



GREAT COMMISSION LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

COMMITMENT TO GOD AND HIS WORD

**God-Honoring Authority**

As believers in Jesus Christ, we recognize that He alone is our King, our Lord, our authority. We also recognize that Jesus Christ has chosen for us to respect, honor, and obey the authorities that He has put in our lives. The following article by Dave Bovenmyer addresses this very significant topic of God-honoring authority.



## God-Honoring Authority

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American culture seems confused about the need for and place of authority. Over the last quarter century, a steady stream of foreign policy failures, presidential scandals, and corporate abuses has left an entire generation skeptical of authority. As society becomes more open about abuses of authority in families, government, the corporate world, and even the church, our skepticism of authority can seem justified. We can easily begin to question the purpose and usefulness of traditional authority structures.

Yet, as Christians, we are not simply concerned with such abuses; we see a deeper root issue. Every aspect of our world's tragic condition is rooted in the rejection of God's authority. In the garden, Adam and Eve were the first to rebel against authority. Their rebellion and the subsequent rebellion of each of their descendants have alienated man from God and have deeply damaged all human relationships. Even those who use their authority abusively are themselves rebelling against God's authority and command.

The Bible has much to say about authority—the authority of God, the authority of the Scripture, and human authority. In this paper we will primarily focus on what the Bible says about human authority. Because of limits in length, this will only be an introduction to the subject of human authority. Many of the more complex issues will not be adequately addressed. On some points, more questions may be stimulated than answered. Yet practical wisdom for specific questions and situations begins with an overview of God's perspective of an issue, a perspective that this paper will seek to provide. Other Great Commission materials, including other portions of the Great Commission Leadership Institute, help to flesh out how authority is to work in the family, church, and world.

### 1. What is authority and where does it come from?

Authority, as expressed by the Greek word *exousia*, denotes “the right or power to rule and command another...the right to exercise power...or the power of rule or government...the power of one whose will and commands must be obeyed by others.”

As Creator of all, God alone possesses the intrinsic right and sovereign power to expect obedience and enforce compliance:

*“...He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords” (1 Timothy 6:15).*

Yet scripture indicates that He has delegated some of His authority over creation to mankind:

*“Authority exercised with humility, and obedience accepted with delight are the very lines along which our spirits live.”*

*-C.S. Lewis*

***“The authority by which the Christian leader leads is not power but love, not force but example, not coercion but reasoned persuasion. Leaders have power, but power is safe only in the hands of those who humble themselves to serve.”***

***-John Stott***

*“...fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (Genesis 1:28).*

Thus God has given man responsibility to care for His earth and the creatures upon it:

*“The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it (Genesis 2:15, NIV).*

In addition to this responsibility to rule and care for the earth, God has also given some people positions of authority in various spheres of relationship with others:

- **Government**—Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God (Romans 13:1).
- **Church leaders**—*“Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account...”*(Hebrews 13:17).
- **Husbands**— *“Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 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. But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything”* (Ephesians 5:22-24).
- **Parents**— *“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother (which is the first commandment with a promise), so that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth”* (Ephesians 6:1-3).
- **Masters and, by application, employers**— *“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”* (Ephesians 6:5).

Understanding that all human authority is delegated to man by God profoundly affects our understanding of authority. First, receiving a position of authority involves accepting a stewardship—the responsibility to care for what belongs to another. Second, authority is limited in scope and limited in the right to enforce compliance—God ultimately maintains the right to command. Third, authority must be used to fulfill God’s good purposes in the world—to love and to care for that which He has entrusted to us. Fourth, all human authorities will give an account for their stewardship—God retains the ultimate right to judge.

In summary, a helpful definition of human authority might be: “The God-given right, responsibility, and power to care for and direct others, for their good and to fulfill the good purposes of God.”

## 2. What is the purpose of authority and why is it needed?

The purpose of authority may be rooted in the very nature of relationship itself. Since creation reflects the Creator, human relationships were designed to reflect the relationship that has eternally existed within the Godhead. Amazingly, the Divine Relationship, perfect in love and goodness, is expressed through interdependent roles of authority and submission. We get a glimpse of this love between Father (setting the direction) and Son (following the Father's direction) in Jesus' earthly life.

*"... that the world may know that I love the Father, I do exactly as the Father commanded Me..." (John 14:31).*

*"...I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does..." (John 5:19-20, NIV).*

*"And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased'" (Matthew 3:17, NIV).*

*"He went away again a second time and prayed, saying, 'My Father, if this cannot pass away unless I drink it, Your will be done'" (Matthew 26:42).*

Furthermore, this Father-Son relationship, with its love, leadership, and submission, is not a temporary characteristic of the Trinity during the time of Christ's humiliation and suffering but will continue throughout all eternity.

*"When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, so that God may be all in all" (1 Corinthians 15:28).*

When God created the first man and woman, He decreed that the two should become one (Genesis 2:24), thus reflecting in them His own plural "Us" nature as well as His essential oneness.

*"Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness...God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them'" (Genesis 1:26-27).*

When Paul wrote about the relationship between men and women in marriage, he advocated the same sort of relational interdependence of authority and submission as is present in the Trinity.

*"But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:3).*

Paul bases his teaching about the differing roles of men and women on God's plan in creation, prior to sin entering the world:

*"For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man; for indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake" (1 Corinthians 11:8-9).*

***"Until the will and the affections are brought under the authority of Christ, we have not begun to understand, let alone to accept, His lordship."***

***-Elisabeth Elliot***

*“God built into the creation a variety of cultural spheres, such as the family, economics, politics, art, and intellectual inquiry. Each of these spheres has its own proper “business” and needs its own unique pattern of authority. When we confuse spheres, by violating the proper boundaries of church and state, for instance, or reducing the academic life to a business enterprise, we transgress the patterns that God has set.”*

*Abraham Kuyper*

*A woman must quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet. For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve (1 Timothy 2:11-13).*

From this we see that righteous, loving authority and respectful, obedient submission were not instituted as part of the judgment of the curse nor were they a necessary evil or an accommodation to the sinfulness of man. Rather, they were present before the fall of man, both in the first marriage and in the Triune God Himself.

In summary, we can conclude that God’s purpose for authority is two-fold. First, it is a delegated stewardship, a responsibility to bring about the good will of God in some area. Secondly, and perhaps more fundamentally, authority and submission seem to be part of God’s pattern for relationship. In His nature and plan, the greatest possible love seems to be expressed as one person sacrifices himself to take responsibility for another’s welfare (loving, leading, directing, protecting, bringing to good) and a second person sacrifices himself to unite with the purpose of another (respecting, following, submitting). When these are practiced according to God’s plan, God’s good purposes are accomplished and love and relationship are enhanced.

### **3. What responsibility and accountability come with authority?**

Since God is a lover who delights in His creation and since He has given those who rule a stewardship over what He has made, those in authority have a God-given responsibility—to love and care and lead in accordance with God’s good purposes. Those in authority will give an account to Him for how well they do so.

