

Power and Authority, Its Use and Abuse

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Abraham Lincoln, at one point in his political career, said, if you really want to test a man's character, give him power. I think the world is replete with proof of that axiom; I think very few people would pass that test. Too often it goes to the head whenever one has power and authority. I saw it many, many times when I was in the military. Today, I'll get right to it; what I want to address in this sermon, is:

Power and Authority, Its Use and Abuse

I'll have four points. In the first one, I'm going to look at a common example of use and abuse of power in the world. The second one will contain examples from the Bible. These will be in two parts—subpoints A and B, from both the Old and the New Testaments. In the third point, we're going to look back historically to the church of God. The last point is going to show how power and authority applies to us. The first point:

1. Examples of the use and abuse of power and authority in the world at large.

Unless we're in a coma, there's not a day that goes by that we don't see power being used and abused by those in the world we see around us. If we're paying any attention at all, we see it all the time. All you have to do is watch the news or pick up a newspaper. You see people in power and they'll misuse it almost all the time. We have power politics, also known as gutter politics. We see that used all the time, where people will dig up anything, use anything, in order to denigrate the character of their political opponents. Some of these folks have whole staffs; all they do is dig up dirt on other people. The most current examples of that are seen in regard to Supreme Court nominees, and those who make a practice of hating the office of the president; we've seen it during every election and it's all done by people in power. (I don't know about you, but I can hardly wait for the mudslinging campaigns that we'll see over the next two years. We'll see more of the same.)

It seems as if the more political power one has, the more one digs up to damage people. It just goes on and on; it's a constant cycle now. Voters continue to put these people back in office, all these corrupt officials. They give them more and more opportunity to be abusive. Historically, we've had many of these same individuals in public office abuse their power, abuse the authority that they've had. Just a very short list. Remember the Clintons? They would unleash the IRS on people who opposed them. I remember some of the presidential pardons that he gave. Not to pick on the Clintons, but they are public figures. If only ten percent of what they were accused of is true, why aren't they in prison? I've never quite understood that. Of course, the double standard is very well known now. Some people who aren't in power anymore, that we've known of in our lifetimes, such as Richard Nixon—there's an individual who

abused his power. How about that governor from Illinois, Rod Blagojevich? He tried to sell that Obama seat, a Senate seat. That's just a short list.

Then you have to look at the news media and the way they do things. It always disturbs me when they legitimize certain people. I remember back when Yasser Arafat was in power; that was an individual who was probably guilty of more death, murder, all kinds of abuse of power in the Middle East, than any other so-called leader of that time. Do you remember what the media started calling him? President Arafat, trying to legitimize him. In the last few years in the news, we've seen Assad in Syria, Putin in Ukraine, and before that Saddam Hussein in Iraq, just to name a few. The way they abused power, no dissent was allowed. Shoot them, bomb them, gas them. That was their *modus operandi*, the way they operated.

Then we have all the countries around the world, again, just looking at some very common examples. The countries that have suffered under Marxist socialism—you know how that works: We're all equal in everything except the privileged few, the elite, who are in power and control. They set up spy systems, they open prisons where they put their political enemies, anyone who would disagree with them. I'll mention an example of that a little later on. They have a police force—usually a secret police force—that enforces the rules, enforces that loyalty to the so-called leaders. Don't forget about all the offshore accounts that these individuals tend to have, and unfortunately, a lot of that comes from the U.S., as the U.S. tries to buy friends.

I was reading a book recently that triggered my thoughts on this whole topic. The title of the book is Six Minutes to Freedom. It's the story of Kurt Muse, an American who was raised in Panama, and if I remember the story correctly, he was in business with someone in Panama, and he lived and worked there but was sickened by all the corruption he saw in the Noriega regime. This was back during the '80s—the late '70s through the '80s. So he and a few friends started a clandestine radio program where they could inform the people, because in these regimes people are basically kept in the dark; they don't really know what's going on. As it turned out, many of his friends were arrested, tortured, murdered—that's the way these notorious prisons under Noriega operated. The only thing that saved Muse, who was later imprisoned, was that his wife worked for the U.S. Department of Defense. There was a treaty between Panama and the U.S., and if he had been killed there would have been too many questions. However, they kept him imprisoned and he suffered a great deal. He would hear all the screams of the tortured individuals, people that would be murdered. He was finally rescued by an elite Delta force, hence the title of the book, six minutes to freedom—that's how long it took to take over the prison and free Muse. That was just a story that got me thinking about all of the abuse of power and authority that we see in the world. There has been way too much of it. We're looking forward to a time when that won't be the rule.

