

GOD'S AUTHORITY, ORDER, AND DISCIPLINE FOR THE CHURCH

Firm Foundation Chapter 13

by

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4 Basic Structures of Authority

Family: father - mother - children.

Col. 3:20; Eph. 6:1-3; Prov. 6:20,21; Prov. 30:17; Prov. 15:5.

Government: national leaders - local officials - citizens

1 Pet. 2:13,14; Rom 13:1; Rom. 13:3,4; Rom 13:5; Rom. 13:6,7.

Business: employer - employees.

Col. 3:22; Col. 3:23,24; 1 Pet. 2:18; 1 Tim. 6:1; 1 Tim 6:2.

Church: church leaders - church members.

1 Thess. 5:12,13; Heb. 13:17; 1 Tim. 5:17,18; 1 Pet. 5:1-3.

3 Basic Purposes for Authority

Bill Gothard describes three basic purposes for authority in his book **Institute in Basic Youth Conflicts: Research in Principles of Life**.

1. To grow in wisdom and character: The only recorded incident in the life of Christ between the ages of two and thirty was a discussion with His parents which involved authority. This occurred when He was twelve. Should He follow His spiritual calling and be about His Father's business (**Luke 2:49**), or **should He become subject to His parents and leave His ministry at the temple?** He did the latter, and the following verse reports, "And Jesus **increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.**" (**Luke 2:52**)

Each of us has a multitude of character deficiencies that need to be perfected. God uses those in authority to do this. God is persistent in our character development. God is even more concerned that our character become like that of Jesus Christ than He is in which "instruments" He uses to accomplish this. Therefore, if we push away or get out from under the reproofs and authority of our parents, God only has to raise up new "tools" to chip away at the rough edges of our character.

2. To gain protection from destructive temptations: The essence of submission is not "getting under the domination of authority but rather **getting under the protection of authority**". **Authority is like an "umbrella of protection"**, and when we get out from under it, **we expose ourselves to unnecessary temptation** which are too strong for us to overcome. This is why Scripture compares rebellion

and witchcraft-- "Rebellion is like the sin of witchcraft" (**1 Samuel 15:23**). Both terms have the same basic definition--**subjecting ourselves to the realm and power of Satan.**

3. To receive clear direction for life decisions: Correct decisions are based on faith; that is, visualizing what God intends to do. "Whatever is not of faith is sin" (**Rom. 14:23**). One of the most basic aspects of faith is to **realize how God gets His directions to us through those He has placed over us.**

After the centurion asked Jesus to come and heal his servant, it occurred to him that just as his life was structured around a "chain of command," so the kingdom in which God operates must have a similar structure of authority. When Jesus realized that he understood this, Jesus "marveled and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel" (**Matt. 8:10**).

Our faith multiplies as we see how God speaks to us through those He has placed over us.

A fourth purpose for authority is to maintain order.

God's Authority for the Church

God has placed **church leaders** in the body of Christ to watch over and instruct the saints. **Eph. 4:11-15** tells us that these church leaders include apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers who are to equip the saints for the work of service for the purpose of building up the body of Christ. As a result of these ministries we will grow in the unity of the faith and not be deceived.

God has also set up **elders in the local body** (**Acts 14:21-23**). The elders are responsible to **be a guard for the flock, to shepherd them, to watch over their soul, and to give an account for their lives**'. **Ezk. 33:2-7** says that a "watchman" of the flock of God (an elder) is to see trouble coming upon a people and warn them. If the watchman fails to warn a person of his compromising sin, then the elder is held accountable for any disaster. However, if the watchman warns a person and he refuses to listen, then the person is held accountable. Therefore, **the members of the body are exhorted to obey the leaders, and submit to them** (**Heb. 13:17, 1 Pet. 5:5**).

