



## 7. Authority to Lead

### Why is leadership and authority a controversial topic in our society today?

As a society we have become sceptical of authority. We are quicker to dismiss politicians, community leaders or experts (in science, medical, etc.). With increased access to information, we can consume alternative or fringe theories alongside authoritative positions. Combine this with the drifting definition of tolerance which has moved from meaning *'respecting another person even if you disagree with their position'* to now meaning *'all opinions are equally valid'*. The undermining of truth means there is just a lot of noise. This has exaggerated our tendency for tribalism and polarisation, where we subscribe to the views of those who seem most like us rather than objectively evaluated truth claims.

French philosopher, Michel Foucault, says all truth claims are a play for power. This type of thinking leads to the suspicion that those who are in authority are merely trying to hold on to their power. Once you lose trust in the source you are no longer consenting to be led by the authority figure. You assume the leader isn't fulfilling their role and therefore following will not benefit and may even harm you. There is also a suspicion that those who have power are privileged and therefore can't understand or represent the needs of followers. These views echo Karl Marx who claims those who hold power have stolen it from the masses.

Yet the bible lays out a very different understanding of authority and how it was designed to be used. Simply put all authority is delegated from God and wielded by humans.

### Where does authority come from?

All authority belongs to God. He speaks and creation comes into existence. There is no contention or competition.

God, wishing to express His love, created mankind to partner with Him. He invites us to participate in His creative project and gives us authority to rule and multiply. God even delegates the naming of the animals (Gen 2:19-20) – he waits to see what Adam would

name them and whatever Adam chooses, that's what they were! When man fell, our God-given, authority wasn't withdrawn. We still have power to create. God can withdraw and redistribute this authority as He sees fit (Dan 2:21) and no authority exists outside His allowance (Rom 13:1). His fundamental modus operandi, of lending His power to His children, hasn't changed.

The fact that all authority belongs to God is communicated by the fact that authorities are 'given' power (Jesus - Matt 28:18, Phil 2:9, disciples – Luke 9:1, Luke 10:19) or 'appointed' by God (David - 2 Sam 7:8, Israel's leaders – 2 Sam 7:11), and that those with authority must give 'account' to He who has delegated power to them (Heb 13:17).

### **What is the purpose of authority?**

God's grand plan is to fill the earth with His glory. He wants everything on this planet to point out His attributes. He knows there is no life away from Him, so He enlists creation to act as a huge neon sign boldly declaring "come to Him". As part of creation, humans are called to reflect His glory by the way we live. When we love we glorify God who *is* love. God devolves His authority to all of creation so we can be involved in the grand plan. Adam glorified God by gardening (Gen 2:15).

The purpose of authority is to glorify God. If we wield authority in a harsh way, we are betraying the nature of God and failing to use power for God's intention. We must represent God's heart in the way we use authority.

Power isn't to be hoarded. God gave it to us freely, and we use it in line with His character. In the same way He laid down His life for me, how can I lay down my life for others (John 13:14). How do I use my power to empower others? How can I use my authority to strengthen someone else so they can bear more authority?

When my four-year-old is having a screaming tantrum, I can use my parental authority to (attempt) to crush the behaviour. I can teach him this type of behaviour is unacceptable. However, I could also use my power to seek to understand what is going on inside him. This doesn't mean there are no boundaries, and all behaviour is permissible but I want to try to empower him to understand what he is feeling, to not be afraid of the big emotions and to find calm. If I can help him navigate the chaos he is feeling, he might be able to manage this on his own in the future. I will have used my power to empower my child.

### **Safety in Submission**

This is a frightful thought. That those in power, which we may want to resist, are bearing the power of God, and that our resistance to them could be resistance to Him! Paul warns the Thessalonians (1 Thes 4:8) not to reject his instruction that they see coming from the mouth/pen of a mere human because in so doing they are rejecting God.

A short study of human history will quickly reveal, mankind has not used their delegated authority to fill the earth with God's glory. They have wielded for their own interest and treated others cruelly. Yet we are being told to submit to authorities on earth. How can we do this?