Then we know of the extreme abuse of power and authority (and I won't go into any details) that has resulted in genocide in places like Eastern Europe, South America, in Africa, Cambodia, China and Tibet. The perpetrators, those in power, have committed

some of the most horrific atrocities in history, attempting to hide their crimes in mass graves. Just looking at this subject and thinking about it for a while, there are some common characteristics of people who abuse power and authority. One characteristic is across the board: They all operate under the assumption that they are above the law—whatever the law is, they are the exception. Here are a couple of aphorisms for you: Power, authority and arrogance usually come in the same package. Another one abusers favor: Power is everything, anything else just demeans the power. Those are astute observations.

Another common denominator is these despots spend an awful lot of time enriching themselves. They have Swiss and offshore bank accounts. In the book I mentioned earlier, there was one estimate that Noriega had at least \$700 million in an account somewhere, probably most of which came from the U.S. taxpayer. I once googled a list of these individuals and how much each despot had stolen while in power, and it's quite phenomenal. Not a pretty thing to see. Again, just looking at some of the common denominators, you'll see that they will ruthlessly attack anyone who threatens their empire, whatever that empire is. Along with that, you will find they will justify any action, any atrocity, just to help them remain in power. We see a little bit of that in history, we've seen Gaddafi in Libya, Assad in Syria—ruthless regimes. In the U.S. we can be thankful that those whom we elect stay in office only four to six years per term.

Point number 2; this is in two parts—A and B.

2A. Old Testament examples of use and abuse of power.

We look at these examples to kind of get an idea of how God feels about those who use and abuse the power and authority that they have, especially if they claim to represent Him. Let's go to Numbers 20. I'll be using the New King James. "Numbers" is the English name for this book, but the Hebrew name is "In the Wilderness", which is the context here, the setting. In Numbers 20, verse 1, it says,

Numbers 20:1 *Then the children of Israel, the whole congregation, came into the Wilderness of Zin in the first month, and the people stayed in Kadesh; and Miriam died there and was buried there.*

2) Now there was no water for the congregation; so they gathered together against Moses and Aaron. (NKJV)

They started the blame game. That's what usually happens; it's not the first time. The Israelites even blamed God, as we see repeatedly.

3) And the people contended with Moses and spoke, saying: "If only we had died when our brethren died before the LORD! (NKJV)

That's probably a reference to the account in chapter 14, where they rebelled. Note that all the references to *the LORD* here are to Yehovah (used 6,521 times, according to Strong's).

4) *Why have you brought up the assembly of the LORD into this wilderness, that we and our animals should die here? (NKJV)*

They pronounced their own sentence because they repeatedly complained that they were going to die in the wilderness, and that's exactly what they did over the next thirty or forty years.

5) *And why have you made us come up out of Egypt, to bring us to this evil place? It is not a place of grain or figs or vines or pomegranates; nor is there any water to drink.” (NKJV)*

Missing all of the comforts of home—what's wrong with you, Moses? No cable TV, no Netflix, no cell phones—none of that.

6) *So Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly to the door of the tabernacle of meeting, and they fell on their faces. And the glory of the LORD appeared to them.*

7) *Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,*

8) *“Take the rod; you and your brother Aaron gather the congregation together. Speak to the rock before their eyes, and it will yield its water; thus you [as God's representatives] shall bring water for them out of the rock, and give drink to the congregation and their animals.” (NKJV)*

Aaron's rod symbolized the priesthood, and Moses's rod symbolized judgment and power; these were given by God to represent what He wanted them to do, and were not to be misused in any way. That wasn't the case here. Continuing in verse 9,

9) *So Moses took the rod from before the LORD as He commanded him.*

10) *And Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock; and he said to them, “Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?”*

11) *Then Moses lifted his hand and [in a rage, we can read between the lines there] struck [he didn't speak to the rock as he was instructed to] the rock twice with his rod [not his rod, but God's rod, that He had given him]; and water came out abundantly, and the congregation and their animals drank.*

12) *Then the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, “Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them.” (NKJV)*

