

## ***Spiritual Authority: Seeing It, Expressing It, and Responding to It***

### **I. THE NEED TO UNDERSTAND SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY**

- A. The purpose of this session is to see the reality and importance of spiritual authority. The quality of a spiritual family (local church or parachurch ministry) is dependent on their understanding of spiritual authority. The Bible has much to say on this subject that is so often neglected. It is essential that every organization, large or small, spiritual or secular understand spiritual authority. As more people recognize it, carry it properly, and respond to it with humility, then more in that group will enjoy unity, efficiency, good morale, and effective problem-solving.
- B. The three necessary responses for each believer are as follows:
  - 1. To ***understand*** the biblical principles of spiritual authority and how it operates
  - 2. To ***express*** the authority that God has delegated to them in a proper way
  - 3. To ***honor*** the authority that God has delegated to others in humility
- C. I compare spiritual authority in the Body of Christ to the nervous system in our physical body; it affects and connects every other part of the body (even the very smallest parts). Spiritually, it determines how we relate to God's authority, resulting in more blessing or more conflicts. Practically, it determines how efficiently we operate and how good our corporate morale is.
- D. IHOP–KC has various valid identities that determine how people relate to us.
  - 1. To the nations we are a ***house of prayer*** (they visit us to spend time in the prayer room)
  - 2. To our staff we are a ***missions base*** (we use a corporate structure with departments/divisions)
  - 3. To God we are a ***local church*** (we use the NT as our model for vision, values, and authority)

### **II. FIVE SPHERES OF DELEGATED AUTHORITY**

- A. ***Self-government*** (Prov. 16:32): Our first responsibility in government is to rule our own lives.
- B. ***The family*** (Eph. 5:18-6:4; Col. 3:18-22): God delegated His authority to the husband in the marriage. The husband uses it properly only by servant leadership. The wife operates with him in team leadership over the family, yet submits or cooperates with his primary role in leadership.
- C. ***The marketplace (employment)*** (Eph. 6:5-8; Col. 3:22-25): Our employers are representatives of Jesus' authority. We serve Jesus as we serve them, whether or not they are saved (1 Pet. 2:13-22). We obey God first. When accepting a job, we accept God's authority through those leaders.
- D. ***The civil government*** (Rom. 13:1-7): God entrusted His authority to governmental leaders.
- E. ***The Church*** (Heb. 13:17, 24; 1 Tim. 5:17): God's delegated authority in the Church is through leadership which is comprised first of eldership supported by deacons, etc. A decision to join a church or ministry is an agreement to accept God's authority through those leaders.

### III. UNDERSTANDING DELEGATED AUTHORITY

- A. All authority belongs to God, yet He administers some of His authority indirectly through people. When God uses other people to administer His authority, we call this delegated authority. We can distinguish between God’s direct authority and His delegated authority, but to God it is all one authority. All delegated authority represents God’s authority. The parable of the vineyard gives insight into the principle of delegated authority (Lk. 20:9-16; Mk. 12:1-9). When Israel rejected the people that God sent with His delegated authority, they were rejecting God.

<sup>40</sup> *He who receives you receives Me, and...receives Him who sent Me. (Mt. 10:40)*

<sup>16</sup> *He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me... (Lk. 10:16)*

- B. God entrusted His authority to weak and imperfect vessels. We recognize people according to who they are in the Spirit (2 Cor. 5:16). We look past their fleshly weakness and see the spiritual authority and calling given by God. It is biblical to make godly appeals to those in authority over you when you cannot agree with them.

<sup>16</sup> *Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. (2 Cor. 5:16)*

- C. Paul connected being filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18) to honoring those in authority in the home, church, and market place (Eph. 5:21-6:9). God sometimes uses unsaved parents, or employers to lead us. God sometimes directs those over us without them knowing it (Prov. 21:1; 20:24).