Ultimately our call is to submit ourselves to God (James 4:7). If I accept that God has made Jesus King of all (Matt 28:18, Phil 2:9), and I make Him Lord of my life, I can submit to whoever He tells me to submit to. My submission to earthly authorities is an expression of my yielding to Him.

David was able to navigate serving under a corrupt leader. David's love for God led to him being willing to humbly serve whoever God had put in power. Even when David had the opportunity to take out Saul, he realised he had no right to undermine who God had put in position (1 Sam 24:6, 1 Sam 26:9, 2 Sam 1:14). David's concern was for God's honour. He would not touch the *LORD'S* anointed. He respected God's chosen channel. He wasn't distracted by Saul's terrible character.

Sarai/Sarah was directly protected by God as she submitted to her corrupt husband (Gen 12 & Gen 20).

I don't submit to Jesus's kingship because it works out well for me. I submit because I believe He actually is king of all. The safest place is to be in His will. Even if that means I suffer in this life. If my basis for 'trusting' God is because it keeps me 'safe' from harm in this life, I have been reading the wrong bible. God doesn't guarantee that. In fact, He made it clear that we will experience suffering (John 16:33). Jesus prayed for his disciples, that God would 'protect them from the evil one' (John 17:15), yet most suffered persecution and horrific deaths. Did God not answer His prayer? Or is there a fate worse than pain, suffering and death? Paul saw something more valuable than alleviation of pain – "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us." (Rom 8:18)

### **What if a leader requires me to go against the word of God?**

If Jesus is Lord of all, our entire lives are lived to please Him. Therefore, obeying His will (confirmed by His Word) must take precedence. *"We are not trying to please people but God..."* (1 Thes 2:4).

Levels of authority (in order of supremacy): [extract from LifeLine Church's Foundation Course - Basics of Belonging]

1. God through Jesus (Jesus is Lord of all)
2. Word of God
  - a. Num 23:19 – God won't contradict Himself.
  - b. 2 Tim 3:16 – scripture is God-breathed.
3. Conscience

- a. 1 Tim 2:5 - For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus
  - b. We must listen to our conscience (Rom 14:5-6; Rom 14:23)
  - c. We must not violate the conscience of others (1 Corinthians 8:12; Rom 14:13)
4. Delegated authority through leaders (through voluntary submission)

Wherever there is a query the higher level of authority must always be deferred to. Delegated authority must always submit to the higher levels of authority. There is no place for tyrants in the Kingdom of God, nor for blind followers.

### **Benefiting from authority**

The leader's responsibility is not just to get tasks complete but to set people free to be all that God intends them to be, to present us as mature individuals (Col 1:28). If I want to become more and more like Christ, I want to get the impact of the leader.

*Heb 13:17*

*Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you.*

*1 Thes 5:12-13*

*Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to acknowledge those who work hard among you, who care for you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other.*

In these two passages we are encouraged to submit and receive our leaders. By supporting those in leadership, we will ultimately benefit.

Lighten your leader's load [Basics of Belonging]

- How are you strengthening your shepherd instead of just being a burden?
- Need to know and live the Word to be able to check and support your leader
- Think the best of someone
- Be understanding – the role of a leader is not always easy!
- My submission to my leader isn't based on my perception of their performance
- Be eager to help them achieve what God has put on their heart
  - David daydreams aloud his desire for a drink from the well of Bethlehem. His mighty men overhear this and fight through the enemy lines just to get a cup of water for David (2 Sam 23:15-17)
  - Am I listening to what my leader's daydream? Am I poised ready to pursue these things?

## Get in the flow

In Ps 133, David paints the picture of oil (representing anointing) being poured over Aaron's head. It trickles down through his beard, and down his robe. If you want to get splashed with anointing, you want to get in right alignment. Position yourself under the head.

The centurion who asked Jesus to heal his servant understood the chain of command (Matt 8:9). To be able to operate with authority you need to be under authority.

Jesus explains if you receive a prophet or a righteous person you get the benefit of what they are bringing (Matt 10:41). The same could be said of the receiving those who have been put over you to benefit you.

## Question leadership, but do so humbly and wisely

Moses experienced multiple rebellions. In Num 12, it was from his own siblings and in Num 16 it was the sons of Korah. In both cases, the argument was why has Moses set himself up above the rest of us who can also hear God.

