

## 1.

### SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY

In beginning our discussion of this all important theme, the first thing which we need to establish is that God is the source of all authority. This is because He is the ultimate authority. He is the one who is sitting on the throne of the universe and it is He who has complete power over all things. Consequently, we can deduce that any other authority which exists in the universe has been set up by Him or at least is permitted to exist by Him. Without His consent, it would not be possible for any other authority to survive. Therefore, no matter where we find authority in this world today (either good or bad), we know that it is something which derives its legitimacy from God. This is exactly what the scriptures teach. We read that human governments, police forces, judges etc. are institutions which are set up by God to restrain the forces of evil in this world (Rm 13:1-7).

The kind of authority which governments and other human rulers have is called "delegated authority." As we have seen, God is the possessor of ultimate authority, but He has chosen to "delegate" or "give" this authority to other individuals who are supposed to act as His representatives. Once God gives this authority, it then belongs to the person to whom it was given. Although they are responsible to God for their use of this authority, it is theirs to exercise as they see fit. In essence, they become the authority. Delegated authorities may use their power well or they may misuse it. They may be good rulers who choose what is in the best interests of God and those over whom they rule, or they may be evil and use their authority to benefit themselves and harm others. Regardless of how they use it, those who hold positions of power are God's delegated authorities.

But delegated authority is not the only kind of authority revealed in the Bible. There is another brand of authority shown to us here which, although it also originates with God, is quite different from the delegated variety. For the sake of clarity, I believe this kind of authority can be referred to as "transmitted" authority. This authority does not belong to the person who is exercising it. It is not something which is "given" to him to use according to his own inclinations. Instead, transmitted authority is exercised simply by transmitting the authority of God. The person involved here is only a vessel, an instrument through which the Divine authority flows. They do not have their "own" authority, but simply are responding to the directions of the Most High. When He speaks to them for others, they speak. When He directs them to take some action, then they move. But they never take this authority upon themselves. No matter how often they are used by God to transmit His authority, they never become this

authority.

Moses was an illustration of someone who exercised this “transmitted” authority. He was not leading the Children of Israel according to his own ideas or directions. He was not expressing himself. As you read the Old Testament account of how he led the Israelites out of bondage, it is quite clear that he was simply moving and speaking according to Supernatural instructions. Every step, every law and ordinance, every detail of the tabernacle—everything was done according to heavenly guidance. He was not exercising some positional authority which God had bestowed upon him. He was not formulating his own plans and making his own decisions. Instead, he was simply allowing God to use him to transmit His authority through him to the people. When Moses’ authority was challenged by Korah and his crowd, he summed up his position in this way: “By this you shall know that the Lord has sent me to do all these works, for I have not done them of my own will” (Num 16:28).

Our Lord Jesus Christ was the supreme example of such transmitted, spiritual authority. He did not come to do His own will, but instead submitted Himself to the will of the Father (Jn 6:38). He did not do His own works or even speak His own words but simply offered Himself as a channel through which the authority of the Father could flow (Jn 14:10). When Jesus cast out demons, He revealed the authority of the Father. When He cursed the fig tree, it was the Father’s voice which was heard (Matt 21:19). When He rebuked the wind and the waves it was the Father’s authority which was demonstrated (Lk 8:24). Every aspect of His living was a manifestation of the invisible God. Even though He was qualified to do so, He never exercised His own authority but instead allowed His Father to flow through Him.

So we see that there are two distinct varieties of authority present in the world today. One is an earthly, human kind—a delegated authority—which is exercised by man, responded to by man and recognized by those who live on this earth. This authority is inevitably accompanied by superficial props which aid the fallen race in identifying these authorities. Positions, titles, uniforms, and many other such externalities all serve to identify those who have delegated authority. This kind of authority is always seeking recognition by other men, in fact it needs this recognition to function. It is a natural, worldly authority which was designed by God to appeal to the fallen nature of man. It is something which God has instituted, which operates according to the fashion of this world to govern the people of the world.

The other kind of authority is a spiritual one. It is the transmitted variety. It is through this authority that God intends to govern His people. One desire which is deeply rooted in the heart of God is that His people would be infinitely responsive to Himself. He yearns to be the supreme ruler over His own. Ultimately, it is His wish that each person would become intimate with Him and be able to follow His leadership individually. His thought is that there would be no obstacles interposed between Himself and His people. Concerning the children of Israel, it was His intention for all of them to be His priests (Ex 19:6). Today, in His Church, His desire is the same. He yearns for each one of His people to grow in a personal, deep knowledge of Himself which will enable them to respond to the slightest inclination of His desire.