That's a pretty serious charge with a severe penalty. What happened? We can see that something happened to Moses's attitude. Maybe it wasn't exactly at that point in time, but it did occur. We see a change in Moses. He was a human being, he ran out of patience and endurance. That's a very long story there. Looking up Moses in Herbert Lockyer's book, All the Men of the Bible, it says that Moses lived 120 years and Lockyer breaks that down in his book. He says the first forty years, Moses is learning to be

somebody—all the perks and everything, the royalty of Egypt—he had a pretty good life. The second forty years he learned to be a nobody, herding goats. I suppose that would tend to engender a bit of humility, when you're walking around with goat dung in your sandals, maybe between your toes. During the last forty years Moses learned that God was everything. God was sovereign. Within the whole account of Moses—we have the complete record that we can look at and review—he saw tremendous miracles. All the plagues of Egypt, God bringing them out of Egypt with a pillar of fire, the crossing of the Red Sea, being given the Ten Commandments; even with all of that, he at least for a time started to elevate himself by stating, must we fetch you water, as if he were somehow providing water with his rod.

In essence, what he did—and we'll talk about this and it will become a little bit clearer as we go along—was put himself between the people and God. He elevated himself. God noticed it. I don't think it was an oversight on Moses's part, with the excuse of, sorry, I just lost it for a minute there, God; I hope you'll excuse me. God didn't say, I know you really didn't mean it but I'm still going to make you suffer even though I know you just had a little hissy fit—God knew the heart. He's going to make him suffer. Let's go to Deuteronomy 32 and we'll see this incident had a major impact on Moses's life. It shows us the danger of misusing power, especially power and authority given by God to anyone claiming to be His representative. What's really significant to me, too, is that Moses lived in history when the most dynamic things were going on. We'll see as we go along, that in all these cases, human nature actually comes to the fore. Human nature is like Satan. Satan never takes a day off, he never takes a vacation, and neither does human nature—it's just there all the time. It's something we need to keep in mind. In Deuteronomy 32, beginning in verse 48,

Deuteronomy 32:48 *Then the LORD [the same, Yehovah] spoke to Moses that very same day, saying:*

49) Go up this mountain of the Abarim [that's a range of mountains], Mount Nebo, which is in the land of Moab, across from Jericho; view the land of Canaan ... (NKJV)

Mount Nebo is about twelve miles east of the mouth of the Jordan river, and is about 12,000 feet high. My dictionary shows a picture of it and one can see Jericho from the top of that mountain.

*49 continued) ... which I give to the children of Israel as a possession;
50) and die on the mountain which you ascend, and be gathered to your people, just as Aaron your brother died on Mount Hor and was gathered to his people;
(NKJV)*

Why? Verse 51 states it.

51) because you trespassed against Me among the children of Israel at the waters of Meribah Kadesh [Meribah just means a place of contention and

quarreling], *in the Wilderness of Zin, because you did not hallow Me in the midst of the children of Israel.* (NKJV)

That's referring to that very place and incident that we saw back there in Numbers 20.

52) *Yet you shall see the land before you, though you shall not go there, into the land which I am giving to the children of Israel.*" (NKJV)

God just wasn't happy about what Moses had done. Look at the scenario here; can you imagine being told by God that you're going to go up to this mountain—and Mount Nebo is about 4,000 feet high, you're an old man, and it's going to take a long time to get up there—when you get up there you're going to look out and see the Promised Land, but you're going to die? You've been told that ahead of time. You'd think that if Moses hadn't repented before, surely he did at that point. We know too that God didn't take his salvation away, we can see that in another place—that's not the issue here. But it's serious enough that God did not allow him to even set foot in the Promised Land. He took that away from him. The record is amazing here, but it tells us a lot. We can look in the book of Joshua (we're not going to turn there) and see how many times God referred to Moses as *My servant*. He never said of him, My dictator, My tyrant, My anointed in charge, the head of My government on earth. He didn't imply any of those things but he called him His servant.

The whole point I'm trying to make is when God gives power and authority, and we all have a little bit of that, if we think about it (and we'll touch on that in the last point), if it's not used properly, God doesn't take that lightly, He just doesn't. We can look through the Old Testament and see similar accounts throughout. We can look at Judges and the bribery going on amongst those who were in the position of the judges—they had power. When Israel wanted a king, God gave them Saul, and we know that Saul abused that power very much. He sought witches, he tried to hunt down David, and one of the reasons he wanted to kill David was because David was a threat to his power—he didn't want to lose that. Then we see King David and a very similar power sets in. Even though he wasn't a perfect man—nobody is—he had that particular sin with Bathsheba and then he murdered her husband, with a callous attitude. When Joab came to him and asked him what he was doing there, David had a nonchalant attitude about it—oh, that just happens in battle, don't worry about it—but the point is he had the power to do that and he exercised that power. He had that man killed by the Philistines. That was the specific reason God did to him what He did to him later on.

