

rebellion against the Head. If he seeks to establish or to expand a domain or region for his own personal work within the Lord's recovery, he is serving self-interest and not the Lord's interest.

Furthermore, if a person exercises authority in a wrong way, it indicates that that person's authority is not genuine. If a person behaves as if he is the authority, if he attempts to exercise control over others (1 Pet. 5:3a), if he "beats" his fellow slaves (Matt. 24:49), if he leads the saints astray by teaching differently (Rom. 16:17), if he reviles others (James 3:11), or if he makes his own "authority" the basis of receiving others in fellowship (3 John 9), these are signs that he does not have spiritual authority.

Spiritual Authority Can Be Lost: Because spiritual authority is based on a person's current relationship with Christ, spiritual authority can not only be increased through growth in life but also be lost by sin, by not staying up-to-date with the Lord in His move (Gal. 2:14a; 2 Pet. 1:12), by not being faithful to the present truth, and by touching God's authority in an improper way.

Our Responsibility: When a person in a position of authority deviates from the truth, we must not follow him, but we also should not revile him (Acts 23:4-5; Jude 8-10). When we observe such a deviation, we have a responsibility to cooperate with the Lord to seek to remedy the situation. We may be led to restore our fellow believer to a proper condition in life and humility (Matt. 18:15; 1 John 5:16). In other cases, we

may need to care for the Lord's interest by seeking out His representatives to make the situation known to them (Lev. 14:35). The household of Chloe did this when they informed the apostle Paul of the situation in Corinth (1 Cor. 1:11). We should not be deterred from expressing genuine concern for the condition of the church or its deviation from the truth by those who claim that our expression of concern is "rebellion". Actually, the proper opening of such concern to the Lord and to His representatives is our duty as a service to the Lord, to the saints, and to the church.

Conclusion: All of these matters are based on the unique fellowship of the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 1:9). Every member in the Body of Christ is organically joined directly to the Head, the unique source of authority in the Body. In the Body there are no subheads, and the authority exercised by any member must be as the outflow of life from Christ the Head (Col. 2:19; Eph. 4:15-16). Any use of so-called authority to restrict the fellowship in the Body is contrary to the principle of the Body and should be rejected. Fellowship that initiates out from the Head, Christ, and takes as its goal the building up of the Body should be honored.

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Concerning Spiritual Authority

"All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (Matthew 28:18).

An abstract of *Properly Discerning Spiritual Authority to Rightly Follow the Lord*, published by the Defense & Confirmation Project

God's work in this age is to establish His kingdom as the realm in which God is expressed and His authority is upheld (Matt. 6:13). The church today is the kingdom of God (Rom. 14:17; Matt. 16:18-19). It takes the lead to be headed up by Christ (Eph. 1:10). In a proper church life, the establishment of Christ's authority is a vital concern, and its usurpation by man is a great offense to the headship of Christ. Because the subject of spiritual authority has been misused by some, a proper understanding of spiritual authority is greatly needed. Over the years some brothers have asserted their so-called position as apostles, workers, or leading ones to demand obedience from the saints and the churches. These brothers have presumed to

assert personal authority, making themselves an issue among the churches, and in so doing have demonstrated their lack of genuine spiritual authority.

Spiritual Authority: Authority in the Body of Christ is not personal, positional or organizational but spiritual. Its application must likewise be spiritual. Spiritual authority is the unique possession of the Head, Christ (Matt. 28:18; Eph. 1:22-23). This authority is transmitted into and through the Body in its organic union in life with the Head. Human beings—whether apostles, workers or leading ones—have no spiritual authority in themselves. Men can only act as Christ’s deputy authority to the degree that they are currently living in organic union with Christ and are rightly related to His Body (2 Cor. 13:3).

Furthermore, delegated authority must be exercised within the constraints of the apostles’ teaching (Acts 2:42; Titus 1:9), which concerns the New Testament economy of God (1 Tim. 1:3-4). Authority is not exercised directly through gifted ones giving orders or controlling the actions of the saints and the churches; rather, it is exercised indirectly through the ministering of life by teaching according to God’s New Testament economy (2 Cor. 3:6). Only the vision of God’s New Testament economy should direct and control us.

A Dangerous Teaching: Some have even said that saints, churches and workers should obey certain ones without exercising any discernment. This is an incorrect and dangerous teaching, as can be demonstrated from

numerous examples in the Bible (e.g. Num. 16:35, where following Korah’s leadership was disastrous not only to Korah but also to all 250 men who followed him). It is vital to have a proper understanding of authority according to the truth of the Bible and a proper discernment of authority—what is genuine and what is presumptively claimed.

Signs of Genuine Spiritual Authority: Genuine spiritual authority can be discerned by observing both the person who exercises authority and the way in which he does it. Authority is produced by the resurrection life of Christ (Num. 17:5). It issues forth as light in the unveiling of God’s New Testament economy (Eph. 3:3). When we contact a person who has spiritual authority, we should receive life and light that matches the apostles’ teaching of God’s New Testament economy (Acts 26:18). When we receive ministry from a person who has spiritual authority, we are brought into light, and the issue is joy (2 Cor. 1:24) and the blossoming forth of the fruit of the divine life for feeding others (Num. 17:8).

We can also discern genuine spiritual authority by seeing how a person exercises authority. Spiritual authority is not exercised in a natural, human way. It is not organizational or administrative. It actually does not look like authority at all. Rather, spiritual authority is a matter of serving the Lord’s people as a slave (Matt. 20:25-27), supplying them in love by flowing out the resurrection life to shepherd, feed, and protect the flock (1 Pet. 5:2a; Acts 20:28-30). Those who demand obedience, for themselves or for others, are in

the wrong realm and are violating what God has measured to them (2 Cor. 10:13).

The Sign of Blending in a Blended Work: A person who exercises authority must himself be under authority (Matt. 8:9). In God’s New Testament economy, authority is found only in the Body. No one can set himself above the rest of the Body and still claim to represent God’s authority. Some “apostles” or workers are not willing to be blended with others (1 Cor. 12:24). They are unwilling to bring their work into the common prayer and fellowship of all the co-workers to be blended through the cross and by the Spirit into the one work of the one Body under the authority of the one unique Head.

False Claims of Authority: Just as there are signs that a person has spiritual authority, there are also signs that a person’s claimed spiritual authority is not genuine. For example, if a person asserts his own authority, either directly himself or indirectly through his supporters, he is disqualified from representing God’s authority (3 John 9). If he depreciates the truth, he has deviated from the teaching of the apostles, which is the real leadership in the New Testament age (Titus 1:9). If he emphasizes “success” in the work rather than God’s economy, he has departed from the narrow way of life which characterizes the work of the Lord in His recovery (Matt. 7:14). If he promotes his seniority or practices self-vindication, his authority is not genuine. If he carries out or directs others to carry out work in rivalry with the work of others (Phil. 2:3), he is violating the principle of the Body and thus is in