However, the stark reality is that not all of God’s people (then or now) are enjoying this experience. To combat this problem, God chooses individuals to transmit His authority and thereby lead the others in the right direction. These chosen vessels He first prepares and then anoints to use as special conduits of His authority. Such men and women must first be broken by God so that they become afraid of ever exercising their own authority. Then God begins to use them to transmit His authority to His

people. They become mouthpieces through which God speaks in situations where the others are unwilling or unable to hear Him for themselves. God's objective in doing so—which is reflected in the heart of the servant who is being so used—is to bring the rest into the intimacy with God which He desires.

After Moses, God continued to use this kind of spiritual authority to lead His people. The next leader whom God greatly used was Joshua who led the Israelites into the land of promise. Later, from time to time as the need arose, the Lord would raise up judges to transmit His will. There are many exciting chapters in the Old Testament describing how God spoke through these judges and what mighty exploits He led them to do. Yet throughout all of this time God's desire was that all of the people would know Him intimately and be able to follow His leading themselves. He raised up leaders when it was necessary but that never changed the fact that He longed for His authority, His kingship to be known by each individual.

Yet for some strange reason the Children of Israel were not satisfied with this arrangement. They had a different longing within their breasts. They wanted to have a king. They desired a human, tangible authority. They yearned for someone who could function as a delegate. So they came to Samuel and insisted that he set up for them an earthly ruler (I Sam 8:5-20).

Perhaps we can identify two reasons for this puzzling desire. First of all, having such a king would relieve them of their personal responsibility to seek God for themselves. Now their "leader" could do this for them. He could bear all the responsibility, take care of all the problems, decide upon the directions they should take and fight their battles. Second, they wanted to be like everyone else. They seemed to feel very peculiar not having a worldly authority. They must have felt somewhat insecure with only an invisible, intangible leader. They longed for someone whom they could see and hear with their physical senses. For them God's spiritual authority was not adequate. So they chose to be like all the other heathen nations.

When Samuel heard this request he became very angry. He knew something about what God's intentions were and he understood that God was using him to transmit Divine direction to His people. He was grieved that the nation whom God had chosen as His own would go the wrong way. However, the Lord reminded him that they were not rejecting him but were in fact rejecting Himself. They were not turning away from a man but were refusing God's kingship in their lives (I Sam 8:7,8).

It is evidence of God's great love for men and His abundant grace that He did not forsake the Israelites even though they were abandoning Him. He let them have their own way, but first He explained that this request would only be bad for them. Earthly, human authority would take away their sons and daughters, demand a share of their possessions and bring them into a bondage from which God would not deliver them (I Sam 8:9-18). He allowed them to have their way because He perceived that their hearts had already turned away from Him. But it is quite clear that this was not His will.

From the foregoing discussion it should be evident that there are two basic kinds of authority in the world today. There is the superficial, earthly kind called "delegated authority" which God uses to exercise some control over those who do not know and follow Him. And there is the spiritual, transmitted authority which has always been God's choice for governing His people. One is for the world, the other is for what today would be called His Church. One functions somewhat independently of God while the other does not, and in fact cannot function, unless God is speaking and moving.

## A MESSAGE FOR TODAY

Let us realize here that all these Old Testament examples are not just interesting stories. Instead, they were recorded for a specific intention: so that we could understand spiritual truths from them. Just as it was then, so today we too have some choices to make concerning authority. Of course as inhabitants of this world we must subject ourselves to the earthly authorities (I Pet 2:13). Concerning our interaction with this world, it is very clear that their delegated authority applies to us. But concerning our functioning in the church, these same two varieties of leadership are also available—human authority and spiritual authority. One kind of authority is set up by man and supported by all the usual props of title, position, vestments, etc. The other is established by God and is confirmed by His Spirit. In the body of Christ, we do have a choice. On one hand, we can learn to recognize and submit ourselves to God's authority, both when He speaks to us personally and when His will is being transmitted through His chosen vessels. On the other hand, we can subject ourselves to some sort of human, delegated authority which is established and recognized by man. We have before us today both the earthly and the heavenly way.

