

Government (Part Seven)

Authority of the Ministry

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Today we are going to look into what the Bible has to say in regard to the authority of the ministry. In order to get a running start at this, I want to go back into the book of Ephesians to confirm the basic relationships of all of us within the church. I made a statement, during the last sermon, that "the government in the church is family government."

One of the major themes in this book of Ephesians is unity. It shows **why** we can have unity and **how** it should be accomplished. So turn with me to Ephesians 1. I am not going to be doing a great deal of expounding, because I feel that these scriptures are so clear in regard to what the apostle Paul's purpose is. And I feel that it really applies to *you* and *me* as part of the church of God, here in the end time. It is something that we very much need to understand.

Ephesians 1:3-4 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.

I just want you to see there that God has been working this thing out—thinking about it, thinking about His purpose—before *time* began! Time began when God created the heavens and the earth, by which we keep time. And, maybe, in one sense we would say that time did not begin until God created Adam. Then time became important. (Time does not mean the same thing to God.) But God has been thinking about the purpose that He is working out in our lives since before time began.

Ephesians 1:9-10 Having made known to us [the church] the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself that in the dispensation of the fullness of time

[Look at this!] He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on the earth—in Him.

Everything "**in one.**" One Body, one Kingdom, one Family, and one Church. That sets the stage for the rest of the book. **Unity**—we do not have it on earth. Mankind has never been "one" in the way that God wants man to be one. And so His purpose, which began before time.

God understood what was going to happen when He created men. There was free moral agency, and there was going to be a Devil to tempt man. And man's nature was going to be such that—because of what Satan was doing—men, and women, and everybody else (nationalities, language groups, ethnic groups) were going to be driven against one another. It is going to seem as if **unity** is impossible.

Look at what is happening over there in Yugoslavia. This is not a Third World, uncivilized country that we are talking about. We are talking about a nation whose history goes back probably as far as our does. (I mean the Israelitish people.) But they have been in Europe for thousands of years—much longer than our people have been in this nation. And yet, here they are—brother fighting against brother. (Maybe they are cousins. I do not know. Maybe they are not brothers.)

Nonetheless, civil war and strife within family units are occurring there. But *God's purpose* is to bring all together "**in one.**"

Ephesians 1:22-23 And he put all things under His [Christ's] feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

We find that the church is a dynamic organism. God is the one who planned that there would be such a body of people. So, it is *a living organism*. We find here that it owes its existence, its life, and its governance to the living Jesus Christ—who is God!

Ephesians 2:14a For He Himself [Jesus Christ] is our peace.

He is the means of peace. (There is no peace among men today.)

Ephesians 2:14 For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one. . . .

The big thing here is *the joining together in "one"* of the Gentile and the Israelite. So, we have to think of this in terms of something that is happening worldwide. But we also have to think of it in terms of something that is taking place in our life, individually—as God blends us into this spiritual organism that He is putting together.

Ephesians 2:14-17 . . . and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near.

We are a diverse people, but we have (all of us) one thing in common. That is, Jesus Christ—or, our loyalty to Jesus Christ. That is why He is our **peace**. He is *the means* to peace. Hang on to this thought, because it has very much to do with government. Your relationship to Jesus Christ is what is going to make government in the church work! Because of that relationship that you have with Him, He becomes *the means* of peace. This theme continues:

Ephesians 3:5 Which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men. . . .

He is talking about this great *mystery* . "Mystery," in this book, has to do with *the uniting of all people into "one."*

Ephesians 3:5-6 Which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy

apostles and prophets: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, **of the same body**, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel.

The theme continues in chapter 4. My Bible has a subtitle over this chapter—telling us to "Walk in Unity."

Ephesians 4:4-6 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

So, he is showing that *spiritually* there **is** a unity. It is men who are divided. But *we* have to endeavor to make this unity occur. And God, knowing how difficult it is going to be, gave gifts to the church. Those gifts are in the form of men—ministers—that He gave to the church. (We will get back to that, a little bit later.) The ministry has been given, by God, to this Body to bring us to a common body of beliefs (doctrine). What you *believe* is what you **act on!** That determines what we are going to do.