Thus civil authorities are ministers “of God to do you good.” (Romans 13:4). Church overseers are to “shepherd (care for) the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.” Fathers are to train and instruct their children, for their good (Ephesians 6:4). Mothers are to love their children (Titus 2:4). Husbands are to lay down their lives to nourish and cherish their wives (Ephesians 5:25, 29). All in positions of authority are to use their position of strength and power to love and care for those they lead.

Because authority comes with the right to direct and perhaps even use force, God is particularly angry with those who use their authority to exploit others or selfishly benefit themselves. Such will incur the wrath and judgment of God, as Israel’s civil and religious leaders did when they exploited the flock and did not shepherd it.

*“Thus says the Lord God, ‘Woe, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flock?... Those who are sickly you have not strengthened, the diseased you have not healed, the broken you have not bound up, the scattered you have not brought back, nor have you sought for the lost; but with force and with severity you have dominated them.’”* “They were

*scattered for lack of a shepherd, and they became food for every beast of the field and were scattered (Ezekiel 34:4-5).*

Similarly, God warns that He will destroy those teachers and leaders who destroy His church (temple).

*“Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are” (1 Corinthians 3:16-17).*

For this reason, those who accept the responsibility of care and leadership ought to soberly evaluate their willingness and readiness to do so.

*“Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment” (James 3:1).*

#### **4. How does authority in God’s kingdom differ from authority in the world?**

Jesus sharply contrasted how authority is exercised in the world and God’s requirement within the kingdom.

*And He said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who have authority over them are called ‘Benefactors.’” But it is not this way with you, but the one who is the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the servant. “For who is greater, the one who reclines at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at the table? But I am among you as the one who serves (Luke 22:25-27).*

In His contrast, Jesus does not negate authority in the kingdom, nor does He lessen the power or diminish the position of those in authority. Rather He commands those in authority to adopt a different goal and attitude. The world’s leaders tend to disregard the responsibility to love and care and to use their authority for personal gain—to feed their ego, to seek security, or to gain a life of pleasure and ease. They pursue these selfish ends while demanding that people enhance their reputation by calling them “Benefactors.” Leaders in the kingdom are forbidden to use their position for such selfish ends, but rather must love, give, and serve. Jesus requires them to be the greatest servants of all—with fewer rights, more responsibility, and a greater obligation to sacrifice. Jesus demonstrated this attitude Himself. Authority in the kingdom, although no less powerful or compelling than in the world, must be used for the good and blessing of others and for the purposes of God and never for selfish ends.

#### **5. What other benefits and blessings come from authority?**

The Biblical often uses the analogy of a shepherd in regard to both civil and religious leaders. Since sheep without a shepherd are entirely helpless against predators, this analogy emphasizes the need for leaders to protect those they lead. Often, a group’s enemies will target its leaders for this very reason, knowing that if the leaders are neutralized, followers are vulnerable and defenseless.

***“Our first remark on this subject is that the ministry is an office, and not merely a work. Our second remark is, that the office is of divine appointment, not merely in the sense in which the civil powers are ordained of God, but in the sense that ministers derive their authority from Christ, and not from the people.”***

***-Charles Hodge***



***“He has right to interrupt your life. He is Lord. When you accepted Him as Lord, you gave Him, the right to help Himself to your life anytime He wants.”***

***-Henry Blackaby***

*“...Strike the Shepherd that the sheep may be scattered; And I will turn My hand against the little ones” (Zechariah 13:7).*

*“But no one can enter the strong man’s house and plunder his property unless he first binds the strong man, and then he will plunder his house” (Mark 3:27).*

The enemy of our souls targets leaders, seeking to make them fall or to undermine their authority so that he can destroy the “little ones.” How many churches have been decimated by immorality in the church’s leadership? How many families have been torn apart when the father turns to alcohol or immorality? First of all, leaders must watch themselves, both for their own sakes and for the sake of those they are charged to protect. And those under authority must not rebel against or remove themselves from human authority, or they will lose a major means of God’s protection, becoming vulnerable to the devil’s schemes.

God spoke to King David about the blessing of righteous leadership, inspiring him to rule in the fear of God for the sake of his people:

*“The God of Israel said, The Rock of Israel spoke to me,  
He who rules over men righteously,  
Who rules in the fear of God,  
Is as the light of the morning when the sun rises,  
A morning without clouds,  
When the tender grass springs out of the earth,  
Through sunshine after rain’ (2 Samuel 23:3-4).*

Just as with the civil authority that David was wielding, righteous and God-fearing leadership in any realm of authority brings great blessing. The guiding, protecting power of a wise and loving father cannot be overestimated. The security and joy gained by a wife through a strong and caring husband is life-giving. The relational peace produced by humble, God-fearing leadership in a business or church is beautiful and catalytic to progress and success. On the other hand, little can be more destructive than the selfish, oppressive, or demeaning use of authority to a child, wife, employee, citizen, or church member.

## **6. How has the fall of man affected the arena of human authority?**

When Adam and Eve sinned, human nature fell from its original state of perfection. Central to human corruption is a sense of pride, independence, and rebellion against our Creator’s authority. This inner corruption increases the need for human authority. For example, early civilization rapidly turned to evil and violence (Genesis 6:5), prompting God to destroy the world with a flood. After the flood, God strengthened civil authority by instituting the death penalty (Genesis 9:5-6), apparently to better restrain and punish human wickedness. The Apostle Paul writes that one purpose of civil authority is to restrain evil and promote good:

*“For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; for it is a minister 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 on the one who practices evil” (Romans 13:3-4).*

Just as the fall of man increased the need for authority, it also increased the potential for sinful men to abuse authority. History is replete with kings, churchmen, employers, husbands, fathers, and mothers who used their authority to exploit, control, and demean others. Such abuse tends to make us suspicious and skeptical of authority, and understandably so. Yet the problem is not with authority, per se, but with selfish, abusive authority. One of God’s purposes for authority is to promote love, order, and harmony in this fallen world.

***“He who makes himself his own master subjects himself to a fool for a master.”***

***-Bernard of Clairvaux***

### **7. How does authority relate to leadership and competency?**

Clearly, the exercise of authority is a type of leadership. Yet if authority is “the God-given right, responsibility, and power to care for and direct others...” then authority is more than leadership. It also involves a right, a responsibility, and a power—the right to direct others, the responsibility to care, and the power to enforce. We may choose to follow a leader or imitate a leader’s example, yet not be under that leader’s authority. For example, a wife may choose to follow the leadership of an older woman whom she views as an example, yet not be under that woman’s authority, but rather under the authority of her husband. A child may benefit by following the example and leadership of an older youth, yet not be under that youth’s authority, but rather that of his parents. There are many people whose leadership we can follow for our good and the good of others, yet those leaders may not have the right, responsibility and power to rule and direct us.

