

Authority: Why So Many Resent It

Pride and Humility

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I was reading an article about submission to authority by Dr. Theodore Dalrymple in the *New Statesman* titled "Just Do What The Pilot Tells You." It contains some interesting findings from some research that another gentleman has done. He writes:

"Some people think a determined opposition to authority is principled and romantic. ... It is a quarter of a century since the psychologist Stanley Milgram published his masterpiece, *Obedience to Authority*."

[Just a background note: Milgram's work was generally taken as a tract against obedience to authority—but, his findings are what are interesting.]

"Milgram asked ordinary people to come to the psychology laboratories of Yale University to take part in an experiment to determine the effects of punishment on learning. The subjects were told to deliver electric shocks of increasing severity, from 15 to 450 volts, whenever a man who was supposed to learn pairs of words made a mistake. In fact the man was an actor who received no shocks at all, but who simply acted as if he had.

Milgram discovered that about two-thirds of his subjects (who were probably representative of the population as a whole) were quite prepared to give a complete stranger electric shocks that they believed to be painful, dangerous and even possibly fatal. This was despite the stranger's screams of protest. They were willing to do so simply because they were told by someone apparently in authority — the psychologist overseeing the experiment — that the test had to go on.

By a series of clever manipulations, Milgram proved that it was obedience to authority that led people to behave in this fashion, rather than, say, the unleashing of a latent sadistic urge to inflict pain on people.

Although Milgram was restrained in his discussion of the significance of his findings, he nevertheless suggested that they helped to explain how, in certain circumstances, even decent people might become torturers and killers.

It is not difficult to see how someone might draw anarchist or anti-authority conclusions from Milgram's horrifying experimental

results. Indeed the title ["Obedience to Authority'] alone sometimes seems to produce this effect."

As I was re-reading it, after an interval of 20 years, on a plane to Dublin, the woman next to me—a social worker in a Dublin hospital—said: "I've always been against all authority."

"All?" I asked.

"All," she replied. "We've suffered a lot in Ireland from the authority of the Catholic Church."

"What about the pilot of this aircraft?" I asked. "I assume you would prefer him to continue to fly it, rather than, say, for me to take over, and that were I to attempt to do so, he should exert his authority over me as captain?"

She readily agreed that in this instance his authority was necessary, though only for a short time, and was legitimate because she had granted it to him. I pointed out that even the brief authority that she had been so kind as to bestow upon him actually depended upon a whole chain, or network, of other authority, such as licensing boards, medical examiners and so forth, upon whose competence, honesty and diligence she could not possibly pronounce.

She was not against all authority, therefore: on the contrary, she trusted much of it implicitly, even blindly. And necessarily so in a complex, technologically advanced society.

But her initial response to the question of obedience to authority was far from unusual. She probably thought a blanket opposition to authority was a heroic moral stance, indeed the only possible decent attitude towards it. To oppose authority is always romantic and principled, to uphold it prosaic and cowardly.

Disobedience to authority is not inherently more glorious than obedience. It rather depends on the nature of the orders given or the behavior demanded."

I thought that was a very good summary of the problems our nation is going through having to do with authority and also the attitude that creeps into God's Church having to do with authority.

Americans do not distinguish the difference between authority, which is something good, and authoritarianism, which is something bad. The concept of authoritarianism is so closely associated with that of authority that human reasoning sees little difference.

Since Americans generally don't see the difference, authority is confused with "abuse of power," when in reality, "abuse of power" is a function of authoritarianism. Authoritarianism, with its inclination to control people's lives, causes us anxiety and fear. Authority does not!

Solomon concluded that it's better never to have existed, than to live under evil, which includes authoritarianism, committed on the earth.

Ecclesiastes 4:1-3 Then I returned and considered all the oppression that is done under the sun: And look! The tears of the oppressed, But they have no comforter—on the side of their oppressors there is power, But they have no comforter. Therefore I praised the dead who were already dead, More than the living who are still alive. Yet, better than both is he who has never existed, Who has not seen the evil work that is done under the sun.

Authoritarianism equals oppression. So much of what we see here is speaking about authoritarianism.

What is Authoritarianism? It is the belief in, related to, or characterization of unquestioned obedience to authority, as that of a dictator, rather than individual freedom of judgment and action. It is a perversion of authority.

