

Proper Spiritual Government



Restoration (Part 9)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again as we continue to look together at the outworking of God's end time purpose for His people. This week I've been focusing on the restoration of the church. Next week I'll be dealing with the restoration of Israel.

Yesterday I spoke about the restoration of the five main ministries given by Christ for the building of His body, the church. Today I'm going to speak about something that flows very naturally out of yesterday's topic, something which is, I'm afraid to say, somewhat controversial. But I'm going to speak about it anyhow. I'm going to speak about the restoration of proper spiritual government or authority within the church.

The New Testament message is the gospel. But it's a specific gospel, it's the gospel of the Kingdom of God. Because of our democratic surroundings in the United States, because of recent history, the word "king" has lost a lot of its proper meaning for us. But when the Bible speaks about kingdom, it speaks about government. So the gospel of the Kingdom of God is the gospel of the Government of God. "Gospel" itself, of course, means "good news." So the message of the New Testament is the good news of God's government. It's the good news that if we meet God's conditions we can come under His government. Therefore, it's a logical consequence if we respond as God requires to the gospel it will necessarily bring us under God's government. To claim to have obeyed the gospel but not to be under the government of God is actually a contradiction in terms. There is a direct connection in Scripture and in life between government and peace.

In Isaiah 9:7 speaking prophetically of the Messiah, Jesus, the prophet says:

> "There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace..." (NAS)

Notice, government comes first, then peace. Without government there can be no peace. The good news of the gospel is that through God's government we can come back into peace. Therefore, we need to understand very simply the basic principles of God's government.

I think the most important one can be summed up in one simple statement: God governs by delegated authority. God does not govern everything in the universe directly and in person. When God wants something done He does not step down from His throne in heaven, point His finger at the person or the situation and say, "Do this" or "Do that." God has got a much more practical way of governing. He has appointed under Him those to whom He has delegated a measure of His authority and He governs through them.

In Romans 13 Paul states that all existing authorities are ordained by God and that if we resist the authority God has ordained, we are in effect resisting God. Now I'm simple-minded enough to believe that that applies to the highway patrolman and the speed limit. I believe that a person who deliberately flouts the speed limit or disobeys the patrolman is actually flouting the authority of God. I believe the Scripture makes that clear. However, I don't want to speak just now about secular authority but I want to speak about spiritual authority in the church. This principle of delegated authority applies also within the church. The basis for it is stated in Ephesians 1:22 where we are told God has given Christ "as head over all things to the church..." Christ is the supreme delegated authority of God over the church.

Now authority flows downward from the head into the body. This is another related principle: authority always flows downward. Let me say, I hope without offending you, the church never was and never will be a democracy. It's a theocracy. It's governed by God through Christ and in turn by those whom Christ appoints and to whom He delegates a measure of His authority.

I explained yesterday that as the first step in governing His body Christ gave five main ministries to build that body: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers. Therefore, in the ongoing chain of responsibility these ministers are expected by God and required by Him either to govern the body themselves or to raise up others to do it. But always there is a continuing downward flow of authority from God through Christ, through the ministries whom He has given, to those who are in turn delegated by those ministries.

Now our attitude toward the ministries whom Christ has set in the body is a matter of tremendous personal importance for us. This brings a third principle, that our attitude to delegated authority is our attitude to the One who delegated that authority. We cannot have two distinct attitudes. In John 13 Jesus says this:

> "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me." (NAS)

There you see the response to authority going upward from the believer to Jesus, from Jesus to the Father. Authority flows downward but our response to it goes upward. And our attitude towards God's appointed leaders is in reality our attitude toward God Himself. Let me say that once more: Our attitude toward God's appointed leaders is in reality our attitude toward God Himself.

The problem of authority in the church today is an unresolved problem. I'd like to look back to the point, I believe, in church history where the problem really broke out. I want to go back to the Reformation. Now, much good was achieved by the Reformation. Many wonderful truths were recovered by it, many wonderful men of God were produced by it. Nevertheless, I believe that the Reformation, in a sense, has perpetuated two opposite errors. In a certain sense, the river of God's people divided at the Reformation and there was error in each side of the division.

