

What Every Christian Should Know About Authority

Romans 13:1 "Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.

(2) Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves." (NKJV)

The Bible says that followers of Christ should be obedient to secular laws and government. Why? Because, according to the Apostle Paul, all authority comes from and originates with God. He is the absolute source of authority in the universe, and has delegated His principle of authority to mankind to maintain order in the world.

According to scripture, secular authority is intended to be a "minister of God for our good" (Rom. 13:4), and serves God's purpose of keeping law and order on the earth (1 Pet. 2:14-15). Again, Paul wrote, "...submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evil-doers and for the praise of those who do good" (1 Pet. 2:13-14).

The Concern with Authority

Authority is something that should be understood by every Christian, since it is the entire basis of our relationship with Christ. Webster defined "authority" as "the right to command and enforce obedience." When we accept Jesus Christ as our "Lord," this means that He is supposed to become our "boss" or "authority" over our whole life (Luke 6:46). In addition, the Bible becomes the source of authoritative instruction for our Christian Life (2 Tim. 3:16).

Since submission to authority is basic to Christian Life, it is important that we understand that all authority is a God-given institution, and all types of authority are related. The Lordship of Christ is the highest source of authority that we must answer to (Matt. 28:18), but God has also ordained at least **three other categories of subordinate authority in the world that we must also submit to:**

(1) THE FAMILY - Children are to obey their parents (Eph. 6:10). The wife is to cooperate with her husband, which is the head of the family (Eph. 5:22-24, 1 Tim. 2:12), and the husband is to submit to Christ and love his wife (Eph. 5:23,25).

(2) THE STATE - We are to cooperate with those authority figures and obey the local and federal laws of the land, within the boundaries of God's laws (1 Pet. 2:13-14).

(3) THE CHURCH - Christians are to submit to the headship of Christ which is exercised through His Spirit (Rom. 8:14), His Word (2 Tim. 3:16), and Church leadership (Matt. 18:17-20, Heb. 13:17).

God has established these authorities as the "delegated" extensions of His authority. If we resist cooperation, we are in effect, resisting God's own authority and Lordship. This is why Paul told wives to submit to their husbands "as to the Lord" (Eph. 5:22).

Rebellion Disrespects all Authority

Just as all authority is related to other authority, all rebellion is also interrelated. It does not regard any class of authority. Rebellion is "the unwillingness to be ruled by any source other than "self." It is an indiscriminate contempt toward all authority.

Our attitude toward Christ as our Lord, is directly associated with our attitude toward other authority. Jesus Christ cannot be fully "Lord" over the person who harbors rebellion toward authority figures. The Bible says, "Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on them-

selves" (Rom. 13:2).

Just as God is the source of all authority, Satan is author of all rebellion. We may recall that the Devil (Lucifer), a former archangel, was originally cast out of Heaven because he led an insurrection against God (Isa. 14:12-15). Rebellion is the very spirit of Satan's attitude (Eph. 2:2), and if we permit it to dominate us it will infect and taint our attitude toward all authority, including God and His Word.

The prophet Samuel said, "...rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, And stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry" (1 Sam. 15:23). The Apostle Peter said that those who are corrupt "despise authority" (2 Pet. 2:10), and the Proverbs say, "An evil man seeks only rebellion..." (Prov. 17:11).

Corrupt Authority

Obviously, in the absence of Godly and moral values, there can sometimes be abuses of authority and perversions in government. Such was the case when Peter and John were forbidden to preach the Gospel by the Jewish Sanhedrin. They replied, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge" (Acts 4:19). The only circumstance that disobedience to authority is justifiable by scripture, is if it conflicts with the laws of God. Authority should be cooperated with except in those situations where laws depart from the basic moral and righteous principles of God's Word.

Paul tells us to pray for all those in authority: "I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence" (1 Tim. 2:1-2). God can use our prayers for those in authority, to either change their heart or remove them from power entirely. God reserves the right of administering discipline and reproof to those who represent His authority (Rom. 14:4, 1 Chron. 16:21-22).

Authority in the Church

Considering how our attitude toward all authority relates to our submission to the "Lord-

ship" of Christ, we should especially be sensitive to the authority of the Church and spiritual leaders, who have specifically been assigned as representatives of Christ. The Bible says, "Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you" (Heb. 13:17).

Even more important than secular authorities, Christians must be cooperative with their spiritual leaders, who are charged with the responsibility to "watch for their souls." An important point revealed from this passage in Hebrews is that it appears that all Christians are supposed to be under the authority of a spiritual leader. This would also mean that all believers should be a part of a local Church which has spiritual supervision by a pastor and elders.

Accountability is Essential

We cannot genuinely be under the authority of spiritual leadership without being committed to a Church (Heb. 10:25). How can we be accountable to spiritual supervision if we excuse ourself from Church fellowship, or just sit at home and watch TV ministries, or merely drift from one Church to another, week after week? Being accountable to a continuity of ministry and leadership is vital to God's plan of providing the necessary "checks and balances" to produce solid spiritual growth.

One of the common reasons that some Christians "hop" from Church to Church, or detach themselves entirely from Church participation, is that inwardly they foster an "independent spirit" which resists authority. They don't wish to be corrected or to confront truths they would prefer to avoid. Without accountability to authority, a believer will often develop "itching ears" (2 Tim. 4:3), which seeks after teachings that validate self-conceived opinions, instead of "objective" teaching which compels us to face truths that may conflict with our self-willed inclinations and desires.

Every believer has the personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit to guide them (1 John 2:27), but this does not discharge them from the Biblical

counsel and ministry of the Church (Heb. 13:7,17). The Church is Christ's plan for His followers. He is the head (Eph. 5:23), and commissioned it to represent Him and His authority in the world (2 Cor. 5:20, Matt. 18:17-20, John 14:12). He ordained elders, deacons, and pastors to supervise and manage the affairs of His Church (Acts 14:23, 1 Tim. 3:10-13), and additional ministries to teach, train, and spiritually equip the saints for service (Eph. 4:11-16). Ministers are also accountable to the authority of overseers, who may offer counsel, reproof, or discipline when necessary (Acts 21:18-24).

Criteria for Spiritual Leadership

All believers should be committed to a Spirit-filled, Bible believing, Christ-centered Church. They should be accountable to a Pastor and Spiritual leaders, on the condition that leadership meets basic qualifications of (1) a moral and Godly lifestyle (Matt. 7:15-16, 1 Tim. 3:1-7), and (2) that they proclaim the uncompromised Word of God (2 Tim. 3:16).

Don't rebel at the man of God whose life exhibits these Biblical qualities. The Bible warns that contempt toward God's obedient servant is equal to contempt toward God (Exodus 16:2,8). We must remember, that even if authority over us makes mistakes, the Lord still demands our respect and restraint toward His anointed. They are His servants and He will reprove them. "Do not touch My anointed ones, And do My prophets no harm" (Psm. 105:15). Don't do anything that would hinder Godly, spiritual leaders. Don't you dare even bad-mouth them, as Paul warned (Acts 23:5). It is an act of rebellion, for which you will answer to God.

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