

The Paradoxical Nature of Spiritual Authority

Our Identity in Christ

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Turn with me in your Bibles to Matthew 8. Matthew 8. We're continuing a series we began last Sunday on spiritual authority. We've stepped back from our exposition of 1 Peter, which we will, Lord willing, resume in a few weeks, but as a church, we have come to the time where every couple of years we nominate officers in leadership, elder and deacon, the two offices in the church, and so we don't do this every time we nominate, but from time to time the Lord wants us to spend time in his word looking at the importance of spiritual authority and what that it's place in our lives and the urgency of our need for the man that God has set apart to these offices. So that's why we're stepping back and doing that and as we prepare to read the Scriptures, I just want to also say a word to those of you who saw this week that our dear brother Ray Marchman passed away, such a blow. He had certainly had his struggles over the last few years health-wise, but was doing really pretty well in many ways but the Lord took him home on Friday and just, we're going to miss him so greatly. One of the warmest and most joyful Christians that I've known through the years and just such a encourager and so he definitely will be sorely missed by me and all of us who knew him and loved him. And I'm so glad that his dear wife Judy is with us here today and our hearts are with you and with his son Matt and the family as they mourn the loss of this dear man, and thankful through the gospel that we don't mourn as those who have no hope. We mourn in a different way. We don't mourn for those that we lose in the Lord because for them it's all gain. That's what Paul said, remember, about going to be with Jesus. He said, "I don't know which to choose, rather to die. I feel like my death is imminent and I don't know which to choose, to die is gain but to stay on is more needful for you." And so in that point, the Lord did give Paul a little more time to minister, but then it wasn't long before he was in the presence of the Savior and in God's presence, there's fullness of joy, at his right hand, there are pleasures forevermore.

We come to the word of God this morning. Let's go to the Lord in prayer and pray for this family and also pray for the word to minister to our hearts.

Father, we thank You for Your goodness and Your infinite grace that is made known to us salvation, that You take wretched sinners like us and You make us Your own dear children. The blood of Christ is that mighty, that powerful that it takes those who are filthy and makes them white as snow. Lord, we glory in the cross. We rejoice in the hope that the moment that we breathe our last to be absent from the body is to be present with

the Lord. And we do pray for the Marchman family, that Your grace would be upon them in the days and weeks to come, and Your grace would be upon this body as we, Lord, deal with the loss of one so precious. So help us. But in all things, Lord, may we mourn as those who do have hope, not as those who don't have hope and may we encourage one another and come alongside one another. And Father, we thank You that You're at work in all these things, that Your plan is perfect. As we come to Your word, we know how much we need Your word, how much we need Your Spirit to minister. Lord, we pray that You would open the eyes of our hearts and that You would do Your will in our lives and that Your word would accomplish its purpose today for the glory of Christ. We pray in his name. Amen.

So we're going to look again at this issue of spiritual authority. Last week, we began talking about it and the message today, today's message title is "The Paradoxical Nature of Spiritual Authority." The paradoxical nature of spiritual authority. I think it's one of these subjects that, honestly, when I began to prepare these messages, I have to confess I was not excited about it and you probably aren't excited about hearing the title of the message. Shame on us. Seriously, shame on me because if we're coming to the word of God, if we're going to hear from the word of God, which as Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 3:16, all Scripture is God-breathed, every single word in the Canon of Scripture has been breathed out by God. All Scripture is God-breathed and profitable. It's profitable. It's valuable. It's exactly what he wanted to put in his word and it's what we need. And so every passage is that way and so, but we are humans and so when we come to passages that some passages more readily grab our hearts and our attention and other passages don't, but faithful Christians, what we should be doing is reminding ourselves in the moments where we don't see the immediate benefit of this, "Lord, show me. Speak, Your servant is listening and I want to believe that You have something for me that will accomplish Your purpose in my life to make me more like You." And one of the things we know that God is always doing just to harken back to our study of 1 Peter 2, when we saw that verse "as newborn babes long for the sincere milk of the word that you may grow in respect to salvation." I love that image, that is, as newborn infants who can do nothing except eat, sleep and that's basically it that long for the milk of the word. And we saw when we looked at that, that it means the milk of the word is the word and the thinking and the logic of Scripture, the *logikos* is the word there that's translated "sincere or spiritual milk." And so the spiritual milk of the word is the logic of God, the way God thinks about things. So we come to Scripture, every time we come to the Bible as Christians, Peter was telling us as believers, we should come with an earnestness that wants to receive what God has for us, the nourishment that this passage or this subject has in our lives. So as we do this morning, I encourage you to have that mindset. Even now be praying that the Lord will show us what he wants us to see about this important issue.