- D. God delegates His authority to aid in establishing unity and protection throughout society to direct and coordinate the labors of those under them according to the corporate vision and values. Authority and unity are two sides of one coin. We cannot maintain unity without authority. Thus, God set up guidelines in His Word to protect the unity of His people by commanding His people to honor His delegated authority by cooperating with leaders’ decisions and not slandering them.

<sup>10</sup> *I plead with you...that you all speak the same thing...that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. (1 Cor. 1:10)*

<sup>2</sup> *Being like-minded...being of one accord, of one mind. (Phil. 2:2)*

- E. Keeping the unity of the Spirit requires lowliness, suffering long, and bearing with each other. Paul called the leaders to invest much work into cultivating a like-minded spiritual family. This involves teaching on unity, providing opportunity for two-way communication of ideas, developing appeal structures, and continually strengthening and repairing relationships.

<sup>1</sup> *Walk worthy...<sup>2</sup>with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, <sup>3</sup>endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Eph. 4:1-3)*

- F. One reason I require all our staff to come to our all-staff meetings and FCF services is to strengthen unity (our vision, values, current emphases, policies, etc.). It is not good for our staff (especially those on our platform) to become disconnected spiritually or theologically from where our senior leadership is leading this movement. If they do, divisions will inevitably occur.

#### IV. AUTHORITY AND MINISTRY

- A. Authority is a central issue in all of life. We honor it out of respect for God, His authority, and His purposes. We seek to be free from all forms of dishonoring authority because of our love and reverence for our Father. Therefore, at every sphere of life, we want to know what authority we possess, who is over us, and who is under us. Submission to authority is a spiritual issue (Eph. 5:20-21). A spiritual person can see God’s hand in weak people who possess delegated authority.
- B. Dishonoring authority is one of Satan’s primary principles of operation. Sacrifice without obedience to authority seeks to serve God in the same spirit in which Satan operates his kingdom. Cain, Saul, Nadab, and Abihu offered sacrifices to God while neglecting God’s authority (Gen. 4:1-8; 1 Sam. 13:8-14; Lev. 9:22-10:3). Their sacrifices were rejected. Obedience to God, His Word, and authority is more important to God than offering our sacrifices in ministry. Without understanding this, many seek to sacrificially serve God before they settle the issue of obedience and honoring His authority (in the home, job, church, or government).  
***<sup>22</sup>Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams. <sup>23</sup>For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. (1 Sam. 15:22-23)***
- C. Lawlessness is powerfully at work, seeking to bring strife and destruction to every order of society (2 Thes. 2:7). There are overt forms of lawlessness such as murder, war, and theft, but subtle forms of lawlessness also undermine God’s authority in every sphere of society. Refusing to honor God’s authority in weak people is an expression of lawlessness (Jude 4-11).  
***<sup>7</sup>For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work... (2 Thes. 2:7)***
- D. Jesus prophesied that the spirit of lawlessness would climax in the generation in which the Lord returns. Lawlessness produces strife and undermines love in the home, church, and all society.  
***<sup>12</sup>And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. (Mt. 24:12)***

#### V. EXPRESSING SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY TO THOSE UNDER US

- A. The New Testament calls those who are first in authority to be last in privilege. Authority in the home and church only properly functions with a servant spirit (Mt. 20:25-28). God appointed apostles to be first in authority in the church (1 Cor. 12:28), but last in privilege (1 Cor. 4:9-13).  
***<sup>28</sup>God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues. (1 Cor. 12:28)***  
***<sup>9</sup>God has displayed us, the apostles, last, as men condemned to death; for we have been made a spectacle to the world... <sup>12</sup>We labor working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; <sup>13</sup>being defamed, we entreat. (1 Cor. 4:9-13)***
- B. The basic function of the eldership or leadership in the NT was to rule, which consisted of shepherding and leading God’s people. Paul spoke of the elders who rule (1 Tim. 5:17). The elder should never dominate a believer’s faith (2 Cor. 1:24; 10:8; 13:10; Mt. 20:25; 1 Pet. 5:3).  
***<sup>17</sup>Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor... (1 Tim. 5:17)***

