

GENUINE SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY

by

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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 – men who were considered leaders. Chief among them were Korah, Dathan and Abiram, 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 the following 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 this authority 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 authority is indeed from Him and which is just the rod of man. On every side and from every group there 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.

DWD

“Then Jesus came and spoke
to them saying, ‘All authority
has been given to me
in heaven and on earth...
and lo, I am with you always,
even to the end of the age’ ”
(Mt 28:18, 20).

“They set up kings,
but not by me;
they made princes
and I did not acknowledge it”
(Hos 8:4).

“The prophets prophesy falsely,
and the priests rule
by their own power;
and my people love to have it so.
But what will you do
in the end?”
(Jer 5:31).

1.

TWO KINDS OF AUTHORITY

*I*n 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 be impossible for any other authority to survive. Therefore, no matter where we find authority, either good or bad, in this world today, 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 people 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 when a person is simply 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.

WHY MEN DELEGATE AUTHORITY

Let us meditate upon this together. Why would someone need to delegate their authority to someone else? It could be because of their incapacity to do the necessary work. Or, it could be because of their absence from the place where something needs to be decided or done.

The heads of large companies always need to delegate their authority to subordinates who act on their behalf. These CEO's are not qualified to do every job in the workplace. They cannot be present in every place at all times.

Therefore, their own limitations demand that they delegate some of their authority to others who act for them in their incapacity or absence. These others are then “delegated authorities” whose authority depends upon their position in relationship to their boss.

In the church today, Jesus has been designated by the Father to be the Head over all things (Eph 1:22). The government of this special group of people is “upon His shoulder” (Is 9:6). He, and He alone, is to be the One governing and directing His people. All authority in heaven and earth has been given to Him (Mt 28:18).

In fulfilling this task, Jesus does not delegate His authority. He does not parcel out little portions of His authority to others in order for them to act on His behalf. This is because He has no need to do so. There is no task in the church which He is incapable of performing. He is all-powerful. Further, He is not absent from His body. He is omnipresent. He is here with every one of us at all times. Therefore, He has no need whatsoever to delegate His authority to someone else to act for Him.

Jesus is physically absent from this world. Therefore, He delegates His authority to men and women to act for Him in His “absence.” These are the governmental authorities with which we are familiar. Yet He is spiritually present in His body, the church. So, being present, He is the one who should be directing, leading, and initiating everything. In the church, no other human being ever gets to have a little part of this authority for himself to use as he sees fit.

Just before Jesus ascended into heaven He said to His disciples: “All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples...” (Mt 28:18). What He did *not* say was: “And now I am parcelling out a little bit of this authority to each of you to do the job while I am away.”

He continued by saying: “...and lo, *I am with you always*, even to the end of the age” (Mt 28:20). The Authority Himself was to be always with them, manifesting His authority through them whenever and wherever necessary.

So we see that in the church whenever true authority is manifested, it is not the person we see who is or has this authority, but it is a revelation of the invisible Jesus flowing through this person. This is what we are calling “transmitted authority.”

POWERLESS, IMPOTENT HUMAN AUTHORITY

You see, “positional” authority or “delegated” authority operates only in the natural, physical realm. It is heard by ears of flesh and produces reactions which are human. It is the means by which men control each other in this physical world. The authority which is thus exercised by parents, police, and other authorities does have its place. It is a necessary part of this world. But it is of no use in building up the body of Christ.

Many have tried over the centuries to use such positional authority to build the church. But alas, it has been a dismal failure. Countless authority figures have tried to herd God’s children in one direction or another. They have taught, cajoled, demanded, and even commanded, yet without spiritual results. Many pastors, bishops, elders, and others have used all their energy and authority trying to move believers in the direction they believe they should be going spiritually. But the result has not been the perfection of the saints.

Although delegated authority can be used to produce some visible effects on the lives of some Christians, these results are not eternal. They are not true transformation. For example, some authority figures in the church have exerted pressure on others under their sway and managed to effect a change in their habits or behavior. Perhaps these “submissive believers” have changed their clothing styles, speech patterns, or even begun to manage their money in a better way.

Yet, such changes are only earthly and temporary. They work from the outside in instead of from the inside out (where the spiritual man resides). These changes are not the result of spiritual growth, but human earthly pres-

sure. These folks have been conformed to a pattern but not transformed into the image of Christ.

The truth is that the army is much better at “changing” men and women’s behavior in this earthly way than the church. There, the recruits are subjected to a tremendous pressure, night and day, until they conform to the standards of the army. But this is not transformation. It is not the saving of the soul which God desires. It is not something of eternal value which results from the Life of God growing up inside them.

Such positional authority is of earthly origin and cannot produce spiritual results. It can do nothing to help men and women grow in Christ. It is impotent to produce eternal changes. Only genuine spiritual authority can effectively work to truly transform the soul into the image of Christ. The goal is not simply to modify men’s behavior. Instead, it is to see Jesus Christ growing up within and being formed within each and every believer. For this to occur, only the authority of God Himself will work.

Only the voice of God speaking into the spirits of His children will create within them what He is seeking. It is when they hear His voice that they will be full of His life (Jn 5:25). This “word” of God might be, and often is, transmitted through other believers. There are many members of the body of Christ whom God may use. Yet it is not their voices which are heard but His. He is the One who is speaking through them to effect the new creation in the hearts of the hearers.

THE EXAMPLE OF MOSES

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 taberna-

cle – 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 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. This kind is manifested in different individuals but does not belong to them. They themselves never *become* the authority but are merely conduits through which Divine authority flows.

GOD'S DESIRE

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 other believers 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 raised up judges to transmit His will.

There are many exciting chapters in the Old Testament describing how God spoke through the judges and prophets 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 Samuel 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.

There is also 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. We should obey them (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 one of His 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.

Again, we understand that 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 individual so that His people as a whole express the fullness of His purposes and will. This has always been and still is one of the focal points of all His dealings with man.

AUTHORITY IN THE CHURCH

There certainly is a need for Jesus' authority in the church. Further, there is no doubt that 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 entitling, 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 exhibit 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 seeing in the church today.

We desperately need men who will speak only 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* (1966 edition) has this to say: "Not a formal ecclesiastical ordination is in view, but the appointment ["pointing out," Gk], 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 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 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 authority! 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 judg-

ment day. Only that which is a result of work of the Holy Spirit will survive that test.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF TODAY'S KINGS

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 leadership 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. Natural authority demands from people their money (possessions). It is without question that the impor-

tance of any person with an earthly position is judged by their sphere of influence and by their 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. Positional authority 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.

The following 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 exhaust-

ed 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).

THE PROBLEM OF INVISIBILITY

One of the main problems we encounter when speaking about transmitted authority versus positional authority is that Jesus today is invisible. We cannot see Him with our physical eyes. But the natural man has confidence in things which are tangible, things which he can see, hear, feel, or taste. For him, invisible things are difficult to perceive and understand and therefore he considers them unreliable.

A consequence of this is that for new believers and those who have not grown spiritually, it is much easier for them to gravitate toward earthly, positional authority. They do not easily understand things which are spiritual. For many of them, a person with a title and position of authority who directs their lives is much simpler and safer than the thought of needing to hear from and follow Someone invisible.

Our relationship with the living, resurrected Jesus is by faith. Through our faith we understand and perceive things which are invisible. Included in these things is the presence of and the leadership of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is impossible to know Him and follow Him without faith. Simply following biblical instructions will not be sufficient. We must through faith enter into a personal intima-

cy with Jesus, learn to know His voice, and follow Him. In this way, He can lead us into all of His will.

NOT ALWAYS BLACK AND WHITE

Unfortunately, in the church today the distinction between positional, earthly authority and true spiritual authority is not clearly defined. Instead, there is often a mixture of these two different kinds of authority. The situation is not always just black or white. In the church there are some men who manifest some measure of spiritual authority but have allowed other men to put them in earthly positions. Possibly some 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 of us individually to know, according to the revelation of the Holy Spirit, to which directives and leadership we should submit ourselves 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 of God.

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 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.

2.

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 expression 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 perhaps 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 kinds 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. The rebels who would not answer Moses' summons to 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 whom God was anointing and using to lead His 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 whom God uses to transmit His will. When such

authority is exercised, it is an actual revelation of God Himself. It is not the person themselves speaking but a manifestation of the Divine will.

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 take away 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 chapter, 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 (Deut 12:8). 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 email 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 reveal His will. When God’s people are unable or unwilling to hear Him directly, it is then that He uses one of His 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 outward-

ly impressive enough to attract great followings. Even a man like Moses who was used to perform such spectacular miracles continually had difficulties 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 those who "murdered 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 the scriptures 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, everyone

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.

Due to the fact that we do not realize such areas exist, it is often very difficult for the Lord to address these problems. Therefore He will try to use other believers to speak to us concerning these things. He will give the necessary understanding and revelation to others about our own lives – things which we are not able to receive ourselves – so they can be used to minister to us.

If, when this occurs, we can recognize the voice of the Lord 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 re-examine 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 personally 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 KJV).

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, could all 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 present did hear God say "something like that." He just did speak to them personally – through their 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 each and every aspect of His will directly to each individual, if we refuse His speaking through His prepared 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 lack of 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 someone

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 listen; 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 Paul, the apostle, 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 who don't have some special "position" or title.

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 one of His vessels.

When we refuse the Lord'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 repeated exactly, they certainly are a type of the spiritual effects which our own rebellion produces.

For example, when we refuse Jesus' 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.

3.

THE BURNING BUSH

Our God is infinite and eternal. He knows all of the future as well as the past. Not only does He comprehend the beginning and end of everything, the Bible teaches us that He *is* the beginning and end. God exists beyond and above what we know as "time." Time is simply a part of His creation.

Since we are finite beings and are therefore limited by "time," this concept of the Eternal One existing outside of time may be difficult for us to fathom. Nevertheless it is true. God simply "is." And His existence transcends both time and space.

As a consequence of this, nothing which God does is accidental. His work has not been done and is not being done on the spur of the moment, as a result of some sudden idea which enters His mind. Instead, everything which God is doing has been planned "long ago" from a human standpoint.

All His activities are directed toward accomplishing the objectives which He determined from the beginning. Nothing which has transpired, either to hinder His purposes or to further them, has been a surprise to Him. Every circumstance has been foreknown, and God in His infinite wisdom has planned a way to accomplish His will through it.

With this in mind, let us take a further look together at the life of a very special man of God. No doubt, long before he was born, Moses was chosen by God as a vessel to accomplish a great and mighty work for His name. He was not selected hastily just because he happened to be in the right place at the right time; rather, he was a part of an unfathomable, eternal design. Not only did the Almighty foreknow and choose Moses, but He also planned a way to prepare him for his future assignment.

Shortly after his birth (I trust that you all have read the story) Moses was taken from his hiding place in the river right into the household of Pharaoh. There he received education and training about the ways and customs of the royal court (Acts 7:22). All this was part of the Most High's design to prepare Moses for the work which lay ahead.

I suppose it is theoretically possible for some shepherd who has spent his entire life in the desert to walk into Pharaoh's presence and deal with him in the way in which Moses did. But Moses was not just an ordinary shepherd. He was a man prepared by God for an extraordinary task.

In preparation for his calling, our Lord arranged a very unusual education. Consequently, when the time came he was qualified to move with confidence in the courts of Pharaoh among the mighty of the land and carry out the assignment of the Lord.

Not only was Moses prepared by God, He was also called by God to the work for which he was predestined. We do not know exactly when in his life Moses began to understand this calling, but it is clear that by the age of 40, he knew something about it. It is probable that he had not yet begun to suspect the fullness of God's plan, but he did seem to comprehend that he had been chosen by the Lord to deliver His people.

In Acts 7:25 we read: "For he supposed that his brethren would have understood that God would deliver them by his hand..." Evidently, because he was aware of this fact he erroneously presumed that they too had realized it. However, they did not. It was not yet God's time and all His work of preparation had not yet been finished.