The paradoxical nature of spiritual authority. What I want to do is step back from it. I was going to move into the qualifications this morning, and I was studying all week on the qualifications for elder and deacon to talk about that, but the Lord really put on my heart to step back and look at the big picture of Scripture and this important concept of spiritual authority and that's why I titled the message the paradoxical nature of spiritual authority.

I have four points this morning and the first, well, first of all, before I give you the first point, the paradoxical nature, a paradox is that which appears to be a contradiction at first glance; two things that are affirmed that when you look at them seem to not be compatible. How can this be true and this be true? Well, they are. That's a paradox. It's something of a mystery but when you look deeper, you then see all this makes beautiful sense. This makes perfect sense. It just didn't appear to at the beginning when I first looked at it. And such is the nature of spiritual authority in the church. There are some things in the Bible itself that help us to understand the mystery of it and the paradoxical nature of it but it is a beautiful reality.

So now, with that said, first point is the New Testament witness to the reality of spiritual equality. The reason it's a paradox is because the New Testament places great stress on the fact that the ground is level at the foot of the cross, that we are all equal in Christ. Equal in value. Equal in worth. And so in one sense, there is this understanding that the equality is so complete and so radical you don't need to go to a clerical group of priests to help you know God. The doctrine of the priesthood of the believer is one of the ways that theologians have captured what the New Testament is saying, that every single believer is himself a priest. Or to use the words back to 1 Peter 2, I keep wanting to go back to 1 Peter 2, 2:9 says you are a royal priesthood, speaking to all Christians, you're a part of a royal priesthood.

So this idea of spiritual equality and I want to show you this in a number of places this morning but first we want to start in Matthew 8:5-13. This is our jumping off point. We're not going to exposit this passage but I want to show you something of even the paradoxical nature of spiritual authority in this passage as we start then to look at this first point. Verse 5 of Matthew 8.

5 And when Jesus entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, imploring Him, 6 and saying, "Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, fearfully tormented." 7 Jesus said to him, "I will come and heal him." 8 But the centurion said, "Lord, I am not worthy for You to come under my roof, but just say the word, and my servant will be healed. 9 For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to this one, 'Go!' and he goes, and to another, 'Come!' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this!' and he does it." 10 Now when Jesus heard this, He marveled and said to those who were following, "Truly I say to you, I have not found such great faith with anyone in Israel. 11 I say to you that many will come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven; 12 but the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." 13 And Jesus said to the centurion, "Go; it shall be done for you as you have believed." And the servant was healed that very moment.

He marveled at his faith. This is the greatest expression of wonder that you find on the lips of Jesus in the entire gospel record. He marvels at this man's faith. There are other

times where he says, "Woman, your faith is great," to the Syrophenician woman who kept coming after him even though he seemed to be pushing her back. He was actually drawing her in and he says to her, "Woman, your faith is great." You can hear it in his heart. He's marveling at that, but this draws an even greater commendation. He marvels at this man's faith and says, "I've not found such great faith in all of Israel." What this man has said is spot on and what this man said is really instructive. He said, "Jesus, don't come. I'm a Gentile. I'm filthy." Now, obviously, he was a Gentile who'd been around the Jews and was aware that the God of the Jews is the true God of the Bible and that God's purpose was always to save people outside of Israel, that's why he sent Christ, but when he says to him, "Just say the word and my servant will be healed for I also am a man under authority," he says to Jesus, "I," this Roman centurion, "am a man under authority just as You are under authority."

And to be under authority, it's interesting because I would have said if I was writing, giving the script to this guy, what to say, I would have said, "I also am a man in authority," because Jesus is in authority, and I would say "with soldiers under me," then. "I'm in authority and soldiers are under me and I say, this one go and he goes, this one come and he comes. I'm in authority." But he didn't say in authority, he said under authority. That tells you the reason that he is in authority is because he's under authority. The only reason those people do what he says when he says it is because he's under the authority of the General above him all the way up to Caesar himself. To disobey this man is akin to disobeying Caesar therefore he's a man under authority and when he says go, they go, when he says come, they come. That's a beautiful lesson about authority. Too often we want to be in authority but not under authority. Too many men who understand what the Bible says about headship in the home want to be in authority but not under authority and this is basically saying if you're not under authority, you are not in authority. You're just pretending.

Now what's instructive for us, though, also is that he says that Jesus is under authority which given our understanding of the person of Jesus, this at first, what's this mean? I mean Jesus is eternal God. The Bible teaches that, that he is the one who always was and is and is to come. He's the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. That through him all things were created which have been created. That he's equal in power and glory to the Father. But this says that he is under authority. So this is the paradox of spiritual authority.