If you look at the accounts in Samuel and in Kings, when David was about to die, some of his last instructions were tinged with revenge. He wanted to get even with various people for things that had happened in the past. Today we would call that a blood feud. That was kind of the way David operated, even though he loved God with all his heart. He even wanted to build God a temple but God didn't allow that, because He said he was a bloody man, not so much because of the wars he fought, but because he had abused his power. He had all that power, he had all that opportunity, because he was the king. He abused that power; it didn't cost him his salvation but it indeed affected his

life. It affected the life of Bathsheba, it affected the life of the child they had, who died—even the whole nation of Israel, when you look at that history.

We could go on in time to see that even the priests completely lost sight of what God commissioned them to do. They instituted prostitution and adultery, repeatedly, even in the temple. They abused the power and authority that God had given them. Even among the prophets, you can find examples—Jonah was forced to obey God. He finally did what God told him to. He had been allowed to go and preach mighty words, and the city of Nineveh responded to him, but his problem was he didn't understand his relationship with God. He didn't understand that the power and authority that God gave him was only temporary, to accomplish what God wanted him to do. Solomon was right in Ecclesiastes 1:9—there is nothing new under the sun; the same problem tends to repeat itself over and over again, and we'll see that as we go along.

2B. New Testament examples of power and authority being used and abused.

Obviously in the New Testament we see right away the example of the Scribes and Pharisees. They set up an entire system claiming it was all of God and in fact murdered the Messiah, whom they perceived as a threat to their coveted power. That was the motive behind it. They didn't understand the very God they claimed to represent. They had acquired that religious power over the people and it was so strong they were even willing to murder the Son of God to protect it. That's what it boiled down to. We have that record in Matthew 23, we won't turn there. Christ condemned the Pharisees for their hypocrisies. He talked about some of the things they would do, how they would ignore widows, and abuse the power and control they had over the people.

After the death of Christ, we see another amazing example in the life of Apostle Peter. Read over in Acts 10—we won't go there again, but just as a reference—Acts 10:9-16, he had the vision, the very familiar account, of the sheet coming down out of heaven full of unclean animals. God used that as an analogy to instruct him that Gentiles were going to be coming into the church. They were going to have the opportunity for salvation. The amazing part of the story to me is, even when he was trying to figure out what all that meant, these guys were pounding on the front door. They had been on the road three days getting to him, even while the vision was being revealed to Peter. It just shows you that God's plan was in action the whole time. Yet, what do we read later on about Peter? Let's go over to Galatians 2. What happened to Peter in this account here, where Paul had to chastise him publicly for his conduct? The Jews came to town and it affected Peter. Galatians 2, beginning in verse 11.

Galatians 2:11 *Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed [for what?];*

12) for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision.

13) *And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him [evidently people in the church], so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy.* (NKJV)

Doing what politicians do—being careful of whom they are seen with. It could affect their position, it could affect their image, their status, whatever.

14) *But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before them all, "If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews?"*

The whole context is about circumcision actually. What happened to Peter? Something affected his whole attitude and approach, causing him to behave this way, even after what he had overcome, what he had done, and what God had given him. Backing up in verse 6 of Galatians 2, we'll gain some insight here. This is Paul speaking.

Galatians 2:6 *But from those who seemed to be something—whatever they were, it makes no difference to me; God shows personal favoritism to no man—for those who seemed to be something added nothing to me.* (NKJV)

The point here is that politics didn't affect Paul at all; it shouldn't have affected Peter but it did. Again, Peter was given all the power that God gave him. He worked miracles, he explained great truths, yet he had trouble with people whom he thought had power and control—whom they were influencing and with whom they were aligned, because the power and authority that they wield is always about perception. Actually, that's all it is, that's what it's all about. Going on though, and looking at Peter's life, he learned through time and experience, I'm sure, because over in 1 Peter he says something very different from what his conduct is here. In 1 Peter 5, I like the Amplified Bible [Classic Edition, AMPC] for this passage because it really captures the meaning; we're going to read verses 1 through 3. Peter is speaking to the elders of the church. He had learned so much, he was older, and he had a lot more experience coming to this point.

