

7 Levels of Authority Christians Must Submit To

There is much misunderstanding of spiritual authority in the church today. Due to sin and compromise, we have lost sight of what true authority looks like and how it works.

In my new book, ***Moving from Sword to Scepter***, I list seven different levels of authority as described in Scripture and how they impact us as believers. Perhaps if we understood how God intended healthy authority to function, we wouldn't resist it so much and would begin to manifest the fruit that brings the greatest blessing and benefit.

On Whose Authority? God wants us to know who and what we answer to and why. The checks and balances He has provided in His Word are not only principles for success but also provide the appropriate boundaries for healthy leadership and accountability.

There are seven different levels of authority spoken of in Scripture that can help us prioritize our goals and shape our decisions. The first one is the most important source of authority and carries the greatest consequence or reward. As the list progresses, each level of authority submits to the authority preceding it, thus putting things in proper order of accountability.

1. **God Himself:** "I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted" (Job 42:2, NASB).

God is the ultimate and perfect authority over all, sovereign and supreme. He is the same yesterday, today and forever, and we can count on His steadfast love and overriding power to do what He intends.

2. **God's Word:** "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I have not come to abolish, but to fulfill" (Matt. 5:17, MEV).

The Word of God is the written account of His eternal law that is inspired, inerrant and without fault concerning His intentions and purposes for us. Every principle needed to live a righteous life and fulfill our creation mandate is provided in Scripture.

These first two levels of spiritual authority never change. They are eternal and immutable. God's Word "submits" to His own heart and character, and both are foundational to any subsequent understanding of authority.

3. **Our Conscience:** "For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me" (1 Cor. 4:4, NASB).

When fed properly by God's Word, our conscience, our "heart," holds us accountable to truth. However, if we feed upon negative reports and false information, our conscience will be seared and unable to lead us rightly (see 1 Tim. 4:1-4). It is our God-given conscience that moves our hearts and helps us to know and follow God's will.

4. **Delegated Authorities:** "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they watch over your souls as those who must give an account" (Heb. 13:17, MEV).

God is the one who calls and appoints leaders (see Rom. 13:1). In our government, citizens affirm that call by voting officials into office. Believers in the church are also to recognize and affirm those whom God has called to serve in leadership. This is not dependent on their likability, but their commission. Unless we are told to go directly against the higher authority of God's Word, we must seek to respect their roles, pray for their success and follow their leadership.

5. Contractual Authority: “(Now this was the custom in ancient times in Israel for redeeming and exchanging: to confirm a transaction, a man would remove his sandal and give it to his neighbor. This was a binding act in Israel” (Ruth 4:7).

This kind of authority is given through a written contract, verbal agreement, vow, rental agreement and so on. When “under contract,” we are obliged to adhere to the rules assigned in the contract for the time allotment given. We are called to honor its authority unless a higher authority releases us from the contract.

6. Positional Authority: “Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king” (1 Pet. 2:17).

This recognizes the various positions of authority that people carry by virtue of their office, responsibility or age. We honor the office of president or pastor simply because of the weight each office carries. We honor military personnel, police and rescue, and other positions that are responsible for our safety and well-being. We honor the elderly out of respect for their journey and our parents because it pleases the Lord. Positional authority is honored and esteemed because of the responsibilities associated with it.

7. A Particular Gifting: “For you may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged” (1 Cor. 14:31).

Spiritual gifts are given by the Holy Spirit as He chooses. When we recognize and honor the gifts in operation, we are recognizing the authority of the Holy Spirit in revealing the Father’s heart and purpose. Where some would like to place this authority higher because of the supernatural aspect of a gift, it must always be tested through the filters of preceding authorities.

Other than the first two authorities of God Himself and His

Word, which always outweigh the others, the rest may shift in order of priority depending on the situation.

The principle to be learned is that there is a proper order of authority and accountability. We cannot place any “word of the Lord” above God’s written Word if it is in question. Nor can we lower the role of delegated authorities simply because we do not agree with them. Each level of authority carries a purpose and has its place.

Unless this understanding is taught and demonstrated by kingdom-minded believers, people will continue to make up their own version of what is right and wrong and decide for themselves who and what determines the truth. God’s Word and character will always be the highest level of authority in the kingdom. Let’s pray we can steward it well to set things in order. {eoa}

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