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ORDER OF AUTHORITY

STUDY GUIDE



ORDER OF AUTHORITY

SCRIPTURE READING

Romans 13:1-7

Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake. For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.

Titus 3: 1-2

Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work, to speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men.

THEME

The order of authority discussed in this study guide is the divine order of God, which must be followed to ensure the proper exercise of power. Understanding the order of authority will assist us in utilizing the various gifts in the Body of Christ. It is time to recognize authority as ordained by God, and we must position ourselves in the order ordained by God.

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. There are many levels of authority, but we will only mention a few in this study.
- B. We must first know and understand the definition of authority before we can truly understand the order of authority.

1. According to Webster's Dictionary, authority is the power or right to command, act, enforce obedience, or make final decisions.
 2. *Exousia* (ex-oo-see'-ah) is a Greek word which has often been translated "authority." The definition of *exousia* (ex-oo-see'-ah) is "the right to exercise power." It is also defined as privilege and as freedom to exercise one's mental or physical powers.
- C. One should not seek to promote himself to a position of authority; he should seek the will of God for his life.
1. One who seeks to promote himself to a position of authority is probably unfit to handle it properly.
 2. Some people in authority have the following power-abusive attitude: "I may not know what I'm doing, but I'm in charge."
 3. We should seek to be servants, not bosses.
 4. Positions of authority must be filled with the proper personnel.
 5. As we seek God's will for our lives, the Holy Spirit will reveal to us the place and position where God wants us.
- D. Responsibility must always precede authority, and responsibility should never exceed authority.

II. TYPES OF AUTHORITY

- A. Direct authority is a straight-line authority which has total responsibility as well as accountability.
1. A message or command given personally by a superior to a subordinate is a good example of direct authority.
 2. Direct authority is an authority granted as a result of position.
 - a. The king or president of a nation operates with direct authority.
 - b. The bishop (senior pastor) of a local assembly operates with direct authority.

- c. The president of a corporation also operates with direct authority.
 - 3. One who functions with direct authority is not without accountability for his actions.
 - 4. One who functions in direct authority must also give an account for the actions of his subordinates.
- B. Delegated authority is a representative authority which acts in behalf of another, with his permission.
- 1. An ambassador of a nation functions through delegated authority.
 - 2. Various leadership positions in the church function through delegated authority.
 - 3. When a direct authority authorizes someone to function in his behalf, the authority operating is a delegated authority.
- C. Stipulated authority is authority which is specified or laid out in a contract, agreement, custom, etc.
- 1. The culture and customs of countries determine such things as dress codes, eating habits, social activities, etc.
 - 2. Although this authority is neither direct nor delegated, it is an understood authority.
- D. Vocational authority is an understood authority that functions in certain situations, but it never violates the order of authority. This authority comes as a result of one's skill.
- 1. Example: A police officer, a paramedic, and a wrecker may all be at the scene of an accident. It is extremely important that each person recognizes his own abilities and limitations. The police officer is responsible for investigating the accident and maintaining good traffic flow. The paramedic is responsible for treating the injured people. The wrecker is responsible for removing the damaged vehicles from the scene of the accident.
 - 2. Each vocation must understand and respect the authority of the other; otherwise, problems will arise.

III. ORDER OF AUTHORITY

- A. Sovereign authority is the highest order of authority.
 - 1. "Sovereign" means above or superior to all others; it also means chief, greatest, and supreme.
 - 2. Sovereign authority is an absolute, irreversible authority.
 - 3. God is absolutely the highest authority in existence.
 - 4. Jesus is the sovereign authority over the believer and the church.

- B. God's authority is manifested to the human race in two ways: Scripture and conscience.
 - 1. Scriptural authority is the written manifestation of God's authority.
 - a. The Word of God provides the "authority of truth," which is also an absolute, irreversible authority.
 - b. Truth may be challenged, but it cannot be changed.
 - c. There are three things that we should constantly be aware of while looking at scriptural authority. They are:
 - (1) Nothing contrary to the Scriptures can ever be true.
 - (2) Nothing in addition to the Scriptures can ever be binding.
 - (3) Every individual is personally responsible for knowing the Scriptures.
 - 2. Spiritual authority is manifested through the conscience.
 - a. The inward man, or the spirit-man, speaks through the conscience of a person.
 - b. Some call the conscience "the voice of the spirit," which proceeds out of the inward man (spirit man).