*Num 12:1*

*"Does the LORD speak only through Moses?" they said. "Does He not also speak through us?" And the LORD heard this.*

*Num 16:3*

*They came as a group to oppose Moses and Aaron and said to them, "You have gone too far! The whole community is holy, every one of them, and the Lord is with them. Why then do you set yourselves above the Lord's assembly?"*

The faulty presupposition in this argument was that Moses had set himself up. The reality was that he was the LORD'S ANOINTED. This is a whole world of difference. It becomes irrelevant if Moses wasn't leading well, if he employed management styles they disagreed with or had make mistakes. We might find our personality clashes with that of our leader, but this is irrelevant. When Jesus managed to lose another crowd of followers by upping the demand, His disciples were considering if the cost of submitting to Jesus was worth it. Jesus calls them out and Peter has to put aside his personal preference and reaffirmed his need to continue serving under Jesus.

*"You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve. Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God." John 6:68-69*

In the same way, Aaron and Miriam needed to put aside their personal preference and accept Moses was God's chosen channel through whom He was working. To challenge Moses was to challenge God.

*Num 12:8-9*

*...Why then were you unafraid to speak against My servant Moses?" So the anger of the LORD burned against them, and He departed.*

*Num 16:11*

*It is against the Lord that you and all your followers have banded together. Who is Aaron that you should grumble against him?"*

You never want to be in a situation where you have set yourself up against God. In these cases, the basis for questioning was about jockeying for power and position which is not about seeking first His kingdom.

The basis for challenge must be out of love for your leader. The confrontation must be on an issue of scriptural accuracy. There is limited value in challenging a style because it is your preference.

Accusation at leadership should not be done lightly.

*1 Tim 5:19*

*Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses.*

It is much easier to tear down than rebuild. We must be wise and humble in how we build upon what God has achieved through another's ministry.

*1 Cor 3:10*

*By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care.*

You wouldn't want to be in a situation where you had taken out a shepherd yet have no intention of caring for the scattered sheep.

*Jer 23:2*

*Therefore, this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says to the shepherds who tend my people: "Because you have scattered my flock and driven them away and have not bestowed care on them, I will bestow punishment on you for the evil you have done," declares the Lord.*

## **Parakouo vs Hupakouo**

When we submit to someone's authority it does not mean that we lose the right to ask questions or to disagree. We can ask questions with the motive of getting a clearer understanding so we can obey better, or we can ask because we are considering if we want to obey or not. The basis of questioning will be different though and come out of a desire to follow better rather than argue a point.

parakouō = listening alongside

- to hear aside

- causally or carelessly or amiss
- to be unwilling to hear
- on hearing, to neglect, to pay no heed to
- to refuse to hear, pay no regard to, to disobey

Esther 3:3 – Mordecai disobeyed the command to honour Haman

Matt 18:17 – A brother refuses to listen to the church

Mark 5:36 – Jesus ignored muttering

Hupakouó = listening under  
to listen, to harken

- of one who, hearing the knock at the door, comes to listen to who it is, (the duty of a porter)

to harken to a command

- to obey, be obedient to, submit to

Most translated as ‘obey’

Acts 12:13 – Rhoda came to answer the door

<b>Hupakouó = listening under</b>	<b>parakouō = listening alongside</b>
Asks so can follow better	Asks so can decide whether or not to follow
Works through to apply	Not taking notice
Arguing to understand	Arguing to win (I don't understand = I don't agree)
Takes advice seriously	Putting even weight on advice
Matters so much will get done	Forgetting
Becomes high priority	Not priority
Not satisfied with agree to disagree	Not bothered about resolving
Struggle to find heart	React to words or solely follow instructions

Often, we can think we are listening under, being submitted but the opposite becomes apparent when a leader starts leading us in a direction we don't want to go. Up until this point we were happy to follow because the leader happened to be heading in the direction we were determined to go in. Only when continued following becomes inconvenient are we faced with the choice, will we submit or not?

I want to ‘listen under’ so I get the benefit of the anointing which flow down God's chosen chain of command.

