

LOVE—THE BASIS AND POWER OF AUTHORITY

Some saints, including some leading ones, may have a wrong concept concerning the exercise of authority. Their concept may be based on cultural traditions and natural concepts, not on the Word of God or the ministry in the Lord's recovery. The ministry in the Lord's recovery presents the matter of authority in a thorough and balanced way, but some, lacking a proper understanding, may exercise authority improperly, thereby damaging the church and the saints and causing the ministry to be blamed (2 Cor. 6:3). Improperly exercising authority misrepresents both the ministry's teaching and the recovery as a whole.

In *The Elders' Management of the Church*, Brother Lee shows the way that authority should be exercised, using the relationship between husbands and wives as described in Ephesians 5:25 as a basis. Verses 22-24 speak of the wife's submission to her husband, but verse 25 does not speak of a husband ruling over his wife. Rather, it says, "Husbands, love your wives even as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her." In a chapter titled "How to Be an Authority," Brother Lee explained:

The way this matter is presented is quite unusual. It says that the wives have to submit to their husbands. We know that the other side of submission is domination, yet God never charges the husbands to dominate over their wives. He only charges them to love their wives. The husband is an authority; he is the head. But how should the husband behave as the head? How should he behave as the authority? Ephesians 5 clearly shows that the way is in love. (199)

Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her. In the same way, a husband should love his wife and give himself up for her. It is an ugly thing for a husband to demand submission from his wife. Furthermore, the more the husband demands, the less his wife may be inclined to honor and submit to him. Rather, if a man genuinely loves his wife and gives himself up for her, this will influence her to follow his lead in the family. It is the same for those who bear responsibility to represent the Lord's authority in the church. For brothers who bear responsibility to claim authority in order to exercise authority is not the Lord's way and does not work:

In some local churches I have seen brothers who act as elders by putting on a front. They say, "Oh, I am an elder!" They assume an elder's bearing and speak with an elder's tone. I must tell you that there is nothing more ugly in the church than to see such a thing. Please remember that the amount of love a person has is the amount of authority he possesses. A person can only exercise authority over those he loves. Without love there will be no basis for authority... Maternal love is the basis for a mother to exercise her authority over her children. Without love there is no ground for exercising authority. Therefore, we must see that the degree of love there is in a person is the degree of authority he can exercise. Love is the basis of authority and the power behind it.

It never works for an elder to try to assume authority in the church by force. Not only will this not be pleasing in the eyes of men, but it will have no confirmation from the Holy Spirit. You can assume your authority, but the Holy Spirit will not be there. You can only be an authority on one basis, and that is in love. If you genuinely love the brothers and sisters, the love itself will become the control, and it will become your authority over others. (200-201)

If a brother genuinely loves the saints and the church and gives himself up for them, the saints will spontaneously honor him and follow his lead. The brother's love and self-sacrifice becomes the authority to take the lead among the saints. Thus, Brother Lee said, "Strictly speaking, to be an authority, as we put it, is simply love. You have to love the church, to love the brothers and sisters. This love will then become your authority" (201).

This is not to say that there is no need for authority in the church. Nor is it to give ground to any form of public airing of grievances, even in cases where authority is exercised improperly. The New Testament gives us clear patterns of how problems in the church should be addressed (Matt. 18:15-20; 1 Cor. 1:10; 1 Tim. 5:19). The church is the place on the earth where the Lord's authority must be realized and properly represented. Still we must realize that just as Christ established His authority in the church by loving her and giving Himself up for her, so those who represent Him must conform to the same pattern.

The elders should realize that, while there is the need of proper authority in the management of the church, and without it there cannot be a proper management of the church, yet in being the authority, the elders must turn their authority into love. It should appear to others that authority is completely gone and that everything is love. Love is authority transformed, in much the same way that the body of the Lord Jesus was God transformed. He never caused others to feel that He was God. On the contrary, He caused others to feel that He was fully a man. In the same principle, those who are the authority should not cause others to feel that they are the authority. On the contrary, they should cause others to feel that everything is absolutely a matter of love. (203)

The elders are responsible, from time to time, to administer discipline. On this point Brother Lee drew on Ephesians 6, which shows that parents, and particularly fathers, are authorities in the family. Verse 1 says, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right." Verse 4 addresses the fathers, saying, "And fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but nurture them in the discipline and admonition of the Lord." To exercise discipline without provoking the one being disciplined to anger also requires love. Speaking of these verses, Brother Lee said, "We can see one thing clearly here: God appoints us to be the authority, yet He does not want us to take the way of discipline. In a family, if the parents lack love toward their children but apply strict discipline only, surely the result will not be good" (200). Without love discipline provokes anger. Hebrews 11:6a says, "For whom the Lord loves He disciplines." Here love precedes discipline. The discipline issues out of love. Love thus becomes the basis for discipline, and discipline becomes the expression of love. God is love (1 John 4:8, 16), so to be without love is to be without God, who is the source of all authority. Thus, discipline without love misrepresents God's authority. To exercise authority without love is to usurp Christ's headship and to beat our fellow slaves (Matt. 24:49).

In chapter 6 of *The Elders' Management of the Church*, Brother Lee referenced other passages in the Scriptures to show different aspects of how to be an authority—in spirit, in resurrection, in patience, with discernment, and in coordination. Each of these aspects is vital, and the saints, especially those who bear responsibility in the church or in any aspect of the service in the church, should read these portions of the Scriptures and Brother Lee's fellowship with much prayer and consideration. Yet the largest portion of Brother Lee's speaking in this chapter concerns being an authority in love. Ephesians, the most crucial book in the Bible concerning the church, speaks of the heading up of all things in Christ and of Christ being made Head over all things to the church (1:10, 22). It also speaks of all the believers growing up into Christ the Head in all things (4:15). These are matters related to God's authority, which is vested in Christ (Matt. 28:18; Acts 2:36; 1 Tim. 6:15). Yet this same book mentions love nineteen times. In Ephesians 4:15, where Paul says that "we may grow up into Him in all things, who is the Head, Christ," he also gives the condition that enables this growth to happen—"holding to truth in love." Holding to truth in love issues in growing up into Christ the Head in all things, which in turn issues in the Body building itself up in love through the mutual supply of life among the members (v. 16). Where the love of Christ is expressed and the truth is upheld, there the Body of Christ is built up, and there the genuine authority of God in Christ is manifest.