

Ephesians 4.11 - Authority

Last week, looking at Ephesians 4.7-10, we saw that there are diversity of gifts in the body of Christ. We saw that:

- Jesus himself gives these diverse gifts,
- Every believer is a recipient of them,
- Among those gifts are a diversity of strengths, roles, and maturity
- that diversity ultimately leads to unity in a mature faith.

Red and yellow black and white ... and young, old, male, female, wealthy, poor, college educated, high school educated, school of hard knocks educated, European, African, Asian, Democrat, Republican, Libertarian: if you are a follower of Jesus, He has given you such grace that all these disparities can be torn down and Jesus alone remains in our midst.

Here's what we didn't talk about last week. Except for referring in a very brief and unspecific way to some of the gifts Christians are given, we didn't talk at all about what those gifts are.

GOD'S DELEGATED AUTHORITIES ARE A GIFT:

Open your Bibles to Ephesians 4.11. *And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers.*¹ The first gift Paul references is leadership and authority – and particularly in the church.²

¹ Eph 4.11

² Because we are talking about the nuclear family and the family of the body of Christ, I am purposely avoiding a technical discussion about church government and the officers of the church. The titles used in this text can be viewed in different ways. For example:

- Some look for exact offices with these titles. They generally try to look up every use of the word 'apostle' or 'prophet' and then generate a job description like in a modern corporation. That approach brings some problems with it.
- Others see these as descriptions of function. That is, the title 'apostle' signifies a certain kind of job description, which may not always have the title 'apostle' attached to it. The same with 'prophet,' or for that matter 'bishop.'
- It's my judgment that apostles and prophets – perhaps along with evangelists – are foundational offices at the beginning of the NT church. Though there may be room for extraordinary circumstances, generally speaking the offices of apostle and prophet don't exist any more.
- Pastor/teacher is a combined office and function, though individuals may be more gifted in one area than another. These are the customary offices and functions in the church today.
- This judgment generally agrees with protestant reformed tradition and Anglican polity.

I cannot help but think that it sounds arrogant for me to be standing here, in this pulpit, saying that one of God's premier gifts to you is I. But I'm stuck with the text. And hear me carefully: I assure you that as I speak about pastoral leadership and oversight, there is no arrogance, but rather fear, a sense of weight, and a deep awareness of my own inadequacies to know I am answerable to God for your souls.

Those of you who are old time Anglicans know the word "curate." The origin of the word comes from the Latin phrase for the pastor, because he had had "the cure of souls," that is to say, the care of the souls of his congregation.

What doctor of medicine is not aware that some mishap of medication, or some ill-thought decision, or a slip of a scalpel might not end the life of a patient, or seriously wound him? But we consider those who have dedicated themselves to the care and cure of the human body as a gift to us, do we not?

Likewise, we ought to be thankful for those who have spiritual care for us, as I am for the many pastors and bishops I've had over the years. As one commentator has put it:

The government of the church, by the preaching of the word, is first of all declared to be no human contrivance, but a most sacred ordinance of Christ. ... They who reject or despise this ministry offer insult and rebellion to Christ its Author. It is himself who gave them; for, if he does not raise them up, there will be none. ... To Christ we owe it that we have ministers of the gospel, that they abound in necessary qualifications, that they execute the trust committed to them. All, all is his gift.³

You are perhaps familiar with the last words of Sir Thomas More. A staunch Roman Catholic, he refused to assent to Henry VIII's departure from Rome and was executed for treason. At his execution, his last reported words define the heart of any true pastor. He said something like this: "Tell the king that I die this day the King's good servant – but God's first."

My brothers and sisters, I am your servant – but God's first.

Notice too that from this verse we can infer this: that all authority structures are ordained by God. If we study the Scriptures, we'll see that proper authority is also referred to in the family, in the work place, even unbelieving civil authorities. It's very clear that there are those who are in authority and those who are under authority, and that is foundational in the gifts that Christ has given to His people.

GOD'S DELEGATED AUTHORITIES ARE GIVEN AS A BLESSING:

³ Calvin on Eph 4.11

For most of us, talking about authority is like pulling your fingernails across a blackboard. Immediately one begins looking for a hidden agenda, or begins to think about all the ways that authority can be and has been abused.

And there's no doubt that human wickedness has a way of taking every blessing and gift and turning it into something wicked. No matter what the grace of God looks like, human wickedness can turn that kindness into something harmful – or at least useless. Those who lived through St. John's time in ECUSA know what I'm talking about. And probably very few of us have avoided seeing or experiencing an abuse of power.

But what is God's intention in this area of authority? It is His intent that his delegated authorities be a blessing for his people. Look at the text again:

To each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift ... He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers.⁴

One of the greatest judgments on Israel is that God took away righteous and competent leadership.

