

## CHAPTER 6

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### THE MYSTERY OF NEW COVENANT MINISTRY & AUTHORITY

In Webster's dictionary the word "ministry" is associated with the word service or serving. This definition is in agreement with what Jesus taught His disciples—that if you wanted to be great you had to become the servant of all (Matthew 20:25-28). New Covenant ministry is about serving people. It is Jesus loving and caring for those who have needs. Jesus meets these needs **through His people** who are filled with His Holy Spirit.



In Ephesians 4:11-12, the apostle Paul tells us about five major areas of ministry...

*“And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for **the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ...**”*

Each of the five ministries listed in Ephesians chapter 4 have supernatural gifts and abilities that help equip believers to do the work of ministry. It is not my intent to take a detailed look at the different ministries of the Church and their function in this chapter. New Testament salvation is more than going to heaven some day. It has many other applications **for this life**. The new covenant in Christ's blood includes the new birth, physical healing and divine health for your body, deliverance from Satan's kingdom, encouragement to build you up, wisdom to help you overcome the world, knowledge to keep you in God's will and spiritual instruction from the Word to build strong faith.

God never intended for one person (or a pastoral staff) to be the source of ministry in the church. He wants His children to get equipped for the work of ministry. Imagine a group of believers who understand their call to minister. Each person already has gifts that enable him or her to be a minister in a particular area. The apostle Paul said that when “every joint supplies” and “every part does its share,” it causes the body of Christ to

grow and to be edified in love (Ephesians 4:16). This is New Covenant family ministry. I've seen this mindset in action and it's very exciting. However, God's people cannot be forced into this life. It doesn't occur by assigning responsibilities and duties. An atmosphere of freedom is needed so that God's people begin to function **according to their God given gifts**. Also, the congregation must have a sense of family where they feel their gifts are needed and accepted in a loving environment. God's people must be allowed to offer this ministry voluntarily.

The reality is that it doesn't always run smoothly with a "professional" appearance. None of us are perfect and sometimes mistakes are made. If we are to experience the Ephesians 4 type of church life, allowances must be made.

For many church members, "ministry" is looked upon as the occupation of the pastor or when someone gives a sermon. We will see that the New Covenant understanding of "ministry" includes far more. The work of the ministry is never limited to seminary graduates and theologians. God's will is for all His people to be involved in the ministry of His Church. Religious thinking and the misuse of authority prevents this dynamic life from taking place. We will try to answer the questions, "Why do most congregations have a passive attitude about getting involved in ministry? Why isn't the Holy Spirit more active in our churches? Why doesn't the local church have more influence on the world for Christ?" Some of the answers may surprise you.

## COVENANT PRINCIPLES AND THE MISUSE OF AUTHORITY

Those who read this book and enthusiastically embrace the reality of God's covenant with His Church may want to find a church fellowship that preaches and practices these truths. Searching for a church home shouldn't be taken lightly. External labels should never influence a believer, such as when the word covenant appears in the church name. The reality is that, just like a book, you can't judge a church by its cover. There are churches that seemingly preach covenant yet their emphasis is more on our relationship with one another. While this is to be included in our understanding of the New Covenant, putting an over-emphasis on the principles that govern relationship between believers will slowly evolve into a subtle form of legalism. The New Covenant is primarily about what Jesus accomplished for His people. Without a proper understanding of the new

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covenant in Christ's blood, we will never understand how to properly "discern the body of Christ".

The desire to have an emphasis on covenant is a good thing. Yet, many times the very principles that are meant to bring liberty and freedom mysteriously morph over time into rules and laws that imprison Christians in a religious system. Churches, which place a priority on covenant principles, tend to be more susceptible to an over-emphasis on submission to church authority. An improper understanding of authority, however, can exist in any church or denomination. In some cases the authority structure is abusive and destructive.

My desire in this section is to help believers understand their responsibility in the ministry of the New Covenant and to provide principles to help you recognize when improper authority is being exercised. As you search for a church home, your primary influence should come from the Holy Spirit. It's God's job to place you in His Church where He wants you. Start by praying and asking the Father to guide you by His Spirit to the best place **for you**. It may not be a church that you would naturally choose. It will be a place where you can be fed spiritually and learn to function as a vital part of Christ's Church.

