

AUTHORITY

USE AND MISUSE



Jacob Ninan

AUTHORITY – USE AND MISUSE

Jacob Ninan

Authority – use and misuse

Jacob Ninan

Copyright 2019

Published by

Comfort & Counsel,
69, Hutchins Main Road, Bangalore 560084,
India

Web site: www.c-n-c.org

Email: jninan@c-n-c.org

Cover design by Pramod Simon Ninan

I am very grateful to those who have offered me suggestions and corrections to the manuscript.

Bible quotations are from the New American Standard Bible unless otherwise mentioned.

Table of contents

1. [Introduction](#)
2. [Authority in the Trinity](#)
3. [God's authority over man](#)
4. [Human authority](#)
5. [Different forms of authority](#)
6. [Spiritual authority](#)
7. [Authority in the home](#)
8. [Conclusion](#)

Chapter 1

Introduction

The apostle Peter, when describing some of the characteristics of the last days, mentioned about those “...who indulge the flesh in its corrupt desires and despise authority” (2Pet.2:10). Some of the words the apostle Paul used in the same connection were “boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, irreconcilable, without self-control, brutal, treacherous, reckless, conceited” (2Tim.3:2-4).

Many children do not obey their parents any more, wives consider it below their dignity to submit to their husbands, young people have no respect for the elderly, subordinates only pretend respect for their bosses, politicians backstab their leaders in the process of seeking for bigger positions, and people in the church do not recognise or value the authority God has given to leaders.

On the other side of the coin, we see abusive display of authority by people in positions over others. Lord Acton observed, “The measure of a man is what he does with power.” He went on to assert, “Power tends to corrupt; absolute power corrupts absolutely.” This is a sad commentary on the current situation, perhaps more applicable now than ever before.

On the receiving side, the misuse of authority generates a general distrust of authority and consequent attempts to resist such authorities, leading many times to open rebellion.

Authority and responsibility

We need to understand clearly in our mind that authority goes together with responsibility. In fact, *authority is vested in someone for the sake of carrying out one's responsibility*. It is not a position of power but an obligation to serve. Authority stands tall on

the shoulders of responsibility, but tends to become abuse without that balance.

Those who are under authority expect the leaders to demonstrate concern, but those in authority many times fail to take up their obligation towards those under their care.

Those who truly feel responsible for others feel *concern* for them. Those who focus only on the authority or the position they have with respect to the others tend to neglect what they should be doing for the others. In effect, they 'exploit' the people under them for their own gain.

There are different forms of authority and responsibility, and it is important to recognise that they do not all operate in the same way in their different scenarios. For example, the clear-cut lines of authority within the military system and the requirement in that context for unquestioned submission cannot be taken in the context of church or family situations

where authority is to be expressed in terms of love and care (1Pet.5:2;Eph.5:25).

Authority and care

Leaders who care for people feel responsible for them and show it in acts of service, and then it is only natural that people respect them and submit to them. This is the characteristic of a servant-leader; he serves because he cares and not because he aims at impressing people and gaining authority. People develop respect for him when they notice his care and then they are happy to submit to him.

On the other hand, those in positions of authority who do not really care for the welfare of those placed under them will not draw respect towards them, and that makes it difficult for the people to submit to them. In such cases, those in authority will also be unable to carry out their responsibilities properly.

In some positions of authority they are able to impose their authority by punishing or disciplining those who would not submit. Governmental and military forms of authority are examples. But it is not so clear in situations such as the church and family where love is the overarching virtue. In these situations the exercise of authority is not to be done by imposing it on the others but generally by drawing out submission from the people by acting with responsibility and care towards them even though at times discipline may become inevitable. Admittedly, this is more easily said than done.

Authority and accountability

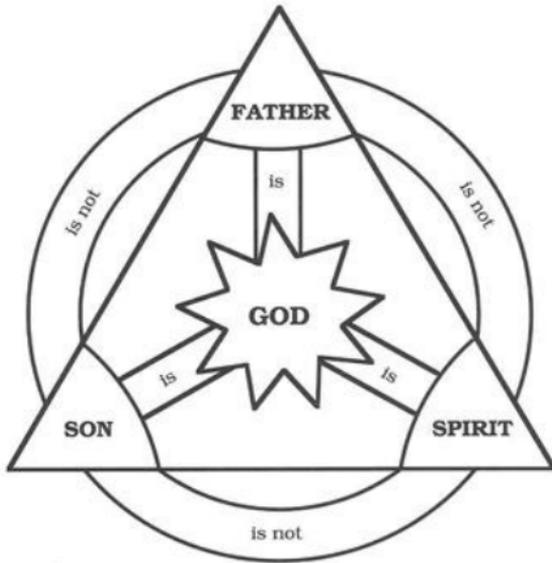
Those in authority are dependent on people under them to carry out their allotted work, for the whole system to function properly. In that way, people under authority are accountable to their leaders who hold them responsible. It is easy to understand that without this sense of accountability the system will fail; leaders will

be forced to take disciplinary action to bring in that sense of accountability, and if people refuse to be responsible, the leaders will find themselves helpless to carry out their tasks.