Up to this point, Paul has been laying the groundwork. Or, you might say "the theology" of the theme that he is teaching these people. At the beginning of verse 17, Paul begins to lay on us the ethical demands of the theology that he gave to us in the first 4½ chapters. So we see at the beginning of the letter, then, *the spiritual basis*; and beginning now (in chapter 4 and verse 17) we see that there has to be *a right moral basis* as well.

Without the right **theology** (without the right teaching, without the right purpose) *and* without the right **activity** (meaning the ethical demand) there will not be much "getting along" at all—regardless of the intensity of the government that is placed over us.

It is the responsibility of each person to govern himself. Otherwise, even the very best government—the government of our Head, Jesus Christ—will not work.

Still looking at the "ethical demands" that are being laid upon us, notice what Paul says in regard to our relationships (conduct) within this Body of people. Maybe most specifically, we might say, that it might apply directly to church services. But I think we have to think of it in terms of a situation that is much broader than that. We are to be:

Ephesians 5:21 Submitting to one another in the fear of God.

We are to be subject to one another—**not** on the basis of being better or worse. It is not a matter of social status. It is not a matter of money, clothing, or anything of that kind. It is not a matter of profession but, rather, on the basis of our relationship with God, through Jesus Christ.

Did you notice what it said in verse 21? "Submitting to one another in the fear of God." That is, out of respect, out of reverence, **for Him!** This is *the key* for the kind of conduct that we are to have in our life—especially with one another.

So, this includes the ministry. It does not matter whether you are a minister or a lay member; whether you are a deacon or whether you are not ordained. It does not matter at all. That applies to everybody. And, if we go all the way back to the beginning of verse 1, we would find what Paul said leading up to this.

Ephesians 5:1-2 Therefore be imitators [or, followers] of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us [There is the pattern. "*As Christ also has loved us.*"] and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.

That ought to give pretty clear instruction. Then he says, "No fornication, uncleanness, covetousness;" and the ethical (the moral) demands are laid down. Before one can meet the moral demands, one has to consider himself *a living sacrifice*—like Jesus Christ. Connect this to the theme of the book, connect this to chapter 5 (especially the end part of the chapter)—he is telling us the basis for *why* we should be able (or, *how* we should be able) to submit.

You see—sacrifice undergirds the action. If we do not have a sacrificial attitude, then it is very likely that we are not going to be able to get along because we are not going to be able to *submit to one another*. So, again in this context (just like in Philippians 2), Christ's relationship with the church is **the pattern**.

Now notice: In Christ's life, even in the context of this chapter, there is no indication of domination by the leader (Christ)—or, we might say, the one in authority (be it a minister, be it a husband, or whatever). The apostle, here, is blending these all together. That is what we are to understand here. *There is no indication of domination by the one in authority, or of blind and unthinking subservience by the one under authority.*

What we see, then, is *voluntary consent* and *mutual submission*—as an act of faith in Christ. This is the way to unity. It all depends on the individual. Within the context of the Bible, we should have the spiritual equipment to be able to do this. We have the right goal—because God has revealed it to us. We have the right Spirit. We have gifts given to us—to preach to us and to bring us to a common body of belief. And, if we have the right attitude, then unity ought to be possible.

I want to clarify here that God is not talking about acts—or, orders—that involve sin. (I am talking about this "submitting to one another", in chapter 5.) Nobody is ever under orders from God to submit to sin, under any circumstance! Everybody has the responsibility of obeying God in regard to those things.

But life is not all "moral," in the sense of every act involving something that has to do with the breaking of a command of God. In fact, I would say that many of the things in life (maybe the vast majority of things—or, maybe I would even go so far as to say 90% of the decisions, or choices, that are made by us or that confront us in our life) have nothing to do with sin *per se*. It has to do with making choices between what are wise and foolish—and all of the spectrum in between. (Thus, what is simply going to be "the best thing to do.")