Jesus clearly said in Matthew 20:25-28 that His "leaders" are **not** to exercise Gentile-like authority (a dominating type of authority) with His people. Jesus commanded His disciples not to lead by being "over" but by serving and counting themselves as the least. The apostle Peter repeats a similar warning in I Peter 5:2-4...

*"Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by constraint but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; **nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock**; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away."*

The word "overseer" as used in this reference does not carry with it the idea of a position of authority. Rather, it carries the meaning of being in a position of watchfulness, like a shepherd watches over the flocks to guard them from dangers. The shepherd in the flock of God has a higher perspective. His greater stature and experience in the faith allows him to

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stand taller so as to look out over God’s flock in order to see dangers that lie ahead. Peter was careful to make this point clear by saying that overseers are not to be “lords over.” When using the analogy of shepherds and sheep, it is important to remember that all “overseers” are members of God’s “flock” just like you are. Never let anyone convince you otherwise.

Improper authority takes many forms and can go through several stages of development. It can begin as subtle intimidation and grow into prideful domination. Improper authority can be exercised by a dominant personality or by a gentle-natured pastor that you love and eventually obey more than Jesus. The question becomes “how much and what kind of authority has been given to church leaders by God?” Are leaders to have “lordship” powers over your personal life? Or, are they to lead by example, allowing Jesus to be Lord by ruling every believer through the Holy Spirit who indwells them?

**The reader should understand that terms like church authority, leaders and leadership are used in this chapter in order to minimize confusion. Jesus said that leaders are to be servants. Using the title of “leader” is actually a violation of the principles Jesus taught concerning the proper use of authority in His Church. I use these terms only to limit confusion.**

## KINGDOM AUTHORITY AND THE BELIEVER

*And He (Jesus) said to them, “To you it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but to those who are outside, all things come in parables... (Mark 4:11)*

In this book we discuss the mystery associated with God’s covenant with man. Yet, Jesus said that there is another mystery—the mystery of the kingdom of God. As we learned earlier, God’s promise (Jesus called it “the promise of the Father” in Acts 1:4) in the New Covenant was fulfilled when

the 120 believers gathered in the upper room and received the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. When Jesus finished His work at the cross and the New Covenant was sealed, the Father had to send the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit came in order to make the covenant union of God and man complete. Many in the church wrongly believe that our goal as Christians is to establish a physical kingdom of God on earth. These Christians attempt to live under the new covenant in Christ's blood with an Old Testament mentality. As a result, many sincere Christians see God's authority as coming primarily from external sources, such as a pastor, minister, priest, apostle, prophet or bishop. Jesus had a different perspective about the true nature of the kingdom of God. In Luke 17:20-21, Jesus says something interesting...

*“Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, ‘The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, ‘See here!’ or ‘See there!’ For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you.’”*

God's kingdom exists wherever God is. God's kingdom is where God's authority resides. You can't have a kingdom without authority. Jesus said that the kingdom of God is within you. This means the kingdom where you receive your primary guidance and instruction is located on the inside of you. I'm not saying that Christians are to disregard spiritual leadership in the church. I am saying that the “inner kingdom authority” has the highest priority. Anyone who attempts to convince you otherwise is operating in improper authority and is not giving you the truth. According to Romans 10:9-10, a person becomes a Christian by receiving and confessing Jesus Christ as Lord. The word “Lord” means absolute in authority. If a Christian gives primary obedience to any other “spiritual” authority than the inner kingdom of God, they have allowed the Lordship of Jesus Christ to be usurped in their life. An authentic Christian minister or leader will never impose his will so as to interfere with the Lordship of Jesus in another believer's life.