## Character of a Leader

### Humility

Revelation gives us a picture of mankind (represented by the 24 elders) voluntarily laying down the authority (in the form of crowns) before Jesus (Rev 4:10). A humble leader knows where his authority has come from, what he is to do with it and where it should be returned to after use.

Our attitude should represent Jesus who came *"not come to be served, but to serve"* (Matt. 20:28). Jesus had all authority but chose to lay down His preference and ultimately His life for the will of the Father. Jesus voluntarily took on the nature of a servant (Phil. 2:7).

### Trainer

David had to be very insistent with his Mighty Men. He taught them to honour God by honouring His anointed. On two occasions he had to stop them killing Saul when they had the opportunity. But you see the penny drop by 2 Sam 1 where they all weep over the death of Saul.

In the siege of Keilah (1 Sam 23), David enquires of God if he should rescue the town from the Philistines. When David hears God say attack, he is already walking out of the cave, but when he looks back he realises his men haven't moved. Understandably they point out *"we are currently being hunted by our own government! Saul's army is combing the country looking for us. And you want to go pick a fight with another nation?!"*. This puts David in a very tricky situation, he has heard God's instruction, he can't ignore that now. But he needs his troops to join him. He enquires of God a second time, for their sake. He asks God, *"if we attack, will we be successful (i.e. will we survive)?"*. When God says "yes", the men get on board. David was willing to obey God irrespective of his own survival, but his men, with their level of faith, needed more of a guarantee. God was merciful to step closer when the doubter wouldn't step forward - as He does with Gideon (Judges 6:36-40), Thomas (John 20:24-27), father with the demonised son (Mark 9:23-24)).

When in training we can expect that there will be times when it clicks and other times when we need a patient, merciful trainer who will help us have another go at it.

### Courageous Forerunner

It can be intimidating to be the first one to try something. We often look for safety in numbers, but God appoints leaders, not representatives. In Joshua 3, the priests were to lead Israel across the Jordan, carrying the ark. When their feet touched the water, the river started stacking up a *'great distance away'*. By implication, it would have taken some time for the water in front of the people to flow away. The priests stood with wet ankles, looking like wallies in front of 2 or 3 million people, who would have known the story of their parents who crossed the Red Sea on *dry land*. How loud were the thoughts, 'these leaders don't know what they are doing?', 'Moses wouldn't have done it this way if he were here'.

In any movement, someone must be the first. Joshua didn't remain within the crowd when he said



*“But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve...But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.”*  
*Josh 24:14-15*

The bible is full of inspiring leaders who walked alone. David was alone when he stepped into the Valley of Elah to face Goliath. Elijah took on 450 prophets of Baal on his own. These leaders follow a conviction, something God has dropped inside them that causes something to bubble up from the inside.

### **Could your leader send you?**

A good question to ask yourself when considering the degree to which you are serving your leader.

The church in Corinth was in a mess and on the verge of collapse into divisions and compromise. They are arguing over which leader they prefer to follow. Paul parachutes in his special forces.

*For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church.*  
*1 Cor 4:17*

Timothy's credentials? He is close to Paul (spiritual son), he is faithful to God and is able to remind others of Paul's values and way of life. He can teach and model a behaviour that replicates Paul. Timothy has caught it. And can help others catch it.

At a later point Paul sends Titus

*Thanks be to God, who put into the heart of Titus the same concern I have for you. For Titus not only welcomed our appeal, but he is coming to you with much enthusiasm and on his own initiative.*  
*2 Cor 8:16-17*

Titus has the same heart as Paul has for the people. It is such a joy for a leader when the very thing that God puts on their heart is also borne by another servant.

### **The role of team**

God brings chaos into order. He calls all His children to participate in bringing all things under His authority. He delegates some of this authority to leaders to help bring order into human relationships not to make teamwork redundant but to enhance a team's contribution.

We believe in the priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:9) and that 'we' together have the mind of Christ (1 Cor 2:16). Therefore, we expect insight and contribution come from any part of the body. As we mature, we should expect each of us has an increased capacity to build up another.