Authoritarianism—authority's shadowy mirror image—is not dynamic but static. It imposes a template of conformity on people to restrict and control their individual development. Its meaning is revealed in the growth it hinders because of its repressive and controlling tactics, which consistently reduces freedom. So it is an oppressive type of perversion of authority.

Freedom is intertwined with the exercise of authority. The foundation of authoritarianism is not in love but in power. It enjoys the use of force, manipulation, humiliation, revenge and winning at any cost. There is a major difference between authority and authoritarianism, or oppression.

Authoritarianism serves the purposes of the few who dominate the many. To that end, authoritarianism promotes bureaucratic structures and casts a finer net of laws and regulations over the lives of ordinary people. Authoritarians use making laws and regulations as ends in themselves to further their own agendas. We see this in a great way in all of this world's governments, and the excessive laws that they pass. In this nation, I have not seen such a flurry of passing laws as I have in the last decade. They seem feverish about it. It is an element of control. It excites and increases the power of the leaders who are so perverted.

Thousands of laws are passed on national, state, and local levels in the United States every day to control the movement and activities of the populace. Although much of this lawmaking is initiated by authoritarians, as Christians we are obligated to obey the laws of the land, provided they do not conflict with the laws of God.

Proper human authority depends on mentally healthy people maintaining healthy relationships in their personal, work, and public lives. Authority serves a good purpose wherever people try to help each other. There is the key. Authority is abused when a person is no longer trying to help and serve others.

The essence of the problem of resentment of authority and oppression through authoritarianism lies in the uncontrolled pride that we see in this world and in individuals and in human nature.

Look at another quote from Dr. Dalrymple in his article "Just Do What The Pilot Tells You":

"Teachers tell me that if they mention to parents that their children are misbehaving, sometimes in grotesquely antisocial ways, the parents will turn unpleasant towards the teachers, who in this instance represent authority.

Recently I met a stepfather who was sent to prison for attacking a teacher who complained about his stepson.

The security men in my hospital tell me that when they catch a boy stealing a car in the hospital grounds and return him to his parents, the parents start shouting at the security men, who again represent authority. Indeed some security men now refuse to take the car thieves home, for fear of parental violence directed at them.

Blind disobedience to authority is no more to be encouraged than blind obedience. It is far from pleasant when encountered. Among my patients are quite a number who admit to having always had "a problem with authority".

They confess it coyly, as if it were a sign of unbridled egotism. Unable to apply themselves at school, they are unable to take orders at work, and their personal relationships are almost always stormy and violent. They accept no rules, not even the informal ones that grow up between people who live closely together.

For people who have a problem with authority, their whim is law. The only consideration that moderates their conduct is the threat of superior, but essentially arbitrary, violence by others.

An order given by another person is thus a threat to his ego, because following orders is submission to power and nothing else."

Egotism is selfishness, self-centeredness, and a lack of consideration for others. So following orders is an affront to a person's pride. There is the key to a problem with authority—PRIDE! Pride is always the underlying element that motivates a problem with authority.

Pride manifests itself by these self-centered characteristics: false humility as in the case of Cain, permissiveness of sin as in the case of Balaam, and rebellion as in the case of Korah.

Pride also manifests itself in the following ways: tooting our own horns; admiring ourselves; putting on airs to attempt to appear intellectually superior to others; contempt and slander of others; envy at the talents others have; anxiety to gain applause; distress and rage when slighted; impatience with others who contradict us; and opposition to God himself. The list goes on and on and on.

The evil effects of pride are beyond computation. It has spread itself universally in all nations, among all people; and it seems that it was the first sin that affected human beings—and it

seems that is the last conquered. Pride is the origin of: discontent, ingratitude, covetousness, presumption, passion, extravagance, bigotry, war, and persecution. In fact, all evil is connected in some way with pride. So if we live in a world that is so affected by pride, it is only natural that there would be a severe opposition to true authority.

The problem, whether small or great, is of great concern to us as we seek to overcome the root of spiritual problems. We are very familiar with the fact that Jesus said,

Luke 16:10 "He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much;
and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much,"

This principle holds true for our obedience to authority. We have to ask ourselves, as Christians trying to overcome our problems, are we faithful in what is least? Are we trying to obey authority even in the small things? (Or what we think are the small things...) Everything we are confronted with in the way of authority is a test to see how well we are going to function in the Kingdom of God.

