

Submitting to God's Ordained Authority

Part II

By Jim and Carolyn Murphy

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In Part I of this teaching, we examined the principle that God has established His ordained authority here on earth. His lines of authority run through our families, our societies, and our churches. We concluded Part I by setting out the benefits to the believer of finding his or her place in God's structure of authority and submitting to those above him.

We will now look at the various aspects of rebellion against authority and the consequences to the individual who rebels.

Consequences of Rebellion

The World's Way: Rebellion

When Carolyn and I discussed what we wanted to say in this section, we thought of a person we both knew well who has been rebelling against authority her whole life. (She is 40 years old now.) We realized that she has failed in virtually every area of her personal life. She has no real friends, she has a failed marriage and is divorced, she is in debt, she has gone from job to job because she always ends up fighting with her boss, and she is out of fellowship with her family. A few years ago, at a desperate point in her life, she became a Christian, but after a few months she left the church in rebellion because it didn't give her what she wanted when she wanted it! Tragically the consequences of her rebellious nature is manifested in every aspect of her life.

Satan rebelled against God and was cast down to Earth. (See Isa 14:12-17.) John tells us that ". . . the whole world is under the control of the evil one." (1 Jo 5:19 NIV) Since Satan is in control of the world's system, one of his best tools of destruction is getting man to rebel. Rebel against what? Rebel against God, rebel against government, rebel against parents, rebel against employers, rebel against school officials, in short, rebel against everything!

Though forms of rebellion vary from country to country, the same rebellious spirit is in every country because Satan roams throughout the earth. Unfortunately, Christians are not immune from this call to rebel. If Satan can entice a Christian to rebel against any authority over him, he has succeeded in causing that Christian to leave the protective covering of God's ordained authority and that is a very scary place to be.

Consequences of Rebellion to the Individual

Let me begin this section by differentiating between the rebellion of an unbeliever and the rebellion of one who is born again. It is obvious that the unbeliever who has been

exposed to the gospel and has not yet accepted it is in constant rebellion against God's word and His authority. He or she is in the world and will reap all the consequences of living in and for the world. I will not say anymore about this person except that God is faithful to the hungry heart and we should all be praying for these people.

I will devote the remainder of this article to rebellion in the life of the believer.

Passive Rebellion by the Believer

When most of us think of a rebellious person, we picture someone with an angry face and clenched fists making defiant gestures. Well, that does certainly portray a rebellious person. But it doesn't encompass what I call the passively rebellious Christian. By passive Christian I mean someone who has decided to live his life as a Sunday morning church going Christian but who lives the rest of the week more or less as the world does. To me, the overwhelming characteristic of the passive Christian is that he or she does not obey the word of God, the Bible. Most Christians who have been saved a number of years pretty well know what the Bible says, at least in a general sense. But simply knowing what the Bible says isn't the test. The test is in obeying what it says! James puts it this way, "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." (Jas 1:22 NIV) Disobedience to the Bible's commands and principles is sin, and is in fact, rebellion.

Often this type of believer is hard to spot. He may look great on the outside, but have rebellion in his heart and mind. For example, take the basic requirement of Scripture that Christians tithe a tenth of their gross income. Failure to tithe is disobedience to God's word and is sin and therefore rebellion. In fact, God said that those who don't tithe are under a curse! (Mal 3:9) Yet, we usually look on a Christian who doesn't tithe with benevolence, seldom regarding such a person as a sinful rebel. Another form of rebellion is the choice to not read the Bible on a consistent basis, and/or to not spend quiet time with the Lord, and/or to not pray for those over whom they have authority and responsibility. Or this Christian's rebellion may take the form of being a poor employee, or a bad boss, or cheating his customers. The list goes on and on.

Consequences of this Passive Rebellion

1. God's Covering Has Holes In It

To be honest, it appears at times that someone in this kind of passive rebellion doesn't suffer a lot of hard consequences. They can spend their whole lives in church.

But there is no doubt that the Lord's covering is not as strong over this person as it is over the dedicated believer. God's ambient covering over this believer will, in effect, have holes in it. If we are this kind of Christian, these holes in the Lord's covering over us and our families and churches can allow consequences to come into our lives such as sickness, disaster, economic bad times, and so on. Please note that I am not saying that any time one of these things happen to us, then it is a sign that we are in sin or out from under God's covering. I am simply saying that this may be one of the consequences of sinful behavior.

Of course, we do have the example of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts, 5! They wanted to look spiritual to the other Christians in the church so they entered into a scheme of deception. They sold property, kept back some of the money, and gave the rest to the church representing that what they gave was the entire proceeds from the sale. We all know what happened to them! God struck them dead within hours of their deception. Certainly God was establishing several principles by this example of rebellion including apostolic oversight in the early church as well as the mighty powers that accompanied the leaders of the first century church. But we can point to this episode as at least one example of how seriously God takes rebellion in the church attending believer!