The miracle of Pentecost is that God now rules and dwells **inside** every born-again believer in Christ. **God's authority is now internal rather than external as it was in the Old Testament.** How can this be so? Because God kept His promise and gave Himself to us in the form of the Holy Spirit. It makes no sense for God to send His Son to die on the cross

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so that He could live and reign inside and then instruct us to be ruled instead by someone who has the same weaknesses and limitations we have. Yet, millions of Christians are in situations like this because they have never given God's Holy Spirit the permission to rule them directly as the New Testament demands. Jesus' teachings about the kingdom of God which resides inside the Christian opposes a majority of popular Christian teaching on church government and authority.

In the pages ahead, we will briefly discuss the reasons improper authority hinders God's purposes in the New Covenant. While the blood covenant is an exciting revelation, there are spiritual dangers to avoid.

*“You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because **He who is in you** is greater than he who is in the world.” (1 John 4:4)*

## SPIRITUAL FREEDOM AND THE BELIEVER'S RESPONSIBILITY

An incorrect understanding of church authority is only part of the problem hindering the effectiveness of ministry. Failing to take personal responsibility to learn the truth of God's Word is the other side of the problem. Spiritual freedom carries a cost that many Christians do not want to pay.

Jesus said that we would know the truth and the truth would set us free. Believers in the Church want to be free, yet many refuse to take responsibility for learning the truth and personally hearing from God. If the real motive of the heart was known, most Christians *want* to be told what God is saying by someone who's "plugged in." If the teaching is wrong, they can point the finger at some pastor or teacher and say, "I'm not responsible...you taught me wrong!" This is why you see Christians flock to ministries that claim to know all the answers. People do not always have the answers they need because they won't put out the effort to seek the Holy Spirit's guidance and study the Word. It's much easier to get the answer through a natural channel. People want to be around those who appear to have "conquered life." Some people gather around a personality and refuse to go the Lord Himself—the only One who has all the answers. Most Christians today are ignorant of the fact that God is just as willing to talk to them as He is to talk to the "leaders". All God is looking for is someone who will take responsibility.

The responsibility problem in the church is a reflection of the world. In today's society, when someone commits a crime the excuse is offered, "we need to let him off easy because his family was poor and he was deprived as a child—we need to understand that he's not responsible." In society, personal responsibility is rarely claimed. A violent act is usually blamed on something or someone else.

Christians that will not take responsibility in their walk with the Lord are in a dangerous place. God has placed His Spirit within us under the New Covenant. It is the job of the Holy Spirit to lead each believer into a knowledge of the truth (John 16:13-15). While God has placed teachers and instructors in His Church for the purpose of helping us come to a knowledge of the truth, it is still **our responsibility** (with the help of the Holy Spirit) to **discern** whether or not we are getting the truth. When the Holy Spirit shows us the truth, we need to **accept it as our own** and make it part of our life. A Scriptural example of this is found in Romans 2:16 where the apostle Paul makes an interesting statement. Paul referred to the Gospel of Jesus Christ as "my gospel." The truth of the Gospel had impacted his life to such an extent that he received it as his own. It wasn't just Jesus' gospel anymore—it was his. This statement is not out of line. When you consider the union that occurs in a blood covenant, everything that Jesus has belonged to Paul (and to you), including the gospel. I believe this is what made Paul such a powerful apostle. The truth of God's Word became so much a part of Paul that he took ownership of it. Few Christians approach truth from this perspective.

Discerning spiritual truth is a serious, personal commitment. The effectiveness of your walk with the Lord depends on whether you properly discern the truth of Scripture **for yourself**. Most Christians adopt the beliefs of someone else (it could be a person, a ministry, a church organization or a denomination) rather than allowing the Holy Spirit to personally establish His truth in them. This is one of the major causes of division in the modern church today.

