

Ministerial Responsibility and Authority

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I'm going to summarize, to begin with, the last two sermons – one on Acts 15 and the other on God's true church government, to kind of set the stage for this third sermon.

In Acts 15, if you recall, we discussed the fact that the number of elders was without doubt in the dozens, if not in the hundreds. And the number of brethren were certainly in the thousands and could have been in a few tens of thousands. Because most all of the brethren and elders resided in Palestine, and with the transportation available relatively easily, the conference in Acts 15 was a large conference. We also saw that the brethren in Antioch, when those came down from Jerusalem preaching that you had to be a Jew first to become a Christian, that Paul and the brethren in Antioch didn't automatically accept it just because they came down from Judea. And even though Paul was an apostle he did not make a unilateral decision right there on the spot, but rather he took the decision to the elders at Jerusalem for a multitude of counsel, and bringing the elders together they were able to reach a consensus. We also saw that the Acts 15 conference was an open conference. There weren't any restrictions in attendance, and it's undoubtedly true that I think the lay members attended. Those that were able and lived locally. It was also obvious that all the elders could give input. There wasn't a small inner circle – they weren't restricted from speaking, and probably the lay members who attended were also able to give input. There was no one man rule, there was no exclusive group in control, and the decision came from a consensus of all of the apostles and all of the elders present there. That is obvious from Acts 15. We also saw that finally, once the consensus was reached and the decision was made, that the church abided by that decision.

In the second sermon, regarding God's true government, we saw that the basis of God's government has to be love. That is who God is. So any government that claims to be God's government has to be based on love. God's government is designed to treat everyone equally. There is no respect of persons with God. There should be no respect of persons in God's church. Everyone should be treated equally. We also saw that God's government is designed to be self-policing. Not that you have a police force in the form of the ministry, but that God's government itself is self-policing. The decision-making process in the New Testament is formed by consensus, guided by God's Holy Spirit, and as we are going to see, it was overseen by the ministry. This consensus process will only work with converted minds, with God's Spirit motivating the thinking of God's people. We also made the point that if you're going to err, if you're uncertain, always err on the side of mercy. The final point that we made, is that God's government above all is for the benefit of His people. It's not to curse His people. It's not to bind burdens on His people. But it's for their benefit.

As we get into this, I would like to remind you that I gave a sermon on October 13, 2007 titled [A True Minister](#), and in that sermon we discussed the characteristics of a true

minister. Some of those will come into play today, but we are going to approach that subject from a bit of a different direction. That sermon would amplify what we are going to talk about today. I'm sure there are many copies floating around if you'd like to find one.

We also want to discuss today, how the process of consensus relates to ministerial authority and responsibility. The subject today is that very thing – ministerial responsibility and ministerial authority. We will also relate it to the process of reaching a decision, or decisions, through consensus.

The first point I'd like to make:

- 1. We can learn about governance from the God family, and from the human family.**

We can learn how God intended human beings to govern themselves in the church by looking at His family, and then by looking at what He set up as the ideal for the human family.

We all know that Christ is head of the church. We, the church, as individual members of the church, are subject to Jesus Christ. I don't think there is any argument about that. But let's go to Ephesians 5 and we're going to read verses 23 and 24. There could be a whole sermon on this subject, but just one scripture to nail this down. Christ is head of the church, and the church should be subject to Him in every way. Notice the analogy here.

Ephesians 5:23 - For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Saviour of the body.

The Greek word for "church" is "Ecclesia". Paul here is drawing the analogy of a husband and wife and their relationship, and the relationship between Christ and the church. He is making a very clear point that Christ is head of the church as the husband is head of the wife. He also mentions that He is savior of the body. We all know that Christ's body is the church, and it is through His sacrifice that we are saved. Now, verse 24:

Ephesians 5:24 - Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so *let* the wives *be* to their own husbands in everything.

We see here that the church is also subject to Jesus Christ in every way. The church here is an analogy to a wife, His bride. We understand that one of our chief purposes, as a group, is to make the Bride ready for this marriage. Since we are subject to Jesus Christ, as we see here in these two verses, we should seek His will in every way and in all things. We should seek Christ's will, because He is the head, we are subject to Him, so shouldn't we therefore want to do it His way and seek His will? Of course.

We are the children of God, and we are members of God's family, right now and right here. Romans 8 and verse 16. This is very clear – we are children of God **now**. God

looks down on us, and I don't care if we're 100 years old, or we're asleep under a table somewhere as a little baby, it doesn't make any difference. Relative to God having the perspective of eternity, we are all little kids. We stumble, we fall. It's amazing to see how God made little kids. We have a granddaughter who just turned one, and is just learning to walk, and little kids, their torso is very long and their little legs are short. They have a lot of padding on the behind, and when they fall, they don't have to go very far, and they're padded on the way down when they hit. God designed it that way, I'm firmly convinced. But God looks at us the same way. We get up and try to walk, we stumble, we fall, we make mistakes – we are little children to God. Notice Romans 8 and verse 16.

