

All Authority Is Christ's Alone

Jesus said that the Gentiles bestow authority with positions of honor, but this is something that His followers should never do. The Greek word for authority is *exousia*. It comes from a verb that means:

1. To do something without hindrance, or,
2. The right to do something or the right to be over something.

When someone has authority, it means that they wield influence and lead others in the accomplishment of a purpose. The world at large operates with titles and positions that have inherent authority and power with those titles and positions. Politics, law enforcement, military organizations, educational institutions, and corporations all bestow power and authority in a hierarchy of leadership positions.

Christ's ways, however, are the opposite of the world's ways. Listen to His words: "Those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them: and their great men exercise authority over them. But it is not (to be) this way among you. Whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be the slave of all. For even the Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:42-45).

An interesting side note is that the Greek word for authority (*exousia*) **is used only one time in the entire New Testament about Christian marriage**. Paul says, "The wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife" (1 Corinthians 7:4). The Scripture clearly states in this verse that the husband and the wife have mutual authority over one another in sexual intercourse.

No Christian husband is ever to take authority over his wife sexually, and vice versa. The consummation of Christian marriage is a mutually shared right or privilege between both the husband and the wife. Again, this is the only time the word *exousia* (authority) is used about marriage in the Bible, and it is never used about the local church at all. More importantly, the belief that the husband has "authority" over his wife is far more pagan than biblical or Christian.

One might ask, "But what about the passages that refer to the husband being the 'head over the wife'?" The English word "head" (see Ephesians 5:23 and 1 Corinthians 11:3) comes from a Greek word that is not generally used to convey the concept of authority over anyone. **It is the Greek word kephale** (pronounced kef-a-lay) and its most common usage in everyday Greek is that of source or beginnings. Our English word "head" can convey the meaning of the "source" as well. For example, "the headwaters of a river" means the source or the beginning of a river.

Knowing that kephale has a different meaning than *exousia* is important to interpret texts like Ephesians 5:23 and 1 Corinthians 11:3 properly. In those verses, the word kephale is translated into English as "head." I believe head should lead you to think "source of" and not "authority over."

Regardless of how you choose to translate kephale, it's evident from other texts in Scripture that there is only one Head (authority) over a person in the Kingdom of Christ, and that Head is Jesus.

The Greek word *exousia* (authority) is used of Jesus Christ in the Bible several places, including:

1. When He was executing judgment (see John 5:27),
2. When He took authority over His own life in the resurrection (see John 10:18),
3. When He gives eternal life (see John 17:2),
4. When He forgives sins (see Mark 1:22; 9:6 and Luke 5:24),
5. When He heals the sick (see Matthew 9:8),
6. When He casts out demons (see Mark 1:27).

Jesus Christ is also said in Scripture to have "all authority" (see Matthew 28:18). Jesus is called the Head over all other authorities (see Colossians 2:10). Authority (*exousia*) occurs 4 times of believers:

1. In becoming the sons of God (see John 1:12),
2. When casting out demons (see Matthew 10:1),
3. When ruling with Christ over cities after His return (see Luke 19:17),
4. When having access to the tree of life in Heaven (see Revelation 22:14).

The word *exousia* is also used in owning property (see Acts 5:4), the right to eat food offered to idols (see I Corinthians 8:9-11; translated liberty), and several other places in Scripture. However, what is missing in the Bible is any place where *exousia* (authority) is used in relationship to someone having authority over a believer in the context of the church. Nor is *exousia* (authority) ever used in relation to any alleged office of pastor or deacon. As we will see, the Bible never speaks of offices of power and authority within the church. The church does have authority, but authority comes from giftings the Lord Jesus Christ gives His people. He has given each of us who comprise His church freedom and liberty to serve others as He gifts us to serve (see I Corinthians 8:9). We are each free in Christ.

Jesus possesses ALL authority. When we exercise the gifts He has given us, fulfill the calling He has placed on us as we live our lives anointed by the Spirit (i.e., the fruit of the Spirit), we will exercise His authority in the church. Christ's authority is based on our sacrificial giving, serving, and humility of character. Likewise, authority in the church is evidenced as we love, serve, teach, and admonish one another, but authority in the church never resides in anyone's position in the church.

While it is true that historically the concept of authority in the church has emphasized the idea of being over others, this idea is a cultural concept and is not a biblical mandate at all. Jesus made that crystal clear with His rather stark statement that while the Gentiles exercise rule over others, it is NOT to be that way among believers (Mark 10:42-43).

There are two false practices in the church that continue to foster the mistaken notion of authority:

1. **The division between clergy and laity** where the former do the work of ministry, and the latter pay the salary of the former as professional ministers. All believers are called to be ministers.
2. **Pastors, elders, or deacons rule over the church because "the office"** of pastor or deacon has an inherent authority within the office. The constitution of an institutional church may grant legal authority to a group of elders or deacons, but this is a cultural practice of preference, not a biblical model at all. Again, legal authority is required by the state, but this legal authority has nothing to do with spiritual authority in the church.