We have an example here in church services. The order of services, in the church, was something that was set by Mr. Armstrong. We have three songs. Then we have an opening prayer. Then we have a sermonette. Then we have another song. Then we have announcements. We might have special music in there. Then we have the sermon. Then we have another song. And then we have a closing prayer.

Now, if somebody wants to alter that, they are really free to do it—as far as God is concerned. It does not matter whether we have two songs at the beginning, or one song. Or, whether we have four songs in between. Or whether, instead of having five songs, we have seven songs or nine songs. That kind of thing does not involve sin. It is a matter of what works best. What is the wisest pattern to follow in regard to arranging church services so that, let us say, psychologically it sets up the best kind of atmosphere—so that everybody is involved spiritually, with their whole heart, in what is going on.

In his experience and his wisdom, Mr. Armstrong came to the conclusion that this works best. We are dealing here (in this thing about *submitting to one another in the fear of God*) with things that involve opinion and experience, wisdom or foolishness—not **sin**. Nobody ever has to submit to sin. Everybody is responsible to God **not to submit** in that kind of a case.

This same principle is true in virtually every area of life. It is true in the family—in family relationships. It is true on the job, as well. The problem is that we often have strong feelings about how things ought to be done, or how we ought to be treated. When this is combined with our competitiveness and desire to control, feelings of offense begin to rise. Someone will begin to pitch a fit, or to nag, or to push, or to throw his weight around. Division begins, and eventually there will be war on some scale. You will have a fight going.

The overwhelming majority of events like this do not amount to a hill of beans to God. Only that we might be offended—that would concern Him. Then we would have offense to overcome. Or, only that division is being

created—that would concern Him. The thing that started it just involves opinions—and not sin. But it may build towards something that is very serious; and that, in turn, would concern Him.

There are various, better, ways of doing things. "There is more than one way to skin a cat," as we might say. What God is getting at is that, unless sin is involved, it does not much matter which way things are done. The object with God (and His purpose) is for us to honestly and humbly *search for* and *submit to* what appears to be **the best way**—regardless of whose idea it is. When this is done (this humbly searching for and submitting to the best way)—whether one is the leader or the one under authority— ***both are exalted*** .

That is the practical application of Philippians 2:5-11. That is what Paul was leading to (only on a much grander scale), when he said "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, who humbled Himself." He did not think it a big thing that He should be equal with God! He did not grasp at it. He let it go. He humbled Himself. "Therefore, (Paul says) He has received the highest of exaltation."

There is a connection between doing this and the kind of results that are produced. It is the way to the right kind of leadership. When you put Philippians 2:5-11 together with the whole book of Ephesians— understanding that this *submitting to one another* is done as an act of faith in God—it produces the right result. God will ensure that things work out the right way. It may not begin the right way, and there might be a lot of trouble going through it. But, because it is done in this kind of an attitude, it will produce the right fruit.

This *submitting to one another* is, in part, motivated by both (1) the desire to get along with one another and (2) being content with less than one's ordinary dues.

Ephesians 5:25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it.

That coordinates perfectly with verse 2 of this same chapter. I say this because He certainly got along with less than His due. Again, He is **the**

pattern. He made Himself a bond slave for the church. And so we see that, in God's order of things, Christ expects the leader (in the family that would be the husband, and in the church, that would be the pastor and the elders) to give, to give, and to give some more. Remember Jesus' admonition (there in Matthew 20), "Whoever desires to be great among you, let him be your servant."

All of these things link together. Matthew 20:25—with the whole book of Ephesians—and Philippians 2. God has **a way** (if I can express it in that way) toward unity, and toward exaltation, toward greatness—the right kind of leadership.

I, again, also want to look to Christ as the pattern here. What I have been saying might lead one to think that *if* one gives, and gives, and gives, *then* one becomes a doormat. Well, I submit to you that just the opposite occurs! There is nobody who *gave* more than Christ, and He certainly was **not** a doormat. What He was, though, was considerate and sensitive—a concerned Leader—who humbly and wisely considered His options, and chose the best ones for all concerned. He was able to do this because He was truly surrendered to God. And He was not just looking out for His own interests. Far from losing authority, this is the very foundation of true authority and leadership.