Romans 8:16 - The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.

The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God – no question about that.

Now, in a family, the children are all subject to the husband and wife, are they not? And therein lays the model for governance in the church. Children are subject to their parents. Children are subject ultimately to the father. In families, there is a system of governance whereby decisions are reached. In a proper family, decisions are reached in a loving process, based on open communication and valuable input from each member. I'm not talking about a little one year old. But as the children get older and they begin to think for themselves, and they begin to develop their own personalities, loving parents will listen to what their children say, and will take it into consideration when decisions are made. They have open communication with their children – they welcome communication with their children. We have seen families where the opposite is true – kids are told to shut up and be quiet. Communication isn't desired or wanted, but that is not the way it should be in a Godly family. All decisions are made on the authority and the final decision of the husband and the father of the family. We see a model developed.

Christ said, "The Father is greater than I". He doesn't know when He's coming unless the Father tells Him. Let's go to Ephesians 6 now, with that in mind that children are subject in this life to their parents, and especially in the final decision to the father, and we understand that Christ is the head of the church as the father is head of the family. Let's read the first two verses of Ephesians 6 with this in mind.

Ephesians 6:1-2 - Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.
² "Honour your father and mother"—which is the first commandment with promise

So we, if we take the model from the family, we the children of God should obey God and Jesus Christ. We should honor our father and our mother, as human beings, and we should honor God our Father and we should honor Jesus Christ as head of the church, and we should honor the church itself. After all, it is the body of Jesus Christ. We should honor one another.

The Father and Christ love their children and provide for their protection and instruction and love, and that results in peace and harmony within the body. God loves each one of us with a love we can hardly comprehend. Christ loves each one of us to the point that He gave Himself for each one of us before we were even born. Christ loves those who spat on Him and who abused Him, with a love that we can hardly comprehend. But God and Christ love their children today, in the church, they provide protection for their children in the church, they provide instruction to teach us how to become the Bride of Christ, and they do so in love. If we follow that the result is peace and harmony and unity in the family.

In order to make the happen, God and Christ decided to do something to aid the church, the brethren. God gave servants to the church to help the children along the path towards salvation. God gave servants to aid and help along this path because He loves the children, He cares for the children. So to help them along the path He gave them physical servants to help them, to help them become the Bride of Christ. Let's go to Ephesians chapter 4, to a very familiar scripture, but let's look at it from the standpoint of God's love for His children and the fact that He provides help for His children. Ephesians 4, and we'll read verses 11 and 12.

Ephesians 4:11 - And He Himself gave...

He gave....this is a gift from God. We haven't earned it.

Ephesians 4:11 - And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers,

The Greek word for "pastor" here means shepherd. Why did God do that? To beat us up? To punish us? To hammer us? Verse 12:

Ephesians 4:12 - for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry...

That word "ministry" in the Greek is "diakonia" and it means servant or service, to serve. The ministry is there as servants.

Ephesians 4:12 - for the edifying of the body of Christ

These servants that Christ and God the Father gave the church are for edifying, for teaching, for perfecting. To help people along the path to be the Bride of Christ. Notice, in Matthew chapter 20, how he wants these servants to behave, and what their role is and what their directive is. Matthew 20 and we're going to read verses 25 through 28. I'm going to read it out of the New Living Translation because it makes it a little bit clearer and has a twist that is very important.

Matthew 20:25 - But Jesus called them together and said, "You know that in this world, kings are tyrants, and officials lord it over the people beneath them.

We see that out of Washington today. If we lived 500 years ago we could have seen it in the Kings of Europe and England, and down through the ages. Notice verse 26:

Matthew 20:26-28 - But among you it should be quite different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant,
²⁷ and whoever wants to be first among you must become your slave.
²⁸ For even I, the Son of Man, came here not to be served but to serve others and to give my life as a ransom for many.

So what we see here, is these helps, these servants, are there to serve others. But in the past, it has been flip-flopped 180 degrees. The servants became the ones to be served, and the ones to be served became the one serving. In many cases it was just warped into something that should not be. All of these servants, we find here in Matthew 20 and Ephesians 4, are lowly assistant shepherds. That's all ministers are – very lowly assistant shepherds to the true shepherd, the great shepherd, which is Jesus Christ. And the fact is, that the children of God, the sheep that they are to help – they don't belong to these servants. They don't belong to the ministry. These sheep, or the brethren, belong to God the Father and Jesus Christ as head of the church and as chief shepherd. They belong to God and Christ and not to the ministry. Some people seem confused about that. Some leaders of groups act as though they own the sheep – that they're the kings and the sheep are their subjects and they better have the relationship of king to serfs. That should not be. We hear comments like, "You better stay with me or you won't be in the Place of Safety." Or, "You better be with me or you'll lose your crown." The ministry does not own the brethren – God and Jesus Christ do. It is quite common today to have that relationship between ministry and brethren to be a relationship of fear. "If you're not with me, you're going to go into the lake of fire." Or "If you don't do what I tell you, I'm going to cast you out and you will be in deep trouble"

Notice II Corinthians 1 and verse 24. The New Testament says something that backs up what I just said, and quite often in the past we've ignored this verse. Notice what Paul says to this very troubled Corinthian church where they had to cast a guy out, and then they took him back and all this – notice what he says.

