

LEADERSHIP IN THE LORD'S RECOVERY, PART 2: THE BIBLICAL PATTERN OF LEADERSHIP

In the previous article we saw that man's concept of leadership and authority is directly opposite to the Lord's concept. For the natural man leadership is an organizational, hierarchical, and prestigious matter. However, God does not sanction this kind of leadership among His people because all leadership and authority is with God Himself and flows out from Him. The Bible strongly testifies to the principle that God's leadership of His people is both actual and practical and that it involves a human channel. Those who take the lead in a proper way express God as the unique authority; they do not have authority in and of themselves to lead or direct others. God's people certainly require direction, but God's intention is that His people would be directed by His speaking. In this article we shall see how this principle is established in the Bible and how God's speaking is the real, actual, and practical leadership of His people on the earth.

The divine arrangement for the leadership of God's people can be seen in the history of Israel. In the Old Testament the law was given by God at Mount Sinai through the human channel of Moses. By the law and with the divinely ordained priesthood, God's speaking was incontrovertibly established among His people and became the highest authority, the deciding factor, and the source and basis for all leadership, much like a nation's constitution:

The law was the constant speaking of God. The law, like the United States Constitution, may be considered as the first written constitution of God's people written by God Himself. The Old Testament, however, shows us that the written constitution of God by itself was not adequate. There was still the need of God's instant constitution, His instant speaking. God's instant speaking always goes along with His written word. The theocracy among the nation of Israel was a government according to God's constant speaking as written in the law or God's instant speaking as revealed through the breastplate of the high priest by means of the Urim and the Thummim (Exo. 28:30; Lev. 8:8; Num. 27:21; Deut. 33:8; 1 Sam. 28:6; Ezra 2:63; Neh. 7:65). (*Elders' Training, Book 9: The Eldership and the God-ordained Way (1), 40*)

God's written word, the law, along with God's instant speaking by means of the Urim and the Thummim, formed God's divine constitution for His people. This divine constitution was a great matter, for it distinguished the nation of Israel as a unique kingdom on the earth directly under divine government (Exo. 19:6). God's speaking was a divine constitution for this kingdom, making God's direct administration of His people actual and practical and preserving the nation of Israel as a theocracy so that God could carry out His move on the earth. For this reason, even after God permitted Israel to take the worldly way of having a monarchy, He strongly charged the kings to uphold the law and raised up prophets to strengthen them (Deut. 17:14-15, 18-19). Moreover, when the children of Israel were recovered to the good land, the responsibility for leadership lay with those who were knowledgeable in the Scriptures and were able to teach others (Ezra 7:6, 11). This indicates that the actual leadership among God's people was God's speaking. Concerning the relationship between God's speaking and His leadership, Witness Lee points out:

In every age of the work of God through His speaking, there has been a leader. At the time of the law, Moses was the leader. After Moses, Joshua became the leader. Actually, the leadership is not the person. The leadership is God's speaking. All the people in the age of the law did not actually follow Moses. Practically speaking, they followed the word of God spoken by Moses. (*The Problems Causing the Turmoil in the Church Life, 16-17*)

Thus, the leadership in the Old Testament was God's speaking through the human channel of those who faithfully brought that speaking to God's people. Such ones had no authority in and of themselves. However, their speaking, which was actually God's own speaking, was full of divine authority. This speaking was the real leadership and became a living constitution to keep God's people under the divine government for the carrying out of the divine economy.

In the New Testament this principle endures. Christ as the Word of God, as the One who speaks for God and speaks forth God, replaces both the law and the prophets (John 1:1, 14; Rom. 10:4; Matt. 17:1-8). As the incarnate Word of God, the Lord Jesus did not speak His own word but spoke the word of the Father, who sent Him (John 12:49-50; 14:24). His teaching was not His own but the Father's (John 7:16-18). In resurrection and ascension Christ as the Head continued to speak through the members of His Body, particularly the apostles (Matt. 10:19-20; Acts 4:29). The apostles also did not speak from themselves but what the Spirit, the reality of the resurrected and ascended Christ, gave them to speak (John 16:13; 1 Thes. 2:13; 1 Cor. 2:13). This speaking became the apostles' teaching, a direct continuation of the Lord's own teaching in the gospels:

What the Lord Jesus taught in the four Gospels became the first part of the apostles' teaching. Then, based on this, Peter taught something more, and based on this teaching, Paul taught even further. Eventually, Paul, Peter, John,

and others wrote the Epistles and Revelation. All these teachings are the teaching of the apostles, and all these portions of the apostles' teaching are the contents of the New Testament, which is God's New Testament economy. (*The Collected Works of Witness Lee [CWWL], 1988, vol. 3, 447*)

As the law was the constitution for Israel as God's Old Testament people, the teaching of the apostles is the constitution for the church as God's New Testament people:

In the Gospels the leadership in the New Testament was a person, the Lord Jesus. From Acts to Revelation, however, the leadership is no longer a person; it is the teaching of the apostles. We may compare the teaching of the apostles to the Constitution of the United States, which is higher than even the president (cf. Gal. 1:8). Neither Peter nor Paul controlled the churches. Rather, their teaching governed the churches. Paul told Timothy to charge certain ones not to teach different things other than God's economy (1 Tim. 1:3-4). The teaching of the apostles, which is the teaching of God's economy, is the unique leadership. John says, "Everyone who goes beyond and does not abide in the teaching of Christ does not have God" (2 John 9). We should not join ourselves to such a one, for he is evil. This again proves that after the four Gospels the governing leadership is not a person; rather, it is the teaching of the New Testament. (*CWWL, 1988, vol. 3, 447*)

The New Testament shows that the apostles took the lead among the churches. However their authority was not exercised by their controlling others but primarily through their teaching the New Testament truths and presenting themselves as a pattern (1 Cor. 4:17; Phil. 3:17; 2 Thes. 3:9; 1 Tim. 4:12). The product of their ministry and work was local churches in various cities (Acts 14:21-23). Once a local church was raised up, the apostles appointed local brothers according to the Spirit's guidance to take the lead there as elders (v. 23; 20:28; Titus 1:5). Rather than exercise hierarchical control over these elders, the apostles left the responsibility of caring for the believers in that locality in their hands and continued their ministry and work to raise up and establish more local churches (14:24-25). However, they certainly expected and exhorted the elders to take the lead according to the apostles' teaching and admonished the believers under the care of the elders to follow them (Titus 1:7-9; Heb. 13:17).

The apostles did not allow anyone to teach differently (1 Tim. 1:3-4). Considering their word to be God's own speaking, the apostles were bold to encourage, charge, and admonish all the local churches raised up and strengthened through their ministry to remain faithful to that speaking (1 Thes. 2:13; 2 Thes. 2:15; 1 Tim. 6:3-4; 2 Pet. 3:2). They also bore the responsibility to address conduct that deviated from their teaching (1 Cor. 11:34; 1 Tim. 5:19). As Brother Lee explained:

The apostles do not control the churches, but the churches should follow the teaching of the apostles. Acts 2:42 says, "They continued steadfastly in the teaching and the fellowship of the apostles." The apostles do not exercise their own authority; instead, the real authority is the teaching of the apostles. All the churches and elders should keep the teaching of the apostles. If they do not, the apostles should come in to correct the situation according to the authority of the teaching of the apostles. (*CWWL, 1988, vol. 1, 594-595*)

Conclusion

According to the Bible, God's leadership of His people is through His constant and instant speaking through the human channel of those who bring His speaking to His people. God's speaking establishes and makes practical God's divine government by becoming a living constitution for God's people to follow. In the Old Testament this constitution was based on the Mosaic law, but in the New Testament it is based on the teaching of the apostles as the direct continuation of the Lord Jesus's teaching in the Gospels. Therefore, leadership in the New Testament is, universally, through the apostles' teaching and, locally, through the elders' shepherding and overseeing of the churches according to the apostles' teaching. The apostles do not exercise control over the elders, nor do the elders exercise control over the saints; rather, the divine revelation received through the New Testament ministry, the teaching of the apostles, is the controlling factor:

In the Lord's recovery we reject the notion of one person controlling persons and matters. We do have some leadership, but not the leadership of one controlling person. Instead, we have the leadership of one controlling revelation in the one ministry through those who bring in the revelation of the ministry. The revelation controls, and it controls through those who bring in the revelation. The revelation in the Lord's recovery controls us and restricts us. (*Leadership in the New Testament, 20*)

In the final article in this series we will see how this vital and precious principle has been recovered and applied in the Lord's recovery both historically and among the local churches on the earth today.