
Authority through the Scripture

Revelation 5:9-14

Authority is a tricky subject. Submission is an even harder subject. Now, I am going to summarily dismiss the world's ideas of authority and submission, even in the western idea of government which is supposedly derived from the Bible. They have infected the church with ideas that have the illusion of Biblical support without framing the reality the Bible does.

And, I want to dispel one false, wicked slander about us and churches like us. We do not believe or teach or require absolute, unquestioning submission to the leadership of this church. Whatever you have been told; whatever bad experience you have had elsewhere, I plead with you to listen this morning to God's word. So in what I am going to say this morning, I am trying to hover close to the Bible and build a Biblical understanding of authority in God's Kingdom. Tonight, Pastor Dale will help us think about how we take these precepts, principles and patterns and institute Biblical governance and guidance in the church.

Through the Bible, God's work in the world is expressed in three motifs, metaphors, themes. They emerge right in the Garden of Eden where Adam and Eve were to govern, grow and guard what God had entrusted to them. This idea of governing what has been entrusted then unfolds through the Bible.

Revelation is a sample of the trajectory of the Bible. One of the key motifs in the Bible is that of Kingdom. As the story line of the Bible unfolds, God is revealing and implementing His plans with this song as its consummation.

⁶And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. ⁷And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne. ⁸And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. ⁹And they sang a new song, saying,

“Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals,
for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God
from every tribe and language and people and nation,
¹⁰ and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God,
and they shall reign on the earth.”

Do you see it? This song celebrates that the redeemed people of God are a kingdom and priests who shall reign on the earth.

Authority as a Dominion – World

A Biblical theology of authority must begin at the beginning: God and creation.

Adam

(Genesis 1:24-30)

Genesis opens with the creation of the cosmos by God speaking everything into existence except man. Made He made from the dust. From the very beginning God, who is the sovereign over the universe, made Adam to have dominion.

²⁶ Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

²⁸ And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” ²⁹ And God said, “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food.

This assigning of dominion is part of how Adam was to reflect the image of God. He was to have and extend dominion over the world that God had made.

After the fall when Adam and Eve sinned, instead of that dominion being a glad work, it became a tiresome and troublesome toil. The earth would produce thorns and thistles so that man’s work was now in a cursed, fallen earth.

The text also establishes that authority will be resisted. Adam and Eve have failed to obey God. Now in fallenness and sin, all relationships will be beset by misuse of authority and an unwillingness to submit to authority. This begins the long and weary struggle by the world who seek to substitute God’s good and wise plan with folly.

Noah

(Genesis 9:1-17)

Emerging from the ark after the world that then was perished by water, Noah is given his creation mandate. Note what is *different* in this mandate.

¹ And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. ² The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth and upon every bird of the heavens, upon everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea. Into your hand they are delivered. ³ Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything. ⁴ But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. ⁵ And for your lifeblood I will require a reckoning: from every beast I will require it and from man. From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man.

⁶ “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image. ⁷ And you, be fruitful and multiply, increase greatly on the earth and multiply in it.”

⁸ Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, ⁹ “Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your offspring after you, ¹⁰ and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the livestock, and every beast of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark; it is for every beast of the earth. ¹¹ I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.” ¹² And God said, “This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: ¹³ I have set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. ¹⁴ When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, ¹⁵ I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh. And the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. ¹⁶ When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.” ¹⁷ God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth.”

After the flood, God establishes His relationship and authority through covenant making. He makes a covenant with Noah that includes the “grow through multiply” aspect and expands the food permission. But there is now no explicit dominion over the post-flood world. The dominion over the world has been lost to man through the first Adam. Now it will be regained through the regency and rule of the second Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ.

But the forward movement here is that God is relating to people through covenants. He establishes the terms of the relationship, makes promises, gives requirements, appoints the sign and secures the covenant with a sacrifice. So God will establish His rule through people with whom he covenants. This covenant highlights the Creator-creature relationship with God as the sovereign maker of all things to whom the whole world gives account. This sovereign God can promise no future judgment by water and change the diet of all mankind.

Authority in the Family – Father

(Genesis 17:1-8)

The next major movement in the Scripture is the call and covenant with Abraham. We will focus briefly on one of the statements of the covenant here in this text.

¹ When Abram was ninety-nine years old the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, “I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless, ² that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly.” ³ Then Abram fell on his face. And God said to him, ⁴ “Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. ⁵ No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. ⁶ I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. ⁷ And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. ⁸ And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God.”

God calls out Abraham and establishes this covenant with him. The covenant is around Abraham being a father and having many children or descendants. But most important of all, Abraham will have one descendent who will be the Lord Jesus Christ. Abraham will be the father of one nation, Israel. But down through the ages, when the Lord Jesus comes, Abraham will be the father of many nations and people groups through all the spiritual sons and daughters born again through the Spirit into the family of God.

This covenant highlights the Father-son relationship between God and His people. It reinforces the authority that God has as our Father as is reflected in the authority fathers have in their families.

