

Chapter 1

Starting At The Beginning: Thinking Through The Limits Of Delegated Authority

In Matthew 28:18, Jesus said, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and earth.” Therefore, Jesus is not just some crown prince, as some Christians are wont to argue. Instead, He is nothing less than “Lord of lords, and King of kings.”¹ The only one excepted from His authority is God, the Father, who gave it to Him in the first place.² Thus, as we begin this study, it is important to understand that with the exception of Jesus and His Father, the exercise of all authority is derived or delegated authority, and that this has direct bearing on the subject to be discussed in this book—namely, the Christian’s obligation to the State.

But instead of proceeding directly to the State and the Christian’s obligation to it, it will be helpful to view this subject in light of two other God-ordained relationships. The first of these is the Home, which the Bible makes clear was created before the State. Consequently, it is most reasonable that the exercise of authority in the Home is foundational to understanding the requirements and limits of any and all delegated authority. The second of these

¹ Revelation 7:14.

² 1 Corinthians 15:27.

relationships is the Church. This divinely ordained institution is by no means of lesser importance than the Home and it is dealt with in this order only because it was instituted long after the Home and the State, although it is clear it had been in the mind of God even before the foundation of the world. So with this order in mind, let us now turn our attention to the Home.

The Home

By use of the term *the Home*, we're talking about the husband and wife relationship plus children, if the relationship be so blessed. It is within this first of all earthly alliances that we are originally introduced to delegated authority. But before proceeding any further, it's important to define some terms. According to Webster's *New Collegiate Dictionary*, authority is defined as the "power to influence or command thought, opinion, or behavior." For the theist, only God innately has this kind of power. In other words, because He is who He is, namely, the Sovereign Creator of the Universe, all lawful authority inherently resides in Him.

While here on this earth, Jesus made it clear that His heavenly Father had invested Him with "all authority," and that it naturally followed that the only one excepted from His authority was the Father who "put all things under Him," as we learned in 1 Corinthians 15:27. Thus, one ought to have no problem understanding that it is from God, and God alone, that all legitimate authority derives, and that all such derived authority is, by definition, "delegated authority." Consequently, the human authority we will be talking about in this study, whether it has to do with the Home, the Church, or the State, is always *limited* authority and, as such, can only be used within certain God-ordained parameters.

As previously noted, the very first articulation of this kind of authority is assigned to the Home, and this after mankind's fall

into sin. In Genesis 3:16b, God said to the woman, “Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.” Thus Eve, as a direct consequence of her sin, was told her husband would rule over her. However, and this is essential to understanding this point, her sinful condition is not the *only*, or even the *primary*, reason for her subjection. This is made clear by Paul in 1 Timothy 2:13, when he said, “Adam was formed first, then Eve.” Thus, the primary reason given for a woman not to *teach* nor *exercise authority* “over a man” is the creation order itself, which is something that can only be attributable to God. So with this truth in mind, let’s spend some time thinking about this created order and what it tells us.

Because the Bible says Adam was created first and existed for some time before Eve, it is reasonable to conclude that God did not create Eve to be Adam’s leader. Before creating Eve, God’s declaration in Genesis 2:18 seems to make this clear: “It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.” God then took Eve from the body of Adam (i.e., formed her from a rib taken from his side) and presented her to him. It was then that Adam declared her to be “bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh.”³ Thus Adam, the “Man” (Hebrew *Ish*), called her “Woman” (Hebrew *Isha*) because she was taken “out of Man.”

Consequently, Woman Was Second And Secondary, Not First Nor Primary

Using this truth as the foundation of his argument in 1 Corinthians 11:8-9, Paul says: “For the man is not from the woman; but woman from man.” In other words, both her origin and name are

³ Genesis 2:22-24.

derived from man and are thus *second* and *secondary*, not *first* nor *primary*. When it comes to the Home, then, the husband (man) exercises his headship over his wife (woman) because God ordained it to be this way, and this was so even before sin entered into the picture. This runs absolutely contrary to some folks' thinking, for they think the wife is to be subject to her husband *only* because of sin. But as we've seen, this is simply not the case.

However, and this is extremely important, man's role in fulfilling the mandate of Genesis 1:26-28 is not fulfilled apart from the female's role. Consequently, the chronological order of creation does not just make her subject to her husband, but it also makes her a vice-regent as well. This means she is not in any way, shape, or fashion, his slave. She is to be respected as an equal, created in God's image, who, at man's side and under his loving direction, fulfills the God-given task of subduing the earth, which is certainly to be included in what was said about the husband and wife relationship in Ephesians 5:25. As things were originally planned by God, man *and* woman, as a family, a unit, a team, were to *explore* (not exploit) and *control* (not destroy) the earth. But unfortunately this plan was marred by the sins of both Adam and Eve, as Genesis 3 informs us.

Something Happened That Changed Everything

Before sin entered into the world, Adam and Eve, respecting each other's role, would have worked together in harmony to fulfill the divine mandate and would, no doubt, have eventually begun to populate the earth. By doing so, they were both operating within the authority of God. Unfortunately, acting independently of her husband, Eve surrendered to Satan's temptation and ate the forbidden fruit. This is certainly no compliment to Eve, but what happened next is no endorsement of Adam either. Eve was

deceived, but not Adam. Instead, at his wife's behest, he willingly disobeyed God. As a result, both the man and woman were cursed by the Creator for their sins.

The curse on the woman is found in Genesis 3:16, and says, "I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; in pain you shall bring forth children; your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you." Notice that there are two effects of this curse on the woman. First, the pain she would experience in child-birth would be greatly increased. Second, there would be tension between her and her husband. It is to this second effect that I want us to focus our attention.

When Adam and Eve sinned, their relationship was distorted. The foretelling of this can be seen in the statement, "...your desire shall be for your husband." Just what this means has been much misunderstood. Some have thought it to be referring to the woman's sexual desire for her husband. But such a desire would already have been part of her makeup as a sexual being, and this before sin ever entered the picture. Therefore, such a position does not appear tenable. The original intention of God was that Adam and Eve would bear children and fill the earth. God made the man and woman two completely different sexes; therefore, sexual desire is not perverted nor distorted, as some have suggested, and within the marriage relationship is, according to Hebrews 13:4, both "honorable" and "undefiled."

What, Then, Was Her Desire?

Well, if her desire was not sexual attraction, what was it? This, I think, can best be understood in connection with the rest of the verse, which says, "And he shall rule over you." Many, thinking the desire of the woman is co-ordinate with man's rule, believe this is describing a *harmonious* relationship that would naturally exist

between a husband and his wife. Another way of saying this is that these folks believe the wife's desire is an instinctive disposition to be in subjection to her husband. I have heard this view set forth numerous times in Bible classes of which I was a part. Others, certain so-called "Christian feminists," understand this passage to be the description of how man, "degenerated by sin, would take advantage of his headship as a husband to dominate, lord it over, his wife."⁴ I believe both these views to be a misunderstanding of the passage.

This misunderstanding occurs due to what I believe is a mistranslation of the Hebrew conjunction in this passage—a mistranslation that uses "and" (a coordinating idea), rather than "but" (an antithetical concept). Thus, I am convinced the correct translation should read: "And your desire shall be for your husband, *but* he shall rule over you."⁵ The conjunction *but* indicates there would be friction between the husband and wife. This can be understood in connection with an identical Hebrew construction in Genesis 4:7b. Both passages use the word "desire" and a comparison of these two passages ought to give us an understanding of what the woman's desire really is.

3:16b "Your desire shall be for your husband, **and** he shall rule over you."

4:7b "And its desire is for you, **but** you should rule over it."

⁴ Letha Scanzoni and Nancy Hardesty, *All We're Meant To Be: Biblical Feminism for Today*, 1974, page 35.

⁵ For a more in-depth study of this point, see *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood*, John Piper and Wayne Grudem (editors), 1991, particularly chapters 3 and 20.