Now I want to get to the first point. Actually that was my introduction. I jumped into point 1 too early. So the first point is the New Testament witness to the reality of spiritual equality. The New Testament witness. The reason it's a paradox is you have the New Testament say we are all equal and the New Testament say we need to be under authority. You see what I'm saying? It says both things. It seems to be contradictory but it's a paradox, and we see something of it even when we begin to look at Christ and him being under authority, which we're going to come back to in point 3. So I want you to see the New Testament really does make great emphasis upon the reality of our equality, our spiritual equality, and we must understand this and give appropriate weight to it if we're

going to be all that God wants us to be and we're going to relate to one another the way he wants us to relate to one another.

You see this a number of places. First place I want us to look at since we're in Matthew 8 is turn to Matthew 23. Matthew 23:6. This is where Jesus is pronouncing a series of woes upon the Pharisees who have rejected him. They're the spiritual leaders of the day but they don't know God and he's pronouncing a series of woes on them and in the midst of it he gives an important instruction that we need to hear. He says in verse 6 of Matthew 23 speaking about the Pharisees, "They love the place of honor at banquets and the chief seats in the synagogues, and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called Rabbi by men." Rabbi means "oh great one, my great one, my teacher." Look at verse 8, "But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers. Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. Do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, that is, Christ. But the greatest among you shall be your servant. Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted." Listen he's basically saying don't want to be above others. You're all equal.

Now let me just show you this as we go through the New Testament. Turn to Galatians 3. We're hitting the highlights. We could go many, many places and look at this glorious reality of our equality in Christ. Galatians 3:26, our assurance of pardon came from the next chapter verses 4 to 7 of chapter 4 which Paul is continuing to work out what he's just said in this passage. In verse 26, having explained the gospel that Jesus was cursed for us, that because he was cursed for us we now can be blessed and accepted as God's son. He took the wrath of God. He has now satisfied God's holy wrath for those who believe. And he says in verse 26, given all of that, verse 26 of Galatians 3, "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise." Just like we saw in John 8. You are truly a descendant of Abraham if you have the faith of Abraham. You're a spiritual descendant of Abraham.

He says that the oneness in Christ abolishes all other distinctions, even the distinction between Jew and Gentile, which was a massive distinction. Even the distinction between male and female in some sense. We're going to see now, God's going to reintroduce the fact that you're still a man, you're still a woman, that he made you and you're supposed to live and be a godly man and a godly woman and it affects how you're to live in the home. His structure of authority is still going to exist, but he's telling us at the same time there is this fundamental intrinsic equality before God. We have to let all of Scripture interpret Scripture. This is what heretics do. They take passages and just read one side of the antinomy and just keep going that way to their own destruction. They twist the Scripture. Faithful followers continue in the word, continue to humble themselves under all that the Bible says and they find the balance that Scripture calls us to.

It's exactly what Jesus did. Remember when Satan was tempting him? Satan says to him, "Hey, the Bible says," and he quoted him Scripture. He said, "The Bible says in Psalm 91

that since You're the Messiah, that God's going to bear You up, angels are going to bear You up in their hands lest You strike your foot against the stone." Is that not true? Yes, it is true. He didn't ask Jesus that. If he had, Jesus would have said, "Yes, it is true." Of course, Scripture can't be broken. It's absolutely true. Satan said, "Well, if God said His angels would protect You and so You don't strike Your foot on a stone, jump off the temple then." And Jesus said, what? Well, he said, well, God would definitely do...he didn't say this. He said, "It is written you shall not put the Lord your God to the test." It is written. That's what always settled it for Jesus. What does the Bible say? And he gave a balancing passage of Scripture, a balancing truth. Yes, God will take care of you, but you're not to put the Lord your God to the test. You see how Scripture complements, it supplements, it fills in and gives the perfect balance and measure of truth. So we're going to see the same thing happens.

Now, look with me at Colossians 3, Colossians 3:9 to 11. There we read, Paul is exhorting the Colossians and he says, "Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all." Basically, again, all distinctions are abolished at the foot of the cross, that in the truest sense, when God made man, he always intended that we had equal value before him because every single human being, no matter their background, no matter their disability, no matter anything about them, every single human being is in the image of God. Every single human being has been created by God for his glory and are therefore of indescribable value. And when someone becomes a believer now, because though we bear the image of God we're sinners and we're dead in our sins and we are slaves of sin, as we saw in John 8, children of our father, the devil, in our rebellion against God until we're saved, and once we're saved now, we're restored image bearers, we take on the nature of Christ and every other thing, though these distinctions remain in some sense because the natural world, we still are human beings, it pales in comparison to our unity in Christ. It's all about, do you know Jesus? If you know Jesus, then you and I are one. If you love Jesus, then you are one with every other person who truly loves Jesus.

