

## Government (Part Six)

Humility, the Ministry & Authority  
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You might recall that, when I began this series, I quoted Mr. Herbert Armstrong as saying, "Government has been the most difficult of all doctrines." I am finding that a major reason for this is that very little already written about it is in correct order. The overwhelming majority of what is already available as research material was written by organizations whose governments—both as to form and operation—are clearly wrong. The result is that much must be researched afresh.

The second reason is far more important, I think. That is that the operation of God's government is something that must be **experienced** in order for one to understand it. Thus, if one has never experienced it, it makes it very difficult for one to write accurately on it.

It's easy for one to instruct us that God's government is from the top, down. That is, indeed, correct—as to structure, or to form. It is from the top, down. It begins with God the Father, goes through Jesus Christ the Son. But even God's government requires that each individual part ( *each person* ) must also govern himself from the top, down—with top priority **in every area** of one's life being freely given to God.

I believe that it is a testimony to the demented perversity of human nature that we **won't** do it! Notice: I did not say that we *can't* do it. I did not say that we *don't want to* do it. But only one human being of all of the billions who have every lived has done it completely through the entirety of His life. That, of course, is Jesus Christ. So, it is not without reason that the Bible says:

**Romans 8:7** The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.

You will remember that a small portion of last week's sermon was devoted to repentance, or surrender to God, or (as I put it) the giving up of **control** to God. This is why it is so important. If one does not give up control **to God** (does not submit to Him), then one is never going to be able to *live* the government of God, and one will never really be able to understand it.

God's government is designed to produce the greatest amount of liberty for development and growth for everybody concerned. This occurs whenever each *individual* part governs himself according to God's Word. But human nature is so perverse that it is very difficult to get people even to **consistently study God's Word**—to find out the areas that God needs to be **submitted to** in, to find out what God expects.

In addition to that, not everyone is equipped (by natural ability or education) **to glean** much of what is in the Bible. So God has provided an arm of His government (a "staff"—we might put it that way) to provide for His people, so that they will be equipped to go on to perfection.

In this sermon here, we are going to watch this unfold in the scriptures. First, turn with me to Philippians 2. It is here that we left off last week, and it is here that **the pattern** for each individual's relationship to God, Himself (and, therefore, to God's government) is expressed.

**Philippians 2:5-7** Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, [Now, notice *the pattern* of the mind of Jesus Christ.] who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but **made Himself** ...

I want you to notice **the voluntary submission** of our Lord and Savior—our Leader, our King. "*He made Himself.*" Now, think of this in reference to what I said just a little bit earlier. Each *individual* part (each person) must govern himself "from the top, down"—with top priority given, in every area of one's life, to God Himself. Each individual has to surrender control to God—voluntarily.

**Philippians 2:7** ...But [He] made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant, and coming in the likeness of men.

Remember Matthew 20 and His explanation to the disciples—that in order for one to have rulership, one has to make himself a servant. No, indeed, **a slave!** He takes it one step further.

That slavery is, first of all, to God. And a slave is defined as a person who has **no control**. The "control" of that person's life is in the hands of the master. In this case, our Master is God the Father. So, without repentance—without the giving up of control—there cannot be the kind of submission to God's government that God would require.

**Philippians 2:7-8** [Jesus Christ] made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He **humbled Himself** ...

We aren't going to go into this in any kind of detail, but "humility" is shown in the Bible as a characteristic that is *chosen*. A person **chooses** to be humble. It is a choice that is presented to each individual. We'll touch on this just a little bit later in the sermon.

**Philippians 2:8** ... And being found in appearance as a man, **He humbled Himself** [He chose to be that way! Remember—we are talking about **GOD** in the flesh] and became obedient [That was the result] to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

Let's think about this. His response to God's governance—and the needs of man—was to humbly and selflessly **submit**. What we are seeing here is an example of supreme condescension—in giving up an existence equal to God! He didn't grasp at it. He voluntarily gave it up. Here is **the pattern**, for you and me, so that we might become submissive to God.