In Genesis 4:7b, sin is depicted (personified, if you will) as one who crouches at the door waiting to take hold of or capture its victim who, in this case, is Cain. Notice the parallels between this verse and Genesis 3:16b: “And unto thee shall be his [sin’s] desire, and thou shalt rule over him” (KJV). Now, the NKJ version of 4:7b reads, “And its desire shall be for you, but you should rule over it.” It seems clear that the idea God was conveying to Cain was that sin was a power that desired to rule over him, but he must resist and subdue it. When compared with this verse, Genesis 3:16b can be understood to be teaching that, as a result of her sin, which was a rejection of her husband’s rule, as well as the rule of God, a battle of the sexes had begun. Contrary to the harmony that once existed between Eve and her husband, she would now have an inclination to exercise control over him. Therefore, if he was going to exercise control over her, as his headship demanded, it would not be without a struggle.

In other words, just as sin’s desire was to have its way with Cain, God has given the woman over to a desire to have her way with her husband. Because she usurped his headship in the temptation, she is subjected to the misery of competing with her rightful head. This is, after all, justice (i.e., a measure-for-measure response to her sin). Thus, in becoming sin-sick, the willing submission of the wife and the loving headship of the husband were corrupted. The woman’s inordinate desire to usurp her husband’s authority would have to be mastered by her husband, if he could. Consequently, the rule of love established in paradise was replaced by a battle between the sexes that has produced an endless stream of usurpation, strife, tyranny, and ungodly domination.

Furthermore, the curse upon Adam would further exacerbate the friction that would exist between the man and his wife. The difficulty of toiling out a living would cause physical and psychological stress that would ultimately be carried over into the man’s

relationship with his wife. The time necessary to eke out a living from the cursed earth would force the husband to spend much more time away from home. As a result, his wife might very well feel like she was being neglected. In addition, the jealousy many husbands feel concerning their hard-earned paychecks, even though marriage is to be a joint effort, has served to intensify the battle of the sexes down through the ages. In many marriages today, the husband has *his money*, the wife has *her money*, and “never the twain shall meet.” Obviously, then, the negative effects of the husband trying to make ends meet in a world that resists him on every hand are very much with us, even today.

The Curse And Its Effect

The history of man and woman, as well as our own experiences, demonstrates the real problems created by the consequences of our first parents' sins. The unity God intended for His creation was destroyed by those sins and, as a result, the woman would desire to usurp her husband's rule. At the same time, the husband, if he was to rule, would do so with some degree of difficulty. Add to these consequences our own sins, and the battle between the sexes has actually grown into a full-fledged war. The family, the very fabric of our society, is being destroyed today. Divorce is rampant. The so-called “traditional family structure” is being redefined to include unmarried couples and homosexual liaisons (they call each other “housemates,” “significant others” and now even “marriage partners,” thanks to the State of Massachusetts and the other states that are following in its footsteps).

In addition, the feminist goal, which is nothing short of social, political, and cultural revolution, is having a dramatic impact in our day. Whether we like to admit it or not, feminism has converted our culture to the feminist mind-set. In fact, the

feminization of America is in full-swing. As a so-called “Biblical feminist” has noted: “Feminism since the early 1960s has begun to color interpersonal relations, the language we speak, family life, the educational system, child-rearing practices, politics, business, the mass media, religion, law, the judicial system, the cultural value system, and intellectual life.”⁶

Paradise Lost

As originally created, the male and female were to complete each other as they enabled the other to fulfill the God-ordained purpose of procreating and subduing the earth. Neither was to seek the other’s position, but as half of a whole *they were meant to complement each other*. When sin entered the picture, their distinctive roles were blurred and their harmonious relationship distorted. Instead of working together in unity, they began to compete with each other. Instead of reflecting the glory of God, they began to mirror the corruption of sin. Their original “oneness” was replaced by a power struggle that has continued in society ever since. This struggle, although it does not always manifest itself overtly, does, nevertheless, lie just below the surface in even the best of marriages.

It is most unfortunate that so many men, even Christians, “hardened through the deceitfulness of sin,”⁷ have engaged in the practice of “lording it over” their wives. On the other hand, and at the same time, many women, even Christians, have become “silly women laden with sins”⁸ and have not willingly submitted to the headship of their husbands. It is sad, but true, that many

⁶ Quoted in Mary Pride, *The Way Home*, 1985, page 12.

⁷ Hebrews 3:13.

⁸ 2 Timothy 3:6.

Christians, both male and female, instead of “prov[ing] what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God,”⁹ are actually being guided by current secular values. Of course, Christians, of all people, ought to know that the answer to this problem is not to be found in current secular thought or even in so-called traditional thinking. Instead, the answer is found in God’s word. Thus, it is in the Bible, and the Bible alone, that we will find the answers to all our problems.

Paradise Restored

A very important part of the “good news” of the gospel of Jesus Christ is that what was lost in the Garden of Eden can be restored in Christ. As faithful followers of the humble Galilean, the husband and wife can once again become the *unit* God intended them to be from the very beginning: the husband, the loving leader who “nourishes and cherishes” his wife, as if she were his own body,¹⁰ and the wife, the suitable helper, who willingly submits to her husband’s guidance “as to the Lord.”¹¹ Obviously, such a relationship must be characterized by selflessness, yet it is *only* in Christ that one learns to crucify Self. It is *only* in Christ that one exchanges the egotistical “I am” of sinful pride for the loving guidance of the Great I Am. It is *only* in Christ that two people will live in the estate of matrimony as God truly intended.

Does this mean that people who are not Christians are really not married? No, it does not. Does it mean that a Christian cannot marry a non-Christian? Again, no, although it is certainly appropriate to argue that such a decision may not be the wisest of

⁹ Romans 12:1.

¹⁰ Ephesians 5:28-29.

¹¹ Ephesians 5:22.

choices. Well, then, what does it mean? What it means is that without the restoration that comes “in Christ,” marriage will never be what the Lord created it to be; *namely, a relationship of unity that supersedes every other earthly relationship and in a very wonderful way reflects the unity that exists between Christ and His Church.*¹² This Bible truth is a part of that light that illuminates a lost and dying world.¹³ And it is this truth that functions as some of the salt that preserves our decaying society.¹⁴ Consequently, if Christians aren’t living this truth out in their lives on a regular basis, then they’re no good to themselves or anyone else.

Delegated Authority, Contrary To What Some Think, Says Nothing About Superiority

Because men and women are made in the image of God,¹⁵ they are equal bearers of the divine image. This means that both men and women are equally human beings. Thus, women are not inferior members of the human race, nor are they to be viewed as somehow being second-class citizens, as they were in this country for years, and still are in many countries around the world.

Furthermore, women must not be counted as second-class citizens of the kingdom of God either.¹⁶ The Bible makes it clear that they are full members of the church of Christ—i.e., the universal body of the saved; namely the “My church” of Matthew 16:18—with access to all the spiritual rights and benefits of such membership. In other words, one cannot be kept from the saving

¹² See Ephesians 5:22-33.

¹³ See Matthew 5:14.

¹⁴ See Matthew 5:13.

¹⁵ See Genesis 1:27.

¹⁶ See Galatians 3:28.

blood of Jesus Christ by his or her *nationality* (“neither Jew nor Gentile”), *status in society* (“neither slave nor free”), or *gender* (“neither male nor female”). All human beings are absolutely equal in that they are privileged by the Grace of God to become “children” and “heirs of God” through faith in Christ Jesus.¹⁷ Consequently, the context of Galatians 3:28, contrary to what the so-called biblical feminists among us think, deals with *who* can become a Christian, which includes everyone, and on what basis, hearing and obeying the gospel, not with male-female roles *per se*.

It is, therefore, unfortunate that so-called “Biblical feminists” have pounced on Galatians 3:28 as the touchstone that tests any interpretation of Scripture. Some have even called this passage the “Magna Carta” of all humanity. They claim it teaches it is God’s desire to see all sex roles completely obliterated in the Home, State, and Society in general, which includes the Church. Equality, they falsely reason, means getting rid of all role distinctions. “Equality and subordination are contradictions!” they proclaim. They feel that “true egalitarianism [equality] must be characterized by what sociologists call role-interchangeability.” They argue that any subordination is “psychologically unhealthy” and totally “carnal.”

