

# AUTHORITY

## WEEK 5: AUTHORITY AND THE CHURCH

### INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

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- In this series we will be discussing the uses and abuses of authority in the realms of government, church, family, and education. God has given his creation, since before the fall, various areas of authority. God is a God of order, not chaos. By design, there are authorities placed over every creature. From infants to kings, all people must understand godly living under authority. This course will not be based on political leanings, philosophy, or opinions, so please bring your Bibles. We want to understand God's Word on authority.
- Humanity understands chaos in these areas where God has given order. There is instability, chaos, and lost blessing when there is no authority, abused authority, or insubordination in our world. Just ask a country in civil war, a child in a fatherless home, a parent of a stubborn child, or a middle manager with lazy workers and a difficult supervisor.
- God perfectly planned these authority structures in our life, provided the instruction of how we should lead and follow, but also empowered us to faithfully do so.
- There should be a plethora of implications for life for everyone regarding children, parents, schools, government, workplace, governments, church, and even your HOA, but most of all, we should gain a larger view to the supremacy of God in every sphere of our life.
- **Class Schedule:**
  - January 11: Introduction and God's Authority
  - January 18: Authority and the Government
  - January 25: Authority and the Government, Part 2
  - February 1: Authority and the Family
  - **February 8: Authority and the Church**
  - February 15: Authority and Education and the Workplace

### DISCUSSION

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- Where is the authority in the church? The people? The leaders? Scripture? The Church Constitution? The Senior Pastor? Shared authority?
- What are the dangers of giving authority to the wrong people?
- Can a father prevent another person in the church from taking communion?
- Can a civil magistrate prevent baptisms in a service?
- Can an elder tell a family not to have a third child or forbid a vacation?
- Can the church leadership punish someone who steals in their church?
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## GOD'S AUTHORITY DELEGATED TO THE CHURCH

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- As we have discussed in previous weeks, there is only one authority with all other authority delegated.
- God rules and all rule on earth is under his sovereign rule and reign.

Romans 13:1 ~ **For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.**

- Just as God has given the rod to the family, a sword to the government, he has given a shepherd's staff to the church.
- “When a sheep goes astray or creates a division in the flock, a pastor must use the hook on his staff too lovingly but firmly pull that sheep back into the safety and fellowship of the fold. He must do so gently come and do so in love, and do so according to the written word of Christ, the Great Shepherd. But he *must* do so. Christ commands and requires it.”<sup>1</sup>

### **Jesus is the Head of the Church, the Supreme Authority:**

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Colossians 1:18 ~ **He is also head of the body, the church;**

Ephesians 4:15 ~ **but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, even Christ**

Matthew 28:18-20 ~ **And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. <sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”**

### **Submission to Christ is expected:**

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John 14:15 ~ **If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.** (Cf. John 14:21, 23; 15:10; 1 John 5:3)

2 John 6 ~ **And this is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, that you should walk in it.**

### **Christ has given the church godly leaders:**

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Ephesians 4:11 ~ **And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers,** (*Ephesians 2:20 describes the first set as foundation-laying roles*)

1 Peter 5:2 ~ **shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to *the will of God*;**

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<sup>1</sup> Bret Laird, *Family Government, and Church*, 58. By design God has inserted checks and balances into this plan for the care and protection against evil in the family, government, and the church.

Christians are to submit to the God ordained leaders in the church:

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 Corinthians 16:15-16 ~ 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), <sup>16</sup> that **you also be in subjection to such men and to everyone who helps in the work and labors**.

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, <sup>13</sup> 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**.

### Christians are to imitate leaders in the church:

1 Thessalonians 1:6 ~ You also **became imitators of us** and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit,

Hebrews 13:7 ~ Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, **imitate their faith**.

1 Peter 5:3 ~ **but proving to be examples** to the flock.

1 Timothy 4:12 ~ **show yourself an example** of those who believe.

Titus 2:7-8 ~ in all things **show yourself to be an example** of good deeds, *with* purity in doctrine, dignified, <sup>8</sup>sound *in* speech which is beyond reproach, so that the opponent will be put to shame, having nothing bad to say about us.