There was no asserting of His "rights", but there was a supreme recognition of the authority of God's Word. (This is **in** Jesus Christ.) He didn't come and start throwing His weight around, become authoritative and bash heads. Remember that we are talking about **GOD** in the flesh. Human beings do not want to submit. Human beings who are converted are going to have to fight this all their life. It is **a choice** that has to be made.

What did Jesus do, then? He, instead, came as an Apostle—one bearing a message. And He taught that message. He came—like He, Himself, said He did (in Matthew 20)—as **bond slave**. Remember how He pointed out to His disciples, "**I am the pattern.**" You have to become a slave—just like the Son of Man did. He became a slave—both to God and man.

**Philippians 2:9** Therefore...

Here comes a connector. The "*therefore*" refers back to the things we have just been expounding about. That is, to His **voluntary act of humility**. It is connecting it to what followed. And what followed—as a result of what Christ did—was **exaltation**.

**Philippians 2:9-11** Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name [Not just any old name, but *the name*] which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

The "rank" that Jesus has been given is one of complete ***Supreme Lordship***. The exaltation includes **rulership**. The exaltation has its basis in *the experience* to being **faithful** in *living* God's government. Please understand that, and tie it into the things that I gave you in the last sermon.

To him who is ***faithful*** goes **rulership**. And, in order for one to be faithful, one has to give up control to Almighty God—in repentance to Him. That will then lead to the person **living** God's government. It's not just a matter of "head knowledge"—where somebody has it explained out of a book that "*Yes. God's government is from the top, down.*" We can agree with that. That is absolutely correct! But what about **the experience of living it** in one's life—where one has given top priority, in every area of life, to the Word of God? Then one **knows** one has been faithful.

This is why so few accurate things are written about the government of God. The people who write the books have never **lived it**—even though they may understand portions of it.

Remember that the exaltation includes **rulership**. Let's go back in the book of Isaiah to chapter 9, and verse 6.

**Isaiah 9:6** For unto us a Child is born...

You may recognize this immediately from Handel's "Messiah," having heard it maybe dozens of times in the past. We are looking at what is a prophecy of Jesus Christ.

**Isaiah 9:6-7** For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and **the government** will be upon **His** shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of **His government** and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.

It's very clear that the government is on **His** shoulders. He bears the burden of authority. That is what is being referred to back there in the book of Philippians 2:9. The exaltation included the giving of authority. The government is now on His shoulders.

This particular prophecy is looking forward to the time when the Kingdom of God is on earth. But it is **in effect**, for you and me, right now! That is, those of us who are in the church.

Now, let's continue to see this unfold. We'll go back to the New Testament once again. (This time to Ephesians, the first chapter.) Again, the general theme is the exaltation of Christ following His resurrection.

**Ephesians 1:20-23** Which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion [Referring to those governmental units that are on earth. Angelic things, as well as human.], and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His 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.

So the general theme, as I said, is the exaltation of Christ following His resurrection—and what ramifications this has for the church. It says in verse 22 that "*He put all things.*" It's very interesting because this is a military term, almost giving one the picture of a vanquished foe lying at the feet of Jesus Christ, and Jesus' foot in on the neck of the vanquished foe. It gives one the idea of conquest.

Now, there was conquest involved in what Jesus was involved in. It was a conquest or a military battle (if we can put it that way) over Satan and sin. When He said, "*I overcame,*" He meant what He said. He is a conquering King! This is the result. The apostle Paul pictures Him as just that—as having overcome.

Remember, again, that Jesus is **the pattern**. We, too, are to overcome—even as He overcame. And what we have then, here, is a symbol (the "putting under" is a symbol) of absolute Sovereign Authority.

It says here that He is the **head**. "Head" is being used here metaphorically to indicate **authority**. He now has authority *over the church*. Here you see the conquest—or the giving of authority—is more specifically defined. Jesus has not yet been crowned King *over the earth*. That coronation will not take place until the seventh trump and His return. But He has already been given **headship** *over the church*. That is why I said that Isaiah 9:6-7 applies to you and me right now. He is *our* Head. He's the one who has governmental authority over you and me.

