

Exercising Authority

Boss Versus Servant-Leader

Part II

By Jim and Carolyn Murphy

March 2003

In Part I of this teaching, we examined the call on all of us who minister the gospel to be servant-leaders, not bosses. We looked at the two sins of pride and the drive to control which are always found in church leaders who abuse their authority. Lastly, we analyzed the six main categories of abusive control: abuse of family members and employees, abuse of money and/or assets of the church, sexual abuse, and the manipulation of others to get your own way, including surrounding yourself with only those who agree with you. Let us continue.

Abusive Leaders in the Church Sin Against the Lord

Over the years I have come to the conclusion that church leaders who abuse their power and authority are at least occasionally if not continually misusing the name of the Lord. I grew up reading and memorizing the King James Version of the Bible. That version of the Third Commandment reads, "Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain . . ." (Ex 20:7 KJV) Until several years ago my general understanding of this commandment was that it commanded us not to swear or curse, and especially to not do so using the Lord's name. The first time I read the New International Version of the Bible it greatly broadened the meaning of this commandment for me. The NIV states, "You shall not *misuse the name of the Lord your God*, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name." (Ex 20:7 NIV, emphasis added.) This translation was very sobering to me. I realized that the Lord is telling us that *any* misuse of His name is very serious, not just using His name when cursing.

One possible example of the misuse of the Lord's name is in the phrase, "The Lord told me. . . ." I have heard numerous pastors and church leaders who want certain things to happen say to their people, "the Lord told me we are to do thus and so . . ." (I have also heard many Christians not in any leadership position using the same tactic to persuade others to do their will.) We must be so careful here. I absolutely believe that the Lord speaks to us from time to time. When He does, we must hear and obey. But, if the Lord has not spoken to us, this is a horrible misuse of His name. If the Lord does tell us to do something, share it with others as you are led, but be careful. Remember, it's ultimately the Lord's job to persuade others that He has spoken.

How God Views Church Leaders Who Abuse Their Authority

Let me begin this very sobering section by stating that this analysis is not meant to be a hammer against the leadership of God's church. None of us is without sin. We are not to judge others, that is God's prerogative. Rather this section is meant as an exhortation and/or warning to all of us in leadership. The verses we are about to examine should lead each of us to a sober self-examination of our style of leadership. We must be extremely careful to not fall into the categories the following Scriptures describe.

I believe Scripture points us to at least three categories of leaders. First, there is the category we see in Matthew of the faithful and wise servant.

"Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions." (Mat 24:45-47 NIV)

This type of leader is appointed by Jesus, the Master, is found to be a faithful and wise servant, and will ultimately be put in charge of all the Lord's possessions.

The second category of church leaders include those who are called but not yet sanctified. Peter describes and exhorts this type of leader.

"Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers--not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock." (1 Pet 5:2,3 NIV)

This admonition of Peter's points to the shepherd who is still unbroken, still prideful, and in at least one or more ways, still controlling. Yet there is no doubt that those to whom Peter is speaking are genuine shepherds, called by the Lord to serve.

The third category of church leaders the Scripture deals with are those whom the Lord did not call. I believe these Scriptures lead us to conclude that they are not even born again. In fact, we are told that they are actually sent by Satan into the church to do his bidding, not the Lord's!

Let's look at the parable of the wheat and the weeds.

Jesus told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared.

"The owner's servants came to him and said, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?'

"'An enemy did this,' he replied.

"The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?'

"No," he answered, "because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn." (Mat 13:24-30)

Note that the owner of the fields left the weeds in place. He specifically instructed his servants not to remove them until the harvest. I believe we can conclude from this passage that God does allow the enemy's servants to grow and, in some instances, to attain positions of leadership in the church. In fact, Matthew tells us that the Lord even lets them accomplish good works while they are present!

Look what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount.

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!' (Mat 7:21-23 NIV)

This passage tells us that the evildoers did drive out demons in Jesus' name as well as perform many miracles. So clearly God allowed them the time and position to accomplish His work. It is only in the end that He commands them to depart from Him, calling them evildoers.

We see this third category again as the wicked servant in a continuation of Matthew 24.

"But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, 'My master is staying away a long time,' and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards. The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (Mat 24:48-51 NIV)

The Results of This Kind of Abusive Leadership

Watching these kinds of abusive leaders within the ministry, I have concluded that they have certain common characteristics about their ministries. I'll briefly list them.