2. Lack of Joy

There is at least one inevitable and absolute consequence of this type of life style. This kind of passively rebellious Christian will not experience the joy of the Lord that He reserves for those who choose to follow Him with their whole heart, mind, soul, and body. We can look at the parable of the multiplication of the talents in Matthew 25:15 to see this principle. To those who used and multiplied their talents, the Lord praised them and then invited them to share in His joy right then and there. "His lord said to him, *Well done, thou good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.*" (Mat 25:21, 23 KJV, emphasis added.) This parable makes it clear that the Lord reserves His special joy here on earth for those who obey His word and use their gifts in the furtherance of the gospel. To sit passively by as a Christian may get us to heaven but we sure do miss out on a whole lot of the Lord's joy in the meantime!

3. Eternal Consequences

Finally, there is no question that there are eternal consequences to the passive believer for this kind of quiet rebellion. We all will face our Lord's judgment. I am mindful of the Scripture, "From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded . . ." (Luk 12:48 NIV) Remember the principle that we are only responsible for what we know? In other words, if we, or anyone else, don't know a biblical principle, then we are not responsible for keeping it. But once we know, then we are responsible and consequently, we will be judged by whether or not we obeyed. Any Christian who sits in church week after week

and hears the teaching and preaching of the gospel is given much for which he will be held accountable.

Active Rebellion of the Believer

Let's now examine the consequences that flow to the believer who goes into active rebellion against the Lord and His word. By active rebellion I refer to the person who wilfully chooses to quit attending church and breaks ongoing fellowship with other believers. Of course, this decision is almost always accompanied by this person ceasing to give to the Lord's work, abandoning spending structured time with the Lord, no longer reading the Bible, and so on.

When a believer goes into this kind of rebellion I believe it is spiritual adultery. Another term that can be used here is idol worship or chasing after other gods. The person can go into the world and seek its physical pleasures, and/or it can be characterized by growing greed for money and material things, and/or it can take a more subtle form such as pursuing other so-called intellectual interests as a substitute for the Christian faith. One thing is for sure, it always results in awful self-centeredness.

Immediate Consequences

Over the years, as I have observed people who go into this kind of rebellion, I have come to the sad conclusion that there are both immediate as well as delayed consequences to this course of action. 1 John 1:7 says, "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin." (NIV) So, John is telling us two of the consequences of walking in the light are that we will have fellowship with other believers and our sins are continually forgiven.

1. End of Fellowship with Other Believers

Obviously this kind of rebellion, or going into spiritual darkness, will immediately result in the ending of true fellowship with other believers. The rebellious soul, mind, and spirit within someone will become critical of the church and other believers. Furthermore, how can anyone expect to stay in fellowship with other believers if he wilfully decides to no longer attend a local church. Isolation will surely set in as other believers leave this sad fellow behind.

2. Accumulated Unforgiven Sin

The second consequence of taking ourselves out of His light is that this rebellious person begins to accumulate unforgiven sin. There is a principle about sin which is that each time someone sins, that makes it easier to sin the next time, and the next time, and so on. In fact, the heart eventually becomes calloused to sin. The conscience no longer speaks. Sin becomes the easy, natural thing to do. Now a paradox sets in. When one wilfully begins to sin, he

or she is usually seeking "freedom" from God's "restrictive" commands. But instead of freedom the very opposite actually happens! The sinner becomes a slave to sin! Peter tells us that, ". . . a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him." (2 Pet 2:19 NIV) Paul affirms that in Romans, "Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey - whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?" (Rom 6:16 NIV) Accumulated unforgiven sin inevitably leads to bondage.

3. Discernment and Good Judgment Disappear

I have also noticed another sad and very immediate result of this kind of rebellion in the believer. Their discernment disappears! Or to put it another way, they no longer exhibit good judgment. They say silly things that no one else believes, they spend their money in ways that are not wise, they start socializing with people they would not have before their rebellion, and so on. I remember a married church leader who entered into an adulterous relationship. He separated from his wife and moved in with the other woman. He told everyone he was just renting a room from her. No one believed it but this man's judgment went so bad so quickly that he actually thought people were accepting his lies!

4. No Longer Hear the Voice of God

Accompanying all these other consequences is yet another one. This rebellious believer cuts himself off from being able to hear from God. Jesus said, "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me." (Jn 10:27 NIV) Conversely, one who chooses to no longer have Jesus as his shepherd will no longer know the shepherd's voice. I have no doubt that the Holy Spirit eventually withdraws both His presence and His voice from a rebellious Christian.

Of course, someone in this position may still hear a voice. Why? Because this kind of rebellion opens up a person to delusion, both by himself and by the enemy of our soul. Demons can mimic the voice of the Holy Spirit. A person in rebellion can think he is hearing from God but he is not, it's actually a demon. His discernment and spiritual judgment is gone. Amazingly I have known people who have been in open rebellion to the Lord's word for years and still claim to "be praying about" something or try to tell me that, "the Lord told me . . ." or "the Lord showed me . . ." thus and so. Frankly, I think that if this person would truly be willing to hear the Lord's voice for ten minutes, what he would hear is a call to repent of his wilful, sinful ways and to get back into fellowship with both the Lord and His people!

