

Undercover

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Let's pray. Father, we thank you for your word. Thank you for the instruction that is in the Word. Thank you, revealing your ways to us. Thank you, Father, that you're working in our lives by your spirit through the Word.

Just pray that you would use this Word today to just help each one of us to be in a place where you can bless us and those around us. And so we give you this time. Now we pray this in Christ's name, who taught us to pray. Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen. You may be seated.

I'll say it up front. I'm a little bit self-conscious about this message because it's talking about pastors and basically saying you need to like them. Okay, but we're going to look into this. I don't know if you've ever been in a situation where things just weren't working out right. You thought they would.

They weren't working out right and you couldn't figure it out. And then you had an aha moment. I know what's wrong. I know what's missing. Anyone ever been in that situation?

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Some of you ladies, if you ever baked a cake, you've probably experienced that, right? It doesn't quite taste right. Aha. I forgot the salt. Okay.

Well, I had a revelation like that several years ago, and it had nothing to do with cakes or cars. It had to do with my life, with my ministry. And I felt like something was missing, but I couldn't put my finger on it. Well, someone gave me a tape series by John Bevere called Undercover. And I wasn't very excited about listening to it and didn't feel like I had the time.

But as luck would have it, we had to drive to the airport at 2 in the morning and we put the tape in and we listened to that tape. And by the time we got the Olympia, I was going, oh, no. No wonder. No wonder things aren't working out the way I expect them to. I had an aha moment and I realized that there was something missing in my ministry.

There may have been many things, but I realized one thing. And so what was I missing? I think it's something that many of us do miss, not just in church, but in our marriages, our families and our work and our sports. And the thing that was missing was authority. Authority.

And the truth is, is what I realized that day listening to that tape is we cannot have authority unless we're under authority. We cannot have authority unless we're under authority. And you and I, as red blooded Americans, we struggle with that because we are independent. You know, we can come complain about the president, we can do whatever we want, but it is important. And only being under authority in God's realm gives us authority.

And so I want to look at that this morning. Jesus taught this back in Luke 7, just real quick of that. And you may remember that a centurion sent for Jesus and, and his servant was sick and dying and he asked Jesus to come. And while Jesus was on the way, the centurion sent a message and Jesus went with them. When he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends saying to him, lord, do not trouble yourself, for I'm not worthy to have you come under my roof.

Therefore I did not presume to come to you, but say the word and let my servant be healed. For I too am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me. And I say to one, go. And he goes, and to another, come. And he comes, and to my servant do this.

And he does it. And Jesus hears this message and he is just amazed, this Roman centurion. And he responds, when Jesus heard these things, he marveled at him. And turning to the crowd that followed him, he said, I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith. And when those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the servant.

Well, and we see there are a couple things here. Again, to have authority, you have to be under authority. That authority doesn't come out of the thin air. It has to come from someone into your life. But second, and even maybe more important, it takes faith to be under authority.

You are trusting someone that has been put in a position above you that what they're going to do is going to be for your good, even when it doesn't look like it. And so I want us to look at this back in First Thessalonians, because Paul gives us several important things here about this. And so first of all, I believe he emphasizes the importance of church membership. Church membership. Notice that he writes to the brothers, and some translations will add the word sisters, but that's a generic term for everyone here.

And that signifies that the people in a church have a relationship with each other. And in that relationship, there's different roles. And one of those roles are people in leadership. Just as physical brothers and sisters are related to each other by blood. Christians are related to each other by the blood of Jesus Christ.

We are brothers and sisters and we're to understand the value of that and to really do what we can to make that as true as possible. When someone becomes a member of a local church, they are acknowledging this relationship. And you think about this. If we were out there in the world, probably most of us wouldn't have anything to do with any of us, right? But when come together, the thing that unites us in the church is our

relationship with Jesus Christ.

And so when someone refuses to join a local church, they miss out on some of the rights and the responsibilities that come with membership. And that's important that we see that. Now, here's where some would protest. Well, wait a second. You don't have to become a church member to be saved.

And that's true. We're not talking about salvation, we're talking about authority. And others would say, I belong to the universal church of Christ, the true church, so I don't need to be a member of a local church. Yet again, that's true. But if you don't belong, you're missing the point.

You can't have authority in your life without being under authority. And so we're going to look at this in a little more detail. Second thing we see is the role and the importance of church leaders. And he says, here we are called to respect and to esteem those who, who are leaders. That would be our pastors, our elders, Sunday school teachers, people that have a role of leadership.