1 Peter 5:1 *I warn and counsel the elders among you (the pastors and spiritual guides of the church) as a fellow elder ... [and here is what he tells them],*
2) *Tend (nurture, guard, guide, and fold) [or, fold into the church] the flock of God that is [your responsibility], not by coercion or constraint, but willingly; not dishonorably motivated by the advantages and profits [belonging to the office], but eagerly and cheerfully;*
3) *Not domineering [as arrogant, dictatorial, and overbearing persons] over those in your charge, but being examples (patterns and models of Christian living) to the flock (the congregation).* (AMPC) [Editor's Note: All bracketed and parenthetical inserts shown in italics are original to the AMPC version; those not in italics are the speaker's commentary.]

He is stating the qualities that a minister should have. Rick Railston gave a two-part sermon on this subject recently. Just going on, a lot of the individuals we've mentioned

up to this point, such as Moses, David, Peter, were the so-called heroes of the Bible. Again, we come right back to the bottom line, that quote from Abraham Lincoln: If you want to test a man's character, give him power. Remember the attitudes, the characteristics of those who abuse power and authority: I'm above the law; whatever the law is, I'm an exception. They spend an awful lot of time enriching themselves or taking care of themselves. They will immediately and ruthlessly attack anyone who threatens their empire, whatever that empire may be. Lastly, they'll find a way to justify any action if it helps them remain in power.

Religious leaders haven't been able to bypass the abuse of power either. I won't mention in detail the Catholic Church and all of its publicized scandals. I have books that highlight all of the really horrible things that have happened down through history in the name of Christianity. I remember Mark Mickelson saying once in a sermon that even the Pentecostals in Nigeria want only money and power. Anywhere you go, it's the same thing, the same pattern. Human nature proves itself wherever we find it, in any religious authority. The church of God hasn't been immune to the evil of the abuse of power and authority. If power doesn't come through God, what's the point?

That brings us to point number three.

3. Some examples of the use and abuse of power in the churches of God.

Let's go over to Mark 10, something quite amazing here. In Mark 10, Jesus and the disciples were on the road to Jerusalem, and He had been telling them about His betrayal, how He would be condemned to death; we're going to break in on the context of Mark 10, verse 34, from the New King James.

Mark 10:34 *and they will mock Him, and scourge Him, and spit on Him, and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again.*" (NKJV)

Then what happens? What are these guys thinking?

35) *Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Him, saying, "Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask."* (NKJV)

He was humoring them, so He asked them a question.

36) *And He said to them, "What do you want Me to do for you?"*

37) *They said to Him, "Grant us that we may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on Your left, in Your glory."* (NKJV)

Those are positions of power.

38) *But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?"*

39) *They said to Him, "We are able." So Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink the cup that I drink, and with the baptism I am baptized with you will be baptized;*

40) *but to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared."*

41) *And when the ten heard it [the others], they began to be greatly displeased with James and John.*

42) *But Jesus called them to Himself and said to them, "You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. (NKJV)*

Consider that they lived under Roman rule, and even though at one time Rome had been a republic, with elected officials, even then the rulers were the landowners, the rich, the elite of Roman society. So James and John knew what they were asking. They wanted top positions in the organization.

43) *Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant.*

44) *And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. (NKJV)*

These guys were probably shocked to hear about a non-dictatorial system.

45) *For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." (NKJV)*

There's an amazing lesson here that I think we have kind of missed as a church. It's been there all the time; maybe human nature just got in the way. Here is Christ, at this point, acknowledging that He understood the limits of the power and authority that He had because He deferred to the Father. So He didn't intervene, but He did tell them that lording it over someone is a very abusive form of government—that's what He was trying to teach them.

As we look around at all these organizations that assumed power after our former association broke apart, all too many of them are plagued by this tendency, they just are. The tendency is to follow the same top-down, business-marketing model they'd been familiar with—the ministry elevated above the brethren, mass advertising, and so forth. Usually to some degree, a controlling leadership style is adopted. It's all worked before, it still will.

Let me interject here, I'm not implying that all organizations are in the wrong or that there aren't good ministries out there; of course there are. I'm not saying that at all. This isn't a diatribe. I'm being fairly mild, actually. My point is that they are all human, just like Moses, Peter, all the rest. All too often, unfortunately, it's power, it's money, it's prestige, it's all of those things, and some individuals will assume an authority that is extra-biblical. It will be self-serving rather than serving of the brethren, which is exactly what Christ warned His apostles about, and it carries down to our day, too. The

brethren suffer under that kind of leadership, unfortunately. The same ego pattern tends to crop up and it's the same sad story—I'm above the law; that rule doesn't apply to me; it applies to everybody else, not me. They spend a tremendous amount of time enriching themselves. Some people are enriched by power, they are enriched by their grandiose vision of a work, and they will attack and suppress—sometimes viciously—anyone who threatens that power base. It's the same pattern; they will justify any means to get the results they want which is mostly just to remain in power. Christ warned His followers to be aware of them.

