to produce in them some kind of superficial appearance of correct behavior, their inward parts are not changed. They are only being reformed but not transformed.

Some imagine that this sort of control over various members by the leadership is necessary because some believers have lives which are completely out of order. In short, they are a mess. So those "in authority" believe that they must exercise some kind of control to rectify the situation. They try to subject these "rebellious" members to some kind of discipline to correct their behavior. This kind of activity can never produce spiritual results. Proverbs 27:22 reads: "Though you grind a fool in a mortar with a pestal...yet his foolishness will not depart from him." While it may be possible to produce some kind of conformation to a superficial standard, human "discipline" will do nothing to transform a human soul.

The real answer here is to help others come into a genuine submission to Jesus. We must lead others into a real relationship with the King. This will solve all their problems. When they are really learning to live the the present Kingdom of God, He will lead them in the way of salvation. Rather than making disciples for ourselves, we make disciples for Jesus. It is as we look into His face and behold His glory that we are transformed (II Cor 3:18).

Perhaps the most difficult thing for us human beings to do is to trust in our invisible Master. Often we have much more confidence in ourselves and in other human leadership than we do in our spiritual Savior. If we are nothing, what will happen? If we don't rise up and take the reins of power, organize something or do something, how will the world be saved and the church be built up? There is so much to be done. What if God doesn't do it? I am not advocating passivity here. In no way am I saying that we do not have work to do. I am merely stating that it is not our human efforts and energy, our natural strength and abilities, our "spiritual gifts" and ministries which God needs. Instead it is our submission to Him. As we allow Him to live in us and through us, His work will be accomplished in an effective way. Jesus is not handicapped. Perhaps He is only hindered by all our "help." We only need to have faith that as we submit to Him in a humble, lowly way, His will can then be accomplished in and through us. All this will be done in accordance with the principles of His Kingdom which He has taught us. Thus His Kingdom will come on earth just as it is in Heaven.

With all these things in mind, perhaps it would be good for us all to take some time to consider what it is that we are doing in Jesus' name. What is it we are building? In which kingdom are we really living? If you find yourself in a position of authority over others, if you are in command and in control of large numbers of other believers, perhaps it is time you pause for a moment and reassess your position. Perhaps there is something which you have missed. Possibly there is some truth regarding the Kingdom of God which has not yet become completely clear to you. My brothers and sisters, please consider these things prayerfully and carefully. Our response to them has many consequences, both in this age and the age which is to come.