As we each seek to serve and put each other first, without selfish ambition (Phil 2:3-4) our focus is on building His Kingdom rather than our own empire. It means we can lay what we have at the feet of the leader (Acts 4:35), believing that God has anointed them to use the contribution and by the grace of God, multiply it (Matt 14:17-20).

If God has joined me to a leader, to receive His grace through them and to contribute to the Kingdom through them, I expect that all that I have will benefit, this includes grace for my work, family and friends. Any areas of my life I choose to bring forward will benefit from the anointing which God has chosen to pour out through this leader.

It is important to remember a leader is still a human. With their own weaknesses and struggles in life. I have an opportunity to build them up, encourage them, bring God's word to them, serve them in their practical and spiritual needs.

### **Anointed to bring matters to conclusion**

Sometimes when a dispute has become so entrenched there is little value in keeping the conversation going because it isn't about communicating opinion/feelings/position anymore – it is about seeking heart change (Matt 7:3-5 – once you have addressed your own issues you are able to see clearly to help your brother/sister with their challenge). Sometimes people resist humbling themselves (e.g. Pharaoh) and instead put energy into endless debate and request for more and more info.

We are warned, that at the point God speaks, He also gives us the opportunity and power to change. We have to make sure that we don't harden our hearts.

*...“Today, if you hear his voice,  
do not harden your hearts  
as you did in the rebellion,  
during the time of testing in the wilderness  
Heb 3:7-8*

But when the heart is humbled – suddenly everything becomes clear.

The wrestling to retain self-rule, kicks up dust which clouds the situation. We can't reach an agreement. In such cases God give leadership the responsibility to bring matters to conclusion through making a (spirit-led) judgment. Sometimes leaders will discern there is an issue or a spirit which is not to be addressed through discussion around the presented issue.

This isn't a popular position, to shut down the conversation/argument, because it looks like closing the door. But it is about recognising we don't have the power to reveal the state of someone else's heart to them if they are unwilling to see it. At this point we continue to pray that God convicts the brother/sister, so they can repent.

In such situations, leaders look unreasonable. In some ways this is true because they have determined the situation can't be reasoned anymore.

Paul confronts the Corinthians for arrogantly thinking they can tolerate immorality in the church. Paul made the judgment based solely on the reports he heard. This is a big call.

### **Scanning for faith**

Sometimes people put forward a good case or are dogged about a decision. Stubbornness isn't evidence of faith in itself. So at times leaders need to test faith. Kris Vallotton, leader at Bethel, says "Faith is not absence of facts but presence of conviction". A conviction is a position for which you are willing to pay a price. Terry King says "a conviction is something you are willing to die for, everything else is personal preference". We are willing to pay a high (even the ultimate) price for a conviction; you don't need someone else to underwrite it for you. For instance, there was a family in our community who were being financially supported by the church. Unbeknownst to us, the money we were giving for utilities was being sent overseas to support relatives. When the electricity company was about to switch off their power due to unsettled debt, the family asked for support. But, if they believed they had been directed by God to send this money, then they could also expect God to meet their needs through reimbursing them financially or gracing them to live without power. To come asking someone to now pay the cost of their conviction is not a faith position.

Sometimes people struggle to articulate their sense of faith. But if we expect that God is at work in every human heart, we should be on the lookout for 'signs of life'. We need to patiently listen with the Spirit helping us to discern. When Samuel first hears God's voice he is a boy serving the High Priest Eli (1 Sam 3). Samuel doesn't recognise God's voice nor realise that the words he is hearing come from God. Eli is slow to cotton on but eventually helps Samuel identify, respond to and process the instructions of God.

Sometimes we have the privilege of helping our loved ones to realise their nudge is actually the word of God. In this case, Eli's role was at the initial interaction between Samuel and God. But we also get to be part of the journey even after someone has received God's word.

If we are called to present each other as mature in Christ (Col 1:28), our opportunity is to be involved in the continued growth of our friends as they follow the instructions they've received. We continue to walk with them, asking them questions, holding them to account, strengthening them in the position they claim to have conviction towards. E.g. "If you say you have a heart for youth, why wouldn't you be taking opportunity to be with youth?"