So, again, I want you to connect this to Philippians 2:8-9, because it says that, *because* He humbled Himself, He is now exalted to the very highest degree possible.

Now, let us go back to Ephesians 4; and we will begin to fit the ministry's piece back into the whole once again.

Ephesians 4:11-13 And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints, for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

There is authority in the ministry, but it is narrow and specific. It is seen as, what I would call, "a staff position"—given by God, as a gift to the church, for equipping the saints for service and for edifying the Body of Christ (so that we can all *grow up* into Christ).

A key word here, in regard to the ministry, is "equipping." This word is used in regards to medicine for the setting of a bone. In politics, it is used in bringing opposing parties together. In Mark 1, it is used for the mending of fishing nets. In Galatians 6, it is used of instructing a church member so that he is fit to take his place in fellowship again. The basic idea of this word is putting something in the condition it ought to be in.

It is the ministry's responsibility to God, in behalf of the church, to put the church member into the condition that they ought to be in. The function, then, of the ministry is to see that the church members are so educated, so guided, so cared for, and so sought for (when they go astray) that they become what they ought to be. Their aim is to see that this work of service (ministry) goes on—beyond themselves. "Ministry" means "practical service."

The concept here is always one of **construction**. It is positive, showing up in the word "edifying." It means, "building up." (We are talking about the work of the ministry here.) It is always one of construction towards *unity*. "Till we all come to. . . the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."

A minister's aim should **never** be that we merely become decent and respectable people. Rather, *the fullness of Christ*—that is the aim. There are a lot of decent and respectable people out there who are not converted. (I mean "out there," in the world.) So, the ministry's aim is to bring people to "the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." That means to examples of perfect Christian manhood [or] perfect Christian womanhood. Brethren, that is a high calling! (I do not mean the ministry. I am talking about the lay member.)

We cannot really serve correctly until we get this thing about government and authority straightened out because there is in every one of us the drive to control. All of us, then, need to learn the extent of our authority. And, as I

mentioned before, it is not always the same in every situation. That ought to be easy to understand. The Bible gives us principles that cover where *our limits* are.

What is so interesting in the Bible, in regard to the ministry, is that there is hardly anything that is mentioned about the minister's authority. There is some, but it does not focus on that. Instead, the Bible focus on what the minister's **attitude** is suppose to be—toward his authority, and toward those who are a part of the congregation.

Again, if you will remember in II Corinthians 10, the apostle Paul told the Corinthians there that his "measure" (meaning his "limits of authority") extended all the way to them. That implies, does it not, that God put in Paul a certain amount of authority over these people. There is recognition of authority being there. So, he had authority in their lives. But, in the apostle Paul's case, it also shows the overwhelming preponderance of evidence that is given is his concern that he did not go beyond his authority and build on another man's foundation—and, also, his attitude toward the people.

Now, both I and II Corinthians deal with a lot of bad problems. I think that someone told me one time that there are twenty-one separate problems that appear in these two books. But all you see, in regard to Paul really "exercising authority," is a little bit of sarcasm and a threat or two (that he would use his "power" when he got there, if need be). Instead, what we see is that his appeal was to *scripture* and *reason*.

Turn with me to I Corinthians 10. We used this verse last time; but I want you to just see what I am having us deal with here.

I Corinthians 10:14-15 Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. I speak as to wise men; judge for yourselves what I say.

"Judge for yourselves." He is appealing to their reason. His teaching was strong and clear, but it was not dictatorial. He appeals to them with strong spiritual arguments and logic. He appeals to them to *think*.

II Corinthians 4:2 But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully...

Notice how honest he shows that he was. He did not twist things in order to make it appear as though he had more power, or authority, than he did.

II Corinthians 4:2 ...But by manifestation of the truth. . .