Let us learn about authority by looking at the Trinity first and then at the common areas of human authority.

Chapter 2

Authority in the Trinity



‘Trinity’ is a concept that is beyond human understanding, and so human beings could not have made it up. But we know it because it has been revealed to us by God in the Bible. The word itself is not used in the Bible, but its reality and operation are seen all over the Bible. But since it is a spiritual concept not

amenable to physical interpretation, no representation that people have devised, including the one above (from Felix Just), is a complete representation of the facts as we understand them! But we use the above picture in order to understand the concept of authority and submission within the Trinity.

In simple terms, Trinity refers to the one and only God revealing Himself as three Persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. These three Persons are equally God, and there is no intrinsic difference among them or any gradation of value, worth or power. Yet they work together in perfect harmony, having instituted among themselves a certain order of authority related to the different roles they carry out.

The Son is not really a physical son of the Father, but rather one who has been 'designated' as one by the Father (Psa.2:7;Acts.13:33). We can guess that this was done in order to teach us something about

Father-Son relationship when, in the fullness of time, God was going to bring out a Father-child relationship between Him and us.

The Holy Spirit is not an impersonal force but a Person equal in every way to the Father and the Son with all the attributes of personality that we can connect with the other two.

Following a certain order of ‘authority’ among them, while the Son was on earth as a Man, He submitted to the Father praying to Him and doing His will, and the Holy Spirit does not do His own will now but seeks always to glorify the Son.

We can take two examples from the Bible of how the three Persons work. The first was at creation. “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters. Then God said,

‘Let there be light’; and there was light”
(Gen.1:1-3).

Even though Christians are used to saying that God just spoke and it got done automatically, a detailed look at how it was done shows us the scenario where the Father announced what was to be done, and the Son executed it with the power of the Holy Spirit. That the execution was not automatic but carried out by the Son can be seen from the alternative name of the Son as the ‘Word’ (Jn.1:1) and the statement that “apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being” (v.3;Col.1:16)). The presence of the third Person of the Trinity, the Spirit of God, is also seen in Gen.1:2. This is not to deny that God spoke and it was done, but only to expand the description of how exactly it got done.

The other example is in the plan of salvation. God the Father sent the Son to the earth to die for the sins of people and to be their Saviour. The Son submitted to the Father, lived the

whole time on earth in total dependence on the Father, and did the Father's will at all times denying His own will, up to laying down His life on the cross. After the Father raised Him up from the dead, He returned to the Father and then the Father sent the Holy Spirit into the world to be in the place of the Son. Now the Holy Spirit dwells in the hearts of people who are saved and exalts the Son in their lives.

In the above examples we see the three Persons of the Trinity taking on different roles and corresponding responsibilities, and a demarcation of authority automatically coming into the picture. We see the Father taking on the top position, with the Son submitting to Him by doing what the Father directed Him to, and the Holy Spirit assisting the Son in the execution of the task.

This is very instructive for us when we place these facts side by side with the fact that the three Persons are still equal in terms of their being God and not having any disparity of

inherent value among them. So, authority is seen not as an expression of superiority over inferiority but as a means to get things done in an orderly fashion.

It is good to realise that our authority is bound to the areas of responsibility we have. As people, our individual responsibilities differ from one another, and our areas of authority cannot go outside or beyond those areas of responsibility.

Parents have responsibility over their own children, and they have no right to discipline their neighbour's children. We cannot exercise authority outside the boundaries of our responsibility, and when we don't take up our responsibility in any area we lose in effect the right to exercise authority there.

On the other hand, the better we carry out our responsibilities, the more we *earn* the right to exercise authority. Then we exercise our authority with the goal of fulfilling our

responsibilities to the maximum in the interest of the people over whom we have the responsibility.

In reverse, if someone has great authority in one place it does not automatically grant him that authority when he goes to other places. A CEO in a company does not automatically gain any prominence in the church, and a newly converted movie-star does not have enough spiritual understanding and discernment to start giving sermons in the church!

Because of our fallen nature and the resulting craving for recognition and affirmation, people look for opportunities to be seen as greater, better and more important than others. As a result, authority is seen many times as an opportunity to acquire that sense of significance. Then it gets misused, and the responsibility for which the authority was given gets neglected.

Our fallen nature contributes a lot of imperfection in every area of life including authority and submission. This shows up both in the way we exercise authority and the way we submit to authority. But let us learn from the perfect example of the Trinity in the way the three Persons in the godhead relate to one another in perfect harmony and respect for one another while recognising authority lines and carrying out their specific responsibilities.

Chapter 3

God's authority over man

God has authority because He is God. His authority is *absolute* because there is no one above Him and all other things exist only because He created them. He is the One who designed the functions and boundaries of each person and thing, and therefore He has every right to exercise absolute authority over all things.

God is also the Ultimate Judge of all things. He is the One who *created* the laws of nature as well as the moral laws. Since He is the Creator, Owner and Lawgiver, He has every right to demand anything He wants from all of us. As a judge God is perfect because His laws are perfect and His judgments perfectly balanced between righteousness and mercy. Because of His being the Creator and as One who has this perfect balance in His judgments, He has a perfect right to judge all things. No

one can question Him, no one should dare to question Him and every knee should bow before Him and confess that He is Lord of all. The conversation between God and Job is a case in point (Job.38-41).