Similarly, competency does not automatically give a person the “right, responsibility and power to care for and direct others”—although, in another sense of the word, we may call a person of great expertise and competence an “authority” on the matter. When someone has great wisdom, we are wise when we submit ourselves to their knowledge and direction. Yet the fact that the husband down the street might be kinder, wiser, and more loving than your husband does not put you under his authority rather than your husband’s. The fact that the pastor on the radio might be a better speaker and theologian than your pastors does not place you under his spiritual authority. Authority is more than wisdom or competence; it involves the God-given right, responsibility, and power to care for and direct another.

### **8. How is an authority granted his position of authority?**

As we have seen, all authority comes from God. Yet we enter authority relationships either by birth or by covenant. Children are under the authority of their parents because they were born to those parents. Most citizens are under the authority of their government because they were born in that country. Yet other authority is granted through covenants and agreements. A husband’s authority is granted through the covenant relationship of marriage. An employer’s authority is granted through an employment agreement or contract. The leader of a volunteer organization derives his authority through the agreement of his volunteers to serve that organization. A pastor’s authority is primarily granted through a parishioner’s agreement to be a member of that church. Yet spiritual birth may sometimes be an aspect of pastoral authority, as we see in Paul’s appeal to the Corinthians, “For if you



***“Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.”***

***-Romans 13:1***

*were to have countless tutors in Christ, yet you would not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel” (1 Corinthians 4:15).*

## **9. What are the spheres of human authority and how do they differ?**

God has ordered human relationships by establishing five spheres of authority: government, church, husband, parent, and master/employer. Every legitimate human authority relationship seems to fall, at least loosely, within one of these five God-instituted relationships.

Yet the way authority is best exercised in each relationship may be quite different. For example, consider the authority of a parent. Because young children have not yet developed mentally, socially, emotionally, and physically, parental leadership needs to be more directive, constant, and intrusive than an adult authority relationship. When a parent fails to recognize the need for such constant leadership and care, terrible things can happen, such as a child being run over by a car, burned in a fire, or drowned in a pool. But the same constancy, directness, and intensity in a husband's leadership of his wife would be demeaning, authoritative, controlling, demanding, and resented.

Also, the exercise of authority may be very different even within the same relationship, depending upon the situation at hand. Governmental authority as seen in the military in time of war is much more intense, directive, and absolute than the authority of, say, a mayor in times of peace. Were a mayor to use the same approaches with his staff at city hall as a drill sergeant does with his platoon, he would be considered demeaning, arrogant, and obnoxious. Certainly he would not be re-elected. We understand that a sergeant's abrupt and dictatorial use of authority in combat is appropriate, since the lives of many people may depend on his unit's ability to quickly and cohesively engage in the appropriate action. Yet in times of peace, such an approach in any branch of government would be wholly inappropriate.

Even a husband's or father's authority may, in an emergency, be more like a drill sergeant than a tender, loving husband. He may need to speak to his wife or children in unusually abrupt and urgent ways, perhaps even yelling at them, if the house is on fire or a thief breaks in or a tornado or flood is imminent. Such situations demand immediate and decisive action for survival, and the leadership of the authority needs to look different than when there is plenty of time to quietly discuss possible courses of action and to use language that is sensitive and gentle.

In general, authority should be tailored to the needs, maturity, and character of those being led. Thus in a nation with a relatively moral, god-fearing culture, citizens will govern themselves more than in a godless nation. God-fearing people require less intrusive government, tending to respect the rights of their fellow citizens, to pay their taxes, and to preserve the peace. Similarly, parents might allow their teenager more freedom as he demonstrates responsible, trustworthy character. The need for intrusive leadership and authority decreases as the teen demonstrates that he is becoming a mature adult.

Finally, the extent of power differs with different authorities. As direct and intensive as parental authority is, parents do not have the authority to inflict the death penalty. Even in Israel's theocracy, parents were required to submit to governmental authority and not administer the death penalty inde-

pendently (Deuteronomy 21:18-21). Biblically, the authority to inflict capital punishment seems to be reserved to the government alone. Parents have the power of corporal punishment and can rely extensively upon it, yet physical punishment is largely inappropriate in relationships of authority in adults. In some way, authority is shaped and influenced by the extent of power appropriate for that relationship. Remembering the goal of authority—caring for those God loves according to His plan—will help instruct us concerning the appropriate ways to use authority in various situations.

*“The greatness of a man’s power is the measure of his surrender.”*

*-William Booth*

### **10. How does authority relate to the rights, freedom, and dignity of individuals?**

Since human authority is delegated by God, it is limited in its scope and limited in its right to enforce compliance. Those in positions of authority must recognize that God has granted certain rights to individuals. For example, the right to possess private property is founded in the commandment “You shall not steal.” This prohibition applies to civil authorities as much as to individuals. God has given individuals the right to possess and rule over that which belongs to them and to use what is theirs as they please (as long as it doesn’t violate the rights of others or the law of God). Thus the prophet Micah appealed to a familiar theme in Israel:

*“Every man will sit under his own vine and under his own fig tree, and no one will make them afraid, for the Lord Almighty has spoken” (Micah 4:4, NIV).*

Second, since God’s purpose for authority is love, care, and the fulfillment of His good purposes, leaders should seek to help individuals achieve the significance and potential that God desires for them. Leaders must recognize that those they lead are created in God’s image and have great dignity, worth, and potential. Therefore leaders should encourage individuals to express their God-given uniqueness, perspectives, talents, and gifts. As individuals flourish, God’s purposes are fulfilled and His kingdom is advanced. Although individual preference is not supreme—the good of the whole and the will of God are paramount—we must acknowledge that individual creativity and expression are important and glorify God.

Adam is an example of a human authority who recognized the God-given dignity in the one he led. God created Adam first and gave him authority to rule over the earth.

Then God brought various creatures to Adam to assess their usefulness, yet Adam found none to be a suitable helper. But when God created Eve from Adam’s side, he instantly knew that she was different—“bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh”—she was his equal. However, he also understood that she was created to be his helper, and he exercised his authority to name her, just as he had the other creatures.

So it is that a husband must treat his wife with dignity and respect as an equal before God, yet as an equal that he has responsibility for—to love, protect, and lead. Peter instructs husbands to treat their wives as equals—as partners and fellow-heirs.

***“In the total  
expanse of human  
life there is not  
a single square  
inch of which  
the Christ, who  
alone is sovereign,  
does not declare,  
‘That is mine!’”***

***-Abraham Kuyper***

*“Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers” (1 Peter 3:7, NIV).*

In this verse, Peter appeals to a type of equality that goes even beyond basic human dignity. Wives are fellow-heirs and therefore deserve respect as kingdom partners. So, all believers—male and female, young and old, rich and poor—are sons of God and priests in the kingdom.

*“For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:26).*

*“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).*

*“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;” (1 Peter 2:9).*

In other passages, both Peter and Paul affirm the need for human authority structures within the Christian home, church, and community (Ephesians 5:22-6:9, 1 Peter 2:13-3:7). Yet the fact that every believer is a priest and son of God and the fact that we are all one in Christ Jesus ought to shape and inform the use of authority in the kingdom. Christian leaders are not leading people inferior to themselves, but equals and fellow-heirs of the kingdom, who also have access to God and a relationship with Him.

