

To Clay Sikes, Frank Viola, Gene Edwards, Nick Vasiliades, Rudi Lopez and all those who seek to know the mind of the Lord, to discern the voice of the Spirit of God, and to rightly divide the word of God,

Greetings to you in the name of Jesus Christ, Yahshua the Messiah. I have read the articles "Straight Talk to Elders" parts one and two, as well as the follow-up comments that have been posted to the End Time Prophetic Vision website. Additionally, I have read Frank Viola's book "Rethinking the Wineskin", having done so a number of years ago along with several other ministers, and a little over a year ago I read some of Gene Edwards views on the same topic as I visited his website and read what material was available there. I have also studied Watchman Nee's "Rethinking the Work", "Spiritual Authority", and numerous other writings that touch on the issue of headship and authority in the church, such as the chapter on Headcovering found in the book "Love One Another".

I would like to speak to the issues raised by Gene Edwards, Frank Viola and others, and I would ask you to patiently consider that which I write. I know this will be to some length, but the issues here are foundational matters in the church and they cannot be treated lightly nor addressed in a few words. The writings that Clay Sikes has posted to the Internet entitled "Straight Talk to Elders" took over fifty pages to print out, and the books each of these men have written on church leadership are over one hundred pages, so I ask you to be patient in reading the words written here as well.

Nick Vasiliades made the following statement when speaking to the elders in Chile:

["If you can come up with \[a model\] of your own, we would welcome seeing this model. We would welcome something superior to what we use and share. But it must be a model that is faithful to the New Testament."](#)

I appreciate this confession of openness, and I desire to do what this brother has invited the saints to do. I will base all that is said upon the word of God, not upon some other man's writing, nor upon an interpretation of history. I agree that it is good to know one's history correctly, but if one's interpretation of history does not agree with the counsel of scriptures and the witness of the Spirit, then one must abandon their historical interpretation, for it does not bear the same weight as the scriptures.

Those who are students of history know that interpretation plays a large part in recreating past events, particularly when one is looking for root causes of particular actions. We all know how the evolutionists have employed interpretation to great effect to attempt to get the fossil and historical evidence to fit their theories and

hypotheses. They merely start with an assumption and then they try to find evidence to support their assumption. One of their own scientists who was formerly the head of a prestigious Chicago museum of natural history stated that the historical depictions offered by leading evolutionists are only limited by the imagination of the theorists and the gullibility of the listeners.

We would be wrong to assume that Christian church leaders and teachers are not prone to the same vagaries of interpretation when they seek to reconstruct images of early church life. One may not intentionally seek to deceive, but it is very easy to grasp hold of any item of evidence and to proclaim that it supports the thesis or model that is being propounded. This is what some have tried to share with Mr. Viola regarding his emphasis on historical reconstruction. It is not that history should be ignored, but that history is always subject to interpretation, and it should not be set on the same level as the words of scripture or the witness of the Spirit.

With this in mind, I will use only the Spirit and the Word as witnesses to what is shared. Paul declared to Timothy the following:

II Timothy 3:16-17

16 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;

17 so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

Frank Viola, Gene Edwards, or any other who would instruct the saints in these matters are offering teaching, reproof and correction. The scriptures are given as the foundation upon which any of these things should rest. When we teach we should teach from scripture. When we reprove, our reproofs should be based on the scriptures. When we correct, we should use the Word of God as our foundation. Beyond this, we also have these words:

John 16:13

"But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth..."

I Corinthians 2:11-12

11 For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God.

12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God...

The Spirit and the Word are the two witnesses that we must use for the foundation

of all instruction to the saints. Anything else is shaky ground. If we use interpretations of history as our guide, then we are at the mercy of the one who claims the greatest historical understanding. We must not use historical analysis and interpretation to define the meaning of scripture, but rather allow scripture to bring us to the right understanding of history.

I would like to state one more thing before delving into the matters of church leadership. Frank Viola in his personal introduction to the elders in Chile made the following comment:

“Halfway into that experience, I met a brother who was a co-worker of Watchman Nee. His name is Stephen Kaung. Stephen came to the United States in the 1950s. Today he is in his 80s. Since 1993, I have had a close relationship to brother Kaung. He has taught me a great deal. He helped us when we were meeting.”