God is also perfect in His love towards us so that whatever He commands us to do is meant for our ultimate best. He has perfect wisdom to know what is best for us and the perfect ability to do whatever He chooses for us. He never makes a mistake.

This gives us confidence to trust Him and do without question whatever He tells us without even waiting to understand things fully. We can be confident that whatever implications there are for obeying Him, He is able to handle all of them. This creates the perfect stage for exercising His absolute authority over us and our full and unquestioning submission to Him.

The authority of God and the way He exercises it are things *we* can never fully imitate as created and fallen human beings. The way we submit to Him is also not something that can be imitated when it comes to submitting to any human authority. This is because everyone else other than God is imperfect. It is a simple but extremely profound truth that we are *not* God!

Whatever form of authority any one of us has, that authority is not absolute because we are created beings with limitations in every aspect of our being. Whatever form of authority others have over us, we cannot submit to them in the same way we are to submit to God. Even when the Bible tells wives to submit to their husbands *as to the Lord* (Eph.5:22), we know that this is not to be absolute submission because there may come times when a wife has to obey God rather than man (Acts.5:29).

The most perfect among God's creation at that point in time, Lucifer, the archangel or the

leader of the angels, had to submit to the authority of God. But when he considered his own abilities and characteristics, especially in comparison to other angels, he forgot about the huge (actually infinite) gap between him and God. He thought there was no need for him to submit to God and he even thought that he could be on the same level as God (Isa.14:13,14). That was what led to his fall, from archangel to Satan.

It is when we become proud in ourselves, thinking about our greatness, our knowledge, our experience, our fame, our achievements, our skills and abilities, etc., especially in comparison with other people, that we fall immediately. We may foolishly try to boost our self-image by being harder in exercising authority over others, but we have already fallen low, and everything we do afterwards will usually make things worse.

This is why ‘servant-leadership’ is the right way in which people can exercise authority

over others, carry out their responsibilities towards the others and keep within proper boundaries. Failure in human authority comes either from neglecting their responsibilities or by going beyond their boundaries of authority.

Hesitation to submit may come from a fear that by submitting one will be acknowledging one's inferiority. This sense of inferiority may exist because one grew up under an abuse of authority by parents. Sometimes those in authority thrive on making people under them feel inferior.

Those who abuse their positions of authority many times try to threaten them with dire consequences if they fail to comply with anything they are asked to do. But we need to learn from the exercise of authority and submission within the Trinity that it is not about superiority or inferiority but about recognising our roles and our responsibilities.

It is not just God's might and authority that we need to consider in order to understand our relationship with Him. While these might cause us to 'fear' Him, to stand in awe of Him and respect Him, it is His goodness that draws us to Him. We think more of His 'love' towards us than His power. But His love is essentially His power in action and His power is His love in action.

The divine kind of love does not love someone because it wants something from that person. This love is completely the opposite, wanting to do something good for the other. In this way, we can understand divine love (*agape*) as a consistent desire to bless and to do good to the other.

God's laws are designed to lead us to a safe place where we can be blissfully happy, and also to protect us from consequences that will be hurtful for us. His discipline has to be seen as an attempt to bring us back to the good path when we have strayed away. It is in love that

He disciplines us, for our good, even though it might appear to us as if it is coming from His anger (Heb.12:4-13).

God exercises His authority *only* for our good – planning good things for us (Jer.29:11), protecting from going wrong, correcting and disciplining us when we have gone wrong, and turning even the evil that happens to us to do something good for us (Rom.8:28).

This is the part of the exercise of authority by God that we can take away for ourselves when we have to exercise authority over others, and not what He does out of His power and might.

Chapter 4

Human authority

Why do we human beings have to exercise authority over others and why do we have to submit to someone else, when we are all equal in the sight of God? We know it is to carry out our responsibilities towards those who are under our authority and to allow those who are in authority above us to carry out their responsibilities towards us.

Authority is required at various levels in order for the world to function in an orderly and healthy manner. Those in authority have the responsibility to ensure that those under their care are provided whatever they need from their particular source of authority. Those under authority must recognise that their submission will enable the authorities to carry out the tasks that are good for everyone. In doing so they become willing collaborators with the authorities. It is the duty of the traffic

police to make travel safe for everyone, and if we follow the traffic rules we cooperate with the police and enjoy our safety.

From the way the Persons in the Trinity exercise authority we can understand that authority does not indicate superiority of one over another. But because of our fallen nature which is propelled by selfishness, our tendency is to put our interests above those of others. So many people in authority tend to neglect their responsibility while they take care of their own interests, or they tend to 'lord it' over others rather than serve them for their good as intended. As Christians these are the tendencies we have to learn to overcome.

On the other hand, we need to also know the difference between submitting to God's authority and human authority. Since God is perfect in every way, when we submit to Him it is fully designed for our very best. So we can wholeheartedly submit to His laws and

obey Him unquestioningly in everything He says. But not so with people!