These “Biblical feminists” have bought into the feminist argument that true equality means monolithic, undifferentiated role-interchangeability, and they have done so *lock, stock and barrel*. Therefore, any Bible passage that does not square with their predetermined feminist definition must be either rejected as un-Biblical or summarily explained away. Mostly, passages that teach a woman’s role is to be one of subjection¹⁸ are interpreted as

¹⁷ See Galatians 4:7.

¹⁸ For example, 1 Corinthians 11:3; 14:34; 1 Timothy 2:11; Ephesians 5:22; Colossians 3:18; 1 Peter 3:1.

culturally mandated and not suitable for all time. It is the teaching of those who hold this belief that the cultural submission of women taught in the aforementioned passages would eventually evolve into the total gender equality and role-interchangeability that they erroneously think Galatians 3:28 to be teaching. (Incidentally, I have had conversations with Christian women who have made this exact same argument.)

But Equality And Subordination Are Not Contradictions

The so-called “Biblical feminists” are wrong! *Equality and subordination are not contradictions.* The Bible teaches that, as divine image-bearers, the female and male are totally equal. Furthermore, the Bible teaches that the female is not a second-class citizen of the kingdom of God. It teaches, in fact, that she is totally equal in her access to the salvation that takes place in Christ.

At the same time, the Bible emphatically teaches that the female role is to be one of submission. Unless one is willing to charge the Holy Spirit with being inconsistent and contradictory (and what true Bible believer would ever think of doing such a thing?), then one is forced to conclude that subordination and equality are not contradictory. In order to make this point, I want to turn your attention to one irrefutable example: Jesus of Nazareth.

The Son of God’s submission to His Heavenly Father stands as the conclusive example that equality and subordination are not contradictory.¹⁹ The Bible teaches unequivocally that there never was a time when the Son of God ever ceased to be fully God.²⁰ Ontologically (i.e., having to do with His nature and being), the

¹⁹ See 1 Corinthians 11:3 and 15:28.

²⁰ See Colossians 2:9.

second person of the Godhead was equal with His Father.²¹ Even so, whenever the Bible says that God the Father sent His Son into the world,²² it is understood that the Son's role was one of subordination: namely, the Father commands and sends; the Son obeys and comes. Only a heretic would be so bold as to suggest that the Son is a lesser God because it is His role to be submissive to His Father. In addition, the Bible tells us the Holy Spirit was sent by both the Father and the Son.²³ Does this mean that He was even a lesser God than the Son who was already a lesser God than His Father? Again, none but a heretic would teach such a thing.

If Christ's subjection to His Father does not suggest inferiority, then the wife's subjection to her husband certainly does not imply her inferiority, as feminists so wrongly insist. The difference between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is a *functional* one, not an *essential* one. They differ not in their essence or nature, but in the different roles they carry out in the Godhead. Similarly, men and women do not differ in their humanness, only in the roles they have been assigned by their Creator. Neither the natural equality that men and women enjoy as creatures made in the image of God nor their covenant equality in the kingdom of God is abrogated by the Biblical assignment of masculine and feminine roles.

Thus, as the Bible teaches us, the God-ordained role of the husband is to exercise a loving headship in the Home. The wife, that same Bible tells us, must willingly submit to her husband's rule. As co-regents, their children are required to obey them both. Thus, it is in the Home that men and women are first exposed to the obligations and responsibilities of delegated authority.

²¹ See Philippians 2:6.

²² In places like John 3:17, for example.

²³ See John 14:26; 15:26; 16:7.

But What, If Any, Are The Limitations Of Such Authority?

Until we answer this question, our study of the Home has no value in our attempt to understand the relationship that exists between the Christian and the State. We will do this by understanding the limitations God has placed on the husband's exercise of authority and, as it relates to this, the wife's and children's obligations to submit to the husband's/father's authority.

As we've learned, the husband's authority is *delegated* authority, and all delegated authority, by definition, is subservient to the grantor of such authority. The Creator and Sustainer of the universe is the ultimate Grantor of any and all authority, as the Scriptures make clear.²⁴ This means that the husband's authority is limited to matters of expedience, which means, in turn, that his authority does not extend to matters on which God has already legislated in His divine revelation. This concept may not be clear at first, but it is imperative to understanding the limits of delegated authority. In other words, although the husband has been given the authority to rule the Home, such authority does not extend to altering or denigrating what God has taught in His word, whether through *command*, *example* or *necessary inference*. When the husband exercises himself to do so, he has stepped outside his realm of authority and those otherwise subject to him (*viz.*, his wife and children) are not obligated to obey in such matters. Although such will be viewed as disobedience by those attempting to exercise such power, such disobedience, if it is even proper to call it this, is really "holy disobedience," which is just another way of identifying the godly disobedience our allegiance to God sometimes requires of us.

²⁴ See footnotes 1 through 3 in this chapter for the Biblical references.

A Tragic Example

For example, a preacher who was there when it happened told me the sad story of a woman he baptized into Christ whose husband tried to prevent her from worshiping with the saints. He did most everything he could to make her life miserable. But because she understood, and was determined to honor, her obligation to obey the Lord concerning this matter, she was willing to disobey her husband in order to assemble and worship with the saints. In his rants, he even threatened to kill her if she continued to meet with the church. All can sympathize with this woman's plight. Nevertheless, she continued to assemble with her brethren. Even those who picked her up for services were subjected to verbal abuse and even likewise threatened.

One Lord's day the husband made good on his threatenings. As the preacher drove the woman home in his pickup truck with her child sitting next to her, the husband, upon their arrival, came out on the front porch and fired his rifle in their direction, hitting his wife in the head and killing her instantly. As soon as he did so, there was remorse. Therefore, he spared the preacher and the child. Nevertheless, the bitter deed was done and his wife was dead, and he, in his ungodly rage, had killed her.

How tragic, you are no doubt thinking. But while you're thinking, ask yourself this question: Did this woman bring this tragedy on herself by continuing to disobey her husband? Of course not!, you may be thinking. Well, then, if not, why not? In other words, doesn't the Bible teach that a wife is under obligation to obey her husband "in everything"? Furthermore, are not his children scripturally admonished to obey him "in all things"? Well, yes, you say, but the "all" and "everything" of such passages are "*superseded*" by other passages that require one to obey God rather than man when man commands something that interferes

with obeying the Lord.” Well, you’re on the right track and, consequently, almost right. However, “almost right” isn’t good enough when it comes to properly understanding this most important of subjects, for in understanding this subject properly, one will come to understand that God never places us in the impossible position of having to violate one of His commands by obeying another. In other words, if one of God’s laws can “supersede” another, this makes one of God’s laws superior to another. Although this idea is all too common among Christians, it is not what the Bible says. I’ll have more to say about this momentarily, but first we must spend some time with the Principle of Qualification.

The Principle Of Qualification

The ancients wisely declared, “*Scriptura scripturam interpretatur,*” or “Scripture interprets Scripture.” If the Bible is God’s Word, then it stands to reason that it must not be inconsistent with itself. In point of fact, one divine Author, the Holy Spirit, inspired the entire Bible. Therefore, it is inconceivable it could contradict itself. An essential rule of Bible study, let’s call it the *synthesis principle*, puts scripture together with scripture to arrive at clear, consistent meaning. In 2 Peter 1:19-21, Peter wrote:

We also have the prophetic word made more sure, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

In other words, there is never any place in Bible study for, “To me, this passage means...” On the contrary, the Bible cannot have

one meaning for *you* and another meaning for *me*. Whatever the Scriptures are saying, it is saying the same thing to both of us. Consequently, the best way to interpret the Bible is to let it interpret itself.

Thinking Of The Bible As A Symphony Orchestra

If the Bible is thought of as a symphony orchestra, and the Holy Spirit as the famed Arturo Toscanini, or some other great conductor, then just as the orchestra plays the notes the great conductor desires, so the Bible, with its great assortment of instruments, produces the message the Holy Spirit wants produced—remember, if you will, that “no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation.”²⁵ When synthesized, or put together, we have the entire symphony or word of God, as the case may be. Just as each instrumentalist’s part becomes fully clear when played in relation to all the other parts, so any one passage of the Bible becomes clear only when compared to all other passages. This means that if we hold an interpretation of one passage that contradicts another, at least one of these passages is being interpreted incorrectly. The Holy Spirit does not—indeed, cannot—disagree with Himself. For example, one passage cannot be saying we are saved by faith alone²⁶ if there is another clear passage that says we are *not* saved by faith only.²⁷ Therefore, passages where the obvious meanings are clear help us to understand passages that are sometimes less clear. The wise Bible student is careful not to build a doctrine on a single obscure or unclear passage. Some otherwise intelligent men have done this to their own detriment.

