

AUTHORITY AND FELLOWSHIP

God desires to establish His kingdom on the earth through a group of people who stand against all forms of rebellion and come absolutely under His authority. Establishing God's authority over the earth is a great matter in the Bible, but fallen men have miscast divine authority according to natural human concepts and have even falsely claimed authority as God's representatives. The Greek word—*exousia* (ἐξουσία)—that is translated "authority" is a compound word. *Ex* means "out of" or "out from," while *ousia* means "being." God's authority issues out of His very being. If you meet God, you meet authority. If you have never met God, you have never met authority. Moreover, if a person exercises "authority" in God's name but we do not meet God in that exercise of "authority," either that "authority" is man's presumption or we ourselves have some kind of insulation toward God.

Revelation 22:1 makes the relationship between authority and fellowship clear. Speaking of the New Jerusalem it says, "And he showed me a river of water of life, bright as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb in the middle of its street." The relationship between the throne of God and the river of water of life is reciprocal and wonderful. The river issues from the throne and brings the throne wherever it goes. When we come under God's ruling, we immediately sense the flowing of the Spirit within, which is the Spirit's fellowship (2 Cor. 13:14). Moreover, when we enter into genuine fellowship with the Lord, two things happen: we touch the flow of the divine life and we are brought under the Lord's Headship. As Brother Lee explained:

According to the picture in Revelation, the river of water of life flows out of the throne. This, in turn, signifies that the flow of life, the fellowship of life, conveys the authority of the throne. The authority of the throne is present wherever the river flows. Authority and fellowship, the two main components of the New Jerusalem, are coordinated. The authority of the throne flows to every part of the city through the fellowship of life; the entire city is in fellowship and under authority. (*The Priesthood and God's Building*, 29)

In the next chapter he added, "On the one hand, wherever there is the throne, there is the flow of life, the fellowship of life. On the other hand, the fellowship of life ushers in the authority of the throne; that is, wherever the river of water of life flows, there is the authority of the throne" (*The Priesthood and God's Building*, 42).

Fellowship has both a vertical aspect with God and a horizontal aspect with our fellow members of the Body of Christ. These two aspects are interwoven. Our fellowship with God in Christ is the basis of our fellowship with our fellow believers, and genuine fellowship with others brings us into the fellowship of the Spirit, which is the flow of the river of water of life (1 John 1:3). Horizontal fellowship is characterized by mutuality with honoring of and respect for one another. In such fellowship we meet God, and thus we meet authority. The Lord's authority comes to us as fellowship both directly in our personal fellowship with the Lord and through our fellow believers. When the Spirit flows out of someone to us, that flowing has the element of the Lord's heading up in it. Though we may not talk about any issue of concern, we may be left with a clear sense of the Lord's feeling. This happens because any fellowship in the divine life imparts God, and where God is, there is authority. We may feel rebuked by the Lord within, yet at the same time we feel refreshed by the Spirit and brought back to a proper relationship to Him as our Lord. Any "fellowship" that does not bring us to meet God and come under His authority is not the real fellowship spoken of in the Bible, and any exercise of authority that does not bring us into fellowship with God in Christ as the Spirit is not the genuine authority.

This picture has great implications for the service of the elders and how they represent and express the Lord's authority. Brother Lee explained:

The eldership, that is, the representation of the headship, must be exercised through the flow of life. Although the throne is the throne of authority, the throne of headship, out of the throne flows the river of water of life. When you look at the throne, you see authority and headship. But when you look at the river, you see the water of life and the tree of life. This indicates that proper eldership is not the exercise of

authority over others; it is the flowing of life into them. We are reigning, but we do not reign by authority; we reign through the flowing of the inner life. (*Life-study of Revelation*, 760-761)

Thus, those who exercise authority in the Lord's name must themselves be under His authority and carry out their eldership by flowing out the divine life.

The issue of the throne and the river, of the divine authority and fellowship, is marvelous. God as light shines in Christ as the lamp from the throne, the river flows in the midst of a golden street, and the tree of life grows in the river. The light with the lamp indicates that God rules by shining, and the golden street shows that the Christian walk under God's ruling in the flow of the divine life is governed by God's divine nature. When we have fellowship with the Lord, we come under His shining. Furthermore, when we abide in the Lord's fellowship under His ruling through His inward shining, we are able to walk according to the divine nature. It is as we walk in this divine nature in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit that Christ as the tree of life grows and supplies us.

The flow of God as life in man brings in light and the way. Revelation 21 mentions light and the street (vv. 23-24, 21). This street follows the flow of life, and the light is God in the Lamb. God is light to man, and He is also man's way. (*The Priesthood and God's Building*, 87)

This river of life flows in the midst of the golden street, and along this flowing river there is the tree of life, which is a vine growing along the river as our rich life supply. The throne is here, waiting for us to submit to the headship and authority of the redeeming God. As soon as we submit to this headship, the life-giving Spirit immediately flows within us, and we find ourselves on the golden street. As we walk along the golden street, we find that the inward flowing of the life-giving Spirit is marvelous, refreshing, satisfying, and supplying. It would take a great many words to adequately describe this flow within us. Along this flow of the living water there are the riches of the tree of life that grows by the flow of the river. This means that where the flow of the river is, there is the tree of life to supply us. In my experience I have a throne, the flowing of the water of life, and Christ as the tree of life growing within me in a very practical way. This is not a doctrinal understanding; it is absolutely a matter of experience in life. (*Life-study of Revelation*, 750)

The throne and the river should guide us in our practice of fellowship and help us to discern what is genuine spiritual authority. Some may claim a measure of spiritual authority, yet their way is not in the fellowship of the divine life and does not impart life. In extreme cases their assertions of authority may grieve the Holy Spirit with corrupt words in bitterness, anger, wrath, clamor, evil speaking, and malice rather than "that which is good for building up, according to the need, that it may give grace to those who hear" (Eph. 4:29-31). Such exercise of authority does not bring God to people or bring people to God. It is, therefore, not genuine spiritual authority, because God is the unique authority, and if He is absent, authority is absent. Those who vociferously argue for their own authority do not know God, do not flow out God, and therefore have no real authority from God.

We should deal with anything that hinders our fellowship with the Lord and with our fellow members in the Body. The Lord's table displays our vertical fellowship with God through Christ and our common participation in Christ and His salvation with our fellow members in the Body. Concerning taking the elements at the Lord's table, 1 Corinthians 11:27 and 28 say, "But let a man prove himself, and in this way let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not discern the body." To discern the body is both to discern the Lord's physical body that He gave for us and His mystical Body, including all those who have been called into the fellowship of God's Son (1:9). In our coming to the Lord's table, the Lord may shine upon us. If we have offended others, we need to seek reconciliation (Rom. 12:18; Matt. 5:23-24). Moreover, if we harbor any offense in our hearts, even if we have been wronged by others and they have not apologized to us, this negates the effectiveness of the rule of Christ in us and hinders our fellowship with God and with others (Matt. 6:14-15; Col. 3:13-15). Dealing with such matters thoroughly before the Lord restores us to His fellowship and to His inward ruling. Dear saints, may we all treasure the throne and the river that we may be those who live in the fellowship of the divine life under the inward ruling of God so that He has a way to establish His kingdom in us and ultimately through us.