So the emphasis on the equality, you see it a number of places. Let me just give you a few other examples. I want to stay in Colossians 3 because I'm going to show you something else in just a second, but to give you an example of how this idea of equality and the check and balance on authority, Acts 17:11, really great verse to commit to memory. The Apostle Paul has described his ministry as he's taking the gospel through the area of Greece and Macedonia, it says that the Bereans "were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica." This is what Luke, the author of Acts says. The Bereans that Paul preached in Berea and they were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, which is really high praise because the Thessalonian Christians were exemplary. Read 1 and 2 Thessalonians. Compared to the Corinthians, I mean, the Thessalonians are poster children for this is what a godly Christian looks like. The Corinthians were like, man, God saves anybody. Look at that. Okay. So the Thessalonians were just fantastic. There's no rebuke of the Thessalonians in the two letters. There's only encouragement. Basically, "You're doing well. Keep doing better."

So when he says the Bereans were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, that's high praise. What was it that made the Bereans that incredibly noble-minded? Acts 17:11 says they were more noble-minded because they searched the Scriptures daily to see if what the Apostle Paul was saying was true. Now, that is really something because we're also commanded by Scripture that we should submit to the word and the apostles were speaking the word of God and that we're to receive the word of God as the word of God. But it's saying this, "Even though you respect the Apostle Paul and you see his commendation by the Lord, he has the signs of the apostle, he speaks the word, you still must do your due diligence as a follower of me, the Lord, you must do," this is what God is saying to us, "we must do this as as followers of the Lord that we search the Scriptures to see that the person speaking the word is what he's saying is consistent with everything that's gone before." That's what they were doing. They were reading their Old Testament and they were saying, "All that Paul is saying, it matches up to the Old Testament." And God says, "That's what I love." That's what God says through Luke, "That's what I love, that kind of diligent searching of the Scriptures."

So what I'm saying is, you see, that shows again, the equality that we have responsibility to search out and test what is taught continually. Now, so that's another example of that. I mentioned 1 Peter 2, I'll just mention John 2:27. 1 John 2:27. John says something astonishing there. He says, "You know, we have no need to teach you because of the anointing you have in the Holy Spirit." He's talking about watching out for false teachers. "Hey, listen, you don't need to worry about that because you have an anointing from the Holy Spirit. You have no need for anyone to teach you." And he's he's giving a balancing perspective here. You need to have confidence that if you're in Christ, God has given you of his Spirit and he's going to help you. Do you see what I'm saying? The equality of the Christian, a believer is stressed in the New Testament.

But then you have the second point is not just the New Testament witness to the reality of spiritual equality, the second point is the New Testament witness to the necessity of spiritual authority. The New Testament witness to the necessity of spiritual authority. And we'll just start right here in Colossians 3. We just read that verse, verse 11, there's no distinctions, there's no differences between Greek and Jew, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free, circumcised, uncircumcised. We might infer from that that all authority is abolished and there's some who want to do that, to say that, you know, that this is egalitarianism, that a man and a woman in marriage is equal authority in the home because of Jesus Christ. That's not true. That's not what the text says. It does say equal spiritually in worth and value. Yes. And it does say given that, that a wife can check out what her husband's saying to be a good Berean and say, "Honey, I think you're wrong on that." Absolutely. And if your wife is doing what she should do, you'll hear that from time to time. Sometimes we hear that a little more than we would even want to, but what a blessing it is. My wife is my best counselor, my best check on me. She tells me, "Ty, you're wrong on this," and I have learned to give a tremendous amount of weight to that.

So it doesn't mean that the equality is not there but look what we see. Colossians 3:11. He said there is no distinction between Greek and Jew circumcised, uncircumcised,

uncircumcised. Does this mean there's no authority? Look with me at Colossians 3:18, "Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord." Wives, be submissive to your husbands as is fitting in the Lord. Well, in the Lord aren't we all equal? Yes, we are. But in the Lord, there still are these authority structures.

Look at verse 20, "Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord." Look at verse 22, "Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who merely please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord." God has not abolished authority, even though he has brought about absolute equality.