### THE HOLY SPIRIT'S ROLE IN DISCERNING TRUTH

The Holy Spirit can be viewed as the "equalizer" of the Church. His presence in each true believer in Christ is designed to invalidate all forms of "Ecclesiastical Hierarchy" that exists in the world of religion. It is for this reason that the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit that allows his

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administration to operate are so maligned by modern theological teaching. The Holy Spirit speaks directly to the believer from his position on the inside of us. Yet, the subject of hearing the voice of God's Spirit **should never down-play the importance of knowing the Bible and discerning truth by comparing it with the Scriptures.** Our knowledge of the Bible should always be used. But, many times religious error is so well hidden that our intellect isn't enough. In these situations we need guidance in an area that the Bible may not specifically address. Learning to follow the instruction and leading of the Holy Spirit comes with maturity—but can be enjoyed by any true believer in Christ. How to be led by the Holy Spirit is not a popular teaching in some congregations. Church leadership generally considers it to be too subjective. They complain that Christians can get their personal feelings, temperament and biases mixed into what they perceive as something the Holy Spirit is saying. This happens all the time and is to be expected. Yet, following the voice of the Holy Spirit as He leads you into the truth is far better than leaning on your own understanding (Proverbs 3:5-6). Whereas our understanding can be wrong, the Holy Spirit is always right because he possesses the very mind and will of God. Learning to follow the leadings of the Holy Spirit comes with maturity. Many mistakes will be made along the way. Errors in judgment and misuse should never be the reason to throw the whole process out. The Bible teaches that being led by the Holy Spirit is a mark of a son of God (Romans 8:14). The apostle John also wrote about this important truth...

*“But **the anointing** which you have received from **Him** abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the **same anointing** teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him.” (1 John 2:27)*

The Holy Spirit guides you in three basic ways. First, He guides you through His peace. One of the characteristics of being saved is having God's peace that passes all understanding. One reason the Father gives you peace is to guard your heart and mind (Philippians 4:6-7). We are told to let the peace of God **rule** in our heart (Colossians 3:15). When the Holy Spirit wants to guide you in a particular direction or alert you to some danger, the peace in your heart will either be disturbed or intensified. We are allowing God's peace to rule our heart when we learn to be sensitive to this prompting. Many times you will hear Christians comment on being

“checked” in their spirit about some decision they are about to make. Or, they might say something like, “I have a real peace about this decision.” The “check” is a temporary disturbance of God’s peace. It’s the Holy Spirit’s way of saying “something isn’t right.” Usually, there will be no immediate outward evidence to support this type of spiritual guidance.

The second way the Holy Spirit guides believers is through the inner witness. Romans 8:16 says...

*“The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God...”*

The witness of the Holy Spirit to your spirit can be described as a supernatural “knowing.” With this understanding I could rephrase Romans 8:16 to say, “The Holy Spirit causes us to know deep down on the inside that we are children of God.” This “knowing” is not something that is the result of study or the receiving of external information. It is a spiritual knowledge imparted by the indwelling Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will, many times, give you knowledge that is not available to your senses.

The third way the Holy Spirit guides you is by speaking directly to your spirit. It sounds like someone speaking audibly to you. At other times the Holy Spirit will speak in what some refer to as a “still small voice” on the inside. An example of this can be found in Acts 10:19-21 when the Lord was sending Peter to preach the Gospel at Cornelius’ house. (Read Acts chapter 10 for the whole story)

*“While Peter thought about the vision, **the Spirit said to him**, ‘Behold, three men are seeking you. Arise therefore, go down and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them.’ Then Peter went down to the men who had been sent to him from Cornelius, and said, ‘Yes, I am he whom you seek. For what reason have you come?’”*

Wow—did you hear that! Peter said that the Spirit (or Holy Spirit) spoke in an audible way to him. It’s important to know that God’s Spirit didn’t speak to Peter just because he was special in some way. The Spirit can and will speak directly to any of his children. I’ve experienced this Divine encounter myself—so I know he’ll do it for you. There are more examples of the Holy Spirit speaking directly to believers in the Scripture.

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## *The Mystery of New Covenant Ministry & Authority*

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In Acts chapter 10 Peter received supernatural knowledge that went beyond his physical senses.