II Corinthians 1:24 - Not for that we have dominion over your faith...

He's talking about the ministry – he's an apostle. He says, "I don't have dominion over your faith" The Phillips says, "We are not trying to dominate you and your faith..." We're not trying to be lords in the sense that Christ said, "they are lording it over you" that we read in Matthew chapter 20. Going on in verse 24:

II Corinthians 1:24 - ...but are fellow workers for your joy; for by faith you stand.

The implication is your faith, and the faith of Jesus Christ in you. It is very obvious when you look at the entirety of the New Testament, that ministers are there to serve. Lowly assistant shepherds to the true shepherd Jesus Christ, and these servants don't own the people and don't dominate the people. They should never do that. The focus should be to God and to Jesus Christ, and not to a man.

So, what have we seen here in point #1? We've seen that Christ is head of the church and we as the church are subject to Him in every way. That the Father and Christ love their children, their kids, they protect us, they instruct us in love, and the result should be peace and harmony, as we all have the mind of Christ. God, in His love, gave servants to the church to help the children along the path towards spiritual maturity and toward becoming the Bride of Christ.

2. Though servants, the ministry have a responsibility and an accountability to God.

This is scary to me, as a minister. We are responsible to God for certain things, and He holds us accountable. Shame on us if we don't follow through with our responsibility, and we don't recognize this accountability.

What are some areas where ministers are held accountable for a responsibility?

A. To feed the brethren, the sheep.

Again, in the analogy of a family, a mother feeds and nourishes her children doesn't she? From her own body in the beginning. The ministry has that job physically and spiritually to the brethren in the church, the body of Jesus Christ. Let's go to John chapter 21 and see a very direct command by Jesus Christ to the apostle Peter. He knew Peter was going to deny Him three times, so Christ asked him three times about how much Peter loved him. John 21 and verse 15.

John 21:15 - So when they had dined, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, *son* of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?"
He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You."
He said to him, "Feed My lambs."

I want you to feed them. I don't want you to abuse them, or ignore them, I want you to feed them.

John 21:16-17 - He said to him again a second time, "Simon, *son* of Jonah, do you love Me?"
He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You."
He said to him, "Tend My sheep."
¹⁷ He said to him the third time, "Simon, *son* of Jonah, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?"
And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You."
Jesus said to him, "Feed My sheep."

The word "feed" is Strong's 1006, and it is the Greek word "Bosko" and it means "to pasture, to lead to pasture, to graze, to keep sheep" The implication is, if you lead sheep to a good pasture, where there is plenty of water, plenty of grass, and no wolves and predators around, they will prosper, they will grow. Notice what Peter did after Christ died and then the church grew, and there were other ministers ordained. Did he forget this admonition? Did he just walk away from it and just start another focus? Or

did he continue with what Christ had told him? Let's go to I Peter 5, and we're going to read the beginning of verse 1 for context, and then read verses 2 and 3. Peter is talking to the elders – he had a ministerial meeting.

I Peter 5:1 - The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder...

I am one of you, I am an elder just like you are. Yes, he was an apostle, but he wanted to remind them that he was an elder also. Verse 2:

I Peter 5:2 - Shepherd [feed] the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly [of a ready mind];

The New International translates “ready mind” as, “eager to serve” – to be the servant that Christ talked about in Matthew 20.

I Peter 5:3 - Neither as being lords over God's heritage...

The same thing that Christ said in Matthew 20...

I Peter 5:3 - ...but being examples to the flock.

What he's telling the ministry is, “your example is far more than the words you say”, and we have seen situations where people up at the pulpit said one thing and then their person example is something totally different. As the old saying goes, “Your example is shouting so loud at me, I can't hear a word you're saying” So he is reiterating the fact that the minister's example, how you live your life, how you treat other people, how your marriage is, how your children are, how you react to bad news, how you react to good news, what your attitude is, says far more than the words that you happen to speak from a pulpit.

But he said, “feed the flock of God” in verse 2. This is a different Greek word, it is Strongs 4165. Thayer's says it means, “to feed or to tend a flock, to keep sheep”. Another meaning is “to rule or govern” And of course that's what a shepherd does – he rules and governs the sheep. He makes sure they're all together and protected, he makes sure that if they're injured he takes care of them, he keeps them out of harms way, he leads them into good pasture and good water. So in that sense, he rules or governs the sheep.