²⁵ 1 Peter 1:20.

²⁶ See Romans 3:28.

²⁷ See James 2:24.

A Definition

Comparing Scripture with Scripture helps us to understand that one passage can actually amplify, clarify, modify, or qualify another. In this section, it is our responsibility to focus on something I'm calling the "qualification of Scripture." By *qualify*, it is meant that one passage can limit or restrict another. Although a qualification may appear at first to be a contradiction or denial of a particular scripture, it is not. A qualification merely sets the particular passage in perspective by applying additional information about the topic under discussion. As we shall see, a qualification may occur in the immediate, general, or remote context. Now stay with me on this, if you will, for it is very important to understand this principle if we are to ever unravel what some think to be contradictory passages having to do with submission to authority exercised in the Home, the State, and the Church.

The Immediate Context

Sometimes a qualification is found in the very passage itself. In Matthew 19:9, for example, the "except for sexual immorality" phrase qualifies, "And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife...and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery." Without this exception clause (or qualification), divorcing one's mate and marrying another would always be wrong.

Another example is found in 1 Corinthians 5:9-10, where Paul writes:

I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous,

or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world.

It should be easy to see that what Paul wrote in verse 10 immediately qualifies what he said in verse 9.

Yet another example is found in 1 Corinthians 10:23-33, where Paul mentions not doing some things “for conscience’ sake.”²⁸ It’s not until we get to verse 29 that we hear him say: “Conscience, I say, not your own, but that of the other. For why is my liberty judged by another man’s conscience?” Without this immediate qualification, we would not know that this passage was actually referring to another man’s conscience, rather than our own.

In point of fact, immediate, clear-cut qualifications of Scripture are very rare. Imagine what the Bible would read like if, after every bit of instruction in the Bible, God would have explained what the passage did *not* mean. Such a list of seemingly endless qualifications would surely cause us to lose the crucial point under discussion. Even so, the principle of qualification is an extremely important concept to understand when trying to discover the correct meaning of any Bible passage.

However, the interpretation of a verse in its immediate context is actually the foundation of Bible interpretation and serves as a precedent for how the process should be employed in the larger context of Scripture. Therefore, understanding how the principle of qualification is to be employed, we are ready to examine some passages that are qualified by the general context.

²⁸ See verses 25, 27 and 28.

The General Context

An example of a qualification in the general context is Solomon's frequently misinterpreted statement, "The dead know nothing."²⁹ Solomon is not denying continuing existence or consciousness after one experiences physical death, as some think. This would be a clear contradiction of the necessary inference of Exodus 3:6, where God stated, "I am the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." The necessary inference, according to Jesus,³⁰ is that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, although physically dead, remain in a state of conscious existence. The Sadducees, of course, did not believe that a human being survived physical death.³¹ Because they failed to make the necessary conclusion of Exodus 3:6, Jesus said, in Mark 12:27, that they were "greatly mistaken." One might suspect that the Sadducees may have even cited Ecclesiastes 9:5 as their proof-text. Yet, when we consider the story Jesus told of the rich man and Lazarus,³² then we realize that Solomon's statement could not be referring to one's lack of consciousness beyond the grave.

There is, of course, the possibility that Solomon could have been mistaken about what he wrote, and that the Holy Spirit permitted his misunderstanding to be recorded in Scripture. This happens occasionally in Scripture. However, when one considers the surrounding context of Solomon's statement, this possibility is immediately eliminated. In the general context, it is clear that Solomon is referring to life "under the sun."³³ In fact, much of what

²⁹ Ecclesiastes 9:5.

³⁰ See Mark 12:18-27.

³¹ See Acts 23:8.

³² See Luke 16:19-31.

³³ Ecclesiastes 9:3, 6, and 9.

Solomon says in this book should be viewed within the “under the sun” context. There are twenty-seven occurrences of the phrase “under the sun” in the book, beginning in Ecclesiastes 1:3 and ending in 10:5. Thus, Solomon’s “the dead know nothing” statement is restricted or limited to an ongoing knowledge of the earthly affairs experienced by those who are still physically alive and, thus, does not extend to those who are dead but still alive in the spirit.

Another example of a general context qualification is found in 1 Corinthians 10:23, where the apostle Paul writes, “All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify.” Some have wrongly taken this passage to mean that those in Christ are no longer subject to law. Although it is true that a Christian is not dependent upon a system of perfect law-keeping for justification, he is, nevertheless, under law to Christ.³⁴ Paul, who is speaking by inspiration, is not saying everything (e.g., fornication, adultery, lying, theft, *et cetera*, which are clearly condemned in other passages) is lawful, which would make the Scriptures contradictory. Instead, the general context indicates that what he’s saying is that within the category of things that are lawful, there are some things that are not helpful or expedient. The context informs us that whatever the Christian does must glorify God (verse 31) and that even our liberty (*viz.*, the “all things” that “are lawful”) may be limited by another person’s conscience (verses 27-29). In other words, even when something is lawful for me, I should usually refrain from doing it if it will give “offense either to the Jews or the Greeks or to the church of God” (verse 32). I say “usually,” because even this doctrine is qualified.

For example, it is important to understand that Paul is not writing in this passage of things that are required. In other words,

³⁴ See 1 Corinthians 9:21 and Galatians 6:2.

if my devotion to Jesus Christ offends a Jew or Muslim, (e.g., invoking His name in prayer), then so be it—I must “obey God rather than men.”³⁵ On the other hand, I will not offend my Muslim or Jewish dinner guest by serving him pork, which, as a Christian, I am at liberty to eat or not to eat. And, in the case under consideration in the passage, I need not be overly scrupulous about eating meat, whether selecting it in the market place or eating it when it is set before me at an unbeliever’s table. But on the other hand, if I am informed that the meat has been sacrificed to an idol, which, in and of itself, does not affect the edibility of the meat, I must, nevertheless, refrain from eating it. This is done not to appease my own conscience, but so as not to embolden the conscience of another.

Furthermore, 1 Corinthians 10:23-33, along with 1 Corinthians 8:8-9, effectively qualify the commandment given elsewhere to “abstain from things offered to idols.”³⁶ Actually, this last example is an illustration of a qualification that takes place in the remote context and, therefore, it is to this subject that we now turn our attention.

The Remote Context

In Matthew 19:26, Jesus says: “With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.” When we contemplate God’s omnipotence, this is exactly the idea we have in mind. In fact, if one were to ask a group of Christians to define God’s omnipotence, they would probably answer that omnipotence means God

³⁵ Acts 5:29.

³⁶ Acts 15:29.

can do anything and everything. Even so, this is not what the Bible teaches!

In Hebrews 6:18, the Bible says “it is impossible for God to lie.” This is not, as some suppose, a denial of the truth taught in Matthew 19:26. It is, instead, a qualification. God, who is holy, “cannot lie.”³⁷ Consequently, we understand that what Jesus meant in Matthew 19:26 is “with God all things [that are consistent with His nature] are possible.” So, the phrase “all things” does not always mean all things. The “all things” in one passage may very well be qualified by something said in another passage.

This brings us to Jacob’s statement in Genesis 32:30, which says, “For I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.” If what God told Moses in Exodus 33:20 is true, namely, “You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live,” then Jacob’s statement in Genesis 32:30 is problematic. Unfamiliar with the principle of qualification, some view Jacob’s statement as a clear-cut contradiction of Exodus 33:20 and other passages,³⁸ ultimately reflecting on the integrity of the entire Bible. But if the Bible is what it claims to be, then it simply cannot be contradicting itself. How, then, can we resolve this apparent dilemma?

