

A world without authority structures would be chaos. When governmental authorities collapse, anarchy usually rules. Man needs structure. He needs direction and someone to give that direction—someone with authority who can force him to obey, if necessary. Of course, order and peace are much better served when men choose to submit and obey than when the authority has to force them into submission.

The Origin of Authority

All authority originates in God. Paul makes this clear in Romans 13:1: “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.” In context, we know that Paul is referring to government rulers. However, the statement also pertains to any authorities, for “there is *no* power but of God.” There is no authority not set up by God. Daniel 5:21 tells us Nebuchadnezzar was driven out to live like an animal “till he knew that the most high God ruled in the kingdom of men, and that he appointeth over it whomsoever he will.”

God sets people in positions of authority in many areas of life. He set parents in authority over children (Ephesians 6:1-4). The Apostle Paul teaches slaves to be subject to masters, and masters to exercise benevolent authority over their slaves—principles that apply to employee/employer relationships today. Peter instructs church leaders how to properly exer-

cise authority (1 Peter 5:1-5) and the writer of Hebrews commands members to submit to their leaders (Hebrews 13:17). Paul teaches women to be subject to men (1 Corinthians 11:3), and Paul and Peter teach wives to submit to their husbands (Ephesians 5:22-24, 33; 1 Peter 3:1).

Other authorities not specifically mentioned in the Bible, but which are authorities nonetheless, include schoolteachers, Sunday school teachers, and anyone who has been delegated the responsibility of authority over others. All these authorities are ordained (arranged) by God. Their authority does not come from within themselves or from the positions they hold. It is a delegated authority that comes to them from God.

No authority figure—except God, the ultimate giver of authority—has absolute authority. No authority figure has the right (authority) to “lord it over” those for whom he is responsible. Every authority figure is responsible to someone else, and ultimately to God.

Relating to Authorities Over Us

Read this New Testament passage about submitting to civil governments.

Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for

conscience sake. For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour. Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.

– Romans 13:1-8

This passage contains principles to guide us in relating to any authority under whom we operate.

Obey

We are responsible to obey authorities. Because God has set them in place, to resist them is to resist God. To disobey them is to disobey God. Disobedience to authority is rebellion, and in God's eyes, rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft (1 Samuel 2:30).

This applies to any authority. "Children, obey your parents" (Ephesians 6:1) indicates