

THE ANATOMY OF AUTHORITY

A Laodicean pastor is required to be a jellyfish! He must swim in the tepid waters of compromise. He will become a hireling, or he will not survive long enough to be anything else! This pathetic hireling pastor (I use the term “pastor” loosely) ruled by the laity is not, nor ever has been, the will of God.

Some, wishing to do harm to the doctrine of divine authority, advocate that the ministry has exalted itself above the people. They use terms such as “exalted clergy” and erroneously claim that “pastoral authority” is a form of the ministry lifting itself above the people, however, that term is used wrongly. The “exalted clergy” in biblical terms is a system of elected officials that rule over their brethren in an unbiblical man-made organization. This type of organization forms a government of clergy over clergy. Nowhere in the Bible can this form of government be found. But much is found in the Bible concerning the authority of a pastor in the local assembly. The pastor being the under-shepherd to the Chief Shepard—Who both appointed him and justifies him placing him in a place of authority—where no other government is over him nor between him and the flock of God.

AUTHORITY IN THE CHURCH

God holds the universe together with His authority (the power and authority of His Word), likewise He upholds His church through His authority. Authority flows from the ministry: it flows into people’s hearts and makes them conscious of God’s will and ways. The local church is revealed when God is able to express His authority through men. A church without authority endued in the ministry is destined to rebellion!

One must only read the “Pastoral Epistles” of the Apostle Paul to see the “pastoral authority” God endows. Read the passages of “commands” to certain individuals and churches that are contained in those epistles.

Without doubt, one cannot escape seeing the authority and the responsibility placed on a pastor when reading 1 Corinthians chapter 5. Just WHO is 1 Cor. 5:6-7 in reference to? WHO is ultimately responsible in that passage of scripture that demands someone to “purge out therefore the old leaven...” WHO must operate the pruning knife? This kind of statement would be nonsense if there were no delegated authority in the church. This fornicator had to go, and someone had to send him on his way! According to Romans 13 the pastor of the local assembly has been appointed as God’s revenger and that he “beareth not the sword in vain!”

A clean church can only be established and maintained by pastors possessing divine authority. Surely, if a pastor must give an account for the sheep—God would not leave that pastor vacant of authority! IF he possesses no authority—neither can he be held responsible!

THE QUALIFICATIONS FOR AUTHORITY

1 Timothy 3:2-6 states the qualifications for a Bishop (pastor). In those qualifications is the contrast of a pastor's home and the house of God. The question is asked, "for if a man know not how to RULE his house, HOW shall he take care of the House of God?" What father, worth his salt, allows his children to rule his house? Likewise, what pastor, worthy of the title, would allow himself to be ruled over by his flock? The pastor's responsibility for the church is shown in Revelation chapter three. "To the angel (messenger, pastor) of the church. . ." God holds the pastor directly responsible for the church over which He made him an overseer!

First Timothy chapter 2 verses 11 through chapter 3, verse 5 present an interesting allegory of the church and the ministry. Authority is plainly the subject as we see from verse 11 and 12, "Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence." Then the verses following remind us of Adam and his headship in relation to Eve. Then, and this is no subject change, chapter 3 begins, "This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)" Clearly, one cannot miss the point here! The woman, Eve (the church) must not usurp authority over the man, Adam (the ministry). This picture is far too plain to miss seeing except by the willingly blind!

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF AUTHORITY

Does responsibility of the pastor end at having "taught" a particular aspect of the will of God? Is he then free from responsibility simply because he exclaims, "I told them, now it is in their ball park, I am no longer responsible?" Sounds good, but it is incorrect according to 1 Timothy 4:11, "These things command and teach." 2 Tim. 3:16-17 continues this same thought, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works."

In his second letter to the church at Corinth Paul speaks of pastoral authority that was conferred upon him and his co-laborers. He said, "For though I should boast somewhat more of our authority, which the Lord hath given us for edification, and not for your destruction, I should not be ashamed" (II Cor. 10:8). An examination of this verse suggests that Paul was not referring to that apostolic authority that he had but his co-laborers did not have. Rather, he speaks of "OUR AUTHORITY which the Lord has given US." This was an authority that the Lord had conferred on Paul and the ministers of the gospel who were working with Paul at the time.

THE PREMISE OF AUTHORITY

More than once Paul affirmed that pastors have been assigned a certain authority for the task to which God has called them. He said to Titus, "These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee" (Titus 2:15). In the first verse of this chapter Paul told Titus to speak the things which become sound doctrine. He then spoke of the conduct of various types of church members and how they should conduct themselves toward one another. He spoke of how slaves were to conduct themselves toward their masters. Then he turns to some moral issues, and finally, to the grace of God and the second coming of Christ. He exhorts Titus to speak these things, to exhort the people to obey, and to rebuke offenders with all authority. He is to let no man despise him, or count his authority as nothing.

Paul, when he wrote to the church at Corinth, as recorded in the 11th chapter of the first epistle, verse 1, "Be ye followers of me . . ." there is the authority, his command. That is what it amounts to—Paul was an apostle and to the church he said: "You be followers of me." Some may think, "What an egotistical man, who was he to so admonish people?" But that isn't all the verse says, for the other part states the responsibility that was upon Paul. In telling them to follow himself, he qualified it, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ." In other words, he was telling them, "You follow me as I follow the Lord, and where I don't follow the Lord, then the responsibility is back upon you to recognize that and don't follow. But in so far as, and as long as, I am following the instructions of the Lord, which He has given us in the word, the responsibility is then to follow me."