God still uses these methods of guidance to direct His children. He has not changed His ways because we are still operating under the everlasting covenant in Christ's blood. When some church leaders try to explain away or discredit these methods of guidance it is because they consider them too subjective and something that cannot be **proven** by "objective evidence." Remember in the Bible when the religious leaders asked Jesus for a "sign" to prove that He was teaching the truth? Jesus said that a "wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign" (Matthew 16:1-4). Jesus said that demanding visual evidence before you believe is unbelief. As more understanding is gained about the new covenant in Christ's blood, you will discover that religious thinking, which is common in the church today, still demands a sign. A study on the life of the apostle Thomas will show that he had a similar form of unbelief caused by His insistence on "seeing before believing." God demands the kind of faith that "believes before it sees." Jesus speaks about this in John chapter 20 verses 27-29 when He met with His disciples after the resurrection.

*"Then He said to Thomas, 'Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing.' And Thomas answered and said to Him, 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus said to him, 'Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.'"*

Our walk with the Lord is one of faith. The New Covenant is entered and appropriated by faith. The faith walk is something that generally occurs without physical evidence (II Corinthians 5:7). Our faith is only supported by what God said in His written Word or what He says directly to your spirit (which always agrees with His written Word). Spiritual maturity is the confidence to obey when the Holy Spirit speaks to you without the need for "evidence." Having the kind of faith that depends only on God's Word is important in the New Covenant. It is the prerequisite for participating in many of the ministries of the Church.

## REDIRECTED DEVOTION

Leaders who abuse authority commit a serious offense against God's kingdom. They fail to acknowledge **the presence of the Holy Spirit** in each believer. Some leaders fall into the trap of usurping the role of the Holy Spirit by manipulating God's people through persuasive speech and intimidation instead of just simply presenting what the Bible says (Romans 16:18). They fail to have faith in the Holy Spirit's ability to instruct the believer from the inside (which is one reason He is there). They resist giving up their **control** to God's Spirit.

Improper authority is used when leaders subtly position themselves **between** Jesus Christ and the believer. Scripture is quietly lifted from its context to make it appear to support certain types of abusive church government. In these situations, believers who are not grounded in the truth of the New Covenant and the authority of God's indwelling Spirit are in trouble. In some churches, Christians are taught that they are being unsubmitive if they make any major decisions (marriage, residence, career, etc.) without getting the permission (some call it "counsel") of their "spiritual authority." While the Bible does instruct believers to submit themselves to authority, "submission" can be taken out of context and to unbiblical extremes. If you study the meaning of "submission" you find that it is given **voluntarily**. If the leadership of your church coerces you—it ceases to be submission. In cases of improper authority, the Christian's love for God and the desire to obey Him is channeled toward a man-made authority structure. This exploits the Christian's devotion to God and hinders the work of the Holy Spirit. The exploitation stops when God's people learn the truth that sets them free. The New Covenant teaches that **no mediator** is needed between the believer and Christ. The Bible calls all believers kings and priests to God (Revelation 1:5-6)

## BODY LIFE MINISTRY

It is clear that the early church had a spiritual life that is impossible to find today. As we discovered, the definition of covenant between the first century church and the church of today has been perverted. This accounts for most of the difference. However, there is one more important reason that the early church had a special life and zeal. The truth of the indwelling

presence of **the Holy Spirit in each believer** was at the very heart of their fellowship.

In America, our churches are structured with a different mentality from the ones in the first century. In our modern churches, the congregation comes into a building and sits down to hear a sermon. In most churches, the pastor is expected to do the majority of the ministry, since he was trained in seminary for this function. I believe that many church-goers tend to think that the pastor or minister is the only one who has the Holy Spirit since he is the one they believe is qualified to do the majority of the ministry.

**I don't want my comments about modern church structure to be misunderstood. I am not saying that all churches led by a single pastor or minister are practicing an abusive type of authority. This is clearly not true. Many churches that have this type of structure have good, faithful men who are doing God's will as they understand it. My point is that tradition has dictated our church structure, many times, to the exclusion of the Holy Spirit which indwells the believer causing "body life ministry" to be lost.**

This type of mentality is not found in the first century church. Ministry took place as the result of the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in each believer. They were not structured so that the emphasis was on one man. The early church knew that if each believer had the Holy Spirit dwelling inside him or her then each had something to contribute toward the instruction of the church. The Holy Spirit is the instructor under the new covenant in Christ's blood. Don't misunderstand me here—Body life ministry never excludes Godly spiritual authority. It is mostly a recognition of the authority of the Holy Spirit speaking through the Church, which is God's people, the **Ekklesia**. The Church includes **all** believers in Jesus Christ. We get a glimpse into the "body life" of the early church in the words of the apostle Paul in I Corinthians 14:26...

