

Xenos Christian Fellowship
Christian Leadership 1-Ecclesiology
Week 8 - Church Authority

Introduction

Tonight we address the subject of church authority. What kind of authority does God invest in the leaders of his church? How should church members respond to church leaders? How should church leaders exercise that authority? What are the key qualities of godly church leadership? **Bear in mind two common extremes/errors on this subject.**

- **Authoritarianism:** This is prevalent in patriarchal cultures, and sometimes Christian groups over-react against an anti-authority sentiment (below). Home groups experience conflict when leaders are heavy handed in their application of their authority, or exceed their sphere of authority.
- **Anti-authority sentiment:** This is especially prevalent in current postmodern American culture, which views virtually authority with suspicion. Also viewed as mindless, a sign of weakness, rejection of my personal rights. Many problems in home churches come from people who don't respond well even to godly leadership.

We need to steer a biblical course between these two extremes, affirming human leadership in the church while also acknowledging human depravity and abuse.

The Concept of Authority in the Bible

In order to think properly about church authority, we must learn more broadly what the Bible teaches about authority. Consider these key biblical principles about this important subject:

1. **God alone is the ultimate authority.** *The source of His authority is rooted in His character i.e. loving, sacrificial, benevolence, omniscience etc.*

(Matthew 6:13) "And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen."

(Romans 13:1) Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.

(Daniel 2:20-21) Daniel answered and said, "Let the name of God be blessed forever and ever, for wisdom and power belong to him. And it is he who changes the times and the epochs; he removes kings and establishes kings; he gives wisdom to wise men, and knowledge to men of understanding."

2. **Rebellion against God is a serious sin.**

Satan evidently revolted against God, and brought untold misery into God's universe.

(Numbers 15:30) But the person who does anything defiantly, whether he is native or an alien, that one is blaspheming the LORD; and that person shall be cut off from among his people.

(1 Samuel 15:22,23) And Samuel said, "Has the LORD as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of divination, And insubordination is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has also rejected you from being king."

(1 Samuel 27:8; 30:1,18) Saul's disobedience when he attacked the Amalekites – spared Agag, people took the best of the spoils. Disobedience resulted in his rejection as king and ongoing issues with the Amalekites.

(Romans 1:28-29) And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips,

Refused to “recognize” God as the authority. Substantial consequences when we choose to go against God's authority. *Paradidomi* = gave them over, “put in prison”

(Jude 1:8-9) Yet in the same manner these men, also by dreaming, defile the flesh, and reject authority, and revile angelic majesties. But Michael the archangel, when he disputed with the devil and argued about the body of Moses, did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgment, but said, "The Lord rebuke you."

Rebellion is the attitude of contempt and scorn for authority that so characterizes our culture. Rebellion is the sin that led Satan to his fall, and will poison the ministry of any Christian who tolerates it in himself. The material in Proverbs and elsewhere on "scoffers" and "mockers" shows God's attitude toward the rebellious.

3. Delegated authority is biblical and important.

The Bible affirms that certain social structures are necessary and good in this fallen, broken world. Specifically, God instituted the concept of limited delegated authority within certain social roles: GOVERNMENT, WORK-PLACE, FAMILY, and CHURCH.

The Bible knows very well that these structures are imperfect and can be abused and it condemns this abuse of authority from the very beginning (EG. Lamech). That's why it also gives important qualifications and limitations to delegated authorities (see below). But it insists that these imperfect structures are preferable to the alternative of social anarchy (EG. Iraq immediately following Baghdad). We junk these structures to our own peril!

- *Human Government*

(Daniel 2:37-38) "You, O king, are the king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, the strength, and the glory; {38} and wherever the sons of men dwell, or the beasts of the field, or the birds of the sky, He has given them into your hand and has caused you to rule over them all. You are the head of gold.

Daniel's interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream. Acknowledges that God put Nebuchadnezzar into a position of authority. We can learn a lot from Daniel's dealings with delegated/secular authorities.

(Jeremiah 27:6) "And now I have given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, My servant, and I have given him also the wild animals of the field to serve him.

(Matthew 22:21) They said to Him, "Caesar's." Then He said to them, "Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's."

(Romans 13:7) Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.

(Titus 3:1) Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed . . .

(1 Peter 2:13-17) Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, {14} or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. {15} For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men. {16} Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God. {17} Honor all men; love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king.

- *Secular Jobs*

(Ephesians 6:5-8) Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ; {6} not by way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. {7} With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men, {8} knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free.

(Colossians 3:22-25) Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who merely please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men; knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve. For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality.

(1 Timothy 6:1-2) Let all who are under the yoke as slaves regard their own masters as worthy of all honor so that the name of God and our doctrine may not be spoken against. {2} And let those who have believers as their masters not be disrespectful to them because they are brethren, but let them serve them all the more, because those who partake of the benefit are believers and beloved. Teach and preach these principles.

(Titus 2:9-10) Urge bondslaves to be subject to their own masters in everything, to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, {10} not pilfering, but showing all good faith that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect.

(1 Peter 2:18) Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable.

- *Marriage*

(Ephesians 5:22-24) Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. {23} For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. {24} But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything.

(Ephesians 5:33) Nevertheless let each individual among you also love his own wife even as himself; and let the wife see to it that she respect her husband.

(Colossians 3:18) Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.

(Titus 2:5) to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be dishonored.

(1 Peter 3:1-6) In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, {2} as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior. {3} And let not your adornment be merely external-- braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses; {4} but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God. {5} For in this way in former times the holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves, being submissive to their own husbands. {6} Thus Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, and you have become her children if you do what is right without being frightened by any fear.

When should a husband exercise this decision-making authority? Here is my conclusion: **In major decisions not clearly addressed in scripture, if after careful and prayerful discussion husband and wife cannot agree, the husband should assume the responsibility to make the decision that he thinks will best advance God's glory and the family's good.**

- **"In major decisions not clearly addressed in scripture . . . "** In those decisions that are clearly addressed in scripture, husband and wife should mutually submit to God. In less important decisions, both parties should be ready to defer to what the other wants ("If you're happy, I'm happy.")
- **". . . if after careful and prayerful discussion . . . "** I am sometimes persuaded by my wife that the course she advocates is better. I am sometimes convicted by God that my motives for my course are selfish.
- **". . . the husband should assume the responsibility . . . "** I will answer to God for this, so I take it very seriously.

In a good marriage, this is rarely needed because you can normally come to an agreement about the best course of action. But it is there for those cases when it is needed. The resolution is not to vote or to take turns on getting what you want--but to move forward in this way. And in these cases, God calls on wives to respect their husband's office and go along with a good attitude.

- *Family*

(Ephesians. 6:1-4) Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. {2} HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER (which is the first commandment with a promise), {3} THAT IT MAY BE WELL WITH YOU, AND THAT YOU MAY LIVE LONG ON THE EARTH. {4} And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger; but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

(Colossians 3:20) Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord.

- *Church*

(1 Corinthians 16:15-18) Now I urge you, brethren (you know the household of Stephanas, that they were the first fruits of Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves for ministry to the saints), {16} that you also be in subjection to such men and to everyone who helps in the work and labors. {17} And I rejoice over the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus; because they have supplied what

was lacking on your part. {18} For they have refreshed my spirit and yours.
Therefore acknowledge such men.

(1 Thessalonians 5:12-13) But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, {13} and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another.

(Titus 2:15) These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you.

(Hebrews 13:17*) Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.

(1 Peter 5:5) You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.

Stedman & Nee Discussion

ASSIGNMENT QUESTIONS: Record where you agree/disagree with on their teaching about church leaders' authority. Be prepared to defend your conclusions in class.

STEDMAN

PRO'S:

Good exposé of abuse of church leadership (examples and scriptures)

Good emphasis on Jesus as living Head of the church, and leaders' primary job to discern his will

Good emphasis on plural eldership as a check on abuse likely with single leadership

Good emphasis on example, respect and persuasion as key features of godly leadership

CON'S:

Rejection of executive decision/command authority

Mk. 10 does not forbid this; they reject using authority to exploit and use others rather than to serve them.

Prohistemi in 1 Thessalonians 5:12 is used in connection with command authority. See 1 Timothy 3:4,5, where Paul says that prospective elders must be able to "manage" their own households (including keeping their young children under control).