Since Moses' comprehension of the Lord's way was incomplete, his behavior reflected this deficiency. He must have looked with natural eyes at the situation. To see his own brethren so abused and in bondage probably stirred many passionate feelings within him. Their continual, severe oppression must have had a great impact upon him. He must have been consumed with the idea of getting on with the job which God had given him to do.

The position of power and authority to which he had come, his own strength and wisdom, the innate leadership abilities which he possessed – all of these things convinced him that he could and should begin to take some steps to carry out the calling of God. So when the opportunity presented itself he took it, killing the single Egyptian and hiding him in the sand.

What a mighty deliverance he accomplished! One oppressor dead and one Israelite temporarily delivered. With all his training and natural talents, this was all he could do.

Moses was undoubtedly burning inside with the desire to see God's people free. He was trying his best to do the work that he had been called to do. Yet the results were so pitiful. Not only were the Lord's people not delivered, not only did they not understand what he was trying to do, but he himself had to flee for his life into the wilderness. Even though he was called by God to do this exact work, what he could produce with his own energy was only failure.

The next 40 years of Moses' life were spent tending sheep. Although he could not have known it, this also was a time of God's preparation. After so long a time, he had given up the idea of executing any kind of deliverance. The burning desire he once possessed to save his own people was now just a faint memory. He had grown older and wiser. The natural strength which once surged through his being had abated and the gifts and talents which he had acquired in Egypt had not been used in years.

This too was the Lord's doing. It was an essential part of the making of a servant of the Most High. It was the

breaking down of that which was natural in Moses – the bringing down into the dust of his human strength and abilities – so that God could be the One who was manifested through him. As far as Moses could see, he was finished, but in God’s eyes, it was just the beginning.

A DIFFERENT KIND OF FIRE

When Moses was about 80 years of age, God appeared to him in a most unusual way. As he was going about with his sheep, he noticed a bush which was burning. But there was something strange about the fire in this bush.

Although it burned intensely, the bush was not consumed. There was nothing natural about this fire. It was not using any of the earthly elements of the bush. It is quite possible that the leaves of the bush remained green. This fire was fueled by something supernatural. It was the fire of God!

As Moses turned aside to see this wonder, a voice spoke to him. The Voice sternly informed him that this heavenly fire had made this place holy and that there was no room for spectators. As a reaction to this, Moses hid his face. The fear of God was upon him and he could not even satisfy his normal curiosity.

Something had been broken within him and he was no longer able or willing to act in a natural, human way. Moses had become “very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth” (Num 12:3). This was the manner in which the Most High God finalized His calling upon Moses’ life – through the burning bush. Through it he received a most important revelation.

Indeed, Moses was to burn for God, but not with his own energy. He was to have a great zeal for the liberation of God’s people, yet a zeal which was not his own. He was to execute a great deliverance, but it was not to be one which he engineered. God was going to use him in a way no human being had ever been used before; however, it was not going to be his doing at all but the heavenly fire working through him.

A NECESSARY PREREQUISITE

Here is an essential truth about genuine spiritual authority. Before anyone can be greatly used by God to transmit his authority, they must be broken. They must first have had a supernatural work done to their natural being so that they are no longer whole. They must be broken by God.

When this work is finished, they will no longer be able to use their natural talents and abilities to serve God. They will no longer be seeking to devise a deliverance for His people. Their own leadership capabilities will have failed them and so, unless Someone higher moves through them, they will not move at all.

Once a child of God reaches this position, he is then ready for greater service. It is then that such a person can be really useful to God. When their trust in their own gifts, personality, knowledge, and abilities is thoroughly and completely ended, then, and only then, are they qualified to be used in a mighty way to manifest true spiritual authority.

Not only the man Moses had to undergo this experience, but everyone who has ever been used by God has also known His breaking hand in their life.

Take just a moment and consider the history of some other biblical figures carefully. Read through the story of Joseph and see how much suffering he had to endure before he was ready for great leadership. Remember Abraham who received such tremendous promises. When they did not come to pass, he and Sarah contrived to fulfill God's word by their own strength. The disaster of this decision is still with us today. But after many years of God's dealings with him, when he and his wife were way beyond any of their own abilities, they saw the power of God revealed.

Review the history of Jacob, the "supplanter," the schemer, the one who was always figuring out a way to come out on top. He was even willing to wrestle with the

angel until he touched his thigh. The strongest part of his body was supernaturally put out of joint and he could no longer be the same. After this he could not walk the way he used to. Something was permanently changed. It was then that his name was changed from Jacob, "supplanter," to "Israel," the "prince of God."

Even King David was not a man who came to power suddenly, but was prepared for years by God while tending the sheep and later during his experiences with Saul. Afterward he was very useful to God in subduing His enemies.

Imagine the sorrow and breaking which Naomi and Ruth endured before they saw victory manifested for them. These and many others all had to pass through the "burning bush" experience. It was necessary for them to be transformed from natural men and women to spiritual ones through having their own strength broken by the hand of God.

THE NEW COVENANT EXPERIENCE

Not only is this true in the Old Testament, but in the New Covenant as well. In fact, I believe that this experience may be even more important for those who have been born of God than it was for those of the Old Covenant. All of these things which were written about them were really written for our sake so that we could receive Divine instruction from them (Rm 15:4).

Perhaps Paul the apostle provides us with the best New Testament example of such Divine dealings. Before his conversion he was, undoubtedly, extremely strong in himself. He was a "Pharisee of the Pharisees," an educated, well-bred Jewish male who was "exceedingly zealous" for the things of God. In his own burning efforts to serve Jehovah, he even resorted to persecuting the Church.

Then one day he had an encounter with the Light on the road. This experience brought him low – all the way to the ground. Soon afterwards we find Saul in the synagogues disputing with the religious leaders and preaching

the good news which he had received. But even this was only the beginning. God wanted something much more from this man than just the winning of a few arguments about religion. He had in mind a far greater ministry.

Shortly after his conversion, Paul almost disappears from the scriptural record. After his initial experience with Christ, nothing much is heard about him until Barnabas goes to Tarsus to look for him. Where has he been? What has he been doing? Evidently he has been doing nothing of any great consequence. But God has been doing something in him.

During this period, he spent some years in Arabia (Gal 1:17), perhaps in the wilderness. We do not really know how long he was there or what he experienced. We only know that when he reemerges upon the church scene, he is not the same man. He is no longer full of his own zeal and energy but is now one who is useful to God to minister Himself to His people.

Now Paul is heard saying things like: "...we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead" (II Cor 1:9), and "...for when I am weak, then I am strong" (II Cor 12:10).

This strong "Saul" has become Paul and this defines the character of his ministry from then on. He portrays his posture in one assembly by saying: "I was with you in weakness, and in fear" (I Cor 2:3).

Not that Paul's ministry was weak; certainly it was not, yet he felt weak in himself. He no longer trusted in his own strength and zeal to accomplish the will of God. The potency of his own life had been broken. He now knew that what he had and what he was as a human being was only useful when it was motivated by the strength of God.

Thus, this once self-sufficient man who was transformed to rely on the power of Someone greater became perhaps the most fruitful Christian of all time. He became a vessel of Divine power, revelation, and authority. Not only did he minister Christ to many in his day, but even now his ministry is still bearing fruit through the pages of the New Testament.

A PROBLEM IN THE CHURCH TODAY

Today in the Christian church there is a very common problem. Young men and women are born again, gifted, called by God, and anointed for the work of the ministry. Their gifts are real. Their calling is genuine. But the preparation work of God in their lives is not complete. For reasons which we will be examining shortly, such talented brethren are often thrust into positions of authority for which they are not fully prepared.

Since they are not spiritually prepared, they have no alternative but to function as mere men. Such earthly authority introduced into the church of God interrupts the flow of Divine authority which is essential to the proper functioning of the body and pollutes the work of God. It brings in a natural, human element which cannot produce anything spiritual and only becomes a hindrance .

Please do not misunderstand. Young believers can exhibit some degree of spiritual authority. As long as they function within the sphere of ministry which the Holy Spirit opens for them, there is no difficulty. This sphere is, of course, small at the beginning and grows as their ability and sensitivity to God increases. However, as they begin to function in the body of Christ, they often arrive at a position where they begin to attempt to exercise authority which is far beyond their capacity and consequently fall into the snare of the devil (I Tim 3:6).

This problem seems to develop in two ways. The first scenario goes something like this: These new converts are usually very zealous and have lots of energy to expend on the things of God. The other brethren cannot help but notice the gifts, anointing, and leadership capabilities operating in these people.

As we have been seeing from the previous chapters, natural men often desire an earthly authority, a "king." They like someone else to fight the battles, take care of the problems, discover the leading of God, and other such things. So when they see those who are energetic, those

whom God is using and who have real spiritual gifts, they often push them forward in the church. They take them and make them into their pastors, elders, and so forth.

All too frequently, they elevate them way beyond their true spiritual capacity and put them into the "positions" of authority in the church about which we have spoken before.

Of course, these recent converts do not have the wisdom and maturity to avoid this pitfall. They sincerely assume that the others who are impelling them must know the right way. Since they are eager, as Moses was, to serve God and do His will, they allow men to put them in these positions.

But this is a serious mistake. It is impossible for such individuals to function properly, according to the Spirit. They simply do not have the Divine preparation. Their spiritual sensitivity to God and their mistrust in their own abilities has not yet been fully established. This then leaves them with no option but to operate naturally, relying on their own capabilities. It is this kind of injection of earthly authority which so quickly pollutes the church.

If such individuals have a strong personality and lots of energy they may appear to succeed in what they are doing, at least for a while. Others may acclaim their accomplishments. Their influence may expand and their "ministry" grow quite rapidly. Soon they may even be leading some large religious organization and attracting many new members.

However, our God deeply understands the true spiritual substance of all our works. Anything which has been done by our own energy and effort is rejected by Him. Such earthly things will be burned up at the judgment seat of Christ. "Wood, hay, and stubble" cannot last on that day (I Cor 3:12-15). Nothing natural will survive. Consequently, much of their effort is in vain.

It is also possible that God will have mercy upon these young recruits and allow their work to fail and fall apart. He does this lovingly so that they will not become entangled completely in their error. He yearns for them to come

to a place of brokenness before Him. However, many of these individuals do not understand such workings or perceive the hand of God in their defeats. They just do not see how God could “fail” them when they were working so hard for Him.

Consequently, they become bitter and disillusioned. Their faith is shipwrecked. For many such believers, what they see other Christians doing all around them is their only guide. According to this standard they have not succeeded and they often believe that God has let them down.

It seems difficult for some to move beyond this understanding. They either give up serving the Lord entirely or move on to other ever increasingly human methods to achieve the results which they are taught to expect.

The second reason that young believers often arrive in positions of authority (a reason which often operates along with the one mentioned before) is that they themselves seek it. These are usually people who are naturally strong and even before their conversion were accustomed to trusting in their own abilities. So when they come to the church, God has not yet had time to change this situation. Since they are gifted, ambitious, and even called by God, these men and women naturally rise to the top in any situation.

Unless there are older, mature believers present who have experienced the breaking hand of God in their lives to counsel and direct such young ones, the taking of Divine authority into their own hands is almost inevitable.

These Christians, through natural strength, rise beyond their sphere spiritually and become leaders. This not only becomes a serious hindrance in the church, but, in the course of time, will also have a severely negative impact upon the person who is so elevated.

Some men enjoy exercising authority over others. It is a real boost to their ego to think that they can control large numbers of people. After they become converted and filled with the Holy Spirit, they begin to see God using them in many, perhaps miraculous ways.

It suddenly becomes very easy for them to impress people and attract followers. Their spiritual gifts just

become the icing on the cake of their human disposition and abilities. Unless this kind of natural personality is humbled and subdued by God, these people will automatically grab for as much power as they can. They have fallen into the same snare as the devil (I Tim 3:7).

The church today is full of such leaders. Some strive to see how many people they can influence. They brag to anyone who will listen about how many “churches” are “under” their ministry, about how many “home groups” they have or how many new members they have recruited.