And we see this further when we understand that he has ordained in the church two offices of leadership, which we looked at last week, deacon and elder. We saw that in Acts 6, that the 12, the 12 apostles were like functioning like elders and the seven deacons were functioning like, the seven men chosen were functioning like deacons. And we see as we read the New Testament that God intends that to continue on. When the church is being formed, I'm just going to give you some verses you can look up later. Acts 14:23, when the gospel is going out across the Mediterranean world through the ministry of Paul and Barnabas, it says this in Acts 14:23, when they would go into an area, they would preach the gospel, converts would begin to come and attend the church, and before they left, they always did one thing, they appointed elders before they left. They sought out who were the men that can now lead this flock of Christians. Works not done until we do that.

1 Timothy 3:1 to 13 are all about the two offices, elder and deacon. Qualifications in verses 1 to 7 for an overseer, which is the same as an elder. Verses 8 to 13, the qualifications for a deacon. And the idea, Paul is saying, he's writing to Timothy, a pastor of a church and he tells him right after he gives this instruction on elders and deacons and their qualifications, he says, "Listen, I've written to you because in case I'm delayed, I want you to know how you're to conduct yourself in the household of God. I want you to know how you're to run things in the church." He said that right after he said, "You need elders, you need deacons." What about the ground is level at the foot of the cross? Yes, it is but there still is authority. There still are leadership offices.

Titus 1:5-9, he teaches Titus, another pastor. He says, "Listen, Titus, I left you there and I want you to take care of the work that's not done. Appoint elders," plural, "in every city," singular. There need to be plural elders in each church, plural deacons in each church.

Let me show you a couple other verses that talk about this concept. 1 Thessalonians 5:12. I said this, the Thessalonians, you won't find any rebuke for anything they're doing wrong, but basically the message is just keep on doing what you're doing and do it better and he gives them instruction on how they can improve. It says in 1 Thessalonians 5:12, that "we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another." So he's saying, listen, there are people in the church that God has set apart to be leaders and laborers. In fact, the idea here of "those who have charge over you," the other

translations, ESV says "those who are over you," King James says "those who are over you." The NIV weakens it a little bit and says "those who care for you." The participle there translated "those who have charge over you" is a word which means "to be set or placed before; to be set or placed in front of." It means "to superintend; to preside over; to lead."

So it's interesting, God is saying here, "Appreciate your leaders." This word's almost the same word that Jesus used in Matthew 23 when he said, "Let none of you be called leaders." Slightly, slight variation of this same Greek word. What is he saying? Don't be called leaders. So be leaders, but don't let anybody call you a leader. No, that's not, the text is basically saying, don't want to have the title, but it doesn't say don't be the kind of man that the title is afforded to. And nothing wrong with actually calling people that if we understand our motive is not to be like the Pharisees who love the position of honor, love to hear the sound of their exalted titles, because we follow a Lord and Savior who is also a servant. The most exalted, the most marvelous, the most glorious God who has come down and become man and yet we see Jesus when he speaks of his own leadership, he says in another place, when the disciples were arguing over who was greatest among them, sounds like what we would argue over, doesn't it? Who's greatest among them? Jesus hears them and he says, "Listen, the Gentiles and the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over one another. It's not to be so among you," Matthew 20:28. He says, "It's not to be so among you, but whoever would be greatest among you shall be your servant, and whoever would be first will be servant of all for the Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many." He's saying that the King of kings came as a servant. He didn't come looking for everybody to give affirmation and acclamation to him though he is worthy. We can't even begin to do the appropriate acclamation to him that he deserves but he didn't come for that, he came to serve. And he's called you, if you're a Christian, to be just like him. Follow Jesus. Serve others. But it doesn't mean there's still not leadership in the body. You see this paradox.

Look with me at Hebrews 13. I'm taking the time to take you these verses because they're places that we don't get to enough and we don't know these things and the spirit of the age is so anti-authoritarian because the essence of sin really is anti-authority. I mean, Satan's rebellion was against God's authority. He wanted to be like the Most High, according to Ezekiel 28. He was not content with his position and then he went to Eve, he said, "You can be like God." You see, it's all about rebellion.

Well, Hebrews 13:7, another one of the authors of Scripture shows us that there's supposed to be leadership in the body. He says, verse 7, Hebrews 13, "Remember those who led you," literally in the Greek "are leading you." It's a present tense verb but it's translated with a past tense because of the next verb is a past tense in the Greek, "who spoke the word of God to you. Remember those who have been leading you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith." So there are leaders in the body who speak the word and you lead, and the idea is remember them and imitate them. In fact, the Greek verb imitate is mimeo. We get our English word mimic. Mimic them. And this is what Paul is getting at when he says, "Follow me as I follow Christ."