First of all, it must be clear that we must obey God rather than men (Acts.5:29), when man tells us to do something God does not want us to. Examples can be if someone tells us to worship an idol, abort our baby, or sign a false statement to make money.

We must also recognise that since all people are imperfect in their knowledge, skill, experience, abilities, gifts, etc., and since everyone operates more or less from their fallen nature, we must not give anyone ‘unquestioning’ submission as if they were perfect like God, even if they expect us to or demand it from us. We need to recognise when what they ask for is reasonable and legitimate and when they are going beyond their boundaries. Otherwise we will make ourselves slaves, ‘yes-men’ or opinion-less zombies – the living dead.

When it comes to human authority, we also need to make a distinction between *submitting* to their authority and *obeying* whatever they say. Submission is to have an attitude that recognises and accepts the position of authority that this person has over us in particular areas. Obedience is to do what they tell us. While we must always keep an attitude of submission to authority, whether we do what they say depends on a few factors.

God's authority over us extends to every area of our life. But man's authority over us is limited to the role they have to play and the responsibility associated with that. Our boss at work can tell us how he wants us to do our work, but he cannot command us to join in his religious activities. He can ask us to do our work in a particular way but he cannot tell us to cheat in our work.

People in authority have every right to ask us to obey as long as they are exercising authority within their boundaries. But if they

go outside such boundaries or our moral boundaries we are not bound to obey them. Even though we cannot revolt against them, we can make a stand and let our own boundaries be known. Just as submission is essentially an attitude because of which we recognise our position in relation to the people in authority above us, rebellion is also an attitude of revolt against such authority (Rom.13:1,2).

In general, what we see is that in any given area of responsibility, those who come under the responsibility of the person need to submit to him and obey him within that area. Here there is no requirement for the submission to take place in reverse, i.e., there is no need for the person with authority (responsibility) to submit to the person under authority in that area – submission is one-way as far as that area of authority is concerned. But keep in mind that the same two people can have a

different set of roles in another context where authority is in the hands of the second person!

It is in this context that we have to understand the intention and meaning of the verse in Eph.5:21, “Be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.” We need to understand that this submission to one another has to recognise the different areas where different people are in authority. This verse is *not* teaching an egalitarian approach where everyone is supposed to have equal authority or right and everyone just submits to everyone else without recognising that someone has authority over another. Perhaps an example will clarify what I mean.

Consider a church where a pastor is in charge of not only the spiritual direction but also the administrative decisions. He has delegated responsibilities to different people to handle different aspects of the church. He now has to submit to different ones in the area of their

responsibility even though he is overall in charge.

For example, he submits to the choice of songs made by the choir leader, to the one who controls the sound system when he adjusts the settings, the electrician who decides how to lay the cables, etc. Since he is overall in charge, he has the right to discuss things with them and to make suggestions. But he recognises that these people are the authorities in their own area and he submits to them. They in turn submit to him when he decides how the church should move forward and what meetings to hold.

But if this pastor thinks that he is the supreme authority and takes micro-control over every aspect in his church, he would stifle the growth of the church defeating the very purpose of his authority as a pastor/leader!

Life is not a free-for-all where each one is making independent decisions, but we all

recognise our inter-dependence and submit to one another recognising each one's area of responsibility.

This is an important point to learn and keep in mind when the spirit of the times is pushing for 'equality' in a way that implies the individual's total independence and right to make any decision. No, we are all inter-dependent – what others do affects us and what we do affects others too. It is only by recognising and submitting to the boundaries and responsibilities that we can manage to work together peacefully and productively.

Chapter 5

Different forms of authority

Max Weber has classified types of human authority as traditional, charismatic and legal/rational. Traditional authority is what has come about as the result of long-standing custom. Charismatic authority is due to the dynamic personality of a leader. Legal/rational authority is where the authority rests in a person's position rather than in him.

In order to understand different ways in which authority works out in practice, let us look at a few scenarios.

We could perhaps say that in a few areas of human life, it is the order and practical working out of tasks that matter, without any reference to personal relationships among the people. An example is bureaucracy. But in other areas such as family and church, human relationships matter a lot. At the same time we

recognise that while this is true in theory, every area of human interaction is in practice affected by personalities and inter-personal relationships.

Authority of position

Bureaucracy is characterised by hierarchy where each layer reports to the layer above and each layer has authority over the layer below. Work is supposed to get done methodically, objectively and in an impersonal manner and the system is designed to achieve that goal. Since every layer reports to the one above, checks are also in place to see that things get done properly.

But what happens in reality is that people have their personal agendas and therefore love of money, ambition for going up the ladder, favouritism, etc., corrupt people's functions. However, the point we need to take from this example is that these kinds of hierarchical

systems are designed in this way to ensure their smooth and safe working.

The judicial system

The operation of the judicial system is also meant to be impersonal, aiming only at arriving at impartial and objective judgments. One thing to be especially noted here is that judgments are to be based entirely on evidence and application of the law, to the extent that even when circumstances point to the conviction of a person he is sometimes set free based on absence of sufficient evidence. Sometimes criminals go free and at other times innocent people are convicted. But that is a limitation of the system rather than a fault in its delivery.

