

Leadership, Authority, and Subordination

In over twenty five years of knowing each other, my wife and I have learned a lot about relationships and the factors that make them work – or not. The truth is, it really didn't begin to gel for us until we became aware of God's Word and began shaping our roles according to His commands. Today, from the outside looking in, an observer might see her needing something done at the house, while I'd prefer to be doing something else. Deferring to her, I would choose to do the tasks she desires. Or, perhaps I have my sights set on pursuing an activity which she sees as a lot more work for her, yet she chooses to support me. Or maybe, I choose to make a decision that is not popular with her, but before I do, we discuss it so I can see her perspective as well, and she knows my decision is informed of her desires.

The choices we have made aren't merely polite and simple, nor without large consequences. While often deferring to each other, I have lead my family through informed choices – cross country with all of our belongings; through several life changing decisions; into three different businesses; into many Ministry adventures; through many disagreements and conflict; and as a family, through countless minefields of issues with far too many strongly opinionated participants.

I believe a measure of our success has been the fact that we have successfully covered an extreme amount of ground as a family, despite the fact we began as undisciplined, un-Churched, married sinners. Yet at the same time my wife would report she is satisfied with my leadership, while not recalling many times where I forced my way, even though I did make choices and led my family in directions with which they didn't always agree. It was in the times I forced my way without considering her desires that I made some of the worst decisions that hurt my family. Godly leadership is unapologetically effective and decisive, yet at the same time strives to be cognizant of the needs of those following. It is a skillful mix, avoiding both extreme pitfalls of disengaged wimp and controlling tyrant. Skillfully leading any group of rebellious sinners with their own desires, and all the while as you have your own competing desires as well, can only be learned by following God's directions and respecting our roles.

The question was posed to our group: What is one way a husband might hinder his relationship with his wife? My answer was "shortsightedness". When I was asked to expand on my answer, I believe I made two mistakes. First, I made a controversial statement that came off as callous and easily misunderstood. It was blunt, and without a proper explanation is even harder to defend. Second, with realistically only a couple of minutes to explain myself, it was impossible to give a thorough explanation. I should not have opened a subject I would not have time to explain, and in doing so, I caused confusion and division. For both of these, I am sorry. Please forgive me if I offended you.

If you care for a further explanation of leadership and authority, I have included my thoughts below. I don't make a habit of pages and pages of text to make a point, but I believe this is a very misunderstood topic, and I want to share what I have learned so anyone who is interested can grow with me as we follow Jesus, in our roles as leaders. If you have anything to contribute (or dispute), please share with me so we can be as iron sharpening iron.

Leadership and Authority

Authority might be defined as having the responsibility over resources, the right to conduct those resources as seen fit, and the responsibility to answer for the outcome of the effort. In all cases, the Bible shows that legitimate authority, be it in men or women, is granted by God. It is prescribed in God over mankind, government over citizens, Church leaders over members, a husband over his wife, and parents over their children. All mankind

are equal in God's Creation, and among us is a hierarchy of organization and responsibilities. Therefore, anyone in his respecting role, and his corresponding responsibilities, are sanctioned by God.

This also means that legitimate authority is established upon assignment, not merit. Authority has nothing to do with a person's abilities, and in fact, means that authority remains even in an ignorant leader. Bad leaders are still responsible. This is why it is so important, when possible, to carefully choose what leadership we place ourselves under. Our job, as subordinates, is to comply with our leaders the best way we can, in as much as those leaders are in accord with God's expectations. We are never expected to sin against God, no matter what our leaders expect of us.

Children, as long as they are under the headship of the father of the family, are under authority. Technically, I believe this means until those children are either married and have formed their own respective family, or have gone out to establish themselves in a single, celibate life. A daughter must therefore choose her mate well. In marriage, each commits to a covenant agreement before God, and once consummated in sexual intercourse, are bound by Holy matrimony until one or the other dies, or through legitimate divorce, or upon the Lord's return. That woman is now subject to her husband's authority, and their joint standing before God. She would do very well to be sure she is committing to a godly husband who, with her, understands their responsibilities before God, and they both should understand how to discern their surroundings and divide the Word accordingly.

