

SOME QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS REGARDING DEPUTY AUTHORITY

Because the matter of deputy authority has been misrepresented and maligned, the following questions and answers seek to clarify what it is, what it is not, and the principles that govern it.

Is deputy authority biblical? Deputy authority is not only biblical; it is a vital part of the divine revelation concerning God's government among men. God's intention to delegate authority to human beings is evident from Genesis 1:26. There God created man in His image and with His likeness and gave him dominion over the earth and all the things in it. This demonstrates a basic principle that God intends to exercise authority through men who express Him. After man's fall, God raised up men, such as Noah (9:1-6), Joseph (Gen. 41:40-44), Moses (Exo. 3:10-18a; 4:16; 7:1), and David (1 Sam. 16:12-13), to represent His authority among His people. In the New Testament the enthroning of the God-man Jesus as Lord and Christ is a central part of the gospel (Acts 2:36). The Lord told His disciples that God had given all authority to Him (Matt. 28:18). In ascension He sent out apostles as His ambassadors (2 Cor. 5:20; Eph. 6:20; 2 Cor. 10:8; 13:10) and through them established elders as overseers in the churches to represent Him (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5; Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Pet. 5:5). In eternity future the redeemed will on the one hand be slaves of God and Christ and on the other hand will reign with Him (Rev. 22:3, 5).

Is there more than one kind of deputy authority? Yes. There are both positional authority and spiritual authority. In secular institutions (including human government) there is only positional authority (Rom. 13:1; Titus 3:1; 1 Pet. 2:13). Among God's people there are both positional and spiritual authority. In a family, for example, the parents have a measure of positional authority (Eph. 6:1; Col. 3:20), but a proper Christian family has spiritual authority as well (Eph. 6:4). The same is true of the elders in a local church (Heb. 13:7, 17; 1 Tim. 5:17).

God's intention is ultimately to head up all things in Christ (Eph. 1:10), making positional and spiritual authority one. Thus, even the nations in the new heaven and new earth will be under the ruling of the shining of God as light in Christ as the lamp refracted through His people as the transformed wall of the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:23-24, 18-19).

How is authority established? God has all authority (1 Tim. 6:15), and He has given the resurrected God-man Jesus Christ all authority (Matt. 28:18). In the old creation, those in secular authority are established through God's sovereign arrangement (John 19:11; Rom. 13:1b; Dan. 2:11; 4:17, 32). In the church as God's new creation, elders are appointed in the churches by the apostles, who act as God's representatives (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). The term *elder* indicates that those who are appointed to oversee a local church should be relatively more mature in the divine life. Because the apostles are one with the Holy Spirit in their appointing of the elders, Paul says that the placement of the elders among the believers as God's flock is by the Holy Spirit (Acts 20:28).

Spiritual authority is not by human appointment. When a person lives in submission to the ruling of the Spirit, growing in the divine life and faithfully serving the Lord, that person becomes a channel of spiritual authority.

What is the basis of spiritual authority? There are two crucial factors that form the basis of spiritual authority—revelation and resurrection. *Revelation*, as used here, refers to one's direct knowing of God experientially and of His intent as revealed in His Word (Exo. 3:1-12; Num. 12:8). The Lord's own authority was evidenced by His teaching (Mark 1:22). The apostles' revelation of God's economy was the source of their teaching and hence their authority (Rom. 16:25; Gal. 1:11-12, 15-16; Eph. 3:3). In the church as the new creation, workers have authority only insofar as their teaching matches the teaching of the apostles concerning God's New Testament economy (Acts 2:42; 1 Tim. 1:3-4; Titus 1:9).

Resurrection is also a crucial component of spiritual authority. In Genesis 1:26 image and likeness, which are related to expressing God in Christ through partaking of His life (2:9), precede dominion. This shows that authority comes out of the expression of the divine life. This principle is illustrated in the budding of Aaron's rod in Numbers 17. There, in the wake of Korah's challenge to the leadership of Moses and Aaron among God's people, twelve dead sticks were put into the tabernacle, one for each of the tribes of Israel. The next day Aaron's rod had budded, blossomed, and borne ripe almonds. This shows that resurrection (life out of death) is both the basis and vindication of spiritual authority.

How is spiritual authority manifested? Spiritual authority is manifested as ministry. Those who have spiritual authority do not lord it over God's people (1 Pet. 5:3a; Matt. 20:25-26a). Rather, they are patterns of the flock in their living to the Lord and by following His pattern to serve His people as slaves (5:3b; Matt. 20:26b-28). As men in resurrection, they minister resurrection life as food to God's people (Matt. 24:45). This is typified by the ripe almonds borne by Aaron's rod. As Brother Nee aptly said, "A man's authority is based on his ministry, and his ministry is based on resurrection. Without resurrection there is no ministry, and without ministry there is no authority" (*The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, Volume 47: The Orthodoxy of the Church & Authority and Submission*, 259).

How is spiritual authority expressed? In Ephesians 5:25 Paul tells husbands to love their wives and refers to the example of Christ loving the church and giving Himself up for her. Christ became the Head of the church not by asserting His authority over her but by loving the church and giving Himself up for her. Likewise, spiritual authority belongs to those who participate in the afflictions of Christ in loving the church and giving themselves up for the saints (Col. 1:24). As Ron Kangas explained in the "Crystallization-study of Numbers" (*The Ministry of the Word* 23:7 (July 2019): 241), those with spiritual authority are not conscious of having any authority and never exercise authority. Rather, they only live out Christ in shepherding the saints in love. Moreover, when they go before God, they humble themselves to be on the same level as others, and when criticized, they are gracious toward others (Num. 12:1-3, 10, 13).

What should be our attitude toward deputy authorities? The Lord Jesus acknowledged the authority of Caesar, that is, of the Roman government (Matt. 22:21). When Peter instructed the Hebrew believers who were suffering under persecution to "honor the king" (1 Pet. 2:17), it was in the context of Nero's reign. The apostles charged the believers to submit to all deputy authorities, without regard to whether they were good or bad (Rom. 13:1; Titus 3:1; 1 Pet. 2:13). Believers are likewise charged to honor the elders in the church (1 Tim. 5:17) and be subject to them (1 Pet. 5:5).

What if a deputy authority is wrong? If a deputy authority is wrong, we should still submit (Dan. 3:19-21; Acts 16:20-25), though we cannot obey if the authority insists that we act contrary to God (Dan. 3:16-18; Acts 5:29). In the church a failure by the deputy authority should be handled through proper fellowship. For example, a failure in the eldership should be handled through fellowship with the apostles (1 Cor. 1:10-11; 5:1, 13; 1 Tim. 5:19-20).

Why is it important to know deputy authority? Submission to God's authority is the principle of God's kingdom. Rebellion against God's authority, including deputy authorities, is the principle of Satan's kingdom. The Body of Christ is built up by the supply of life, which, as seen in the New Jerusalem, comes from the throne of God (Rev. 22:1). In Ephesians 4:15-16, the Body is built up as the members hold Christ as the Head and mutually supply one another according to their measure. Rebellion against deputy authority insulates a believer from the supply of life ministered through that person (see *The Knowledge of Life*, 215).