Within the church, pastors should not exalt themselves above those they lead, but must place themselves on a level of equality.

*“And do not call anyone on earth ‘father,’ for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. Nor are you to be called ‘teacher,’ for you have one Teacher, the Christ. The greatest among you will be your servant. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted” (Matthew 23:9-12, NIV).*

Jesus mandates that church leaders lead with humility and recognize that those they lead are their equals—brothers and sisters in the family of God.

Even parents must recognize the dignity and worth of their children, as Jesus affirmed, commanding that the children be brought to him and affirming their God-given dignity and equality as fellow-heirs of the kingdom.

*“And they were bringing children to Him so that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw this, He was indignant and said to them, “Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these” (Mark 10:13-14).*

## 11. How should authority and relationship work together?

In modern, technological societies, authority tends to be detached and impersonal. No longer is the policeman known personally by the members of the community, nor does he personally know most of those he serves. Political leaders tend to be distant and detached. It is difficult, if not impossible, for pastors of larger churches to personally know all their church members. Although personal knowledge between an authority and people under authority is not always possible, it should be acknowledged that authority and submission tend to work best when there is personal knowledge of one another. An authority's ability to love and care will often depend upon his knowledge of the needs, preferences, and desires of those he cares for. Parents, husbands, pastors, employers, and civic leaders all must work to understand the needs, desires, strengths and weaknesses of those they lead. Leaders should be good listeners, not assuming that they inherently know the problem and its solution. Leaders should have a humble attitude, seeking advice from those they lead, realizing that their position of responsibility and leadership does not necessarily make them superior in wisdom, knowledge, discernment, or perspective. The solemn responsibility of care should induce in leaders an attitude of fear, lest they make decisions that damage other's lives. Leaders must be learners first and foremost and must find ways to move toward those they lead in relationship.

*"If my life is surrendered to God, all is well. Let me not grab it back, as though it were in peril in His hand but would be safer in mine!"*

*-Elisabeth Elliot*

## 12. How should various human authorities interrelate and work together?

God's ideal is that all authority work together toward the same end—the glory of God, the advancement of His kingdom, and the good of those whom He loves. This working together is best achieved when each sphere of authority operates from a Biblical world view under the authority of God. Unity among authorities is also enhanced when each sphere of authority acknowledges the jurisdiction of the other. For example government should acknowledge that God has given authority to church leaders to lead the church, to husbands and parents to lead their families, and to business owners to lead their businesses. Yet in some situations involving crime or injustice, one institution of authority should step into the realm of another to defend the defenseless or to promote good.

In the Law of Moses we can see examples of situations where the government and religious authorities were required to respect other spheres of authority and yet at times were to intrude into them. Under Mosaic Law, the government supported and enforced marriage vows (Leviticus 20:10), contractual obligations, and property rights (Exodus 22:9-15). Religious authorities were required to honor the authority of a father or husband in relation to a vow made by his daughter or wife (Numbers 30:3-16). The government had authority to protect the rights of wives and children and to provide some protection for slaves.

Examples relating to family rights are 1) upholding a slave woman's right to divorce her master/husband if he refused to provide her with food, clothing, or conjugal rights (Exodus 21:8-11), 2) ensuring the firstborn rights of the son of an unloved wife (Deuteronomy 21:15-17), 3) protecting a wife from false accusations by her husband that, upon marriage, he did not find her to be a virgin (Deuteronomy

***“The modern world detests authority but worships relevance. Our Christian conviction is that the Bible has both authority and relevance, and that the secret of both is Jesus Christ.”***

***-John Stott***

22:13-19), and 4) protecting the rights of a divorced woman to remarry by requiring a certificate of divorce (Deuteronomy 24:1-4). Examples relating to slavery include 1) prosecuting a master who kills or injures his slave during a beating (Exodus 21:20, 26), 2) requiring that slaves also rest on the Sabbath (Exodus 23:12), and 3) limiting Hebrew slavery to seven years (Leviticus 25:39-43).

Even though modern societies are not under Mosaic Law, we can learn from the Law that each sphere of authority must respect the others and yet be prepared to intervene in cases of crime or abuse. Exactly when and how this balance of respect and willingness to intrude are to play out is not an easy question to resolve practically or Biblically, as evidenced by the longstanding question in Western society concerning the proper interaction of church and state. A culture’s strength of respect between its authority structures and the specific situations in which intervention is expected will largely determine whether a government, church, or family is considered free and empowering or restrictive and oppressive.

### **13. What is the breadth of authority?**

Someone in authority might ask, “What is the breadth of my authority? Does a leader have authority only where the scripture gives specific instruction, or does his authority extend into areas that might be considered grey areas or preferences?”

First it is important to note that even the Old Testament Law, although much more extensive than the New Testament “law of Christ,” did not speak to every specific moral or legal issue. Rather, the Law gives examples that illustrate the spirit behind the law. Take for instance, the following command:

*“When you build a new house, make a parapet around your roof so that you may not bring the guilt of bloodshed on your house if someone falls from the roof” (Deuteronomy 22:8, NIV).*

Behind this command is God’s desire that we value human life. The command does not speak to every instance in which human life might be endangered, but uses one situation as an example of the need to protect life. How the basic principles of the law are to be applied in other situations was left up to the priests and judges in Israel to figure out. Examples of applying this same principle today would be laws governing the speed limit or laws regarding worker safety. Behind these laws is the principle of valuing human life. It is the responsibility of governmental authorities to determine where the principle of protecting life requires a specific law and what that specific standard should be (i.e. 70 miles per hour).

Secondly, God seemed to place confidence in the ability of human authorities, as they sought God’s will, to take the principles of the Law and apply them in diverse situations.

*“If any case is too difficult for you to decide, between one kind of homicide or another, between one kind of lawsuit or another, and between one kind of assault or another, being cases of dispute in your courts, then you shall arise and go up to the place which the Lord your God chooses. “So you shall come to the Levitical priest or the judge who is in office in those days, and you shall inquire of them and they will declare to you the verdict in the case (Deuteronomy 17:8-9).*



Thirdly, providing leadership in areas of preference, in grey areas, or in questions of emphasis seems to be one of the reasons God has appointed leaders and given them authority. It may seem somewhat arbitrary what hours a business chooses to be open or what particular brand of product it sells or what style and color logo it chooses. Yet somehow a specific choice must be made. For any group to work together or make progress, a unified goal and plan must be achieved. Someone must be given authority to make the decision and others must follow that lead, or chaos will ensue.

Thus, even with godly, Christ-following families, there will be very different perspectives on various issues resulting in different cultures within the families. These will be based on the strengths and weaknesses of the particular parents and upon the things they choose to emphasize, often in grey areas and areas of preference. Similarly, different churches will have different approaches to ministry and areas of emphasis, resulting in different cultures, again based upon the church leaders' strengths and upon their convictions and preferences. God instituted leadership and authority to help unite a group not only around the obvious truths of the scripture, but around particular ways and approaches to living those truths out in the kingdom.