I would say that, there, he is talking about the Scriptures of God. (Nothing deceitful.) He had no ulterior motive. He *manifested the truth* in his teaching, as well as in his life.

II Corinthians 4:2 ...Commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

This is the way Paul dealt with a congregation with very serious problems. Like Christ, he was not throwing his weight around. We used the scripture back in Philemon the last time.

Philemon 8-9 Therefore, though I might be very bold in Christ to command you what is fitting, yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you—

Paul is implying, is he not, that under the circumstance, he had the **authority** to give some commands. But that is not the way that he approached it. He *appealed*. "Philemon, I am appealing to your love." "Philemon, I am appealing to your reason."

Philemon 9-10 Yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you—being such a one as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ—I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten while in my chains.

I Thessalonians 2:3-4 For our exhortation did not come from deceit or uncleanness, nor was it in guile. [That sort of reminds you of II Corinthians 4:2.] But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts.

You can tell where the focus of Paul's life was. It had to do with his relationship with God. And, because of that **relationship**—that he had **with God** through Jesus Christ—he, then, responded to these people in the way that he did.

I Thessalonians 2:5-8 For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness—God is witness. Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children. So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us.

That is pretty clear. We could go all the way to verse 12, but we will not do that. Instead, turn with me to II Timothy. Here is advice from this same apostle to Timothy, to whom he was "passing the baton" (1) of preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God and (2) of pastoring the Ephesian church.

II Timothy 2:24-25 And a servant of the Lord [meaning, the minister] must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition...

"In humility." There it is. Connect that with Philippians 2. Humility is the way to *leadership*. Humility is the way to *exaltation*—God's way.

II Timothy 2:25 In humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth.

The power and authority in the ministry is in the exercise of *the gifts of God* given for fulfilling their responsibility. God gives *gifts* to the ministry so that they can teach, and then He *gives* the ministry to the church—in order that the church will be able to be equipped and come to the unity of the faith to the knowledge of Jesus Christ, unto a perfect man.

So the ministry's power is in the use of persuasive language (and I want to differentiate here, *not* carnal arguments). Their power is in the use of *persuasive language* that is in harmony with the truth of God which will, in turn, stir the Spirit of God in people—and encourage and motivate them to follow.

Now turn with me to Acts 15. I think that this chapter shows something important in regard to this. Most of you know that this was the council that was held in Jerusalem,(somewhere around 49 or 50 AD. These people were considering whether circumcision and other laws of that ilk were to be binding upon the New Testament church. There was a lot of controversy taking place within the church, as different groups were gathering themselves against one another; and the church was threatened with division.

Acts 15:6-9 Now the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter. And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up and said to them: "Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.

Acts 15:12-14 Then all the multitude kept silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul declaring how many miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles. And after they [Paul and Barnabas] had become silent, James answered, saying, "Men and brethren, listen to me: Simon has declared how God at first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name.

I chose this because I feel that it is important in showing where the authority of the ministry is. The authority of the ministry is **not** of the magisterial kind. That is, in which the person in authority dictates and coheres. Rather, it is in the form of *teaching* and *scriptural persuasion*.

Did you notice how the decision was reached? Did you notice whom God quoted? He quoted Peter. He quoted Barnabas. He quoted Paul. And He quoted James. Regardless of who it is that appears to give the decision, it was (1) the arguments of these men—which were in harmony with the scripture, and (2) their own personal experience that persuaded the multitude. (We will get back to this a little bit later in the sermon.)

So God preserved this to show us where the leadership was. It was with the apostles, in this case, because it was they who came up with the arguments that persuaded what the decision had to be in this area. That is, the **arguments** that those men gave (1) from their own personal experience in dealing (in this case) with the Gentiles and with (in Peter's case and James's case) Jesus Christ directly (while He was yet alive) and (2) from the scriptures. Then everybody said, "Yeah, that's the only way you can go. That is the right answer."