Authority as a Nation - Law

(Exodus 24:1-11)

The major step in redemptive history is the establishing of Israel as a nation through the giving of the Mosaic Covenant and Law. There are many texts that speak of this. I have chosen this one because of the clear, covenantal nature of the relations.

¹ Then he said to Moses, "Come up to the LORD, you and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and worship from afar. ² Moses alone shall come near to the LORD, but the others shall not come near, and the people shall not come up with him."

³ Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the rules. And all the people answered with one voice and said, "All the words that the LORD has spoken we will do." ⁴ And Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD. He rose early in the morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel. ⁵ And he sent young men of the people of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the LORD. ⁶ And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he threw against the altar. ⁷ Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. And they said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient." ⁸ And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words."

⁹ Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up, ¹⁰ and they saw the God of Israel. There was under his feet as it were a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness. ¹¹ And he did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; they beheld God, and ate and drank.

The Bible views this covenant as establishing the 12 tribes of Israel into a nation.¹ Through the Mosaic Covenant and Law, they are marked off from the rest of the world, given an identity, given a law code to live by individually and corporately. Since God was their King, their regent, then He gave them their law, established how they might approach Him and serve Him. Furthermore, the law gave them a sacrificial system which pointed to something larger and later yet had to be believed and accepted in order to have a right relationship with God.

Leadership and authority were first invested in an individual who was appointed or recognized by God. Moses was first, then Joshua and finally a long series of leaders that led

Israel to demand a human king. Alongside of these leaders, there was a High Priest and a generally recognized national prophet who mediated God with His people.

The New Testament and Paul in particular interprets this whole system as being temporary. It was never intended to be permanent and has no future place either. It was used to move redemptive history forward until the Lord Jesus came who fulfilled the whole system. Authority was vested in the Word that God spoke. Everyone was to bow to the supremacy of the Covenant Law. As more and more scripture was given by God, it was that by which God's people were to be governed. In Israel, through the Law, God's authority rested in "this says the Lord". The Scriptures were what all were accountable to.

In Israel under the Old Covenant, God highlights His relationship with His people as a nation, or more properly, a people group. His authority is no longer merely the word of those in authority. God's authority is His Word and those in authority are responsible to govern, guide, grow and guard *in accordance with the revelation God had and was giving*.

Authority as a Kingdom - Davidic Kingship (1 Chronicles 17:11-14)

Israel became dissatisfied with being governed by interpreters of the Scriptures, the priests, the prophets and the judges. They wanted a king like the nations around them had. They wanted a human king. It was always God's intention to give them a king. Moses had promised them that God would rule them through a king and the Law anticipated Israel becoming a kingdom once they were settled into the land.

God gave them a king who was very much like the pagan nations around them. He gave them Saul. Saul fit the standards of the world. He was of the world. In the same rhythm of the old first, then the new, Israel had Saul and then was given David. Here is the Davidic Covenant in which God promises that a son of David will be King over God's people forever.

¹¹ When your days are fulfilled to walk with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, one of your own sons, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹² He shall build a house for me, and I will establish his throne forever. ¹³ I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. I will not take my steadfast love from him, as I took it from him who was before you, ¹⁴ but I will confirm him in my house and in my kingdom forever, and his throne shall be established forever.' "

God promises to bring to the throne of David a son who will rule forever. His throne, His kingdom, His regency will never end. Certainly, the initial fulfillment of this promise is through Solomon. But someone greater is being alluded here. There is going to be a future king who will fulfill these promises. The fulfillment He will bring will be even greater than could have been anticipated. He will establish a rule, reign and dominion that will never fail and never fall.

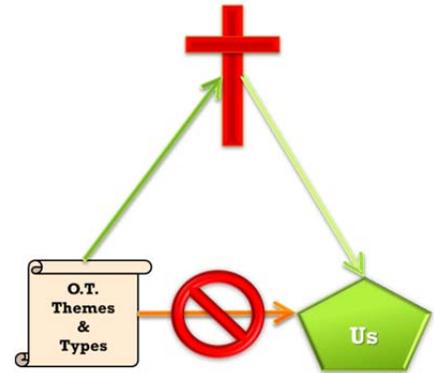
Though not evident in this text, we must remember that David is the first of the shepherd-kings. He as king is to shepherd God's people.

In summary, in the unfolding of redemptive history, the Sovereign God, the Creator's authority is revealed and applied through the analogies of a garden, a family, a clan, nation, a

temple, a people group, and a priesthood. We have not looked at all of these this morning. But each of these Biblical themes have their own govern, grow and guard aspects.

Authority as Messiah – the Lord Jesus Christ

All of these themes, these covenants, are fulfilled in the Christ. In our Bibles, Christ means anointed one and messiah. So He completes the Old Covenant and fulfills its types and themes. He begins (you will use the word, “inaugurate”) the New Covenant and the new creation. The New Testament writers are applying these themes to the church through Christ. They do not bring them directly across. They come through the Lord Jesus. That idea is represented in the diagram. This is how we are to understand them as well.