Although Mr. Viola did not state it, and I do not think he meant to mislead anyone, it would be wrong to infer from this comment that Stephen Kaung holds the same views as Watchman Nee, or that the church model that Mr. Viola and others are teaching is something that Watchman Nee also taught. In fact, the truth is just the opposite. Mr. Viola, Mr. Edwards and others are disannulling the delegated authority of God within the church, and issues of authority and submission, through their teaching, while Watchman Nee sought to do just the opposite. Following are some of Watchman Nee’s own comments.

Authority is a tremendous thing in the universe - nothing overshadows it. It is therefore imperative for us who desire to serve God to know the authority of God.

To offend God’s authority is a rebellion far more serious than that of offending God’s holiness. Since it is a matter of conduct, sinning is more easily forgiven than rebellion, the latter being a matter of principle. Satan’s intent of setting his throne above the throne of God was the thing that violated God’s authority; it was the principle of self-exaltation... In serving God we must not violate authorities, because to do so is a principle of Satan. How can we preach Christ according to Satan’s principle? *Yet it is possible in our work to stand with Christ in doctrine, while at the same time stand with Satan in principle.*

[When we look at men] let us not see the man, but only the authority vested in him. We do not obey man, but God’s authority in man... We are on the wrong road if we meet man first before we obey authority. The opposite is the right way. Then we will not mind who the man is.

As God's servants, the first thing we should meet is authority. To touch authority is as practical as touching salvation, but it is a deeper lesson. Before we can work for God we must be overturned by His authority. Our entire relationship with God is regulated by whether or not we have met authority. If we have then we shall encounter authority everywhere.

The basic lesson that all brothers and sisters need to learn is that we should never allow grace to interfere with God's government. I say most emphatically that never in our lives should we permit grace to intervene in what God has decided in government. God wants men to respect His government not to overthrow it. If we are ignorant of God's government, we are lawless people in the sight of God. Since we have never seen the kingdom except as it is seen in the church, it is imperative for us to see the system of government. As a matter of fact, the system of grace is for the sake of completing the system of government. The system of government is not for the system of grace, but grace is for the completion of government.

Many hold to a fundamental error: they foolishly maintain that grace can set aside government. The truth is that what God does in grace never alters God's government.

So the system of grace and the system of government are two separate matters. The humbler a person is, the more he progresses in the governmental system. Never think that because you have entered into the system of God's grace you can therefore escape the system of God's government.

Grace can never nullify government; rather, grace enables people to obey government. May I say with all seriousness that grace gives us the strength to be subject to government. It does not make us rebellious or desirous of overthrowing government. These systems complement each other. Grace never abolishes government. Only a fool would say that since he received grace, he can afford to be loose and careless. What a foolish thing that would be.

God has purposed to manifest His authority to the world through the church. *God's authority can be seen in the coordination of the various members of the body of Christ.*

There are two important matters in the universe: trusting in God's salvation and obeying His authority.

Watchman Nee never made light of authority in the church. Instead he sought to magnify it and bring the saints to a place of understanding. He testified fervently that God has established authorities in the church, those who are described as ministers in Ephesians chapter four. This election of ministers is a sovereign act of Christ. It is not done according to the will of man, and all who would progress in the kingdom of God should recognize these authorities and honor them, not disannul them or explain their presence away.

Watchman Nee made so much of authority as to say that there were two important matters in the universe, and one of them is obeying God's authority, including the authority He has delegated to man and to those who are ministers and leaders in the church. That God has given such authority to men in the church is clearly seen in scripture.

II Corinthians 10:8, 13

8 For even if I boast somewhat further about our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for destroying you, I will not be put to shame...

13 But we will not boast beyond our measure, but within the measure of the sphere which God apportioned to us as a measure, to reach even as far as you.

Paul is declaring here that he has been given spiritual authority in the church. He goes on to say that he has been given a "measure" of authority. The word for measure in the Greek is "metron" and it means a portion, something that is meted out. Paul said he would not extend himself beyond the measure of authority given to Him, but His measure extended as far as the Corinthian church, for he had labored to establish the church in Corinth. A minister's measure of authority goes as far as the sphere of his labor. It would be error for a minister to interfere in the affairs of a body that he has not labored in, for his metron of authority does not extend that far. But it would be just as grievous to declare that there is no authority granted to men in the church, that Christ alone has the authority. Such a message appeals to the flesh of men, for the flesh is rebellious.

Ephesians 4:11-12

11 And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers,

12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ...

