

# Who is an Authority in the Church?

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Author:

Christopher J. E. Johnson

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Some months ago, I was listening to a preacher talk about people being hurt by things in their past, and that hurt is ruining their life in the present.

For example, some Christians have been taken advantage of by church leadership when they were younger, and it hurts them now because they rebel against authority.

Being someone who has been hurt by church leadership many times all throughout my life, and as someone who wants to submit to the proper Biblical authorities in my life, I want to know who has Biblical authority in the Body of Christ and what that details.

First, let's hear what Christ said about the world's authority vs the ministers of God:

*But Jesus called them to him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.* -Mark 10:42-45

Christ is telling us that we are not to select specific people for a position to rule over the congregation or church building. This has become a serious problem in modern American 'churchianity', especially with the corporate-style one-pastor church systems so popular nowadays. The true Biblical authority in a church will be a chief servant and minister that has the backing of the Body of Christ.

*Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?* -Matthew 25:44

*But now I go unto Jerusalem to minister unto the saints. For it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem. It hath pleased them verily; and their debtors they are. For if the Gentiles have been made partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister unto them in carnal things.* -Romans 15:25-27

*But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak. For God [is] not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister. And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end: That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.* -Hebrews 6:9-12

Many Christians have been led to believe that ministering is something only one with "higher education," and scholarly licensing, can perform, and therefore have developed a convenient excuse for themselves to do nothing for the Lord. Typically, the Laodecian church, filled with many slothful Christians, throw a few dollars into an offering plate every week, and leave it up to someone else to do the works "*that accompany salvation.*"

I can find nowhere in Scripture where a Christian would have an excuse not to be a minister in some form or another. This is not to be confused with a "pastor" because the two terms have been falsely linked together.

Despite what many Christians today are led to believe by their church leadership, pastors can be ministers, but **not all ministers are pastors**. Ministering is basically someone who humbles themselves to serve the needs of another; the specific role of a pastor is ministering in teaching and guiding under the authority of Christ and His congregation.

An experienced Christian ought to be a minister, and here are a few examples of what Christians can do to obtain the title:

- Sharing your food and shelter with others
- Sharing financial and/or emotional burdens
- Sharing knowledge about God's Word
- Evangelizing to lost souls
- Assisting with another's housework, yardwork, paperwork, etc

For example, I refer to Creation Liberty Evangelism as a ministry because we have many people who need answers to a wide variety of questions, and it is our hope in Christ to share the truth of His Word. I minister in terms of knowledge and teaching outside of what many refer to as an "official" church capacity, and help to dispel pagan religions (like evolution) from corrupting the minds of dedicated Christians.

Also, many of the lost in this world need the True Gospel of Jesus Christ, and I minister to their unknown need to hear it. There are a lot of other things I do personally that are labeled as ministry, but hopefully the Christian readers will understand the wide variety of roles they can fulfill as ministers, that a "minister" or "ministry" does not automatically equate to "pastor," and that **all Christians should be a minister**.

A while back, I recall talking with an elderly Christian lady on Scriptural matters, and she asked if I was a minister. I have been around modern-day churches long enough to know the proper reply to that question: "Would you define a minister for me?" She said, "*Someone who heads up a church and has gone to school to learn to be a minister.*" I told her "no" because by her modern-day corporate definition, I was not a minister. God's Word says I am a minister, but based on this woman's definition, only a tiny fraction of specific Christians would be allowed to minister, and I am unable to find any Biblical justification for that.

This lady, being a Christian for decades, should be reading the Scripture to know what a minister is ([1Thes 5:21](#)), but it's also partially her pastor's fault for not teaching the truth of the Word so the congregations will know what a minister is supposed to be, and how they all can participate in the commandments of our Lord.

However, I personally believe there are many pastors today who not only don't know the proper definitions of a minister because their "higher education" is not teaching them the whole truth of God's Word, but there are also others I have personally seen know the proper definitions of a minister and do not preach about it because it will water down the authority they have asserted for themselves over the Body of Christ.