**Ephesians 1:22** He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head...

At the beginning of this verse, the "**He**" who "*gave*" was God the Father. What we are here to understand is that *Jesus Christ's governance of the church is the Father's gift to the church*. Brethren, you know from your own experience of living in this world and from your study of history that if there is anything any people need it is **right government!**

Everybody gripes, complains, about the way the government exercises its authority. Probably several times a day, you either think it or say something against the government of the United States. Maybe it's in terms of "Why don't they do this? Why don't they do that?" "Why is there so much crime?" "Why are taxes so high?" "Why is there a traffic jam that I have to go through? Why doesn't the government do something about this?"

I think that we can honestly say that there is nothing more needed by a group of people than right government. God the Father's gift to you and me is the epitome of right government.

The word "body" (in verse 23, where it says "which is His body") is used here in two ways: both in the sense of a human body connected to a head and also in the sense of being a community that is being governed. That is, a social unit—a society.

The apostle Paul (and, of course, God) wants us to understand that our relationship with Christ is more than just one of Sovereign to subject. The church is not an institution. The church is not a corporation. The church is *a living organism*. It is a Body connected to the Head. It is a Body that *has life*, because it is connected to a head [The Head, Jesus Christ]. That is the picture that the apostle wants us to understand. And that this Body exists and functions by reason of its *vital union* to the **living Jesus Christ**. The church derives its very *life* from Christ.

Christ and the church are *one*. And *the church* is actually seen in this word picture that the apostle Paul is drawing here as *necessary to Christ's fullness*. Even as Christ is exalted, so is the church. This does not, in any way, mean that the church is equal to Christ. After all, He's the Head! But the church does bask in the reflected glory of the Head—even as Moses reflected the glory of God, when he came down from the Mount.

The church is the instrument through which God works here on earth—even as Moses was the instrument that God used during that period of time. The church needs teaching. It needs direction and correction. And that's what the Head does. The Head and the Body form an organic unit. The church is the hands, the feet and the mouth that the Head needs to carry out His plans. The ideas of the mind cannot become effective without the work of the Body. Thus, *you and I* play a vital role in God's spiritual purpose that is being worked out here.

**I Corinthians 12:12** For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ.

It is so plain! The apostle is describing "an organic whole" here—with Body and Head. So, Christ is complete. He is Head and Body, and the Body part is called **the church**. But the church consists of many people—many different parts. When you combine this with Ephesians the first chapter, it is very clear that the Head stands apart from the Body in terms of authority. That's where the authority lies—not in the Body, but in the Head.

And within the Body—that is, among all of its individual parts—there is a great deal of *diversity*, but also *equality*. Let's watch how this unfolds. It has very much to do with government. There is diversity, but there is also equality.

**I Corinthians 12:14-15** For in fact the body is not one member but many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body?"

The apostle Paul is saying, "That's ridiculous!" The foot is just as much a part of the body as the hand is.

**I Corinthians 12:16** And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body?

Just because it *makes* that argument, it doesn't make any sense—and that statement is not true. Yes, it is just as much a part of the body as the eye is.

**I Corinthians 12:17-18** If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body **just as He pleased**.

That's an important statement! Even as God designed the human body; and there are a lot of different parts within the human body. There is a lot of diversity. Every single part in the human body was put in the body with the foreknowledge of God, with thought and concern for the well-being of the whole.

It is the same with the church. God has put every individual within the church—with the well-being of the whole, as well as the well-being of the individual, being a part of His thinking.

**I Corinthians 12:19-27** And if they were all one member, where would the body be? But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable parts have greater modesty, but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.

If you were following there carefully, you will see that no part of the body is seen as being more important, more necessary, better or intrinsically possessing more authority—regardless of office. The arrangement of **all** the parts of the body is not left to chance, but is by appointment of God; and each part is shown as *needing the other*! Did you get that?

Did you apply it to the Church of God? Each part of the Body is shown **needing** the other parts. All service ranks the same with God—whether it is rendered by male or female, old or young.

The diversity of the Body is to enable it to do its work.