Christ is the Head of the body. He is the authority over the church. He has in turn given a measure of authority to men that He has appointed as ministers to the body. When Christ gives responsibility to man, He also gives authority. This is seen in all

areas of life.

I am the father of my children and I have responsibilities as their father to train them up in the ways of Yahweh. I have therefore been given authority over my children and they are to honor that authority. It is not me that they honor, but the authority of God given to me as their father. This authority extends as far as my children, but it does not extend to other men's children.

In the county in which I live we have a Sheriff's department and the Sheriff and his deputies have authority to arrest criminals and to enforce the laws of the county. They are given responsibility to make sure the roads remain safe to drive and the neighborhoods are safe to live in. With this responsibility they are given authority. Those who resist this authority will suffer the consequences, for it is God who has established ALL authority.

Romans 13:1-7

1 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.

2 Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.

3 For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same;

4 for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil.

5 Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake.

6 For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing.

7 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.

Did you note that the word minister is used in this passage? When God appoints a minister He endows such a minister with His authority. God has established ministers in local and national governments. He has established ministers in the home. He has established ministers on the job. Why would we then conclude that He has not established any such ministers among the body of Christ? Why would we conclude that there are none among the body of Christ who have been granted a measure of authority that should be honored?

One of the elders in Chile raised this question with Frank Viola and Frank passed the question to Nick Vasiliades who in turn gave a rather disingenuous answer to the question. One of the elders desired to make a comparison between fathers having authority in their homes and elders having authority in the churches.

Question: I want to know what the role of the father is in the family. I want to do a comparison between authority in the family and authority in the church.

Frank Replies: I will let my esteemed colleague brother Nick answer the question.

Nick Replies: The New Testament is virtually silent when it comes to families. The whole idea of a Christian family is a relatively new idea to Christianity. My belief is that this is one of those things we have exported from the United States, which is another distraction from knowing Jesus Christ. I don't know what to tell you about authority concerning the family.

Question: The authority in a family is the father. Is he among the family or is he over the family? Relate that to the spiritual authority of the church.

Nick Replies: I think that your principle of using the family does not extrapolate over to the church. You are comparing apples and oranges.

This is a remarkable exchange. This elder has asked a very good question that has great relevance to the subject at hand, and he is met with untruths and avoidance. How can one say that the New Testament is silent in regard to families? This is simply not true. Following are just a few of the scriptures that speak of families, and particularly how they are to relate to one another as regards authority and submission.

Colossians 3:18-21

18 Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.

19 Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them.

20 Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord.

21 Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they will not lose heart.

Ephesians 6:1-4

6:1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.

2 honor your father and mother (which is the first commandment with a promise),

3 so that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth.

4 Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Ephesians 5:22-25, 28, 32-33

22 Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord.

23 For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body.

24 But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything.

25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church...

28 So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself...

32 This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.

33 Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must see to it that she respects her husband.

I Timothy 2:11-15

11 A woman must quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness.

12 But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet.

13 For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve.

14 And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression.

15 But women will be preserved through the bearing of children if they continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint.

Titus 2:2-6

2 Older men are to be temperate, dignified, sensible, sound in faith, in love, in perseverance.

3 Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good,

4 so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children,

5 to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, so that the word of God will not be dishonored.

6 Likewise urge the young men to be sensible...

Does this sound like the New Testament is silent concerning the family? Why did Nick want to avoid this question? Why did he want to downplay its significance? Because to admit what the scriptures clearly teach about authority in the home and in the church would totally destroy the no-leadership model that he and others are espousing. Answering this question about authority in the family has great bearing upon what the scriptures teach about authority in the church, which is the family of God. We are even told that the family is the training and proving ground for those who would be elders and ministers.

I Timothy 3:2-5

2 An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach,

3 not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money.

4 He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity

5 (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?)

This Chilean elder was not comparing apples and oranges. Paul himself made the same comparison that he desired to make. Will we tell the apostle, “Paul, you cannot compare a father’s role in the home with the elder’s role in the church. Paul, don’t you know that the principles seen in the family don’t extrapolate to the church?” How absurd to make such a statement. Where responsibility is given, authority always accompanies it. The man who has used his authority in his family to edify and build up his family, leading them to exemplify godliness, has been practicing the very thing that elders are called to do on a wider scale among the church of God.

