

## Apostolic Authority

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**Whereunto I am ordained a preacher, and an apostle, (I speak the truth in Christ, and lie not;) a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and verity. {1Ti 2:7}**

Occasionally over forty-five years in the ministry I have encountered preachers who quote Paul and imply that they have every bit the same authority as Paul. Typically this response grows out of a despotic attitude toward pastoral rule in the church. Advocates of this role for a pastor conveniently omit Peter's requirement that both pastors and apostles lead by example, not by despotic authority. In fact Paul himself displays incredible gentleness in most of his apostolic functions. Only on rare occasions (example; his letter to the Galatian churches) does Paul assert his apostolic authority with emphasis. In the case of the present passage we must keep this verse in its context. Paul has been personally involved with the Ephesian church from its earliest existence. He has a vested personal interest in its spiritual health. Although he cannot visit them presently, he sent Timothy to Ephesus to confront and correct a growing problem that threatened the health of the church. It is important that the rebellious members at Ephesus understand that Paul has officially endorsed Timothy and charged him with his present ministry among them. By asserting his apostolic authority Paul is actually lending support for Timothy's ministry at Ephesus.

In our last chapter we noted the potential that the tension between Jews and Gentiles that plagued so many first century churches seems to have surfaced as part of the growing problem at Ephesus. Roy Zuck (the comment from that chapter repeated here for our present context) affirms this point, "The exclusivists in the Ephesian church evidently felt that the gospel was only for Jews. This was a common problem, as seen preeminently in the case of Peter." {Ac 10:9-43; Ga 2:11-13} {1}

Paul held two unique offices in the church. Although the office of apostle was viewed as far higher than that of a preacher, Paul lists his function as a preacher, an official herald of the gospel, before mentioning his office of apostle.

What gives a man spiritual authority in a local church? Before answering the question, I will strongly assert my conviction that in our age no man should claim any authority over any church other than the one where he ministers as pastor. Other than the possible office of apostle, the New Testament knows nothing of any global or regional authority above the local church. The claim of such authority should be viewed with grave concern and forthrightly rejected. It is altogether proper for churches to respect each other, consult with each other, and work together where the need requires. Paul's collection from various churches to help the poor saints at Jerusalem supports this concept. However, no cooperative venture can justify regional rulers in the New Testament church culture. A generation or more ago our own people commonly gathered themselves into regional "associations," local bodies of churches that worked together and held various annual or semi-annual meetings to promote fellowship and goodwill among their churches. I have never seen the rules of an association that did not clearly state, "The association shall have no authority to lord it over any of the member churches." However, with time an increasing number of associations became the vehicle for a layer of authoritative government over the member churches, a blatant violation of the precise charter of the association. It is likely that repeated violations of this prohibition are largely responsible for the demise of most associations in our time. In some areas "fellowship meetings" have replaced former associational structure. These meetings firmly avoid official business and focus their energy on the preaching of the gospel, sponsored by local churches. The meeting rotates from one host church to the other with each church leading the administration of the annual meeting that it hosts according to its preferences. Had associations so faithfully avoided lordship over churches, they would likely remain a beneficial factor among our

churches today.

Paul affirms his role as apostle and teacher of the Gentiles to reinforce his charge to Timothy at Ephesus. In 2Ti 2:24-25 Paul forbids a despotic strife-laden attitude in a preacher. Even Paul practiced leadership by example. Therefore, the men who claim Paul as their authority, but who exercise near-despotic rule over a church, violate the practice of the man whom they claim.

Strong defines the Greek word translated "verity" in this passage.

"1 objectively. 1a what is true in any matter under consideration. 1a1 truly, in truth, according to truth. 1a2 of a truth, in reality, in fact, certainly. 1b what is true in things appertaining to God and the duties of man, moral and religious truth. 1b1 in the greatest latitude. 1b2 the true notions of God which are open to human reason without his supernatural intervention. 1c the truth as taught in the Christian religion, respecting God and the execution of his purposes through Christ, and respecting the duties of man, opposing alike to the superstitions of the Gentiles and the inventions of the Jews, and the corrupt opinions and precepts of false teachers even among Christians. 2 subjectively. 2a truth as a personal excellence. 2a1 that candour of mind which is free from affection, pretence, simulation, falsehood, deceit." {2}

This definition, quoted in its entirety to give you a full sense of the nuances of its meaning, requires every preacher to conduct his ministry with a sincere openness that honors God and that builds integrity and credibility in his personal conduct. When a man allows himself to become the primary theme of conversation or controversy, he has violated the spirit of his calling and ministry. He may have well violated the "verity" with which Paul affirmed his ministry. This model, affirmed throughout the New Testament as a requirement of ministry, also forbids any man from using guile or intentional deception of any kind in any way in his ministry and teaching. This emphasis on a man's sincere openness in his ministry stands in obvious contrast with the character that Peter exposes in the false teachers that he confronted. {2Pe 2} In fact Paul's affirmation in First Timothy of the character and qualifications of church leaders consistently exhibits the distinction between the false teacher and the true.

Now shall we return to the question I posed at the beginning of this discussion? What gives a man spiritual authority in a local church? Some will answer that ordination itself bestows this authority. I reject this idea. A man who is not living up to his calling and Paul's stated qualifications for church office has no authority-and should not have it-in the church. His failure to live up to the qualifications of his office shames his position; he certainly cannot claim official authority while failing the office.

Others may claim that they are living up to the qualifications of their office, so they claim authority almost indiscriminantly. This attitude sidesteps the leadership model that consistently appears throughout the New Testament. Leadership by example avoids claiming authority. It justifies its influence by integrity and conduct without the need to claim authority as justification. Quiet leadership by example may not be as exciting or dramatic as other forms of leadership, but it fosters godly health and respect throughout the whole church culture. If the pastor teaches the church on giving, he need not trumpet his personal giving habits, but the church must be aware by his example that he lives what he teaches. A preacher who never gives the church a penny cannot teach on giving with any true authority. In fact any effort to do so exemplifies hypocrisy, not leadership. The same principle applies to every other aspect of a man's ministry. Leadership by example means just that. You don't expect people to do what you tell them because of position, ordination, or the office that you hold. You expect them to follow your personal example. Practice first; lead next. This is the Bible rule of leadership.

Elder Joe Holder

#### **FOOTNOTES:**

{1} Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). The Bible knowledge

commentary : An exposition of the scriptures. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

{2} Strong, J. (1996). The exhaustive concordance of the Bible: Showing every word of the text of the common English version of the canonical books, and every occurrence of each word in regular order. (electronic ed.) (SGreek: 225. aletheia). Ontario: Woodside Bible Fellowship.