Hebrews 13:17 does indeed stress obedience to church leaders. *Peithw* coupled with *hupaiokw* indicates that actual obedience is called for (within proper bounds, of course). How can leaders give an account to God if they do not have authority? How can they watch over your souls if they don't have authority?

See Paul issuing commands to local churches on church discipline (1 Corinthians 5:4,5), sending workers (2 Timothy 4:12), criticizing workers for deserting (Acts 15:38; 2 Timothy 4:10). These statements imply that

Paul had command authority, and therefore that command authority in itself is not sub-Christian.

The idea that command authority is the law and that it inevitably produces resentment and rebellion is unbiblical. God exercises command authority as well as the grace resources to follow his commands.

Practically speaking, church leaders have to fire staff, create budgets, design ministry structures, etc. These matters require command authority.

While church leaders should rarely compel obedience, it is important that we have an ethic that disobedience to church leaders is wrong (unless they are acting unbiblically)!

Insistence on unanimous agreement by elders

Agreed that this is the goal and ideal, and that we evidently have biblical example of this in Acts 15:22. But there is no biblical command to operate this way.

Practically speaking, requiring unanimous agreement can stalemate a leadership team and prevent it from doing its job. Ornery or carnal elders can have *de facto* absolute authority by vetoing decisions. This may also create needless conflict and alienation, while on the other hand agreeing to a voting procedure can prevent this.

NEE

PRO'S:

Church leaders (like all delegated authorities) have command authority (p. 67).

It is a sin to wrongly disobey church authority (pp. 71,73).

It is appropriate to disobey delegated authorities that violate God's commands (pp. 74,109). Submission (respect) and obedience are not the same (pp. 107,108).

Good qualifiers for church authorities in pp. 116-121. Much of this material agrees with Stedman, and shows that Nee is not advocating tyranny.

CON'S:

Younger leaders should not necessarily obey older leaders (p. 67). This is not taught in the New Testament--in fact, Paul tells Timothy to act authoritatively even though he is leading people older than he (1 Tim. 5:1,2).

Women should not necessarily obey men in the church (p. 67). The passage he quotes (1 Corinthians 11:3) is about marriage, not the church in general. The two passages on women being silent in church (1 Corinthians 14:33-35; 1 Tim. 2:11-13) are situation-specific, not general.

James did not make the final decision in Acts 15 (p. 69). The text indicates that the leaders agreed.

Luke 10:16 refers to official ambassadorial authority--not to church leaders in general (p. 70).

Christians should be concerned with whether their leaders are right or wrong (p. 71). Just as leaders will give an account for how they led, we will give an account who we chose to follow. We will not be able to answer (as Nazi leaders did at Nuremberg), "We were just following orders!"

4. Unjustified disobedience to delegated authorities is disobedience to God.

Numbers 12,16 teaches this principle, as does **Romans 13:2**. Since it is God who commands our subordination to delegated authority, unjustified insubordination to them is insubordination to God himself.

Because of this, the statement "I have no problems with God's authority--just with man's authority" usually betrays either ignorance or a rebellious attitude.

5. Three limiting features for delegated authorities

- *The scope of the authority is limited to the area of the authority given to them by God.*

God does not require us to obey delegated authorities outside the legitimate sphere of their authority. This is why wives are urged to "be submissive to your *own* husbands" - not to all men (1 Peter 3:1; Ephesians 5:22). For the same reason, it is inappropriate for parents to tell their adult children who they must marry, or for civil authorities to tell their citizens what religious beliefs they must hold, or for church authorities to tell Christians what jobs they may take.

Within the area of given responsibility, the delegated authority has the need to make authoritative decisions (command authority when needed,) even in non-moral areas. Elders have authority to decide what structures the church will employ, what the requirements are for different positions in the church, what ministries to start and stop, what courses can be taught, how resources like money and man-power are deployed, etc. Although the Bible provides us with principles and priorities in these matters, most of these decisions are *judgment calls*. Who should make these decisions? The leaders should - and the others should be willing to abide by these decisions. Home group leaders can and should determine things like meeting time, ministry strategy, and who to recognize for areas of responsibility within the group. Many negative problems are avoided by positive and aggressive leadership.

- *Delegated authorities should not be autonomous.*

All delegated authorities are under God's authority. This is why when scripture addresses those under delegated authority, it also addresses those in delegated authority in the same passage and reminds them of their responsibilities before God.

