

Human Authorities—God’s Servants

By Denny Kenaston

Many times we do not see God’s gifts as God’s gifts. Sometimes we need eyes and ears to see the gifts that God brings our way. We need to learn more about authority. Our human authorities are God’s servants.

Authority is a Bible word; you will find it in the Bible 36 times. You will have to look at two different words; one is the English word authority, and the other word is power, which is translated from two different Greek words, *dunamis* and *exousia*, which both mean power. One means mighty power and the other means authority.

The definition can be found in “Vines Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words.” It is a very revealing definition of the word authority. Many people don’t like the word authority. Maybe they have had bad experiences with the word. Perhaps they are bit reserved when they hear the word authority. It is a Bible word and this is what it means: “Authority is the power or right to enforce obedience.” Perhaps you read that definition and thought, “Whoa! Wait a minute!” That is exactly why we need to take a look at this subject. That word should not cause reactions inside our hearts, but many times it does.

Five Types of Human Authority

In 1988 the congregation did some brainstorming on the subject of authority. We took this subject of authority and looked at the different types of human authority that God has given to man. We opened it up to the congregation to share different ways in which human authorities affect our lives. There are five areas of human authority that God in His loving-kindness has given to man:

1. **Parental Authority**, applies to all, God uses this in our lives.
2. **Marital Authority**, God has placed a wife under her husband.
3. **Governmental Authority**, we find ourselves continually face to face with them.
4. **Ministerial Authority**, if we are born again we are under our ministers.
5. **Occupational Authority**, if you work for someone you are under their authority.

Let’s look at each one. Parental authority is laid out clearly in Scripture. “*Children, obey your parents in the Lord for this is right, honor thy father and mother, which is the first commandment with promise, that it may go well with thee while thou art on the earth.*”

Scripture tells wives to submit themselves to their own husbands as unto the Lord. We find this in Ephesians and Colossians.

In this next Scripture God tells us how to relate to the government authorities that are all around us: “*Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.*” (1 Peter 2:13) We can also read Romans 13 that speaks of the powers that be which are ordained of God. Whosoever resists the powers that be resists the ordinance of God.

The following verses teach about ministerial authority: “*Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation.*” (Hebrews 13:7) “*Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.*” (Hebrews 13:17)

The following verses teach us how to relate to those we work for: “*Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eye service, as men pleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God; And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ. But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons.*” (Colossians 3:22-25)

How Authorities Affect Our Lives

Here are some practical ways in which human authorities affect our lives. Government authorities have the power or the right to enforce obedience upon us. They enforce us to pay taxes, they make us keep

traffic laws, we have to get building permits when we want to build something; they have educational laws that must be followed to have the right to school our children at home. There are work laws that we must submit to. The government has certain moral conduct laws that we are forced to obey. There are marriage laws, recreation laws, littering laws and many other laws. We also recognize them and somehow by God's grace we have all learned to live with them.

I remember very clearly when they came out with the new seatbelt laws. I grumbled about that. I was not quick to obey. I thought it was an infringement upon my liberty to buckle my children in the chair. But, God is faithful and He would not allow me to keep that attitude and He dealt with me until I learned how to obey the law with delight. The government has made me do that. God, through the government has dealt with me until I could do it with a good heart. I do buckle my seatbelt now with a willing heart.

Ministers have the right to enforce obedience upon the congregation in areas of moral conduct. Paul told the Thessalonians if the men would not work that they should not eat. He changed the communion service in the Corinthian church. He encouraged some of the brothers in Thessalonians and Romans to withdraw from those who cause division. He also gave direction to the church as to how to help widows. He had that kind of authority.

Paul passes on many directives throughout the New Testament. He says, "I want you to do these things and teach these things with *all authority*." And that was not a bad word. When Paul used it, it was a good word. The Scriptures give ministers the responsibility for exercising discipline at times on the members of the Church. One of the reasons why we see the need to have membership of the Church is that people need to commit themselves to the local fellowship. They must say from their hearts, "I want somebody to watch over my soul." Also, ministers exercise their authority in other church ordinances such as baptism, the laying of hands, and anointing with oil when someone is sick. They also exercise their authority when giving someone counsel.