- C. ***To rule*** speaks of bringing direction to the church (1 Tim. 5:17; 1 Thes. 5:12; Heb. 13:7, 17, 24): Direction includes establishing vision, values, and action plans, bringing correction, and problem solving in spiritual, financial, and administrative issues related to its ministries.
- <sup>7</sup>Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you...<sup>17</sup>Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you...<sup>24</sup>Greet all those who rule over you, and all the saints. (Heb. 13:7, 17, 24)***
- D. ***To watch over*** or to oversee the souls of believers (Acts 20:28; Heb. 13:17): The eldership is responsible to watch over the flock, which includes feeding them from the Word, addressing areas of sin and blind spots, providing counsel for spiritual direction, watching for wolves (Acts 20:29-31), and ministering to the weak (Acts 20:35; 1 Thes. 5:14) and sick (Jas. 5:14-15). Creating a culture of humility involves operating in and honoring proper spiritual authority.
- E. What does spiritual authority provide?
1. ***Unity***: Facilitates coordinated efforts by maintaining unified vision, values, practices, etc
  2. ***Support***: Offers resources and stands with people in their ministry assignment with its joys and sorrows (Rom. 12:15) so they labor as part of a family instead of being alone.
  3. ***Counsel***: Points out blind spots in one's doctrines, practices, and character to help them.
- F. What does abuse of spiritual authority look like? It is abused:
1. When it seeks to direct issues in one's domestic life (unless sin is involved).
  2. When those in authority take more privilege and embrace less sacrifice.
  3. When those in authority manipulate by promising exaggerated benefits of being "covered" by them (promising that their mantle will be passed on to faithful "armor-bearers," etc.).
  4. By failing to adequately communicate requirements by not giving the *why* behind the *what* (leaving the people under them feeling exasperated).
  5. By operating with an authoritative spirit that is rigid and leads without kindness.
  6. By being a leader who does not embrace the things that they require of others.
  7. By not having an adequate appeal system in place for differences to be expressed.
- G. Every church in the New Testament was ruled by a group of elders rather than just one person. This is called "plurality" and it describes team ministry as God's pattern for leadership. The New Testament church was led by a plurality of elders (Acts 11:30; Acts 14:23; 15:2, 4, 6; 16:4; 20:17; 21:18). Plurality of elders does not imply equality of authority within that leadership team. All leaders vary in their authority based on their function and responsibility, yet God releases one leader with "headship" or with the highest responsibility and authority within a team at each level of ministry. The principle of headship is expressed in the Trinity and throughout creation in the animal kingdom, the home, the church, and in the angelic and demonic realms.

## **VI. HOW TO RESPOND TO THE LEADERS OVER US: COOPERATE WITH HUMILITY**

- A. ***Obedience:*** Scripture calls us to obey the eldership. Submitting means being teachable and having a cooperative spirit to the corporate directions of the ministry (as long as they do not violate the Scripture). Elders do not direct the domestic issues of individual believers.  
*<sup>17</sup>Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls...Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you. (Heb. 13:17)*
- B. There are always varying opinions on practical issues in ministry (each with strengths and weaknesses). Yet, God ordained leaders (elders) to determine the corporate direction, which includes administrative direction (organizational policies, time of meetings, etc.), financial direction (building issues, distribution of finances, etc.), ministerial direction (vision, values, outreach ministries, church discipline), spiritual direction (teachings or prayer focuses, etc.).
- C. ***Cooperative spirit:*** We esteem leaders by having a teachable spirit that seeks to be helpful. We seek to cooperate for conscience sake without being forced into compliance by ultimatums. Cooperation makes the leader's task joyful instead of burdensome. To resist, criticize, or simply ignore the direction that leaders establish will cause them unnecessary grief and turmoil.
- D. ***Giving honor:*** One way we esteem a leader is by embracing the policies and procedures related to being involved in their sphere (i.e., financial office, ministry teams, IHOPU procedures, prayer room policies, showing up on time for briefings or team meetings, etc.). When we come up short, we should acknowledge it to the one in authority over that department.  
*<sup>12</sup>We urge you to recognize those...over you in the Lord...<sup>13</sup>and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves. (1 Thes. 5:12-13)*
- E. ***Dishonoring:*** We dishonor authority by quietly disregarding what a leader asks of their team (until we are caught), by having a resistant spirit with a disagreeable attitude that regularly challenges the values and policies or by undermining the leader with our words to others.