Military authority

One outstanding character of authority in military setups is the emphasis on rank and the unquestioning obedience demanded from lower ranks. Any defiance of this authority

will be made subject to court martial. From the time one joins the military, this is drilled into the mind of the people. Even through the rigors of physical training, one goal is to break the mental resistance to authority. The expectation is that in times like war the commanders can be assured of compliance from the soldiers to whatever decisions are taken, because there is no time for discussions or arguments. Obviously, this system is designed for war-like operations and is not suitable for normal life where individuals and their opinions matter.

Authority of the police

The authority of the police is similar in terms of hierarchy to the military, but the difference is that they have to interact with outside people – criminals, victims, family members of convicts, mass behaviour in public, etc. – and here they have to bring together the enforcement of the law as well as humane

attitudes towards those who are being victimised.

The enforcement of the law has to be carried out on one side without partiality towards the rich or the powerful, but those who are suffering are to be treated with understanding or even compassion. Of course, when the police are enticed by the love of money or controlled by unscrupulous politicians the system fails to punish the guilty or to deter others from breaking the law.

Charismatic authority

This is where people submit to those who have a strong charismatic personality in fields such as politics or religion. Because they create an artificial aura around them by the way they talk and conduct themselves, many people begin to follow them. Some of the people become willing to blindly follow whatever these leaders tell them, even to the extent of committing suicide for them.

Perhaps people follow these leaders because they think that these leaders are the messiah or saviour they were waiting for, because they are hoping for advancement for themselves in position by being their followers or because they fear some calamity if they left them. But most such charisma based followings dissipate after the time of the leader.

Earned authority

Some people gain respect from others by the way they demonstrate their concern and care for others and serve them. This was how Jesus gained His followers. There have been, thankfully, many leaders in the church and also outside, who have been responsible for leading their followers in a good direction. Some of the people who admire such leaders begin to follow them. The authority these leaders have has been earned and not imposed on others. Unfortunately, some of these leaders begin to allow this power to go to their heads – and power corrupts.

Concluding this section, it is easy to see that it is one thing to theoretically describe how things ought to be and another thing to see it in practice. This is because imperfect human beings are involved! We are all influenced by sinful desires within ourselves, the culture we have grown up in, the experiences that have shaped our thinking, the values we believe in, the prominence we give to what others think about us, etc. There are challenges we all face, both in exercising authority over others as well as in submitting to others.

The ultimate standard for authority and submission comes from God. The more we get to know Him and His ways, His Spirit is able to transform our attitudes and ways of looking at people and circumstances.

Chapter 6

Spiritual authority

For us Christians, this is an area which is misunderstood much and hence misused or abused both by leaders and followers. There are leaders who lord it over others and there are followers who blindly submit to their leaders. There are leaders who assume that God has given them such absolute authority that their word should be treated practically as God's own and there are followers who are scared to do anything without their leader's approval or even to disagree with him. There are leaders who are there as those who are in a profession for earning their livelihood and have no spiritual food to give to the others, and there are also others whose whole aim is to deceive their followers and maximise their own gain.

God has not left the church of His Son without any leadership because He knows that

recognised levels of authority should be in place in order to assist proper functioning of the church which is the body of Christ.

In the body of Christ there are members who are positioned to exercise different levels of authority over others for the welfare of the whole body. “And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, *for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ*” (Eph.4:11,12). Christ is the Chief Shepherd and He has set up some people as shepherds over the others (1Pet.5:1-4).

The two parts of the truth that we see from the above passage from Ephesians should be kept in their proper balance in order for us to see things in the right perspective. The first thing we see is that there are certain people who are given the responsibility of teaching, training, guiding and directing the general crowd of people so that everyone grows up and fulfils

their part in the body of Christ. So there is leadership, and these leaders have authority and responsibility over the people in their care.

The second truth we see here is that the final goal is for the people to grow up and fulfil their roles in the body. Leaders are not the ones who have to have prominence in the scheme of things but the people. People need help and they are to submit respectfully to the leaders and the leaders have to remember that it is for the people that their roles exist.

It is very important for the leaders to keep in mind that their function in the body of Christ exists not to make them feel important or as a provision to make a good living for them, but to serve the people. They must not forget the fact that they too are accountable to Christ the Head.

Paul recognised very clearly that the great authority that the Lord gave him as an apostle

was for building others up (2Cor.10:8). He understood this task so clearly that in his heart he was even willing to be lost for eternity if that somehow would serve to save the people of Israel (Rom.9:3). The heart of a true shepherd yearns to serve the flock. The Chief Shepherd gave the ultimate example of physically laying down His life for the sheep.

Another point to remember is that, in a real sense, the 'leaders' are also a part of the 'people'. They themselves need spiritual growth, and they too are dependent on others for that. They are not self-sufficient even if they have come from Bible colleges and the congregation cannot win any prize in Bible quizzes! There will be always things that they can learn from 'lowly' people in the church *if* they are willing to learn.

Leaders have to recognise that they too are 'brothers' and not some superior persons even though they have more prominent roles in the church than the people. Jesus said to the

crowds and to His disciples (Matt.23:1), “But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers. Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. Do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, that is, Christ. But the greatest among you shall be your servant. Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted” (vv.8-12).

