

## ABUSING AUTHORITY

The abuse of authority is evident everywhere in the world and everywhere in our society.

- a. In **political and governmental affairs** the likelihood of authority being abused is so great that our founding fathers wisely framed a government that is divided into three branches (judicial, executive, and legislative) in order that the separate branches of government would serve as a check and balance on each other.
  - ▶ And then, in addition to that, the Bill of Rights was added to the Constitution.
  - ▶ But even in our society today the abuse of political and governmental authority is commonplace . . . from the halls of the Supreme Court, the Oval Office, and Capitol Hill all the way down to the policeman patrolling the streets of our cities.
- b. In **the workplace** abuse of authority is seen in unfair labor practices, excessively long workdays, job discrimination of one kind or another, sexual harassment, and in a myriad of other ways.
- c. In **the home** abuse of authority is evidenced in physical, verbal, and emotional abuse against marriage partners and against children, and in the highhanded, arbitrary, even dictatorial way that decisions are made for the family and the family members individually.
- d. In **the church** abuse of authority is seen in elderships that overplay their role as *overseers* and underplay their role as *pastors* . . . they are all about *making the decisions* and very little about *feeding and nurturing*.
  - ▶ I hear of too many churches having elders that seldom if ever collaborate with the members in any meaningful way, and elderships that try to impose capricious requirements upon the evangelist.

The abuse of authority leads to disrespect for authority and even contempt for authority.

Every person in a position of God-given authority ought to have the attitude the apostle Paul expressed toward the authority given him as an apostle of Jesus Christ.

- a. In **1Cor 9:18** Paul says: "What is my reward then? That when I preach the gospel, I may present the gospel of Christ without charge, that I may not **abuse my authority** in the gospel."
  - ▶ NASB ~ "What then is my reward? That, when I preach the gospel, I may offer the gospel without charge, so as **not to make full use of my right** in the gospel.

In the sermon this evening I want to talk about the abuse of authority.

- a. I want to warn against the abuse of authority
- b. And I want to make some observations and suggestions that should help those who are in positions of authority to avoid abusing their authority.

## WARNING

**Those in positions of authority must use wisdom and good judgment in the exercise of that authority.**

**Civil authorities** ought to be wise in the exercise of authority.

- a. When Rehoboam ascended to the throne of Israel at the death of his father Solomon, he foolishly took the advice of his young friends and announced his intention to make full use of his authority as king and demand even more from the people than his father had.
  - ▶ **1Kgs 12:4-11** ~ "Your father made our yoke hard; now therefore lighten the hard service of your father and his heavy yoke which he put on us, and we will serve you." 5 Then he said to them, "Depart for three days, then return to me." So the people departed. 6 King Rehoboam consulted with the elders who had served his father Solomon while he was still alive, saying, "How do you counsel me to answer this people?" 7 Then they spoke to him, saying, "**If you will be a servant to this people today, and will serve them and grant them their petition, and speak good words to them, then they will be your servants forever.**" 8 But he forsook the counsel of the elders which they had given him, and consulted with the young men who grew up with him and served him. . . . 10 The young men who grew up with him spoke to him, saying, "Thus you shall say to this people who spoke to you, saying, 'Your father made our yoke heavy, now you make it lighter for us!' But you shall speak to them, 'My little finger is thicker than my father's loins! 11 'Whereas my father loaded you with a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke; my father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions.'"
  - ▶ Rehoboam's heavy-handed use of authority . . . his abuse of authority . . . led to civil war and ultimately a divided kingdom that left him ruling over only the tribe of Judah.

- ▶ Rehoboam learned the hard way that civil authorities need to be wise in the exercise of their authority.

**Elders** must be wise in the exercise of authority over the congregation.

- a. The writer of the book of Hebrews reminds elders that they will answer to God for how they use their authority as overseers and how they meet their responsibilities as spiritual shepherds.
  - ▶ Heb 13:17 ~ “Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for **they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account.** Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.”
- b. And Peter, in instructing the elders as to *how* they are to oversee and shepherd the flock of God (and how they are *not* to oversee and shepherd the flock) promises “the crown of glory” to those elders who rule well.
  - ▶ 1Pet 5:1-4 ~ ““The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: 2 Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; 3 nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; 4 and when the Chief Shepherd appears, **you will receive the crown of glory** that does not fade away.”