Now, look at yourself, and consider yourself. None of us, who are a part of the Church of God, is good at everything. None of us is so eminently talented, so complete that nothing else is needed to perfect the Body. The whole Body is not one single part. And so, we cannot afford to think of the work that we do—in or for the church—in terms of its relative importance. When we do that, it automatically elevates the self. It puts us on a vanity trip and in competition with other parts of the Body (rather than cooperating with them). We are actually, then, expressing our *supposed* authority.

A man in the church is not better, or more important, than a woman. A young person in the church is not better, or more important, than an old person. Maybe this will shock you—but an apostle is no better, or more important, than any other part of the Body. An apostle is not intrinsically better than a little old widow is. God placed them both in the Body! He [the apostle] does something that is more **visible**, but not more important.

In the eyes of God, all service is the same—a pastor is not better or more important than a deacon, and a deacon is not better or more important than a lay member. One who speaks is not better or more important than one who doesn't speak. Are we getting the point?

Where do we get off on this vanity trip of exercising authority through a chain of command? That is, a human chain of command. It isn't there. There is diversity in the Body of Christ, but there is **equality** as well.

**Matthew 23:5-12** But all their works they do to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders of their garments. They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues, greetings in the market-places, and to be called by men 'Rabbi, Rabbi.' But you, do not be called 'Rabbi'; for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren. Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. And do not be called teachers; for One is your Teacher, the Christ. But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself will be abased, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

Now, when we were in this chapter last week, we were using it as an example of how Christ showed that religious leaders are only to be obeyed and submitted to when they are telling you the truth. One of the things that He is drawing upon here is an illustration to show that these Pharisees has set themselves up as the religious authority—and that these are some of the practices that we are **not** to copy. Remember that these were practices that the authorities of His day were doing. These are things that we should not do.

Now, what were they doing? I'm not talking about "specifically" here. I'm talking about in general, in practice, what they were doing was exactly the opposite of what Christ did. Remember that when we were in Philippians 2, I said that what Christ did not do was come to the earth throwing His weight around and flaunting His spirituality. But that is exactly what the Pharisees did do! They threw their *supposed* spiritual authority around. And they did it with an outward show, so that people would defer to them. It was nothing more than a vanity trip.

I want you to consider this: Our relationship with God is essentially something that is *inward*. However, it must have *outward* expression in what we do, or what good is it? There is no witness for God.

The Pharisee exhibited his religion in order to be deferred to, or in order to be recognized as a great one. What we would call it today is "*pride of place*," or "*love of power*." Or, we might say, "*the desire to have influence over others*." And so they did it by putting phylacteries on, by making long prayers, or by assuming to themselves ecclesiastical titles (like "Rabbi," or "Master," or "Father").

What we see here is Jesus denouncing this assuming of ecclesiastical titles. When one looks into history, we begin to find that Jesus was dealing with this at a time when it was really just beginning to get under way in the Jewish world. It had been going on, maybe, thirty or forty years—or whatever. But it didn't reach its pinnacle until about two hundred years after Christ. By that time, the authority—and the reverence, and the deference—which was given to a rabbi was awesome!

The rabbi's disciple had to obey his rabbi (his teacher) without question. He was never to walk beside the rabbi, but always behind. Never in front either. And he was never to greet him first. He had to wait for the rabbi to defer to him. And there were many more of these things.

What we are dealing with here is a deference that is so pervasive that it's almost foreign to a person living in a modern Israelitish country—because we are taught not to give that kind of deference. However, something like that could develop within a social, spiritual organization.

Now, back to the other thought—about religion (our relationship with God) being **inward** and yet it has to have **outward expression**, or it is no good. One of the places that our relationship with God has outward expression is within the church. That is, the church community.

**Matthew 23:8** But you [Church member; disciple of Christ] do not be called 'Rabbi'; for One is your Teacher, the Christ, [Now, notice this explanation of WHY] and **you are all brethren**.

They are **equal**.

[Note: Some of the sermon is missing here, when the tape was turned over.]

...of the church are **equal**. Instead, what our responsibility is (amongst ourselves especially; and, of course, out into the world as we have opportunity) given in verses 11 and 12:

**Matthew 23:11-12** But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself will be abased, and he who **humbles himself** [a choice, again; he chooses to do that] will be exalted.