Parents are given the responsibility by God to direct the schedules of their children. They tell you what time to get up. They tell you what time to go to bed. They can enforce obedience upon you in your habits. They can force obedience in the way you dress. They can force you to have good manners. Thank God for mothers who have a bit of concern for boys and their manners! God stands up for them. They can say that you can't talk while you have food in your mouth at the supper table.

Parents can enforce obedience on our possessions. They can decide whether you get a new bike or an old bike, and you just have to live with that. They affect your language and influence your activities. They determine where you live. They even affect the house you live in. If Mom and Dad decide that we can only afford a run down shack, then that is where we live—in a run down shack. Parents are called by God to punish their children at times. They choose who your friends are. They choose the literature you read and the music you listen to. They also have authority over your attitudes. They can enforce submission on you in a multitude of different ways.

In marital authority the husband is the head of the wife. The husband gives direction to his wife on how to raise the children and how to spend the money. He gives direction to the wife on speaking—when to speak and how to speak. He directs her in the clothes she should wear. He gives direction on how the house should be kept and on scheduling. He can even give direction on the kind of food he would like to have on the table. He gives direction on where they go. He gives direction on what house they will live in. She would have to live in that same rickety, run-down house there just like the children would have to. He gives direction in what kind of work she might do. He gives direction on the church she goes to and all of her activities. He also directs her in regards to her friends.

The employer is your boss. This man tells you what time you go to work and he tells you what time you will work until. He determines your wage, which affects many areas of your life. If he tells you that he will give you only \$10.00 an hour it will affect the way you live. This man has a lot of authority over your life. He has authority over your attitudes. He has authority over your performance. He can come alongside you and say, "I don't think your attitude is very good today, is there something wrong?" And you have to bow to that man's or woman's word. He tells you how to work. He has the authority to hire you and fire you. He has authority over your clothes. If he decides that he wants you to wear a uniform, then you must wear the uniform providing that it is not against the convictions of the Word of God. He has authority over your

moral conduct while you are at work. If he has a caution about something you are doing he has the authority to walk up to you and tell you about it. You have to bow to that. He has authority over where you live. Sometimes you might be transferred to another location. He affects your vacation. He tells you how long that vacation can be. You have to go to him and ask for time off if you need it. He has authority over your education. If he feels that you need to get more education you do what he says. He has authority over public relations. If he feels that there is something not right between you and another employee he has every right to come to you and tell you that he does not like your conduct. He also has the authority to delegate authority to someone else. He can say to the newer worker that you are to be obedient to him. You have to do what he says.

We Are All Surrounded by Authorities

When you look at all of these authorities, **parental** authority, **marital** authority, **governmental** authority, **ministerial** authority and **occupational** authority, you have to face the fact that we are surrounded by people who have the power and the right to enforce obedience in our lives. We have to face the fact that it is God who did that. It is God who surrounded us with human authorities. This is good. Sometimes it will come in an old raggedy bag, other times it comes with flowers and beautiful colors on it. Either way it comes from God.

As I was meditating I thought about the many paradoxes of God. God says the way up is down. God says if you want to find your life, lose it. God says if you need, give. These things do not make sense. It may be in your own heart that you say, "This does not make sense that God has surrounded my life with many human authorities." It does not need to make sense. We do not have to understand nor see the depths of it. God's ways are not our ways. God works in mysterious ways, His wonders to perform. As the great hymn says, "Even behind a frowning Providence there is a smiling face." God's ways are not like our ways, so if we have an uneasy feeling as we read this, we must remember we don't have to understand everything about authority. We just need to know that God has surrounded all of us with human authorities.

The Five Purposes of Authority

God wants these authorities to have a profound influence in our lives. God wants to touch our lives through these avenues. You may be thinking that only God is your authority and that is all you need. That may sound very spiritual in the beginning, but if you think it through a bit you will realize that it is not a spiritual statement. It is ANARCHY! "God is my authority. Then I don't need a father, or a mother. I don't need a boss. I don't need a husband. I don't need a policeman." There are five divine purposes for authority in our lives:

1. God wants to build **character** in your life through human authorities.
2. He wants to give **protection** over your life through human authorities.
3. He wants to give **direction** to your life through human authorities.
4. He wants to give **encouragement** to your life through human authorities.
5. He wants to bring **discipline** at times to your life through human authorities.

