

## THE REBELLION OF KORAH

Many years ago when the Children of Israel were encamped in the wilderness, a discussion arose among them about who was to be in authority. The man Moses and his brother Aaron had been leading God's people up until that time. Moses had come to Egypt, spoken the word of the Lord to the Israelites and to Pharaoh, and eventually led God's people out of their bondage towards their Divinely appointed destiny. This was a marvelous time in the history of God's people, during which the power of God and His victory over the forces of evil were dramatically demonstrated.

However, in the course of time, some of the other men in the congregation became disillusioned with Moses' and Aaron's exercise of authority. These other men (over 250 of them in fact) were also leaders in the congregation and were well known among the people (Num 16:2). They had begun to wonder why it was that Moses and Aaron were setting themselves up as "the authorities" and "exalting themselves" above everybody else (Num 16:3). Their reasoning went something like this: "We are all believers here. God is among us all. Everyone in the congregation is just as holy as anyone else. In God's eyes we are just the same. Who do these two think that they are? Our understanding of God's will is just as valid as theirs. Why should we follow them?"

Now this kind of reasoning is easy to understand. It is perfectly natural for us to think this way when we are continually confronted with spiritual authority. At first when someone comes along with a word from the Lord and manifests a spiritual anointing, it is easy to be impressed and pay attention to what they say. But after a time, when you get to know the person and learn something about their human frailties and weaknesses—when the first aura of spiritual impression is gone—it is then that these kind of thoughts begin to occur.

It is not hard for us to sympathize with these men and the reasons they began to think in this way. Moses had promised to bring them to a land flowing with milk and honey, but around them stretched only desert. He had told them that God wanted to bless them abundantly but even Egypt had been more comfortable than this. They had eyes in their heads. They could see that they were not taking the most direct route to their destination. And this Moses was keeping things in the family by appointing his relatives to the priesthood. Only a fool would continue to be led about by the nose by these two without expressing his own opinion a little. Did Moses intend to keep them all blinded so that he and his brother could continue to hold all the positions of authority (Num 16:14)?

As we read on we discover that God's reaction to this thought process was extremely severe—so shockingly severe in fact that many of the people were appalled by it and became angry. Those who would not answer Moses' summons to the the Tent

of Meeting were swallowed alive by the earth. A new thing happened, and these men, along with their entire families, went down alive into the pit (Num 16:30-33). Next, fire from heaven descended and consumed the remaining 250. Then, as if this most devastating and awesome judgment upon God's people wasn't enough, a plague broke out upon those who were offended by what had happened and killed 14,700 more! In fact, it was only through the intervention of Moses and Aaron that the entire congregation was not destroyed in a moment. What a calamity of unimaginable proportions had happened to those whom God had chosen to be His own.

Let us pause a moment and consider this event carefully. This is not simply a recitation of ancient history. The New Testament clearly explains that these things were written for our benefit (I Cor 10:11). This is really a message to the Church of our day which God is very anxious that we hear. This is a sobering, corrective word of instruction which is upon His heart. May He have mercy upon us that we would be able to receive it as such.

### **TRUE SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY**

Of course most readers will have already realized that the real issue here is not an argument about personalities or opinions. It is not an analysis of who had the best ideas or advice. It is the question of spiritual authority. It was a discussion about who was qualified to lead God's people according to His will. Since it is evident that this subject is so important and that God has gone to such extreme lengths to demonstrate to us its serious nature, it seems good to spend a little time here and examine the need for recognizing genuine spiritual authority and what our response to it should be.

In the first chapter of this book on spiritual authority we discovered that there are two varieties of authority in the world today. One kind is an earthly authority called "delegated authority" which God has instituted to keep the evil of this world in check. This authority is exercised by those who hold titles and positions in our societies—such as policemen, government officials, judges, etc. The other kind of authority is a spiritual one which we have called "transmitted authority." Those who manifest this kind of authority are simply channels through which the authority of God directly flows. These are yielded vessels through whom God has chosen to transmit His will. When such authority is exercised, it is an actual revelation of God Himself.