The role of a father is very much akin to the role of an elder. Are fathers to be invisible in the family? No, and neither are elders and other ministers to be invisible in the church. Are men to declare to their wife and children that they do not need to honor his authority because they have Christ as their authority? No! The man is delegated authority in his home by Christ, and to fail to exercise that authority for the welfare of his family is gross irresponsibility. This authority includes carrying out discipline at times. It includes reproof and correcting and instructing. These are the very things that ministers are called to do among the flock.

II Timothy 4:1-2

1 I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom:

2 preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.

Those who deny that God has delegated a measure of authority to men whom He has appointed as leaders in the church are akin to those who state that men have no authority in the home. There are many who deny the clear language of scripture that states:

I Corinthians 11:3

But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ.

Instead they teach that a marriage is to be conducted democratically and all should be done by consensus and agreement. If the husband and wife do not agree then the husband cannot act. This overturns the government of God and it removes honor from the home. I once asked God what would be wrong if I never made a decision or took an action without getting my wife's agreement first. I asked Him what would be the problem if I chose to treat our marriage as a 50/50 partnership. The Spirit answered suddenly and with great clarity, "Honor would be missing." Wives are told to honor their husbands, recognizing their headship and authority, while men are told to love their wives.

Now this same teaching that asserts that men and women are to be equal in the home, having Christ alone as their head, is spreading to the church. But woman does not have Christ alone as her head, she has man as her head. To deny this is to deny the word of God. Likewise, the church does not have Christ alone as head, it also has spiritual authorities that Christ has appointed until the body should come to the fulness of the stature of Christ. To deny this is also to deny the scripture.

Do husbands abuse their authority in the home? Yes they do. Does this mean that women should cast off the authority of their husband because he is disobedient to God? No! The scriptures are plain on this as well.

I Peter 3:1-2

**1 In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives,
2 as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior.**

Should the church then cast off all the authorities delegated by God because many, even a majority of these leaders, have proven themselves to be disobedient to God? This is what is being espoused, but two wrongs do not make a right. Rebellion is not the answer to correcting a wrong authority, and saying such authorities do not legitimately exist is rebellion, even as it would be rebellion for a wife or child to declare that the husband and father has no legitimate authority in the family.

I know there are abuses, very grievous abuses, among leadership in the church. A large part of this is due to men adopting leadership that is not of God. They have taken to themselves self-appointed leaders, instead of God-appointed leaders. There is very little discernment in the body today regarding those whom Christ has called to stand as ministers and elders. The church has heaped up to itself teachers that will tickle their ears and tell them the things they desire to hear. They love a message of ease and prosperity and comfort. They loathe a message of the cross and of suffering.

The church has also adopted false teachings regarding the role of ministers. The ministers are to equip the saints. They are to prepare them for the works God has called them to do. The ministers are servants to the body, teaching them, correcting them, pointing them to God and a dependence upon hearing the voice of the Spirit that they might no longer be dependent upon men for guidance. Yet these things are not done because there are many men who love to be held up on a pedestal as the spiritual elite and there are many others who don't want to embrace the demands of discipleship. These two groups have formed a symbiotic relationship that feeds off of one another.

What is the answer? Is it to abolish leadership and to declare that only Christ is head? This sounds enticing and very spiritual, but it is very wrong. It is no different than declaring that men no longer are leaders in their homes, that Christ alone is the head of the home. The answer is not to cast off all human leadership, but to petition Yahweh that He would raise up godly leaders among the flock. Rebellion must be put far away, and the saints must clothe themselves with humility as they ask God to supply that which is sadly lacking.

Servants Versus Benefactors

One of the scripture passages that has been used to support the overthrow of all spiritual authority in the church is the following:

Luke 22:25-27

25 And He said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who have authority over them are called "Benefactors."

26 "But it is not this way with you, but the one who is the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the servant.

27 "For who is greater, the one who reclines at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at the table? But I am among you as the one who serves."

What does it mean to be a benefactor? A benefactor is one who derives benefit from another. Kings collect tribute and taxes, and they in many ways use the people to

derive personal benefit. Yahshua was stating that this was not to be the pattern among the children of God. They were not to view leadership and authority as an opportunity to derive personal gain. Rather they were to see it as an opportunity to serve. Yahshua was not saying that there would be no authority among His disciples, nor that leaders would be absent. He said the leader must be as a servant. This is clearly seen in the fact that he used Himself as the example or pattern.