- c. The conscience is the knowledge or feeling of right and wrong; it is the faculty, power, or principle of a person which decides on the lawfulness or unlawfulness of his actions, with a compulsion to do right. It is also seen as moral judgment that prohibits or opposes the violation of a previously recognized ethical principle.
- d. The most practical way to define conscience is inward awareness.
 - (1) Inward awareness is developed through knowledge.
 - (2) Without knowledge one cannot have awareness.
 - (3) Lack of knowledge or awareness can cause one to be destroyed. (Hosea 4:6)
 - (4) It is imperative that the conscience be developed. An undeveloped conscience is an unreliable guide.
 - (5) Our inward awareness is greatly affected by the influences that captivate our attention; therefore, we must avoid ungodly influences.
- e. The conscience can be seared or cauterized. A seared conscience is not sensitive to God.
- f. Since the conscience is the spiritual authority used by God to speak to people, its development is vital.
- g. Spiritual authority is active when the Scriptures remain silent on certain issues.
- h. When the Scriptures are not specific concerning a particular issue, then the spirit must be followed. (The Scriptures teach that we are to be led by the Spirit.)
- i. True spiritual authority will not lead you outside the parameters of the Scriptures.
- j. Scriptural authority always supersedes spiritual authority. (The Holy Spirit will never violate the Word of God.)

- k. One who follows true spiritual authority is actually following the leadership of the Holy Spirit.
- l. The following Scripture references refer to the conscience of man:
 - (1) In John 8:3-11, we do not see the Scriptures violated, but we do see sin revealed.
 - (2) Acts 24:16 reveals the importance of having a pure heart toward God and men.
 - (3) Romans 2:14-15 reveals spiritual authority operating when scriptural authority is absent.
 - (4) Romans 9:1 teaches that the conscience is in contact with the Holy Spirit.
 - (5) Romans 14 teaches respect for the conscience of another. (We must use discretion when enjoying our liberties.)
 - (6) According to I Corinthians 8:4-13, the conscience can be violated.
 - (7) I Timothy 1:5, 18-19 is an admonition to protect the conscience.
 - (8) I Timothy 4:1-2 teaches the possibility of becoming insensitive to spiritual authority.
 - (9) Hebrews 9:6-14 reveals the effect of Jesus' redemptive work on the conscience of man.
 - (10) Hebrews 10:22 reveals the possibility of having an evil or guilty conscience.
 - (11) I Peter 3:16 & 21 reveal the reliability of the conscience in the midst of human criticism.
- C. Apostolic authority is the lowest order of authority in this particular study.
 - 1. Apostolic authority is an authority that comes as a result of the position or doctrine of an individual or organization.

2. The founding fathers of a church or denomination function in the capacity of apostolic authority.
3. Doctrinal guidelines, as well as personal preference, often flavor apostolic authority.
4. Scriptural authority always supersedes apostolic authority. (The Bereans verified the teachings of Paul by searching the Scriptures daily. Acts 17:10-11)
5. Apostolic authority must not be allowed to violate the conscience of an individual; therefore, spiritual authority supersedes apostolic authority.
6. If God tells you to do something, do not allow anyone to persuade you to do otherwise. (I Kings 13:1-32)
7. We are told to be led by the spirit, not by the apostles or prophets.

IV. SUMMARY

- A. "Order of Authority" is the divine order of God.
- B. Knowing the order of authority will assist us in our everyday lives.
- C. There are many different types of authorities; each must operate in its proper setting, while always respecting other authorities.
- D. Vocational authority must recognize skills and abilities and allow them to operate freely.
- E. We must constantly keep ourselves alert to the divine order of authority.

V. CONCLUSION

- A. What is God's divine order for obtaining authority?
 1. One must prove himself responsible in service before he can become eligible for authority.

2. Certain positions carry with them certain authority; therefore, it is extremely important that qualified people are placed in those positions.

- B. When is scriptural authority superseded? Never!
- C. When is spiritual authority superseded? Spiritual authority is superseded if and when it violates the Scriptures. When the Scriptures speak specifically to an issue, the conscience must follow the Scriptures. We must never be led outside the parameters of the Scriptures.
- D. When is apostolic authority superseded? Apostolic authority is superseded when it violates the Scriptures or the conscience.
- E. God's divine order of authority places God first, the Scriptures second, the conscience third, and apostolic authority last.
- F. Never, under any circumstance, should this order of authority be broken!
- G. Authority must always operate in its proper order. Never break rank!!!