Often such individuals find ways to drive out of their churches others who are being raised up by God or anyone else who appears to be a threat to their authority. Since their authority has a human basis, it can only be defended by human means. Contention, pride, jealousy, and many other things are evidenced in such situations. This kind of “authority” is repugnant to anyone who has real spiritual eyes.

The exercise of authority in Christ’s Church is a very profound thing. It is not something which should be taken lightly. We are not dealing here with some kind of earthly organization or business. Just because someone has “leadership ability” in the world does not at all qualify them to do anything in the church.

How we need to approach this subject with godly fear! How much we men need to repent of substituting our own authority for the Lord’s! What we are supposed to be building here is something eternal, something of heavenly substance. We must take this responsibility very seriously and approach the exercise of authority with trembling lest we corrupt the work of Christ. The misuse and misunderstanding of God’s authority is one of the primary reasons that the Church as a whole is in such a low spiritual state and has not fulfilled her commission toward the world.

GOD’S SERVANTS REQUIRE PREPARATION

During Jesus’ earthly ministry, He taught His disciples many things. One of His methods for teaching was to

give them pictures or examples. On one occasion, the twelve noticed that the people to whom Jesus was ministering were getting hungry. The day was almost gone and they had nothing to eat. Jesus took this opportunity to show them something profound. His response to the problem was to tell the disciples that they should meet this need. "But," they protested, "we have only a little food (five loaves and two fish), how can we do anything with that?"

Jesus was asking them to do an enormous task, and they were able to recognize that, according to their natural ability, it was impossible. Yet He took what they had into His hands and broke it. Crunch, crunch, crumble, I can imagine their astonishment. But, when He was finished, there was more than enough for everyone.

This then is how God works with His followers. His instruction is for us to minister Himself to the multitudes. But what we have naturally is not sufficient for the job. Even with our God-given abilities we will be able to minister to only a very few people at the beginning. Our few loaves and fish can never meet the larger need until they have been broken in the hands of the Savior.

God must do a breaking work in our lives. If we are to be mightily used, a vessel for supernatural authority, there is no other way. The natural strength must be crushed and our wholeness fractured beyond repair. Then, and only then are we qualified to be used by God in any larger way.

First, God may work to break us. Perhaps, after such harsh and painful treatment, we feel that what we are has been cracked and will never be whole again. But, He does not stop there. Next, if we are willing, He will further break what is left into little pieces, into something which can never be put back together.

Then, if we are still yielded to Him, possibly our Master will gather these pieces in His loving hands and put them in His mill. There He will grind them into flour. It may be that after the first time through the flour is still a little coarse. So, He might have to grind it again...and again, and again.

When our “flour” is finally truly fine, a powder soft as silk, He will then pour out His oil upon it and mix it together. Then, and only then, is it ready to be made a holy offering upon His altar (Lev 2:1). Such prepared men and women can be greatly used by God to express Himself to the world.

Does this sound harsh? Does it seem difficult? It is! None of the Lord's true servants ever had an “easy time of it.” Dying is never enjoyable, but it is the only way. The elimination of our natural strength is the only possibility.

If we are not profoundly touched in this fashion, even when we are trying our best to do the right thing, the flesh will express itself. Often we are completely unaware when this happens. Our spiritual immaturity blinds us to how our attitudes and actions appear to others and to the spiritual world.

We often have no concept of the depths of our own self-strength or of the evil that lurks within us. Consequently, we do not have any idea of how badly we need to be broken by the hand of God. But our Master knows us intimately and He sees clearly the areas of our lives which need alteration. For this, the “self” life must die. While it remains alive, it will always be manifested and defile the work of God.

All those who would be greatly used by God will pass through some dark, difficult, painful, times. It is not that Jesus is angry with us or that we have sinned against Him in some way. No, these experiences are for those who are especially loved by Him. These are hours of trial for those who are chosen to be vessels of His power and authority.

No doubt such individuals will encounter many times and situations where they think that they just cannot go on. They may believe that they cannot bear the difficulty and pain which they are experiencing for another minute. They can find no way out.

Yet somehow, God grants them just enough grace to survive. During each hour of darkness and turmoil, He is there to see them through. All along they are expecting His deliverance *from* their situation, not realizing that Jesus is

delivering them from themselves *through* the situation. In fact, He has probably allowed these circumstances to bring them to just such a place so that He can accomplish His breaking work within them.

Let us not think at such times that God has forsaken us. Just the opposite is true. These experiences really are the manifestation of Divine love. He is preparing His servants so that they will be infinitely useful to Him. There is simply no other way. While the natural life persists, it will always be a hindrance and a problem.

Paul, the apostle, seems to be describing just such an hour of trial when he writes: "We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed – always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh" (II Cor 4:8-11). The fact that he too experienced such things should be a source of great comfort to us.

Dear Friends, please realize that this is not a work which you can do to yourself. The breaking of the natural strength is not something which the natural man can do. Only God can do this work within a person and He will do it in His way and in His time. All we can do is to yield ourselves to Him completely, holding nothing back, and give Him permission to do whatever He wants to in our lives.

The breaking experience takes time. There is no substitute for years of preparation in the hands of the Potter. However, this time period is not the same for everyone. With some, God may do this work gradually over a period of years and so with these ones, the exercise of Divine authority will also expand slowly. With others, the Master may see fit to appoint a special time in their experience where He does a dramatic breaking work.

When this takes place, everyone around will notice a tremendously rapid change in the character and personality of this person. Probably soon after this, God will begin

to use them in a much more mighty way. But however He works in our lives, it is His to choose and do. Our part is simply to be submissive and obedient to Him.

These, then, are the qualifications for transmitting Supernatural authority: to be called, anointed, and prepared by God. None of these items can be passed over. There is no doubt that God can and does want to use those gifts which He has given us and also, to some extent, the natural abilities with which He has equipped us after He has broken the natural strength of them.

However, none of these things can be of very much use to Him until our strength is exhausted and He is in complete control. Some of the things which we might consider to be our very strongest assets are actually of the least use to Him because of the human strength which still lies within them. It is most often in the areas where we are weak that His power can flow. While you remain “whole” you can be of little use to God.

4.

THE FORM OF A SERVANT

We have been discussing in these chapters the subject of spiritual authority. We have examined together the two types of authority found on earth today, i.e., positional, delegated authority and spiritual, "transmitted" authority. We have investigated the necessity of being able to recognize genuine spiritual authority and to distinguish it from the earthly variety. Further, we have seen how it is that God prepares His vessels and then manifests Himself through them to the church.

With all this in mind, we are brought to one particularly relevant question concerning authority; that is what are a person's motives for exercising authority? When anyone is acting or speaking with authority, inevitably they have a purpose behind what they are doing. Furthermore, these motives clearly reveal the source of such authority.

For example, when the impulses are from God, the authority is His. He is the One being revealed. On the other hand, when there is a desire to dominate, when there is a craving to appear to be "someone," when there is a longing to be seen and heard, etc. selfish ambitions are certain to exist. Consequently, understanding the motivations behind the "authority" which we see displayed, both

through ourselves and others, can be a valuable tool to understanding the source of such authority.

Let us remember that the thoughts and intentions of the human heart (especially our own) are often very difficult to see. There is a great need, therefore, to sincerely open our hearts and minds to the illumination of the Holy Spirit and humble ourselves before Him as we examine the scriptures together.

Since our Lord Jesus Christ was the ultimate example of true spiritual authority, let us take a look together at His life and teaching. When Jesus walked on the earth with His disciples, He spent a large portion of His time teaching them. His methods of teaching were diverse and unique. Often He instructed them through graphic illustrations as well as with words.

It was just before the culmination of His work on earth, while they were together eating what we call "the last supper," that Jesus chose to make a powerful demonstration for them concerning authority. The time He selected for this action, the very climax of His ministry, is evidence of the tremendous importance which He attached to the subject.

While they were eating together, Jesus got up from the table, took off His clothing, and put on a towel. He dressed Himself like a servant. Then He proceeded to perform the function of the lowest slave by washing the disciples' feet. Here was God incarnate, the Creator of the universe, the One who had the right to exercise all authority, acting like a personal attendant.

Undoubtedly, He was trying to convey an all-important message. He was pointing out, as emphatically as He could, the true attitude and position of those who exercise spiritual authority and leadership.

While He was performing this act He said, "You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example that you should do as I have done to you" (Jn 13:13-15). He then concludes this message by saying: "If

you know these things, happy are you if you do them" (vs 17).

This then reveals for us the scriptural motivation of true spiritual authority. Those who are used by God to convey His authority are to be servants. Their attitude and their disposition is not to set themselves up as "something," i.e. masters and lords, but to take the lowliest position. They are to use their God-given gifts to serve others instead of to elevate themselves and/or build up their own "kingdom" or "ministry."

Jesus' actions are far more than just the basis for a new foot-washing ceremony in the church. Here our Divine Instructor has shown us a tremendous principle which governs *all* the exercise of spiritual authority among His people.

What does this then mean in our practical experience? It means that when God begins to use someone as a channel of His authority and consequently they begin to be elevated in the eyes of other people, they themselves have no interest in being so elevated. Their hearts are not set on themselves or on some kind of "position" but are instead bent on serving others.

They have been humbled by God and so have become, in every sense of the word, servants. Their life's ambition is no longer to become "something" in the church themselves but to raise others up to be what God wants them to be. "Self" is no longer the motivation. Instead, the good of others has become the dominating force governing their actions.

These are the people who have really understood God's message and thus have become very useful in His kingdom. Alternatively, if someone in their heart of hearts does not have this attitude, then they are not truly qualified for spiritual ministry.

Those who are really the instruments of God are not trying to "build up their own ministry." Their motivation is never to "build a bigger church than someone else's" or to keep as many as they can under their influence. They are not creating their own empires and kingdoms using the

name of Jesus and the word of God as a disguise for self-serving living.

These are not people who enjoy controlling others and basking in the aura of being the "man or woman of God." They are simply servants working for the good of others. Such authority is never hard or demanding because the person manifesting it does not stand to gain anything personally from it. It is an authority with an entirely different motivation from anything human. This type of leadership can only come from another source. It displays the true character of God.

NEW TESTAMENT "TITLES"

The "titles" which the New Testament uses to describe God's servants reflect the aforementioned truth very strongly. In the original text, the thought of men and women in the church reigning and ruling over one another is completely absent. However, in many cases, the true meaning of the terminology has been greatly twisted or even lost entirely to our modern generation.

Perhaps the best example of this problem would be the word "minister." Today, a "minister" is someone who "runs the church." This person has an official title, a religious position, perhaps also has certain special garments which he wears to distinguish himself from the others and, in general, is elevated above the people. Often a large degree of respect is expected from the members, similar to what one might give to a political dignitary.

However, the scriptural revelation of what being a "minister" means is much different. There are actually three different Greek words which are translated into this one English word "minister." The first one is DIAKONOS. It means "servant" or "attendant." The second word, LEITOURGOS, referred to someone who served the public in a special capacity at his own expense.

The third word, HUPERTES, originally meant "under rower" which was a lower order of seaman. Certainly such a sailor was not in command of the ship. It later came to

mean any subordinate acting under direction from another.

Some other words which are related to the thought of spiritual service are: DOULOS, "a bondslave;" OIKETES, "a household servant;" MISTHOIS, "a hired servant;" and PAIS, "a servant boy." (Definitions from Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words.)

Nothing in any of these words suggests the concept which we commonly encounter in the churches today. Servants do not tell those whom they are serving what to do. They are not the ones reigning and ruling over the others. Instead, their function is to be of assistance to others by serving them in a lowly fashion. In these terms we discover no exaltation of self, no elevation in the eyes of the world, and no special position of social respect. In fact, just the opposite is true.

The use of such terminology suggests that such persons have humbled themselves and become genuine servants, following the example of our Lord Jesus throughout His life (Phil 2:8). From this brief investigation it appears that this word "minister" has become so misapplied in its usage in today's church as to mean virtually the opposite of what it did in Jesus' time.