### THE UNDER-SHEPHERDS AND THE SHEEP IN 1 PETER 5:1-5

1 Peter 5:1-5 ~ Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as *your* fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, <sup>2</sup> shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to *the will of God*; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; <sup>3</sup> nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. <sup>4</sup> And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. <sup>5</sup> 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.

The nature of authority in the church is serious

- Elders/Overseers... they must shepherd (pastor) according to the high calling that is given to elders. They will be held accountable for the sheep (Hebrews 13:17) and the household of God receives persecution and judgements first, often with the leaders taking the first hit.<sup>2</sup>

#### The leaders of the church are given delegated responsibility

- The flock is God's
- The task is according to God's will
- The leader's example is humble, under the leadership of the Chief Shepherd
- The sheep are allotted to their charge (*portion* of the church) until the appearance of Christ.
- The shepherd is feeding Christ's sheep (John 21:15)

#### The shepherd is also a sheep

- Not under compulsion
- Not for sordid gain
- Not lording it over those allotted to your charge.

#### The Shepherd takes great care of the sheep

- Overseeing them
- Willingly volunteering to serve them
- Serving by God's standards
- Eagerly caring
- Exemplifying to the flock (shepherds lead out front, cowboys push from behind).
- Holy character, humble character (1 Peter 1:14-17).

#### The Shepherd is honored on That Day

- Jesus is the great shepherd of the sheep (Hebrews 13:20)
- The chief shepherd will grant under-shepherds a crown of glory. This is a promise and an honor.
- The glory/honor awaiting under-shepherds is unfading.
- Christ will "bestow on them heavenly honor and glory. All elders are to keep their eyes steadfastly fixed on his appearing, for reward day is coming."<sup>3</sup>
- We do not know what the reward is, but we know when it will be given and who gives it and who receives it and the surpassing value of this honor.

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<sup>2</sup> Rick Holland, "The Shepherd and His Flock," in *The Shepherd as Leader*, John MacArthur, 117.

<sup>3</sup> Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 251.

## LIMITATIONS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

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- They are given authority to teach “these things” and “let no one disregard YOU” but their authority and power are limited.

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

### **Elders are not alone in leading: Humble Plurality**

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- “The Bible places the government of a congregation into the hands of a group of elders who rule in a joint capacity. Since the elders rule collectively, no single individual makes the binding decision of a church.”<sup>4</sup>
- Elders are also accompanied by qualified deacons who serve the church.

### **Their leadership is according to God’s standard, not their own (1 Pet. 5:3).**

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- “All legitimate religious authority is derived from Christ; thus, the true believer should not heed the authority of any ecclesiastical government which is not subject to Christ’s word.”<sup>5</sup>
- They are to be able to manage the household of God (1 Timothy 3:4-5):

1 Timothy 3:15 ~ **but in case I am delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.**

- They are faithful in leadership according to their character first, not their oversight (1 Timothy 3, Titus 1). “Able to teach” and “oversight” are required, but in all things, they are to be “above reproach.”

### **There are means to discipline a man out of leadership.**

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1 Timothy 5:19-20 ~ **Do not receive an accusation against an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses.** <sup>20</sup> **Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also will be fearful of sinning.**

- There is a built-in safeguard here: One accusation cannot instantly remove a spiritual leader. One opinion cannot be the standard of judgment against the leadership of the church.
- “We must judge our traditions, regulations, and our structuring of churches and works in the light of Scripture alone.... Yet we must not allow our individual examination of biblical Truth to become a pretext for refusing the authority of the ministers of the church and thus attempting to live according to the dictates of the flesh. This would be nothing more than an ideological veil created to cover the unsubmitive will still present in the believer, rejecting the authorities established by God for His church. Anti-ecclesiastical individualism thus must be rejected.”<sup>6</sup>
- Authority even in the church has limits, defined by God’s Word.

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<sup>4</sup> Kevin Reed, *Biblical Church Government*, 14.

<sup>5</sup> Kevin Reed, *Biblical Church Government*, 39.

<sup>6</sup> Jean-Marc Berthoud, *Authority in the Christian Life*, 81-82.

- In Peter’s case, another apostle needed to exhort him in regard to his hypocrisy. Elders can confront elders as well. They are sheep too.