I will make mere lads their princes, and capricious children will rule over them, and the people will be oppressed, each one by another, and each one by his neighbor; the youth will storm against the elder and the inferior against the honorable.⁵

But when God renews his people, he renews their leadership: *Then I will give you shepherds after My own heart, who will feed you on knowledge and understanding.⁶*

The writer to the Hebrews says: *Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.⁷* Respect and obedience to proper authority is profitable for us.

Paul instructs Titus regarding his congregations in chapter 3:

*Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed ... (8) This is a trustworthy statement; and concerning these things I want you to speak confidently, so that those who have believed God will be careful to engage in good deeds. **These things are good and profitable.**⁸*

⁴ Eph 4.7-11

⁵ Isa 3.4-5

⁶ Jer 3.15

⁷ Heb 13.17

⁸ Tit 3.1-2, 8

What does one say to a gift from God? Uh, no thanks, not interested? Rather, we should be saying: “Thank you for every good and perfect gift, those authorities you have established over us! Thank you for blessing us with them!”

GOD’S DELEGATED AUTHORITIES ARE TO BE RESPECTED AND OBEYED:

All proper governing authorities are from the Lord. Honoring them is honoring God. Therefore, God’s delegated authorities are to be respected and obeyed.

One of the most stunning examples of this principle is in Romans 13. Here, Paul is talking to the Christians in Rome about civil authority:

Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. (5) Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience’ sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.⁹

Remember, this is the Christian Jew Paul talking about the Roman government. Was it a Christian government? Was it sympathetic to Christians? Was it thoughtfully monotheistic? Was it gently pluralistic? None of the above!

Listen carefully, my brothers and sisters: not everyone voted for the present administration. Not everyone likes the present administration. Not everyone here agrees on the present administration’s economic policy. I hope we all agree on his ethics regarding abortion. But let me be clear – and this rubs against my own personal grain – *there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.*

We must speak and act respectfully, even when we oppose the government by lawful means.

You might say, “what about disobeying wicked commands? In Acts 5, didn’t Peter respond to the Jewish authorities who commanded him to cease speaking of Jesus: *We must obey God rather than men.*¹⁰

⁹ Rom 13.1–7

¹⁰ Act 5.29

Yes he did. We may not deny our faith. But we had better be sure that what we are doing is clearly what God commands! Otherwise: *Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.*

And if this is true with secular governments, how much more, then, those who have care for your souls and bodies in a godly context? Children, in the home, if your parents command you to do something wicked, by all means disobey. But taking out the trash is not an immoral order! Turning off the television isn't contrary to the law of God! Doing your homework won't break any of the 10 commandments!

Employees, obedience to your employers is clearly taught in the Scriptures. In fact, the context is even more repulsive by our modern standards.

Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who merely please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.¹¹

You might say: "OK God, I'll obey, but I don't have to like it!" Well, actually, yes you do. This obedience needs to be with a good attitude.

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.¹²

Imagine how this principle would change the atmosphere of our homes and churches. I will serve – with joy! I'm serving Jesus. And even if I don't like the pastor, the vestry, the job, or my boss, that's OK, the Lord Jesus gets the honor and I get the blessing. I'll serve my family with cheerfulness, even if the kids are whining, my wife is mad, or my husband is cranky!

Children – take out the trash with joy. Instead of "oooo-kaaaayyyy," or "in a minute;" try "sure Mom, I'd be glad to!" and then do it.

I can only commend those, who serve here at St. John's week after week, in quiet ways, in lowly ways, and do so with good cheer. God sees you, good brother, good sister, and knows your heart!

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION:

¹¹ Col 3.22-24

¹² Heb 13.17

Actually, all of us are both leaders and servants. All of us are, in some way, in authority and under authority. Even the smallest child here at least has authority of the pets, or some responsibility over their bedroom. Seeing godly authority as foundational, as a blessing, and as something to be respected and obeyed – all of this because it is Christ Jesus’ gift to us, will give us a complete different perspective. And the family – nuclear and ecclesiastical – will thrive on this principle.

Husbands and wives, employers and employees, parents and children, those in leadership and those under leadership – these are sacred responsibilities. Not because every one of these relationships is conducted in a godly way all the time, but because these are God’s structures, not ours.

Family Ethics - Authority

Ephesians 4.11

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

1. God’s delegated authorities are a gift
 - 1.1. Pastors are said to have the “cure of souls” like a physician for our bodies.
 - 1.2. We may infer that all other God ordained authorities are also gifts.
2. God’s delegated authorities are given as a blessing
 - 2.1. God’s judgment is often expressed by removing godly authority (Isa 3.4-5) and His blessing is expressed by returning it again (Jer 3.15).
 - 2.2. These authorities are for our good, not our harm (Titus 3.1-8).
3. God’s delegated authorities are to be respected and obeyed
 - 3.1. Even ungodly authorities can be God’s servants (Rom 13.1-7).
 - 3.2. Obedience should be respectful and with a good attitude (Col 3.22-24, Heb 13.17).