Now, I know here's where some would protest. Wait a second. I know pastors and church leaders who have abused their authority. Anyone say Amen to that? I think we can.

And of course, that gives us pause to want to do that. So it's important, I think, that we define what spiritual authority is. And notice, first of all, Paul asks them to respect and esteem their leaders. He asks them, he doesn't tell them, if your leader demands that respect and authority that doesn't come from God, and you're not to give in to that. And Peter, over in First Peter, Chapter 5, Peter gives some qualifications for leadership.

If you want to turn over there, First Peter, chapter five, verse one through four. And so Peter says, so I exhort the elders among you as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed. Shepherd, the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you, not for shameful gain, but eagerly. Not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And the

role of a leader is to be an example.

And when he's that example, then people should follow him in that sense, just as they follow Christ. We see the result of that when it actually works out. In verse six, it says, humble yourselves therefore, under the mighty hand of God, so at the proper time he may exalt you. And when we come into that position of humbling ourselves before God and those that we serve, it's God who exalts the leader. They're not in it for themselves, but they're in it for the blessing of the flock.

We become examples of the flock. Second of all, we see that we should respect our leaders. And Paul gives three reasons for this back in First Thessalonians, chapter 5, in verse 12, we ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you. And we see three roles of a leader here. First of all, they labor among you.

They work. Second, they rule over you. We'll explain that. And they're to admonish you. And these are important.

Good leaders should be laboring, ruling, and admonishing. They labor by studying God's word and preparing messages and presenting that to you to help you in your walk with the Lord. They labor by praying for you. They labor by visiting you. And you have a need, and it's the idea that it takes work, and they should be doing that.

A good pastor will work hard to bless his flock. Second of all, they rule over you and the Lord. And that's one we don't like. Rule over. Well, notice the context in the Lord, he's talking about spiritually, that they rule over you in the sense that they give guidance and direction regarding spiritual things.

That would mean that church is doctrinally sound, that we are holding on to the truths of the Word that have been passed down over the ages to you and I. And it deals with spiritual things, not temporal. Spiritual things, not temporal. If a spiritual leader tries to run your life in any area that's not spiritual, they are out of order. They're not here to tell us who we marry or what job we should take or what car we should buy or how much money we should spend or how often do we go out to dinner.

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Those are issues between each of us and the Lord. But they are concerned about spiritual things. And if they claim the right to have that kind of authority over you, they're not spiritual advisors. They're spiritual abusers. And we should run from that had nothing to do with them.

And the third thing it says they admonish us. And the idea of admonisher is the idea of correcting or rebuking. And if our spiritual leader sees us doing something we shouldn't do, they have a responsibility to tell us, you know, or if they see there's something we should be doing and we're not, they have the responsibility to tell us, because their goal is to help us to grow in our relationship with Jesus Christ and to be useful in his kingdom. That's not a popular thing today. Usually today, if a pastor or an elder admonishes one of his members, you know what they do?

I'll just find a different church where they won't bother me. And they end up missing out on spiritual authority in their life. And so that's what a good pastor should do. And if we did, I think our churches would be stronger spiritually when we came together like that. Well, Paul goes on to tell us that we're to highly esteem are Christian leaders because of their work, not because of their position, not because they have a nice personality or give a wonderful sermon.

But he says, because of their work, spiritual leaders have been appointed by God to minister to his flock, his sheep, and they're to care for them, to feed them and protect them, and we should esteem that.

I know from experience and also from what I've read, that being a pastor is one of the hardest jobs anybody could ever have. It's amazing the number of pastors who leave the ministry every year because of the difficulties in that ministry. You're accountable to everyone, and sometimes that's not easy. And yet if it's done right and the pastor and a church are working together, it's one of the most rewarding jobs in the world. And such a blessing when there's a right relationship between church leaders and the church congregation.

We see the result in verse 13 of chapter 5. At the end of that verse, he says, be at peace among yourselves when we fulfill our roles, whatever they are, whatever God has appointed to us in a way to honor him, he brings peace into our lives. And again, looking back at that undercover series and wondering sometimes why there isn't peace, realizing, you know, there's times that I haven't done a good job of being under authority, and there's consequences to that. I'VE been on both sides of this issue. On the positive side, I've pastored churches that were just a joy and a delight, including this one where people are not in it for themselves or their agenda.

Not rocking the boat, so to speak, but really doing whatever they can to contribute to the ministry of a church.