Such is it in placing ourselves under Church leadership. Again, it behooves us to know the leaders' fear of and commitment to God, as well as the basis of their decisions and how the Church is organized. Believers are to be under Church authority, and in obeying this, are offered the protections of the Church.

It is common today for people, including believers, to attend a congregation yet not become members. The problem, aside from not understanding the issue to begin with, is two-fold; first, attendees might require guidance, even Church discipline. Non members who do not commit to the bond to the Church then find it convenient to just leave when confronted by the uncomfortable process of discipline. While apparently not a covenant bond like marriage, this avoidance of Church membership – and more specifically a commitment to hold oneself under the leadership's Bible-guided, legitimate authority no matter what – is still rebellion in that the attendee will not submit to that authority under membership. It is preferable in their eyes to leave and find another Church that does not challenge or know about their sin. In the end, non-members enjoy many of the benefits of the Church, without the safety of the bonds of being under authority. The problem arises when this person, faced with godly, Bible based discipline, leaves to escape what they need the most – correction, forgiveness, and repentance.

How leaders thrive

The best example of leadership we might follow is seen in God. Jesus, and other leaders who work to emulate Him, show us the living out of the Scriptures. Some key points in Jesus' example include: Sanctioned by Father; Knowledgeable of His responsibilities and boundaries laid out in the Word; Instruction of the facts to those under Him; Careful examination of the current issues in relation to Scripture; Reacting and following through as Father expects; and, doing all in love and while understanding the needs of all people involved. In summary: the leader exercises his resources, in accord with God's Truth, all done in love – be it towards our child, our congregant, our wife, our employee, or anyone under our charge.

How leaders fail

Conversely, a leader has unlimited opportunities to fail, such as failure to acknowledge the responsibilities of himself or his subordinates, which leads to confusion, abandonment of his post, or rebellion. Or, he might fail to instruct all in his circle of responsibility, which leads to a lack of cohesion to God's directions, and to problems that

might have been avoided. For example, consider Eve. Genesis 2 and 3 describes Father's instruction to Adam, as well as Adam's responsibilities to govern, all before Eve was created. Scripture does not tell of God talking to Eve, and we conclude that Adam was to instruct her, as he was her authority, under God. In the Fall however, Adam stood by as Eve proceeded to take of the fruit, and then too, did Adam from her hand. In this, Adam failed to either instruct her or turn her away. As further proof of his responsibilities, though she ate first, Father placed the most substantial curse on him – and through him sin entered the world, not her. This was Adam's failure to live out God's expectations. In this, Adam failed to read the situation correctly and follow through as Father expected, as well as his thoughtless exercise of his responsibilities, lacking love and regard for the billions of people his actions would ultimately affect.

I will get my way anyhow, in the end

Be it good or bad, right or wrong, popular or despised, informed or ignorant – the decision of a legitimate leader, as it agrees with God's expectations, is his right and responsibility.

A shortsighted leader is interested in the immediate outcome, often in that it satisfies his goals. His priorities trump those of others, be it through an exercise of power, pride, ego, wealth, gratifications, or other personal gains. In all of these cases, he puts himself first, and accordingly, the people he is responsible for are placed behind his own consideration. Pressing ahead for his own gain, at the expense of others without consideration or understanding, damages the chief tool of his influence – the relationship. This is a shortsighted, I-want-it-my-way-now, approach. He will likely get his way, but at what cost?