As we have seen earlier, Moses was such a vessel of Divine authority. He was a man who was used by God to manifest His own plans and purposes in an astounding way. Very few other men in the history of the world have manifested such supernatural power and leadership. We know that Moses was not instituting his own ideas and opinions. He was not leading God's people according to his own wisdom or direction. He was simply an instrument being used by God to transmit His will to His people. He was a conduit through whom God spoke clearly and directly.

Perhaps this understanding will help explain the severity of God's reaction to the challenge of Korah and his company. They thought they were disagreeing with a man. They imagined that they were dealing with some kind of delegated, earthly authority. Instead, they found that they were opposing God Himself. Although God's authority had been manifested through a human vessel, this did not subtract anything from the fact that it was really HIM! Moses tried to save them from their error and explained this fact to them by saying: "Therefore you and all your company are gathered together against the Lord" (Num 16:11), but they refused to listen. Consequently they suffered the most astonishing and swift judgment from God Himself. Without realizing it, they

had challenged Him directly and He was swift to respond.

### **THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COIN**

In the first article, we have seen that to establish "delegated" authority in the church is a grave mistake and that the consequences of it are far-reaching. However, now it appears that there is also an extremely serious error to be made on the other side of the coin. Some Christians have been enlightened and have seen through the humanness of so much of what today passes for spiritual authority. They have rejected the error of the "king system" and all that it entails. But as we have seen in the beginning of this article, this is not enough. We must also be able and willing to recognize and submit to genuine spiritual authority. It is not good enough for every man to do what is right in his own eyes (Num 12:3). It is not sufficient for us to reject human authority but fail to submit ourselves to the true. When we do this, we put ourselves exactly in the position in which Korah and his band were found: opposing God's own authority which is being manifested through a human being.

Today God has limited Himself. He is not sending airmail to His people. It is not often that He speaks audibly from heaven. Even though He does communicate with each believer personally through the Spirit, there are times when He must use human vessels to manifest His will. When God's people are unable or unwilling to hear Him directly, it is then that He uses chosen instruments to speak forth His word.

The problem is that these human beings whom God uses are just that—human beings. When God speaks through them, they do not grow wings, sprout halos or suddenly begin to walk without touching the ground. They simply remain what they are. At this moment in time, it happens that God is quite short of perfect Christians to use to transmit His will. Consequently, He is forced to use some who are, well, shall we say, less than completely sanctified. They still need to eat food, they still need to sleep at night and unfortunately from time to time they are still going to manifest the untransformed part of their nature. Yet when they speak according to the Spirit of God, they are during that period a living manifestation of His authority.

### **A GREAT MISTAKE**

It is a great mistake to think that those whom God is using to express His authority will be easy for the natural man to recognize. Most of the prophets were not outwardly impressive enough to attract great followings. Even a man like Moses, who was used to perform such spectacular miracles, had difficulties continually with men and women who could not see past the superficial appearances. Our Lord Jesus Himself was the ultimate example of spiritual authority. Yet many of the earthly people around Him who lacked spiritual vision were unable to discern just Who and what He was. His own family did not recognize Him. The people from His hometown could not receive His ministry. Even the leaders of the "church" of His day, the very ones who should have embraced Him, failed to understand the source of His authority (Mt 21:23). In the end the delegated religious officials opposed to the death this manifestation of authority because it presented a threat to their position and "place" (Jn 11:48).

Perhaps our preconceived ideas sometimes get in the way. Perhaps it is possible that we idealize many of the Biblical figures, whom God used in the past, a little too much and expect our brothers and sisters to be as we imagine they were. While the scriptural record focuses mainly on the times when they were anointed by the Spirit, no

doubt they had moments when they were less than perfect. As we contemplate these men and their work for God, it is easy to suppose that if we had lived at that time, we would certainly have recognized them as instruments of the Most High. We surmise that their demeanor, their bearing, or something about them would surely have impressed us and we would not have rejected their testimony as so many of our forefathers did. Certainly we would not have been among those who "killed the prophets" when they brought a word which was hard to hear (Mt 23:31). But it is evident that the vast majority of God's people did have this trouble. They failed to see past the humanity of the vessels and hear His voice.