The Small-Town Policeman

I would like to take you to a small town. Perhaps where you live you don't know your local policemen. In this area most of us do not know the policeman. In a small town of 500-600 people everyone knows the policeman, and the policeman knows everyone. And by the way he is not the *cop*. I feel that is a disrespectful term for the minister of God who watches over our lives.

Let's go to the small town. There is a policeman sitting in his car. He builds character in your life without even saying one word to you. All you have to do is see his car and character is built in your life. I noticed at certain places where they need some authority they will place a police car there with flashing lights and no one will be in it. It will build character in your life when you see the police car there. I have seen a couple of places where a dummy was sitting behind the wheel of a parked police car. But that dummy was building character in everybody's life because of the policeman that he represents. You see that police car and your heart is alerted to do what is right. He trains you to drive the speed limit. He trains you to stop at the stop signs. He provides character and accountability in every one of our lives.

In some places there have been policemen who watch the traffic at intersections. When a policeman notices that the traffic is getting very busy at an intersection he decides that a stop sign is needed on that intersection. He then goes through the proper channels to get a stop sign in place at that intersection. He is protecting your life by getting a stop sign placed there.

Many small towns have curfews. They are for young people. That curfew has an amazing way of giving direction to a young person's life. If the curfew is 11:00 PM, at 10:45 PM the young people start heading home. They walk in to their driveways or drive home. The policeman is affecting their lives.

In a small town a policeman is an encouragement to do what is right. He will give encouragement to your life. It is not unusual at all in a small town for a policeman to approach someone and say, "I appreciate the way you drive around here." We miss this one because we don't have a lot of interaction with policemen.

Sometimes policemen bring discipline into your life. It is a spanking—if you have ever gotten a ticket you know it is a spanking. It does not matter who you are, how old you are, how big you are. When those little red lights start flashing behind you and that man pulls you over you just got a spanking. It does not feel good. It is humiliating and embarrassing.

Human authority builds character, protection, direction, encouragement and discipline. I chose this illustration of the policeman because we have those lines very clear in our hearts. I don't think that any of you reading this would rebel against the police officer. It does not matter who he is. It does not matter what kind of life he lives when he is off duty. It does not matter how many mistakes he made. When he walks up to the side of the car we roll down the window and say, "Yes, Sir." We give him our driver's license and there is no guff in our hearts. We all understand those lines of authority.

Working for UPS

I think about my own experiences 31 years ago. When I used to work for UPS I got a spanking. When I started working there I was a lazy man. Being in the Army often makes you lazy because there is nothing to do. I was lazy. I went to work at UPS. They put me to work loading boxes and stacking them in the truck. One day the boss called me into the office and said, "Denny, I am not happy with your work; you are not working fast enough." It was rather embarrassing for him to say that. I was humiliated. I did not have any choice, because he was the boss. The lines were clearly drawn. He told me that if I did not do better, I would not have a job.

I went back to my trailer and grumbled. Do you ever do that after you get some direction? I went back to my trailer and grumbled about how hard the work was. I did not learn my lesson. The boss had me in the office again two weeks later. The boss said, "Denny, this is your last warning. You are lazy and you are not working hard enough and if you don't straighten up you, don't have a job."

The lines of authority were very clear. I went back to that truck very humiliated. Something clicked inside of me. "I am a preacher," I thought. "What a terrible testimony. How will I pay my way through school? How will I feed my family? I had better wake up and get busy." I worked and worked and then they gave me another truck to fill. The first thing I thought was, "What?" Remember, the lines of authority were clearly drawn. When I mastered that second truck they gave me a third truck. That is how lazy I was. I thought one was too hard. By the time that boss got done with me I was doing three trucks all night long.

At UPS they work part-timers hard. They get eight hours of work out of those who worked six hours. God built character in my life through that. God gave direction in my life and gave encouragement through that. About six months later I was promoted to the dock. Six months after that I was made a manager. That would not have happened if that boss had not spanked me for only doing one truck.

What About Your Life?

God works character, protection, direction, encouragement and discipline in our lives through human authorities. What about your life? Do you have a boss? Is there conflict in your life? Is life miserable for you? Life was miserable for me until I learned what God was trying to teach me through human authorities. Once I realized the lines of authority and brought myself to a place of submission to authority all of sudden things changed at UPS. Things that were a great burden became a great joy to me! By the time I left there I loved working hard!