Let's see what Paul had to say about the subject – Acts chapter 20 and verse 28. We are talking about the first ministerial responsibility about feeding the sheep. Paul called a meeting of the elders in verse 17 of Acts 20. We won't go there, but that's just to set the context. Notice verse 28:

Acts 20:28 - Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to feed [Strongs 4165] the church of God, which he has purchased with his own blood.

That is something awesome to think about, when you understand the accountability and responsibility of a minister. Paul is saying, “Look, these folks have been purchased with the very blood of Jesus Christ and you better take care of them. You better watch over them. They’re here and you need to serve them, and you need to lead them on the path to salvation and nothing else. These are not your toys, these are not your subjects or your servants – they are God’s people, purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ.” Too often that is forgotten.

Therefore, the ministry has a responsibility to provide good pasture, in the analogy of sheep, which would mean a good environment – a safe environment, a loving environment, where people are not abused and feel comfortable and happy. A minister is responsible to feed them spiritually and to help them physically. In the first epistle of John, he tells us, if we see our brother in need and we don’t extend help, how can the love of God be in us? Needy can be spiritually needy or physically needy. If we see our brother hungry, we better do something about it! So, as I said before, the ministry has the responsibility to provide good pasture, and to feed the sheep physically and spiritually. Also to determine what they are fed. The shepherd determines this. He makes sure they are not fed poison, or substandard food. That is so very important – that is a responsibility of the ministry.

B. To protect the brethren

An analogy would be, if a minister led the sheep to this beautiful pasture, this beautiful meadow, with long sweet grass, and the sheep were out there just calmly feeding, and all of a sudden out of the woods at the border of the pasture, he could see wolves looking in at the pasture. That would be an analogy of something that he needs to be very careful about.

In our statement of values on our website, which we spent countless hours developing, it says, “We welcome brethren who desire to meet in unity and peace with us.” The key is, unity and peace. We want brethren to feel free to come, as long as they are willing to meet in unity and in peace. The flipside of that, is that we cannot and will not allow wolves or snakes or demons into the sheepfold. That is a responsibility that the minister has as a shepherd – he is watching the borders of the meadow to make sure that predators aren’t waiting to pick off the sheep. Look at John 10 – we’re going to read verse 1 to set the context, as this is a whole parable obviously, and we’ve covered that before. We’ll read verse 1 to set the context and then focus on verse 10. Christ starts off this parable by focusing on one particular aspect of the sheepfold.

John 10:1 - Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber.

And later on, He makes the point that He is the door – you must come through Him. But if you want to jump over this rock wall that was the sheepfold of the day, then you are obviously a thief and a robber. In verse 10 He amplifies that.

John 10:10 - The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy.

We have to be very aware of the fact that Satan inspires individuals, we have called them plants in times past, tares in times past. He plants those to come into the church to steal and to kill and to destroy, because that is exactly what Satan wants to do to God's people. He wants to kill us! He wants to steal us away from God's church, and ultimately to destroy us permanently and forever. Christ continues in verse 10:

John 10:10 - ... I have come that they may have life, and that they may have *it* more abundantly.

And these lowly assistant shepherds are here to help achieve that goal, where the brethren have a life that is more abundant than they had before. We do our best to be kind and gentle and forbearing of God's people. But, there are limits. We have to understand that.

I have a short fuse in three areas, and I believe it is biblically sound. We will be kind and gentle and patient and loving, but in three areas, God says, we cannot just ignore this. Let's look at these three areas.

1. Heresy

The ministry is responsible for heresy from coming into the church. At the demise of Worldwide it was just the opposite – heresy was welcomed into the church! Notice Titus 3 and verse 10. Titus is an elder, and Christ is talking through Paul about the qualifications in an elder. But notice what He says to this elder – He is giving him an admonition. This elder now, given the communication and transportation limitations, had to function on his own – he couldn't pick up the phone or write an email.

Titus 3:10 - A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject;

Three strikes and you're out! You admonish once, you admonish twice, and if it happens a third time, he is gone. No questions asked – he is gone. Hopefully not forever, if he repents and is brought back. But you don't mess around – you don't just go on and on. This is not the case of leaving the 99 and going after the one, and just go after and after with a heretic. I have a short fuse with heresy.

2. Division and the destruction of peace.

We are called to peace – that is our moniker, our name. That's one of the things we stand for. So if someone comes in to destroy peace by causing division, I have a very short fuse for that, and you do too, I would hope – every one of you. Look at Proverbs 22 and verse 10. A favourite scripture of mine, because I've seen it work,

Proverbs 22:10 - Cast out the scorner, and contention shall go out; yea, strife and reproach shall cease.

This tells us very clearly that if somebody is a scorner, somebody who talks evil of people, or talks evil of the ministry, or there's always a conspiracy going on, or there's

always some problem, or there's always these hidden agendas – it causes people untold upset. We're told that you cast the person out and peace is the result.

