

PREFACE

As children of God, one of the most important things for us to know is how to obey and follow Jesus. He is our Lord and our King. It is to Him that we will give account one day for our attitudes, actions and words. In the garden of Eden, Adam and Eve rebelled against the Most High. Since that time the vast majority of the human race has been living in rebellion against Him. After repenting from our sins and being born again, it is our privilege as God's sons to submit ourselves to His rulership and authority. We have the opportunity to reverse the worldly trend of rebellion and become obedient. In fact, it is a necessity for us to do so if we are to enter into the experience of His kingdom. Consequently, it is imperative for all of us to be able to discern spiritual authority. It is essential that we be able to know the voice of our Lord and so be able to follow Him.

One factor which perhaps makes this task more difficult is that often God does not speak directly to us but uses other men or women as vessels through which He is manifesting His authority. But how do we know when it is God? How can we be sure when it is our Lord speaking or when it is simply man? This is an essential issue which all of us need to resolve.

In the wilderness, the Children of Israel were also confronted with such a decision. Besides Moses and Aaron, there were many other men among the congregation who were well known, and considered leaders. Chief among them were Nadab and Abihu, who along with 250 others gathered together to challenge the leadership of God's anointed. They were competing for positions of authority and recognition among God's people. We will speak further in chapter two about God's judgment upon these rebels. But here our consideration is different.

Immediately after the resolution of this confrontation relating to God's authority, our Lord felt it was necessary to teach His people a supernatural lesson. He knew that His children would in the future also need to be able to recognize spiritual authority. They would need a basis from which they could judge which kind of authority was merely human and which was truly divine. Since earthly authority can be very impressive with all of its charms and abilities, perhaps we too could benefit from God's supernatural illustration.

What God did was this: He instructed Moses to take a staff from each of the leaders in the congregation. This staff was a symbol of each one's leadership and authority. This collection of rods, along with that of Aaron, was put in the tabernacle overnight. In the morning, something supernatural had occurred. Aaron's rod had changed in three ways. It had budded, blossomed and born ripe fruit—all at the same time! This is really incredible. Have you ever seen a tree branch have buds, blossoms and fruit simultaneously? The other rods remained just as they were—old, hard and dry. But the staff of the one who was manifesting divine authority became completely different.

This illustration still speaks to us today. Human authority and divine authority

each have a distinct spiritual "flavor." Each one has individual characteristics which we can identify. Earthly authority is hard and dry. It makes demands upon us but gives no supply. It is exercised with human strength and enforced with earthly measures. Just as an old, dry staff might be used to beat or whack a disobedient animal, so human authority controls others through the use of strength, coercion, demand and superior force, whether it be physical or psychological.

True spiritual authority, on the other hand, has an entirely different flavor. No one would ever think of beating someone else with a branch full of blossoms and fruit. Something else is in view here. To begin, the buds speak of something new, soft and fresh, something that is alive. So we see that spiritual authority is living, that it is full of divine Life. The blossoms speak to us of something fragrant, something with the sweet smell of the character of Jesus Christ. And the fruit speaks to us of something nourishing, not something of demand but of supply. These then are the characteristics of true supernatural leadership and authority. Those who are exercising it will exhibit these qualities: They will be full of God's life, living in close communion with Him. They will have the sweet aroma of Christ because they have had His character worked into their lives, having had their own natural abilities and authority broken by His hand. Finally, they will be a source of nourishment and supply rather than dry demand, since they themselves are firmly attached to the heavenly Vine.

Here, brothers and sisters, is the true test of any and all authority in the Christian church. Which characteristics does it display? What flavor and aroma does it have? Truly these things are spiritually discerned and cannot be understood by the natural man. But that does not negate their reality. Each one of us is required by God to submit to His authority. Therefore it is necessary for each one of us to be able to discern and decide which is indeed from Him and which is just the rod of man. On every side and from every group are those who are claiming to have or be the true authority. May God grant us grace that we may rightly discern the flavor of what is genuinely from Him. May God also use this book to help His people in this all important endeavor.

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