First of all, God “cannot lie.”³⁹ So we can be sure that Jacob did not see the face of God in the same sense God uses this expression in Exodus 33:20. When one looks at the context of God’s statement to Moses, it seems clear He uses “My face” to mean His pure Spirit essence, “dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see.”⁴⁰ Thus, Jacob cannot be understood to be saying he actually saw the pure and glorious Spirit essence of

³⁷ Titus 1:2.

³⁸ See John 1:18; 1 Timothy 6:16; and 1 John 4:12.

³⁹ Titus 1:2.

⁴⁰ 1 Timothy 6:16.

Almighty God. If so, then Jacob was mistaken and his misperception was accurately recorded here like other false ideas and downright untruths that are cited elsewhere in Scripture.⁴¹

Second, when we consider what was said about this incident in Hosea 12:4, then it is clear that Jacob wrestled with a not so ordinary angel. In fact, when we examine verses 4 and 5, it appears Jacob wrestled with the Angel of Yahweh,⁴² elsewhere called the Angel of God,⁴³ or the Angel of His Presence,⁴⁴ who some believe to be pre-incarnate appearances of the Lord Himself. Others who encountered this unique Angel had very similar reactions.⁴⁵ On these occasions God evidently took upon Himself human form for the express purpose of manifesting Himself to those involved. In theological parlance, these manifestations are called theophanies, which means “appearances of God.” Because those who saw God in these theophanies did not see God in His true Spirit essence, they did not die, as they had expected. This interpretation is compatible with all the accepted rules of Bible interpretation. As such, it is consistent with the totality of Scripture and it completely harmonizes what would otherwise be absolutely contradictory passages.

Finally, it is very important to see the Lord’s unqualified endorsement of the Principle of Qualification. In his temptation of Jesus, Satan, according to 2 Peter 3:16, “twisted” the Scriptures by neglecting the principle of qualification. In Matthew 4:5-7, the Bible says:

⁴¹ For example, Satan’s original lie is recorded in Genesis 3:4, as are the false theological ideas expressed by Job’s friends.

⁴² See Exodus 3:2 and Judges 2:1.

⁴³ See Exodus 14:19.

⁴⁴ See Isaiah 63:9.

⁴⁵ See Judges 6:22 and 13:22.

Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: 'He shall give His angels charge over you,' and, 'In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.' Jesus said to him, "It is written again, 'You shall not tempt the LORD your God.'"

Satan's citation of Psalm 91:11-12 was accurate but misapplied, in that the providential care promised in this passage did not include the deliberate testing of God's faithfulness. Jesus makes this clear in His citation of Deuteronomy 6:16, which says, "You shall not tempt the LORD your God." This means that Jesus gave His unqualified endorsement to the Principle of Qualification when He made it clear that the protection offered in Psalm 91:11-12 is qualified by the Scriptures' teaching on man's obligation not to tempt God. In other words, being a child of God is not a license to act imprudently or recklessly. Which is just another way of saying: If you can't swim, don't jump into water over your head to discover (i.e., to test) if God will save you.

So, What Does All This Have To Do With The Issue At Hand?

When we factor into our thinking the Principle of Qualification, it is not difficult to understand that the "everything" and "all things" of the husband's and father's authority are qualified by principles taught elsewhere in God's word. Consequently these passages were never intended to impinge upon territory belonging solely to God, but are, in fact, qualified by such things. Thus, passages that say wives are to submit to their husbands "as is fitting in

the Lord”⁴⁶ and that children are to obey their parents “in the Lord”⁴⁷ are examples of precisely this kind of qualification. We can be sure, then, that when God commanded wives to obey their husbands “in everything,” He was speaking *only* of those things which fell within the husband’s delegated authority.

Remember, man’s delegated authority *only* applies to matters of expediency. This means that those areas where God has already legislated are off limits. So, when children are commanded to obey their parents “in the Lord,” this *only* refers to those things that fall within the parents’ delegated authority, nothing else. If a man functioning either as a husband or a parent commanded one under his authority to do something inconsistent with God’s word, the one being so commanded would not be under any obligation to submit, as God never requires us to obey an unlawful command.⁴⁸

Consequently, the obeying-God-rather-than-man principle espoused in Acts 4:19 and 5:29, although not referring to the Home, *per se*, is precisely the principle under discussion. In other words, no man invested by God with any kind of authority has the right to command anyone under his authority to do anything inconsistent with what God has said in His word. Things that are either commanded or prohibited by God cannot be interfered with by the exercise of delegated authority. This means there may well be times when a wife or a child is required by God to be disobedient to those who, under other circumstances, he or she would be

⁴⁶ Colossians 3:18.

⁴⁷ Ephesians 6:1.

⁴⁸ In this regard, it is interesting to note that the *Uniform Code of Military Justice*, which governs all military personnel serving the United States of America, extends to every serviceman and servicewoman the right to resist and, if necessary, to disobey any and all unlawful commands issued by a superior, up to and including the President of the United States, whose authority, of course, makes him the military’s Commander-in-Chief.

obligated to obey. And when this happens, no guilt attaches to either the wife or the child.

Now, it needs to be pointed out just here that nothing said so far has anything to do with the so-called higher-lower law distinction that some try to make. For if God had actually implemented a higher-lower structure of law, as some contend, such would ultimately require us to disobey His lesser commands in order to obey the greater ones. But this, after everything is said and done, would make every one of us lawbreakers and, therefore, partakers of unrighteousness. What's more, and just think about this for a moment, this would all be at God's command. Who can believe it?

In truth, the Bible teaches no such doctrine. But you may be thinking, "Doesn't Jesus, Himself, talk about 'the weightier matters of the law?'"⁴⁹ Yes, He most certainly does, but what He says is not that one can break a lower law in order to obey a higher one. No, no, a thousand times, no!

In the very context in which Jesus speaks of the weightier matters of the law, He says, "These you ought to have done *without leaving the others undone*" (emphasis mine-AT). He's not saying the lesser matters of the law can be overlooked, and therefore violated, in order to obey the weightier ones, as the higher-lower law proponents claim. Instead, He's saying that within the grand scheme of things there are some principles "more important" (this is the way some versions render the Greek word translated "weightier") to understand—things like doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God.⁵⁰ Such principles, Jesus claims, sum up every requirement to be found in God's law.

⁴⁹ Matthew 23:23.

⁵⁰ See Micah 6:8.

In yet another place, this same point is summed up in one word: Love, which is, we are told by an apostle of Christ, “the fulfilling of the law.”⁵¹ The following episode, which is recorded in Matthew 22:34-40, deals with the two very different perspectives placed on this word:

*But when the Pharisees heard He had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?” Jesus said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”*⁵²

In other words, “against such [Love] there is no law,”⁵³ for all such Love is, ultimately, the “fulfilling of the law.”⁵⁴

Some Final Thoughts On The Home

In concluding this rather lengthy examination of the Home, we do so with the understanding that there are limitations placed on the God-ordained authority exercised within it. Those in submissive roles (the wife and children) should realize they are not under obligation to follow the commands of the husband/father if they would cause them to violate the will of God. In other words, absolutely no breaking of one’s obligation to submit to one with delegated authority occurs in these situations and circumstances

⁵¹ Romans 10:13.

⁵² Jesus is using Deuteronomy 6:5 as His quoted text here.

⁵³ Galatians 5:22-23.

⁵⁴ Romans 13:10.

precisely because those scriptures requiring submission to delegated authority are not applicable in such cases.

We were helped in this by our exposure to the Principle of Qualification, which teaches us that one passage can actually amplify, clarify, modify, or qualify another. But in understanding this truth, it is important to recognize that any such qualification of delegated authority is not based on the argument that duties commanded by God, like not forsaking the assembling of the saints,⁵⁵ take precedent over duties commanded by man (e.g., “I forbid you to worship with that church”). Instead, it is qualified by the truth that submission to delegated authority only applies to matters of expedience, which means that a husband or parent has no right (i.e., authority) to contest any item of divine legislation.

Remember here the case of the woman mentioned earlier who was killed by her husband after returning from assembling with the saints on the Lord’s day. Yes, she was certainly under obligation to obey her husband “in everything,” as the Scriptures require, but this “everything” is clearly qualified/limited by the God-given obligation to assemble with the saints on the Lord’s day. Therefore, one can be sure that one of God’s laws which is presently in force will never supersede another of His laws currently in force.