God intends to work through leadership and listen, in reality at its core, the very basis of discipleship and the Great Commission "make disciples" implies this kind of leadership. We all need to be led and we all need to lead. To be a disciple is to be a learner. So make disciples. That is, you go out and you get people that you teach and you basically say to them, "Follow me as I follow Christ." And what are they supposed to do? They're supposed to go out and get people that they teach and say, "Follow me as I follow Christ." That's the Great Commission and in the working of the church and the Lord to continue that work sets up those two offices.

Now that gets us through our first two points and our third point is the analogy of the Godhead. We've looked at the reality of spiritual equality and the New Testament witness to that, the New Testament witness to the necessity of spiritual authority. Now we'll talk about the analogy of the Godhead. One of the things that we see in the Bible that is really a wondrous mystery is the fact that God is three persons in one essence. That's the doctrine of the Trinity, that God the Father is eternally God, God the Son is eternally God, God the Holy Spirit is eternally God. There's never a time when they were not. They've always been. They've always existed in a communion of love. They work together in harmony. There's never a sense of separation in anything. They always work together in all that they do. Their purposes are united. Their hearts are united and they are of the same essence. It stretches the mind. It blows the mind. How can you understand that, three in person, one in substance or essence?

What we see in the Bible is that God, the Triune God, as the Triune God effects and accomplishes his will, there is authority at work within the Godhead in the economy of redemption and creation, that what you can observe that what God the Father, in a sense, is in charge directing God the Son and the Father and the Son direct the Spirit, and yet there's still equality in power and glory. You see this in creation where it says God created the heavens and the earth. You see intimations of the Trinity even there. It's really glorious how you see that in Genesis 1. First of all, you see it in the amazing statement that God makes before he creates man. Remember what God says? God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness." God, singular, said, "Let Us." Okay, it says the same thing in chapter 11, "Let Us go down and deal with what's going on at the Tower of Babel." But you also see it in that God, how does he create? He speaks. God said. God said. God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God said, "Let the waters above be separated from the waters below," and it was so. God said, "Let the dry land be separated from the water," and dry land appeared and it was so etc. etc. God said.

Well, John 1:1 to 4 tells us what was going on there when it says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The Word, that's the name for Jesus that John uses. The Word. The revelation of God. You can't know what someone's heart is until they speak. It's the Word. He's the eternal Word. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were created by Him and apart from Him nothing was created which has been created." All things were created through the instrumentation of the Word, the eternal Word. That is, God spoke and it happened. Do you see that?

So God sends forth his Word. The Father directs, administers. This is actually, I think, a helpful way to remember the economy of the Trinity basically three things: God administers, the Son accomplishes, and the Spirit applies. The Father administers and directs. The Son accomplishes. The Father at creation, he's the one that was conceiving of what was happening. He said, he sends forth the Son. The Son accomplishes. "Let there be light." And the Spirit is there in Genesis 1 hovering over the waters in verse 2. The Spirit is there at the point of contact and it's exactly what happens in redemption. That was creation. You see the Father administering, the Son accomplishing, the Spirit applying. In redemption, you see this even more clearly. It's like the lights come on and we can see the mystery of the Trinity in all of its glory.

And you see it in what we saw a little bit earlier in John. John's gospel makes this really clear. Jesus' favorite thing to say, he says 34 times in the gospel of John, he speaks of the one who sent him. "The Father who sent Me." In fact, turn to John 5. John 5:24. "Truly, truly, I say to you," this is John 5:24, "he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life." Look what he says just before that, verse 19 of John 5, "Therefore Jesus answered and was saying to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner. For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing; and the Father will show Him greater works than these, so that you will marvel.'" Look down at verse 30, "I can do nothing on My own initiative. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me." Over and over, he speaks about the fact that the Father is directing him.

Now, Jesus, fully God, takes on humanity in such a way that he does not use his intrinsic power in the carrying out of his life. This is what happens. He's anointed by the Holy Spirit. He lives as true man, though he could do it with his own power. In fact, he's keeping the universe in its orbit, all of the planets in their orbit. As a man, he lives as true man. He does the works that he does by the power of the Holy Spirit. This is why Luke describes him coming back from the time of fasting in the power of the Spirit. But when you look at the whole Canon of Scripture, it's clear he is eternally God, equal in power and glory but in the work of redemption, we see that the Son is taking his direction from the Father. "He is the One who sent Me. I'm doing the will of Him who sent Me." Do you see that? And this doesn't mean there's any less value or power or glory. In the economy of salvation, this is just clear, the economy of redemption and creation. Now, what that says is we can understand the same thing for us, that we can be equal in dignity and value and still have submission to authority as a part of our lives. Does that make sense? If the Godhead that can be happening, how much more with us? This is the idea.

