

Practical Christian Living

Lesson 11 – God’s Delegated Authority

In our last lesson we learned that authority means the right to rule. All authority belongs to God because He is the Creator of all things. We saw that the basic principle of the world is rebellion; whereas, the basic principle of God's children is obedience. We are here to obey God and uphold His authority.

In this lesson we are going to learn a very important truth: *We must obey God's delegated authorities in order to be fully obedient to God.*

What is Delegated Authority?

A delegated authority is someone who represents God's authority. All authority belongs to God, but God has two ways in which He exercises His authority:

1. Direct authority. This means that God tells us directly through His Word or through His Spirit what He wants us to do.

2. Delegated authority. This means that God designates certain people to represent Him and to exercise His authority.

God not only directs us personally, but He also directs us through His delegated authorities. Some examples of people who are delegated authorities are: parents, school teachers, police officers, governmental officials.

Since a delegated authority is a person who represents God's authority, he must be obeyed. To be disrespectful or disobedient to God's delegated authority is like being disrespectful or disobedient to God Himself.

The Four Basic Structures of Authority

In this world in which we live, God has established four basic structures of authority:

Let us consider each of these four structures of authority.

1 - THE FAMILY

God's arrangement for the family is that the father be the head of the house under God. The wife is to be subject to her husband, and the children subject to their parents. The Bible says,

"Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord." Ephesians 5:22

"Children, obey your parents in all things..." Colossians 3:20

In the family, God has placed His authority in the parents. Since the parents represent God's authority in the home, it is right that they should be obeyed. The Bible says,

"Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right." Ephesians 6:1

Many times, young people would like to change God's Word to suit themselves. For example:

"Obey your parents..."

If they are right...

If you think they are right...

*If it does not interfere with what you want to do...
If they ask you nicely in a way that satisfies you..."*

But the young person who wants to please God will not consider these variations. Instead, he will choose to obey his parents because it is right to do so.

The father is the God-appointed head of the family, but he is not to be a dictator. He is to love his wife and children and be an example to them. He is also responsible before God to bring up his children in the ways of the Lord. The Bible says,

"Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it." Ephesians 5:25

"Fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord." Ephesians 6:4

2 - GOVERNMENT

Due to the sinful and rebellious nature of men, God established laws and set up human government. God gave men the authority to enforce His laws. He did this for our protection and for our good. Civil authorities are God's provision for the restraint of evil in order that we might live *"a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty."* (1 Timothy 2:2)

School teachers, police officers, local officials, judges, state and federal officials are all God's delegated authorities. Since they represent God's authority, we must obey them. The Bible says,

"Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God." Romans 13:1

Christians are to be law-abiding citizens. The student in school honors God when he obeys the rules of the school and shows respect to his teachers. He dishonors God when he does not do this. As followers of Jesus Christ, we are to live our lives by the principle of obedience.

The Bible says, *"Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man FOR THE LORD'S SAKE..." 1 Peter 2:13*

Our Lord was never a party to any rebellion. He taught people to obey governmental authorities. When the Pharisees asked Jesus whether they should pay taxes to Caesar, the Lord replied,

"Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." Matthew 22:21

3 - CHURCH

God's plan is that Christ be the Head of every church. Under Christ are God-appointed leaders such as elders, pastors, deacons, and teachers. We are to be subject to God's delegated authorities in the church.

The Bible says,

"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..." Hebrews 13:17

Those who are in authority in the church are not to lord it over God's people but rather to serve them and to be examples to them. Concerning elders, the Bible says,

"Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock..." 1 Peter 5:2-3

4 - BUSINESS

Our employer or "boss" represents God's delegated authority at work. We honor God in our work when we do our best for Jesus' sake. God is not pleased when we do our work in a careless and half-hearted way. He wants us to put our heart into our work. The Bible says,

"Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers; but in sincerity of heart, fearing God." Colossians 3:22

The word "servant" here simply means an employee—one who is employed by another. The Bible tells us that employees are to be subject to their bosses, not only to those who are kind and gentle, but also to those who are hard to get along with. The Bible says,

"Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh." 1 Peter 2:18

Concerning our jobs, God wants every believer to work as though he were working for the Lord Jesus. A young man was having trouble holding his job. His attitude was not good and the quality of his work was such that his boss was displeased with him.