There it is again. It agrees perfectly with Philippians 2. It agrees perfectly with Matthew 20, and other places, where Jesus said that the road to faithfulness is in the person who humbles himself and becomes a servant. Yea, indeed, becomes a slave.

**Matthew 25:40** And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these **My brethren**, you did it to Me.'

The least person (or, that person we might think to be the least) in the church is still **Christ's brother**, and that person is to be treated in a way commensurate with Christ's brother. Is that clear? And the government is on His [Christ's] shoulder.

The government is not on the ministry's shoulder. Notice that I did not say that there is no authority in the ministry. I said that the government is not on their shoulder. But there is authority in the office, and we will get to that a little bit later.

**I Corinthians 11:3** But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.

Here we are shown a structure, and that structure is from the top, down. For most of us, I guess you might say, in a practical way—Christ is at the top.



I want you to see that there is no indication of a chain of command between the family (husband and wife) and Christ. There is no injection of the ministry in there. He did **not** say that authority runs from the wife to the husband, to the local pastor, to the apostle, to Jesus Christ, to the Father. Anything like that is artificial and comes from men, not from God. You will not find that anywhere in the Bible.

The authority above the family is Christ. The authority in the church is Christ. There is no indication in God's Word that everything has to be cleared through the ministry. I mean, there were times in the past with some ministers that this reached ridiculous proportions. Why, a person wouldn't buy a car unless it was cleared through the ministry. And he had to buy the car that the minister said that he had to buy. A person couldn't move without the approval of the minister. A person couldn't do anything, it seemed, without the minister getting involved in some way. There is **nothing** like that in the Bible at all! That is something that was created by men.

I don't want to get off into that too far at all, but what it resulted in was a tremendous waste of ministerial time. Running to the members' homes, or on the telephone, for things that the ministry should not have been involved in whatsoever at all. It also led, in many cases, to people getting bad advice because they were asking a minister something about which he knew nothing. (Whether it was banking, or automobiles, or finances, or I don't know what.)

The minister's *area of authority* is spiritual. It has to do with relationships with God primarily.

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

This verse appears in a unique position. It appears at the end of a series of advice that the apostle gave in regard to Christian living, as well as conduct within services of the church community.

That is, their relationships with one another within that community. And so it concludes by saying "submitting to one another." There is the responsibility. There is an equality there. We are to submit to one another.

But it also is attached to what follows. Everybody within the sound of my voice, who is an adult, knows what follows. Some of the strongest, best, clearest advice in all of the Bible in regard to marital relations—and, specifically, the relations between a husband and a wife. We are talking here about government, brethren.

The subject is government within the family and government within the church. That verse (Ephesians 5:21) bridges between the two—and it was inspired by God's Holy Spirit. It was put in there because He is showing that both of them are exactly **alike**. For government in the church—the model is the family! For government in the family—the model is the relationship between Christ and the church. It ties the two together and tells us what our responsibility is. Whether within the family, or within the church—the responsibility of *each* part is to **submit to one another**. It doesn't sound like a lot of authority, does it? No, it's not.

So, this section is intended by God to clarify what relations in the church are to be governed by. Once again, **the pattern** is Jesus Christ. In this case, it is His relationship with the church—which, in turn, then provides the model for married couples. **Church** government is *family* government. It is so plain.

God uses terms: "father," "son," "children," "brethren." Those are family terms. And family government is *the* government that is in the church. In the family, who is the head? The father! In the church, who is the Head (The Commanding Officer)? It's the Father. He has delegated responsibility to our Elder Brother—and made Him the Head of the church.

What we can see here is certainly a very clear expectation of **headship** and **submission**. But there is *no* indication at all of domination by the head. There is no degrading servility, blind obedience, or unthinking subservience that is required of those who are under authority. Instead, what is shown here is *voluntary consent* and *mutual submission*.

It is the opposite of self-assertion—the opposite of an independent, autocratic spirit. It is the desire (expressed by God the Father, through His Son, through the apostle) to get along with one another and being satisfied with less than one's ordinary due.