### **THE NEED FOR AUTHORITY**

It is a fact of life that mankind has serious difficulty recognizing and submitting to authority. This deficiency is a direct result of the fall of man and the subversion of human nature. Whether we like to admit it or not, a deep-seated rebellion lies in the heart of every man. In fact, it is this rebellion which is the source of all the problems with sin which we have today. Rebellion—disobeying the commandment of God—was what destroyed Adam and Eve. And it is this very same rebellion within our hearts which keeps us from hearing His voice today when He speaks to us individually or through others.

One of God's primary purposes in His working within our hearts is to subdue this rebellion. God desires to establish His kingdom, His authority, in our lives. This liberating experience becomes ours as we submit ourselves to Divine authority. The expression of His authority, the manifestation of His will for our lives, comes to us in many different ways. But no matter how it is exhibited, it is important for us to recognize Him as the source. God will speak to us individually through our spirit, not only with words but more often with subtle inclinations towards His desires. God will speak to us through His Word as we meditate upon the things which He has written in the Bible. And God will direct us through our circumstances as we submit ourselves to Him and seek His will as it manifests itself through our environment. I am not saying here that we should be completely governed by the events which take place in our surroundings. The point here is that we must learn to be sensitive to recognize the hand of God working in our situations so that we will not miss anything which He is saying through them.

Another important way in which God shows us His will is through other Christians. When we are born again, we are placed by Jesus into His body. In God's supernatural design, He has not made us each complete and independent. Instead, His pattern is that each member of His body has specialized gifts and functions. He has designed a great diversity into His body which He intends to result in a great interdependence. No one person "has it all" but each must be willing to receive the ministry of others to be complete. In this way every one has something to minister and each one is in some measure dependent upon the others for things which they do not have themselves.

This is especially true in the area of knowing God's will and being sensitive to His authority. As each individual grows spiritually in the sphere of his or her appointed ministry, the authority of God begins to flow through them in this area. The more they grow in obedience to the Spirit, the more God can use them to manifest His will. Consequently, each one begins to have a unique understanding of the will of God. So, when we are open to God speaking to us through others, He can minister Himself to us

in many important and unusual ways.

Probably most Christians like to imagine that they are very sensitive to the speaking of God's Spirit within them. In actual practice, however, most of us are far from this ideal. Within the heart of virtually every believer still lie areas of darkness and rebellion. These are the untransformed parts in which God is still trying to work. Because of the fact that we do not realize such areas exist, it is often very difficult for the Lord to address these problems. Often He will try to use other believers to speak to us concerning these things. He will give the necessary understanding and revelation about our own lives, things which we are not able to receive ourselves, to others and use them to minister it to us. If, when this occurs, we can recognize the voice of God speaking through our brothers and sisters, we will be blessed. If we refuse to respond to the authority of God, we will miss out on what He has intended for us.

As we live and move in Christ's body, we must learn to recognize one another and interact with one another spiritually. In order to do this it is essential that we stop knowing each other according to the flesh (II Cor 5:16). This means that we are not to make our judgments of others according to what we perceive with our physical senses or mental apprehensions. We must never focus on their peculiar personality traits, failings, strengths or weaknesses. Instead we must learn to spiritually discern the Lord's Spirit in others and recognize the specialized gifts and ministries which He has given them. We must see them through the eyes of God. As we acknowledge the spiritual ministries of our brothers and sisters, God can begin to use them to minister Himself into our lives. His authority will flow out and touch us in ways we may never expect. This is an essential Christian experience. It is in this way, through the supply of every part (Eph 4:16), that the body is built up into what Jesus desires.

It is for precisely this reason that we are taught to submit ourselves to one another in the fear of God (Eph 5:21). When we interact with other believers who are following the Lord, we are not just touching human beings. The church, the Bible insists, is the very dwelling place of the Holy Spirit! When we are experiencing living spiritual relationships with others it is not just "them" with whom we are in contact. It is God Himself. This fact should have a profound impact upon us. This realization should bring us up short and cause us to reexamine our attitude towards and relationship with other Christians. How we all need a large dose of the fear of the Lord introduced into our church experience!