As was pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, understanding the exercise and limitations of delegated authority in the Home, the very first of God’s divine institutions, will ultimately aid us in understanding the thorny issues associated with the Christian’s obligation to obey the State. With this said, we must now turn our attention to the Church, a very special, God-ordained institution that followed the establishment of the State by a

⁵⁵ Hebrews 10:25.

considerable length of time and, when properly understood, serves to reinforce the lessons on delegated authority we have already learned.

The Church

Because congregations of the Lord's people are composed of Christians working together for a common cause, God has ordained a structure of authority (government) within each congregation. By examining the nature and limits of such authority, one comes to further appreciate the limits that are always placed on the exercise of delegated authority and will, in the end, be better able to understand the limits God has placed on the State's authority.

To begin with, Jesus Christ established only one church (sometimes referred to as a "body") of which He, and He alone, is the Head. This is made clear in Ephesians 1:22-23, Ephesians 4:4, and Colossians 1:18. Consequently, "the man Christ Jesus,"⁵⁶ and this refers to the ascended and glorified Jesus, functions as this body's High Priest and only Mediator.⁵⁷ Thus, the church belonging to Christ needs no earthly mediator through which it offers its sacrifices, and any such provisional system is a perversion of the "My church" of Matthew 16:18. As such, the one and only true catholic church (i.e., the universal body of believers) has no earthly head or organizational structure. This means that all ecclesiastical constructions, whether they be Catholic or Protestant, are not just extra-biblical, but anti-biblical as well. "In Him,"⁵⁸ and this is to say "in connection with" Jesus Christ, the church is complete, and

⁵⁶ 1 Timothy 2:5.

⁵⁷ For a further exploration of this subject, please refer to the book of Hebrews.

⁵⁸ Colossians 2:10.

because it is, it needs no exalted priestly caste, like the old Jewish system, to intercede or mediate on its behalf.

Nevertheless, the Lord instructed His “called out” group of people⁵⁹ (i.e., His church) to organize themselves into local congregations. Such were referred to as “churches of Christ,”⁶⁰ along with other scriptural designations. Consequently, within the pages of the New Testament, we can read about the church at Corinth,⁶¹ the churches of Galatia,⁶² the saints that made up the church at Ephesus,⁶³ Philippi,⁶⁴ and Colosse.⁶⁵ We can further read of churches at Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea.⁶⁶ According to 1 Peter 5:1-5, the men in these local congregations who had the “oversight” (the Greek word here is *episkopeo*, from which we derive the word *bishop*), were also called “elders.” The English word *elders* is translated from the Greek *presbuteros*, which in a transliterated form is “presbyter.” Thus, an elder (or presbyter) was a bishop (i.e., one who exercised oversight) in a local congregation. This is borne out by the immediate passage under consideration, and by others, like 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9, where the qualifications of these men are specifically enumerated.

In Paul’s letter to Timothy, he calls these uniquely qualified men “bishops.” Then in Titus he refers to the same group of men as not just bishops, but also “elders.” Consequently, the Scriptures

⁵⁹ The English word “church” comes from the Greek word *ekklesia*, which means a called out gathering or assembly.

⁶⁰ Romans 16:16.

⁶¹ See 1 Corinthians 1:2.

⁶² See Galatians 1:2.

⁶³ See Ephesians 1:1.

⁶⁴ See Philippians 1:1.

⁶⁵ See Colossians 1:2.

⁶⁶ See Revelation 2-3.

make it clear that those who served as elders and bishops in local churches of Christ were not men with different offices (or functions); but were, instead, men who were being referred to by terms that either described their *maturity* (they were elders or older men) or *oversight* (or bishopric). Then, in Peter's instructions in 1 Peter 5:2, we learn that these very same men were to "feed" the flock of God which was among them. The NKJV translates this word as "shepherd," while the ASV says "tend." The Greek word so translated is *poimaino*, from which we get the word "pastor." So, according to the New Testament, the terms *elder*, *bishop* and *pastor* are used interchangeably of the same man, and are not titles *per se*. Instead, they simply serve to describe *who* and *what* these men are in connection with the "flock," or local church, of which they are members. (It is worth noting here that it was only after some began changing the government of the local church, mimicking the Greek-Roman culture in which they lived, that they developed an ecclesiastical order that conferred a higher ranking on a bishop than they did an elder, eventually granting to bishops oversight over more than the local church of which they were a member.)

In addition, the bishops/elders/pastors who exercised the oversight of local churches of Christ were *always* referred to in the Scriptures in the plural. For example, when Paul was in Miletus and wanted to speak with the leaders of the Ephesian church, he sent for "the elders [plural] of the church."⁶⁷ This will not surprise the careful Bible student, for in Acts 14:23 Paul and Barnabas, in their second missionary journey, had "appointed elders [plural] in every church." Further, in a letter written to Christians everywhere, James assumes the established order in every church would be "elders" (again, plural), for he instructed Christians, no matter

⁶⁷ Acts 20:17.

where they were, to “call for the elders [plural] of the church.”⁶⁸ One must conclude, then, that the New Testament order was that if a local church was blessed to have elders,⁶⁹ there would always be *at least two* of them. Thus, a local church that was scripturally and fully organized had a plurality of elders/bishops/pastors who exercised oversight in that church. They had to meet certain stringent qualifications⁷⁰ and be selected by the church of which they were members.⁷¹ Thus, one-man rule of a local congregation would never occur if Scripture was being followed.

As noted previously, Genesis 1:27 makes it clear that both men and women equally bear the divine image and are, therefore, absolutely equal when it comes to their relationship with God and one another and are, as a result, joint “heirs together of the grace of life.”⁷² At the same time, God created different roles for men and women in the Home, and as we shall see, this is true for the Church as well, as it is men, not women, who have the oversight of the local congregation. This does not mean that women are not called upon to be leaders in the Church, any more than they are not scripturally prohibited from leading in their homes, only that men within both these venues exercise the primary leadership. Thus, there should be no doubt in the Christian’s mind that the primary role of oversight in the Church, like the Home, is male.

Because the Church is a family of sorts (albeit a rather extended family, according to Ephesians 3:15) that cries, according to Romans 8:16-17, “Abba, Father,” we should not be surprised that

⁶⁸ James 5:14.

⁶⁹ This was not a given, for there would *not* always be men with the necessary qualifications.

⁷⁰ See 1 Timothy 3; Titus 1.

⁷¹ See Acts 6:3.

⁷² 1 Peter 3:7.

primary leadership in the local church (which is, in turn, usually made up of several, if not many, individual families) is the prerogative of not just one man, but a plurality of men who meet the qualifications laid out in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. Thus, the God-ordained eldership of the local church will always consist of a plurality of men who have first proven themselves successful leaders in their own homes—men who have, thankfully, already exhibited loving, gentle and considerate oversight of their wives and children.⁷³ We ought to praise God for His magnificent gifts to the church.⁷⁴

Because elders/pastors/bishops are commanded to lead by example, according to 1 Peter 5:3, some have thought that their oversight does not entail an actual “rule.” These folks are wrong. The Bible says unequivocally that these men do exercise “rule” in the local church.⁷⁵ The word translated “rule” in the Timothy references is *proistemi*, which carries with it the idea of “standing before” and “presiding,” according to *Strong’s*, and to “be over” and “superintend,” according to *Thayer*. In the Hebrews references, the Greek word translated “rule” is *hegeomai*, and is defined by both *Thayer* and *Strong’s* as “to lead, rule, command, have authority over.” So, it can be seen that “government” at the hands of elders/bishops/pastors is what God desires for churches of Christ, and in exercising this governance or “piloting,” as this is one of the meanings of the word according to *Strong’s*, they exercise a “rule” in the local church that will be obeyed by every submissive member.⁷⁶ (In further explanation of this, compare 1 Corinthians 12:28,

⁷³ See Ephesians 5:2ff. and 1 Peter 3:7.

⁷⁴ See Ephesians 4:7-16 and notice that “pastors” are specifically mentioned in verse 11b.