Did Christ have authority? Yes he did. One of the most common titles attributed to Him is Lord. A Lord is someone with authority. Someone who should be obeyed. He made this plain when He spoke the words: “**Why do you call Me Lord, and do not do the things that I say**” (Luke 6:46)? Yahshua never denied that He was Lord. He never denied that He was granted authority by the Father. Yet He did not use this authority as one who is a benefactor. He did not come to gratify Himself. He used this authority to serve others.

This then is the meaning of Christ’s words. There are those who are granted authority in the kingdom of God, but they are to use that authority to edify others, not to satisfy their own selfish desires. This again is what Paul proclaimed:

II Corinthians 10:8

For even if I boast somewhat further about our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for destroying you, I will not be put to shame...

Paul was granted authority to build up the church. In the exercise of this authority Paul devoted himself to teaching and to setting an example of godliness in all things. In the exercise of this authority he also reproved, rebuked, corrected, disciplined and gave firm instructions at times that were to be obeyed. This is the same as any father would do with his children, and Paul established that this was his relationship with the churches among which he ministered.

I Corinthians 4:14-15

14 I do not write these things to shame you, but to admonish you as my beloved children.

15 For if you were to have countless tutors in Christ, yet you would not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel.

There is much wrong being done by those who stand as leaders in the church, but the answer is not to cast off all authority other than the direct authority of Christ. Submitting to God’s authority in man does not invalidate Christ’s authority. We must submit to the civil authorities, but when we do so does that invalidate Christ as our Head? No, it does not. Why then would it do so in the church?

There are many proclamations that were made in the conversations with these Chilean elders that are in error, and the error can easily be seen in scripture. I can understand the reluctance of these elders to receive what was said when very plain truths are being denied. One such instance is in the following exchange:

Question: Regarding the word “honor” in I Timothy 5:17, I understood that you said it didn’t have anything to do with money or sustenance. But the context says this clearly.

Frank replies: In this passage the word means honor or respect.

Frank goes on to declare that “the elders who labor well are to be respected, or valued by the church.” Yes, it does bear this meaning, but Paul says they are to be considered worthy of “double honor”. Respect is one type of honor, and material support is the second honor of which Paul speaks. This is clear from the context of the passage.

I Timothy 5:17-18

17 The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.

18 For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing," and "The laborer is worthy of his wages."

Frank makes the argument that the word for honor in the Greek means “honor or respect” and it is not the word for financial payment that he identifies as “misthos or opsonion”. Yet misthos is used in this passage. It plainly states, “The laborer is worthy of his wages [misthos].” Furthermore, we can compare this passage written by Paul to another passage where he is also speaking about material compensation and we can see that his usage of the scripture regarding oxen is used to justify the right of ministers to receive support.

I Corinthians 9:9-11

9 For it is written in the Law of Moses, "YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING." God is not concerned about oxen, is He?

10 Or is He speaking altogether for our sake? Yes, for our sake it was written, because the plowman ought to plow in hope, and the thresher to thresh in hope of sharing the crops.

11 If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we reap material things from you?

Paul goes on to conclude this passage, that is written specifically to address the matter of the compensation of ministers, with these words:

I Corinthians 9:14

So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel.

Frank continues to say the following:

What I see Paul saying there is that just as an employee deserves money and just as a working ox deserves food, an elder in the church who serves the church well deserves double honor. Not single honor as all brothers do, but double honor. That is, greater respect.

Whereas it is possible for one to interpret Paul's words in I Timothy chapter 5 this way, if one really forces it, it is impossible to bring the same interpretation to I Corinthians chapter 9. Paul uses the same examples and the same scriptures in both passages, so it is really undeniable that he is speaking about elders receiving material compensation for their spiritual service.

Frank Viola, Nick Vasiliades, Gene Edwards, and others need not work so hard to get the scriptures to fit the model they have set forth. All they need do is adopt the correct model. The correct model does have men in the body who are set there by God as leaders. These men are worthy of respect and compensation, or as Paul put it, **"The lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel."** The correct model has Christ as the head of the church, and it also has men who have been granted a measure of authority and who should be honored.

This does not imply that these men should be followed and obeyed blindly, but their words should be given great weight and they should be shown respect as ministers who will one day give an account of their service on behalf of the souls of men.

Hebrews 13:17

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.