Even in smaller organizations we'll see the same pattern repeat itself. It seems no one is immune. We'll see patterns where individuals are just filled with ego, vanity, they want to control everything. We continue to see it. It becomes very discouraging. We've seen it repeatedly. For my wife and I, we've been through five organizations. You would think we would have learned some lessons from what the "big dogs" did, but everyone still wants to be the big dog. Isn't that amazing? Unfortunately, these individuals are willing to destroy people if they even hint that they're wrong, because they want total control. That continues to splinter the church, even to this day.

Let's go over to 3 John, an interesting passage; it gives an example of the New Testament church. Just the context here, to kind of get the picture—here is John, who had walked with Christ, who had lain on His breast at the last supper; now he's an elderly apostle, and he's wanting to go visit one of the churches, and yet we see here what happened. John says,

3 John 1:9 *I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us.* (NKJV)

Can you imagine? You're claiming to be a true minister of the church but you won't allow one of the original apostles to visit your church—you can't come to this congregation! That's amazing. It's a good example of what power going to the head can do. Why is this even in the scripture? To teach us something, to show us something. Ministers are to be overseers of the brethren, they are not owners of the brethren. We belong to Christ, we belong to the Father, not to men.

10) *Therefore, if I come [John says], I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren...* (NKJV)

In other words, he is telling people that they can or can't come to church, and is getting rid of anyone who doesn't agree with him.

10 continued) *... and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church.* (NKJV)

Again, getting rid of the people who won't allow him to have the total control that he covets, that he wants. He's afraid to have John come, afraid John might take care of the problem. He's not even going to let John set foot in the door.

11) *Beloved, [what does he say?] do not imitate what is evil ... (NKJV)*

I read into that, don't organize and do things the way the world does. John remembered the lesson that Christ taught him on the road to Jerusalem.

11 repeated) *... do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God. (NKJV)*

That person doesn't know God at all. James Smyda gave a sermon a number of years ago (now in the archives), Know Them By Their Fruits. The point is, what this individual was doing was not a godly use of power and authority. What's described in this account, written nearly 2,000 years ago, could have been written yesterday about too many organizations, unfortunately. It's easy to take potshots at the Catholic Church because they're a big church—hundreds of millions of people—all the sexual problems, the shuffling around of priests, even promoting them, but the church of God did the same. There were men who were adulterers on a regular basis, and the church simply moved them or swept their sins under the rug. One time, I said sarcastically, there's a lot under that proverbial rug, but those in power are standing on the corner—they don't want you to lift it up and let the light shine under it, they just don't.

At one point, the church taught that divorce was wrong but they allowed it in the upper echelons of the organization. Some of us had to separate, even to be baptized. My wife and I can speak to that. I even heard of a case where a minister told a woman that she had to have an abortion. She was ordered to do it because if she didn't, and carried her pregnancy full term, she would make the church look bad. I'm not sure where that happened; I don't even want to know. I'm not trying to depress everybody with all of this, I'm just telling you we are not immune to these kinds of things happening in the church of God, we're just not. I'm not putting down the whole of the church or saying it was all wrong. There were commendable things the church did, and there were good programs, but there were definitely areas of abuse, there just were. Back to the point about human nature—it should never be what we put our trust in. Just a reminder, a reference scripture in Psalm 146, verse 3,

Psalm 146:3 *Do not put your trust in princes, nor in a son of man, in whom there is no help. (NKJV)*

I like the New Living Translation version of that. It says, and this kind of fits right in with what we're talking about,

Psalm 146:3 *Don't put your confidence in powerful people; there is no help for you there. (NLT)*

There just isn't. Unfortunately, we've had a kind of organizational think, what some would call a group think, that it makes a difference what 501(c)(3) type of umbrella organization you're sitting under. Well, it really doesn't, because every one of these groups has individual leaders who should be doing what God directs all of us to do, but sometimes they don't. Again, it's that human element.

One of the greatest abuses of the church, foisted on the members (and this is very similar to what Moses tried to do at the rock, at Meribah) was when the ministry of the church claimed they were the government of God on earth, and if you left the organization and didn't submit to their authority you would lose your salvation—remember that? You wouldn't go to the place of safety; everything depended on them. Unfortunately that generated a cult-like fear in many. We should look back on that in shame because we allowed it to happen. We allowed men to come between us and God. One of the symptoms of an unhealthy, maybe even a toxic church environment, is that there's fear there, and such fear is always the product of intimidation, in all its forms, from the top down.