A longsighted approach is based upon opposite goals: Admiration of what is right, the betterment and success of his people, promoting the success of his people's efforts over his own, and generally foregoing short term gratification in exchange for the payoff down the road. The leader knows that success means all affected parties believe their relevant input has been considered, and they find it easier to work to support the goal he has pointed them toward. Most of us feel safe under good, longsighted authority. Once in submission, I felt comfortable under Father. In my roles as leader, sanctioned by God, I also feel comfortable exercising my responsibilities. The people under a leader's charge should also feel comfortable, as he leads wisely and in consideration of his subordinates. Good leadership is that in which a subordinate can achieve more than he might on his own.

In the end, the person in authority makes the final decision. A Scriptural approach employs participation, but is not a democracy. By definition, a pure democracy is decided by the will of the majority, and no one person has authority over another and all are equal in effecting the outcome. It is also not a shared leadership, where both husband and wife are equal authorities over their marriage and family. Instead, God prescribes for us a positionally authoritative hierarchy, exercised in a Biblical love where we always strive to put the other's needs first, yet as we carry out our responsibilities in agreement with Scripture. This would be a leader who, in accord with Scripture, in Biblical love, takes his subordinates into consideration as he makes an informed decision. He will direct his resources as he sees fit, and one day will answer to God for the outcome of his efforts.

Can women lead, and excel at their work? Of course, under the authority over them. Women are under the same principles of authority as men. Husbands often make a mistake in believing their authority is threatened by their wife's activities – especially when she is better at it than he is. But a wise husband knows his authority has nothing to do with how smart he is, and he actually realizes his wife is a tremendous asset who can help him achieve more than he ever could have on his own. His wife can thrive as she exercises her abilities, under his authority. Both men and women have the ability and privilege of pursuing their chosen activities, in as long as their primary responsibilities to their family and each other are first met.

Leaders who do not execute their post as commanded by God will suffer loss. So will subordinates who resist their leaders' authority, though it agrees with Scripture. Men who do not submit to legitimate authority, who fail to understand and embrace their role as husband and father, who fail to know the Word and instruct their family and help them obey, who allow their authority to be assumed by others, or who abuse their position, will suffer loss for their failure. Women who do not submit to legitimate authority, who fail to support their husband in his efforts, who attempt to control him and fail to submit, who fail to uphold their responsibilities before God, will also suffer loss for their failure. The work of every leader, as well as the obedience of every subordinate, will be judged. In the end, we all are subordinate under Father. We are equal in value, but not in responsibility. And accordingly, we will not all be found equal as we are judged according to the quality of our work, be it as leader or subordinate.

Informed decisions and appeals

This doesn't mean a leader exists in a vacuum, answering to no one. A wise leader solicits the opinions of everyone his decision will involve, and takes those opinions to heart before setting the course. This also means that a wise subordinate understands the process and uses it as well. Acknowledging that his leader will make a decision that affects him, a subordinate will do his best to inform his leader of the issues he should consider before making a decision. This might even be a passionate argument, but it should never be confused as a passionate challenge to legitimate authority. If both parties understand that it is not the issue of authority at stake, but instead the issues impacting the pending decision, it paves the way for an honest discussion about the facts as they impact the decision to be made. And once the decision is made, it is the responsibility of everyone subject to the decision to support it and follow through.

Love and fear as motivators

A pastor has observed that husbands employ one of two approaches in directing their families – leading through love, or forcing through fear. There are four different aspects to this notion: Leading versus forcing, and, love versus fear. All four are effective means, in their own right. But, all four are not interchangeable. We might, at first, believe that the negatives – force and fear – do not belong at all. However, don't we see this very thing in God's handling of Israel at Mount Sinai? And King Belshazzar of Daniel 5, so scared his knees literally knocked. And what of God's Law, promising the sure demise of those who didn't obey, as well as the numerous times He followed through when they failed to do so? The Jews had every reason to fear God, and when they failed Him, people died.

Conversely, leading and love are the hallmarks of this Age of Grace, following the Cross. Enemies of God are warned by the pre-Cross actions of God in the Old Testament, but He has stayed His Judgment for the time being and asked everyone to turn to Him now during a period of clemency. The Lost are shown love and grace, and no one is forced to comply, they are led to obey – if they will.