It is without question that Jesus Christ desires to exercise His rightful authority over His Church. The doctrine of His headship over all things (Eph 1:22), His preeminence (Col 1:18) and His complete control over every aspect of the church is not an obscure teaching. The fact that every member of the body is intended to develop an intimate relationship with Him which enables them to increasingly sense His leadership in their lives should come as a surprise to no one. Once again it is His will for us all to be priests (I Pet 2:5). Once again it is not His will that any human being be interposed between us and Himself. God yearns to personally rule each one of His people so that as a whole they express the fulness of His purposes and will. This has always been and still is one of the focal points of all His dealings with man.

There certainly is a need for authority in the church. No doubt God uses men to be both leaders and examples to the others and draw them into a relationship with Christ. But what sort of authority should this be? Is it an authority which is derived from a "position" in the assembly. Does it come from an appointment to be an elder, minister, deacon or some similar thing. Does a title or an "office" qualify a man to lead God's people. Is this responsibility conferred on someone by other men who also possess some entitlement, education or position. Does it come by some kind of vote of confidence by the majority. Or is this honor taken upon oneself by virtue of being the strongest personality in the group? All these are just earthly ways which can only serve to be a hindrance to God's purposes and bring others into bondage.

As we have seen, genuine spiritual authority emanates from God Himself. Those who exercise such authority are prepared vessels who transmit God's thoughts and desires to His people. It is this sort of authority which we should be exercising in the church today. We desperately need men who will speak when God speaks to them, who will lead according to His direction and who will manifest His revelation. The great necessity of the hour is not for those who have been schooled, elected or appointed to positions of authority but for those who are intimate with God and through whom He can freely transmit His will.

There is a tremendous difference between this kind of authority and that which is exercised by the flesh. Yes, the Bible does say that the Apostles "ordained" elders in every church (Acts 14:23). But what does this really mean? W. E. Vine in his Expository

Dictionary of New Testament Words has this to say: "Not a formal ecclesiastical ordination is in view, but the appointment, 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." You see, these Apostles were not arbitrarily selecting men who met certain qualifications, or who perhaps were most willing to go along with their program or possibly had a lot of money or influence in the community. Instead, they with spiritual eyes, were pointing out for the benefit of those who could not see so clearly, those whom God had selected and prepared to use as His vessels.

Genuine spiritual authority does not come with an appointment to a position or "office." In fact, the word "office" used in I Timothy 3:1,10,13 in the King James Version represents no word in the original Greek language but is the invention of the translators. Although certain men in the New Testament acquired labels such as "elder," "deacon" or "apostle" their authority did not emanate from holding some "position." Exactly the reverse is true. These designations came as a result of the inner spiritual work which God had done within them. They were a means of describing their special functions in the body. In some unique area God had prepared these men to be conduits of His authority. These names were used to identify these areas of service, not to qualify them for it.

Untold damage has been done to God's people through the misunderstanding of this principle. All too often, men are appointed to a "position" by other men with the thought that some kind of authority is needed in the church. Tremendous injury and loss has been experienced by God's people through this kind of practice. When we establish earthly, delegated authority in God's church, we thereby offer a substitution for the true. When we elect or appoint men according to human reasoning or perception, we establish a variety of authority which is foreign to God's plan and which will only be a hindrance to His perfect will.

The reason for this is that no matter how "scriptural" it may be, positional authority can never produce spiritual results. Nothing which originates on the earthly level can achieve God's designs. The Bible is quite clear: "The flesh profits nothing" (Jn 6:63). Please don't misunderstand this—human efforts, backed by natural authority, may be able to accomplish many notable things in the religious world. "Revival" campaigns, membership drives, fund raising and building projects all can be carried out by strong human leadership. But let us remember that "success" is not the measure of our spiritual accomplishments. No matter how grandiose or impressive our works appear, if they have been constructed with the wrong substances—earthly materials instead of supernatural—they will be destroyed on judgment day.

It is true that God allowed His people to have their own way and appointed a king for them. Even though He did not want it, He continued to work through this erroneous system as much as possible to bring His people into an intimacy with Himself. In the same way today He tolerates our disobedient behavior when we establish for ourselves earthly authority in His Church. In His abundant mercy and grace, He even works through our "king systems" as much as He can to accomplish His purposes. But it is not His perfect will and it can never fulfill His highest desires. Instead, the Bible makes it abundantly clear that establishing such authority is a rejection of His own and is a serious mistake.