### **THE "BODY" EXPERIENCE**

So far we have been speaking generally about our individual lives, but these same truths also apply to the body of Christ as a whole. Not only does God want to lead us singly, but He greatly desires His church to move together as one at His bidding. The Bible teaches us that Jesus Christ is the head of the body, the church (Col 1:18). We read that He is to have complete authority in all things. It is His intention to control every aspect of her movements. The church is to behave like a corporate woman, responding to every inclination of her heavenly Head just as a wife responds to her husband. What a glorious thing it is when the church moves together in the direction that God is leading them. What a beautiful sight to see the Bride of Christ responding together to her Beloved.

This is a wonderful doctrine. It makes for inspirational meditation during our private times with the Lord. But how is this authority going to be manifested? I suppose that it is theoretically possible for the Lord to move His body by

simultaneously giving every member the same instruction at the same time. In actual practice however, it seems that God uses leaders, men and women whom He has prepared to receive and transmit His will. This sublime possibility of moving as one in the church becomes a genuine blessing to us as we submit ourselves to God speaking through others. When we are willing to hear His voice and obey, all of His holy purposes will be accomplished in us, through us and around us. The prophetess Deborah saw such a sight and it inspired her to dance as she sang: "the leaders took the lead in Israel" and "the people offered themselves willingly. Bless ye the Lord" (Judges 5:2).

From the scriptures we learn that there are specialized ministries in the church which are designed by God specifically for leadership of the whole group. The apostles, those men to whom God has entrusted the overall vision of His habitation; the prophets, those through whom He delivers timely messages which His people need to hear; the pastors, teachers and elders, the servants through whom God expresses His heart's desires to His own; and, in general, any qualified individuals whom He can use to manifest His will to His body; all of these could be categorized as "leaders." Most often it is these leaders that the Head will use to point out His directions and plans for the rest.

### WHAT IS OUR RESPONSE?

But when such people speak, what is our response? (Please remember here that I am not referring to the ungodly exercise of positional authority in the church, but to true, transmitted, spiritual authority). Are we able to discern the voice of God or do we stubbornly refuse it? Are we submissive or do we think something like this: "I don't agree with that. That's not anything I have a burden for. Who does that person think he is, trying to tell us what we ought to do?" Or even, "I didn't hear God say anything like that to me." Actually, everyone did hear God say "something like that." He just did speak to you personally—through your brother.

Not everyone is called of God to function as a leader. In fact, most are not. Consequently, it is imperative that the majority submit themselves to the voice of God speaking through the leaders. In this way, those who do not have this gift will find direction and satisfaction. They will be led into the will of the Father simply by following the Lord in their brothers. When the expression of this authority is genuine, a tremendous power and fruitfulness will be exhibited as the church moves according to the direction of the Head. In this way a glorious expression of the kingdom of God will be manifested on the earth.

Conversely, since God is not always speaking directly to each individual, if we refuse His speaking through His chosen vessels, we will experience a great loss of purpose and direction. Such rebellion breeds confusion. Spiritual poverty and loss of overcoming power result as each one does what "is right in his own eyes" (Deut 12:8). Reduction of spiritual fruit, both in the individual lives and in the increase of new believers will quickly be manifested. When we are unwilling to hear those through whom God is speaking, we lose His leadership and are left with only our own ideas and opinions. These contrary opinions—those which rise up to oppose the way of the Lord—will naturally compete for acceptance among the believers. Thus without Divine leadership the church becomes both paralyzed and divided.

The proper reaction we should have when someone godly claims to have a word from the Lord for the church is to humbly and prayerfully examine it before Him.

When the individual who has spoken is known as a vessel through whom God often manifests His will, this should greatly increase our diligence to make sure that our response is the right one. It is well for us to remember here that if we do not understand something, this is not grounds for rejecting it. Often it is not easy for us to comprehend the vision associated with the ministries of other members. Our responsibility is to seriously and honestly take these things to God in prayer. If what we have heard is not from Him we do not need to, in fact we should not, obey it. However, such a decision must be made with the utmost humility, fearfulness before God, and carefulness to make sure that our discernment is correct. Remember, the general tendency of our flesh is bent towards the side of rebellion.

