



Straight Talk

A simple definition of authority is power rightfully used. Authority is having the legal right to impose one's will in a situation. The wrongful use of authority is to seek to enforce one's will in a way and towards an end that the authority was not given for. A leader acting like this is seeking selfishly to control people by sheer force of power – whether it be will power, physical power or mental power, rather than to guide people in line with the purpose of God for their good which makes the leader's position necessary. It is this wrongful use of authority that Jesus condemns when he said, 'Don't lord it over others as the Gentiles do'.

This misuse of authority, to dominate others for ends or purposes outside one's remit, has no place in the body of Christ. The Bible tells man clearly that he is a rebel: All of humankind is under the control of a spirit of disobedience. The natural inclination of fallen people is to seek their own way. The ultimate expression of rebellion in society is 'every man did that which is right in his own eyes.'

Rebellion and disobedience are simply man's refusal to live life inside the context of God's will. Yet living within divinely set boundaries is what God calls the Christian community to do. The Bible is the revelation of God and his will. The reason for elders in the church is not to 'control' in some despotic, dictatorial fashion but rather to steer, lead and guide people according to God's will. God has given the elders authority to rule in this fashion.

As a parent, I never found my children resisted my suggestion that I bought them an ice cream or took them to the fun fair, but I had some great protests when I said 'it's time for bed' or 'we

have to go home now'. The reason for the agreement in the first case was that both wills wonderfully coincided. The reason our wills clashed in the second instance was that I was seeking to do what was wise and best for them by using my parental authority, whereas they wanted to do what felt nice to them at the time.

Inside the Christian church today an increasingly popular way of asserting what the individual wants, against all effort to guide biblically, is to shout 'control'. Control is the present buzz word. This accusation has become a way of stamping approval on every excuse to rebel. It makes disobedience OK.

The rebel knows that shouting 'control' will find immediate social sympathy. This tactic can often be successful in marshalling many forces to the aid of self-interest, self-desire and self-will. Nevertheless, this kind of crying wolf, far from protecting the flock of God, will actually put those who are genuine victims of abusive leaders in greater danger—as their cry may not be heard as an arousing alarm, but merely as a trendy complaint.

No church, society, or family can act in this way and escape the consequences of disobedience. To escape rule by shouting 'control, control' will ultimately frustrate God's will to bless those shouting it and lead to self-damage. It is not popular today to speak of authority or rule in the church of God, but it must be said, because authority, rightly handled, is God's ordained way to secure the highest good for his people. **R**

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