Is there conflict in your life? Is there trouble in your life? Are you trying to figure out how to wade your way out of something? Maybe God is trying to do something beautiful in your life. Maybe He sent one

of His servants your way, but you have not seen the lines of authority clearly enough yet, and because of that you are kicking and fussing and carrying on. You are dragging your feet and complaining behind the door like I did in the trailer. Whatever it may be, perhaps God is trying to work in your life, and you are frustrating God's plan for your life.

These principles apply in so many ways it would take me a week to make all the applications. Can I trust God and your heart to make them where you sit today? We are all surrounded with human authorities. The lines are very clear in God's mind. The lines are not gray or blurry. They may be in our own minds; we may have imagined things and come up with our own idea why it might be ok for me to kick against whoever the authority may be. We may have found a reason to explain it away. We may try to excuse what we are doing or how we are feeling. Don't miss what God is trying to do in your life. He works through human authorities. In so many ways they are God's servants.

Are the Lines of Authority Blurred?

Maybe it is your marriage, sister. Maybe that is where the lines are not clear. Maybe it is church lines that are not clear. Maybe it is parental lines that are not clear. I thought about this as I was praying and working on this message that a lot of the children and youth that read this have as their boss their Dad. That can be good. But it can also not be good. Sometimes when Dad is the boss the boys or girls think its just Dad and he can't fire me. The lines of authority get a little gray when Dad or Mom is the boss. But, I want to assure you that the lines are very clear in God's mind.

I have thought over the years at times that it might be good for children to work for someone other than their parents. Because the other person could easily say, "You are not working fast enough you had better straighten out." All of those beautiful things that happened inside of my heart would happen in that boy's heart. But when Dad says it somehow the boy might not take it seriously. I assure you boys, the lines are just as clear in the face of God if Dad is your boss and also your Dad. If Dad says you need to work harder, in God's eyes it is just the same as if you had another boss tell you it is time to straighten up or you will loose your job.

Somehow in our minds we decide we must balance these things with other things. Sometimes we think that the lines are gray between authorities and us. A child may think that just because they don't have a good relationship with their parent or parents that he does not have to listen to that parent. Tell that to the policeman when he asks you for your driver's license if you get pulled over. Would you ask him who he was and tell him that you won't listen to him until you develop a better relationship with him? Try that with a policeman and you will find out it does not work.

I am all for having good relationships. That is one of those principles that the authorities need to work on. These principles balance each other. The husbands and fathers should be very concerned about their relationships with their wife and children, but when those under their authority start questioning this all of a sudden the lines of authority get gray.

Show up at work at 10:00 AM instead of 8:00 AM and see what the boss says. When he asks you where you were, will you say, "You are being harsh with me?" We all know what the boss would say if we said that. How about if you said to your boss, "I know it is 10:00 AM, but we don't have a close relationship so I thought I could come in at 10:00 instead of 8:00? Maybe if we get a closer relationship I will come in at 8:00 AM." He won't buy that. Do you understand the lines of authority?

Dads and Moms, you need to build relationships with your sons and daughters. These principles are easier to obey when we do that. But, sons and daughters, if you wait until relationships are better to obey it will not work. The lines of authority have just gotten gray. That is not how God sees it, I guarantee.

Beauty in Disguise

Sometimes God sends His gifts in an old, dirty paper bag. If you have just received that gift you may get the sweetest flower of the whole bunch. Many times we look at that brown, old, dirty paper bag and don't want to submit to it. Think about it!

I chose the policeman and the employer because these lines are very clear in our minds. We understand these principles very well. Maybe you are not always successful but you understand the principle very well. And to the degree that your boss or that policeman steps into your life you will do what he says. The other lines of authority that God gives to us are really not any different in God's eyes.

Why we are so hard with fathers? Why do we think they are so un-reasonable? Think about God the Father for a few moments. Think about what He asks us to do. He asks us to do things that we do not understand. He tells us that if you want to gain your life you must lose it. He tells us that the way up is down. No matter how long He tries to explain it to us we may not understand it. God the Father trains us by many disciplines, sometimes with no questions asked. Sometimes He asks us to suffer, and He says, "I want you to have a good attitude when you do." He leads us through every step of the way. Why are we so hard on our Dads? Why must he be so perfect for you to submit your heart to that man called your father?