Delayed Effects of Rebellion to the Individual

So now we have an openly rebellious believer who has broken fellowship with other believers, who no longer

correctly hears the voice of the Lord, who has pursued other gods for some period of time, who has bad judgment, and who has been accumulating unforgiven sin. Is it any wonder that this person has now broken faith with his Christian friends and family members and opened himself up to demonic attacks which ultimately lead to demonic strongholds, which in turn lead down the path to full scale demonic delusion?

1. Estranged from Christian Family Members

One of the saddest long term consequences of this kind of turning away from the Lord is that it inevitably leads to a break in relationships, especially within families. For example, if a husband and wife marry in a Christian ceremony, both covenant before the Lord, each other, and those gathered at the wedding, to love and serve Him all the days of their lives. They promise to love, honor, and cherish each other with Christ as the center of their marriage and they pledge to raise their children in the ways of the Lord. What happens if one of the spouses goes into this kind of rebellion? These vows are broken. There is a betrayal of the covenants made before God and this is very serious. Scripture tells us, "It is better not to vow than to make a vow and not fulfill it." (Eccl 5:5 NIV) "Whatever your lips utter you must be sure to do, because you made your vow freely to the LORD your God with your own mouth." (Deut 23:23 NIV)

If there are children, they will often want to quit going to church and use this person as an example. "Why do I have to go to church. So and so doesn't. I don't want to go either." When I hear of this kind of a situation I often think of the verse in Matthew 18:6, "But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drown in the depths of the sea." (NIV)

Inevitably, other Christians in the family relationship lose respect for the rebellious person. Christian friends drift away. When the rebellious person persists in his ways, Christians just can't be the kind of friends they used to be. Things just aren't the same anymore. Often the rebellious one is fighting feeling guilty so he or she doesn't want to be around anyone who reminds him of his sin. Eventually the conscience will harden and there will be no more real fellowship left.

2. Demonic Attacks and Strongholds

It is inevitable that at some point ongoing rebellion will expose the believer to demonic attacks. When this begins he or she will not have the power or authority to defeat the attacks that the Christian has who is not in rebellion. These attacks may be financial, relational, health, or whatever. Remember, the devil's objective is to rob, kill and destroy but God's objective is abundant life. (See John 10:10.)

As we have already seen, sin removes us from under God's protection. Once one is no longer protected by God's authoritative covering, the devil is free to act. Although it

is clear from the book of Job and 1 Kings 22 that God limits the devil's power, I believe the longer one rebels and the more severe is a Christian's rebellion, the more slack God gives the devil. If we persist in this rebellion long enough, we become fully deceived. Paul makes this clear in his letter to the Thessalonians, ". . . in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they *refused to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a strong delusion so that they will believe the lie . . .*" (2 Thes 2:10,11 NIV, emphasis added.) Once someone is deceived, black becomes white, white becomes black, right becomes wrong, and wrong becomes right. Sadly, once someone is in this kind of deception, no argument, however persuasive, can convince him otherwise.

Remember the story of Balaam and Balak in Numbers, 23? Satan knew that if he could entice the Israelites to sin, then their protective covering would be removed. So here is what he did. He sent lots of Balak's women, along with their idols, in among the Israelite men to entice them to bow down before their gods and have sex with the women. Yet every man who bowed down to the idols knew God's command, "You shall have no other gods before me." (Ex 20:3 NIV) The devil's plan was simple: idol worship for sex. "Men, come and indulge yourselves!" And they did. The moment they willfully sinned, they left God's covering of authority. As a result of their sin, a plague settled on them and 24,000 died of that plague.

How Do I Get Back Under Authority?

I think it is incumbent on every Christian to at least occasionally examine his or her life to see if there are any areas of rebellion. If we find one, than we must ask, "What can we do if we have willfully rebelled against God's line of authority and are presently out from under His protective covering?" In other words, "How do I get back under God's protective covering of authority?"

Here are some suggestions.

1) Identify the people in leadership against whom you have rebelled, mistreated, talked about, lied about, gossiped

about, and so on. Maybe you left a church or group in anger, hurt, disgust, or disappointment, but looking back, and with the help of the Holy Spirit, you now recognize that you were rebelling against God's authority. Identify all those you have rebelled against.

2) Ask God how you can make amends to each of them.

3) Do what He tells you. If it is a matter of humbling yourself, do it. If it is a matter of going to apologize, do it. If it is a matter of forgiving, do it. If it is a matter of asking for forgiveness, do it.

4) Then ask the Holy Spirit to show you any principle or command in God's word that you have rebelled against, or are only partially following. When the Holy Spirit shows you your rebellion, and He will if it is there, repent immediately and completely.

5) After you have prayerfully, humbly done all these things, ask God to take you back under his sheltering authority. Ask Him to set you free from all the demonic influence you may have picked up during your absence from His covering.

6) Make a commitment to God to never again leave His protective covering.

In Part III, we will conclude by examining God's ordained structure of the local church and what we as believers can and should do if something goes wrong in the leadership of our church. We will concentrate on the principles found in Matthew 18 concerning going to someone in love and trying to resolve differences.

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.

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