SERVICE FUNCTIONS

I believe that it is time for all of us to do a serious re-examination of our concepts about what God is trying to convey to us in the scriptures. When such terminology as apostle, prophet, minister, elder, etc. is used, exactly what is the thought of our Master behind it? From our foregoing discussion it is plain that these cannot be titles or labels signifying special positions of importance or "offices" in the church. This would be in direct contradiction to the clear teaching and example of Jesus.

Therefore, we must seek further until we see, in the light of God, a revelation which is in harmony with all of the scriptures. (It should be noted that the word "office" which is found in some English translations of the Bible

referring to the ministry of the bishops and deacons in I Timothy 3:1; 3:10; 3:13 actually represents no word in the original Greek text but is the invention of the translators.)

Instead of being regarded as positional titles, these words such as “minister,” “apostle” and “elder” could be understood simply as descriptions of certain service functions in the body of Christ.

This is perhaps best illustrated by using earthly analogies since we do not have any religious preconceptions concerning them. For example, anyone can go fishing. But when someone fishes often and becomes adept at catching fish then you might say that he is a “fisherman.”

This is not their title or some kind of position but a description of what they do. Similarly, many people can fix a leaking faucet, but when they regularly do that sort of work and become good at what they do, then they are regarded as a “plumber.”

So it is in the church. God has assigned to each one special tasks. We might today call them “ministries.” These are unique areas of service through which we nurture the body of Christ. When someone regularly is used by God in the area of prophecy and they become known for their exercise of this gift, then they could be called a prophet. When someone is specially sent by God to establish and feed the churches, then they become known as an apostle, which means “sent one.”

When these words, which today are thought of as titles or positions in the church, are seen as merely descriptions of service functions, all conflict with the teachings of Jesus disappears. Instead of being a means of elevating certain talented individuals above the rest, they are in reality simply a means of describing the kind of servant these people are.

This idea is strongly supported when we examine how these words are *not* used in the New Testament. For example, the scriptures never use the phrase the “Apostle Paul,” thus signifying a title. Instead we read of “Paul, the apostle,” the servant, the one who has been sent by Another to perform a service to His church. We never

encounter “Elder Peter,” “Reverend James” or “Pastor John” in the holy writ. Something entirely different than this is in the mind of God.

Not only are these various ministerial descriptions *not* used as titles in the New Testament, Jesus strictly forbade the use of titles among his followers. When He said to His disciples, “Do not call anyone on earth your father” (Mt 23:9) this was not simply a prohibition from using this one single word. It was clearly an instruction against the elevation of some individual to a position of prominence by the use of a title. Any use of titles among God’s people to indicate a position of authority, honor, or respect is strictly forbidden by Jesus!

He further explains saying, “For you are all brethren.” You are all equal. You are all on the same level. No one ever gets to be bigger, better, or greater than the other. He reinforces this truth by insisting, “Do not be called ‘teachers,’ or ‘master’ (some ancient Greek texts use the word ‘leader’ or ‘discipler’ in place of ‘master’)” (Mt 23:7-10).

This clearly indicates that *all* use of special words to distinguish and elevate one believer above another is against the clear teaching of God’s word. Praise God that all the titles and positions of honor are reserved for Jesus! He is “King of kings” and “Lord of lords.”

THE DIVINE ORDER

Today in Christian circles, many people are teaching about divine order. The basic thought behind this instruction seems to be that there exists a kind of hierarchy, a sort of chain of command, within the church of God, and that when we recognize it, submit ourselves, and “get in line,” we will fulfill God’s will and experience a blessing. In this “chain of command” the apostles are at the top, then come the prophets, evangelists, etc.

Other groups perhaps put the “pastor” as the leader, the elders next below him, and then the deacons, Sunday school teachers, and so on down the line. Although there are many variations on this theme, the fundamentals are

generally the same: there exists a kind of pyramid structure, similar to an earthly corporation or government, within the church. Furthermore they insist that it is through this structure that God leads His people.

With this in mind, let us read a scripture together. "But Jesus called them to Himself and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them and those who are great exercise authority over them. *Yet it shall not be so among you*; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave – just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many' " (Mt 20:25-28).

What a statement! What an important truth this is! Here Jesus is absolutely forbidding any exercise of authority of one believer over another. It is something which, although common today, is strictly prohibited by our Lord.

In Luke's account we discover that these rulers who exercised lordship were called "benefactors." In other words, they were exercising authority over others for their "benefit." Their rulership was supposed to be benefitting the others in some form or another.

Yet, the idea of one believer exercising authority over another, even if it seems to be beneficial for the other, is expressly forbidden! Jesus says, "But not so among you, *on the contrary*, he who is greatest among you let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves" (Lk 22:25-27).

Here we find the true divine order. Within the church it is to be exactly the opposite of the way it is in the world. God's way is upside down. The greatest are to be on the bottom serving the others in a lowly, humble fashion.

While the world has a hierarchy and a chain of command, in the church of God we should find nothing like this. This activity has been strictly forbidden by our God! It does not matter what others are doing. The popular practice or custom of our day has no bearing on the matter. We have been called to obey Jesus. Many of us commonly state that we believe the Bible and that the words recorded

therein are of the highest authority. How then can we allow popular opinion and methods to govern our work for the Lord?

TRUE LEADERSHIP

This, then, is God's plan. Those who are being used by God to transmit His authority have a completely different attitude than those who have authority in the world. They have no intention of "exercising authority over" another brother or sister but are simply conveying the will of God according to His leading. These men and women are never arriving at a position of being higher than another or being "over" them but are servants using their gifts to build others up.

Concerning the authority manifested through him, Paul himself says, "Not that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy" (II Cor 1:24 KJV). He and his co-workers had no dominion over the others. They were mere "helpers."

Although some English versions of the Bible translate I Thessalonians 5:12 as if someone were "over" another in the Lord, the word in Greek here is PROISTEMI which means basically "to lead," or "to get out in front," *not* to rule over. As we have been seeing, the concept taught by Jesus in the scriptures is to become a servant, not a ruler. Although some may be "ahead" of others in terms of spiritual maturity, this does not indicate that they should dominate the body of Christ.

It is impossible to be "over" someone and be their servant at the same time. These two positions, being "over" and "beneath," are opposites. They are mutually exclusive. To be a servant, you must stop being a master. To be under, you must cease from being over. As long as we remain in a position of superiority and authority, we cannot succeed in being true servants.

The only way to remain a servant and still manifest authority is when the authority is not our own. When it becomes exceedingly clear that we never obtain our own

authority but are merely humble vessels, all contradiction disappears. As long as we refuse to be elevated to positions of authority or pretend to have any of our own authority, God can use us to express Himself while we remain lowly slaves of our brethren.

Perhaps it would be useful here to investigate just exactly what the concept of leadership entails. To “lead” in the Biblical sense does not mean to command, to order, or in any way to exercise authority “over.” Instead, it means that someone goes out in front as an example. The rest, seeing this example, realize that it is from God and follow.

This is exactly the way a real shepherd functioned in Jesus’ day. He developed a close relationship with his animals. They knew him well and they trusted in him. So, when he left the fold, they followed him believing from experience that he was heading for greener pastures.

These shepherds did not drive the sheep from behind. They did not send an order for the sheep to move to a certain place. Instead, they walked out in front of the flock. It was their example and their faithfulness which made them leaders. This is New Testament authority. It is a service of love, showing by example and faithfulness the will of God.

It is interesting that God chose to use terms such as “elders” and “fathers” to describe those who were more mature in the Lord. These terms (as opposed to “general” or “governor,” for example) were carefully chosen to convey God’s thought.

If you think about it, you will realize that there is an important aspect of being a father or grandfather which is quite different from one who is in command. Simply put, a father has the future of his children in mind. It is no problem for a good father if his children become greater than he. In fact, it is his goal for them to do so. If they can be better educated, happier, richer, have a better home and life, it is only a joy to him. His goal is to serve them and help them to prosper in every area. Fathers are to be in a very real way the servants of their children.

Similarly, the objective of any true servant of God is to build others up. His work is to manifest the reality of Jesus

to them in a manner that will encourage them to become real disciples. Our task is to serve others, not ourselves. Our privilege is to encourage others to follow Jesus in such a way that, if possible, they could become “greater” than we are. If they become wiser, more powerful, more used by God, or more recognized, this should be for us a source of the greatest blessing. Since we are their servants, it is only a joy for us when they are exalted. This is a fulfillment of our ministry: to have others become all that God wants them to be.

Let us then contrast this with what happens in the world today. In politics, business, sports, theater, and every other activity, people are scrambling for the top. They want to be the biggest and the best, the richest or the most famous. Many times this competition to be great becomes an ugly manifestation of the fallen human nature.

Power struggles, lies, and deception become part of the process. Not admitting weakness or failure, not letting others know how you really are inside – these are absolute necessities for getting ahead. Appearances become much more important than reality because this is what influences others. Hypocrisy thus runs rampant. In short, many inhabitants of this earth are daily involved in a power struggle. They are trying to rise above others while at the same time trying to keep the rest from beating them to it and putting them down.

WHAT IS OUR CONDITION TODAY?

How, then, do we find the situation in the church today? With which of the above two examples could we compare the practices which we encounter in the house of God? Sadly, it is often the latter of the two which describes the situation in the church.

The human desire to elevate oneself is found in many pulpits. The tendency to keep others down is also there. The desire to become more and more powerful, influential, and famous motivates more than a few “ministers” today. The norm of our day is to find out how many people a leader has in “his” church. How many churches does he

have affiliated with his ministry? What are the numbers? How much success? How great has this “servant” become?

This practice has gone so far that I understand some Bible schools even teach future leaders special techniques to maintain their authority. They realize all too well that if people see the human side of these leaders they will have trouble recognizing their authority.

So they instruct them to keep aloof from the congregation. They admonish them not to become friends with “those in the pews” and not to let others know about their personal problems. If they do, then the people will not respect them or obey “their” authority.

Not only does this result in the establishment of a false kind of authority in the church, it also dooms the leader who is thus encumbered to an isolated, and therefore incomplete, Christian experience. This earthly kind of authority is utterly foreign to the New Testament understanding of the church.

Also, it is not uncommon to find Christian leaders fighting to keep their position in the church. When someone else begins to be raised up by God in the congregation and be recognized and respected by others as having a message from God, then the present leader may find a way to get rid of that person. Send them off to Bible school. Let them start their own church. Accuse them of being rebellious and throw them out. Any method is okay as long as it preserves the position of the one in front. Accusations, fears, and competition all form the basis of a fleshly power struggle.

True spiritual authority, on the other hand, flows from God. No one really used by God ever needs to fight to gain a position or ministry. Jesus is the one who raises up leaders among His people. Genuine leaders never raise themselves up by their own abilities to preach, teach, and in general, influence others to think well of them.

King David for example was a lowly shepherd, but the Lord chose him to lead His people. Many of the prophets were nobody and nothing until God touched their lives and began to flow through them. Ministry is not a product

of ambition but a result of intimacy with God. Those who are really used by God are those serving others instead of their own egos. Works done with this motivation are those which will stand the test of judgment day.

Also, there is never a necessity to defend our "position" or ministry. A real servant has no position to defend. He is simply at the disposal of God to be used or not as his Master sees fit. When Moses' leadership was challenged, his response was to fall upon his face before God. He knew that it was the Lord who was using him and it was His power that was keeping him. Human strength and reasoning would only pollute the testimony of what God was doing through him.

God will defend that which is truly of Him. Nothing will prevent His will from being done in the course of time. There is never a need for human effort to secure or "protect" the work of God.

Strife, contention, debates, power struggles, etc. are the works of the flesh. Lowliness, gentleness, and meekness are an evidence of the Holy Spirit. If we are biting and devouring one another, it will certainly cause destruction in the family of God (Gal 5:15). If we have been touched deeply and humbled by God to be a servant to His people, our work will bring blessing and ministry to all those around us.

