

# Church Authority

by

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The words of Christ must ever be our guide. They cannot be too often repeated. Again we quote: "Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister: and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many." Matthew 20:25-28.

It should be understood that the word "minister," in the above text, does not necessarily mean "preacher." A minister is a servant, one who ministers or serves. In the text just quoted, the word "servant" indicates a more complete and humble servitude than the word "minister." The difference is shown in the margin of the Revised Version, where we have "servant" given as the equivalent of "minister," and "bondservant" as the equivalent of "servant." The word rendered "minister" is the ordinary word for servant, while that rendered "servant" is the usual word for *slave*. Now note the gradation in which they are used by the Lord. He who will be *great* in the church, must be a servant; but he who will be *chief*, must be a bondservant. That is, the degree of greatness depends upon the completeness of the service and the giving up of self to Christ.

So we learn from the words of the Saviour, that there is to be no such thing in the church of Christ as the exercise of authority such as is known in civil government. The church is on an entirely different plane from the State. **There is no likeness whatever between them.** The kingdom of Christ is a thing entirely different from human ideas of government. He said, "My kingdom is not of this world." John 18:36. They who think to understand the working of Christ's kingdom, by studying earthly models, are proceeding in the wrong way, and are working in the dark.

We have read in 1 Corinthians 12:28 that "governments" are among the gifts that God has bestowed upon the church; but we shall come more closely to God' s idea of government if we note that the Revised Version gives the alternative reading, "wise counsels." One of the titles of Christ, as the one upon whose shoulder the government is laid, is "Counsellor"; He is "wonderful in counsel," and so He provides wise counsels for the government of His church, said counsel to be derived solely from Him, who alone is the Source of wisdom. He governs by love. His counsel is "the counsel of peace."

Recall again the words of 1 Peter 5:3. The elders or bishops he exhorts not to be "lords over God' s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock." There can therefore be in the true church of Christ no such thing as a "Lord Bishop." That is one of the fruits of the unlawful connection of the church with the world. Christ is the only Lord; but here again we shall grievously err if we think of Him as occupying the "lordly" position of earthly lords. He is "meek and lowly in heart" (Matthew 11:29), and all men have to learn humility from Him who is "Lord over all." He calls upon them to humble themselves to walk with Him. Micah 6:8, margin.

The church of Christ, as directed by the Lord Himself, is the only place on earth where "liberty, equality, and fraternity" can be fully realized. The apostle Peter proceeds, "Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble." 1 Peter 5:5. The trouble with earthly associations formed for the purpose of promoting liberty and equality on earth, is that they are only human organizations, directed only by human wisdom and human power, and among men self is bound to predominate. Only the Spirit of Christ is unselfish.

**"Rank," as known among men, is unknown to the church of Christ. There is no such thing as one setting himself up above another, or allowing himself to be so placed or considered.** That pertains to the princes of this world, but the words of Christ are, "It shall not be so among you." Christ "emptied Himself," and therefore self has no place in His body, the church. To the Jews He said, "How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God?" John 5:44. Through the apostle Paul He said, "Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another." Romans 12:10. Again, "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem

other better than themselves." Philippians 2:3. Love "seeketh not her own." 1 Corinthians 13:5. "Be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren." Matthew 23:8.

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