So the apostles "appeal" was to the Scriptures—reinforced by personal experience, which showed these scriptures' true application. The Holy Spirit in the others, then, moved the participants to see that Peter's presentation (and Paul's, and Barnabas' and also James') was in harmony with the Scriptures of God. So that made the decision clear.

I Corinthians 2:1-5 And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

This section is showing that Paul subordinated himself to the glory and the power of **the message!** His power was not in pretentious and clever rhetoric. Please understand that. When I am talking about "persuasive arguments," I am **not** talking about carnal rhetoric. We might be talking about just plain down-to-earth words, but they are in harmony with the scriptures of God.

That is where the power is—combined with the Spirit of God! Remember that Jesus said: "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life."

Paul subordinated himself to the glory and the power of the message. And so, the message that he gave contains simple words; but, combined with the Scripture and the Spirit of God working with those whom God was calling, they had powerful impact on them. That is what this chapter is about.

What we see in the Bible, in regard to authority, is that authority is something that we *give* to a leader because we see qualities in them that are in harmony with the truth of God. That motivates us to follow, because we are being stirred by the Spirit of God. This has a price, and that means that each and every one of us is **individually responsible**. It means that we must be very careful to prove all things and to hold fast to that which is good. That is our responsibility.

Remember that man [Herbert W. Armstrong] saying: "***Don't believe me. Believe the Bible!***"

If you are being led by the Spirit of God, it will respond. That is why the book of Ephesians said: "Don't quench the Spirit." So often we do, because we begin to see that following the prodding of the Spirit may lead us to a sacrifice in our lives that we do not want to deal with. That is when we quench it. That is why Ephesians 5 is so important.

Now, let us go back to John 21. After Jesus' resurrection, we begin to see clarified here the duties and responsibility of the ministry.

John 21:15 So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?" He

said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Feed My lambs."

What are the "these" in this context? Was it the material things—the boats that they fished out of, all the fishing gear that they used? Was it family members that were around there? Was it apostles that had also gone with Christ? Christ was throwing down the gauntlet to this minister. "Do you love Me more than these? Feed My lambs."

John 21:16-17 He said to him again the second time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Tend My sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Feed My sheep."

There is the responsibility of the ministry. There is where the minister's authority is. In **feeding** the sheep!

John 21:18-19 Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish." This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, "Follow Me."

Follow Him in what? Follow Him in the kind of death? Or, does it refer back further, to *feed My lambs*? That is: "Take care of the lambs in the same way I did. Lay down your life for them." Which one is it? I do not think that it matters, but it is something for all of us to think of—and, especially, the ministry to think of.

I Peter 5:1 The elders who are among you. . .

Now, remember who is writing this. The same one that Jesus told, "Feed My sheep. Feed My lambs. Tend My sheep."

I Peter 5:1-4 The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by constraint but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.

The title, or the term, "elder" goes all the way back to Numbers 11—in Moses' appointment of the seventy to assist him in administering God's law to Israel. "Elder" is the basic office in the church; and it includes everybody from "apostle" to "local elder." They are, in short, the counselors, and the teachers, and administrators of the church. This is a very weighty responsibility. The Bible looks upon the **elders** as the most privileged of all people—because of their responsibility. That is, their responsibility to serve God's church.

Because of this responsibility, they are *the most exposed* of all people to God's judgment. Remember the principle: *to whom much is given, much is required*. God has given "gifts" to the ministry—so that they, in turn, will be able to teach the church. It is a tremendous privilege—but also a weighty responsibility that no minister can afford to just slough off as being nothing.

Let me give you an example all the way back in Ezekiel 9. You will recognize these verses immediately.

Ezekiel 9:4-6 And the LORD said to him [to this angel with the inkhorn], "Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and cry over all the abominations that are done within it." To the others [That is, to the angels with the battle axes in their hands.] He said in my hearing, "Go after him through the city and kill; do not let your eye spare, nor have any pity. Utterly slay old and young men, maidens and little children and women; but do not come near anyone on whom is the mark; and begin at My sanctuary." So they began with the elders who were before the temple.