⁷⁵ See 1 Timothy 3:5; 5:17; Hebrews 13:7, 17 and 24.

⁷⁶ See Hebrews 13:17.

where it is recorded that God gives “governments” as a gift to churches, with Ephesians 4:11, where it is said that the ascended Christ gives “pastors” to aid in the perfecting of the saints, and then factor in to all this the idea that these passages are referring to the work of elders as they govern the flock which is among them.)

Even so, the Bible makes it clear that the *rule* of such men does not partake of the characteristics so prevalent in the world, which consist of controlling, lording it over, and domineering those who are deemed to be in subjection to them.⁷⁷ This means that the leadership of elders, who see themselves, ultimately, as humble servants of the Lord, does not ask of others things they are not willing to do themselves. As such, they will always be serving as “examples to the flock.”

But none of this means, as some claim, that the elders’ rule is actualized *only* through example. Instead, members of the local church are commanded to, “Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account.”⁷⁸ The Hebrew writer continues, “Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.”⁷⁹ The “joy” of Hebrews 13:17b refers to what the elders would experience as the result of the congregation’s willing submission and obedience to their rule. But if there was “grief,” which would be an obvious indication that those in the elders’ charge were, in fact, being disobedient, then such would not be “profitable” for them. Why? Because God, no doubt, would be provoked by such groanings to exact judgment on the disobedient. In other

⁷⁷ See 1 Peter 5:3, where elders are told their rule is not to be as “lords over,” as the Gentiles rule (cf. Mark 10:42 and Luke 22:24-27), but as “examples.”

⁷⁸ Hebrews 13:17a.

⁷⁹ Hebrews 13:17b.

words, if elders must give an account to the Lord for their watch-care over the church, then it stands to reason that any rebellion against their authority would be speedily and appropriately judged by the Lord. Furthermore, if such became necessary, it would definitely not be profitable for the rebels, for the grief they cause will be justly recompensed by the grief they receive.⁸⁰

Consequently, the idea that elders do not exercise actual authority in the local church, *only* leading by their examples, is an idea that is absolutely foreign to the New Testament. Elders do, in fact, exercise God-given authority in the local church, and those who are the rightful subjects of such authority, in order to be pleasing to the Lord, must be willing to submit to such authority.

So, with this said, it is time for us to consider those situations where “holy disobedience” would be necessary.

The Limits Of Elders’ Authority

Just like in the Home, there are limits to the authority men are to exercise over the Church. Although members of a congregation, individually and collectively, are under divine obligation to submit to their elders, the rule of such men, like that which the husband exercises in the Home, is only legitimate in matters of expedience. For in those areas where God has already legislated, elders must not, indeed cannot, tread.

For example, meeting together on the first day of the week to partake of the Lord’s supper is something the New Testament teaches Christians are obligated to do. It does so through a direct statement, an approved example, and a necessary inference. These are found in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 and Acts 20:7. In the first

⁸⁰ See also 2 Thessalonians 1:4-6.

passage, we are confronted with a commandment (i.e., a direct statement) that we are, as often as we partake of the Lord's supper, to do so in remembrance of our Lord. Then, in the second passage, we are confronted with an approved example (specifically, an approved, apostolic example) of a congregation of the Lord's people coming together on the first day of the week to eat the Lord's supper. Finally, in the same passage, we necessarily infer that this commemoration is to be done each and every first day of the week.

So, how does this relate to elders and their authority? Well, consistent with their understanding of the particular circumstances that exist in their congregation (e.g., the work schedules and time constraints of those who make up the church), elders have the authority to decide exactly *when* on the first day of the week it is most expedient for them to meet. Consistent with the admonition not to exercise themselves "as being lords," *vis-à-vis* 1 Peter 5:3, one can be sure that such a decision would never be made by a set of godly elders in an arbitrary or self-serving way. Several factors might come into play regarding the final decision of when to meet, but foremost would certainly be what is best (i.e., the most expedient) for the congregation as a whole. It is exactly this kind of authority that has been delegated by God to elders, and it is exactly this kind of authority members of the congregation are required to obey. However, elders have absolutely no authority to change the day the congregation meets to partake of the Lord's supper, just as they have no authority to prescribe other elements to be used in the Lord's supper, as these have already been specified in Matthew 26:17-29—namely, "unleavened bread" and "fruit of the vine."

There are other things we could talk about along these lines, but I think this simple example demonstrates that the elders' authority is limited to matters of expedience and nothing else. Consequently, elders, like husbands in the Home, must be very careful

not to develop a haughty, self-absorbed, domineering spirit, which would be nothing less than sinful. Finally, it almost goes without saying that such a spirit would make life in the Home or Church most miserable.

Therefore, elders have been delegated by God to make decisions involving the work of the Church; but in the exercise of such authority, they have no jurisdiction in the Home, as such is something that belongs primarily to the husband/father. If, of course, it should come to the attention of the elders that a husband/father who is a member of the congregation was conducting himself sinfully in the exercise of his headship, the elders would certainly have the authority to rebuke such behavior, calling upon the guilty husband/father to repent. If, per chance, he refused to do so, it would then be a matter for the whole church, according to Matthew 18:17. If he still refused to repent, the elders would have no choice but to lead the church in withdrawing from the offender.⁸¹ Thus, there may be times when there seems to be an overlapping between authority exercised in the Home and Church. However, such is only an allusion. Elders, even when taking the action mentioned above, exercise no authority in the Home. Instead, they are simply exercising the responsibility and authority commanded them by God, who demands that elders watch for the souls of those in their charge.⁸²

Examining, then, the exercise of delegated authority both in the Home and the Church, as we have, and realizing there are always limitations placed on the exercise of such authority, we are now ready to examine the scope of the State's authority.

⁸¹ 2 Thessalonians 3:6 and 1 Corinthians 5:11-13.

⁸² Hebrews 13:17.

The State

The earliest reference in Scripture to the authority of the State is inferred from Genesis 9:6, which says, "Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God He made man." Enlightened people down through the ages have recognized this principle as the very foundation of civilized society. Because man is uniquely made in the image of his Creator, his "right to life" must not be interfered with by any other creature. This is made clear by what was previously said in verse 5. Thus, if this principle or law is broken and a man is murdered, then the murderer must be put to death, as this is the clear, unequivocal teaching of these verses. Furthermore, it must be understood that this precept or principle was instituted prior to the Law of Moses given at Sinai, which was not until a much later date. Consequently, Genesis 9:6 has no more been rescinded than the fact that man is made in the image of God, for as long as the latter is true, the former will be in force.

Now, although it is true that the particular judicial process by which this is to be carried out is not specified in this verse, it is clear, nevertheless, that capital punishment is commanded by it. As H.C. Leupold, that great commentator on the book of Genesis, observed:

This verse attaches itself directly to the preceding, particularly to that part which says: "from man will I demand the soul of man." [Of this previous verse, he said: "When man's blood is shed ruthlessly, without warrant and authority, there God Himself shall demand an account. He may do this by prompting human agents to punish the evildoer, or He may achieve His ends by ultimately exacting vengeance upon the murderer who has not been

brought to justice by man.”] *This verse now shows how God does this demanding: He lets man be the avenger. As Luther already very clearly saw, by this word government is instituted, this basic institution for the welfare of man. For if man receives power over other men’s lives under certain circumstances, then by virtue of having received power over the highest good that man has, power over the lesser things is naturally included, such as power over property to the extent of being able to exact taxes, over our persons to the extent of being able to demand various types of work and service, as need may arise. Government, then, being ground on this word, is not by human contract, or by surrender of certain powers, or by encroachment of priestcraft. It is a divine institution.*⁸³

I agree with these observations. But that it is specifically the State that has been given delegated authority to punish, and even execute, criminals is made much clearer in the New Testament. In Romans 13:1, the apostle Paul said: “Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.” Then to an evangelist, he wrote, “Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work.”⁸⁴ Addressing this same issue, the apostle Peter said, “Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good.”⁸⁵ In this regard, it should be noticed that Jesus, when standing before the Roman prefect (or procurator) Pontius

⁸³ *Exposition of Genesis*, Vol. 1, 1942, page 333.