I would like to quote from an article, "Is the Ministry God's Government?" Some of you may be familiar with it. What is the true government of God?

The true government of God is the rule of God in our lives as we are led by the Holy Spirit. Also it is going to be the rule of Christ through the Kingdom of God on the earth when He returns. The ministry usurped God's own authority and contrary to scripture made it their own. This concept and use of authority becomes devastating, because the leadership took upon themselves the government of God. With that very act, they supplanted God! They may not have fully comprehended what they did. [Remember Moses, that's my addition here. Continuing the quote,]

In doing this they took advantage of the membership. But each one of us has said to God, "You will rule my life." In other words, we are dedicated to God, not to an overlordship ministry, who usurped the authority of Christ to themselves.

The next sleight of hand was the taking of the love, loyalty and faith that we give to God and to the brethren, and transferring it to men. They then exercised hierarchical lordship and authority over the brethren. Such rule is contrary to Jesus Christ's direct command.

Then he goes on to cite Luke 22:24 and 25 where it says,

"And there was also a strife among them, which of these should be accounted the greatest. And He said unto them, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship [Greek, kata-kurieuo] over them; and they that exercise authority [Greek, kata-exousiazo] upon them are called benefactors."

He goes on to explain the meaning of those Greek words—you can look those up, I won't try to pronounce them. The Strong's number for the first one, "exercise lordship", is #2634, and the second one, "exercise authority", is #2715. What they both mean is lordship or authority from the top down. Continuing from the article,

Weren't the ministers called our benefactors as they leveraged this authority to themselves? Yes, they were, but Christ does not want the love, dedication, faith and loyalty that belongs to God and to Christ given to a man.

Why does God not want that leveraged to a man? Because people are then worshiping a man, who becomes an idol in the place of God. Now we are getting to the crux of the issue. Why is it that God does not want the ministry to leverage that love, faith, loyalty and dedication that you give toward God? Because men take God's place. And when they take God's place, what happens? You serve man and you have created a pope, a person in the place of God on earth. We had abusive ministerial authority exercised over us. We were told that these men were our benefactors. Having what belonged to God leveraged subtly into the hands of men was devastating to the people, because they had committed themselves to God, not men.

That's what we all were supposed to have done at our baptism, but continuing:

This was a tremendous sin against the people and against God. God says we are to have no other gods before Him. He is a jealous God. What does God want from you? [What does He want from all of us? Mark 12:30 is quoted, "And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." This is the first commandment.]

Just breaking in to kind of shorten this up a little bit. So what is the result when this happens?

An organization of men steals part of your love of God. Your love and loyalty goes to them instead of to God. God is a jealous God. He called you, and Christ died for you. He doesn't want anything or anyone interfering with that love.

When that love, which should only go to God, is leveraged to a human being or organization, it causes you to love God less because they have diverted the love, which should be directed only to God, to men and their corporate organizations.

He's basically saying you can't serve two masters, and we can't.

Then the vanity of the ministry becomes involved, as evidenced by the authority exercised upon the members.

I'll give the credit to Fred Coulter for that article. That was penned back in the '70s, brethren. What changed? We could focus on that for a long time, stir up a bunch of old

memories, open old wounds, but I don't want to do that; let's just leave it there. My hope, in quoting it, is that we've learned from some of the lessons of the past.

4. How does using power and authority apply to us?

All of us have power in some way, somewhere in our lives. We've been called to someday be kings and priests. In 2 Samuel 23:3, the context here is David's last words. There is a lot in these chapters about David, his closing days.

2 Samuel 23:3 *The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spoke to me [that's the same God, talking about one Being]: 'He who rules over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God. (NKJV)*

Let's turn over to Exodus 18, where Moses appointed the leaders of the tribes over the different branches of the people, because he just couldn't handle everything. That was often used to justify a man-made version of God's government. The fact is that form of government actually came from Jethro, Moses's father-in-law, who suggested it. I'm sure God inspired him to do that. When you think about government, that word is used only twice in the Bible, in Isaiah 9, speaking of Christ, not of anything devised by man. In Exodus 18:21, we're breaking in on the account—Jethro is counseling Moses.