This is a great necessity of our day: not to hear those who are using the things of God to elevate themselves and build their own ministries but to receive from those lowly ones through whom God is manifesting Himself.

One day when the twelve were walking with Jesus, they began having an argument. They were discussing who would be the greatest when Jesus became king. The Lord used this opportunity to try to show them again something about how He intended His body to function. He took a little child and set it there beside Him and said something so profound: "He who is least among you all will be great" (Lk 9:48).

Another time two of the men were making a special request for positions of authority. Jesus again made a pro-

nouncement which is exactly the opposite of our normal, human way of thinking. We read, "Whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave – just as the Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve" (Mt 20:26,27).

These things are not meant to be just nice religious philosophies. Jesus said these words so that we would seek to enter into the reality of them. He meant that we should put them into practice in our lives. "If you know these things, happy are you if you do them" (Jo 13:17).

THE DANGER OF RECOGNITION

We have been speaking about the necessity of humility in the service of God and how a true leader is really a servant. However, it is inevitable that when God begins to use a human instrument, some people will begin to be impressed and, at least in their own minds, elevate him to some kind of position. When true spiritual authority is expressed, it often results in individuals gaining a kind of earthly authority in the eyes of men. In fact, people will often try very hard to give this kind of authority to their leaders.

This puts the servant of God in a very dangerous position. Once men, even if only in their own minds, have placed such a person in this situation, it is a constant temptation to use this earthly authority. Instead of continuing to rely upon God, it becomes possible for the servant of God to resort to human tactics. When difficult situations arise, it becomes easy to make their own decisions and take matters into their own hands. Interestingly, the more the vessel is used by God, the greater this danger becomes.

Again Moses' story becomes an example for us. He was a man who became a conduit for God's authority in a very remarkable way. He proved to be almost completely obedient in this ministry. But once, just once, he lost his temper and chose to use his positional authority to meet the people's need. Instead of obediently speaking to the

rock as Jehovah had instructed, Moses angrily struck the rock with his staff.

God honored him in this position and poured water out of the rock (Num 20:11). However, this action cost Moses dearly. Through this one use of natural, human authority, his entrance into the land of Canaan was denied him! This one time when he acted on his own instead of obeying God brought upon him a severe judgment. This account demonstrates clearly how important God considers the distinction between these two kinds of authority.

All servants of God should take this to heart. When God uses them and they are elevated in the eyes of the people, they must be careful to only manifest the authority of the Spirit which flows through them. Any natural or positional authority is disqualified even if it seems to be achieving the needed result.

God's will may be quite clear. His direction may be obvious to the leaders whom He is using. But any appeal of natural authority, "office," gift, or ministry, to the fleshly nature will not produce spiritual results. In fact, it cannot. The scripture reads: "What is crooked cannot be made straight" (Ecc 1:15). Nothing which begins in the earthly realm can ever produce spiritual fruit.

Another point which must be very clear to the servant of God is that it is never our duty to try to enforce God's authority. We are never required to try to make someone obey Jesus. We are not allowed to push, discipline, humiliate, pressure, or in any other manner try to force someone to obey. We may be sure in our own mind that God spoke through us. It may, in fact, have been His voice. But, if our brother(s) or sister(s) who received this word does not hear it, this is not our responsibility. It is not up to us to make sure that they hear and obey.

Since it is Jesus' authority which is being manifested, it is His responsibility to deal with anyone who rebels against it. It is *never* our place to try to enforce God's will on anyone. Such activity is simply fleshly and natural.

This, then, is God's way. The man or woman who wishes to please God must become a servant. We are to

humble ourselves before the Lord and before our brothers in Christ, rather than taking the way of the world. Instead of seeking exaltation in the eyes of men so that we can control them and thereby “help” them to walk in God’s ways, we are to choose to be lowly. In this way, only those who are truly willing to hear the voice of God will hear Him speaking through us and be obedient.

This is exactly the way our Lord Jesus Christ lived while He was on the earth. Not only did He have the right and the authority to demand obedience, He had the power to force things to go His way.

However, instead of using this power we read: “Who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross” (Phil 2:6-8).

Dear brothers and sisters, this is the way. It is a wonderful Person. May we enter into the full experience of His reality.

5.

THE HEAD OF EVERY MAN

Many Christians enjoy reading the Bible to discover what it is that God has done and will do for them. Theirs is a search for the riches of God which are available to them through faith. This is a wonderful pursuit. Time spent in the presence of the Lord meditating on the scriptures will feed us spiritually, causing us to grow.

As we grow, there begins to form in us a realization that the universe is not man centered. As a Christian matures, he begins to understand that he was made for God and that God does not exist merely for his benefit.

Perhaps more profound than to learn what God can and will do for us is to contemplate why He created us in the first place. Possibly it would benefit us greatly to understand more about His divine intentions concerning mankind.

For example, a deeper revelation of God's purposes for creating such a being as man may greatly help us to comprehend the work which He is doing within us and through us. Knowing why we were made will undoubtedly help us in understanding God's will for our lives. Similarly, armed with this knowledge we can more easily

go through the tribulations and trials which are used by Him to accomplish His divine ends. With this in mind, let us examine a few passages of scripture together.

When God made man in Genesis, He said: "...let them [men] have dominion" (Gen 1:26). This reveals something. Our Creator made us in His image and likeness to be rulers – to reign over the earth. Part of His intention was that human beings would be more than His servants. They were to be kingly rulers over the newly created world.

In another passage, the psalmist David – no doubt meditating on this very truth – exclaims, "What is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him? For You have made him a little lower than the angels and You have crowned him with glory and honor. You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands" (Ps 8:4-6).

When someone is crowned, this speaks of royalty and kingship. It speaks of authority and ruling. And who has done this to man? It is God Himself who has set man in this position, reigning over His creation! This is not a small consideration. The almighty God has made man, crowned him with glory, and honor, and then set him to rule over the world.

Not only is this plan revealed in the Old Testament, but also in the New we discover that this is one of the more profound plans of God. We are to become, through the work of Christ, "kings and priests" unto God (Rev 1:6). We are to "reign on the earth" (Rev 5:10). We are to "reign in life" through Jesus Christ (Rm 5:17). These scriptures demonstrate beyond a doubt that God does have this wonderful intention for man. When our Father created us, He had in mind this very thing – that we would rule over His creation.

Now we all know that the Lord is the supreme ruler of the universe. He is still sitting on the throne of heaven. Furthermore, He is not giving up this position. So how are we to understand this fact that He formed another being similar to Himself (in His image and likeness) and set him up as a king?

It is evident that this was not done because the Ancient of Days has gotten old and ready to retire and, therefore, created a substitute. No, our Lord has no intention of relinquishing control of the universe. He is not going to turn everything over to us.

GOD IS NOT A EXHIBITIONIST

Part of the understanding of this mystery must lie in the fact that our God is not an exhibitionist. Isaiah declares, "Truly, you are God, who hide[s] yourself" (Is 45:15). This is part of the Divine nature. It is our Creator's character not to do things in a showy, conspicuous manner but to remain hidden. (By the way, how does this truth reflect upon the work that you are doing in His name?)

Even the present creation is an example of His secret work. Although creation reveals Him, only those who are really open to Him can see it. Further, the present glorious work which He is doing in His sons is a hidden thing.

The invisible God, the creator of the universe, has chosen to remain in the background and reveal Himself through a being whom He created – man. This same God revealed Himself in Christ Jesus two thousand years ago.

Today, He desires to be expressed through His many sons in an even larger way. He is manifesting Himself to us so that He can be revealed through us to the world and even to the whole universe. In the future, this will also be true. Those believers who are faithful to Him will be crowned with glory and honor and set to rule over God's creation.

So we see that our God's purpose is (and always has been) to remain hidden, choosing to reign through this representative whom He created. Men, filled with God and under His control, are to be manifesting His authority over the earth.

This is not to be their own authority. They are not to be choosing and acting according to their own will. Rather, they are meant to be acting by the Spirit of God exercising His authority. He in them will be ruling through them.

They are to be a manifestation of both His nature and His authority.

This understanding that God intends to reign and rule through man harmonizes perfectly with what we have been seeing in the foregoing chapters. Man's role in the divine plan is to be a vessel, a conduit through which the authority of God flows.

No man ever becomes the authority himself but is simply a channel through which supernatural authority is transmitted. We are now in a time of preparation and training. Someday soon, these sons of God will be manifested (Rm 8:19). Praise God for His marvelous design!

ARE WE REALLY SUBMITTED?

In the previous chapters we have been discussing how it is that God uses men to be vessels of His authority. His will is often revealed through those who are intimate with and open to Him. These men and women then are channels for divine authority and serve as leaders among the flock. Through such leaders, God's people can be directed by the Most High and move in harmony with Him to fulfill His plans.

However, this marvelous plan can only work under one condition. In order to receive true spiritual authority flowing through someone else, we all must be genuinely submitted to God ourselves. He must become our "head."

When our knees have been bent and our will bowed so that we are really willing to obey God in whatever circumstance, we will be able to hear His voice speaking to us individually or through others.

If, on the other hand, we are secretly resistant to the Lord's direction (especially if it contradicts our own) or we are not sincerely wanting to know the will of God, all exercise of spiritual authority will be in vain. When people cannot or will not submit themselves to God and hear from Him individually, most certainly they will never submit themselves to another speaking to them with spiritual authority.

This is especially true if we are one of those many brothers (or sisters) who cannot listen to anyone else. There are many Christian men today who fit into this category. They simply cannot be humble enough to receive anything through another man. It is an insult to their pride. They imagine that God will speak everything directly to them "through the Spirit," not needing to use anyone else.

Therefore, the thought of teaching or direction from another rubs them the wrong way and they are constantly resisting any input which another brother might have for their life. These are rebellious brothers who, although they may have a superficial appearance of Christianity, are not very open to the leadership of God.

This, my dear brothers and sisters, is not a small consideration. In fact, it is of the utmost importance. Why did God institute governmental authority on the earth? He did it because mankind was unwilling to obey Him directly. Why did He allow Israel to have a king? It was because the people did not wish to follow Him (I Sam 8:7).

And why do we have so much human, earthly authority in the church of God today? It is, at least in part, a result of stubborn, rebellious believers who refuse to respond to true spiritual authority. So then, human authority is frequently used by those who are trying to build God's house. They try to pressure others to do what they perceive is the will of God.

When we refuse the inward speaking of God, the option which seems to present itself is an outward kind of control. If we are not responsive to His Spirit, then some imagine that we can be subdued by His law. Unfortunately, this will never work. This is an important truth. Unless we all arrive at a place where our entire being is completely submitted to God, we will not be truly sensitive to the Lord's every desire and be able to perceive His authority flowing through others.

Lacking this, we will only be led about by superficial ordinances, "New Testament principles," spiritual guidelines, and earthly leaders. In this way we may produce something which appears to be an orderly, disciplined

group or church but it will lack an essential ingredient – true, from-the-heart, submission to the Lord.

THE LORD OF ALL

When bringing people to the Lord or coming to Christ ourselves, we must affirm a truth which is often neglected. When we receive Jesus Christ, we must receive Him for who He is. And who is He? He is the LORD. He is the “head of the body.” He is not only the Savior but the Master.

In short, He is the absolute authority in the universe. Therefore, if we are in any measure whatsoever unwilling to submit every aspect of our being to His control, we are just playing games with God. We are hypocrites. We honor Him with our words, but our heart is not really His.

In talking about submission to Jesus, we mean this: He must be permitted to control our actions, our words, our thoughts, our feelings, our opinions, our desires, and every other aspect of our lives. This does not mean that we occasionally do a few things which the Bible says or that we don’t do a few things which are “against the rules.” No such superficial submission is in view.

Every Christian must, sooner or later, come to the place where they make a decision to open every corner of their heart to Jesus and give Him complete control over it. This is not an option. It is an essential part of real Christianity. Unless and until we do this, we are not really moving anywhere spiritually. God will never do anything inside of us against our will. Consequently, any resistance in us to His authority will keep us from spiritual progress.