This is also the scriptural basis for disobedience to delegated authorities--when such obedience would constitute disobedience to God (see **Acts 4:19,20; 5:29**).

- *God's design for all delegated authority is to serve.*

Even though God often permits wicked people to hold positions of delegated authority, the scripture condemns the abuse of that authority for the purpose of exploitation or oppression, and God will personally call them to account for their actions.

(Mark 10:41-45) And hearing this, the ten began to feel indignant with James and John. {42} And calling them to Himself, Jesus said to them, "You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them. {43} "But it is not so among you, but whoever wishes to

become great among you shall be your servant; {44} and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. {45} "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

(Romans 13:4) . . . for it (civil authority) is a minister (servant) of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath upon the one who practices evil.

6. Attitudes and actions for those under authority:

Learn to be a good follower! This is a lost value in our autonomous, self-willed culture. Good followership is viewed at best as a necessary evil to be endured only when necessary; at worst as a terrible sign of mindlessness and weakness. But God has a different view (Titus 3:1-6), and most of us come into the Body of Christ needing deep transformation of our thinking in this area.

Titus 3:1-6 Consider the following principles:

- **An attitude of submission (respect and the inclination to obey) is commanded regardless of the character of the delegated authority (1 Peter 2:18).** While our obedience (following commands) to a delegated authority is conditional, our submission (as it is defined above) should be unconditional. (Daniel and his friends submissive attitude even though they couldn't obey.)
- **Submission should be active--not passive.** We should seek out authority, and find ways to help them succeed in accomplishing their legitimate goals. (Checking with authority before starting new initiatives. Includes bringing up problems you foresee before they impact the church. Includes seeking out authority when we see that you won't be able to obey – Godly dissent.)
- **Whenever possible, we should be sure that we understand why we are being asked to do something by the delegated authority.** This is important because such understanding enables us to follow their instructions more enthusiastically, and to do so out of genuine obedience to God (see Ephesians 6:5,7; Colossians 3:22,23 - "as to the Lord" has this meaning).
(Ephesians 6:5,7) Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ; {7} With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men,
(Colossians 3:22-23) Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who merely please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. {23} Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men . . .
- **The burden of proof is on the one under authority to justify why he should not obey, not vice-versa.** Unless we are able to demonstrate from scripture that obedience to the delegated authority would constitute disobedience to God, we should obey.
- **When we cannot obey the command of a delegated authority because we believe this would constitute disobedience to God, we should seek for a constructive alternative which will fulfill the righteous desires of the delegated authority and also enable us to obey God (see Daniel 1:8-16 for an example of this).** In this

spirit, we can and should ask questions, make suggestions and even raise objections - so that we will be able to obey.

- **When disobedience to a delegated authority is necessary, we should do so respectfully, not rebelliously or maliciously.** We should also make it clear that we believe this action is necessary in order for us to be in obedience to God (see Acts 4:19,20; 5:29).

(Acts 4:19-20) But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; {20} for we cannot stop speaking what we have seen and heard."

(Acts 5:29) But Peter and the apostles answered and said, "We must obey God rather than men.

- **Within the church, dissent is different than rebellion or disobedience.** We may disagree with delegated authorities over issues, and yet remain in a submissive and obedient posture if we handle the disagreement properly.

Obviously, we will never agree with our leaders about everything, but most areas of disagreement are minor enough that we can simply go along with those who lead.

Some issues, however, are important enough that our conscience tells us that we need to take further measures. In these cases, the first thing to do would be to talk about the issue with those who are in authority (or those over you who have access to them).

Perhaps we will persuade them that our viewpoint is correct; perhaps they will persuade us. Either of these results would obviously end the dissent. If this action does not resolve the disagreement, we must decide how important the issue is.

If we think that we may be disobeying God or our conscience to follow the leadership, we should either:

- *Inform the leadership that we will be unable to obey and ask what they want to do, or*
- *Inform higher leadership of your dilemma and appeal for intervention, or*
- *Leave the group and find leadership which we can follow, making clear to the old leadership what our reasons are for withdrawing, or*
- *If we decide that the issue is one that, though important, does not violate our conscience, we should be able to serve with a good attitude toward the leadership, though in disagreement in a specific issue.*

In this case, we may declare ourselves to be loyal dissenters. A loyal dissenter is unwilling to remain quiet about his dissent, but also unwilling to leave. Such a posture is permissible, but often questionable. Such dissenters need to exercise special care to avoid division in the church. Their dissent must be shared only in helpful ways, and qualified carefully. Care must be taken to avoid construing or portraying other's positions unfairly. Leaders may call on dissenters to restrict their dissent in various ways.