God's judgment begins with the ministry. "To whom much is given, much is required."

Malachi 3:1-3 "Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight. Behold, He is coming," says the LORD of hosts. "But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire and like launderers' soap. He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi [who are a "type" of the ministers today], and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer to the LORD an offering in righteousness.

Back in I Peter 5, the minister is admonished that he must **not** be in the office for what he can get out of it. He is to lay down his life for it. There are those (surely among the ministry, as well) who desire power and prestige more than money. They love authority so much that they are willing to exercise it in a small area—just so they can exercise it.

Those of you who might be familiar with Milton's poem "Paradise Lost" will know that Milton portrayed Satan in there as being rather willing to rule over hell than to enjoy heaven. He liked his authority that much.

The elder is to be a **shepherd**, and a shepherd is a symbol of selfless care and sacrificial love. He is to consider that his responsibility and his office was not earned by merit, but allotted or assigned by God. That is important! It is not something that he earned, or deserves. This is clarified all the way back to Deuteronomy 9:29.

It is interesting there because exactly the same word used in reference to Israel being God's *inheritance*, in the Septuagint that word "inheritance" is [the Greek word] *kleros*. That is the same word that is used here in I Peter 5: 3 in regard to "being lords over those entrusted to you." The ministry is to look at the congregation that he pastors as having been given, or allotted, or assigned to him as his "inheritance"—in the same way that Israel was God's inheritance. The idea behind this is that, as God treated Israel (and He gave

His life for it), the minister is to treat his congregation. That is, having the same kind of regard. So the congregation is "the allotment" of the elder, and he had better take care of it.

So, we have "elder." We have "overseer." And we have "shepherd"—used to describe the elder's responsibility. *Elder* indicates being "senior." It implies having a lot of experience; and, therefore, indicates having a lot of wisdom. Also, being a counselor. An *overseer*, or a bishop, indicates having a measure of rule. It means to superintend—one who surveys, or watches. *Shepherd* indicates somebody who feeds, or guides, or guards, or tends, or cares for. And the apostle Paul (in I Corinthians 4:1-2) described himself as being both a servant and a steward. A steward is one who administers, or oversees.

I Timothy 5:17 Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine.

I want to pick up on the word "oversee," that appears there in I Timothy, because it indicates a different area of authority for an elder. Here, "rule" means to be over, to preside over, to superintend, or to supervise. The same word is also used in I Thessalonians 5:12 and in I Timothy 3:4-5. There it is used—in context of a man in his qualifications for an elder—as one who "rules well his own house." Again, you see the comparison between a family and the church. That is, that *church government* and *family government* are similar. And here, it indicates no more authority is given to the ministry than a husband has in his family.

The authority to supervise is given to carry out the work of the church. Again, I think, we must see that it is God's intention that the authority is not absolute. It is not dictatorial. But I think there are some who would construe it that way—if they avoid the scriptures that we have been going over here.

I want to show you examples out of the scriptures that will, I think, prove to you how the apostles thought of their authority over the church. This is very interesting. We are going to go to the book of Acts. I will give you these scriptures fairly rapidly, because I do not think that they need a great deal of explanation.

In the first chapter of Acts, Christ has died. He has risen. He has ascended to heaven. And the apostles are short one. They need another one to fill out so that there will be twelve in their group.

Acts 1:15 And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples (altogether the number of names was about a hundred and twenty.)

Then he begins to explain that there is need for another to fill out the number to twelve. But he presents it, here, to the whole one hundred and twenty.

Acts 1:23 And they proposed two: Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias.

It seems like the congregation had a voice in things, did they not? And then, out of those two, God chose one. (Matthias.)

Acts 6:1-7 Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. [So, trouble in the church.] Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word." And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen. . .[and then the rest.] whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them. Then the word of God spread [and so forth.] ...

Did you see that? "They chose." It was not arbitrary, on the part of the apostles.

Acts 8:14 Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them.

Who are the rest of the "*they*" ?

Acts 13:1-3 Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon. . .[and so forth]. As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away.