Forcing someone is an act against their intentions, while leading is an invitation to follow. The first is pushing someone to the instigator's conclusion, while leading is drawing them to the conclusion. Forcing, at its worst, is a violation of someone's personhood, while leading is making an environment to attract that personhood on its own volition. A wise leader, acting Biblically, will seek to lovingly lead his followers to the conclusion he has in mind.

Love is not one dimensional

Father shows us love in several ways – not only tenderly holding our hand as we are led along the Path, but also in the assurance and justice of the protection of His legal hierarchy and order. His love for us - in dividing what is right and wrong – isn't shown by His winking at us and letting things slide, but instead in His absolute adherence to His dutiful leadership through His Just Law. I'm thinking about the love that Jesus showed us in the Cross. That was a show of selfless love in giving Himself. However, His simply giving of Himself in just any sort of death wouldn't Save us. Our Salvation is an absolute legal exercise as He satisfied Father's Justice, through a legal

sacrifice on the Cross, to settle debt according to the Law, to be legally propitiated, or attributed, to us. His governing us in justice is a strict adherence to His Law, which because it is absolute, provides us shelter. Therefore, even his absolute Law is a show of His loving care for us. If we only see Jesus' holding our hand, yet overlook His loving Justice through the Law, we would only be seeing half of the picture.

Resolute love

Resolute: Firm, unyielding, unbendable, determined, unwavering.

In my mind, I see Jesus on the Cross in His steely resolution to complete the task, bravely carrying out His role for the sake of His subordinates, Humanity and Creation. Was the scene lacking gentleness and the softer expression of love? In many ways I think so, but it wouldn't make it any less loving.

The statement "I will get my way anyhow, in the end" was callous. The intent was reaffirming the reality of a man's role in leadership, and demonstrating a side of a man's responsibility in deliberate contrast so it could be showcased. Soft men, who only exercise passive love yet not resolute love, and those who are easily pushed over in their authority, should see they are lacking a sense of duty towards their wives, children, and whoever else would try to dissuade them. Good leadership includes both an exercise of soft love and resolute love.

The statement "I will get my way anyhow, in the end" is also a warning to all of us. The realities of the authority of a leader mean that he will get his way (under God's authority), and followers must do their part (under God's expectations). But this also advises us to be sure we carefully lead, taking all underlying issues into consideration, and that subordinates both respect the leader's rights and work hard to help him make good decisions. Resolute leadership is a shelter and a blessing, and resolute subordinates play an important role in helping the leader achieve that.

Leading with conviction

A halfhearted approach to our responsibilities would be a mistake. If you were convinced that God had a specific purpose for you, wouldn't you firmly stand your ground and carry out your job as best you could? Consider Nehemiah, who set out to rebuild the Temple and the walls of Jerusalem. Nehemiah reported that he was on a mission from God, supported by His clear declaration of intent. While rebuilding the wall, their enemies sought to stop them from building and threatened to attack. Nehemiah responded by posting the military officers behind the workers, and the workers themselves were also armed to fight. (Neh 4.13-18) Nehemiah knew Who had sent him, he fiercely stood his ground, and he invoked God's Name and His command as the basis of his authority, both over his people and his enemies. Nehemiah knew why he was there and what he was expected to do, and no one was going to dissuade him. We too are under that same God, and likewise, we should not be dissuaded from our responsibilities, lest we be judged as unfaithful. And to anyone who would seek to take our position and assume our respective authority, Nehemiah says we should fight, backed by the authority of the Lord.

Is it correct for a leader to state he will have his way anyhow, in the end? Yes. But a wise leader knows that while he can expect to have his way, it is always best to do it well, in a longsighted manner for the overall sake of his cause and his people. If we do this well, as subordinate or as leader, we can look forward to one day hearing "Well done, good and faithful servant!"