Spiritual growth cannot take place in a resistant believer. I personally knew someone (not myself) who became born again but never really opened their heart to God’s control and inspection. For more than thirty years the battle raged. For thirty long years God called and this dear child of God rejected the idea of complete openness to His Spirit. Then, miraculously the day came when Jesus began to conquer this, His child. The resistance began to crumble and a new openness to the Lord appeared. The

gates opened up and the walls came down to welcome in completely the Lord Jesus Christ.

What a change took place! What a marvelous new spiritual growth appeared! This full, total yielding to God brought a whole new chapter into the life of this individual. A new infusion of divine Life took place. Real spiritual progress began. Hallelujah! It is never too late to really open your life to Jesus and let Him take complete control. This is the beginning of real Christianity.

By the way, if you are not growing spiritually, or you are beset year after year by the same old problems, sins, and weaknesses, this could well be the reason. You have not yet opened your being completely to God. You are secretly resisting and refusing to allow Him access to every part of your heart and life. You are unwilling for certain aspects of your nature or past to be exposed and treated.

The answer, of course, is to do it today, honestly and sincerely by faith. Make your whole being a living sacrifice. Give yourself without reserve to Him and submit yourself completely to His control. He is able to save completely those who come to Him (Heb 7:25).

Jesus must be our head, not only theoretically, but in actual experience as well. The scriptures teach that "we have the mind of Christ" (I Cor 2:16). This is a wonderful doctrine. Unfortunately, for many it is no more than that. In their day-to-day existence, their mind is full of their own thoughts with perhaps an occasional insertion of God's will into the process.

However, this marvelous teaching is meant to be our experience. Believers can actually experience the Spirit of God taking control of their thinking processes. Their thoughts and opinions can become those of Jesus through yielding control of their mind to Him.

Real Christianity is when Jesus Himself is in complete control of our lives. Anything else is just an imitation. God's desire to rule and reign through us can only be realized when we are submitted to His authority. His plan will only come to fruition in us as we yield every area of our life – body, soul and spirit – to Him.

HEAD COVERINGS

In I Corinthians, chapter 11 we encounter what has come to be in some Christian circles a very controversial subject – head coverings. Here Paul is teaching about the use of veils, hats, or some form of covering for the women during church gatherings.

Based upon their interpretation of this passage, some believe that it is essential for women to use a physical covering in public meetings. Others think that long hair on a woman is the “covering” about which Paul is speaking. Still others reason that this admonition is a result of ancient culture and has no place in our society today. These and many other opinions have resulted in no small dispute in the church of God.

Even though many people hold varying opinions, I believe that most will agree upon one key point. Paul is teaching about the necessity for a woman to have an attitude of submission toward her husband or, lacking a husband, to a father, leader, or other man whom God is using to express His authority. The physical covering, whether we may believe it to be necessary or not, is only a symbol of an inward heart attitude.

Surely all would concur that any covering, whether hair or hat, which is not accompanied by an attitude of submission is simply adornment, or worse, hypocrisy. The primary focus of the teaching then is that a “covering” is an outward evidence of an inward position of the heart.

It is the sign or symbol of the fact that the woman has decided to submit herself to a man and that this man is her “head.” She is covering her own head, whether with hair, veil, or simply with a reverent, submissive attitude to signify that another “head” is recognized as being supreme.

DISHONORING CHRIST

With this in mind, let us examine another part of this passage together. Paul teaches that “the head of every man

is Christ" (vs 3). Further, he states that for a man to pray or prophesy with his head covered dishonors his true Head. When a man uses a "covering" he dishonors Jesus Christ (vs 4). While it is not a common thing in the world today to encounter men wearing hats in church meetings, there is, I believe, a deeper, more serious lesson to be learned from these verses.

We have concluded that the essence of the "head covering" teaching is a heart attitude. It is an inward decision to put oneself in the position of being in submission to a man. Therefore, if a man puts himself in this position, he is acting like a woman. He is behaving in a manner which shows that he has taken another man to be his head. He is choosing to submit himself under a human authority.

This position, my dear brothers, is clearly against the scriptures. According to Paul's teaching, this activity dishonors Christ. It is an insult to Him and His headship over each and every man. When any man takes another man as his head, he is declaring that the headship of Jesus is not adequate. He is placing his trust in a human leader, thereby showing that he does not have complete confidence in his invisible, divine Head.

What a shame this is to Jesus! When men, whose true and only head is Christ, begin acting like women and placing themselves under the authority of other men, this is the most ugly insult to God. If, for example, a woman would submit herself to a man other than her husband, adopting a position of complete rendition to his will, this would be the worst kind of offense to her husband. It is a declaration that her husband is not sufficient nor manly enough, does not satisfy her, and is not worthy of her trust.

In the same way, when men who should be submitting to Jesus bow their hearts and lives before another man, it is a proclamation to all that their Lord is not sufficient for them. This truly is dishonoring Christ (I Cor 11:4).

Although men's hats in church is really a non-issue today in our culture, the practice of being in submission to a man or group of men or being under the "covering" of some man or men is very common indeed. It is, in fact,

something which a significantly large portion of the Christian church insists upon.

If you are not "in submission" they say, you are out of the will of God. If you are not "covered" by some other man or ministry, you must be a rebel of the worst variety. Ideas such as "coming under," "umbrella," and "looking to for direction" are all extremely popular in today's church. The thought that somehow there is a kind of safety in adopting this position of submission to another man is quite prevalent.

While all this is currently so popular and has perhaps an aura of being "right," let us stop and think about it critically for a minute. If a woman uses a covering, she is stating publicly that she is in submission to a man. If, therefore, a man states publicly that he is in submission to another man, he in fact is "using" a head covering. He is taking a position of being in submission to another.

Therefore, whether a physical veil is present or not, he is assuming an attitude which is dishonoring to his true Head, Jesus Christ. Surely it is plain that in the case of the woman, the attire is not at the core of the issue but rather the attitude of the heart. So also, in the case of the man, the real crux of Paul's teaching is not about sombreros or baseball caps but the position of the inner man.

Here the scripture is quite clear. When a man prays or prophesies (meaning that he is functioning in some capacity in church meetings) with his head covered, he is insulting Jesus. He is humbling himself before another man instead of God and relying upon this other person for direction and supervision.

This man is indicating that Jesus alone is not sufficient. His leadership and headship are not adequate and therefore he must look to a human being for a more satisfactory covering. Although Jesus may be his head in some kind of mystical, distant way, he is choosing a more "real," tangible human being to whom he can submit himself and whom he can follow. If you were the Lord of the universe and your child acted in this way, would you be dishonored? Jesus is. The Bible plainly tells us so.

Interestingly, in verse 4 of chapter 11 of I Corinthians, the word translated “covered” in the phrase, “having his head covered,” actually means in the Greek language “down.” This would then read “having his head down (or bowed).” In many cultures, bowing your head to someone is a sign of reverence. It is a sign that you are recognizing the superiority of the other person.

Therefore, it is clear that Paul is speaking about more than mere hats, but about a heart attitude of a man when he is speaking in the assembly. He must never be doing this from a position of submission to another man, but only to Christ. He must not be bowing down his head in recognition of the “superiority” of another human being.

Why is this so important? There are several very clear reasons. The first is that God created man to fulfill a marvelous plan. If man is to be God’s representative, He must be in intimate daily contact and communication with Him. When another head or “covering” is placed between the Christian man and Jesus, this hinders the proper flow of authority. No man can adequately transmit to another all that God would want to say and do.

Since all men are finite, our comprehension of God’s will will also be correspondingly circumscribed by submitting to man. It is impossible for a man or even a group of men to ever come close to expressing the will of God to another in a complete fashion. When a man places himself “under” the authority of man, this severely interrupts the flow of authority from the Head into and through his life.

A second reason that men of God should not place themselves “under” another is that we cannot keep our attention focused in two directions at once. No man can serve two masters. God has designed man so that he can only give his allegiance to one principal at a time. This is an unalterable truth.

When we turn to look to man for direction, we automatically divert our attention from Jesus. Doing this, we bring ourselves under a curse from God. He says, “Cursed is the man who trusts in man, who makes the arm of flesh his strength, departing from the living God” (Jer 17:5).

You see, trusting in man and departing from God are inexorably linked. There is just no way that we can look to a leader and not look away from our Lord. Could this be the reason that Jesus taught us to call no man "father," "teacher," "discipler," or "leader" (Mt 23:8-10)?

When we try to divide our attention, the direction which is easiest will usually win out. There is no doubt that a tangible, physical, human leader is simpler to follow than an invisible Lord. The natural tendency of human nature is to want someone to lead it.

This is exactly the situation which Samuel encountered with the children of Israel. They came to him wanting a king. Consequently, he became very upset. He tried in vain to explain to them the plan of God. The Most High was already their king. They did not need a human one. Although their leader was invisible, He was very real.

Nevertheless, Israel rejected the counsel of Samuel and demanded a leader to rule over them. God gave them their wish, but it was not His will. In the same way today, God tolerates our earthly systems and even uses them to further His purposes, but it is not His design.

A FUTILE EXERCISE

A third reason that placing ourselves "under" another to help our spiritual life is erroneous is that it simply does not work. No one besides our God sees clearly into the depths of our soul. Men can observe our outward actions and words. Sometimes they even have small glimpses into our heart. But only the Spirit of the Lord really searches out what is hidden in our innermost being.

Therefore, at best the disciple of another man will have only a superficial dealing with the thoughts and intentions of his heart. It is possible for a person to be very obedient to his overseer's will but have within his heart deeply hidden areas in which he is strongly rebelling against his true Master.

Furthermore, there is a great danger of becoming a Pharisee. Under the guidance of a human being, the out-

ward appearance of a person can perhaps be cleaned up or controlled. By pleasing a human "leader," this person then imagines that he has made spiritual progress or is growing in the Lord. When he has become very obedient to his "discipler," he could then suppose that he has become mature and ready for spiritual service.

But if we are submitted to some man are we really more submitted to God? Has a great change taken place in our intimacy and relationship with our Lord? If we were not really given to God before we submitted ourselves to a leader, how has our true heart attitude really changed? We must remember that the goal of spiritual authority is to bring people into obedience to God, not to the servant of God or to a superficial standard. Such submission will help no one.

On the other hand, when and if a believer is truly submitted to God, he will gladly submit to anyone and everyone who is truly speaking from God. Such Christians will easily and readily hear the voice of their Master because they are constantly looking for it. This will be especially true with respect to those who are known to be channels of God's authority.

Therefore, if we can minister to Christians a deep, genuine submission to the Lord, all problems with rebellion in the church can be resolved. Instead of covering the problems with a band-aid of superficial attitudes and actions, spiritual ministry can help expose and eliminate the root of the problem. How the church of God today needs such ministry! How we need to become genuinely submitted to God!

ANOTHER SERIOUS PROBLEM

With the passing of many years of trying to serve Christ, I have noticed a serious problem. Men who have submitted themselves to human leadership for a prolonged period of time have actually seen their relationship with Jesus destroyed. Over time, they have actually lost their ability to hear from and follow God themselves. They

have been taught to trust in man and so have diverted their hearts from Christ.

One reason for this tragic loss is that they have learned if they receive some direction from the Lord which does not conform to what their leadership believes, they will be labeled as “rebellious.” Perhaps they have seen others rejected, ejected, or “disciplined” for such spiritual crimes.

The consequence of this is that they begin to fear or mistrust their own relationship with the Lord. If they could so easily be wrong, perhaps it is better to keep their distance from Him and let others “more qualified” make such decisions. This then impels such believers to distance themselves from their Savior and put their trust in men.

As believers we have the responsibility to rightly divide the word of truth. There is such a thing as true, spiritual submission. There is also the error of submitting to men instead of God. It is our responsibility before the Lord to discern which way is His way.