So, spiritual authority is a part of who God is. It's a part of how he's made the world. I mentioned last time the first commandment on the horizontal in the 10 Commandments is not you shall not murder, but it is honor your father and your mother. God has created authority. He works through it. Now, listen, authority is not absolute because you submit to authority to the degree that it does not cause you to disobey a higher authority, the authority of God. So, this means that the presence of leadership in the church is

something that we obviously need and this is what the beauty of it: we all need leadership. And I say that as someone who's a pastor of a church. I need leadership. I need the leadership of my brother elders. And listen, the wonder of it is I also need the leadership of every single believer in the body because there are times where you're supposed to come to me and say, "Ty, I think what you said right there is wrong. Or I'd like to know about it. It seemed to me you might be saying this." And this is the beauty.

The fourth point: the application to the church. So, God put these two offices in the church, the office of elder and the office of deacon. The office of elder are the shepherds. In fact, that's basically elder, overseer, shepherd are all words for the same office. You see, when you read the Bible carefully, it make this so clear. In 1 Timothy 3, he speaks of overseers and gives a list of qualifications. Titus 1, he calls them elders and a list of qualifications. 1 Peter 5 in talking about the elders, he says, you're to do the work of shepherding. Acts 20, the same thing talking about talking to the elders. He says, you're overseers and you're shepherds. So, elder equals overseer equals shepherd and we can add that our English word pastor is basically another way of saying shepherd. That's what it literally is. It's a Latin word that got mixed into our vernacular. But the three Greek words that if you translate the three key Greek words into English, you translate them with these English words most naturally, presbuteros in Greek is elder in English; episcopos in Greek is overseer in English; poimenes in Greek is shepherd in English, though it's sometimes called pastor.

We need shepherds and so the work of the elder/overseer is basically shepherding. So we like to think of them in terms of the action, the office of elder is shepherd. The office of deacon, deacon is a servant, someone who attends to the practical needs of someone. So God put over the church shepherd and servant. He said, these are the leaders, shepherds and servants and they're basically there to say, "Follow me as I follow Christ." And I love this because who is the greatest shepherd? And David said, Psalm 23, "The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want." Jesus identified himself as the good shepherd. "I am the good shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep. Come follow Me." That's his call. "I'm the shepherd. I will lead you." And now he appoints under-shepherds in the church who are to help to say to the other believers, "Follow me as I follow Christ," but in reality, all of us are called to shepherd because you're called to make disciples and that's essentially what making a disciple is. You're shepherding someone's life and saying, you're speaking the truth to them and saying, "Follow me as I follow Christ."

So the Lord put this office of elder out there and said, "Here's some guys that are out in front that I want to put out in front and you follow them as they follow Christ and you learn how to shepherd everybody else in your life like you should because you'll be concerned and have a heart of compassion to those around you. You'll know how to speak the truth to them." And then these servants, though, were out there too in the church saying, "Serve like those servants serve. Be like Jesus in that." I said, he said in Matthew 20:28, "I didn't come to be served but to serve." Our God is a servant God. It's mind-blowing and if you're a follower of Jesus, you're called to be a servant.

So listen, what this means is God has put these leaders out there and we're all supposed to follow them and learn from them, and there's a sense in which we put ourselves under

them and follow them. We watch somebody serve and we say, "Lord, I want to be like that. Make me more like that brother serving." And then they are helping the rest of us shepherd and serve so that in reality what happens is every other Christian is the one who's giving you lessons on how to be a better Christian.

I've been teaching on spiritual gifts on Wednesday night and if you haven't been there, you could pick up the series online, but one of the things that I was sharing this past week is the Lord has given each one of us a spiritual gift to motivate us to ministry. That is, you see a need and God has wired you, if you belong to Christ, you have at least one spiritual gift, you may have several, and he's wired you with these gifts to recognize a need and move toward it and then to minister in light of that. You see something that other people don't see as clearly because they don't have the same gift, and as you act in that, you're teaching other people how they should be more like this. And they're doing their own gifts, which are different than what you have, they're seeing things and they're teaching you how you should be more like them. Do you see that? Everybody's teaching if we're doing it right. We're all using our gifts, we're all saying, in essence, "Follow me as I follow Jesus." That's what we're all called to do. This is how the church grows up. But it doesn't grow up with people who are anti-authority and unsubmitive. It grows up among people who are humble and teachable and who know they don't have it all together, but they're following Jesus the best they can and they're helping other people follow Jesus, and when that happens, the church starts to look glorious.