Exodus 18:21 *Moreover you shall select from all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth ... (NKJV)*

Why is that important? If we really know our Bible we would recognize 1 Timothy 3:15, where Paul is giving instruction to Timothy, telling him how to conduct himself in the church of God, which is "the pillar and ground of the truth." Continuing,

21 continued) *... men of truth, hating covetousness [men covet power and authority, maybe even more than they do money, in some cases]; and place such over them to be rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. (NKJV)*

Back to why we should be concerned about it. We all have opportunity to practice that now. What about in our personal relationships, what about in our marriages, what about in child rearing, what about the power of your example? We all have a certain amount of power. Just think about it; how is that power tested? How does that quote from Abraham Lincoln apply to you and me? I paraphrased it a bit—if you want to see what a person is made of, give him or her some power and authority over others.

Thinking about this whole topic in that context, we come to realize why God doesn't make us spirit beings right away, when we're first baptized and first converted—because it's a process. We have to learn over a lifetime and I think God wants us to be aware of our personal faults in this area. To me it's kind of why God allowed Moses to go through what he did, to learn the lessons that he did. Why He allowed David to learn the lessons he did about personal use and abuse of power and authority. We all have

the potential to abuse power in some way in our lives. The real question is how do I use what little I have in this regard? What should my approach and attitude be?

We find some direction for that over in Philippians 1. We do have some control over that. Sometimes it's just a very little bit. Even with the people we deal with on a day-to-day basis. I worked all my life; I don't know about anybody else but I think I've been working since I was about twelve, probably not legally. We used to live out in the country and there was a farmer down the road from us who let us kids go pick grapes and we'd even buck hay, things like that—only doing the hay took two or three of us to lift a bail up and throw it on the truck. What I'm trying to say is, even when I worked, I tried to always maintain the idea in my mind that I needed to respect people, I needed to be civil, I couldn't be my old Irish self. I had to control those things. Philippians 1 gives us some direction about what our approach should be. Paul says,

Philippians 1:27 *Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel, 28) and not in any way terrified by your adversaries [don't be afraid to live God's way of life], which is to them a proof of perdition, but to you of salvation [you don't understand at all what you're doing—most of us have run into that more than once], and that from God.*
29) *For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake ... (NKJV)*

To suffer just means to do it willingly, to be like Christ—not sometimes, not when we feel like it, not when it's convenient, but a way of life. That's what it's talking about there, that's the way we should conduct ourselves. In Philippians 2 we see a little more of this.

Philippians 2:3 *Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. (NKJV)*

It has to do with how we treat one another. Those words pretty much rule out abusing anyone—any abusive conduct at all. They apply to everybody, especially the ministry.

4) *Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. [Continuing the thought.]*
5) *Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus ... (NKJV)*

We may have read right over those words, many times, but it's speaking of everything we do in this life—everything. God and Jesus Christ are the same always. We have that in a couple of places, but over in Jeremiah 9, looking at it from this point of view, there's something a little bit interesting in Jeremiah 9.

Jeremiah 9:23 *Thus says the LORD [Yehovah]: "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, nor let the rich man glory in his riches; (NKJV)*

Who is He talking about? People in power and authority, that's what I see there.

24) But let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight," says the LORD. (NKJV)

Do you find abuse in that last verse? It's just not there, there is no room for it. When you think about the mind of Christ in this whole topic, in a few short months we'll be observing the Passover, and we have the greatest example of all in Christ. You have to think about His last hours, some of the things that happened to Him before His crucifixion—being tortured, beaten, spit on, all of that—in all of that time He could have called down a billion angelic helpers. I don't know what that would be like. It seems to me you would only need a handful because you can't shoot them, you can't bomb them, you can't gas them—but He could have done that at any time and He didn't do it. Look at the immense power, the total control that He had. He didn't use and abuse the power He had, even when He was completely justified in doing so, to stop the torture He was going through. That's a powerful example and something we can remember in every part of our life.

What are you and I doing to gain that power, that mind that is in Christ, because that's where the real power comes from. Maybe that would be a good question for us to ponder every day of our lives. God is calling us to be kings and priests, to share awesome power in His Kingdom—that's going to happen some day. Sometimes we think that's a long way off, and it just doesn't seem like we'll ever get there. We live, we die, but someday that's what we're going to be. We have the example of Jesus Christ, who had tremendous power and refused to use it. Hopefully we have learned those lessons from the past, learned from those examples of abuse, but more importantly, what are we learning today to handle that power, that authority, through God's Holy Spirit that He gives us today, to use in every part of our lives—what are we learning?