Do we have an example? We certainly do. **Jesus Christ humbled Himself**. He was GOD in the flesh. What would be His ordinary due? All the acclamation, all the obsequious obedience, all the bowing and scraping, all of the deference that we could possibly give Him. But He didn't insist on it at all. He became **our** bond slave while submitting Himself to God.

"The Lord," it says, "loves the church and **gave** Himself for it." So He certainly got a great deal less than what was His due. He died for it!

In God's order of things, *the person who is in authority* (the father in a family, the pastor of the church, or whatever it might happen to be) is expected, by God, to **give**, to **give**, and to **give some more**. That is, to give himself unstintingly. He [God] doesn't ever draw the line and say, "That's enough." The reason He doesn't have to is because His Son showed us when it's enough—at death! (Although He may never require that.)

In order to do this, it becomes necessary for each one of us to become converted in the way that we **evaluate** one another. We can no longer afford to evaluate according to social standing, money, clothing, goods, profession, skill, talent, sex, where a person lives, accent, athletic skills, nationality, and a host of other things. People have to be judged on the basis of the fact that they are **Christ's brothers**. There is no greater honor that can be given to a human being. We defer to those to whom we give honor. There is the attitude that is necessary to govern properly.

The government in the church family, and the authority, is in the Head [Jesus Christ].

Does this mean that there is no authority in the ministry? No, it does not. But the minister's authority has bounds on it, like everybody else's. And he has to live within it. His authority is narrow and specific. The most succinct statement that I know of on it is given in this same book of Ephesians 4.

We are going to begin in verse 7, because I want you to see what Paul says here in the light of what we read in Ephesians 1 (about Christ being God the Father's **gift to the church**).

**Ephesians 4:7-11** But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore He says: "When he ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men." (Now this, "He ascended"—what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended [Christ] is also the

One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.) And He Himself **gave** some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers.

Even as Jesus Christ was the Father's gift to the church, *Christ's gift to the church is the ministry*. Now, for what reason? Notice how specific this is.

**Ephesians 4:12-16** For the equipping of the saints, **for** the work of the ministry, **for** the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith [meaning, a body of belief] and the knowledge of the Son of God [by experience], to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness by which they lie in wait to deceive, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

We'll confine ourselves here to general statements regarding the ministry's area of authority. It is in *the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry* (or, serving) *and for the edifying of the body of Christ*.

*Equipping* is interesting in what the word means. It means, to set in order. In other words, it is saying that something is not aligned properly, and it needs to be realigned, and put into the proper alignment.

What is out of line is our knowledge of God, our knowledge of truth, our knowledge of His way of life. Our character is out of line. And so, God has given **a gift** to the church in the form of the ministry, to help put people in right alignment with God.

They will therefore be equipped for the work of the ministry—which is a work of service. Serving God. Glorifying God in one's witness. That might include everything from preaching the gospel in evangelistic settings, or administering to local congregations.

Now, *edifying* means "to promote the spiritual growth of." It becomes very clear that the ministry's area of authority has to do with **teaching**. There is administrative responsibility as well, but the administrative responsibility has to do with the work of the church. It does **not** have to do with having magisterial authority in people's lives—dictating to them about what they can do, and what they cannot do. The minister is a teaching machine. That's where his authority lies.

I think that what is so interesting is that the Bible, in regard to a minister, does not focus on authority at all. It will give implications of it, but it does not describe it in very much detail at all. Some of it is there. It is almost as if it is mentioned in passing. Instead, what is really interesting is that the Bible focuses on the minister's **attitude** in carrying out that responsibility—because, brethren, that is where the problem lies.

**II Corinthians 10:12** For we [Here, the "we" is sort of like "the royal **we**." Paul is referring to himself, primarily.] dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.

Now notice what he says next:

**II Corinthians 10:13-16** We, however, will not boast beyond measure, but within the limits of the sphere which God has appointed to us—a sphere which especially includes you [Corinthians]. For we are not overextending ourselves (as though our authority did not extend to you), for it was to you that we came with the gospel of Christ; not boasting of things beyond measure, that is, in other men's labors, but having hope, that as your faith is increased, we shall be greatly enlarged by you in our sphere, to preach the gospel in the regions beyond you, and not to boast in another man's sphere of accomplishment.