*"It is not you who shape God; it is God that shapes you. If then you are the work of God, await the hand of the Artist who does all things in due season. Offer the Potter your heart, soft and tractable, and keep the form in which the Artist has fashioned you. Let your clay be moist, lest you grow hard and lose the imprint of the Potter's fingers."*

*-Irenaues*

#### **14. What should a believer's response and attitude be toward those who have authority over him?**

First of all believers are to submit, as Peter enjoins in his first letter:

- *"Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right" (1 Peter 2:13-14).*
- *"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" (1 Peter 2:18).*
- *"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" (1 Peter 3:1).*

The word translated "submit" and "be submissive" is *hypotassomai*, and in the middle voice means "to subject oneself," "to be subservient," "to submit voluntarily." Submission is yielding to the authority or will of another. It is following the lead of another in obedience.

Second, accompanying this submission and obedience, Peter calls for an attitude of respect and honor:

- *"Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king" (1 Peter 2:17, NIV).*
- *"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" (1 Peter 2:18).*
- *"...wives, be submissive...as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior" (1 Peter 3:1-2).*



***“The objective Word, the written Scripture, together with the subjective word, the inner illumination and conviction of the Holy Spirit, constitutes authority for the Christian.”***

***-Millard J. Erickson***

The word translated “respect” is the Greek word *phobos*, which means (a) fear, dread, terror, or (b) reverential fear. Such reverential fear comes from a respect for the place and role of the authorities that God has ordained for us and from a healthy fear of the consequences that will come upon those who disobey God’s commands.

Finally, Paul instructs believers to submit to their authorities “as to the Lord.”

- *Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord (Ephesians 5:22).*
- *Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right (Ephesians 6:1).*
- *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... With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free (Ephesians 6:5, 7-8).*

Our attitude toward our authorities should have God in view. We should ultimately submit, not because we love and respect those in authority over us, but because we fear and trust God. Submission takes faith, not primarily in the

wisdom or goodness of our human authority, but faith in the wisdom and goodness of our God. God often works and leads through very fallible and sinful human authorities. Ultimately, our response to those in authority reflects our fear of and trust in our Heavenly Father and His ability to work for our good through fallen human beings.

### **15. Why do we so often find ourselves resenting authority, resisting authority, and justifying our lack of respect toward authority?**

As fallen human beings, we constantly battle pride and tend to think of ourselves more highly than we ought. We fail to recognize our limitations in knowledge, wisdom, character, moral integrity, and ability. Our tendency is to think, “I don’t need your direction,” or “I’m OK, leave me alone.” We would do well to ask ourselves: “What might I need from my leaders that I don’t realize I need?” The Bible likens believers to sheep, one of the most helpless and dim-witted of farm animals. We need direction and protection, primarily from God, but also from those humans whom He has commissioned to lead us.

Secondly, we have been wounded by authorities. Someone has hurt us and we tend to harbor resentment and fear that it might happen again. We must humble ourselves, acknowledge our resentment and fear, look back at the times where we were hurt, and ask the Lord to help us to better understand His grace and purposes in those situations. We must find peace in the confidence that God will work those hurtful times together for our good. Otherwise our wounds can cause us to doubt God and to be suspicious of those in authority over us, even when we may now have wise and caring leaders.

Thirdly, our culture tends to discount and belittle the need for authority. In some relationships, such as the marriage relationship, even loving, godly authority is viewed as oppressive, selfish, and “patriarchal.” And with the increasing emphasis on children’s rights, the place of authority is being questioned and minimized even within the parent-child relationship.

Finally, we are in a spiritual battle. The enemy of our souls has been a rebel from the beginning. The devil loves rebellion and does what he can to tempt and stir up any inclinations within to question, disrespect, or disobey our human authorities.

#### **16. How does our attitude toward authority relate to our growth in faith and maturity in Christ?**

Our response to our human authorities is one of the clearest and most practical indicators of our heart attitude towards God. We may think that we are humble and obedient before God, but be deceived. However, when a human authority gives a directive, pride and disobedience are not as easily hidden. Our true heart is more clearly seen.

Whether we grumble and rebel or respond with joy, honor, and obedience, indicates either a heart of disobedience or of faith and humility toward God. In this way, God can use human authority to develop Christ-like character in us in a very practical way—by revealing the true nature of our hearts before the Lord and bringing us to repentance and growth in our faith.

#### **17. What should leaders do when they find that they have violated their responsibility to love and care?**

All human leaders, other than Jesus Christ, are fallen, imperfect, sometimes-selfish human beings. Sadly, failures to discharge the duty to lead, care, and protect are inevitable, even with the most dedicated and good-hearted leaders. So, when leaders find that they have acted selfishly, harshly, insensitively, or unwisely, they should not be surprised. Failures, inadequacies, and impure motives should drive us to God and to a more urgent quest for our own life transformation. If we have the humility to look, a position of leadership will help expose what is wrong, twisted, or selfish within and will allow us to confess, repent, and move in the direction of Christ-likeness.

So a godly, humble father and husband won't be surprised when he often finds himself having to say, "I'm sorry, will you forgive me?" He may find himself needing to say this more than anyone else in the family. Similarly, church leaders, business leaders, and civil leaders must have the humility to acknowledge errors, weaknesses, and faults. Although God gives all of us, including leaders, the grace of covering most of our faults, and we do not have to publicly expose every sin and weakness (1 Peter 4:8), yet many of our failings cannot be hidden and must be openly confessed and repented of. Rather than undermine our respect and leadership, such humility tends to inspire confidence and to teach others how to handle their own weaknesses and sins.

Blatant and consistent violation of God's directive to love and care are grounds for removal from a position of leadership. Paul instructed that those church leaders who continue in sin should be rebuked in the presence of all (1 Timothy 5:20). A church leader who finds that he does not have the maturity to consistently lead with love and care should—in the fear of God, for his own sake, and for the sake of those he leads—step down from his position of leadership. The same principle ought to apply in all types of authority, civil, family and business. Fathers, husbands, mothers, managers, and civic leaders who find themselves grossly failing in the duty of love and care must humble themselves and urgently

*"I can't help but wonder, are we now seeing the fruit of education that predominantly throughout our country has stopped performing any teaching on the basis of moral principles or what is right or what is wrong?"*

*-Ronald Reagan*

*“I would advise no one to send his child where the Holy Scriptures are not supreme. Every institution that does not unceasingly pursue the study of God’s word becomes corrupt.”*

*-Martin Luther*

seek the help they need from God and others or they can do great damage to those they lead. The question of what practically constitutes abuse of a nature or duration where removal from leadership is required is complex and beyond the scope of this paper, but such a step ought to be considered where the duty of love and care is flagrantly violated.