*“How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, **each of you** has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.”*

Some may feel that the above Scripture has its fulfillment when members of the church teach Sunday school, teen ministry or Bible class. The Scripture says, “Whenever you come together.” This involves participation in **the whole ministry to the church**—and it includes the teaching and preaching of God’s Word to the entire congregation.

God has created every person different and has given specific gifts to each one to benefit the church. Therefore, a ministry contribution can be made from the body of Christ that is much more effective and complete than if it originated from the limitations of just one person. In this type of loving environment, the pastor and elders are participants in body life ministry **with** the congregation. They are respected because of their greater stature and experience in the faith in much the same way as an older and more experienced member would be respected in a family. This is one reason why some leaders are called “elders” (or an “older one” in the faith). Leadership is to be recognized by their quality of life and not by an assigned position of authority by a denomination. Today, church leadership is appointed according to natural ability, intellectual and educational qualifications. In most churches, the Holy Spirit’s authority is not considered; yet all true, effective ministry comes from Him.

In I Corinthians 12, Paul starts out by describing the different gifts of the Holy Spirit that are given to each member of the Church. In verse 7 Paul writes...

*“But the manifestation of the Spirit is **given to each one for the profit of all.**”*

Notice that God’s focus is on “the profit of all.” God causes all the Church to profit by giving a different manifestation of the Holy Spirit to each member. Paul goes on to list the different gifts of the Spirit that operate through the Church (verses 8-10). In verses 11-14 Paul writes...

*“But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing **to each one individually as He wills.** For as the*

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*body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. For in fact **the body is not one member but many.***”

The early church pattern of “Body life” continues to be our pattern today. The reason it isn’t followed is because it disturbs the controlling influence of religion. It also greatly upsets the “spectator mentality” of the congregation. A few brave churches have ventured into this new territory and have rediscovered the truth of “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27). It’s nearly impossible to stop religious habit patterns, especially when it is supported by centuries of tradition, but it’s worth the effort. Religious thinking and church tradition robs us more than we know.

Leading by example is one way honor is given to the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in each believer. Respecting and allowing Body life ministry to operate, no matter how unpopular, is an evidence that we rightly discern the body of Christ.

### DOES GOD RESIST THE CHURCH?

The improper use of authority is a serious problem in the modern church. It short-circuits the ability of Jesus Christ, as head of the Church, to direct as He wills. It interferes with Christ’s ability to rule—and hinders individual believers from being involved in ministry. Churches that have an improper authority structure place leaders in a position of “being over” rather than “under” as a servant as Jesus taught. In God’s government, the Church, the Bride of Christ, is God’s highest priority. God’s focus is on the maturity of the Church. This is why a New Testament leader must have a servant’s attitude. He serves by helping the Church come into her calling in God. A leader’s goal is to help the Church become all that she should be in God rather than indulge in building a personal ministry—or a personal kingdom.

The type of authority commonly found in today’s “modern” church does not fit the model of which Jesus spoke. In Matthew 23:6-12, Jesus warned the multitudes and His disciples about the religious leaders of His day and made some very pointed statements which apply to us.