**Husbands** must be wise in the exercise of authority over their wives.

- a. Peter warns that husbands who are not “understanding” and considerate in the exercise of their authority cause a problem for themselves with God such that God may refuse to hear their prayers.
  - ▶ 1Pet 3:7 ~ ““Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, **that your prayers may not be hindered.**”

**Parents** ought to be wise in the exercise of authority over their children.

- a. The heavy-handed use of authority . . . which is an abuse of authority . . . can cause children become discouraged and embittered.
- b. Col 3:21 ~ “Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become **discouraged.**”
  - ▶ NIV ~ “Fathers do not **embitter** your children or they will become **discouraged.**”

In societies where some form of forced servitude is legally permitted (whether it be some form of indentured servitude or outright slavery), **Masters** must be wise in the exercise of authority over their servants.

- a. Paul warns those who are masters over men on earth have One who is their Master in heaven . . . and He will be just and fair only to those who have shown themselves to be just and fair
  - ▶ Col 4:1 ~ ““Masters, give your bondservants what is just and fair, **knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.**”
- b. That’s a good reminder and warning for all who are in positions of God-given authority.
  - ▶ Government officials: Remember that you have One above you who is the Governor of all the universe and heaven itself.
  - ▶ Elders: Remember that you have One over you who is “**the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls**” (1Pet 2:25), therefore “**take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, . . .**” (Ac 20:28).
  - ▶ Husbands: Remember that you have One who is Head over you and who sits at the right hand of the Father in heaven.
  - ▶ Parents: Remember that you have a Father in heaven who will hold you accountable for how you have conducted yourself toward those innocent ones entrusted to your care.

### **OBSERVATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS**

#### **1. Those in positions of authority should not always act authoritatively.**

Even when you have the authority, it is not wise to be always acting authoritatively.

The apostle Paul is an excellent example of one who was wise in the exercise of his authority.

- a. Paul was an apostle of Jesus Christ, and he had the authority to command Philemon with regard to how he should receive back his runaway slave, Onesimus.
  - ▶ But Paul did not approach Philemon in that way. He did not “make full use” of his authority as an apostle.

- vs8-9: “Therefore, though I might be very bold in Christ to command you what is fitting, 9 yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you . . .”
- ▶ Instead of *commanding* Philemon to do what was right, he *appealed* to him to do what was right.
  - In fact, Paul used great diplomacy and tact in appealing to Philemon.
    - + “for love’s sake I rather appeal to you” -- vs9
    - + “being such an one as Paul the aged” -- vs9
    - + “and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus” -- vs9
    - + “I appeal to you for my son Onesimus . . . whom I have begotten in my chains” --vs10
    - + “therefore receive him, that is, my heart” vs12
- b. Neither did Paul approach the church at Corinth in an authoritative way when he appealed to them to be generous in sending aid to the poor saints in Judea.
  - ▶ 2Cor 8:1-8 ~ “Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: 2 that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. 3 For I bear witness that according to *their* ability, yes, and beyond *their* ability, *they were* freely willing, 4 imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. 5 And not *only* as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and *then* to us by the will of God. 6 So we urged Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also complete this grace in you as well. 7 But as you abound in everything--in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in your love for us--see that you abound in this grace also. 8 **I speak not by commandment**, but I am testing the sincerity of your love by the diligence of others.”

All who are in positions of authority would do well to learn from Paul’s example.

- a. Those who are in positions of authority need to use ALL the tools of leadership, and not just “lay the law down.”
  - ▶ **implore . . . explain . . . reason . . . persuade . . .** and, sometimes, **yield** to the judgment and desires of those under your authority

## 2. Those in positions of authority should not micro-manage those who are under their authority.

A good leader recognizes the need to do what he can to develop leadership qualities and skills in those under him.

A good overseer, a good manager, understands the need to give enough latitude to those under him so that . . .

- a. they are able to demonstrate their abilities and judgment, and further develop their abilities and judgment
- b. they are able to develop self-confidence
- c. they are able to accept more and more responsibility

What I’m talking about is clearly seen in the Parable of the Talents in [Matt 25:14-30](#).

What I’m talking about is also implied in the description of the excellent wife given in [Prov 31:10-31](#).

