

Submission/Authority Paper

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Throughout the past twenty years, the world has been rocked by multiple church scandals. From church treasurers embezzling money, pastors having affairs with their administrative assistants, to televangelists being full of pride and selfishness - these scandals have shocked the watching world. Unfortunately, these atrocities have hindered the Gospel from going forward. What causes all of these scandals? Why do church leaders still struggle with pride? Why is the Gospel sometimes hindered? We need a proper understanding of the role of character and humility in the lives of Christian leaders. In the book of Acts, God shows us two examples of how He desires character and humility to be of utmost importance in the life of a Christian leader.

In Acts 9 the story of Saul's experience is told. He was a Pharisee who ruthlessly persecuted and killed Christians. But God put Saul in a corner. As he was traveling to Damascus, he encountered Jesus Christ. His life was transformed and he began to proclaim the Gospel of the one He formerly despised (Acts 9:20). Later Paul¹ recounts the story of his conversion to King Agrippa.

In Acts 10, Peter receives a vision where he is told to tell the Gentiles about the risen Lord. Initially he had no desire to evangelize the Gentiles, but God backed him into a corner until Peter finally humbled himself and did what the Lord wanted him to do. The incredible result according to Acts 10:44 was the Holy Spirit moving among the Gentiles, to the amazement of everyone, including Peter.

In summary, both Paul and Peter ministered in a godless, corrupt society, yet the Gospel still went forward. What was the difference between them and others who failed in proclaiming the Gospel? Character was of utmost importance in the lives of Paul and

¹ Saul is also called by the name of Paul beginning in Acts 13:9.

Peter. You could see evidence of how God was being reproduced in their lives. As Christians, they had to break with the old way they had lived. No longer do we see Peter saying that Gentiles were not worthy to be called children of God. Instead he submits to the authority of God and ministers to them. No longer does Paul persecute Christians. Instead he becomes a pastor and evangelist to the Christians. Neither Paul nor Peter had asked for the revelation that God gave them. But once they had received the revelations from God, either they submit to his authority and do it, or disobey God. Both of them did submit to the authority of God and became world-changers for Christ and helped spread Christianity throughout the world. They realized that God had invested everything He had into them. They understood His great sacrifice on the cross for them. God had called them to come under His authority so He could use them as His hands to further His will. Their mandate now was to help the newborn Christians to mature and grow in grace.

Based on the story of Paul and Peter, the following questions need to be asked: What is the place that humility and submission need to have in the life of the person who is going into the ministry? What kind of character must they have? In what way should we reflect a spirit of submission and humility?

Pride versus humility

It should be a given that Christian leaders are to live lives of humility and be subjected to the authority of Christ. Sadly, some leaders have failed to understand that and have allowed pride to be the dominant characteristic of their ministry. Scripture has numerous passages urging Christians and Christian leaders to submit to Christ and to

forsake pride. In James 4:6, the writer tells us that “God gives grace to the humble”. It isn’t for those who help themselves, it is for those who are living lives of humility. In Mark 9, the disciples of Jesus are arguing over who was the greatest among them. Jesus tells them that if anyone desires to be first, he must be the last and a servant of all (Mk. 9:35). Shortly after this, Jesus has to reaffirm his instruction to James and John as they have asked Him to show them special favor (Mk. 10:35-37). Jesus simply tells them that “even the Son of Man has come to serve”. Pride has no place in the life of a Christian leader.

The practicality of humility

In 1 Peter 5:6-7, the apostle Peter makes humility practical for us and shows how we can humble ourselves daily. He writes “Humble yourselves, therefore under the mighty hand of God.” Then Peter shows us how to do that: “casting all your anxieties on Him, because He cares for you.” Peter, in essence, is telling us when we humble ourselves, we can be care-free. Where there is anxiousness, often pride is the root issue. The solution is to humble ourselves before Christ. Pride has deceived many leaders into believing that they are allowed to live above what Christ has commanded. Hebrews 3:13 tells us to guard against being “hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. Pride has destroyed so many leaders and organizations. In 1 Corinthians, Paul tackles the mess that the church leaders made at Corinth. The drunkenness, debauchery, and divisiveness were all due to pride and self-righteousness. Paul urges them to live their lives in the shadow of the cross of Christ. In chapter 4, Paul admonishes Christian leaders and tells them what to expect from the ministry. They are to be servants using

their gifts from God and stewards who oversee the church. Christian leaders will stand before God someday, and they must be sustained by the grace of God. Paul is telling the Corinthian church and Christian leaders of today that ministry is all about laboring for an audience of One. It isn't about seeking approval from the masses; its about seeking approval from the Creator. It isn't about seeing how high you can climb on the ladder; its about seeing how humble you can be. It isn't about seeking the wisdom of the world; its about seeking the wisdom of the Cross. Paul is also writing that Christian ministry is about the grace of God. God's grace saves Christian leaders, gives them the spiritual gifts, and empowers them for service.

Today, it is often the flashy that is successful. Those that live lives of humility are often overlooked. Paul is writing that often there will be no notice of what one is doing for the sake of Christ; the number of hours invested in ministry will sometimes will be exhausting, there will be people and groups that will disappoint, there will be people that talk negative and even tell lies. Ministry isn't about one's own self; it is about Him, the King of kings and Lord of lords. He was the answer for the troubled church leaders in Corinth and He is the answer for the troubled church leaders in America.