Let's look at the errors for a moment. Of course, what I am saying is highly simplistic. Nevertheless, I believe it contains the essence of vital truth. First we look at the Catholic side of the division. I believe that the error there was excessive authoritarianism and excessive emphasis on a corporate church with the result that the individual tends to lose his personal relationship with God and simply rely on a general relationship which has no personal reality for him. Also, the individual tends to lose his sense of personal responsibility and initiative.

Now let's look at the opposite error, the Protestant error. I would define that as "excessive individualism." The individual becomes a law to himself. In reality, he is a religious rebel without any real responsibility to God-given leaders or to his fellow believers. The scriptural picture of each believer as a member of one body really does not apply in a practical way to such a believer.

Now the traditional course of religious controversy is this: that each group focuses on the errors of the other and ignores its own. And that, I believe, has been the case in the history of controversy that stems from the Reformation. The Protestants have pointed out the errors of the Catholics, the Catholics have pointed out the errors of the Protestants. Actually, there are plenty of errors to point out on both sides. But just pointing out other people's errors isn't going to help us much.

I like the suggestion of my friend, Frances McNutt, a Catholic priest who suggested that we should reverse our usual procedure, each point out the good points of the other and

acknowledge our own bad points. I really believe that would make for tremendous progress.

Let me say at this point that if I'm anything, I'm not a Catholic. I no longer like the label Protestant. I don't want to be continually protesting. I was brought up a member of the Anglican Church in Britain. Though until the age of 25 I never came to know God in a personal way. My whole background and associations have been essentially Protestant. I never expect to become a Roman Catholic but I really am not happy any longer to be called a Protestant. I believe each group needs to repent, not to point out the errors of the opposite group. For those of us who are of Protestant background, I believe this means that we need to renounce unscriptural individualism, to commit ourselves to the body of Christ and to come under proper scriptural authority within the church.

Let me read to you from Hebrews 13:17 and I'd like you to check your personal position by this verse. It says:

> "Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls..." (NAS)

Notice, it's assumed in the New Testament that every believer will know who his leaders are and whom he is expected to obey. Let me therefore ask you just a few questions. Do you have recognized leaders? Do they know you? Do you know them? And if you do, do you obey them and submit to them? If your answer to those questions is "No," then let me tell you gently but firmly that you are a religious rebel. And you need to understand the whole purpose of authority in the church.

Well, our time is up for today but I'll be back with you again tomorrow at this time. Tomorrow I'll be speaking about the fourth essential for the restoration of the church, the restoration of unity. I'll be explaining why the restoration of authority is an essential stepping stone to the restoration of unity.

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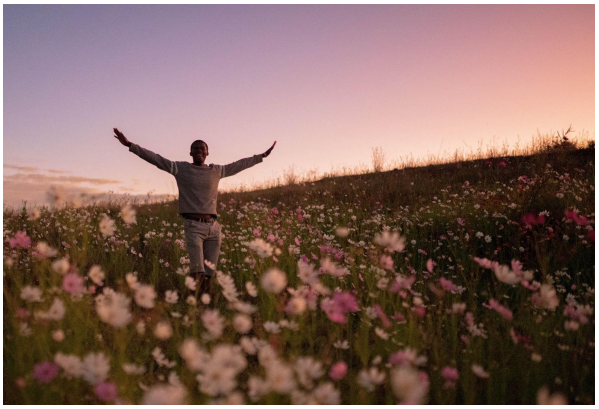
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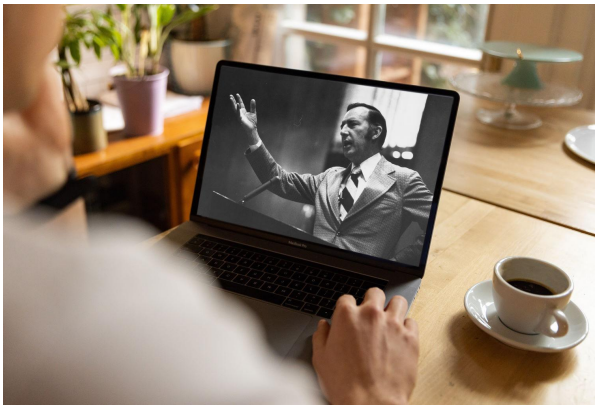
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