The three consequences of this error which Samuel so clearly predicted are as follows:

- 1). It robs people of their spiritual fruit (sons and daughters). Human authority

paralyzes the body of Christ by substituting its own directions and plans in place of the Holy Spirit. While this authority may be well-intentioned and even have many programs such as “evangelistic outreaches,” the awesome power of the gospel is diminished when this substitution is made. A related adverse effect is that the believers naturally tend to begin looking to the human authority for direction and approval instead of being continually led by their true Head. Consequently, those under this kind of authority become hesitant to initiate anything themselves lest it be seen as a challenge to the leader’s position. Increasingly they become unable to be led directly by the Holy Spirit. This robs the believers of spiritual power. As the living intimacy with the true Authority is replaced with something weak and human, the fruit bearing capacity of every facet of spiritual life is constricted.

2). It demands from people their money (possessions). It is without question that the importance of any earthly position is judged by its sphere of influence and by its extravagance. The more people a leader has under his authority, the more important he is. The greater the territory he rules, the more prestige he has. Usually accompanying this elevation in the eyes of men are fancier clothes, more expensive means of transportation and more elaborate dwelling places. In the church today it is no different. Almost invariably, as the influence of a leader grows, so does his desire for larger, more impressive meeting places, a wardrobe more fitting to his position and in general an increase in salary. This inevitably costs money and this money comes from those who have placed themselves under the influence of this earthly authority.

Stop a moment and compare this with the example of our Lord Jesus. He had no place to lay His head and probably did not even have a change of clothes. He never constructed any palaces or temples. He steadfastly refused to be given any earthly position of authority. His wages were only what the Father prompted others to give. How does what we are doing compare with this?

It is true that the Scriptures exhort us to give our money to the work and the workers of God. But if we use our funds to support merely human endeavors and authorities we will not be rewarded. When the fire of God descends, anything which has been constructed of natural materials (wood, hay and stubble) will be consumed and our hard-earned money will go up in smoke with them. On the other hand, if we are careful to invest our money in those things which are truly spiritual, our investment will bear fruit for eternity. When we use our finances to support truly spiritual works and leaders, we will never lose our reward.

3). It brings God’s people into bondage to the will of man by using their time, energy and talents to build up an earthly organization instead of a spiritual body. Natural authority with all of its plans and programs needs people to do the work. So when you place yourself under such authority, you begin to allow yourself to become the tool of such endeavors. Additionally, to the degree that you submit to human authority to rule your life, you proportionately wall out the authority of the Spirit. You cannot serve two masters. It is inevitable that there will be a conflict between the two. Your heavenly Master wishes to direct every aspect of your existence and any other authority will only prove to be competition and a frustration. When you choose the earthly way as the Israelites did, you become a slave to the will and whims of man, instead of experiencing the true liberty of submission to God.

This is a bondage from which God will not deliver us (I Sam 8:18). God will never violate our will. When we choose something, He will not forcibly change that decision. He may work in many different ways to help us realize our error. We may discover our sense of His presence in our life waning. We may begin to find that

problems which seemed small when we were walking in intimacy with Jesus now seem insurmountable. He may even allow us to become very miserable in the path which we have chosen. But when we voluntarily subject ourselves to human authority, He will not deliver us from it. Our only alternative is to reverse our choice. We must exercise our own will and choose to remove ourselves from the control of any authorities in the church which are a substitution for His own.

This may come as a surprise to many people, but it is nevertheless true. When we subject ourselves to earthly authority, we actually bring ourselves under a curse. The scripture reads: "Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart departs from the Lord. For he shall be like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see when good comes, but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land which is not inhabited" (Jer 17:5,6). Notice here how relying upon man and departing from God are linked. When you look to human beings, you cannot help but look away from God. Another verse warns us: "Do not put your trust in princes, nor in a son of man, in whom there is no help. His spirit departs, he returns to his earth; in that very day his plans perish." Then it continues: "Happy is he who has the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God" (Ps 146:3-5).