Pride distorts truth and reality. Satan was the first to allow this to happen to himself; and now he uses his deceptive ways to encourage our pride to grow and fester deep down inside of us.

Jeremiah 17:9 The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?

The Hebrew word for "deceitful" in that verse means "full of windings or twistings." It is not the narrow and straight path but it is the broad and winding path that deceit causes us to take.

Since Satan was the first to lose control of himself to pride, and he is the father of pride, he has had a long time to fine-tune his skills in deceitfully and subtly causing us to lose control to our own pride. He deceives us into exalting ourselves so he can turn our minds from GOD. Paul expresses this here:

Galatians 6:3 For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself.

That is a flat-out, blanket statement with no exceptions.

The English word "deceives" in verse 3 is translated from the Greek word *phrenapateo*. It means, to be a mind misleader after having been misled by a seducer. Or, in other words, it is the individual who has himself been deceived and in turn deceives someone else.

Related to pride it means the individual has been seduced by Satan and his own human nature to believe that he is above the level in understanding of others, he then proceeds to try to deceive everyone else to think the same thing he does. Sometimes this is done knowingly and sometimes he is so deceived he does it unknowingly.

If Satan and his demons have been cast down to earth (as mentioned in Revelation 12), then,

we are at a time of great deception. All of humanity is in greater danger now (than they ever have been) of falling into the pitfalls of pride. This pride is going to hammer this society until it is on its knees (so to speak). At times of deception and ignorance, pride seems to flourish all the more. We are certainly at that point—of such ignorance, spiritually.

Thankfully, we have the Holy Spirit to help us fight pride. But, fight we must, since Satan has targeted us individually (and as the Church) for persecution. Most of the persecution comes from areas and directions we don't expect. But we do know the source of it, which of course is Satan the devil.

Revelation 12:7-13 And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, "Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death. Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time." Now when the dragon saw that he had been cast to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male Child.

Since Satan deceives the whole world, he has infused many false beliefs into this present day society that portray selfishness as a virtue—they encourage manipulation, assertiveness, arrogance and even intimidation as acceptable ways of dealing with life's difficulties. But God calls this intellectual pride—spiritual drunkenness—in Isaiah 28, because, if we let our pride get control of us, it distorts our judgment as if we were intoxicated.

Pride can so blind us to our true motives that we could even sacrifice our physical lives and still be 100 percent wrong. We certainly see that when nations go to war and thousands of troops lose their lives. But they are 100 percent wrong in what they are doing—even if it is for a religious cause, as we see with the Muslims and with the United States and its "Christian" cause.

Jesus Christ was concerned about people's motives. He's more interested and impressed by WHY we do good deeds, rather than THAT we do good deeds. Although doing good deeds is certainly an important aspect of our Christian life.

He knows that man's reason and moral impulses are distorted by "the pride of life" as mentioned by the apostle John in I John 2:16. The pride of life manifests itself in the more or less unconscious belief that we ourselves, as individuals, are the final authority, that we are quite capable of running our lives at our own pace and without God. In fact, this world feels that

God is in the way when it comes to exerting one's own authority.

This enthronement of self—this confidence in our own ability; this determination deep inside that we can operate independently of God; this carefully concealed self-will—is what God's word calls pride. It is actually rebellion against God and God's authority.

Pride is affecting our lives more than we realize. It causes the rejection of and the rebellion against authority. Ungodly people have always insinuated their way into the Church, distorting God's true message, and stirring up opposition against the leaders of the Church.

Jude 3 urges us to "contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. Jude 8 says that these people, who creep in unaware and try to usurp or accuse authority in the church, "reject authority, and speak evil of dignitaries." So we know who these people are many times because they are attacking leaders in the church.

We have seen this to be a major characteristic of our time today, both in and out of the Church. We have all experienced it, especially with what we saw in the World Wide Church of God years ago. And, no doubt, it is still continuing.

The attitude that characterized false Christians in Jude's time is as old as Satan, the original rebel. Isaiah reveals that pride was the trigger for Satan's rebellion long ago, before human beings were created. Regarding the fall of Lucifer:

Isaiah 14:12-14 "How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart: 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.'