The responsibility of a leader is to serve the people with the attitude of a servant. Leaders who crave for a prominent place on the platform, dress up in special costumes to show off, desire to be addressed with special titles and ‘served’ by people and are unwilling to be ‘one among the people’ have no idea of ‘servant-leadership’.

Peter warns the leaders of churches to ‘shepherd’ the flock of God according to the will of God, and not ‘under compulsion’, not for ‘sordid gain’, and not to ‘lord it over’ those

allotted to their charge (1Pet.5:1-3). When Paul describes the qualifications for ‘overseers’ and ‘deacons’ (1Tim.3), we should note that the emphasis was not on Bible knowledge, impressive oratorical skills or knowledge of management techniques, but on character.

Of course, Paul recognised that Bible knowledge is required to be in spiritual authority (Tit.1:9), because leaders are not to deal with the people according to their own understanding but according to the will of God which is revealed in His word. Shepherds should also know the word of God clearly in order to be able to recognise and deal with false teachers who might try to destroy the sheep. But Bible knowledge alone will not be effective without character. Skills will be useful but what is more important is a personal walk with God that produces godly character.

On another side what we find are people who have taken over leadership of churches

without a proper relationship with the Lord or sufficient knowledge of His ways. Such ‘leaders’ are prone to bring out all kinds of wrong teaching and then cover up their lack with excessive authority.

Knowledge and skills can impress people, but it is character that earns respect and trust. When leaders are merely doing their duty out of compulsion, if they are working to get wealthy or famous or if they are manipulative or acting like dictators over the people, people lose their respect for them even if they submit to them out of a foolish fear of offending God.

When God calls someone for a ‘ministry’ in His church, He ‘anoints’ him with His Holy Spirit and also gives him special supernatural gifts for use in the ministry. 1 Corinthians chapters 12 to 14 talk about many such gifts and guidelines for operating them. The guidelines given in chapter 13 show us how all these gifts are to be used in love for the people for their good (1Cor.12:7;31).

When someone has this anointing over him, the others can see that what comes through his ministry is much larger and powerful than which can be attributed to human abilities. For example, when an anointed evangelist preaches, the hearts of the listeners are 'pricked' by the Holy Spirit and they turn to God (Acts.2:37). When someone preaches from the word of God with a prophetic anointing, his listeners connect it in their hearts to details in their personal lives which the preacher was not even aware of, and they realise that God is speaking to them (1Cor.14:24,25).

Such leaders receive recognition for the anointing that is over them, and recognise that it is not from them but from the Lord (1Cor.3:6). People happily submit to such leaders, but the leaders ought to be aware that the entire glory goes to God and they should not start imagining great things about themselves.

Think, on the other hand, about leaders who are only known for their natural gifts, whether it is for speaking, holding the attention, singing, moving the listeners emotionally, etc. At the end of listening to them, we are left with thinking how great *they* are! But if their ministry does not touch our life in such a way that we draw closer to God and it changes us a little more to be like Jesus, we might as well have been listening to political speeches!

“Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you” (Heb.13:17).

Submitting to authority is the other side of the coin. As we have seen earlier, without submission coming up from those under authority, proper exercise of authority cannot happen and those in authority will not be able to fulfil their responsibilities properly. Yet, spiritual submission is highly misunderstood

by many people, affected by mismanagement of authority by the leaders. Submission varies in practice between unquestioning obedience to revolting and backbiting against the leaders.

Submission is not the same as obedience.

Hupotasso is the Greek word used for submit. It means “to be under the appointed authority of another person.” The biblical command to submit is a command to put oneself under the delegated authority of another person who in some way represents Jesus to a particular group of people.

This attitude of submission comes from recognising that the leader is working with the responsibility and authority given by God for the care of the people. The more care the people experience and observe coming from the leaders the more they will respect them. This leads to their obedience to the instructions of the leaders regarding what needs to be done in their area of responsibility.

If a leader steps outside his area of responsibility and starts interfering in other matters in the lives of the people, he does not have to be obeyed. People should be able to discuss with the leaders if they have different points of view concerning the working of the church, with the understanding that if finally they still cannot agree with the leader, they need to keep the order in the church by doing what the leaders want. In case they are convinced that they cannot do that with a good conscience, they may have to perhaps choose to leave that particular church, without rebellion or spreading confusion by spreading the matter to others about what they think.

On the other side is the matter of dealing with people in the church who go wrong in their personal lives and others who create problems for the leadership. In the former case, there is the need for those with a shepherd's heart to reach out to the persons and counsel them. The shepherd in Jesus' parable left the ninety-nine

sheep which were in his flock and went searching for one sheep which was lost. That is the heart of a true shepherd. He does not wait for the sheep to seek him out but goes seeking after them.

Sometimes counselling may be required to help a person who is confused or who has gone wrong. Counselling is not about teaching and correcting them, but first of all understanding their points of view and offering to help them to find the right way. In the latter case also, where a person is a troublemaker, the real goal is to understand him and *win* him back. Jesus said, “If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have *won* your brother” (Matt.18:15). Jesus went on to say what to do if this person did not listen to the leadership (vv.16,17).