Back in the old Yakima church 20 years ago, in the days of Worldwide, we had a couple move in, who came from a different part of the country. Within 2 or 3 weeks, we had had a peaceful congregation, and there was all of a sudden an unsettled feeling. There was this back and forth, people over in the corner, all this kind of stuff going on, and it built up month after month, week after week. Within a few months I was putting out fires all over the place. You look around and say, "What is going on here?!" and finally the light bulb comes on and you think, "Okay, before they arrived (it was the man, not the woman) we had peace, but the fruits of this man has cause chaos in the church." There was always a problem, always something he was upset about. Going around getting other people upset! And then, they decided to move away. Within two weeks, the church returned to its former peaceful state. I learned a powerful lesson from that – cast out a scorner and the strife ceases. We have a very short fuse with those who cause division and those who will destroy peace. We are all here in part because we want peace. We're tired of strife and trouble and upset and turmoil. Yes, we're loving and kind and gentle, but if somebody is just bent on destroying the peace, we're not going to tolerate that, for everyone's benefit. Christ says that the sheep should be in a peaceful pasture, and shame on us if we don't provide that.

3. The abuse of the brethren.

If brethren are being abuse, if sheep are being abused, guess what the shepherd should do? He shouldn't tolerate that one bit. Look at Psalm 82 and verse 3 – something that is a general principle, but applies to the ministry in this context of protecting the sheep. Something that a shepherd should be always on the lookout for.

Psalm 82:3 - Defend the poor and fatherless: do justice to the afflicted and needy.

I'm telling you, there are poor and fatherless amongst us. There are spiritually needy and physically needy people. We need to do justice to them and defend them. If someone comes in and starts abusing the brethren, that sharp end of a shepherd's staff is used for a purpose! That pointed end will go after somebody and drive them off. We will not put up with that, because God wouldn't put up with that. The widows, the fatherless, the needy – God wants the shepherd to, as he would a sheep that is hurt or injured, you get ointment out. The shepherd had a bag with ointments and herbs to take care of sheep who had been cut or hurt in some way. It was his job to take care of them. Protecting the brethren is an important part of a minister's job, and especially to protect them from heresy and division and removing abuse. That's when the sharp end of a shepherd's staff comes into play.

It is a minister's responsibility, a shepherd's responsibility, to comfort and care for the brethren. Comfort and care for them! It used to be the joke, and it was a sad joke, that back in the Worldwide days the brethren's purpose was "to pray and pay!" – that was it. That is not the purpose of the brethren. Their purpose is to become like Jesus Christ –

to be the Bride of Jesus Christ. Look at James 1 and verse 27. If an apostle says, "I'm going to tell you what pure religion is", our ears should perk up, our antennas should go up, because we want to know what pure religion is!

James 1:27 - Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction...

Because the fatherless and the widow are afflicted, as are many others when they are hurt or abused.

James 1:27 - ...and to keep himself unspotted from the world.

We see here that there is an obligation to the fatherless and the widows, the afflicted, to take care of them. That is a ministerial responsibility.

Notice how this is done – we find this in II Corinthians 1 verses 3 and 4. This is how it works, or how it **should** work. There is a process whereby we can comfort and care for the brethren – all of us, but particularly the ministry.

II Corinthians 1:3 - Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort;

This tells us that God is not a harsh God. He is not waiting for the shoe to drop. He doesn't have the axe over our neck just waiting to chop our head off. But rather, He is a Father of mercy, and He is a God of all comfort. Verse 4:

II Corinthians 1:4 - Who comforts us in all our tribulation...

Why does He do that? So we can just sit on that comfort and do nothing with it? No.

II Corinthians 1:4 - ...that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble...

So we get comfort from God so that we can turn around and give it to others.

II Corinthians 1:4 - ...by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.

You see, God is the God of all comfort, through His Holy Spirit and His love. He comforts us because we love Him and He loves us. He's saying "Don't sit on my comfort. Don't just waste it and do nothing with it. But take the comfort I give you through my Holy Spirit and shed it abroad to others who are afflicted, who are going through trials."

In order to fulfill that role, a minister has to be approachable. You have to have a relationship with the brethren and the sheep. If you never associate with the sheep how can you be a good shepherd? If you don't know the sheep, how do you know what their

problems are? If you don't walk around among the sheep, how do you know when one of them is lame or cut or diseased or sick? You don't!

Notice II Timothy 2 and verse 24. You have to be approachable. The sheep have to feel free to come and talk to you! Paul is telling this young minister something very profound and very fundamental.

II Timothy 2:24 - And the servant of the Lord must not strive...

Now the Greek word for "strive" is Strongs 3164, and it's root means, "to make war". So a minister can't have a war-like spirit. Ready to fight, short fuse, ready to double up the fists! He continues:

II Timothy 2:24 - ...but be gentle unto all, apt to teach, patient,

Now if somebody is not a striver, not a war-monger, but is gentle and apt to teach and is very patient, then the people will come and talk. They will know they're not going to be yelled at or screamed at or something like that. Notice James 3 and verse 17 – talking about wisdom from God Almighty. Again, under the subject of comforting and caring for the brethren as a ministerial responsibility. Notice what James, an apostle, half brother of Jesus Christ says:

James 3:17 - But the wisdom that is from above is first pure...