And that's what God has called us to. In his infinite wisdom, he tells us we are absolutely equal before him. No distinction between even male and female as it comes eternally your value. But yet, given his glorious creation, the way he's made it, you're a man, you're a woman, there are things that speak to you uniquely in the Scripture and if you're following Jesus, you follow him and be the most godly woman that you can be, the most godly man that you can be. Whatever roles you have in your life, married, single, whatever your position, the responsibility is in your company or your neighborhood, your family, use your gifts, serve others and glory in the fact that God knows that we need to have examples. This is really what it's basically telling us. He knows that if we don't have people around us and we're not intimately connected with people who are serving, we won't serve. If we don't have people around us who are shepherding souls, we won't shepherd like we would.

You know, think about this idea of spiritual gifts. We were talking about there's two types, major types of gifts in the New Testament, according to 1 Peter 4.10, serving gifts and speaking gifts, and they kind of break down that way. And so some gifts are more attuned to the needs of people addressing immediate needs and some gifts are more attuned to knowledge, content, motivation, kind of speaking things. But you think about what we recognize, what we see, and as you grow in the Lord, you'll see that you have a wiring, that you notice certain things that other people don't notice quite the same way, and other people don't notice them at all. And this is comforting because for those of us, you can see this in the practical outworking of life too, some of you are like me, some of you guys even are like me, that you can walk by something broken in your house, not be that troubled by it. You know, you've learned the secret of contentment, right? And you just want your wife to learn the secret of contentment. Now, some of us don't notice it.

What I notice about myself, I will notice it. "Oh, that light bulb's out or, you know, that's not, I need to..." I might even think I need to deal with that sometime, but I just walk around and I don't deal with it then. I may not deal with it for months. Thankfully, I have a little helper that helps me remember things like that. But you think about other people are wired in such a way they see that and they have a compelling just drive to fix it right now. Now, sometimes we may not notice that and it's not a character flaw. It's because we're noticing something else. I see a spiritual need in this situation and so I'm missing this obvious need for some practical thing that needs to be done. Do you see that? I see that the problem here is this person doesn't understand the implications of the gospel in their life right now and I want to communicate that. And I see that it's glaring. This is the problem. This is the problem. This is the problem. "Lord, help me minister to that." Somebody else sees the fact that they're hurting right now, they're bleeding, they need somebody to stop the bleeding on some kind of wound they have, physical wound. Now, if I was thinking correctly, I would notice that but I mean, fully, but the Lord has wired me to see this. I see that. Somebody else sees another need that's going on. And what happens is if any of us doesn't do what we're supposed to do, something remains undone. But if all of us do what we're supposed to do, what happens? The wound gets treated. The person gets encouraged. The truth gets spoken. Everything comes around it. And Jesus Christ is revealed in all of his glory because Jesus has all the gifts and when you use your gift and you follow the leadership of other people watching them, but then what happens, even as I use my gift in that circumstance, in the middle of my conversation, I might notice, "Wow, they're doing a really good job of it. Oh, there's a wound there. I didn't even know that. I'm so glad you see that." Makes me a little more sensitive next time there might be a wound there.

You see, I'm learning from other believers as I use my gifts and the infinite wisdom of God in making the church this way. He does all things well. He says we just need to trust him, love him. Listen, to be a Christian, you have to submit to him. You have to stop living for yourself. You have to bow the knee to Jesus Christ and say, "Yes, I believe and I submit to You. I will follow You. I trust in Your finished work and not in my own works at all. My righteousness is filthy rags in Your sight and I trust in all that You've done. Make me like You. Let me follow You and help me now to be a servant and a faithful follower of You that I can say to others, follow me as I follow Christ." And as the body begins to do that, people begin to see, even as they get around us, when they see the gifts working, this is a great picture. Look at Ephesians 4 later this week. What you see is as people use their gifts and speak the truth and serve one another and are equipped and functioning as a unit coming together, meeting needs, invisibly the church is growing up into the full measure of the stature of Christ. That's what the church is to be. It's not just that we gather every Sunday to hear a sermon, to sing songs. No, we are a body that is supposed to look more and more like Jesus. To do that, we have to follow the leadership. Leaders, we've got to be more godly. We've got to follow Christ and follow one another. But when that happens, and that's something beautiful and glorious. May God help each one of us be about his business to see that reality.

Let's pray.

Father, we thank You for the beauty of what You've done in Christ. We thank You that our great Savior, King of kings and Lord of lords, eternal God, a humble servant, lay down His life, went to the cross and says to us, "As I have loved you, may you also love one another." Lord, help us to do that. Help us to love You so much because of how much love You poured out upon us and help us understand that to love You, the best way we can express that and gladden Your heart is by loving Your people, serving them. Make us like You, Lord Jesus. We pray this for Your glory and in Your name. Amen.