There is the example for pastors of the Lord's churches. I believe the same principle applies because the pastor is referred to in the scriptures as bishop (Greek: episkopos) which means "overseer." Overseer—it is certainly a scriptural term. It is one of the titles given to pastors and it identifies their role and responsibility as the overseer of the assembly. Heb. 13:17 refers to pastors and there the admonition is to the people (the rest of us), and it says, "Obey them that have the rule over you and submit yourselves . . ." Some don't like that word rule,

it is quite a strong word and pretty well means what it says (within the context of this discussion). The admonition is, "Obey them that have the rule over you and submit yourselves . . ." and that word has the meaning of a willing submission unto the authority that has been delegated to pastors."

THE DEFENSE OF AUTHORITY

In his first letter to Timothy, Paul had a good deal to say about the office and responsibility of the pastor. Among those things he said, "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine" (I Tim. 5:17). When a congregation has the attitude, "We will run things around here, Pastor. You just preach to us," they are saying, in essence, "We don't submit to your rule as pastor." I have seen men in churches who swell up and bow their necks at the idea of a pastor fulfilling this aspect of his ministry. Such rebellion is not just rebellion against the pastor, it is rebellion against God and His Word. When such rebellion occurs, it is tantamount to sheep saying to the shepherd, "We will run this show, you are a mere figure head." Any time that I see such a situation I am reminded of God's words of comfort to Samuel when Israel wanted a king. God said, "They have not rejected you, they have rejected me that I should not rule over them." Any church, or church member, who rebels against the biblical rule of a pastor is rebelling against God, not just the pastor.

Look at other declarations of the Scriptures where reference is made to pastoral rule. "Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation. Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you. Salute all them that have the rule over you, and all the saints. They of Italy salute you" (Heb. 13:7, 17, 24).

Paul admonishes these people to remember those who had the rule over them, speaking of their pastors, the ones who speak the word of God to them. He exhorts them to obey their pastors and submit themselves to them for "they watch for your souls." He then tells them to salute them. There are three significant and strong words that should be considered in these verses—rule, obey, and submit. Within the context of Scripture, they say what they mean. The congregation is to obey the pastor as long as he is obedient to the Lord and commanding them from the word of God. He rules over them, leads them, and instructs them. They are to submit willingly to his rule and leadership. Paul warns them that it will be unprofitable for those who rebel and refuse in this matter.

This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work" (I Tim. 3:1). The pastor is the bishop of the assembly. As such he has the

oversight, the superintendency of the congregation. Thayer says that EPISCOPE, the Greek word used here, means "the overseer or presiding officer of a Christian church. Oversight, overseership, office, charge."

THE CHARGE OF AUTHORITY

One of the most awesome responsibilities that God has laid upon his pastors is the oversight of the congregation. And God has given them the oversight of his churches. "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all THE FLOCK, OVER THE WHICH THE HOLY GHOST HATH MADE YOU OVERSEERS, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood" (Acts 20:28). It occurs to me that it must be a terrible sin in the eyes of God for one of his children to rise up in rebellion against the Scriptural leadership of a pastor whom God has installed over a congregation.

When a pastor is leading, ruling, and overseeing scripturally, one who rebels against that is placing himself on hazardous ground. There is no area of a church's work that is not under the oversight of the pastor. A preacher residing in a congregation, regardless of who he is, who has not been called by and installed by the Holy Ghost as pastor, has no special authority in the church other than that given to him by his pastor. He is just another member when it comes to pastor-church relationships. He is one of the sheep and the Spirit-made overseer is the shepherd. He is as obligated to obey the pastor and submit to his rule and oversight as any other member is. Also, it is important to note that while Aaron and Miriam were elder brother and sister to Moses, they were taught a severe lesson by God that it was wrong to attack Moses' position on the basis of a family reason. The fact that Moses was family did not abrogate his divine authority! "And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves" (I Thes. 5:12- 13).

Peter also had something to say of the oversight of the pastor. He admonished certain pastors, "Feed the flock of God which is among you, TAKING THE OVERSIGHT THEREOF, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock" (I Pet. 5:2-3). Peter instructed pastors to take the oversight of the churches where God has placed them. They are to do it willingly, and the people are to receive their oversight willingly. Pastors will give an account of their oversight and rule and church members will give an account for their response to this oversight. They will give an account of their obedience and submission to the leadership of their pastors.

Having oversight of the church, the pastor has oversight of all activities in which the church engages, as well as its teaching and preaching ministry. The pastor may delegate some of the work, but he cannot delegate the authority and responsibility. In the church at Jerusalem, the twelve were neglecting the ministry of the word and prayer in order to feed the widows. They saw a need to delegate this work load. They told the church to choose seven men. They, however, kept the work of these men under their oversight. "Look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom WE MAY APPOINT over this business." The twelve delegated the choosing of the seven to the church; they delegated the waiting on the tables of the widows to the seven. They maintained oversight and responsibility while having others actually do the work. That is as it should be, biblically. No church should engage in anything that the pastor does not oversee. If it would be wrong for him to oversee it, it would be wrong for the church to do it!

"And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves" (I Thes. 5:12-13).