As was pointed out in the writing "Straight Talk to Elders", the word for obey in the Greek carries the meaning of "let yourself be persuaded." Paul follows this by stating that the church should also submit, or yield themselves, to the leaders in the body. If these leaders are men approved by God, if they are filled with the Spirit and they are of good reputation, if they have proven themselves in their own families, if they labor among the saints in teaching, correcting, refuting, protecting, etc., then the body is to honor such men and act humbly before them. They are to listen attentively to their words and not be a grief to them.

The church today needs these leaders as badly as homes need fathers who will shepherd them and labor to build them up. The answer is not to deny that this calling exists, but to seek to see it fulfilled and restored after the heart of God. Again, we can learn much of the true calling of these leaders as we look to the role of fathers.

As a father, I desire to see my children come to maturity. I long to see them develop their own relationship to Christ, to hear and discern clearly the voice of the Spirit, and to respond in faithful obedience to all that they hear. I do not want my children to remain children forever. I do not want them to continue in dependence upon me. I want them to attain to the fulness of the stature to which they have been called.

As a minister I also desire the same thing among the household of God. I don't want the saints that I have been called to minister unto to develop a dependency upon me. I don't want to be established as the mouthpiece of God to them. I want them to discern the voice of the Spirit themselves. Ministers are given to the body until it comes to full stature. The body is not to remain in perpetual immaturity, nor should a minister be content with immaturity in order to justify his continued place among the body. John recorded these words:

I John 2:27

As for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him.

John 6:45

"It is written in the prophets, 'AND THEY SHALL ALL BE TAUGHT OF GOD.'"

Paul echoed these words in the following scripture:

Romans 8:14

For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are mature sons of God.

This should be the goal of every church leader, to bring the body to maturity where they are being led of God in all things. The body is not yet mature, and new saints are entering the kingdom every day. These have need of father figures to lead and guide them. Yahshua was the ultimate example of this type of leader. For three years He lived with His disciples. He shared His life with them. He taught them. He corrected them. At times He sharply rebuked them. And in the end He released them that they might in turn disciple others.

This is the pattern in the body. Fathers in the faith instruct faithful men, bringing them to maturity, that they in their turn might do the same.

II Timothy 2:1-2

1 You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

2 The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

Is this pattern followed in the traditional church? No, it is not. But this is the pattern set forth in scripture. Yahshua was not invisible among His disciples. The disciples, turned apostles, were not invisible either. They were very evident among the saints. Paul was very visible everywhere he went. He did not try to hide among the body and make himself obscure, nor should leaders today. They are granted authority to edify the body, to build it up. They are called as servants, not benefactors, and they are visible servants.

It has been asserted that it is wrong for any saint to stand out among the others. It has been stated that it is wrong for any of the saints to be looked at differently due to their calling. This sounds like humility and sound reason, but it is not scripturally supported. In regard to the issue of support, Frank Viola spoke the following:

Frank replies: Let me add something more practically. I have been a Christian a long time. I have never seen in all of my life a man who received a salary from God's people who was not set apart from them as someone better, someone higher, and someone of a different class...

Also the saints will look at you differently. You are separating yourself from them by this practice.

Did we not already read that an elder is worthy of double honor? If this is true, then do not elders stand out? Are they not set apart and presented as an example to the body of Christ? In this same talk Frank has stated that he believes that elders are worthy of double respect, that is, not the same respect as other brothers, but a special, double respect. It cannot be both ways. Elders cannot be given double honor and no honor at the same time. They cannot be treated with extra respect and with the same respect as everyone else at the same time. Many such difficulties are encountered by trying to make the scriptures fit a wrong model.

As a father, I stand out in my family. I am accorded respect. If we are having a discussion about some matter, all may be heard and voice their thoughts, but when the father speaks his words are given greater weight than the children, and even more than the wife and mother, for "man is the head of woman." Distinctions such

as this are common in the kingdom of God. We may all have the same Spirit, the same salvation, and be partakers of the same promises, but in the government of God He has granted some a greater measure of authority than others, and that authority is to be honored.

Paul declared his apostleship when he wrote to the churches, as did Peter. They were not ashamed of their calling, nor were they concerned that they should stand out in an improper manner.

Romans 1:1

Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God...

I Corinthians 1:1-2

Paul, called as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother,

2 To the church of God which is at Corinth...

II Corinthians 1:1

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,

To the church of God which is at Corinth with all the saints who are throughout Achaia...