*“They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues, greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called by men, ‘Rabbi, Rabbi.’ But you, do not be called ‘Rabbi’; for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren. Do not call anyone on earth your father, for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. And do not be called teachers; **for One is your Teacher, the Christ.** But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself will be abased, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”*

Almost everywhere I hear church leaders referred to as “Father so and so,” “Bishop so and so,” “Reverend so and so” and “Pastor so and so.” I understand that most people show their respect in this way. Jesus said that this kind of “titled” authority undermines what He wants to do in His church. It causes God’s people to have a passive attitude and to sit on their gifts. It stops body life ministry and hinders the outworking of the New Covenant. I believe one of the main points of Jesus in the above Scripture is found in the phrase, “do not be called ‘Rabbi’; for One is your Teacher, the Christ, **and you are all brethren.**” God wants a sense of oneness in His church. He wants us to have a sense that we are all brethren, a covenant family. When improper authority is exercised, it robs us of the sense of family and establishes a “class mentality.” The terms “clergy” and “laity” are used everywhere in the modern church. A dividing line is drawn between “recognized” church leadership and the people of the congregation. This was exactly the thing that Jesus was teaching His disciples to avoid. Yet, it is an accepted way of thinking by the average church-going Christian today. Jesus wants an attitude of equality, not class superiority. People might accuse me of being “anti-authority.” This is not true. My desire is to see man’s authority minimized and God’s authority through His Church maximized. After all, the Church belongs to Him! Jesus went on to give a warning about the danger of exalting one’s self. Spiritual pride can sometimes be at the very heart of improper authority in the church. James 4:6 says...

*“God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”*

A majority of churches that practice an improper authority do so because that’s the way they were taught. Body life ministry is a radical concept and violates the traditional understanding of how a church should operate. On the other hand, unbiblical authority can flow from spiritual

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pride in a leader. It answers the question as to why the efforts of many modern church organizations to “win the world for Christ” seem to meet with Divine resistance.<sup>1</sup>

A leader has the ability to help guide God’s people deeper into truth—or deeper into error. Individual believers have a responsibility to discern the truth of God’s Word for themselves, yet many will not make this effort. In the end, God holds the leaders responsible for the purity of the truth contained in their instruction. As a result, they will be judged in a stricter manner because of their position and influence.

### **COVENANTS OF OBEDIENCE**

The Lordship of Jesus Christ lies at the very heart of the New Covenant. Without it, Christianity is just another world religion. It becomes a counterfeit—something that looks “godly and heavenly” but isn’t. This is why it’s a serious sin and offense for a human authority (or church government) to be placed between the believer and Christ. Many times it is justified by the desire to accomplish a “higher” purpose. Usually this purpose is to achieve the full “maturity” of the believer. Christians are told by spiritual leadership that they can’t “mature” unless they “submit” to God’s “delegated authority”—which of course means them.

In my study of the New Covenant, I discovered that it meets every area of need in the believer’s life. Nowhere does Scripture support the establishment of any other “covenant”—verbal, written or by blood to cover additional needs. The New Covenant of Jesus Christ is a blood covenant that ends all covenants between the Christian and God. The New Testament calls it “an everlasting covenant”. Nothing was left out and nothing else is necessary—unless you want to do something that God has not ordained.

In America, there is no Scriptural support for some of the types of church structure we are starting to see. Extraordinary efforts are made to guarantee that believers conform to the teachings of church leaders. Yet, Scripture clearly leaves this matter between the Holy Spirit and the believer. To achieve the goal of obedience, we are seeing a dangerous trend that subtly threatens to undermine God’s authority. Well-meaning pastors and teachers hold special classes to instruct new believers in basic Bible

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<sup>1</sup> Additional information available from the January 1995 issue of *Chrisma Magazine*, article entitled “Is God Opposing the Church?” by Francis Frangipane, p. 18.

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doctrine. There's nothing wrong with these classes if the goal is only instruction. However, some new church programs are both unbiblical and dangerous—in my opinion. Teachings on “Honoring Your Pastor” and “Loyalty To Spiritual Authority” are being taught which require some kind of verbal or written “agreement” that you will obey the leader's instruction. At the end of one such class everyone stands and makes a “covenant to obey” the pastor by **swearing** on the body and blood of Jesus Christ. Participants raise their hands to God while the person in charge leads the group in a prayer of “covenant commitment”.

James 5:12 tells us...

*“But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and you nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation.”*

Jesus used stronger words in Matthew 5:34-37...