This same attitude of self-exaltation can easily affect Church members. So we have to caution ourselves whenever we complain or gripe about a decision that has been made in God's church in an administrative way or in doctrinal ways (as long as they are in line with God's truth). We have to realize that this is the attitude we have when we do that—the attitude of Satan. We know what happened to him and anyone who has associated themselves with him, or what will eventually happen to him.

Regarding the qualifications of ministers, Paul warns in I Timothy 3: 6,

I Timothy 3:6 "not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil."

It doesn't matter who we are in the Church of God, anyone can fall into the deception of self-exalting.

Pride could be called the original sin. And it always goes before destruction (Proverbs 16:18). Satan has insidiously pumped every human mind with this perverted attitude. Those who claim

they are the most free from it are usually the most blinded by it. Everyone has pride. If we are working on it we see it, but if we're not working on it we don't.

The deception really comes in when we are not doing our part to overcome sin such as pride. God inspired Jude to use three case histories from the Old Testament to illustrate pride in action. Jude 11 presents "the way of Cain," "the error of Balaam" and "the rebellion of Korah" as examples of pride in action. These three memorable examples mirror attitudes with which we are all familiar—having to do with pride and self-centeredness and self-gain.

Cain's self-centeredness and false humility

Cain, killer of his brother Abel, is well known as the world's first murderer. With very few humans around, he couldn't very well resort to one of the cardinal tricks of pride, that of blaming others. It is obvious that there were very few others to blame.

So instead he blamed God!—the authority of the universe. When God indicted Cain, Cain's first reaction was an accusative, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Underneath these few words lurked a hostile attitude. Cain gave in to the natural tendency of the human mind by trying to dodge correction, as did his parents Adam and Eve before him.

Sometimes we see these attitudes in our children as we try to correct them. They blame someone else. Sometimes it is the dog who did it! You know how children are. They are not very good at being deceitful in their reasoning so they are very obvious sometimes.

Cain's pride drove him down the dark alley of self-justification and hostility to authority. The real truth about ourselves disappears in our own minds when we self-justify our mistakes.

In Isaiah 59, Isaiah describes how people allow sin to separate them from God, and part of the result is that they make crooked paths for themselves.

Isaiah 59:7-8 Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood; their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity; wasting and destruction are in their paths. The way of peace they have not known, and there is no justice in their ways; they have made themselves crooked paths; whoever takes that way shall not know peace.

A "crooked path" is an emblem of dishonesty, fraud, and deceit. A "straight path" is an emblem of sincerity, truth, honesty, and uprightness. Their counsels and plans were perverse and evil. We have a similar expression now when we say of a man that he is 'straightforward,' meaning that he is an honest man. He tells the truth.

Cain lashed out at God in self-pity and hostility when God announced the penalty. Cain complained, "My punishment is greater than I can bear!" Don't be fooled by Cain's "woe is me" tactic of self-pity. There was no humility, no true repentance, and no deeply ashamed earnestness to do better. How can we tell?—By the fruits!

Authority is a positive force that naturally encourages growth. Its function is to assist in

encouraging life. We parents "author" the growth of our children. We endow our children with the growth that makes them good parents to a future generation. The music teacher encourages the talented student to compose a symphony. Our Pastor encourages our spiritual growth with his God-given authority.

In our own lives, we may be able to relate to what we have become because of a parent or teacher who opened us up as no other had done and whose relationship sustained our ongoing development. We recognize that these individuals have authority, because we grew positively out of our relationships with them. Good fruit was produced. And from true authority, good fruit is produced.

Cain produced a line of hardened criminals whose hearts were impervious to real repentance. It got so bad that God had to destroy them in the Flood and start the world over again. As a result, initially, from Cain's murderous attitude, pride and rebellion against God.

Have we ever complained about what the authority in the Church has decided? That's the way of Cain, whose heart hardened like a stone in the face of God's merciful correction.

Proverbs 29:1-2 He who is often rebuked, and hardens his neck, will suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy. When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice; but when a wicked man rules, the people groan.

No doubt people groaned under Cain's authoritarianism, and under his descendants. A person who has to be corrected constantly for breaking rules or laws has a problem with submission to authority. Instead of repenting and refraining from more of the same infractions he will become more callous to the authority. "He who is often rebuked and hardens his neck" has a definite problem with authority. That is what Solomon discovered in his life, at least in secular wisdom.