The whole idea is to make every possible attempt to set things right. Leaders who do not have any proper concern for the ‘sheep’ in

their care but who are afraid of losing numbers tend to overlook people's problems and show only an 'accepting' approach. They may manage to keep the strength of the church and perhaps also attract those who are only looking for such a welcoming acceptance and no real transformation in their lives. But shepherds who watch their sheep getting hurt but will not 'interfere' (actually *intervene*) are shirking their responsibilities. In the language of the Old Testament, they could be getting the blood of the sheep on their hands!

It may be unavoidable sometimes, as Jesus Himself said, that the leaders are unable to win everyone who has problems. Especially those who create problems in the church may not listen to any advice or instruction. In such cases, the leader may be finally forced to even send them out of the church in order to give the person himself a serious warning and sometimes also to avoid this person from affecting the others in the church.

As Jesus said in the same chapter, after the leader tries personally to win this person, he may then try to help that person with the support of other mature people in the church. If that also does not succeed, he is forced to bring the matter to the attention of the whole church. What must be clear to everyone is that the ultimate aim in such cases is not to throw out troublesome people from the church but first of all to try and win their hearts and to set things right.

In such situations, it is very important for the leaders to try and understand what is really going on in this ‘trouble-maker’s’ heart and mind. It may even happen that they get to see that they themselves were mistaken in their thoughts about the so-called trouble-maker and that they (the leaders) had to learn something new from the situation.

A serious issue that has come up in some churches is that some leaders exercise authority to such an extent that it becomes

abuse. They extend their authority beyond their scope and try to direct their people even in personal matters. They preach against rebellion quoting the examples of Lucifer, Miriam and Korah, and warnings such as “Do not touch the Lord’s anointed,” and “Judge not.” They demand virtually unquestioning subservience from the people and warn about the calamities that would follow if anyone disobeyed them.

Many self-appointed ‘prophets’ give specific directions to people saying that they were passing on what the Lord wanted them to say. Due to a lack of personal knowledge of the Bible and the assumption that these ‘men of God’ were sent by God, many people put aside their common sense and obey them, only to discover later that it was a huge mistake!

There should not be any place for rebellion against authority. But that does not mean that no one can ask questions or discuss

differences of opinion. After all, as Jesus said, we are all brothers and sisters.

So, there are two types of warnings from God, one to leaders telling them to serve the people for their good and not to lord it over them (1Pet.5:1-3), and the second to the people to submit to their leaders (Heb.13:7) but not to be gullible and submit without thinking (see 1Cor.14:29;1Thes.5:20,21).

Chapter 7

Authority in the home

The second area where Christians face the challenge with regards to authority is the home. This is a place where clash of personalities and ideas is very common, and since the home is very important for the general happiness of families and societies and the proper training of the children for the future, it is most important that there should be order and harmony in the home. That is why the loving and wise God has set up a hierarchy even for the home.

Jesus recognised as a matter of fact that there would be a person recognised as the head of the home (Matt.13:52;24:43;Lk.12:39;13:25). Later, the Holy Spirit made the hierarchy in the home clear as God the Father, the Son, the husband and the wife, in that order (1Cor.11:3;Eph.5:23), designating the husband as the head of the wife. Then we see specific instructions to husbands and wives (along with

other specific instructions for children, masters and servants) where the husband is to love his wife as Christ loves the church (Eph.5:28), to live with her in an understanding way (1Pet.3:7) and not to become bitter towards her (Col.3:19), and the wife is to be subject to her husband (Eph.5:22;Col.3:18;1Pet.3:1).

To understand the context of this order in the family we must remember that there is absolutely no implication of differences between the husband and wife in terms of worth or importance, as we have seen from the example of the Trinity. Both husband and wife have been created equally in the 'image of God' (Gen.1:27), and God makes no distinction between men and women as far their relationship with Him is concerned (Gal.3:28). This hierarchy of authority and accountability is only to define the different roles within the family so as to ensure harmony and happiness.

When God gives the husband the role of the head of the family, it is not so much to define his authority but his overall responsibility for the family. God is going to hold him responsible for what happens to the family just in the same way as the CEO of a firm is held responsible for some mistake of the firm even though he may have had no personal involvement in the mistake.

The husband has to make sure that the family is provided for according to their needs and that he protects them from any trouble that might come to them. It is his responsibility to see that the ways of the Lord which he has learned are passed on to his children in turn (Deut.4:10). He cannot shirk his responsibility towards the children and casually pass them on to his wife. He cannot make any decision for the family without thinking of the long-term implications on his wife and children, and if anything goes wrong he has to take the responsibility for it and seek to set it right.

This is the way he ‘loves’ his wife, as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her (Eph.5:25). If a husband loves his wife like this, he makes it easier for the wife to ‘submit’ to him. To submit is *not* to have to blindly obey whatever he tells her, but to recognise and accept the position and responsibility that God has given him.

In an ideal situation, where a husband knows that he does not know everything and that he cannot do everything by himself, he takes advantage of the availability of his wife, putting their heads together, discussing about the decisions that need to be taken and arrives at a mutually acceptable direction.