Jesus is the Sovereign Creator

John 1:1-5

The New Testament portrays Jesus as the sovereign creator.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. ⁴In him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

John writes this to show that Jesus’ person and power were rejected by the world and by His own. He is the true life and true light of the world. He is not seen or accepted by those who are only born once, but is received by those who are born by the will of God.

Jesus is the New...

In the book of Matthew, the author is working through the Old Testament showing how Jesus fulfills not only the prophecies, but the types and pictures. Matthew argues that Jesus is the new Israel, the new Adam, the new Moses, the essence of the Kingdom. the new King, the new Temple, the final Priest, the final Lamb, the eternal Son of David on the throne launching His rule and sending His servants/disciples into the world to gather and grow His people.

Jesus is the Chief Shepherd

(1 Peter 2:25; 5:4)

²⁵ For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

⁴ And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

In the middle of the long section on submission, Peter reminds us that Jesus is the shepherd and overseer of our souls. These things are deeply connected. Our submission in all our roles is under the Lordship of Christ. He is our ultimate authority. He is the one who is governing His church.

Peter also reminds the under-shepherds of who is the chief-shepherd of the church. We all serve under the Lord. All shepherds, that is, all the pastor-elders of the church are to submit to Jesus’ Word and His will.

Jesus is the King

1 Timothy 6:13-16

Finally, Jesus is the King. He is the ruler of the Kingdom of God.

¹³ I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, ¹⁴ to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵ which he will display at the proper time—he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, ¹⁶ who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.

There is a sense in which Jesus is the ruler over all the universe. He is its sovereign whether it is acknowledged or not. Jesus is Satan's King, even if Satan does not obey Him. Satan is a rebel, not because he has found a space where Jesus does not rule, but because Jesus rules over all the Universe.

There is sense in which Jesus is the king of His people, the church. The kingdom of God is not being brought to consummation through the church. Just as the kingdom was here when Jesus was here and it began with Him, so the kingdom is here because His submissive people comprise the church. Jesus's kingdom is primarily about the geography of the heart. He is not interested in territory – He is interested in conquering hearts in all the people groups.

Authority in the Church - Shepherd-Elders

How does all this help us understand the church? We are going to explore this more fully this evening as Pastor Dale will unpack for us as we have worked it out at the Chapel.

Jesus exercises His rule over and in the church through His Word. The Scriptures are the rule of the church. That governance is invested in a body of men the Bible calls, *the Elders*.

As Overseers

The New Testament often uses the word translated *overseer* or *bishop*. This word was primarily used in the culture to refer to a governor who was sent by a conquering king to govern a city/state on behalf of the king. The overseer, the governor was to exercise oversight under the law the king had given. He was serving, not on his own behalf, but in the place of and for the good of the king.

This is the term used for Elders. We are to govern the church on behalf of our King Jesus using the Scriptures as that which expresses His will and frames His wisdom. We are to govern and guide according to the Word of God.

This means that we are not the king. We are not the CEO. We are governors. The Elders have been given authority. We have diagrammed that authority as follows.

	Corporate Body	Individual Sheep
God's Will	Command	Command
God's Wisdom	Govern	Guide

As Shepherds

The Elders are to shepherd the flock. This is the primary verb. Shepherds rarely owned their own flocks. They were caring for a flock that was not their own. But they were to love the sheep that had been put in their care. They were to see that the sheep were taken care of, fed, watered, and defended for the sake of the owner. The Bible uses this analogy for what the Elders do. We are to tend, pastor, care for, the sheep God has put in our care.

This means that we are not the chief shepherd. We are not the "Senior Pastor" of the church. We are under shepherds. We do have authority to govern the church. But we are serving the chief shepherd, the overseer of our souls.

Reflect and Respond

Jesus is the sovereign Lord. This is the foundational truth on which all authority rests. All human authority is derived from God's. Eventually, all will bow and submit to Him.

God has established and ordered the authority and submission. Satan has rejected it and rebelled against it. Man may and often does try to overturn or replace it in the institutions God has created. In fallenness and in sinfulness, submission to authority is often very, very difficult.

God gives grace to His people to submit to His authority. That enabling grace empowers Biblical leaders to govern well. It enables His people to submit well. When God's people are pleasing to God in this area, they model for the world how to live together God's way.

Human authority and submission are always limited, never absolute. Only God has total absolute authority to command what He will. God has set boundaries around authority and submission. To please God we must recognize, affirm and honor those bounds.

May God continue to grant that we will please Him as His people. May we as the Elders, govern, guide, grow and guard you well. May you be poised to be governed, guided, grown and guarded well. And this beautiful dance of love and life delight the heart of our King.

¹ Note: the Bible does not see a unilaterally applied constitution as the means of authority. It uses a covenant to govern through mutual obligation. This is not what western governance is based on.