First, as I have already said in this teaching, at times these ministries do produce good fruit. People get saved, healed, become strong Christians, and so on. God is sovereign and He will use any means He chooses to get the work of the Kingdom done.

Secondly, these ministers, as individuals, forfeit the eternal rewards that God reserves for those of His servants who, like Apelles, have been tested and approved. (Rom 16:10)

Thirdly, these leaders don't leave either spiritually or emotionally healthy works behind them when they are no

longer in charge. Often, by the time they leave, the ministry or church has shrunk and is no longer spiritually alive.

Fourthly, these leaders seldom retire at a good time. They most often stay well past the time the Lord has set for them. Usually the only ways they leave their positions is by ill health or death.

Fifthly, these people almost never leave a successor in place who has been raised up and taught to take over leadership. A controlling person somehow thinks he must stay in absolute control to the end, or more properly, his end!

God's Final Judgment

Let's examine the final end of those in positions of leadership who horribly misuse their positions of authority. We have already seen in Matthew 7 that Jesus commands them to depart from Him. We see in Matthew 24 the fate of the wicked servant. He will "cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (Mat 24:51 NIV)

Looking again at the wheat and weeds parable, Jesus continues to explain to His disciples.

Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field."

He answered, "The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels.

"As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear. (Mat 13:36-43 NIV)

So here we are told that these people will ultimately be thrown into the fiery furnace where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Thus, it's very clear that there will be some leaders in the Lord's church who will be judged this harshly. God is a God of absolute justice. He gives us warning after warning throughout the entire Bible of the fate He has reserved for those shepherds who only take care of themselves while abusing their authority and misusing others.

"Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Woe to the shepherds of Israel who

only take care of themselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock? You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock. You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally. So they were scattered because there was no shepherd, and when they were scattered they became food for all the wild animals. My sheep wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. They were scattered over the whole earth, and no one searched or looked for them.

"Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, because my flock lacks a shepherd and so has been plundered and has become food for all the wild animals, and because my shepherds did not search for my flock but cared for themselves rather than for my flock, therefore, O shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: This is what the Sovereign LORD says: *I am against the shepherds and will hold them accountable for my flock.* I will remove them from tending the flock so that the shepherds can no longer feed themselves. I will rescue my flock from their mouths, and it will no longer be food for them." (Eze 34:2-10 NIV, emphasis added.)

How horrible! God is declaring that He will be *against* those shepherds who take care only of themselves and let the flock go untended. This is a very scary place to be!

The Proper Use of Authority

Jesus Himself set the example for His disciples of the proper use of authority. Here is how Luke told the story.

Also a dispute arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest. Jesus said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But *I am among you as one who serves.*" (Lk 22:24-27 NIV, emphasis added.)

Remember, Jesus took the basin and towel and washed His disciples' feet, and He is Lord of all. This is how servant-leadership is to be exercised in the church.

Those of us in positions of authority in a church have a heavy responsibility to exercise that authority while taking care to treat those under us properly. Realize that even a frown on your face at the wrong time can be interpreted by a

subordinate as your displeasure with him or her. Once I was the supervisor of a national Christian counseling organization in America with dozens of state representatives under me. One day I made a casual remark to one of the representatives, casting one of his minor personality traits in a negative light. He was devastated. I immediately realized that my insensitivity had hurt him. Even my apology couldn't remove his shaken feelings. I learned from that incident how important it is to control my thoughts and to choose my words carefully around those over whom I exercise authority. I have never forgotten this principle.

Delegating Authority

When I was a young man, I once worked for someone who made unrealistic demands for work production but would not hire more people to get the job done. So those trying to do the job had that responsibility but just couldn't physically do it. They even tried to tell the boss they needed more help, but he wouldn't listen to them. Often people like this boss either don't realize what they are doing, or they think they can't trust the subordinate's judgment.

I believe the fundamental flaw in this kind of leadership is that these people are either unwilling to delegate authority to others, or they just don't know how to delegate. This includes listening to those under our supervision. If one is given the responsibility to get a job done, he or she also *must* be given the authority and the tools to do it. This is a fundamental principle of leadership.

I am a retired US Marine. I concluded a long time ago that military men and women usually have a very clear understanding of authority and the delegation of it. In the military a person is given a rank with very clear authority inherent with the rank. Therefore the person with that rank has the inherent authority to get the job done. It is only when the person shows he or she cannot handle the responsibility that his authority is taken away.

Here are some of the basic principles of delegating authority:

Don't withhold the necessary authority or tools to do the job.

Don't insist that the job be done *your way*. Only concern yourself with the end result, not the means, assuming that the means are honorable!