Before continuing, I need to remind Christians that not every pastor is doing bad things. Some of them *DO* handle their congregations in a Biblical manner, so be careful not to start making accusations at anyone that holds a pastoral title unless it can be demonstrated they are actively doing wrong. However, I have personally found a very minor number of pastors upholding Biblical authority in all areas, in all matters, in the Body of Christ.

I have found many pastors preaching about rebellious-natured people or "lone-wolves," and admittedly, there are some people out there like that, and yes, they are not following Biblical standard protocol, even though God can still use them.

However, the problem now is that some pastors are labeling anyone who does not accept their own personal authority over the Body of Christ as "rebellious" against the church, and that is not only hypocritical, but also causes numerous problems. (I too have been accused on more than one occasion of that same thing.)

*"While many people associate authoritarian pastoral styles with a fundamentalist theology, authoritarianism cuts across the political spectrum, said Howard Batson, pastor of First Baptist Church of Amarillo. "It has nothing to do with Baptist politics. It really is an interpersonal skills problem. As a pastor develops a healthy self-esteem, he is less likely to be dictatorial and more likely to be a strong leader... When he's not sure of himself, he'll either hide in a corner or shout from the rooftop. When he's sure of himself, he'll do neither of those." Bob Sheffield, a specialist in church conflict mediation with LifeWay, concurred. **The more insecure a person is, sometimes the more authoritarian he has to be. If you're secure, you can allow people to be involved in decision making.**"*

-Mark Wingfield, "Church Conflict: Pastoral authority," June 10, 2002, [www.baptiststandard.com]

A large number of American Christians, often unknowingly, have suffered at the hands of bad people in authority, and therefore, they sometimes react to this abuse by rejecting and rebelling against many authorities in their lives. I have been down that road myself, but Christ has taught me to accept the just and righteous authorities in this world. However, not focusing on the wickedness of those in authority today in the world, there are many people within the Body of Christ abusing their position by claiming a false authority they were never given, and are causing suffering (sometimes knowingly) to those around them.

We as Christians should not be rejecting all authorities, but **we should be rejecting false claims to authority**. We need to seek to please the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ by congregating together and supporting one another.

There are many pastors, deacons, and elders out there who think Christians need to have an authorization by a certain approved organization for someone to preach the Gospel. I have personally known some pastors who think you need their personal authority before you should have the right to preach, and they are more common than most people would think. However, Jesus Christ was *ALSO* told He was not allowed to preach without the permission of the church leaders, and He answered them:

*And when he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him as he was teaching, and said, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority? And Jesus answered and said unto them, I also will ask you one thing, which if ye tell me, I in like wise will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men? And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say unto us, Why did ye not then believe him? But if we shall say, Of men; we fear the people; for all hold John as a prophet. And they answered Jesus, and said, We cannot tell. And he said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things.*

-Matthew 21:23-27

When we stop to carefully consider Christ's words, He knew they were trying to stop His preaching on *THEIR OWN* authority, and not on God's authority. They had no way to go after Christ because they feared the mobs. (Pro 29:25) The priests and elders knew they had no Biblical authority to stop Christ's preaching, but they still wanted to stop Christ because **He was revealing the truth about their abuse of authority**.

*Do ye look on things after the outward appearance? If any man trust to himself that he is Christ's, let him of himself think this again, that, as he is Christ's, even so are we Christ's. For though I should boast somewhat more of our authority, which the Lord hath given us for edification, and not for your destruction, I should not be ashamed: -2 Corinthians 10:7-8*

*Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.*  
-Romans 14:19

*Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do. -1 Thessalonians 5:11*

As Christians, we all belong to our Lord Jesus Christ, so why are many Christian men obsessed with claiming rulership over those in the Body of Christ? It seems they forget that if they trust themselves that they are Christ's, they must also trust that their fellow brethren are Christ's, and trust in the Holy Spirit to regulate them properly. There is no need for men to try and gain a monopoly over the Gospel, but many do. (Not just mainstream, but average evangelical churches as well.)

One of the key ways to determine if a church leader is using Biblical authority is by testing all his actions to see if they are for edification or destruction. Lying (which includes failure to keep his word), gossip, cheating, back-biting, railing (i.e. name-calling and slander on brethren), theft, etc -- all these are actions that lead to destruction, not edification.