- a. In order for this woman to do all that she is described as doing, it has to be that her husband showed confidence in her and gave her the latitude to fully exercise her abilities and judgment.
  - ▶ v14 ~ **She is like the merchant ships, She brings her food from afar.**
    - I knew a husband who kept his wife on such a short leash that she was never permitted to go “afar”
      - + She wasn’t even permitted to get a driver’s license until she was pregnant with their first child
      - + And she couldn’t go anywhere without getting his permission beforehand -- he didn’t want her “running the streets”

- ▶ v15 ~ She also rises while it is yet night, And provides food for her household, And a portion for her maidservants
  - ▶ v16 ~ She considers a field and buys it; From her profits she plants a vineyard.
    - There are husbands who do not permit their wives to have any “discretionary funds” . . . no money they can call their own and do with as they please!
    - There are wives who have to ask their husbands for every dollar they get!
  - ▶ v24 ~ She makes linen garments and sells them, And supplies sashes for the merchants.
  - ▶ v25 ~ Strength and honor are her clothing; She shall rejoice in time to come.
  - ▶ v26 ~ She opens her mouth with wisdom, And on her tongue is the law of kindness.
- b. This woman is able/allowed to do all these things because “the heart of her husband safely trusts her” (v10) -- he trusts his wife and has confidence in her.
- ▶ I have known husbands who showed more confidence in their teenage sons and gave greater latitude to their teenage sons than to their wives!
- c. These verses in **Prov 31** give insight into what Paul says in **1Tim 5:14** about wanting women to “manage the house” --
- ▶ **1Tim 5:14** ~ “Therefore I desire that *the younger widows* marry, bear children, **manage the house**, give no opportunity to the adversary to speak reproachfully.”
    - KJV: “guide the house”
    - ASV: “rule the household”
    - NIV: “manage their homes”
  - ▶ **Prov 31:11-31** gives insight into *how* a wife is to “manage the house”
- d. It’s clear that the excellent wife of **Prov 31** has an excellent husband who is wise in the exercise of his God-given authority.
- ▶ All who are in positions of authority need to demonstrate that same wisdom in the exercise of their authority: civil authorities, managers, overseers in the church, parents, as well as husbands.

### 3. Those in positions of authority should be wise in the use of praise and criticism.

We ought to be heavier on the praise and lighter on the criticism when it is at all possible.

- a. We ought to try to develop a personality that is more prone to praise and less prone to criticize.

Thoughtful, successful people in every age and in every society have shown that they understand that while there are times when criticism is justified and needed, there is the need to be wise and judicious in the use of criticism.

- a. **Arthur Helps:** “If you would be loved as a companion, avoid unnecessary criticisms of those with whom you live.”
- b. In his book *The Youth Builder*, **Jim Burns** talks about the importance of building up young people with affirmation and trust.
  - ▶ What he says about criticism applies to every age group: “For every critical comment we receive, it takes nine affirming comments to even out the negative effect in our life. Most young people receive more critical comments a day than encouraging ones. You can have a very positive, life-transforming effect when you develop a ministry of affirmation.”
- c. **Cicero:** “It is the peculiar quality of a fool to perceive the faults of others, and to forget his own.”

Thoughtful, successful people in every age and in every society have shown that they understand the value of praise and the wisdom in being generous in our praise.

- a. **Robert T. Allen:** “The truth is that for everything that can be accomplished by showing a person where he’s wrong, ten times as much can be accomplished by showing him where he’s right. The reason we don’t do it so often is that it’s more fun to throw a rock through a window than to put in a pane of glass.”
  - ▶ I think Robert Allen may be over-stating the case when he says that praise accomplishes ten times more than can be accomplished by criticism, but I certainly would agree that we ought to stress the importance of praising what is praiseworthy in other people.

- ▶ We ought to be at least as conscientious about praising people as we are about criticizing people.
- ▶ A person who does a lot of criticizing and rebuking and very little praising and complimenting is going to cause a lot more resentment than accomplishment.
- b. **L. Perry Wilbur:** “When deserved, be sure to praise your team members individually or before the group. They’ll appreciate your appreciation, and most of them will work all the harder for you.”
- c. **Catherine II of Russia:** “I praise loudly, I blame softly.”
- d. **Billy Sunday:** “Try praising your wife, even if it does frighten her at first.”

Of course, what the Scriptures say about praising others ought to carry even more weight.