Why are we so hard on Dad? His motivation is love. Authorities are God's servants, and God's heart is love. In whatever situation it is, in whatever cloudy providence it may be, no matter how difficult it is, human authorities are God's servants. I know we could do some balancing, but I plead with you to consider the boss and the policeman. The motivation is love. That policeman might be an arrogant fellow. He can be a real character by coming up to your car and letting you have it, but God's motivation for sending him to you is love.

Someone told me a story about getting called to jury duty. He wrote a letter of appeal and sent it back in. The authorities sent it back and said that his appeal was not accepted he must come to jury duty. The man threw it in the trash. He got another letter and this time he opened it. It was a strong letter that said that you **MUST** appear before the judge on a certain day. So he went to make his appeal. That judge scolded him and carried on and humiliated him. He told them he was wrong for not showing up for jury duty. He was harsh. He fined him \$300.00 and told him to report for jury duty the following week.

He reported for jury duty the next week. He stood before the judge with gum in his mouth. The judge said, "Get that gum out of your mouth!" He got that gum out of his mouth very quickly. You might be thinking that the judge was mean. He was a little mean, but he is the judge that takes care of all the people that refuse to come to jury duty. He is the guy that gives them a spanking because they refused obey the law that was given to them. When you refuse to obey the law that was given to you, God's servants by God's hand get stronger until we learn our lessons.

Don't Miss a Blessing

In any one of these five areas you could be missing a great blessing. Maybe the policeman is a cop to you and you don't have a problem driving way over the speed limit. You come up to the stop sign and give it a slight tap on the brakes. Someone said you are not speeding unless you get caught. What kind of a mindset is that? I was driving with someone the other day and he asked me a question. He said, "Brother Denny, I have a question for you." I said, "Sure, go ahead." "Tell me the truth, brother; do you drive the speed limit?" He was asking it in a bit of a sarcastic way. I looked at him and said, "Brother, of course I do." Then he did not know what to say. Somehow I think he thought that everybody just talks about it but no one actually does it.

Maybe you are missing the character building that God wants to do in your life just by submitting to the authorities and magistrates that are all around us. Maybe you are missing 20%. Maybe you are having trouble at home too that is another 20%. Maybe you are fussing and carrying on with your boss at work. That is another 20%. Who then will build character in your life? Who will protect, lead, encourage and discipline your life?

If you live like that for a few years you will have a lot of flat spots in your life. Think about the men in prison. Do you know why prisons are full of men and women today? We have been reading about it here. The prisoners said, "I don't need authorities! No one is going to tell me what to do." They say, "He has no right to talk to me that way." They just go and get another job and another job and another job. What is the problem? The problem is not the bosses; I can guarantee that. The prisons are full of people who did not learn these lessons when they were growing up. They did not learn to submit to those authorities that God lovingly surrounded them with.

The Person that God Will Use is under Authority

For 31 years I have been watching and working with young people. Do you know what those young people are like that God picks up and uses? They have these lines clear in their minds. They are the ones who found their lines and got in to place. Maybe they had a skirmish or two with the boss. Maybe they had a skirmish or two with Mom or Dad. Maybe they knocked heads a couple times with the preacher. But after

that they found their place. The lines were clearly drawn in their minds and in their consciences. Once they found their place they began to prosper. God began to build character and direct them. He began to discipline and encourage them through human instruments called authority. As time went on it became evident to everyone else that there is a blessing on that young person. Then they went away to serve God.

This message is not just for young people. It is for Moms and Dads. It is for the wives, workers, youth and children. It is for all of us. Human authorities surround every one of us in this room. Imagine that! Perfect God! Powerful God! Wise God! Beautiful God! Spotless God! Yet He uses imperfect humans to mature me and guide me and protect me and direct me. I can't figure that out, but I don't really need to. God is in charge. If He wants to use some dirty old worn out bag as a gift in my life, that is fine. Some of the most powerful lessons that God has wrought in my life were wrought through some very imperfect authorities. May God help us to see our human authorities as His servants.

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