In a practical situation, because husbands and wives are going to be different in many ways – gender, personality type, family background, education, cultural background, etc. – it is going to happen often that they are not able to arrive at a common approach. In this case, if the wife submits to his role as the head of the

house, she allows him to make the final decision.

In such a case the husband takes his decision after considering all that he knows and all that he has heard from his wife, keeping in mind the fact that he is going to be responsible for the outcome of his decision. Such a husband will not be a dictator or one who treats his wife with disdain; he will be an enabler to bring out the best in everyone, like the conductor in an orchestra.

It is easy to see that if both husbands and wives obey these instructions from the Lord, there will be increasing harmony in families, and that if these are violated or disregarded there will be increasing conflicts and all sorts of trouble which will in turn badly affect the children too.

Through centuries of abuse of authority by men in general and husbands in particular, women have suffered much physical harm,

indignity, injustice, rejection, devaluation and neglect. Culturally, even now, many men go with the assumption that their wives are at their mercy and strongly believe that they are entitled to treat them any way they like. It is sad that there are even some Christian preachers who teach husbands to act in a superior manner with respect to their wives.

It is then no wonder that many women react to this strongly to the extent that they stand against the idea of submission to husbands and fight for equality. But then they many times end up against the plans that God Himself has made for the family. The solution is not to throw out the whole idea of the head of the home but to find out how it is to be properly understood and carried out.

Another area where authority comes into the picture in homes is parenting. Here again there has been much abuse of children by parents over time in the name of discipline, but that is not an excuse to throw out the whole concept

of discipline. Sadly, that is what seems to be happening.

Nowadays every form of discipline is treated as if it is abuse, and in some places children are authorised to complain to the police for their parents spanking them or even scolding.

During the 1960s a concept came up in psychology saying that every person is a unique personality and that parents should not thrust their own ideas on their children but allow them to develop into their own potential. While it is true that parents should not impose on the children, e.g., to make them into doctors or engineers against their own interests, abilities and choice, that is not to say that children do not need any discipline in character at all.

It is seen that a human baby has great potential to grow up to accomplish great things, and as such that baby needs many years of training and nurturing before he can reach the position

to step off into his future. Also, on the other hand, this same baby is born with sinful tendencies (Psa.51:5) and the potential to become the world's worst criminal unless he is protected and guided properly. That is where parental discipline (training) is essential.

No school or Sunday school is a substitute for this home training where character is first formed and where he is guided into pursuing the right direction for all round development. The Bible clearly says that the rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself brings his mother to shame (Prov.29:15). There are many other verses (Gen.18:19; Deut.4:10; 31:12,13; Psa.78:5,6; Prov.22:6,15; 23:13; Eph.6:4; Col.3:21; 1Th.2:7,11; 1Tim.3:4) that bring out the importance of child care and discipline.

Here again, why the God-ordained scheme of parental discipline turns to abuse is selfishness on the part of the parents and the lack of true love for the children. When children are seen

as a nuisance rather than as a blessing, every occasion when the parents need to interact with the children is seen as an interference into the parents' routine. So the children are punished severely for their 'interference' or the children are diverted away from the parents through indulgences such as TV, video games, etc.

Some other parents who think they love their children very much overdrive the children to unreasonable and unrealistic levels of achievement. As a result many children grow up to see themselves as always coming short of the parents' expectations, and they either give up on life and turn to wasteful habits or go off to 'show' their parents in acts of rebellion or defiance what they are really capable of.

But the discipline that the Bible talks of is to be done in love (Heb.12:6). It is not good food, clothes, toys, sports or music training or education that the children primarily need. It is

love and affection that is to be expressed by the parents to the children, by spending time with them, getting to know them, showing appreciation and encouraging them. This is what really ‘earns’ them the ‘right’ to chastise them. Then the children who receive correction or chastisement know that their parents love them and that what is being done is for their good.

Chastisement done in anger or irritation actually amounts to abuse or bullying. As the children grow up into their teenage years, if the parents have built up a loving and friendly relationship with the children, the transition from being children to adults becomes easier for everyone.

God’s ways are perfect and His instructions for people on how to live life on earth are what are best for us. If we recognise this Creator-creature relationship well, we will take care to understand God’s ways and follow them.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

What is the sum and substance of all that we have discussed? Authority, responsibility and accountability are a part of our everyday life in various forms. These are required for the smooth functioning of everyone's life.

People who are entrusted with different levels of responsibilities in different areas of life need to know that the authority they have is meant to enable them to carry out their responsibilities efficiently and not to be used for self-pleasing or self-advancement.

Those under authority must recognise that their submission is what enables those in authority to fulfil their responsibilities.

What goes wrong is when someone shirks his responsibilities and misuses his authority or when someone fears those in authority and blindly obeys them.

We ought to recognise that all of us – including those who have authority in specific situations and others who have to submit – are to be accountable to God for all that we do (Rom.14:12).

I would like to hear from you very much.

Jacob Ninan,
69, Hutchins Main Road,
Bangalore 560084, India

Email. jninan@c-n-c.org

Web. www.c-n-c.org



What we can learn from the Bible
about the use and misuse of authority
in different scenarios.