Galatians 2:11 ~ **But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned.**

### **There is a warning not to appoint leaders too quickly.**

1 Timothy 5:21-22 ~ I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of *His* chosen angels, to maintain these *principles without bias*, doing nothing in a *spirit of partiality*. <sup>22</sup> **Do not lay hands upon anyone too hastily** and thereby share *responsibility for* the sins of others; keep yourself free from sin.

### **There is ultimate accountability before God.**

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.

### **There are false shepherds, abusive shepherds, and pretentious shepherds.**

- If a leader exploits his position, he can rightly be deemed a false teacher ([2 Peter 2:3](#)) and should be avoided ([Romans 16:17–18](#)).<sup>7</sup>

2 Peter 2:2-3 ~ **Many will follow their sensuality**, and because of them **the way of the truth will be maligned**; and in *their* greed they will **exploit you with false words**; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.

Romans 16:17-18 ~ Now I urge you, brethren, **keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances** contrary to the teaching which you learned, and **turn away from them**.

18For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech **they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting**.

“To summarize, we are called to pray, support, submit and appeal to our spiritual authorities... Likewise, our spiritual authorities- pastors and elders- should pray for us, teach us, protect us and correct us as we need it.”<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> “What does it mean to submit to authority (Hebrews 13:17)?”, <https://www.gotquestions.org/submit-to-authority.html>

<sup>8</sup> Larry Kreider, *Authority and Accountability*, 24.

## SPIRITUAL ABUSE IN THE CHURCH

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- Cults and prosperity gospel, faith healings
- False Teachers such as Benny Hinn, Joyce Meyer, Joel Osteen, TD Jakes, Paula White, Kenneth Copleand, Steven Furtick, etc.
- Personal attacks against known issues or people from the pulpit
- Public shaming or show for selfish gain (Luke 22:26)
- Protection of legal accusations and a lack of transparency or repentance
- Arrogance, pride, and self-promotion (Mark Driscoll). Matthew 6:1-2, 5, 16
- Will not submit to other elders like Diotrephes (3 John 9-10)
- Dictatorial Pastors who abuse their power or treat people poorly.
- Elder Boards with unqualified elders
- Elder Boards with unqualified elders who lord it over **and** weak elders who do not able to rebuke those who contradict sound doctrine!
- Some key signs:<sup>9</sup>
  - Abused people are forced out.
  - Abuse is minimized as “conflict.”
  - Abuse is managed in committees.
  - Abusers do not abuse everyone- they are selective and have loyal defenders.
  - Abusive leaders attempt to flip the script by accusing their victims of slander and attacking their character, rather than taking responsibility for their own harmful actions.

“In general, you should be leery of joining a church where the leaders **play favorites, punish those who disagree, have a temper, use the silent treatment, must always have the last word, cannot be wrong, emphasize external conformity, are consistently dogmatic on both the big and small issues, seldom if ever admit they are wrong, have difficulty giving authority to others, only promote their closest friends or family members, and generally need control.** You can probably think of more yellow flags. You might even look for a few in yourself.”<sup>10</sup>

### Diluted words

- We must allow serious words to retain their serious meaning. Abuse is abuse if it betrays the Word of God, not simply because of hurt feelings.
- “Abuse,” “toxicity,” “trauma,” “violence,” and adjectives such as “ignorant,” “controlling,” “manipulative,” “apathetic,” “dangerous,” or “dictatorial” lack patience and integrous communication.
- “We mustn’t conflate ordinary sins and relationship trouble with true trauma and abuse, precisely because *we care about ending real abuse.*”<sup>11</sup>
- Another note of caution: In the case of a church leader who sins, they may also be truly humble (and human), and we ought to grant them the grace to repent and seek forgiveness.

<sup>9</sup> Michael Kruger, “Key Signs of an Abusive Pastor”, <https://michaeljkruger.com/key-signs-of-an-abusive-pastor-1-a-long-track-record-of-broken-relationships/> . See also his e-book entitled *Bully Pastor*, <https://refugefromabuse.weebly.com/uploads/1/4/9/8/149891263/bullyp-1.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Jonathan Leeman, “Why Church Discipline Goes Awry—and How to Avoid It”, <https://www.9marks.org/article/why-church-discipline-goes-awry-and-how-to-avoid-it/>

<sup>11</sup> Trevin Wax, “If You Care about Spiritual Abuse, Watch Your Language,” <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/spiritual-abuse-watch-language/>