Yes, as we have already studied, some versions of the Bible do speak about those who are “over” us in the Lord. As we have seen, this is a terrible translation of the Greek word “PROISTEMI” simply which means “to stand before, hence to lead” according to *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*. This word has nothing to do with domination, control, or being “over” in the commonly understood sense. This mistranslation has led to wrong concepts and practices, causing Christians much suffering down through the centuries.

Also, I know about the Centurion, the “man under authority” (Mt 8:9). He recognized Jesus’ supernatural authority because he himself had earthly authority. However, in his declaration concerning Jesus’ authority, he was in no way giving a teaching about church government! Nor should we understand it that way.

Of course, we should be respectful and submissive. That is what this entire writing is about. However, wrong submission will get us nowhere. Only genuine submission to God will work. May we prayerfully seek God for His will and way in this all-important question.

ABDICATION OF RESPONSIBILITY

Perhaps another reason that so many embrace the idea of submitting themselves to another man is that it releases them from much responsibility. This is the same reason the ancient Israelites wanted a king. They wanted someone else to fight their battles, make the important decisions, and set the direction. In this way, they were free to go about their own pursuits unhindered by spiritual responsibility. They could just sit back and coast.

Now, there is a certain fleshly appeal to this idea. To trust a leader whom we respect and be free from responsibility is just what many people want. However, to do so is to give up the priesthood and kingship for which God created us.

By adopting another "head" we reject the true One. Each of us has a responsibility before God as a priest and king to seek His will, practice daily intercession, maintain a relationship with Him, and be involved in leading others into His kingdom.

What a temptation it is to let others do the hard work. How easy it is just to trust in the abilities of another. But God is asking more than this. Each man must wear the priestly garments and bear the kingly responsibilities for his own household, friends, and brothers in the Lord.

Brethren, it is God's will for you to reign with Him. Do not trade this privilege for the broad, easy way. Don't let others come between you and your Savior. "Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown (Rev 3:11)!"

6.

THE HEAD OF THE BODY

*J*esus Christ is the head of His church. He is the One who has been appointed by the Father to fulfill this important function. He has been chosen and anointed to preside over all the activities of His people. This is an extremely clear teaching of the scriptures. Colossians 1:18 states this plainly, "And He is the head of the body, the church." Ephesians 1:22 explains that God the Father "...gave Him [Jesus Christ] to be the head over all things to the church." Paul, the apostle, further emphasizes this in Ephesians 4:15 by affirming that Jesus is "...the head, even Christ" (KJV). This tremendous fact is not an obscure or irrelevant teaching.

However, even though the message is indisputable, the meaning of this message is often not well understood. What possible practical application does this truth have for us in our daily lives?

Perhaps the common understanding is that Jesus functions today in His "headship" capacity somewhat like the head of a large corporation. Probably He is there somewhere in the background, making high-level, executive decisions, holding conferences from time to time with the

big, important leaders and, in general, orchestrating the whole endeavor from afar.

No doubt, the common “worker” will see Him in the halls occasionally or even at a meeting of the whole congregation; but, people imagine, His job is done on a high level which impacts the daily lives of those on the lower echelons only indirectly. This misconception is perhaps supported by the fact that Jesus did ascend into heaven. He is indeed “far above all” (Eph 4:10).

Adding to this notion that the “Head” is somewhat remote is the fact that He is invisible. He is not perceived or understood by the natural man. These things can lead many to the following erroneous conclusion: Jesus came to earth, died for our sins, and then rose to be seated with the Father. Now our job is to carry out the instructions which He left us in the Bible until He decides to return and reward us for our labors.

Thinking this way, many forget that Jesus is indeed present here and now, today. Through the Holy Spirit, He is constantly with us (Mt 28:20). It is impossible for Him to be physically present in every place at all times. But in the Holy Spirit, He is more than able to be present with every one of us at all times (II Cor 3:17).

The aforementioned wrong assumption brings people to a position which is perhaps the greatest deficiency in the church today. Very few believers know and experience the headship of Christ in their lives. Many Christians have little trouble relating to a Savior, Redeemer, Helper, or Comforter. These are functions of Jesus Christ to which the human heart can readily respond. Perhaps a little more difficult is the concept of an intimate relationship with a “Lord” or a King who expects obedience.

Even further removed is the idea of a “Head” who is directly affecting not only our actions but our attitudes, thoughts, and feelings as well. However, if we are to enter into all that God has for our lives and become well-pleasing in His sight, this intimate, headship relationship with Him is essential. Perhaps the best way to grasp the true meaning of this relationship is to look at what it means to

be His body. We, God's people, are the "body of Christ" (Eph 1:23). The church as a whole is the "body" and Jesus is the Head. The individuals then are seen as "members" of this body (Eph 5:30). God chose to explain things to us in this way because it is an extremely accurate analogy.

In a human body, all the parts are controlled by the brain. No muscle or organ functions on its own, according to its own ideas. Neither is the head depending on opinions or ideas from the various parts. The whole works smoothly only when each part is in intimate communication with, and obedient to, the head.

In this way, the body serves to be an expression of the will of the head. The various muscles and body parts, including the mouth and eyes, respond to the direction of the brain and form an expression of what the head has in mind.

This, then, is exactly what the Bible means to say when it states that we are His body and that He is the Head. Each one of us is a member of this body with some kind of function to perform. When we do so according to the moment-by-moment impulses from the Head, we are then an expression of Himself.

The body of Christ is not an automaton simply following written or pre-programmed instructions. It is a living organism manifesting the Life of God within it. It is an extremely serious error to suppose that we can perform our part on our own. How can we possibly express the life of Jesus acting independently or simply trying to follow a set of instructions? It is not possible. Our part is to allow Jesus to control all of our being so that when we act or even react, it is His life and nature which are manifested.

This spiritual truth of our being the body of Christ can only be experienced by maintaining an intimacy with the Head. While it is true that all Christians are members of the body of Christ, this truth will do us no good unless we are experiencing its reality day by day. The theoretical "position" of being members of His body will not benefit us unless we also know by experience what it means to be guided by our Head.

In a human being, when the head loses control over its own members and they begin acting independently, we identify that body as spastic. It begins behaving in an ungoverned, uncoordinated manner which is frightening and even hideous. When a person's body responds imperfectly to the orders of the head, that person is called crippled or, in today's terminology, "challenged." How often does Christ's body appear in this way? How often do the members of the church appear to be behaving in infantile, ungoverned, and even ridiculous ways?

We can also imagine someone who is confined to an iron lung or is completely paralyzed. The tissues and organs present comprise what is termed the "body" of that person. However, it has ceased to respond to the direction of the head and, therefore, is no longer an expression of that person. Could it be that the body of Christ, although it is His because of the shedding of His own blood, is not truly responding to His direction and, therefore, not exhibiting His life and nature to the world?

Dear brothers and sisters, these are very serious considerations. Perhaps we have supposed that we can act *for* God and that will be enough. But God is not wanting us to act on His behalf. He does not wish us "to do things" for Him. Instead, He greatly desires to act through us. His will is for us to submit ourselves to Him in such a way that He has control over all of our being and can use us as vessels to manifest Himself. Only in this way can we experience what it really means to be His body.

What is at issue here is not "who is the body of Christ." All believers are certainly part of this group. The crux of the matter is "who" is animating this body. Who is in control? Whose life and nature are emanating from each and every member? Perhaps we as Christians take comfort in the fact that we have become members of Christ. We are secure in our membership and believe that this is enough. However, now we see that this fact is not sufficient to fulfill God's will and satisfy His desires.

No doubt, Jesus intends for His own body to be an expression of Himself. We are to be His witnesses not sim-

ply by saying things about Him but by actually expressing Him. God has called us and redeemed us so that we can form a corporate manifestation of all that He is. His life and nature, which were so clearly and powerfully portrayed in Jesus when He walked on this earth, are to be now on display through those whom He calls His "body."

God's will is to manifest Himself to the world and even the watching universe. He greatly desires that all men could see Him and know Him. This responsibility has now been put upon those who comprise His body.

This can never happen by our own efforts. We cannot try to imitate God and suppose that this will be good enough to convince the world of sin. Furthermore, simply following a set of rules from God's book won't get the job done either. The only possibility is that we will submit ourselves to His headship so that we will be filled with His life and be animated by His direction.

When He is living through us, we are an exhibition of Himself. When we are merely trying to live *for* Him, we inevitably can only express our own concept of what He is like. True righteousness, peace, joy, victory over sin, and all the things which comprise an actual manifestation of the nature of God are only possible when He is our head.

How we need this experience today! How essential it is that the headship of Christ be much more than some remote doctrine to us. We must experience the reality of this headship to be pleasing to God. Our heavenly Father is in some respects a very narrow Person. There is only one thing in the universe which truly pleases Him: His Son. When He sees His Son manifested through us, He is greatly pleased. Nothing less than this will ever satisfy Him.

If we say that we are His and that we want to do His will, this is the way: allow His Son Jesus to dominate our personality and be our head. When He is the One initiating our words, attitudes, and activities, then – and only then – we will please the Father.

In the scriptures we will encounter the phrase "the mind of Christ" (I Cor 2:16). This is something which the Bible tells us that we have. Unfortunately, for many this is

nothing more than a nice little teaching which has no real impact or influence in their life. It is not their daily experience. Possibly their minds are instead dominated by their own ideas, thoughts, and opinions.

There is also in the scriptures something called the “renewing of the mind” (Rm 12:2). Here we read that we can be transformed by this process and that the result will be something which is “that good and acceptable and perfect, will of God.” How exciting! Here is a way to be changed so that we will be pleasing to God.

And how is this accomplished? It is simply by allowing the Holy Spirit of God to dominate our thinking processes. We can experience Jesus as our Head. This is exactly what the scripture means that speaks about being “renewed in the spirit of [our] mind” (Eph 4:23). This speaks of the Holy Spirit filling, changing, and then using our minds to express Himself in all His fullness. This is truly a wonderful salvation.

As you can see, experiencing Jesus as our head is much more than an obedience to His occasional directions or to some scriptural mandates. Instead, it is submitting our entire being to His control. When Jesus dominates our mind, He controls us completely. In this way He can give us His thoughts, opinions, attitudes, desires, and direction. He can think and live through us. Through this transforming process, we, individually and corporately, will become a living expression of Himself – His body.

HEAD OF THE BODY

Not only does Jesus intend to be the head of each individual member, He is also the head of the church as a whole. What then does this mean? It signifies that when we gather together in His name we are not free simply to do our own thing. He is not eager to sit in the back watching us go through religious rituals or be entertained. His intention is to be the leader of all that we do. In order for the church, His body, to be an expression of Himself, He must be in charge of our meetings. Think about this for a

moment. If we do not follow the moment-by-moment leading of the Holy Spirit in our gatherings, we are not expressing Jesus Christ. If we only occasionally allow Him room to move as He wishes, then we manifest who He is in a very limited way.

This then brings us back to our analogy of a cripple, spastic, or paralytic. While we may be the church of God in a positional sense, our experience of this fact is too often lacking. Although we will never cease to be His body, the actual church which Jesus is seeking can never be realized while He has very little influence over it.

Jesus Himself explained this truth to the Samaritan woman whom He met at Jacob's well. She was inquiring about the proper location for worship. Naturally, she was curious to solve an age-old dilemma about which place was right and/or which formula would satisfy God. So many times today believers are preoccupied about which format is most scriptural, which method is best, or which day has been chosen by God for us to meet together.

Hopefully, you can see how none of this has any bearing upon fulfilling the will of the Father. Jesus responded to her by saying that true worship could only occur in the Spirit. This means that it is only when the Spirit of God is filling and directing our worship that the Father is satisfied. How we need to experience such worship today! How our Heavenly Father is longing for us to fulfill His will!

How then should we meet? This is a question which must be decided by listening to the direction of the Holy Spirit. "How", "when," and "where," are all questions which He can answer if we are only open to listening to Him. First of all, however, we must empty ourselves of all our own ideas and opinions. We must free ourselves of religious tradition and practice. Simply copying what others are doing or have done for centuries will not enable us to arrive at God's best. In fact, doing so will guarantee that we do not.