No agendas, no pollution.

James 3:17 - ...then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated...

The New Living translation translates "easy to be entreated" as "willing to yield to others." – not insisting that it's my way or the highway. We're not talking about God's law, but ways of doing things, approaches.

James 3:17 - ...full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.

Saying one thing, and doing something else. James 3:17 has a mouthful of instruction on how all of us should be, but particularly how ministers should be.

Notice that Paul followed these admonitions. I Thessalonians 2 and verse 7 – notice how he says he was among the brethren. He didn't have a whip and a chair. He didn't come pompously strutting in, saying "I'm here now! I'm going to tell you how it is!" We've seen that before. But notice Paul's attitude and his reminder to the church in Thessalonica.

I Thessalonians 2:7 - But we were gentle among you, even as a nursing mother cherishes her own children

That's the way a minister should be in comforting and caring for the brethren. A nursing mother doesn't slap the baby around! The nursing mother does not keep the baby from nursing and getting nourishment. The nursing mother doesn't yell and scream at the child. The nursing mother is very kind and very gentle, with this little tiny nursing baby. So a shepherd must tend to those who are hurt and sick. But in the past, all too often, brethren were afraid to go to the minister because of fear, they were going to be yelled at or rejected, or not feeling welcome to come up to the minister. The minister made them feel by body language or tone of voice, that he wishes he was somewhere else, he wishes they wouldn't bother him, he's got better things to do. Or being made to feel stupid and put down. I had a lady write me the other day, from this area, and she said, "I never asked questions before, because when I did I was made to feel stupid. I was made to feel like I should already know this." So when people are made to feel stupid, guess what they do? They don't come back! They don't ask anymore! None of us wants to be put in that position.

The summary of ministerial responsibility is that the ministers are responsible and accountable in their service to the brethren. They are responsible to serving, but they are also held accountable for serving. Look at Hebrews 13 and verse 17. This is a scary scripture for an elder. Usually the very first sentence was the one that was emphasized. And yes, it's true, and yes, it's there and I'm not diminishing that in any way at all.

Hebrews 13:17 - Obey them that have the rule over you and submit yourselves...

Yes, in these responsibilities that we've just outlined, you need to obey those that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves.

Hebrews 13:17 - ...for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account...

That is the scary thing for a minister. It's not all do this, do that, and this pompous exercise of authority. It's that they must watch for your life as a shepherd watches the life of the sheep, and he's looking out there to make sure no predators are coming around or no disease begins to infect the flock, or that some poisoned food has entered in. He is watching for the sheep. But a minister has to give account to God for how he treats the sheep. How he looks after the sheep, how he talks to the sheep and addresses the sheep. Continuing on:

Hebrews 13:17 - ...that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.

Don't be rebellious sheep, don't be contrary. Let me just read this out of the Phillip's, to give it a different slant.

Hebrews 13:17 - Obey your rulers and recognise their authority. They are like men standing guard over your spiritual good, and they have great responsibility.

Try to make their work a pleasure and not a painful burden—by so doing you will help not only them but yourselves. **[Phillips Translation]**

I lay awake at night, I don't sleep some nights because I'm concerned about this person or that person. Dorothy will tell you. I get sometimes 2 or 3 hours of sleep because I wake up at night thinking about somebody. I'm concerned and worried and I feel accountable and responsible.

So let's understand, God holds the ministry responsible and accountable for their service to the brethren, and He delineates what that service is and where they are responsible to Him, and where they therefore have authority.

C. Because God holds the ministry responsible and accountable, therefore He gives the ministry authority to back up the responsibility.

For those of you who have been in business, I have been in situations where I had the responsibility to do something, but I didn't have the authority to do it, and that is a horrible thing. They want you to do this job, but they don't give you the authority to do the job. You can't do it – you are just doomed to failure. You're going to fail sooner or you're going to fail later, but sooner or later you **are** going to fail. And God won't do that to the ministry. He gives them the authority to back up the responsibility – that is only fair. Look at II Timothy 4, and we're going to read the first two verses. We'll do it out of the NIV because it's a little more clear. When we read verse 1, this is about as strong as an elder can get with another elder. Or in this case, an apostle with an elder – it can't get any stronger than this! Paul is saying to Timothy:

II Timothy 4:1-2 - In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge:

² Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction.

If you give instruction to somebody it needs to be so clear that there is no doubt about what the minister wants from you. You can't do a job if you don't know what they want. If you don't understand your boss's expectations of you, how can you fulfill those expectations if they've never been said?

So let's understand this. Preaching the word, correcting, rebuking and encouraging are jobs that a minister has the authority to do. The authority to preach the word – the word is the food that feeds the flock. The minister has a responsibility for determining what the flock is fed as far as food goes. And also then, to correct when necessary, to rebuke when necessary, and to obviously encourage. All done with great patience.