Rom. 13:1-4 says that God is responsible for all authority. Therefore, if we resist the authority God has set over us, then we are resisting the ordinance of God and will receive condemnation. God will be pleased if we submit to our leaders, regardless of whether we believe they are right or not. Bill Gothard says, "no matter how inconsistent or unfair those in authority may be, **we are responsible for our responses to them.** God can use those who are hardest to get along with to motivate us **to develop mature attitudes.**"

1 Sam. 15:23 compares rebellion to the sin of divination (witchcraft). Both sins expose a person to demonic forms. A person who rebels against authority is being lead away from an "umbrella of protection" against deception and evil forces. Just as a little child does not understand or agree with the wisdom of his parents, often we will not understand or agree with the wisdom of our spiritual elders, yet they can "see" things that we cannot. **A little child is easily deceived, and so could we if we do not receive the insight and correction of our leaders.**

Order of Discipline

Jesus has given the church an order for correcting the rebellious members in the church in **Matt. 18:15-17**. If a member sins, we ought to first **reprove him in private**. If he **does not listen** to you, then we ought to **take one or two more to reprove him**. If he still **refuses to listen** and repent, then he ought to be **confronted by the church**. If he still refuses to listen, then he is to be treated as a Gentile and a sinner.

If misunderstood, these Scriptures could scare someone from sharing his sins to anyone, especially after he has tried to repent from them. The key word in these Scriptures is "**refuse**." Suppose a brother comes to a pastor and says that he has a problem in a certain sin, and then he comes back six months later saying that he fell in the same sin. This does not mean that he refused to listen to the pastor, but it does mean that **he is having a problem over-coming it**. As David Houston says:

we want to teach people to hate sin and to fight sin, but there is an area of standing with one another-- of compassion-- of understanding and being patient with one another and saying, 'brother, I am going to stand with you and we are going to beat this thing in the name of Jesus.' **Refusing to listen** is where a person says, 'oh, I believe I can do this and be a Christian. I believe this doesn't matter. I don't care what the Bible says. I can do it.' If this person refuses the clear Scriptures and the witness of the church, then with tears in your eyes, you go the first step, then take it in front of the church and say, 'we love this brother, but he doesn't understand his sin is going to kill him and he'll lose his salvation if he continues in his sin. This is a sin unto death, and we are bringing it before the whole church to let you know that we pleaded with him to repent and **he will not repent** of it. So we are going to have to remove him from the church.

This incident is different from a person who is having to fight against strong principalities over him that hold him in sin.

Discipline for the Church

Church discipline was practiced by the early church (**1 Cor. 5:1-13**). If evil and sin remain in the church, it will leaven the whole lump. In other words, the sin will spread to other members of the body and soon the entire body will be affected. Therefore, we ought to clean out the old leaven of malice and wickedness. We are responsible to judge and warn members of the church and to remove those wicked members that refuse to repent. Jesus also spoke of the importance of removing parts of the body that are "infected" with sin so that the whole body will not go to hell because of its spreading (**Matt. 5:29-30**).

In Joshua chapter 7, the Israelites went up against Ai, but the Israelites fled and suffered 36 lives. God told Joshua that they were defeated because one person had taken some things under the band, thus sinning. This one sin caused the entire assembly of Israel to be defeated before their enemies. When the people who took the things were found, they were burned with fire. Similarly in the church, "**if sin and rebellion are allowed to remain in it, the whole body is in danger of being infected, and the church will be defeated before their enemies.**" Intentional sin must be dealt with.

If God loves us and we are His sons, then we can expect to be under correction and discipline (**Heb. 12:5-11**). He disciplines us for our good, though for the moment it may seem not to be joyful, but sorrowful. The Bible assures us that those who have been trained by such discipline will yield the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

Order of Authority

Moses was given wisdom to divide his many followers into smaller groups of 1000, 100, 50, and 10's, and to put leaders over each of them. Similarly, the "local body should be divided into smaller groups for more personal governing and counseling." This will lighten the work load on the senior pastor. The elders that are to be appointed over the smaller groups should be mature able men who know God's ways. Every minor dispute should be handled by them, while major disputes should be passed to the senior pastor. "For more effective counseling and disciplining, **the older women** should be in charge of counseling and shepherding the women" (**Titus 2:3-5**).

"The older women, under the authority of the elders, are to counsel and instruct the younger women in the ways of the Lord. Likewise, the men, under the authority of the elders, are to instruct the men in the ways of the Lord. Any cases that are too difficult or cannot be settled must be brought before the elders for judgment and further discernment."