

A Healthy Church

My friend Chuck Andrews, a pastor and teacher, and one whom I've respected for years, has given me permission to publish an article he wrote on the subject of authority as an afterword to this book. Chuck summarizes beautifully what the Bible teaches about authority in the church and in the home.

As you read this article, ask yourself the question: "Am I reflecting the principles of New Testament Christianity in my life as I love and serve others, or is there a desire in me to control other people to bring them to do my will or what I want from them.

"In the Old Covenant people were born into their position of priest or king. Their authority was inherent in their person according to their birthright. Prophets were called into their positions of authority and a stereotypical personality doesn't appear to be a prerequisite to the call. The following may show how historically culture has influenced our thinking in the matter of "authority" in the local church. "The Divine Right of Kings states that a monarch owes his rule to the will of God, not to the will of his subjects, parliament, the aristocracy or any other competing authority. This doctrine continued with the claim that any attempt to depose a monarch or to restrict his powers ran contrary to the will of God."

A Priest is defined as "One who is designated an authority on religious matters. In some churches, especially the Anglican Communion, Eastern Orthodox Church, and Roman Catholic Church, the ordained church leader who serves a congregation of believers is called a priest. The priests in these churches administer the sacraments, preach, and care for the needs of their congregations." The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 4th edition by Houghton Mifflin Company

A more evangelical term is Prophet. Defined by the **The American Heritage Dictionary** as:

- 1). A person who speaks by divine inspiration through whom the will of God is expressed.
- 2). A person gifted with profound moral insight and exceptional powers of expression.
- 3). A predictor; a soothsayer.
- 4). The chief spokesperson of a movement or cause.

In most of the SBC pastoral training I've been through and, for that matter, most of the evangelical pastors I have been around have merged "prophet, priest, and king" together and come up with an understanding of their gift and calling. They owe their rule (kingship) to the will of God and to question their authority is to oppose the will of God. Though, confessionally, they verbally give ascent to the priesthood of the believer, they believe themselves to be ordained, educated, and authorized by God to administer the ordinances, preach, and be the all-around expert on ministry. And when they speak it is as the inspired interpreter of God's word and will, with irrefutable insight (because God told them). This historical cultural understanding has found its mate in this combined reproduction of prophet,

Diligently leading is not only commendable but commanded in the scriptures. In Romans 12:8 those who are gifted as leaders are to express that gift "with diligence." "The elders who rule (to lead out in care for) well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard (persistent strenuous labor) at preaching and teaching" (1 Timothy 5:17). Yet, more often than not, we are seduced by our own egos to swallow, hook-line-and-sinker, the historical cultural perception of authority. Pastors who are more concerned with authority than leadership use that perception to defend their positions. Their authority and identity is postured in "I am the pastor!" In support of this seduction, it seems that in today's church growth movement, churches are looking for a savior who will redeem their church

from irrelevancy, the next king who will lead them to kingdom growth (more numbers), a priest who will represent them before God, and a prophet who will confidently and effectively tell them God's will.

The mindset becomes, God wants all pastors to be dynamic preachers, charismatic personalities, and gifted CEOs. He wants all churches to have continues numerical growth in attendance, finances, and ministries. If we're not being that kind of pastor and if our church is not experiencing that kind of growth then it's because we are not allowing God to develop us into the leader He wants us to be. Antiquity has become relevant in this post-modern cultural phenomenon. Whether these values are by the Spirit or the flesh it makes no difference. Visible results are what matters. Today, in this Western culture, it is not uncommon for a local church to be developed and grow around a charismatic (not theologically but personality) pastor. With the advancement of electronics these types of the Internet. Accordingly, pastors can begin to judge themselves in comparison to these. Also, churches can begin to judge their pastors by those they see on the internet, hear on the radio, watch on TV. Unfortunately, lay leaders can be seduced by their own egos to be a part of a "successful" church and become authoritarian too.

In the New Covenant we are all (re)born equal and called equally. Maybe at Christmas time we would do well to remember that the one whose birth we celebrate was born Savior, Prophet, Priest, and King. He alone has authority inherent in His Person and Position. He alone rules His kingdom. He alone fulfilled all the roles of the Old Covenant completely and perfectly. He alone absolutely and faultlessly represented God to people and people to God. He alone is the one and only God-Man. If the local church is His then He is her Authority. As our authority He is our identity. There is to be a harmony and melody between pastors and people. Not a blind following due to authoritarian roles but a relationship built on personal knowledge, reputation and giftedness. Eugene Peterson interprets Hebrews 13:7 *"Appreciate your pastoral leaders who gave you the Word of God. Take a good look at the way they live, and let their faithfulness instruct you, as well as their truthfulness. There should be a consistency that runs through us all. For Jesus doesn't change—yesterday, today, tomorrow, he's always totally himself."*

Then in verse 17, "Be responsive to your pastoral leaders. Listen to their counsel. They are alert to the condition of your lives and work under the strict supervision of God. Contribute to the joy of their leadership, not its drudgery. Why would you want to make things harder for them?" You see in this interpretation that a relationship between people and pastors is developed through a willingness of each to serve the other. Pastors receive a positive reception, responsiveness, and respect in direct proportion to their willingness to relate their lives to the congregation and employ their gifts.

Congregations are to give this positive reception, responsiveness, and respect as they, in relationship with their pastors, observe the identity of Jesus throughout the lives of their pastors. Christ is "seated far above all rule and authority and power and dominion" (Eph. 1:21) and as servants of His, we serve each other in "the fullness of Him who fills all in all" (Eph. 1:23). It is impossible to serve one another as is defined in Hebrews without people and pastor being in a growing relationship with each other. The basis of this relationship is a recognition that Christ is the Head, and each submits to Him and that one is not more "full of Christ" than the other. In fact, maybe it takes "all" to experience the totality of the fullness of Christ since He "fills all in all." Regardless of the time, churches don't need another Savior, Prophet, Priest, or King. We need servants who will demonstrate Jesus, regardless of whether those servants are called pastors, elders, deacons, teachers, councils, leaders, committees, or members. May we all find our identity in Christ and learn to live in Christ. If we do, we will become servants like Christ. Then pastors and people will not be campaigning for authority but will be serving one another—

"Accepting one another, respecting one another, appreciating one another, knowing one another."