Let's look at an example. The most obvious example we find in I Corinthians 5, where this horrible sin was going on in the church – this young man was having sexual relations with his step-mother, the church knew about it and they were winking. Apparently nobody applied Matthew 18 or Matthew 5, nobody applied Galatians 6 and

verse 1 – none of that was done, it was just winked at. So what did Paul do? Did he have a group meeting? Did he take a show of hands? I Corinthians 5 and verse 3:

I Corinthians 5:3-6 - For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that has done this deed,

⁴In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ,

⁵To deliver such a one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

⁶Your glorying is not good. Know you not that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?

He says, “You get that guy out of here” – he didn’t seek a consensus. He wasn’t even there. He had a responsibility to protect the flock and he acted immediately. He just did it, because he has the authority to back up his responsibility, and we need to understand that. Let’s go to II Corinthians 13 and verse 10. Paul reiterates this in his second letter that we have canonized. Now, remember, the man was disfellowshipped, but he was later brought back. The Spirit was saved in that regard, and he repented, which was in part why this letter was written. But notice II Corinthians 13 and verse 10.

II Corinthians 13:10 - Therefore I write these things being absent, lest being present I should use sharpness...

The NIV says “harshness”. He says, “I’m going to write you a letter, but boy, if I was there, I wouldn’t spare you. I would be very blunt and maybe even harsh.”

II Corinthians 13:10 - ...according to the power which the Lord has given me to edification, and not to destruction.

As far as edification, the Corinthians were tolerating this sin, so he edified them and said, “You can’t do this, for this reason and this reason and this reason!” He was edifying them and teaching them that they were wrong in letting this sin to go on in their presence. But then he says, “not for destruction” because the action he took resulted in the man repenting and coming back. So the man wasn’t destroyed, and the brethren weren’t destroyed in the Lake of Fire by allowing sin to pollute them and pervert them, as a little leaven leavens the whole lump.

So the point here is that God gave the ministry the authority to feed and comfort and protect the brethren. He gave them the responsibility, but also the authority. With all of this in mind, we come to the fourth point:

D. How does the process of reaching a consensus relate to ministerial authority and responsibility?

Some people could draw the erroneous conclusion that consensus is democracy. Consensus is that we take a vote every time we want to do something. Is that the way it should be? Of course not. And I will have to admit to you, I have used the term

“consensus government” before, and I should not have used that term, because it is not a correct term as far as we are concerned in the Church of God. Rather, consensus is a **process** of arriving at a decision, guided by the Holy Spirit. It is a process of decision making.

With a dictator, there is no discussion. There is no consensus or getting people’s opinion – he just makes a decision and that’s it. Very efficient, doesn’t take a lot of time, and depending on whether a dictator is a good one or a bad one, you might have a bad decision or a good decision. But consensus is a process of arriving at a decision guided by God’s Holy Spirit. It can occur within the ministry, as we talked about in the first sermon in Acts 15. A consensus among the ministry was reached on how to deal with this problem. It can occur within a congregation. As the members of the Pacific Church of God, we looked at various Feast sites for a satellite Feast site, and narrowed it down to a few. John went over and looked at the number one site, came back with a report, everybody talked about it, and decided that this is where we wanted to go. It happened within a congregation.

It can also occur within a family. Get the kids together, mom and dad together, you discuss an issue, “where do we go for a vacation” or whatever. I remember my Dad did that with us. We lived in El Paso, and he got a chance to go to Santa Fe, NM for a promotion and we all packed in the car, went up to Santa Fe, looked at the town, talked about it, came back and everyone talked and he made the decision to stay based on everybody’s input. So it can occur within a family.

So with consensus being a **process** of arriving at a decision, the important thing is that all members have input and they are listened to with respect. The desire of consensus is to reach a decision that Christ would reach if He were present. We are here to do Christ’s will, and if God guides all the brethren as they discuss, and guides them with the Holy Spirit, then we will arrive at a Christ-like decision. It is a process of decision making.

So in addition to the responsibilities that we’ve already talked about for the ministry, part of a minister’s responsibility is to oversee that process. To oversee the process of arriving at a decision through consensus. We’re not talking about whether we should keep the Sabbath! We’re not talking about in I Corinthians 5 whether this guy should continue his relationship with his step-mother or not. We’re talking about decisions that affect the congregation.

Look at Acts chapter 20 and we’re going to start in verse 17. Part of a minister’s responsibility is to oversee the process of making decisions, to oversee the conduct of the church.

Acts 20:17-18 - And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church.

¹⁸And when they were come to him, he said unto them...

And then it goes on and on, but look at verse 28:

Acts 20:28 - Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers...