Today in Christ's church, there are two kinds of authority being exercised. Therefore, as members of the Church each one of us is confronted with an important choice. If we submit ourselves to the human, positional variety, it will crowd out and eventually replace the spiritual. Conversely, if we yield ourselves to the heavenly authority, it will inevitably come into conflict with the earthly. As we have seen, this decision is extremely important, in fact it is crucial. If we elect to walk down the broad, easy way we will no doubt find plenty of company and may even enjoy a good degree of popularity, but the effects about which God has so clearly warned will come upon us. If on the other hand we choose the more difficult, narrow path, no doubt there will be times we will feel quite lonely and, whether we want to or not, we will become embroiled in the conflict between these two kinds of authority.

The first apostles, and in fact Jesus Himself, found themselves in this kind of situation. Although they did not seek it, they encountered continual opposition from those who held "positions" in the established religious organization of their day. The traditional authorities saw one thing very clearly: if they allowed this manifestation of spiritual authority to go unchecked it would eventually replace their own. Somehow, they were able to recognize that it was in essence, a superior kind of authority which was destined to supplant their lower, earthly variety. Their hearts were not in touch with the heart of God and so they fought to maintain their "place" which they so much enjoyed (Jn 11:48). In the process they did everything they could to suppress the higher authority. At last, when they had exhausted all other options, they resorted to killing God's representatives.

How easy it is for us to want to avoid trouble. It is certainly the natural tendency for us to just go along with the status quo and "be like everyone else" (I Sam 8:5). Yet we are not in any different position from our predecessors or our Lord. If we are to truly follow Jesus, His conflicts will become ours. So again, we have these two choices. We can either preserve our personal happiness and peace or we can prepare ourselves to share in the sufferings of Christ. We can submit ourselves to man or humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God (I Pet 5:6).

Unfortunately, the choice before us is not always just black or white. In the church today there is often a mixture of these two different kinds of authority. Some men who possess some measure of spiritual authority have allowed other men to put

them in earthly positions. Possibly others have even taken these positions for themselves. This then puts these leaders in a situation where they can and probably do exercise both kinds of authority. (We will be discussing their unique problem in later writings on this all important subject). One kind builds up God's people, the other hinders His purposes. One is what we must submit to, while the other should be avoided. Many times, these leaders themselves are unable to distinguish between these two varieties of authority. They have not been taught or are not mature enough to understand the implications of exercising each kind. Therefore, it is up to each individual to know, according to the revelation of the Holy Spirit, to which directives and leadership he or she should submit themselves and which should be refused.

In this extremely important decision, we must be very careful. There are two ways in which we can seriously err. On the one hand, , fleshly rebellion against earthly authority is not God's way. When we discern that natural authority is being substituted for God's in the church, if our reaction to this is not characterized by meekness, humility and love, it is not the response of the Spirit. When we manifest hatred and anger, it does not accomplish the work of God. We must not allow our flesh to react to what we see but rather be led in every way by the Higher authority. In general, His response while on the earth was not to confront and condemn but to go on about the real work of God. We are not called to overt rebellion against any positional authorities but simply to submit ourselves to the Superior will.

On the other hand, we do not wish to and in fact we must not miss God's supernatural direction, especially when this direction comes through other human vessels. We cannot simply reject any and all authority which is expressed through men. It is essential that we humble ourselves in this matter before our Maker and be certain that we are willing to obey His voice wherever it is heard. We must be willing to obey Him in whatever He says. If we do not have this heart attitude, we will certainly end up not only rejecting human authority but in fact all authority. Our condition will be that of independent rebels who are of little use to God. The truth is that if we cannot submit to the Lord speaking through our brothers and sisters, we are not really submitted to Him at all.

The obvious question which arises from all this discussion is: "How can we know the difference between the authority which is spiritual and that which is of the earth?" The answer is very simple but not at all easy. The only way to distinguish between these two kinds of authority is to have spiritual discernment. Outside of the revelation of the Holy Spirit, there is no way to tell. The natural man is not able to differentiate between the two. Only those with spiritual sight will be able to know what is from God and what is not. It is a something which must be discerned.

Therefore, it is essential that every child of God cultivate an intimacy with Him. Each one of us is responsible to develop and maintain a spiritual relationship with our Lord. No one else is going to do it for us. We cannot rely upon some kind of "king" to carry the burden. Just as it was with the Children of Israel, so today God's desire is still the same. In His heart, He yearns for us to allow ourselves to be drawn into a deep love relationship with Himself. From this position, leaning on Jesus' breast (Jn 13:23), we will understand all that He deems it necessary for us to know.