Five Principles of Godly Leadership

Is it a sin to want to become an authoritative leader? Not necessarily (see **1 Tim. 3:1**)--God wants and needs many such people to lead his church! The key qualifier is that we must aspire to godly leadership.

Consider the following biblical principles for godly and authoritative church leadership:

1. *Model godly behavior, values, and attitudes.* See **1 Timothy 4:12; 2 Timothy 2:20,21.**

Never underestimate the power of your example! This includes:

Serving others within the group. Do you have a reputation of one who loves the people in the home group, showing up at meetings in the Spirit and ready to serve, initiating with people, etc.? Do you make sacrifices in your life to lead, evangelize, disciple, etc. (EG. schedule, finances, career advancement, etc.).

Willingly following the authorities above you. Do the people in your home group hear you advocate and defend church leadership's directions? Or do you grouse and complain and cynically talk about "they" and "them?" Do you make it hard or a joy for those who oversee you?

Humility about our own opinions and need for growth. Do you clearly distinguish between what the Bible says and your opinions? Do you talk openly about your own besetting sins? When you make mistakes or wrongly offend, are you quick to take responsibility and apologize?

2. *Teach scripture and persuade through biblical principles, priorities, and example.* See **1 Timothy 4:13; 2 Timothy 4:2. We should not only teach what the Bible says, but also foster the ethic that we should follow what the Bible says.**

Try to point people back to God's perspective through use of scripture, and call on them to think through the same. In disputes about direction, call on yourself and others to try to find God's perspective, not argue from personal power and opinion.

As leaders we miss an opportunity to help our group develop leadership-thinking (and vision for leadership) if we don't include them in the process of how and why decisions are made. In other words, we should be leading people to see the connection between our decisions about structures, meeting format, etc. are to facilitate the Great Commission.

3. *Provide direction and vision for the people under your leadership.* **John 10 - Like a good shepherd, good leaders lead--they are out ahead of the flock, charting a course to the goal!**

Be proactive and initiate; don't just react to problems or people's requests. Be *transformational* (calling people to growth), *not transactional* (reading what people want and dishing it up to them) or *managerial* (applying our leadership by pointing out behavior/attitude problems or define leadership by managing the structures/events that are part of group life).

4. *Work toward consensus on extra-biblical issues within your sphere of authority when possible.* See **2 Corinthians 2:6 for an example of this in church discipline. See **Acts 15:4-29** for an example of this on an important doctrinal and strategic matter (circumcision).**

Most decisions can and should be arrived at by consensus between the leaders, then persuading the other workers, then calling the rest of the home group to respond (EXAMPLES: PLANT PLAN & TIMING; MEETING SCHEDULES & FORMAT). This increases ownership of the decision and motivation to carry it out. Most church

leadership decisions can be made this way. (See the paper on [Decision Making](#) for practical guidance on how to accomplish this.) When it can't – see the next point.

5. *Exercise command authority on extra-biblical issues within your sphere of authority only when necessary. See 1 Corinthians 5:3-5 and 1 Timothy 1:20 for examples of this in church discipline.*

A godly leader must not be self-willed, pulling rank on minor issues for whatever pleases him. Usually it is better to defer in these matters, saving your insistence for matters of greater importance.

On the other hand, a godly leader must be prepared to "grasp the nettle" and make a difficult decision on important matters--even if everyone else disagrees with him (EXAMPLES: NO SINGING AT HC; TERMINATING A SACRED COW MINISTRY; CALLING TO PLANT IN A TRIBAL HC, see 3rd Servant Team teaching from 2002 retreat for more on this).

Memory Verses

Mark 10:40-45**

Hebrews 13:17*

Assignment

Study for Quiz

Key Points to Know for Exam

1. Be able to explain three limiting features for delegated authorities.
2. Be able to explain three of the seven essential attitudes and actions for those under authority.