And often that's when leaders are respected and esteemed by those that they're ministering to. And I believe that when that happens, that God grants spiritual authority to that church that allows it to reach out and touch people's lives, that allows it to train us to walk in a way that pleases God, that keeps us from so many heartaches that we see in church. On the other hand, I've experienced times in churches where people have not respected leadership and they have worked against the leadership. We don't like it this way. We think we should do that.

You know, you're not good enough. And it didn't bring peace, I guarantee you. It brought division in the church and in people's lives. There was no joy, no peace, no love. And people weren't really looking forward to coming on Sunday morning because of that.

I experienced that in this church, I don't know, 15 years ago. And a group in the church decided that they didn't like the direction the church was going. And again, we're not saying you have to do whatever the leader says to do. We're talking about, are they faithful to the word of God, Are they trying to build people up? But these people didn't like the direction the church was going, and they started complaining.

And then they started finding someone to be on their side. And then they started protesting in ways that were hard to go through. And finally they end up leaving. And I

never thought that having some people leave would be such a good thing, but it was. All of a sudden it was like, whoa, the problems are gone.

This is fun again. But what disturbed me, and there were about five families that left, is after they left, not one of them did well. They all dropped out of the church. They all had some kind of problem in their life that was a disaster. I don't need to go into the details.

They had a negative impact on some other people that were young in the faith, and they had no spiritual authority. They did not understand this principle that God is the one who is in charge of everything. He tells us that with our government, he's the one that appointed our leaders, and we're to respect them. It doesn't mean we can't complain, but we are to Respect them. They are our leaders, and we're to pray for them.

In families, we see this where family members don't want to fulfill their role, the role that God has given for family members. And then we wonder why things aren't going well. I see that at work sometimes complaining about the boss, doing what I can, but complaining, and then wondering why things aren't going better with my career. And so the point I want to bring out and close with is God is the one who has established authority. And when we refuse to come under that authority to respect and esteem those he has put over us, we have opened ourselves up to losing authority.

And if you don't have authority, you won't get anything done in life. That's why things fall apart so often in our lives. But the more important thing is the reason that we struggle with authority is we don't have faith. We don't really believe that God could be working through that leader for my good. I may disagree with him.

He may make mistakes, he may have problems. All those things are true. But yet God wants to use that person in our lives to help us to grow and become strong and in the Lord. I don't know what kind of problems they were facing at first, Thessalonians, the Thessalonian Church, but they were, and Paul had appointed leaders, and they hadn't been Christians very long, and yet now they're the leader. And I'm sure there were

people who were saying, hold on here, you know, my opinion is just as good as your opinion, and my way is just as good as your way.

And they were undermining those who were in leadership. And so Paul is correcting them here because he knows that when we're in right relationship with others, that his blessings flow in our lives. It's then when we experience that joy, that peace, that love, that power to do the things that God wants us to do. And again, sometimes that's hard for us. We've been taught to, oh, well, I can do it my way.

My way is as good as his way. And now there's times that we should stand up and say, doctrinally, that's wrong. I have to say something. And it doesn't mean that we can't make suggestions about where we're going as a church, but we want to be careful that we don't undermine the leaders that God has put in our lives. And so this is an important principle.

I believe it's important in a marriage. It takes a lot of faith for a woman to submit to her husband, doesn't it? Especially when they're doing stupid things. You know, it takes a lot of faith for a young boy or girl to submit to their parents when they're so old, you know, they don't understand. It takes faith, takes a lot of faith in a church to respect and esteem the leaders that God has given us and believe that God is working through them for our good.

And so again, I'm self conscious preaching this message. I'm not doing this for myself. It's what we came to in the passage. But I believe it's something that God has revealed that would help any congregation have spiritual authority. And we are fighting a spiritual battle.

And if we don't have authority, we're going to get beat up by Satan, I guarantee you. And so I just want to encourage you with that. And I'm not trying to encourage you, though. I've got to respect the pastor. That's my goal.

I just want you to see that this is an important principle that impacts our lives. Let's pray.

Father, again, I thank you for your word and God that is there to teach us, to train us, to equip us. And in many cases, it's there to show us what we're missing and why things haven't gone the way they should, to give us instructions on the best way to walk and to live. I thank you, Father, for in my life, for those in spiritual authority that I was under and who ruled over me spiritually and who I could trust to want the best for me and God. You worked through that. I'm aware, Father, that we often struggle with this because of different opinions, different goals, and yet help us to realize this is from you, and you're the one who can bless and only you can.

And that only happens when we're walking in your ways. So we pray this in Christ's name, Amen.