#### **18. What should we do if we disagree with the desires of a person in authority over us?**

When we disagree with an authority’s desire or direction, the first step is to listen carefully in order to clearly understand his perspective and the reasons behind his direction or desires. We should approach a conflict of opinion with humility, acknowledging that our perspective is limited and that God may be giving our leaders understanding and direction that we very much need.

Second, we should seek to clarify the intent of the authority’s desire. Is he giving a suggestion—advice that should be seriously considered—or is he giving a command to be obeyed.

Thirdly, if there is a directive that we truly feel will be detrimental to ourselves, to others, or to the glory of God, we should appeal to the person in authority. Scripture gives many examples of people who respectfully and successfully appealed to those with power and authority over them. A wise and respectful appeal can have great power and will often be appreciated by the person in authority.

Fourthly, we should consider appealing to other authorities. For instance a child might appeal to both his father and mother or even seek the advice and help of a grandparent. A church member might appeal to another of the church’s elders or to a denominational leader. An employee might appeal to a higher authority in the organization. Similarly, a citizen might appeal to a higher authority or make an appeal through the court system.

Lastly, if an appeal does not bring about a change of direction, we should submit to any command that is not a clear violation of God’s will as revealed in His word, believing that God will use our submission even to a command that we view as harmful. Typically, such submission, even to an unwise or hurtful command, will cause less damage to us, to others, or to the glory of God than would outright disobedience.

#### **19. Is human authority absolute? When, if ever, should it be disobeyed?**

Since God is the supreme authority over all His creation and all human authority is derived from Him, human authority is never absolute. The king is subject to the laws of God in the same way that His subjects are. If there is a Creator and Sustainer of all things, then it is never true that “might makes right.” Although God raises up one and puts down another (Psalm 75:6-7), and although God can and does often use unrighteous authority for His own purposes (Acts 3:17-18 & Acts 5:27-28), authority can and does deviate from the will and plan of God (Psalm 94:20). Where human authority clashes with the clear, revealed command of God, human authority should be disobeyed.

Throughout the Bible, many people were blessed by God because they feared and obeyed Him, rather than a human authority. Below are a few of many examples.

- *The Hebrew midwives disobeyed Pharaoh's order to kill every baby boy and were blessed by God because they feared and obeyed Him rather than Pharaoh. But the midwives feared God, and did not do as the king of Egypt had commanded them, but let the boys live...So God was good to the midwives, and the people multiplied, and became very mighty. Because the midwives feared God, He established households for them (Exodus 1:20-21).*
- *At the command of God, Moses and the Israelites disobeyed Pharaoh, their civil authority, and escaped Egyptian oppression: They journeyed from Rameses in the first month, on the fifteenth day of the first month; on the next day after the Passover the sons of Israel started out boldly in the sight of all the Egyptians (Numbers 33:3).*
- *The scripture commends Obadiah for disobeying wicked King Ahab and rescuing 100 of the Lord's prophets: Now Obadiah feared the Lord greatly; for when Jezebel destroyed the prophets of the Lord, Obadiah took a hundred prophets and hid them by fifties in a cave, and provided them with bread and water (1 Kings 18:3-4).*
- *The Lord commended the apostles when they chose to obey God rather than men: 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; for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard... And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness. (Acts 4:19-20, 31).*

***"The only right a Christian has is the right to give up his rights."***

***-Oswald Chambers***

Disobedience to an authority should be limited to situations in which the authority is requiring something that is in disobedience to a command of God. In everything else, authorities ought to be obeyed, even when obedience may seem unwise, a waste of money and effort, or threatening to our desires, hopes, and dreams. There are times when we should appeal (see question 18) and there are times when we should remove ourselves from under a relationship of authority (see question 20), but while we are under an authority we should submit to that authority unless to do so would be a clear violation of the will of God.

## **20. Is it ever right or wise to leave a relationship in which we are under authority?**

Some authority relationships are temporary, such as the parent-child relationship. While still having responsibility to respect and honor their parents, when children become adults they leave the authority of their parents and become a family unit of their own as written in Genesis: *"For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh"* (Genesis 2:24).

As this verse indicates, this release from authority occurs at marriage. But what about a single person or a person who marries later in life? Should there be a releasing of authority even without marriage

***“The very first thing which needs to be said about Christian ministers of all kinds is that they are “under” people as their servants rather than “over” them (as their leaders, let alone their lords). Jesus made this absolutely plain. The chief characteristic of Christian leaders, he insisted, is humility not authority, and gentleness not power.”***

***-John Stott***

as a child becomes an adult, and, if so, when should this occur? One factor to consider is the parents’ evaluation of when the child is ready to lead his own life and be out from under parental authority (Galatians 4:1-2). Another factor is if the child is still living in his parent’s home. If this is so, he ought to be under his parent’s authority, at least in regard to life at home (Numbers 30:3). A third factor is whether the child is supporting himself financially. A young person who is still receiving funding from his parents ought to regard himself as continuing to be under their authority.

Even in authority relationships that are intended to be permanent, there may be times when the person under authority must leave the relationship. Since all human authority is derived from the authority of God and since human authority can be so badly abused that it no longer performs the function that God desires, there will be times when leaving an abusive authority relationship is required, whether this be a government, church, business, or family.

Biblical examples include the following:

- Jesus’ parents, following the command of God, fled from the authority of King Herod who sought to kill Jesus (Matthew 2:13-18).
- Moses, at the command of God, led the Israelites out from under the oppressive authority of Egypt (Exodus 3).
- Jehu, at the command of God, overthrew the idolatrous and corrupt government of Ahab and his son Joram (2 Kings 9-10).
- Jehoiada the priest preserved the royal line and overthrew the usurping Queen Athaliah (2 Kings 11).
- In the Mosaic Law, a slave woman was allowed to go free from her marriage to her master/husband if he did not provide her with food, clothing, and conjugal rights (Exodus 21:8-11).
- Also in the Law, a slave who was forced to flee from his master was to be protected and not returned to his abusive master (Deuteronomy 23:15-16).

These examples indicate that it is permissible to flee from abusive authority to preserve life or under severely abusive circumstances. Yet, even when flight is required, authority is still to be honored and not undermined, except in the most extreme cases and then perhaps only at the command of God. For example, for many years, David was forced to flee for his life from King Saul. Yet, out of respect for God and for Saul’s position of authority, David twice refrained from destroying Saul when he had the opportunity (1 Samuel 19-26). And even after God removed Saul, David honored Saul’s memory out of respect for Saul’s position (2 Samuel 1). In the New Testament, Peter commands believers to submit, even to harsh authority (1 Peter 2:13-3:22). So, it seems that leaving a relationship of authority that is designed to be permanent should happen only rarely—to preserve life or in extreme cases of abuse.



## 21. What should we do if we find ourselves in a harmful or abusive authority relationship that God does not want us to leave?