No doubt it is for this reason that the Apostle Paul exhorted his readers to be careful to recognize those who were spiritual laborers and who were manifesting real spiritual authority (I Thess 5:12). This must be the burden which is behind the admonition in I Corinthians 16:15,16 where he urges the believers to acknowledge and submit to those whom God was using. Again and again in the New Testament this theme of submission to spiritual authority is stressed. Why? Because it is so easy for the flesh to miss it. It is the natural tendency of the fallen nature to refuse Divine authority being manifested through other men.

## **SPIRITUAL JUDGMENT**

Today on this earth, God is limited to expressing His authority through imperfect beings. Consequently, it is very easy for the human mind to examine the person rather than the source of the message. It is quite natural for some to act as Dathan and Abiram and see others only with eyes of flesh. Lacking spiritual vision, they make their assessments from superficial appearances. They find some fault with the vessel and miss the content. They pick out some real or imaginary flaw in the one through whom God is leading and then excuse themselves from any obedience and submission. To do so is a tragic mistake. It will result in some spiritual judgment upon those who make it. This is not because they refused to listen to their brother's opinion or take into account the ideas of another. It is because they rejected the voice of God Himself manifesting His will through His chosen vessels.

When we refuse God's voice speaking through others, there will be consequences. Rebellion against our King will always result in some degree of spiritual darkness. It will usually produce in the affected parties a directionless, wandering, unfulfilled kind of experience similar to that of those who refused to enter the land of Canaan. Such individuals tend to go nowhere spiritually and accomplish nothing for the Lord. Some claim to be looking for the perfect Christian group or experience but nothing ever meets their expectations. They cannot find the Lord's rest. These are often people who have trouble submitting themselves to anyone else and so they continue to seek for some independent, personal direction for their lives. What they fail to realize is that they can only find their fulfillment in submission to the leadership which God is already giving through others. Since their gifts and functions in the body are not in the area of leadership, it is impossible for them to find their place without yielding to God's direction through those to whom God is speaking.

God never changes. His attitude towards rebellion today is just the same as it was in Old Testament times. Although the judgments which the rebels of Moses' day experienced will probably not be exactly repeated, they certainly are a type of the spiritual effects which our own rebellion produces. For example, when we refuse God's

speaking in areas which need alteration, these weaknesses remain untransformed. In the course of time, the adverse effects of these problems can become so serious that the spiritual ground crumbles away under us and our sins swallow us up completely.

### A FINAL CONSIDERATION

This then brings us to our final consideration and that is: What can we do to avoid this serious error? How can we make sure that we hear the voice of God when He speaks through our brothers? The only answer is that we must be truly submitted to God. In our hearts, we have to be willing to hear His voice and obey. If we really desire His will, we can receive it no matter which instrument He uses to convey it. If we truly want to obey Him and have established a submissive relationship with Him, we will recognize His speaking even from the lowest, least esteemed member of the body. His sheep will "hear His voice" (Jn 10:27). This is not something which will come to us in an instant but is an ever-deepening experience as our relationship with the Lord grows. Our increasing submissiveness to God is true evidence of spiritual growth and maturity.

No amount of teaching can replace this sort of relationship. Pressuring rebellious believers to "submit" to leaders will have no real effect on their problems. Insisting that the insubordinate ones move in some direction, even if it is the right one, cannot produce spiritual results. All this can create is hypocrites whose hearts are not right with God. There is no real substitute for each believer truly humbling themselves before God, refusing the rebellious instincts which rise up within them, and submitting themselves under the mighty hand of God (I Pet 5:6).

The great need of this hour is to allow Jesus to establish His kingdom in our hearts. Someday soon His authority will be established physically on this planet. But as a preparation for this momentous event, it is necessary for Him to establish His kingdom—His heavenly authority—firmly within us. It is essential for those who proclaim that they love Him, also to obey Him. Let us all, in the light of God and His Word, examine ourselves thoroughly and then yield to His control any areas of our lives which are seen to be in rebellion. Let us crown Him king in our lives.