Make sure the subordinate knows what needs to be done and when it must be done. Written instructions or a job description are an excellent way to do this.

Realize that delegating authority opens the door to the possibility of failure. If this is unacceptable to you, then don't delegate the job. Do it yourself but recognize that this could be a control problem for you, especially if it happens often.

Don't micro-manage. By this I mean don't continually impose yourself in the day-to-day decisions but do be available in case your help is needed.

Be liberal with compliments and encouragement.

Train yourself and others to carry responsibility well.

Realize that the ultimate responsibility must always rest on the person in charge, even with the proper delegation of authority.

In other words, be a leader, not a boss.

Authority Is for Building Up, Not Tearing Down

One of the most powerful authority figures in the New Testament was the Apostle Paul. He had great authority. Remember, apostles are sent by Jesus and are a direct extension of His authority. Paul was very aware of the purpose for the authority given him by the Lord. He told the church at Corinth, "This is why I write these things when I am absent, that when I come I may not have to be harsh in my use of authority--*the authority the Lord gave me for building you up, not for tearing you down.*" (2 Cor 13:10 NIV, emphasis added.)

Paul set the example for all who follow him in the Lord's work. The authority the Lord has given us is for building the church up, not for tearing it down.

Let me make a suggestion. Examine your position of leadership in whatever realm the Lord has placed you. Think about how you use your authority. Ask the Lord to show you how you use your authority. Ask those under you if you are in any way abusing your authority. Give them the liberty to speak freely. Even suggest that they write their unsigned comments to you. You may be surprised at their views of your use of authority.

What to Do if You Are Under Abusive Authority

It is very hard to work under someone who abuses his authority. Let me make a few suggestions that should help.

First and most important, pray. Leave the outcome to the Holy Spirit and *continue to do your job to the best of your ability.*

Always, always check your own spirit and maintain a cheerful, cooperative work attitude.

Straightforward honesty is often a good step. Think your problem through thoroughly and even put it in writing. This helps you focus your thoughts. Then, if the Lord gives you the go-ahead, present your problem to the abuser in an calm,

gentle manner. It is best to have a private meeting specifically for this purpose.

If there is no change, ask the Holy Spirit to show you if there is anyone else you can speak to about the problem.

You are powerless to do much of anything beyond these suggestions. If things don't change, you should 1) pray about changing your position/job, or 2) consider that the Holy Spirit is using this situation *to change you.* Either way, ask God for an answer. He is always faithful when we listen and obey.

Conclusion

We have a tremendous task ahead of us. Our world is full of people who don't know Jesus as Savior. If our use of authority is hindering the spreading of the gospel in any way, we need to change our approach and become part of God's solution, not part of the problem. And, if we have learned how to be a real servant-leader, then one of our primary jobs should be to train up others with these same skills and maturity. We are responsible for the work the Lord has set before us in this generation, but we are also responsible to raise up the next generation to do the work that they are called to do.

Lord, thank you that you have called each one of us to minister the gospel to the lost and to help mature and disciple those who do know you. Thank you that your Word gives us all the tools we need to accomplish these tasks. And Lord, thank you that you have called us to be servant-leaders over those we lead. Heavenly Father, please help us to be more like your son, Jesus, who took up the basin of water and towel and washed the feet of His disciples whom he knew were only hours away from their awful betrayal of Him. Lord, show us the way to that unconditional love and service to others. Help us to reflect Christ to all those whom we encounter. Amen.

HUNDREDFOLD MINISTRIES, INTERNATIONAL

P. O. Box 625
Blue Jay, CA 92317

Telephone 909/336-9701

E-mail: jim.murphy@hundredfold.org Web site: www.hundredfold.org

Rev. Jim Murphy and his wife, Carolyn, of Blue Jay, California, United States, head Hundredfold Ministries, International. They write Christian teaching literature and travel to the Developing Nations of the world teaching Christian leaders. Hundredfold Ministries, Int'l is a cross-denominational Christian ministry dedicated to strengthening the church in the Developing Nations of the world.

Hundredfold Ministries, Int'l provides in-country Bible school courses and leadership training seminars. The classes and seminars are taught by seasoned, anointed teachers. The subject matter is directed towards the development and maturing of Christian leaders. The goal of the Ministry is to produce leaders who will be better equipped to lead and direct national churches.

All of Hundredfold Ministries training material is available from our web site listed above. Pastors in the Developing Nations may receive this material free of charge by going on our web site and requesting it.