*“But I say unto you, swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: Nor by the earth; for it is His footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: **for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.**”*

In some churches a verbal or written agreement to “tithe” is required before membership is awarded. Once again, giving and tithing in the New Testament is between Jesus and the believer and is considered an expression of worship. Giving is always to be done freely with no compulsion (2 Cor. 9:7). Generally, our giving should be directed toward the local church that we attend. There are expenses associated with the local church that must be paid. Yet, the responsibility for meeting a ministry's needs ultimately falls on God—if it truly belongs to Him. However, there may be times that the Lord will tell you to give to a ministry that is not connected with your church. Remember that God has other ministries under His authority. Giving to ministries outside your local church is still giving to Jesus. If you aren't free to obey His request then maybe Jesus isn't Lord of your finances—and someone else is. Beware of churches that track your giving

## *The Mystery of New Covenant Ministry & Authority*

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or attendance records for the purpose of correcting you if the expected behavior isn't followed.

Never confuse the loving concern of your spiritual family with abusive authority. When following Jesus, He will sometimes take you in a different direction than those around you. Your family may want to know what's happening because they care about you. Many Christians have misinterpreted the voice of Jesus and take off in a wrong direction. For this reason, there is safety in Godly relationships. God will speak to you through other believers who may have a better perspective on your situation, especially your pastor. The question is, are you mature enough to recognize God's voice when it comes through a fellow believer? Or, are you mature enough to follow His voice when everyone else disagrees with your direction? These can be difficult questions to answer.

In modern America "relativism" is replacing spiritual truth. Suddenly, everyone has become "their own god" with "their own truth" rather than embracing the God of heaven and His truth. The false philosophy of relativism will eventually destroy the moral fabric of this country if left unchecked. I'm convinced that this is one of the reasons we are seeing churches initiate these programs to control their members. However, the cure can do far more damage. Spiritual "control" of this nature only belongs to Jesus as head of the Church. Even under the best of intentions, by making a "covenant of obedience" you are subtly allowing the infringement of the Lordship of Jesus in your life. Leaders engaging in this activity will strongly deny this interpretation because it may disagree with their idea of discipleship or it interferes with the desired **end result** of the believer's maturity. Yet, you are giving a human authority "control" of an area that belongs only to Jesus and you are opening the door for spiritual authority abuse whether it is taken advantage of or not. The end does not justify the means with God. A throne only seats one person and you decide who that person is to be. Unbelievers place themselves on the throne. Religious people place earthly human spiritual authority on the throne. True Christians place Jesus on the throne.

### **CONCLUSION**

Many look at the work of a pastor or minister as just another career or profession. Ministry is a **calling from God**, not a career we choose. It may involve years of formal education (as with the apostle Paul). However, it

may involve no formal education—as was the case with Peter and John, both of whom were also major apostles of the Church (Acts 4:13). What qualifies a person to be “in the ministry” is God’s call and the unique preparation of the Holy Spirit. This preparation may not necessarily include seminary or formal religious training. The Church belongs to God. Every other reason given by men to disqualify a person who has a call from God becomes irrelevant.

The subject of authority is not an easy one to discuss. A proper balance is difficult to maintain—yet, we must try. Too much is at stake. The kind of balance that stops authority abuse in a church congregation comes as a result of the Holy Spirit’s **ruling** influence. The “leadership” and the individual believer has authority in Christ’s Church because God’s Holy Spirit indwells both of them. Only churches that allow the Holy Spirit to rule in this manner enjoy a proper balance. When the Holy Spirit is ignored, over-ruled, or pushed out of the affairs of a church, human safe-guards and improper authority takes over.

When a believer personally knows the truth, it stops the exploitation found under an abusive church government. If you do not take responsibility and discover the truth for yourself with the Holy Spirit as your guide, there is no excuse when you stand before Jesus at the final judgment. God’s response will be, “I put My Spirit in you to show you the truth. What was done with this gift?” Every born-again believer has the Holy Spirit and has the same capacity to experience the freedom that comes from **personally** knowing the truth. This is a benefit of the New Covenant for which Jesus shed his blood.