God's Holy Spirit has made the ministry overseers. That Greek word for "overseer" is Strong's 1985 and it's the Greek word "episkopos", where we get the English word "Episcopal". In the King James it is translated "Bishop" six times, and then once "overseer" as we read right here. Thayer says this about the word "overseer", now think about this, "A man charged with the duty of seeing that things done by others are done correctly." To oversee the activities of others, to make sure that they are done correctly, meaning according to God's way and will. A second meaning means, "A superintendent, elder, or overseer of a Christian church". The root word for overseer, "episkopos" is the Greek word "episkopeo" and it means "to look diligently, to beware". Look at this very carefully, make sure it's done rightly and correctly, make sure it's done according to God's word, as an overseer or a superintendent.

So the ministry is there to make sure that all that is done is in order and according to God's will. Let's go to I Corinthians 14 and verse 33 – a very famous scripture. A minister's responsibility is to oversee this process of consensus, to make sure it all goes according to the will of God.

I Corinthians 14:33 - For God is not the author of confusion...

We read that and often stop there, but notice the rest of the verse:

I Corinthians 14:33 - ...but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.

God is the author of peace – that is something that we all seek. We seek peace, not confusion. We should run away from confusion. One of the elder's responsibilities is to make sure that there is no confusion, no anarchy. Notice verse 40, related to this topic.

I Corinthians 14:40 - Let all things be done decently and in order.

That is a responsibility of the elders to oversee this consensus way of making decisions, to make sure it is done decently and in order.

Now let's jump to Titus 1 and verse 5, and see that Paul made an instruction to Titus about the responsibilities of an elder, and he gave him instruction on how things ought to be done.

Titus 1:5 - For this cause left I you in Crete [an island in the eastern Mediterranean, west of Israel], that you should set in order the things that are wanting...

Or that have not been done. He is giving him this charge, go there and make sure all the knots are tied. Pick up all the loose ends, put it together and make sure everything is done decently and in order. To set in order the things that are wanting. And he goes on to say:

Titus 1:5 - ...and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed you:

Part of chapter 1 and going on are the qualifications of an elder. He wants to make sure that he didn't ordain anyone that was not qualified. But the fact is, that Titus was given the commission, the responsibility, of making sure that things were done correctly. If something is undone, if a knot is untied, he looks at it and makes sure that it gets tied up, so that we don't have chaos and confusion.

Let's understand how consensus decision making relates to ministerial responsibility – the ministers are responsible for overseeing the process, to make sure that everything is done according to God's will, decently and in order. He needs to be very aware, and it says to "be aware" of what is going on, and to point them in the right direction, according to God's will.

Let's conclude with something very important to understand about ministerial authority and responsibility. I think we see how it relates to consensus forms of making decisions, we understand what ministerial responsibility is, and that there is corresponding authority and we understand that we have a model in God's family and in the human family, of how we should relate to authority within the church.

But what is the work of a true minister? What is his ultimate goal? What should be the overriding principle that dominates his thinking and his actions? It's found in Colossians chapter 1 and verse 25 through 28 – this is what should dominate the mind of a true minister.

Colossians 1:25 - Wherefore I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God;

He says that he has been made a minister for your benefit. Verse 26:

Colossians 1:26-27 - Even the mystery which God has hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints:

²⁷To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory:

We have no hope of glory if Christ isn't in us. Let this mind be in you which is in Christ Jesus. Let God's Spirit be in you, because that is the definition of a Christian. Verse 28:

Colossians 1:28 - Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus:

That Greek word means, "complete". That is his goal – to help everyone become spiritually complete. To fill what is lacking in a person's life.

You cannot help complete someone if you are ignoring them. You cannot help complete someone who you have no relationship with. You cannot help complete someone who you are abusing. If you're whacking on them with a stick, how can you help complete

them? Therefore, a true minister must have a personal relationship with each of the brethren based on his love for them, through God's Holy Spirit.

Our last scripture is I Thessalonians 2 and verse 19. Paul is saying, "What is my ultimate hope? What is my ultimate joy?" This is the focus, the goal, the work of a true minister. To perfect the Saints so that something happens. We find that in I Thessalonians 2 and verse 19.

I Thessalonians 2:19 - For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?

He said, "My whole focus is to make sure you are there when Christ returns! To make sure that you are a part of the body of Christ. That is why I am here! That defines my thoughts, my actions, my every waking moment – is to make sure that you will be there when Christ returns. You will be the Bride." If a minister's goal is anything less than that, it is self-serving. It is in a wrong focus or a wrong direction. And for decades, I think in many cases, we have ignored that. The minister is not there to be served, the minister is not there to exalt himself, the minister is not there to be worshipped or to be the King over his servants. The minister is not there to have power and authority and control, but the minister is there to be of service, to help the brethren down the path to become perfect and complete so that they can be the Bride of Christ. He has to be a living sacrifice to make that happen. In order to do that, God holds the minister responsible and accountable, and He gives him the authority to back up the responsibility that God has given him. But it is all to be done with love, kindness, gentleness, goodness, mercy and all the fruits of God's Holy Spirit.