One day his youth leader asked him this question, *"Suppose Jesus Christ Himself was the manager of that store? Would that make a difference in the quality of your work?"*

He replied, *"It sure would! I'd do my best all the time."*

The youth leader explained, *"Do you know that God expects you to consider that you are actually working for the Lord Jesus on your job?"* (story source: Bill Gothard)

Then they looked at this verse:

"And whatever you do, do it heartily, AS TO THE LORD and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; FOR YOU SERVE THE LORD CHRIST." Colossians 3:23-24

The Bible says that bosses have a responsibility too. They are to be considerate of those who work for them, recognizing that they have a Master in heaven. The Bible says,

"And you, masters, do the same things to them [be kind and considerate], giving up threatening, knowing that your own Master also is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him." Ephesians 6:9

Questions Concerning Authority

You may have questions regarding authority. We will try to answer some of them.

- **"Suppose that I think my parents are wrong about something. Do I still have to obey them?"**

The relationship between children and their parents is so important in God's sight that He made it the subject of one of the Ten Commandments. The Bible says,

"Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God gives you." Exodus 20:12

The word "*honor*" means to respect and to obey. Even though you may disagree with your parents, do not be disobedient or rebellious. The person who does not honor his parents is not only breaking God's commandment, but he is also stepping out from under God's authority. The result of this is that his life may be cut short.

We can think of God's authority as an "umbrella" to protect us from Satan's attacks. Satan hates the people of God and wants to destroy them. But, so long as we are under God's "umbrella," Satan cannot touch us without God's consent.

- **"Suppose the one in authority makes a wrong decision. Will I be held responsible?"**

The one who makes the decision is the one who is responsible for the results. If you are merely obeying the authority over you, God will not hold you responsible. Instead, He will hold the one in authority responsible for the mistake.

- **"Suppose the one in authority has a bad personality and I don't like him. Do I still have to obey him?"**

Yes, you must be subject to him if he is in a position of authority over you. We must distinguish between a person's position and his personality.

For example, a police officer is in a position of authority. He represents God's authority in upholding the law. He may not have a pleasing personality, but that does not excuse you from obeying his authority. If you received a ticket for speeding, you could not disregard it and say, *"I got a ticket yesterday for speeding, but I tore it up because I didn't like that officer."*

- **"What if someone in authority commands me to do something which is contrary to what God has commanded?"**

This is a situation in which you are not to obey the one in authority. There is an illustration of this in the New Testament. Jesus had commanded His followers to preach the gospel to everyone. Later, the religious leaders commanded Peter and the other disciples not to preach or teach anymore in Jesus' name.

Peter could not comply with this command because it was contrary to the Lord's command. Peter said,

"We ought to obey God rather than men." (Acts 5:29)

Any time that man's command conflicts with God's command, you must obey God. For example, suppose your boss tells you to do something dishonest or to lie about something. To do this would be to disobey God's commands; therefore, you cannot obey. Even in an instance like this, you should be respectful. You should have a spirit of submission, even though you cannot obey. You should say quietly, *"I'm sorry, but I cannot do that."*

In some instances, refusing to obey your boss when he tells you to do something wrong may mean that you lose your job. If that happens, accept it from the Lord, knowing that He is pleased with your actions. The Bible says,

*"For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief suffering wrongfully."
1 Peter 2 :19*

All Authorities are Ordained of God

God wants us to see that all authorities are ordained by Him. Since all delegated authorities are ordained by God, they must be obeyed. We have no choice in the matter. We must obey those in authority over us. The Bible says,

"...the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority [God's delegated authority] resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves." Romans 13:1-2

Who of us would dare to disobey a direct command from the Lord? But do we realize that resisting God's delegated authority is disobeying God's command? To obey God's command, we must be subject to His delegated authorities.

The Lord Jesus Himself is our example of what it means to be subject to authority. He was subject, not only to God's direct authority, but also to His delegated authorities. He was subject to His parents, He was subject to governmental authorities, He paid taxes, He was obedient to the laws of the land. Throughout His entire life, the Lord Jesus was subject to authority. He was never rebellious on any occasion. He truly lived His life by the principle of obedience.

The most important thing we can do to please God is to obey Him. To be fully obedient to the Lord, we must obey His delegated authorities. The Apostle Paul said,

"Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey..." Titus 3:1

Discovered Gem – We must obey God's delegated authorities to be fully obedient to God.

Questions

1. What is delegated authority?
2. Define direct authority.
3. In God's arrangement for the family, who is the head of the house under God?
4. Who is joint head of the family with the father.
5. Why are children to be subject to their parents.
6. How must every believer work?
7. What is the most important thing we can do to please God?
8. What is God's provision as relates to civil authorities?
9. Are those who are in authority in the church okay to lord it over God's people? Why or why not?
10. Are believers to obey the person in authority, in business, despite them having a bad personality and you don't like them?