## **VII. NOT SPEAKING AGAINST THOSE WHO HAVE SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY OVER US**

- A. We are commanded by God to not speak evil of our leaders in the home, church, or society (Ex. 22:28; Lev. 20:9; Acts 23:5) without going through a proper biblical process.  
*<sup>28</sup>You shall not revile God, nor curse a ruler of your people. (Ex. 22:28)*
- B. God commands this because He honors His own authority that He delegated to them and the unity in the family, job, church, or society. To sin against a leader is to sin against the unity. To sin against the unity is to sin against God's purpose for that particular group.
- C. Jesus answered the unsaved high priest because of honoring God's authority (Mt. 26:62-64). Jesus encouraged paying taxes to Caesar as a statement of submission to authority (Lk. 20:25).

- D. Paul respected the same unsaved high priest who helped orchestrate Jesus' crucifixion. Paul repented of speaking sharp words to him because he represented God's authority.  
***<sup>5</sup>Paul said, "I did not know, brethren, that he was the high priest; for it is written, 'You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.'*** (Acts 23:5)
- E. When any feel mistreated, they should make an appeal first to the Lord, then to the brother who mistreated them, and then to the leaders who have authority to help with the solution. To share an offense with a friend who is not a part of the solution is slander. (Mt. 18:15-20)
- F. God commands leaders to remove slanderous people from the community after giving them opportunity to repent (Rom. 16:17; 1 Cor. 5:11, 13; 6:10; 10:10; Jas. 4:11; 5:9; Titus 3:10). This command is given because they sin against the unity of the body. The church is not allowed to receive an accusation against a leader except on the basis of two or three witnesses (1 Tim. 5:19). This prohibition is not for the sake of the elder, but for the sake of the unity of those under them.  
***<sup>10</sup>Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition... (Titus 3:10)***  
***<sup>17</sup>I urge you...note those who cause divisions and offenses...and avoid them. (Rom. 16:17)***  
***<sup>11</sup>I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral...or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person...***  
***<sup>13</sup>Therefore put away from yourselves the evil person. (1 Cor. 5:11-13)***
- G. When Korah spoke against Moses, he spurned the Lord (Num. 16:3, 30; Jude 11). It is not about obeying a leader, but it is God's authority in that leader that we respect.  
***<sup>3</sup>They [led by Korah] gathered together against Moses and Aaron, and said to them, "You take too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation is holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the congregation...?"***<sup>28</sup>***Moses said: "By this you shall know that the LORD has sent me..."***<sup>30</sup>***If the earth opens its mouth and swallows them... you will understand that these men have rejected the Lord." (Num. 16:3-30)***
- H. David refused to strike Saul because he recognized God's authority in him (1 Sam. 26:9-11).  
***<sup>6</sup>He [David] said to his men, "The LORD forbid that I should do this thing to...the LORD's anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the LORD."***<sup>7</sup>***David restrained his servants with these words, and did not allow them to rise against Saul...***<sup>12</sup>***Let the LORD judge between you and me...but my hand shall not be against you...***<sup>15</sup>***Let the LORD be judge...and plead my case, and deliver me out of your hand." (1 Sam. 24:6-15)***