The emphasis in verse 1 is placed on the suddenness of the long-delayed justice upon the stiff-necked person. Most of the time, if a punishment is long in coming, the repetitive sinner continues to commit the same infractions over and over again.

Jude predicted that people in the end time, rather than accept correction, would hide behind a smoke screen of self-delusion, self-pity and complaining, all triggered by pride!

Balaam's self-centeredness and permissiveness as a result of his deep-seated pride

Balaam, pagan priest and prophet of ancient Mesopotamia, had a reputation to maintain. When Balak, king of Moab, dangled a large sum of money before him if he would put a curse on the nation of Israel, Balaam's mouth watered. But Balaam suspected he couldn't do any more than God allowed.

But He wanted the "wages of unrighteousness" as the apostle Peter states in II Peter 2:15 referring to false teachers:

11 Peter 2:15 They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness.

Balaam wanted his precious reputation preserved intact. A major concern to false teachers is their pride. They want to preserve—under all circumstances—their reputations.

In the sometimes humorous and ironic story in the book of Numbers, Balaam revealed himself to be a compromiser at heart. He would push as far as he could in the wrong way without, he hoped, incurring the wrath of God.

God's word to him was clear: Don't go with the Moabites, and don't curse Israel. But Balaam wasn't satisfied with that. His lust for wealth and esteem was overpowering. He tried to appear obedient, while he also tried to get God to change His mind.

Numbers 22:12-19 And God said to Balaam, "You shall not go with them; you shall not curse the people, for they are blessed." So Balaam rose in the morning and said to the princes of Balak, "Go back to your land, for the LORD has refused to give me permission to go with you." And the princes of Moab rose and went to Balak, and said, "Balaam refuses to come with us." Then Balak again sent princes, more numerous and more honorable than they. And they came to Balaam and said to him, "Thus says Balak the son of Zippor: 'Please let nothing hinder you from coming to me; for I will certainly honor you greatly, and I will do whatever you say to me. Therefore please come, curse this people for me.'" Then Balaam answered and said to the servants of Balak, "Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the word of the LORD my God, to do less or more. Now therefore, please, you also stay here tonight, that I may know what more the LORD will say to me."

What he was saying, in his own way was, "Let me see if I can convince God into letting me do what I want so that I can get the riches from you.

His answer to the Moabites in verse 13 reeks of self-righteous posturing. He complained, "the LORD has refused to give me permission to go with you." But in his proud heart, Balaam wished that God would give him permission. He wished God would be like him—a bit more permissive. When tempted with more money, Balaam went back to God again "just in case" God had changed his mind.

Balaam's attitude was one of self-centeredness. He wanted to see how much he could get away with. Eventually, God gave him enough rope to hang himself by—letting him go with the Moabites. Then God overruled Balaam's prophecies.

Numbers 23:11-12 Then Balak said to Balaam, "What have you done

to me? I took you to curse my enemies, and look, you have blessed them bountifully!" So he answered and said, "Must I not take heed to speak what the LORD has put in my mouth?"

The error of Balaam was stubborn self-will. He tried to get around as many of God's commands as possible. Balaam wanted to find out how much he could get away with while at the same time appeasing and boot-licking the one in charge—in this case, God. In the end, Balaam paid for his proud deceit with his life.

Korah's self-centeredness and rebellion

The cause of rebels has often seemed right and just. The pride of human nature loves to portray itself as the champion of the oppressed, the hero of the underdog against real or imagined grievances. It seems that is the first thing a prideful person does when he tries to cause people to go against authority. He makes himself seem humble in championing the oppressed causes.

Korah was like that. He was one of Moses' cousins and a "man of renown" in the congregation of Israel. He held a prominent position in the priesthood.

The hardness of pride cloaked Korah and he couldn't escape from it. Korah's deceptive pride had no doubt convinced him that he was not really rebelling. He saw himself as rescuing Israel from authoritarianism. He was altering the government to more equitably serve the needs of the people, or even more grandiose deceptions.

Jude 16-19 These are grumblers, complainers, walking according to their own lusts; and they mouth great swelling words, flattering people to gain advantage. But you, beloved, remember the words which were spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ: how they told you that there would be mockers in the last time who would walk according to their own ungodly lusts. These are sensual persons, who cause divisions, not having the Spirit.

We have to be very careful that we are not guilty of being one who has a problem with authority!
Korah was easily