For instance, the Catholic church has a long history of teaching a false Gospel that will lead folks to hell, and I have watched pastors condemn and banish other Christians for teaching the truth about the Catholic church. Another example, Antioch originally had congregations meet at homes, but I have watched pastors condemn and banish other Christians for having a home church. It gets so bad, that I have watched pastors condemn and banish other Christians who support a Christian that the pastor has already condemned and banished!

No where in the New Covenant Gospel does God give one man in the Body of Christ the authority to do these things. The Catholic church believes Christ gave one man the authority, and they call him the pope! Biblical authority builds up the Body of Christ through edifying by teaching and enabling Christians to go out and do what God has called them to do, and anything that they do beyond this servant's goal is *NOT* Biblical authority because true Biblical authority is designed as a servitude position in faith of the **Lord Jesus Christ, who is the only Chief Ruler over the Body.**

Some Christians immediately object to say, "*Pastors have the authority to remove people from the church,*" but I challenge any Christian to show me a chapter and verse where pastors are given that authority on their own. The *WHOLE* congregation has that instruction in [Matthew 18:15-20](#), and it is supposed to involve the entire Body of believers within that group before any removal is initiated. That doesn't mean board of directors, or the elders, or the deacons--the *ENTIRE congregation* is supposed to be involved. I have listened to many testimonies and personally witnessed pastors kicking Christians out without Biblical justification in that manner. In [1 Corinthians 5:9-13](#), there is instruction to remove people who call themselves brethren and openly live a sinful lifestyle, but no where does it give a single pastor or deacon or elder the authority or sole responsibility to do this without the rest of the congregation involved.

Another interesting excuse for the non-biblical authority of some church leaders is claiming they are "accountable" to another Christian, and based on their claims, that is supposed to give them some sort of more credible authority. That raises some interesting questions because, often times, they will never reveal who it is they are accountable to, and generally, the people to whom the pastor makes himself accountable to are hand-picked by the pastor himself, and someone who will, in most cases, not give the pastor proper rebuke when he does wrong because his cherry-picked buddy is violating Scripture on the same account. (Or the pastor will never reveal to his accountable partner that he did wrong in the first place, because the pastor himself decides what is and is not wrong according to his own authoritative standards.) We all have been guilty of this in some respects, but what makes the pastor's "accountability-buddy" more legitimate than any other Christian's?

And this begs another interesting question: Is the "accountability-buddy" accountable to someone else? This really gets into [respecters of persons \(sin\)](#), and many "authorities" in top "clergy" levels of the church system have what seems to be a higher level club that only certain people are allowed in. What we ought to be doing is keeping open levels of communication with the congregation, via whatever means necessary, and relying on our Lord Jesus Christ via the Holy Spirit to make us accountable to Him.

We, as Christians, should not be blind to what is going on around us. Most American Christians should, from experience, be able to recognize the worldly corporate, Catholic-style church structure that is being duplicated all around us, but fear what would happen if they speak up about it. Again, not all churches have these problems, and there are some really great church leaders out there, but the problem obviously exists because of rapid abuse many of us in the Body of Christ have witnessed.

Let's follow our Lord Jesus Christ into spiritual battle as we continue to preach the truth, not only the non-believer, but also to our fellow Christian brethren, no matter their station in life. Remember, **if a church leader is doing more than is listed above as the definitions for authority in the Body of Christ, they are acting solely on non-biblical, self-proclaimed authority.** We teach the truth to our brethren as well, not in a heavy-handed way, but in a humble and loving way in hope that they may be faithful to our Lord Jesus Christ and not turn from the teachings of His Word; allowing all to work as commanded by the Holy Spirit.

Remember that our Lord Jesus Christ did not give commandments to his servants in a specific bracket of "pastors and deacons and elders only." He spoke to *ALL* His servants, expecting all of them to be ministers unto His Church:

*[For the Son of man is] as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch. Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning: Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. -Matthew 13:34-36*

If someone has taught you that only a church leadership position is a minister, then he/she has done so on false authority because they are not teaching Biblical truths. God has called all saved Christians to be ministers of His Gospel, so let's make effort to do our part.