Galatians 1:1-2

1 Paul, an apostle (not sent from men nor through the agency of man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead),

2 and all the brethren who are with me, To the churches of Galatia...

Ephesians 1:1

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,

To the saints who are at Ephesus and who are faithful in Christ Jesus...

Colossians 1:1-2

1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,

2 To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are at Colossae...

I Timothy 1:1-2

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus according to the commandment of God our Savior, and of Christ Jesus, who is our hope,

2 To Timothy, my true child in the faith...

II Timothy 1:1-2

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, according to the promise of life in Christ Jesus,
2 To Timothy, my beloved son...

Titus 1:1-4

1 Paul, a bond-servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the faith of those chosen of God and the knowledge of the truth which is according to godliness...
4 To Titus...

I Peter 1:1

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia...

It sounds like humility to state that titles should never be used, but it is a humility that does not have its origin in God. I know families where the parents have adopted this attitude and they have instructed their children to call them by their first name and to not call them mother or father. This is nothing other than a denial of the established government of God, and it leads to dishonor. The same is true in the church of God when it is taught that no titles should be conferred or positions of leadership and authority acknowledged.

When Paul and Peter wrote to these churches they began by declaring the authority in which they wrote. They were not writing as Paul or Peter a brother. Or as Paul or Peter a fellow saint, but as an apostle. They were writing as one who had been given a measure of authority among the saints, and their words merited special honor and weight because of their authority. As we have seen, Paul also instructed the churches to show special honor to those who were leaders among them.

Let me share something that the Spirit has shown me regarding authority and government. Whenever a man or woman submits to the government of God it leads to a crucifixion of their flesh. Our flesh is rebellious by nature and wants to submit to no one. In order for a woman to submit to her husband and to manifest the things that are spoken of as attributes of a godly woman, a quiet and gentle spirit, a chaste and respectful attitude, even to the point of calling her husband her lord, she must die to her own soul and its desires. A crucifixion must take place. Whenever a man submits to the headship of Christ, becoming perfect in obedience, he must crucify his flesh first. In order for teenage children to honor their father and mother when their parents require something of them that they disagree with, it requires a crucifixion of the flesh.

It is the will of God that the flesh be crucified. The hard outer shell of the flesh must be broken and crushed in order for the life of Christ within to come forth and be released. Because of this fact, the Father has established His governmental order to bring about this crushing of the outer man. Those who are the most humble in God's hands will make the most progress in these things. If a man is hard and resistant toward authority, whether Christ's direct authority, or any authority delegated by Him, he will not make progress. The life of Christ will be dammed up and unable to be released. When a man is humble and submissive in the presence of authority, the life of Christ is released.

It is unthinkable then that God would not establish authorities in the church to be employed for the purpose of bringing the saints to a place of crucifixion of their flesh. When the saints are met with authority they must decide whether to submit and obey, or to harden themselves and rebel. One path leads to the life of Christ being manifested, the other leads to death.

The model for church leadership put forth by Frank Viola, Gene Edwards and others removes this very crucial function of leadership in the church. One could argue that the saints must still be subject to Christ, but in examining the following scripture we see a pattern God has established.

I John 4:20

If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.

Man proves his relationship to God as he relates to other men. A man who hates his brother is deceived if he declares that he loves God. He proves his love of God through his love of man. In the same way, a man or woman who calls Yahshua Lord, but who fails to submit to the authorities established by Christ is deceived. One way we prove our submission to Christ is through submitting to the authority He has placed in man. If we say Christ is our head, yet we will recognize no authority but the authority in the person of Christ, then we are deceived and are not walking in truth. Remember again Paul's words:

Romans 13:1-2

1 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.

2 Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.

If we honor those in civil government with our obedience, then how much more should we honor those men who have been set apart by Christ as ministers to the body and who labor to bring it forth to maturity? They are worthy of more than honor. They are worthy of double honor. May you allow yourself to be persuaded by these words.

Let me close with these words of Watchman Nee from his book “Spiritual Authority”.

It does not require humility to be obedient to God’s direct authority, but it does require humbleness and brokenness to be subject to delegated authority. Unless one sets aside the flesh completely he is not able to receive and to hearken to delegated authority...

It is the rebellious nature of man that makes him want to obey God’s direct authority without being subject to the delegated authorities God has established.

(Pages 72-73)

Joseph Herrin