

Five Principles Regarding *Spiritual Authority Over People*

Spiritual authority among Christians is a much debated and, as I've discovered of late, a much-misunderstood concept. Having served as a pastor for nearly four decades, I know firsthand the ease in which a pastor can assume "rule over" or "control over" the lives of other people.

It's never easy to resist a form of control that comes in the name of God, but Fraudulent Authority will help you consider whether or not the pastor or church leader with whom you serve wrongly believes he "rules over" you. There are a few basic principles which serve as the foundation for the study.

Principle 1: There is only one head of the Church/churches, and all authority is His.

If anyone ever assumes authority because of who they are or position they are usurping the authority of the Head (Ephesians 4:5,15).

Principle 2: The Head of the Body has given an authoritative Word to the members of the Body (universal and local).

The Old and New Testaments are that inspired Word. New Covenant people are bound to the New Testament writings (Hebrews 1:2, Acts 18:28).

Principle 3: All believers are responsible to the Head individually and have a responsibility to each other (Romans 14:4, Ephesians 5:21).

All believers are priests unto God and are gifted by God. Therefore, all must take their place among the body to minister for the good of all (1 Corinthians 12-14).

Principle 4: There are certain ones (both men and women) who are gifted as all members are, but, then become a gift to the body in a unique way.

The purpose of these people/gifts is to equip all for ministry (Ephesians 4:11-12).

Principle 5: There is no emphasis in the New Testament on "authority" derived from an "office" or "position of authority" over other Christians.

The King James Version translates the word "office" in Rom. 11:13, 12:4, and 1Tim. 3:1. But in Rom. 11:13 it is the word "diakonia" or "service." In 12:4 it is "praxis" or "action/function." While in 1 Tim. 3:1 "office" is not in the text at all. The verse says in the original "if anyone aspires to oversight (episcopos)."

There is no "office" of authority in the church of Jesus Christ.

Leadership is experienced in the assembly because the gifts and ministries of the Holy Spirit are obvious in and through people of good character who persuade by their example. In one sense, the entire body shares authority (Ephesians 5:21, 1 Peter 5:5).

Followers of Jesus recognize one another's gifts, knowledge, and experiences in the Lord, and we choose to serve or follow leaders because the Holy Spirit has placed these gifted and older people in the assembly as gifts to us. That is the key to understanding Pastors/Elders and their function. No one has authority because they have a stronger personality, knows more Bible, or they hold an office.

That is foreign to the New Testament. Paul the Apostle had to defend his Apostleship by it being the work of the Spirit setting him aside for it. 1 Timothy 5:17 speaks of those Elders that "give oversight well" ... "are worthy of double honor."

It is the ability to "give oversight well" that is the source of their leadership. This ability is defined as Holy Spirit anointing. In other words, the anointing of the Spirit makes clear the authority that rests on a ministry done well, not the office holder's position of authority or any inherent authority within an office, because there is no authority like this in the church.

I will expand on these principles in the coming lessons. As we go through this study, you may be led to some new conclusions about churches, church ministry, and so-called pastoral authority. For example:

1. Churches built around a "one-man show" are foreign to the New Testament.

2. Submission to authority is given to those who "serve" the body well, whatever area of "service" that might be and regardless of "gender."

Some people believe that the Spirit will never place a woman functioning as a shepherd, teacher, or encourager (the role of a pastor). Whether that is true or not, "authority" and "submission" are never "gender-based" in the New Covenant, but are rather "Holy Spirit" ministry-based, for the Spirit gifts His people as He sees fit. No one is to be a leader by saying "I'm the Pastor/Elder" or "I have a Seminary degree" or "I'm a man."

3. Servanthood is the "badge" of Christian living and is to be the overriding characteristic of body-life. If God's people are ever to reflect the biblical relationship of the Head (Christ) to the members (us), then servanthood is essential.

4. The rule of church life is to be the Headship of Christ, the priesthood of all believers, and each member contributing with giftedness and edifying each other in the process.

There is biblical freedom for a gathering of believers to set up any system, any format, any procedure to carry out business, but each church body is to function under the anointing of the Spirit, serving one another.

5. A church or church leaders who understand Christ's authority and the spiritual gifts of all those in Christ will respect all Christians, be open and receptive to any disagreement from other believers, and will never subvert the Lordship of Christ by seeking to "rule over" other Christians.

These outcomes must be practiced, not just theory, in a church that desires the reality of Christ to a lost world in need of the gospel. Check any church leadership by these standards if you want to be biblical in church life. *Fraudulent Authority* will help you understand the biblical reason to live your life and lead your church with an acknowledgment that Jesus Christ alone rules over His people.