Why is it that we trust God so little to lead and direct us in these simple, practical things? How is it that the One

who holds the universe together by His power could be incapable of leading His people in their meetings together? We must humble ourselves before God and open our hearts to Him. We must repent of doing our own will, which we suppose will satisfy Him. He can and will build His church if we only let Him be the Head of everything.

No doubt, the Lord will lead us by speaking through those who are intimate with Him. If we truly have ears to hear His voice, He will guide us in every practical step. The use of His money, for example, is one way in which He can guide us concerning a place to gather. The amount of space is another consideration. Has He actually led us to arrange something special for the children? Has He Himself instituted a choir? How about the arrangement of the seating? Have we really heard from Him?

Perhaps you think that all these things are too petty to require His attention. Absolutely not! The Bible states that "...in *all* things He may have the preeminence" (Col 1:18). Additionally, we must always be ready, as were the Children of Israel in the wilderness, to change anything at any time. As the body grows, or as other considerations arise, Jesus can and will lead us day by day in these details. In this way we begin to provide Him a place in which He can do His work.

MEETINGS LED BY THE SPIRIT

Once we have heard from God concerning the practical questions of when and where we should meet, we are left with determining exactly what will go on during the meeting. This too must be left open to the leading of the Holy Spirit. In the Bible we read that when we come together each one may have a song, teaching, tongue, or interpretation (I Cor 14:26). Also we learn that all can prophesy according to the leading of the Spirit (I Cor 14:31).

When we come together, Jesus Himself comes into our midst. He comes there not as an observer but as the Leader. He can and will motivate each member of the body to contribute their portion of Himself in an orderly and coherent

manner. When each member has been in intimate contact with Jesus during the week, many of them will have something fresh to share from their fellowship with Him. It is from the supply of every member that the whole body is edified in a more efficient manner.

All of this activity is led by the Holy Spirit and overseen by those who are known to be channels of spiritual authority because of their intimacy with God. Such meetings are not some kind of lawless free-for-all but are an exhibition of the body of Christ orchestrated by the Holy Spirit. In this way, Christ can be manifested in His body. In this way, “every joint” will supply the others with their portion (Eph 4:16). In this way, all will grow together into what God wants them to be.

Teaching, preaching, and exhortation can certainly have a place in a Spirit-led meeting. In fact, God could also lead us to arrange special meetings just for these purposes. Times for prayer, special ministry to new believers, intensive teaching sessions, evangelistic outreaches – all these things can be arranged by our Head if we are attentive and open to Him.

God is able to lead His body. He is able to build His church. We only need to empty our hands of our own programs and plans and humble ourselves before Him. Jesus is able to fill our church experience with Himself.

Let us suppose that we notice a need among the young people. Our first thought might be to find some kind of program for them and then choose someone to carry it out. This method, however, will never produce a truly spiritual result.

What if, instead of this, we spent some time in prayer opening ourselves to God and seeking His solution? Perhaps He would raise up someone with a special gift and anointing to minister to these young people. Then, in the place of a program, we would have a spiritual ministry operating in the church. We would have someone with a true anointing and burden to fulfill this ministry.

This is really what we need. We do not need more entertainment, programs, and “support groups” in the

assembly. We need the presence of the Holy Spirit! We need God Himself! If and when we seek Him with all our heart, we will find a new, living kind of church experience which will deeply satisfy not only our own longings but God's as well.

RESERVED FOR THE HEAD

As you can no doubt understand from the foregoing discussion, all authority in the church is reserved for the Head. There is no room for any other. Any other authority will simply substitute for, or get in the way of, the flow of authority from Jesus. Unless the "leadership" in the church is simply a manifestation of God's own authority, it will hinder instead of help the process.

Dear friends, this is a very serious consideration. Jesus' body is His! We are not free to construct some kind of imitation. We simply cannot set up any other kind of authority in our meetings besides that which the Father has already instituted. We must allow Jesus to be our Head! Only in this way will we experience the reality of church and satisfy God's requirements. Only in this way can the body grow and minister to itself in the way which God has designed.

Perhaps now the reader can more easily understand the great need in the church today for genuine spiritual authority. Also, it becomes clear why merely human authority can never achieve God's ends. It is only when the Head is animating His body that His life and nature are expressed. When someone else is in control, no matter how well-intentioned they may be, the result will never be an expression of God.

This, then, is the unalterable principle of headship. In Christ's body there can be no other authority, no other head. When we place someone else in this position, we contaminate Jesus' expression and we introduce a foreign element into the church of God.

Perhaps here would be a good place to discuss the meaning of the word "antichrist." Interestingly, one of the

principal meanings of the prefix “anti” in Greek is “instead of” or “in the place of.” This then leads us to a new understanding of the word “antichrist.”

It may be that we have always thought of an antichrist as someone who is against Christ or opposed to Him. Here, however, we see that simply taking His place as the true authority and Head also qualifies as being “antichrist.”

The role, then, for leaders in the church meetings could best be understood as a kind of supervisor. Those who are mature and intimate with God watch over the proceedings. In fact, the Bible uses the word “overseers” to indicate this function. Those who are less mature are free to exercise their gifts and abilities because there are more mature members who can gently correct any problems.

True spiritual leadership can be exercised in a very unobtrusive way. A mere word or prayer at the appropriate time, spoken by the leading of the Holy Spirit, can bring the meeting back from any sidetrack it has taken. Those who would wish to dominate the meetings with their ideas and opinions can be carefully admonished. The leaders are present not to control everything or use the meetings as a forum for their own ministries but to serve the body by helping everything be done according to the leading of the Head.

Of course, no meeting is going to be perfect. There will always be times when someone is praying or testifying from their own heart. A leader who has been truly broken and qualified by the Holy Spirit will know from God when it is necessary to say or do something or when the Lord would simply allow an imperfection to go uncorrected.

All of us have imperfections in our lives and God alone knows the time and place for these deficiencies to be addressed. Having a sensitivity to perceive divine wisdom is a result of experience and maturity. Perhaps this is why the scriptures use the word “elders” to describe such people. Notice how Paul exhorts that no novice should be expected to function in this capacity (I Tim 3:6).

There is a great need for patience, forbearance, and love to be wrought into the character of someone who is a

channel for Divine authority. If the character of God is not displayed in those who are leading, the manifestation of God will be contaminated by natural personalities.

The leadership in the church is an awesome responsibility. It is not something which anyone should try to take upon themselves. There is a great temptation for young, gifted men to imagine that they are qualified to lead the church. They hear from God. They are anointed by Him, and therefore they suppose that they are qualified to be leaders. Mistaking gifts and anointing for spiritual maturity, they imagine that they are qualified to function in leadership capacity.

However, nothing can substitute for brokenness and years of experience under the hand of God. Those who are "leading" will be judged by God for their work just as every one else will be. If we have taken upon ourselves the mantle of "authority" and led the church of God according to the initiative of our own heart, we will be shown to be rebellious, ambitious, and foolish in front of everyone and be held accountable to the Judge of all.

Another important consideration here is that those who are channels of God's authority and functioning as "overseers" must have an intimate relationship with one another. They must be knit together in the Spirit by God. This requires a willingness on the part of these individuals to open their hearts to one another – to have a kind of godly transparency. They must have a unity which the Bible describes as having "one heart and one soul" (Acts 4:32).

In this way, they can act together as one in exercising Divine authority. If there is any disunity or disagreement among the leaders, it will lead to disaster for the flock. If those in leadership cannot or will not act in harmony with one another in the Lord, shipwreck will result and the testimony of Jesus will be lost. It is impossible to preserve the authority of the Holy Spirit when there is mistrust, disharmony, and argument among the leaders.

This then is an essential place to begin when thinking of meeting together. At least two or three men whom the

Lord has prepared and chosen must come together in some kind of agreement on these issues. It is absolutely imperative as a place of beginning for this kind of unity among the leaders to be established. If this is not in place, the result will only be confusion. Many others will try to enter in and take over. "Authority" from every direction but God will be manifested. And the leadership in a weakened, divided condition will not be able to deal with it according to the direction of God.

Not only must these first few brothers agree with one another in their vision of what God wants, they must allow Him to knit them together in love. They must have spent some years together permitting the Holy Spirit to bring them into His unity.

As we live together in the presence of God, sooner or later our sins, failings, and weaknesses become apparent. Those with whom we have communion will notice these things. All of us must, as we see the shortcomings of others, learn to deal with these things in love. We must forgive. We must forbear. We must react with patience, kindness, gentleness, and all the other aspects of Jesus' nature.

When those who are more mature have seen the failures of others and learned to deal with this in Christ's love, then they form a kind of foundation for the local church. When the devil has no more ammunition with which to accuse them to each other and so divide them, then something solid and eternal has been established. These believers are then ready for God to add many more to their number. Their practical, experiential unity will withstand whatever the future might bring.

It is easy for some to suppose that since Jesus does not desire any "official," positional leadership, then there is no place for leadership at all. Some immature believers, when they begin to understand a little of these spiritual truths, then begin to reject any and all expression of authority even if it proceeds from the Holy Spirit. This is a serious error.

What we desperately need today is not "no leadership" but the leadership of the Holy Spirit. When Jesus'

authority is combined with spiritual oversight by those who have been prepared by God, it will be a great help in experiencing Christian gatherings which are a consistent manifestation of God Himself.

Why is it today that Christianity appears so weak? Why are so many believers' lives still full of various bondages and sin? Why is it that we are having so little effect upon the world around us? The early church within 30-40 years "turned the world upside down" (Acts 17:6). On the other hand, in our day with all the money and materials at our disposal, comparatively little is being done.

Now I am not saying that there is not a lot of activity. There certainly is. However, the impact of this activity seems strangely less powerful than it did two thousand years ago. Has God changed? Absolutely not! However, if we are honest with ourselves, we must admit that something seems to be different. Perhaps, therefore, it is worth our time to pause and consider if there is a part of God's plan which we have missed which could be hindering His power and His will.

A LIVING TEMPLE

The Bible teaches us that we individually and the church corporately are the temple of God. God Himself, we are told, dwells there. Now what could be more powerful or effective than the presence of the Almighty? What could change lives more than a face-to-face encounter with Jesus Himself?

But let us for a moment be completely honest with ourselves. Does God actually dwell among us? Is the palpable presence of the Lord Himself the chief feature of our meetings? Is the awesome majesty and glory of God the main attraction for us and others? Is He permanently resident among us or merely an occasional visitor? Truthfully now, is this doctrine about us being His temple our daily experience or just another one of those nice Bible teachings which sound great but are not really real in our daily lives?

I believe the great need of our day is for the Head, Jesus Christ, to be restored to His rightful place in His body. For far too many years, Protestants and Catholics alike have substituted formulas and forms, rites, and ceremonies for the true leadership of the Holy Spirit. We have put mere men in the place of God and supposed that this could produce the results which He seeks and which we so desperately need.

How we need a great repentance! How we need to turn from our own ways and humble ourselves! How we need to admit that we have been standing in God's way and blaming Him for the lack of results which we crave for our own glory and enjoyment.

Let us be the ones who usher in the King. Let us be among those who are the first to submit to Him as our true Head and allow Him to manifest Himself among us. How we need to fulfill His will so that He can be all in all. Jesus is the Head. He is the one who can direct and fill His body if only we will give Him the opportunity.

Our church experience which, if we are honest with ourselves, has until now been weak and at best only partially effective, can be changed to be a powerful manifestation of the presence of God. All we must do is submit ourselves to Him. We have only to empty ourselves of what we have been substituting for His headship and allow Him to lead us in all things.

In this way, God Himself will be with us. His presence will permeate our gatherings and our daily lives. His glory will fill His temple. It is clear that God does not dwell in a temple made with human hands (Acts 7:48). If what we have been doing is a product of our own labor, God will never bless it. On the other hand, when we humbly cooperate with Him in building His church, He will fill it with Himself. His power, glory, and majesty can be our daily experience.

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