- a. **Prov 31** shows us that the wise husband will be generous in his praise of all that is praiseworthy in his wife.
  - ▶ **Prov 31:28-31** ~ “Her children rise up and call her blessed; Her husband also, and he praises her: 29 ‘Many daughters have done well, But you excel them all.’ 30 Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing, But a woman who fears the LORD, **she shall be praised.** 31 Give her of the fruit of her hands, And let her own works praise her in the gates.”
- b. In the Old Testament we also have the example of David praising Abigail for her “good understanding” and “advice” when she interceded with David on behalf of her foolish husband.
  - ▶ **1Sam 25:3,32-33** ~ “The name of the man was Nabal, and the name of his wife Abigail. And **she was a woman of good understanding** and beautiful appearance; but the man was harsh and evil in his doings. And he was of the house of Caleb. . . . 32 Then David said to Abigail: “Blessed is the LORD God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me! 33 And **blessed is your advice** (“discernment”-NASB; “good judgment”-NIV) **and blessed are you**, because you have kept me this day from coming to bloodshed and from avenging myself with my own hand.”
  - ▶ When Nabal died and left Abigail a widow, David asked her to become his wife . . . and she accepted.
    - We can only hope that he was as good to praise her *after* she became his wife as he was *before* she was his wife.
- c. In the New Testament, we have Peter pointing out that God intends that governmental authorities be generous in their praise of “those who do good.”
  - ▶ **1Pet 2:13-17** ~ “Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake, whether to the king as supreme, 14 or to governors, as to those who are sent by him **for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good.**”
- d. The writer of the book of Hebrews implies that it is “unjust” to withhold praise from those who are praiseworthy.
  - ▶ **Heb 6:10** ~ “For God is not **unjust to forget your work and labor of love** which you have shown toward His name, . . .”
  - ▶ Point: We should learn from God. We should not be so unjust as to forget the good deeds and accomplishments of others . . . especially those under our authority.
- e. We have Paul’s example:
  - ▶ **1Cor 11:2** ~ “Now I **praise** you, brethren, that you remember me in all things and keep the traditions just as I delivered them to you.”
  - ▶ And in Rom 16 he singles out a number of Christians for special mention, generously praising them for their goodness and for what they had done and were doing for the Lord’s sake.
- f. We also have the Lord’s example in His letters to the seven churches of Asia in **Rev 2,3**.
  - ▶ He had nothing but praise for the churches at Philadelphia and Smyrna.
  - ▶ And even though he rebuked and warned the other five churches, He praised what was praiseworthy in four of those churches.

#### **4. Those in positions of authority should wisely apply the broad principles governing a Christian’s behavior to the use and exercise of their authority.**

I have time to give but two examples of what I’m talking about.

Do nothing from selfish motives. Do not use your authority selfishly.

- a. 1Pet 5:2-3 ~ “Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, **not by constraint** but willingly, **not for dishonest gain** (personal gain, selfishly) but eagerly; **nor as being lords over those entrusted to you** (heavy-handed, dictatorial) . . .”
  - ▶ JBP ~ “Shepherd your flock of God, looking after them not because you feel compelled to, but willingly, as God would wish. Never do this work thinking of your personal gain but with true compassion, 3 You should aim not at being dictators but examples of Christian living in the eyes of the flock committed to your charge.”
- b. Php 2:3,4 ~ “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. 4 Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

Apply “the golden rule” to the use of authority.

- a. Matt 7:12 ~ “Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.”
  - ▶ NASB ~ “In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets.”
  - ▶ JBP ~ “Treat other people exactly as you would like to be treated by them--this is the meaning of the Law and the Prophets.”
- b. Husbands, are you applying “the golden rule” to the way you exercise authority over your wife?
- c. Parents, are you applying “the golden rule” to the way you exercise authority over your children?
- d. Elders, are you applying “the golden rule” to the way you exercise authority over the members of the congregation?

### Conclusion.

This is the way **civil authorities** are to exercise authority without abusing their authority.

- a. 1Pet 2:13,14 ~ “Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake, whether to the king as supreme, 14 or to governors, as to those who are sent by him **for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good.**”

This is the way **parents** are to exercise authority without abusing their authority.

- a. Eph 6:4 ~ “And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.”
- b. 1Th 2:11 ~ “as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father *does* his own children,”

This is the way **husbands** are to exercise authority without abusing their authority.

- a. “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church. . . Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything” -- Eph 5:22-24.
  - ▶ But, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it. . . So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church” (Eph 5:25, 28-29).
  - ▶ And, “. . . let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respect her husband” (Eph 5:33).

This is the way **elders** are to exercise authority without abusing their authority.

- a. There is so much more to the work of elders than making decisions with regard to the worship and work of the church.
  - ▶ They certainly have that authority and that responsibility, but there is much more to the work of elders than that.
- b. “Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by constraint but

willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you . . .”  
(1Pet 5:2-3).

It is much easier to respect authority, and submit to authority, when those in authority are careful not to abuse their authority.