It looks to me like *the whole church* was involved in this.

Acts 15:22 Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, namely, Judas who was also called Barsabas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren.

Again *the whole church*, apparently, was involved. I do not know exactly how they did it. But God's Word is showing that there was involvement by the congregation, and that the apostles were not acting arbitrarily in their position as leaders over the church.

Now, Acts 15 took place some sixteen, seventeen, or eighteen years after Christ had ascended. So they had plenty of time to learn; but we find that they are involving the congregation in the direction of the church. The ministry is still responsible; but, nonetheless, they are doing those things.

I think that Acts 6 is especially interesting in regard to something that is important to all of us. I am not going to go back to it; but it tends to show the ministry being somewhat "removed" from paternalistically solving problems in the congregation—which, in turn, implies that they were willing to turn the necessary authority over to others (for working out the solution). As a matter of fact, they turned the solution of the problem over to those who were most acutely and passionately affected by it. Read it, and you will see that.

Matthew 18:15-17 "Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you,

you have gained your brother. [Okay. We have got trouble in the congregation.] But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.' [Now, I want you to notice verse 17. Read it carefully, with me.] And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the [minister?]. But if he refuses even to hear the [minister?], let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.

It does not say *minister*, brethren! We read that into it! Jesus' advice in a situation like that was to ***take it before a jury of your peers in the congregation*** (and that may include the minister), because "*in a multitude of counselors there is wisdom.*" In a multitude of counselors there is safety.

I will tell you, the ministry has been "burdened" with that responsibility—a burden that Jesus never put on the ministry! I think that that is exceedingly important.

In I Corinthians 6 we find, again, a dealing with problems.

I Corinthians 6:1-2 Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints? Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters?

Now, think about this. Is he talking to the ministry? Or, is he talking to the whole congregation? I do not think that there is any indication that he is talking directly to the ministry. The ministry is included, because they are part of the congregation.

I Corinthians 6:3-4 Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life? If then you have judgments concerning things pertaining to this life, do you appoint those who are least esteemed by the church to judge?

It is a question. He is calling them into account. They were doing the wrong thing. They were calling those to judge who were least able to do so. Now,

what kind of justice, what kind of fairness, what kind of equity can there be in that kind of situation?

I Corinthians 6:5 I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you, not even one, who will be able to judge between his brethren?

Disputes of this kind are to be brought **to the church**. And, I dare say that there will be a lot less problems (or, more problems being resolved between the people involved) if they know that they are eventually going to bring it before a whole group of people. It will get resolved, and settled, before that occurs.

Now, let's begin to close this.

Galatians 6:1-2 Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

This dovetails perfectly with Ephesians (and especially Ephesians 5) and, of course, with Philippians 2 as well.

Galatians 6:3-5 For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let each one examine his own works, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For each one shall bear his own load.

It is that, which I want you to think on. I think that we should be able to see, from this series, that the key element in making government work is **YOU!** Each one of us bears the responsibility **from God**: (1) to study, and (2) to know what our limits are under His law, and (3) to govern ourselves accordingly. And there is no escaping this responsibility! Each one bears his own load.

This is largely what this Christian life is all about. That is, *making government work*.

Today, in this culture in which we live, we have been largely instructed to have "a welfare mentality"—in which the responsibility is shifted from the individual to the government. Indeed, government does bear some responsibility but its responsibility is to **teach** and **direct** so that there can be an environment of order and purpose. But *the individual* bears the responsibility of ***governing himself*** within that established authority.

Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe, the German philosopher, said: "The best of all governments is that which teaches us to govern ourselves." That is exactly what God is doing.

The major bugaboo hindering good government among men is *self-interest*. Unfortunately, this same *self-interest* is in "the government" as well as in "the governed." And this is the very flaw that God is working to eradicate in us.

II Corinthians 5:9-10 Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

So, let us make it **our aim** to do that which is good. If we are surrendered to Him—and making it our aim to please Him—we cannot help but succeed. To stand before Him "on that day" in a way that is pleasing to Him.