

A Symbol of Authority

by Hendrik Joubert

Authority, and significantly submission to authority, is a major theme of the Bible. The Jewish leadership challenged the authority of Jesus rather specifically by asking: **“Tell us, by what authority are You doing these things? Or who is he who gave You this authority?”** (Luke 20:2) The Lord acknowledges the question by focusing attention on the two possible sources of authority for what we may do in religion: **“The baptism of John--was it from heaven or from men?”** (Luke 20:4)

Their reaction is recorded to illustrate the only proper source for authority, but also how we may allow the opinion of people to sway our *faith*. **“If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say, 'Why then did you not believe him?’⁶ But if we say, 'From men,' all the people will stone us, for they are persuaded that John was a prophet.”** (Luke 20:5-6) Our actions are demonstrations of what we believe, a point vividly argued through James. (2:14-26) **But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the will of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him.** (Luke 7:30)

We should be aware of how the opinion of people may sway us one way or the other. (1Corinthians 2:4; Colossians 2:4) It is important that we will discuss spiritual matters with an open mind and pure heart; however we should verify that our faith comes **by the word of Christ.** (Romans 10:17) We should also realize that failing to submit to God’s authority is rebellion and therefore constitutes sin. (Genesis 2:16-17; Matthew 15:9)

Repentance is submitting to the authority of God – I do not do what I *think* is right, but that which God tells me is right. (Mark 7:7; 2Timothy 3:16-17; 2John 9; Jude 1:3-4) **The love of God** is the motivation behind a complete submission to His will: **“If you love Me, keep My commandments.”** (John 14:15; 1John 5:3; Philippians 2:12-13) This submission involves a total denial of self: **“If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.”** (Luke 9:23)

A basic Scriptural chain of command is described as follows: **But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.** (1Corinthians 11:3) In our society this chain of command is challenged, and often rejected. This is true not only of the relationship between a man and a woman, but also of the relationship between man and God. We may do this rather blatantly by denying God period, or we may do so subtly by submitting His word to personal interpretation so that it would be friendlier to us – no change is required. (2Timothy 4:1-5; Matthew 15:9) We will use His love and the idea of grace in order to justify this behavior, effectively attempting to patronize God. **“But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say?”** (Luke 6:46)

The role and position of women in the church seems especially vulnerable due to their *liberation*, as society sees it. We may neglect to speak out for the standards set by God for fear of being considered narrow-minded and prejudiced. We may engage in subjective persuasive reasoning, however we need to consider the substance of our arguments – is it confirmed by Scripture, or does it consist of persuasive reasoning in human logic? (1Corinthians 2:4; Colossians 2:4)

The instruction to the Corinthian church that **your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive**, may be considered the result of abuse in that church, however in his letter to Timothy Paul writes: **Let a woman learn in silence with all submission.**¹² **And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence.**¹³ **For Adam was formed first, then Eve.**¹⁴ **And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression.** (1Timothy 2:11-14) As in the case of divorce and remarriage he goes back to the *beginning* to explain the basis for this instruction, and not a local abuse.

Some have even objected that Paul is a chauvinist; however the language of Peter seems as *oppressive* when he writes: **Do not let your adornment be merely outward--arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel⁴ rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God.**⁵ **For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands,⁶ as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror.** (1Peter 3:3-6)

What about the *prophetesses* we read of in the New Testament? (**Acts 2:17; Acts 21:8-9**) Just before Paul gives the instruction concerning the women in **1Corinthians 14** he made the point that prophets are not to interrupt one another because **God is not the author of confusion. (14:33) The spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. (14:32)** Was this Paul's opinion? ***If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord. (1Corinthians 14:37)***

Is it not here where the outward (important) demonstration of submission enters the discussion - ***But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head... (1Corinthians 11:5)*** This is not done in the assembly or in the presence of men as women are to ***keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak***, and they are not ***to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet***. Praying and prophesying do not occur only with men present, where the women demonstrate ***entire submissiveness by a gentle and quiet spirit***. Praying and prophesying occur also where women are assembled, as some were before their conversion. (**Acts 16:13**) Is it not here, where she is removed *from her head* and ***prays or prophecy***, and is not *lead* in prayer or prophecy *by her head*, that she has to recognize *her head* with the covering?