The Apostle Peter's first letter addresses a proper response to abusive authority or to authority that does not honor God in some way. In chapter 2:18-25 he addresses slaves, who had little or no hope of escaping abusive authority. He encourages them to submit themselves to their masters, even to those who are unreasonable or harsh. He gives the following reasons to do so:

1. This is commendable and will produce special favor with God.
2. We are called to suffer unjustly.
3. Christ set an example through his submission to unjust authorities. He endured suffering without uttering threats or retaliating.
4. Like Christ, we can entrust ourselves to God, who judges justly. Often He will protect and defend us in ways that we would never have humanly imagined.
5. By implication, as Christ suffered unjustly to procure our salvation, our unjust suffering may result in the salvation of others.

In chapter 3, verses 1-6, Peter's exhortation to wives whose husbands are not following Christ is similar. For several reasons, wives are to submit to their husbands, even when husbands are disobedient to the will of God.

1. A husband can be won to God and His ways by his wife's submission, pure behavior, and respect.
2. A gentle and quiet spirit will make women beautiful and attractive to their man.
3. Women will be imitating the holy women of old, who were submissive and respectful to their husbands.
4. God will bless them as he did those women, who were obedient and submissive in faith and didn't give in to fear.

Submitting to harsh or unjust authority can result in great suffering—emotionally, spiritually, and even physically. Yet, if the gospel teaches us anything, it teaches that God will sometimes ask those He loves (including His own Son) to suffer, if He knows that suffering will result in a greater good for all. And He knows that suffering is producing incomparably greater glory for those who suffer (2 Corinthians 4:16). As with Jesus, suffering while hoping in God can powerfully influence others and greatly glorify God, both now and forever.

## 22. When, if ever, should a person remove himself from under the authority of church leaders and move on to another church?

Answering this question is often difficult, with many complex factors. In some cultures, church life and authority are woven into the very fabric of family and community and leaving a church may be viewed

*“The Church is the Body of Christ, and the Spirit is the Spirit of Christ. He fills the body, directs its movements, controls its members, inspires its wisdom, supplies its strength. He guides into truth, sanctifies its agents, and empowers for witnessing. The Spirit has never abdicated His authority nor relegated His power.”*

*-Samuel Chadwick*



***“Don’t be scared by the word authority. Believing things on authority only means believing them because you’ve been told them by someone you think trustworthy.”***

***-C. S. Lewis***

as a betrayal of all three—church, family, and community. In other cultures, church membership has become so separated from family, community, and social life that changing churches can seem little more than deciding to shop at a different store. With such diverse circumstances, what principles ought to guide us on this important question?

First we must acknowledge that membership in a particular church is not necessarily intended by God to be a life-long commitment, as marriage and family are. Our commitment to our church should be one of radical love, since God commands us to lay down our lives for our brothers (1 John 3:16). Our love and loyalty to our eternal, spiritual brothers and sisters should be no less than the loyalty shown by members of earthly families or by a band of brothers in combat or by teammates on a championship team. Yet the covenant relationship within a church does not typically carry with it the permanency of the covenant relationship of marriage—‘til death do us part. The kingdom of God is like a mustard seed—it starts out small and grows large. That reality requires that God’s people start new churches and move to new geographic areas, leaving their former church and former leaders behind. Yet God can lead a person to leave a church and join another for many reasons other than

church growth. Examples might be differences in doctrinal convictions or core values, differences in vision, a requirement to move to a different city for business or family reasons, or a loss of trust in a church’s leadership.

Second, it would seem ideal that a church’s leaders commend the person leaving and even send him out. Just as a father gives his daughter to another man’s authority, responsibility and protection, or as an employer might transfer a valuable employee to another office, so it is best when church leaders can commend a person or family to a new ministry outreach or into the care of another fellowship. Evidently New Testament churches would commend those sent on a mission or sent to another church, sending a letter of commendation with them (Acts 15:40, 2 Corinthians 3:1, Romans 16:1).

Third, church leaders will sometimes have hesitations about a person leaving for particular reasons and yet will feel that it is best for them to go. This might be loosely analogous to a father giving his daughter away with hesitations and concerns, yet still believing that it is best, and God’s will, that he do so. Such a situation is not ideal, but the reality is that much of what happens in ministry (and life) is not ideal. In situations where someone is not able to wholeheartedly follow the church’s vision and submit to its leadership, it is often best, both for the person and the church, that the person move on to a place where he can serve more wholeheartedly. Otherwise the person or family may have left the church and its leaders in their heart while still being actively involved—resulting in an undermining effect. Such a person should respect the doctrine, vision and leaders of the church enough to leave it altogether and get involved in another church where they can be more wholehearted. God honors this more than when a person is maintaining a disgruntled “quasi membership” in a church.

Fourth, a decision to leave a church and its leaders should ideally be made slowly, with careful reflection on whether this is God’s will. Where a church is living out the Biblical example and commands of love, unity, commitment, devotion, and loyalty, changing churches is no small matter. A church should be more than a group of people who come together and listen to a message on Sunday morning. It should be a community bound together in love for Christ, in love for one another, and with a common

purpose and vision for God's kingdom. Leaving such a committed community is no small thing. It means leaving, not just a Sunday meeting, but your closest friends and comrades in order to join another community, where, hopefully, commitment and belonging to a similar community will develop. Similarly, changing from one group of church leaders to another can be personally and relationally difficult. Even within the same denomination, there can be major differences in core values, philosophy of ministry, and character strengths and weaknesses between the leadership of different churches.

Fifth, leaving a church, especially because of dissatisfaction, should involve careful reflection and self-examination. Being led and inhabited by sinners, every church has major flaws and weaknesses. If a hospital is a valid analogy for a church, we might expect to find more hurting and dysfunctional people there, seeking help, than we might find in the world at large. Yet, every individual considering leaving a church is also a sinner, with major flaws and weaknesses. When a church's weaknesses and an individual's weaknesses combine in such a way that a person wants to leave because of them, it is an ideal time for those weaknesses to be exposed and for growth to occur on both parts. When people bail out too soon, they lose the opportunity to be exposed themselves (and thereby grow in the Lord) and they lose the opportunity to expose the church's weaknesses (and thereby help it to grow).

Sixth, we should realize that one common ingredient in the motivation to start a new church is that some aspiring leaders, in their vision to grow the kingdom, have a passion for a different emphasis or philosophy of ministry and want to give it a try. Differences in vision or doctrine or philosophy of ministry are not necessarily detrimental to the growth of the kingdom. Sometimes they are God's way of sparking something new and fresh. If church leaders and members are more interested in building the kingdom of God than building their own kingdom, this will help them discern whether God is wanting to do something new or whether the disagreement stems from pride or a lack of submission to God's will.

Finally, when a person leaves, it is important for the glory of God and His kingdom that he strive to honor his former leaders, both in his heart and with his mouth. In cases where someone (especially a leader) is leaving because of disagreement, it might be important for church leaders and the person leaving to come to agreement on how to best communicate why this is happening. Attempts to pull other people away because of disagreement or criticisms can easily undermine God's authority structure in the church, promoting strife, division, and discord. Unless the church is not accurately preaching the truth of the gospel, such division should be avoided, since it can be horribly destructive, both to the church, to those who are drawn away, and to the reputation of the Kingdom of God.