This word translated "measure" is the same word from which we get our English word "canon." (Not "cannon" but "canon.") That word means "standard, limit, or rule." We talk about the *canon* of scripture—that is, what is standard for scripture.

What Paul is arguing (if I can put it this way) is that he has not taken on more than he should when he asserts his authority over these people—as their leader. And his argument is "which God appointed us." God gave him, or allotted to him, this authority over the Corinthians—and the Corinthian church. Another way to put it is that God assigned him this area in which to work.

Paul's broader assignment was to be apostle to the Gentiles (even as Peter was apostle to the Israelitish people). In one sense, because of that, he was to consider that wherever Gentiles lived was his area of work. Corinth was a Gentile city. Paul went there and preached the gospel, in an area assigned to him by God. A church was raised up [there] by God (as the result, though, of the preaching by the apostle Paul). And those people, raised up by God in the city of Corinth, were then handed over to the apostle Paul to further *refine* their understanding in the truth of God—in more particular and specific areas of the knowledge of God.

But it is clear from the context that there were **others** in the city of Corinth who were there preaching. And it is clear from the letter that they were not there to help Paul, and they were not there by his assignment of them. Rather, they were there to *displace* him. And these were people who were ostensibly "Christian" ministers.

I want you to see this because of the apostle's argument. He did have authority from God over that area of the world. He was very much aware of his area of responsibility, and he was also very much aware of other people's labors. And he was concerned that he live **within** the limits of his authority.

You will recall this from other sermons that even Jesus Christ had to live within the limits of the authority dictated to Him by the Word of God. Here we have an example of an apostle doing the same thing. But this is where the problems arise. Problems arise in the ministry because ministers go **beyond** what God has assigned them as their limit of authority.

**Romans 15:20** And so [This is the same apostle—Paul.] I have made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man's foundation.

On the one hand, we have this apostle that was **so zealous** about doing the work of God that he said, "Woe is me, if I preach not the gospel." And yet, on the other hand, he was also very concerned to live within the limits of his assignment from God. Most of the trouble in the ministry has resulted from the failure to do this!

Let's go to Acts 20 and continue looking at Paul's example. And we will see how he carried out (by his own testimony) the limits of his authority. Here we have him making a final visit with the Ephesian elders. And, in his discourse to them, he says:

**Acts 20:24-27** But none of these things moved me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, will see my face no more. Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.

There's his authority. "To declare the whole counsel of God." God gave him that authority—to do that; and Paul used it, to the *nth* degree. How did he do it? Did he just ram it down people's throats? I want you to notice how **constrained** the apostle Paul was in what he did. And I want you, as we continue, to draw this more and more specifically—where the ministry's authority lies.

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

What is he doing here? He is showing a general pattern of the way that he operates. We could use the entire book of I Corinthians—where he appeals to people through strong spiritual arguments and reasoning. His teaching was strong and clear, but it was not dictatorial. He **pleads** with these people to *think*—to use their minds, to use the knowledge of God, of the Word of God. And to see if, indeed, the reasons and arguments that he was giving to these people were correct. "I speak as to wise men; judge for yourself what I say."

**II Corinthians 4:2** But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the **truth** commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

There was nothing deceitful about Paul—no ulterior motives. He manifested truth in his teaching.

**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—being such a one as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ.

Paul reasoned with people. Paul presented them with logical arguments based upon scripture, in order to secure their *voluntary consent*. In order to secure their *voluntary submission* and *giving up control to Almighty God*.

**II Timothy 2:24-25** And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth.

Brethren, the power (and authority) **in the ministry** is in the exercise of the gift of God. In Ephesians 4, beginning in verse 7—Christ gave men *gifts*; and, in turn gave them to the church. The power and authority in the ministry is in the exercise, by the minister, of the gift of God in fulfilling their responsibility.

Their power, then, 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.

We will stop there; and I think that I can say that two weeks from today I will conclude this series. So, thank you for your patience.