⁸⁴ Titus 3:1.

⁸⁵ 1 Peter 2:13-14.

Pilate, did not deny that the governor had the power to rule the province of Judea, but instructed him that such authority derived ultimately from God. I'm fairly certain that Pilate had no real appreciation for what Jesus said, probably thinking he derived his power, instead, solely from Tiberius Caesar Augustus, who ruled Rome at that time. Jesus' point, of course, did not deal so much with Pilate's power over Him as much as it properly identified the source of Caesar's lawful authority. In Matthew 22:21, Jesus had already said about such authority that the Jews were obligated to "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." Although I think some have clearly invested the State with too much authority based upon their understanding of this passage, it should be clear that worship of Caesar as a god is something that could not be rendered by anyone being obedient to Jesus' words. However, that Caesar was invested with certain lawful authority cannot be doubted. Just what this entails is the subject of this book. It cannot be denied, then, that (1) the State, and the idea here is not any particular state, but the State in general, has been delegated by God to exercise authority and (2) as it does so, it is to be willingly obeyed:

Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men—as free, yet not using your liberty as a cloak for vice, but as servants of God. Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.⁸⁶

⁸⁶ 1 Peter 2:13-17.

As we have already observed in the Home and the Church, delegated authority, although extremely important, always has limits. This is no less true when it comes to the State. Although the passage cited above makes it clear that we must be willing to submit “to every ordinance of man,” we should know by now that such a statement is qualified and, therefore, refers *only* to those things that fall within the State’s jurisdiction.

For example, the New Testament depicts the Church and the State as separate entities,⁸⁷ both of which are accountable to Him who has been given “all authority...in heaven and on earth” by His Father.⁸⁸ For not only is Jesus the “head of the church,”⁸⁹ but as the book of Revelation points out, He is also the “ruler of the kings of the earth.”⁹⁰ Therefore, both Church and State must respect God’s authority, upholding Righteousness and Justice in the process. Failure to do so results in the removal of the candlestick for the Church⁹¹ and a rod of iron for the State.⁹² Although it is true that under the Old Testament the kingdom of Israel was a theocracy (i.e., a combination of Church and State), under the New Testament, there is to be a separation of these two institutions.

Rendering To Caesar The Things That Are Caesar’s, And To God The Things That Are God’s

In 2 Corinthians 10:3-5, the role of the Church under Christ is presented as one of spiritual warfare. On the other hand, Caesar

⁸⁷ See Matthew 22:17-21.

⁸⁸ Matthew 28:18.

⁸⁹ Ephesians 1:22; Colossians 1:18.

⁹⁰ Revelation 1:5.

⁹¹ See Revelation 2:5.

⁹² See Revelation 12:5.

(i.e., the State) is given a physical sword (i.e., the penalty of death) to aid in its warfare against evildoers, according to Romans 13:4. Unlike Israel of old, the Church today is not in the business of taking human life. On the contrary, this is today the sole prerogative of the State.⁹³ But in doing so, the State is not free to arbitrarily and capriciously exercise itself, but must do so consistent with the principles of Righteousness and Justice taught in the Bible.

The government is, therefore, duty bound to protect the law-abiding and punish the evildoers. If a government consistently fails to meet its obligation “under God,” and this would be evidence of a Revelation 13 government,⁹⁴ then there can be no real Justice. Under such government, the law-abiding become prey, not just evildoers. When this happens, society eventually experiences the fiery wrath of the Lord’s righteous indignation, which ultimately manifests itself in some sort of judgment.

Thus, it is the responsibility of the Christian to be praying for the State that it will meet its obligation to maintain order in society.⁹⁵ In addition, the Christian will dutifully pay his taxes to support the State, and he will always be found obeying the laws of the land as long as these laws do not constitute a contravening of God’s Word. But, and this is most important, the State has no authority to tell the Church what to do in spiritual matters. It cannot (i.e., “under God”) tell the Church when, or when not, to pray; when to preach or not to preach; when to worship or not to worship. In these matters, the Church is amenable *only* to Christ. In purely secular matters, the Church belonging to Christ is obligated to respect

⁹³ See Romans 13:1-7.

⁹⁴ A Revelation 13 government is one that has fallen under the sway of Satan and is contrasted with the kind of government outlined in Romans 13, which is clearly a God-ordained government.

⁹⁵ See 1 Timothy 2:1-2.

and obey the laws of the land. This is, however, as far as it goes, and if, and when, the State seeks to regulate the Church spiritually, the Church is obligated to engage in holy disobedience.⁹⁶ Please understand that I am not talking hypotheticals here, as I have lived under the jurisdiction of just such a State and know of others around the world who presently live under such governments.

The Church is “the pillar and ground of the truth,” according to 1 Timothy 3:15, and must preach the truth *whenever, wherever, and to whomever* it applies. It must do this without respect of persons. This may involve telling Caesar he is wrong on some moral or spiritual issue or that he has overstepped the bounds of his jurisdiction by trying to deal with those things that belong solely to the Church. The Truth must always be preached without fear or favor, not “having men’s persons in admiration because of advantage,” as Jude 16 puts it.

Yes, the Church is separate from the State, as these two God-ordained entities have two very separate roles—one spiritual and the other physical. And no matter what it may think, the State is not unaccountable to the Lord’s principles of Righteousness and Justice. After all, it is subject to Christ and will answer to His “rod of iron” if its policies are contrary to His principles. In addition, the degree to which a particular government finds such things offensive is a good indicator of just how far down the path toward a Revelation 13 government it has traveled. We must not forget that the Bible says, “The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God.”⁹⁷

⁹⁶ See Acts 5:29.

⁹⁷ Psalm 9:17.

In Conclusion

The Home, the Church, and the State have all been delegated authority in their realms of jurisdiction. Within either one of these realms, the other two have not been given any authority. Although this is an accurate depiction of these very different jurisdictions, it is, after everything is said and done, an oversimplification, for such does not address the various moral complexities that come into play as these three realms of jurisdiction attempt to function in a world that is, unfortunately, stained with and distorted by sin—a sinfulness that prods men and women to bite and devour one another in their ungodly pursuit of controlling, manipulative and self-serving power.

I like the way Kerry Duke deals with this in his informative and challenging little book, *Ox In The Ditch: Bible Interpretation as the Foundation of Christian Ethics*. In a chapter entitled “Qualification in Realms of Delegated Authority,” he says:

Delegated authority, then, is qualified in a vertical direction by the revealed will of God in Scripture. It is also qualified in a horizontal direction because of the relationship between the different realms in which it resides. The home, the church, and civil government each have been delegated decision-making power in their respective realms of function. Parents have authority over their own children but not over children as a whole in society. Elders make decisions connected with the life and work of the church, but they have no such authority about the internal affairs of the homes of which Christians are also members. Ideally, civil government maintains order and peace in society as a whole without usurping the role of either the home or the church. Of course, the relationship between these realms has been

*simplified; the moral complexities associated with government intrusions into private matters are too numerous to discuss here. However, the fact remains that a separateness is to exist between these realms of delegated authority. Otherwise, biblical injunctions regarding submission in separate areas are meaningless. Even more important is the fact that an understanding of the distinction between realms provides a general framework for evaluating different decisions.*⁹⁸

In the next paragraph, he concluded by saying:

*The principle of submission to delegated authority generates a disposition that is foundational to Christianity: the renouncing of one's own will to follow the will of another. The duty to obey those in positions of authority is a responsibility to God, so that in obeying or disobeying these people one is obeying or disobeying God. It is also true that submission to certain persons on earth is broadly analogous to subjection to the Lord Himself. In terms of practical importance, however, the principle of submission creates a humble attitude of obedience so basic in pleasing God, an attitude often described in the Bible as the heart of a child (Matt. 18:1-4; I Cor. 14:20).*⁹⁹

So, with this said, and having now some appreciation of both the obligations *and* complexities associated with the exercise of delegated authority, whether it be in the Home, the Church, or the State, it is time to turn our attention to making sure we understand the difference between “a right” and “a privilege.”

⁹⁸ 1993, pages 84-85.

⁹⁹ Kerry, page 84