### **23. What should elders and pastors be aware of in their use of authority within the church?**

Church leaders must remember that they are caretakers of the church of God, which He purchased with His own blood. We must lead and guide God's flock with the understanding that they are the precious people of God, loved by Him.

*"Modern intelligence won't accept anything on authority. But it will accept anything without authority."*

*-G. K. Chesterton*

***“If we and our posterity reject religious instruction and authority, violate the rules of eternal justice, trifle with the injunctions of morality, and recklessly destroy the political constitution which holds us together, no man can tell how sudden a catastrophe may overwhelm us, that shall bury all our glory in profound obscurity.”***

***-Daniel Webster***

*“Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood (Acts 20:28).*

Second, we must remember that we will give an account for our treatment and care of God’s people. What we do for God’s people will not be forgotten, whether it be for good or ill.

*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 (Hebrews 13:17).*

Third, we must resist temptation to use our place of leadership and authority for selfish advantage, whether that be for personal power, to gratify our egos, or for financial advantage.

*Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away (1 Peter 5:2-4, NIV).*

Fourth, we must take care not to lord it over the flock. We must treat those we lead with respect, using our authority in strong ways only when necessary and never to stroke our own egos.

Fifth, we must be particularly careful when exercising church discipline, the ultimate power granted church leaders. An abuse of church discipline will create a state of unhealthy fear and legalism within the church. Before Great

Commission pastors exercise church discipline, they should thoroughly review the scriptures that reference church discipline and read the Great Commission Leadership article regarding the use of church discipline. Additionally, the GCC Articles of Association require Great Commission leaders to seek counsel from regional leaders prior to exercising church discipline.

Sixth, we must be careful to support, uphold, and work in coordination with family authority, business authority, and civil authority and to respect the freedoms of individuals. In the case of a crime, we shouldn’t be slow to involve civil authorities. In the case of the family, we shouldn’t ignore or circumvent the efforts of husbands or parents. If there is a problem with a young person, we should seek out the parents and work together with them, whether the parent is a part of our church or not. Often parents can be of considerably greater help than we might at first think, even when the parents are not believers in Christ.

Within the church, we should develop a culture that honors and respects the family, seeking to keep families together as much as possible, rather than excessively splitting individuals up into age-segregated groups. And particularly with women’s ministries and church youth programs, we should be careful not to inadvertently undermine the authority of husbands in leading their wives or of parents in leading their children. In efforts to encourage faith and godliness in women and children, it is easy

to take responsibility and authority that ought to fall on the shoulders of husbands and parents. Even though this pastoral usurpation of family authority might be with the best intentions, it will not produce good fruit in the end. Church leaders must let the load of responsibility and authority fall on those to whom God has ordained it to fall.

Finally, there are times when church leaders should use their authority without flinching and should let no one disregard them. Paul admonished Titus and Timothy to forcefully use their God-given authority in regard to those who contradicted the fundamental truths of the gospel or who advocated behavior that blatantly undermined godliness.

*For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds. These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you (Titus 2:11-15).*

*In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction (2 Timothy 4:1-2, NIV).*

*This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance (and for this we labor and strive), that we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, and especially of those who believe. Command and teach these things. Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity (1 Timothy 4:9-12, NIV).*

In a culture suspicious of authority and where tolerance is one of the supreme virtues, the unbending use of authority enjoined in these commands will often be one of the most difficult things for Christian leaders to practice. Yet, people desperately need guidance, correction, reproof, and leadership from living examples—godly leaders who are not afraid to stand up for the truth of the gospel and its implications no matter what the cost.

#### **24. What should our overall hope be in regard to relationships of authority?**

Loving relationships involving authority and submission are beautiful—reflections of the love relationship between God the Father and His only begotten Son. We must not be afraid or ashamed to live out such relationships and teach others to do so. When leaders humbly love and lead according to God's plan and when followers adapt and respond to that lead, a beautiful dance is created.

***“It is easy to criticize and find fault with the conduct of kings, and write furious articles against them in newspapers, or make violent speeches about them on platforms. Any fool can rip and rend a costly garment, but not every man can cut out and make one. To expect perfection in kings, prime ministers, or rulers of any king, is senseless and unreasonable. We would exhibit more wisdom if we prayed for them more, and criticized less.”***

**-J.C. Ryle**

***“A sacred regard to the authority of God ought to lead us to reject an error, however old, sanctioned by whatever authority, or however generally practiced.”***

***-C.H. Spurgeon***

My fellow pastor loves to tell about the time he attempted dance lessons with his daughter. Hoping to learn the Salsa, they watched as their instructors stepped, turned, swayed, and dipped in graceful, flawless harmony. It was breathtakingly beautiful. Inspired to give it a try, they listened as the instructor told them the first rule—men, you have to lead, and women, you have to follow. My fellow pastor was surprised. He had been so mesmerized by the beauty of the dance that he hadn't even realized that one was leading and the other following. All he could see was the glory of the dance. But he quickly realized that leadership and following are absolutely necessary for two people to be able to dance like that.

So it is in all our relationships. If we want to dance the dance of God, some must have the courage to lead and others must have the courage to follow. To accomplish the good purposes of God, every group and organization needs leadership. Sports teams need coaches, armies need generals, families need parents, businesses need bosses, churches need pastors, and nations need presidents and legislators. The ability of any group to dance the dance of God

will largely depend on the faith, strength, and character of the leaders who lead and of the followers who follow.

Leaders whose hearts burn for the glory of God and to advance His kingdom must be willing and eager to lead as God directs them to—to storm the gates of death and hell and to bring in the glories of life and the Kingdom of Heaven. They must lead with unwavering strength—yet in the fear of God, with the humility that comes from understanding their own brokenness, and with the love that was so powerfully demonstrated in the leadership of our Savior. And those who follow must do so with respect, with confidence in God, and with the submission that our Savior showed towards His own Father.



GOD-HONORING AUTHORITY

**Exercise**

1. How does the fact that all human authority comes from God affect our perspective of authority?

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2. What are the implications of the fact that a relationship of authority and submission are present in the Godhead?

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3. Summarize the approaches and attitudes that God-honoring leaders should have in their use of authority.

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GOD-HONORING AUTHORITY

**Exercise**

4. Summarize the actions and attitudes that followers should have in their submission to authority.

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5. In what practical ways can parents model to their children submission to and honor for authority?  
What might happen if they don't?

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6. How can church leaders and youth leaders train young people to respect, honor and obey their parents? How much is this a focus of your church's college and youth ministry?

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GOD-HONORING AUTHORITY

**Exercise**

7. When people come to you with concern or discontentment about the teaching or practices of their pastors and church, what should you do? How can disunity and division be avoided?

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8. When a wife confides in a Christian friend, expressing discontentment with her husband, how can these be resolved in a way that avoids gossip and encourages her to be submissive and respectful?

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9. How should we respond when people make sarcastic jokes about the government, their boss, or others in authority?

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