

(A Spiritual Leader) 6. Broken Through Submission

by Zac Poonen

A spiritual leader is a broken man who has learned to submit to spiritual authorities and accept public correction, allowing them to receive guidance and spiritual authority from God.

Scripture: Genesis 4:12, John 6:66-68, Acts 16:9-10, 1 Peter 5:5-6, Revelation 3:19

Topics: "Spiritual Authority", "Submission"

Description

Zac Poonen emphasizes that a true spiritual leader is a broken man, shaped through submission to authority, much like Jesus who submitted to Joseph and Mary. He explains the importance of both individual and corporate guidance within the Body of Christ, highlighting that submission to godly leaders is essential for spiritual growth and authority. Poonen warns against the dangers of unbroken pride and the necessity of accepting correction, using examples from Peter and Judas to illustrate the consequences of their responses to correction. He encourages believers to embrace humility and submission to spiritual authorities, as this is the pathway to receiving God's grace and authority. Ultimately, Poonen calls for a recognition of the difference between spiritual and ecclesiastical authority, urging believers to seek genuine spiritual leadership.

Transcript

A spiritual leader will be a broken man.

God breaks us in our early years by setting some authority over us, to whom we have to submit. It is thus that He breaks us. Even Jesus had to submit to the authority of Joseph and Mary for 30 years before God gave Him a ministry.

The law of submission is an important law in the Body of Christ. It is similar to the way that law functions in the human body.

The right hand, for example, is part of the right arm's "team" and submits to the "leadership" of the right arm. The left hand however, is not a part of this team. It submits to the left arm. In the Body of Christ too, God connects some members (like those in one local church or in one team of workers) more closely with each other than with others.

God guides us in two ways -individually and corporately.

The head can tell the right hand to move by itself, without the right arm moving at all. That is individual guidance from the head. There are many matters concerning our personal life, marriage, job, where we are going to live etc., in which we should get individual guidance from Christ our Head. We can get advice from other members of the Body, but we must get our guidance from the Lord directly.

But when the head tells the right arm to move up, the right hand moves up, along with the arm, without getting any separate guidance from the head. That is corporate guidance. The right hand cannot say at such a time that it is not going to move because it did not get any individual guidance from the head.

One doesn't need individual guidance in corporate matters. If you're connected to a particular section of Christ's Body, God will guide your leaders in such matters, and you just have to follow them. I'm referring here only to corporate matters that relate to that section of the Body that you are teamed with, and not to personal matters. If you are certain that God has joined you to a certain team, you must move along with your leaders in that team.

We see an example of this in Acts 16:9. Paul and his team (who had been placed together by God) were in Troas, when a vision appeared to Paul in which a man asked him to come to Macedonia and help them. In verse 10, we read that although Paul alone saw the vision, all in his team were convinced that God had called them to preach in Macedonia. How were they convinced of that, when none of them had received any individual guidance from God? Because they had confidence in Paul as the leader of their team. In team-matters, God doesn't have to give individual guidance to everyone in a team. He guides only the leader.

If you don't have confidence in your leader, then of course, you must leave such a team (or such a church) at once. But you should never stay in a church or a Christian organisation and become a cause of rebellion or strife there. God will never bless you if you stay in a group and rebel against its leadership - even if the leadership is wrong. Leave the group and join another. That is the best thing to do.

We must distinguish however, between ecclesiastical authorities appointed by men and spiritual authorities appointed by God. Today, many Christians are in leadership positions, not by virtue of their having been appointed by God and having fathered spiritual children and churches, like the apostle Paul, but on the basis of elections and appointments by human authorities. The diocesan bishop sends a priest to a particular parish and the General Superintendent sends a pastor to a particular church. Such people are not spiritual authorities but ecclesiastical authorities.

Spiritual authorities are appointed by God Himself. They do not impose themselves on others, like ecclesiastical authorities do. They wait for others to accept their authority voluntarily. Believers submit to such authorities, because they recognise the anointing of God on them. A spiritual leader is one who has earned the confidence of others.

Submission to a godly man will not only protect us from doing many foolish things, but will also enable us to learn a great deal of wisdom from him. He will be able to warn us about dangers that he himself has faced that we may be unaware of. So to be under spiritual authority is as safe for us, as it is for children to be under their parents.

In 1 Peter 5:5 we read that younger men should be subject to their elders, because God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble. Here is a great secret of obtaining spiritual authority from God. I've known many fine brothers who were never given spiritual authority by God, for just one reason: They never learned to be subject to anyone in their entire lives. And so their strong will was never broken.

Authority is a very dangerous thing in the hands of an unbroken man. If you're not broken first and you try to exercise authority over people you'll ruin them and you'll destroy yourself in the process too. God has to break the strength of our pride first before He can commit spiritual authority to any of us.

Even to exercise authority in a home, in a godly way, as a husband or as a father, one has to be a broken man. If you want your wife and children to be subject to you, you've got to first learn to be subject to spiritual authorities yourself. Only then will God back you up in what you do in your home.

Let me tell you of my own experience briefly. Between the ages of 20 and 30 in my life, God allowed me to be pushed down and publicly humiliated in more than one church, by elders who were jealous of my ministry. In all those instances, the Lord told me to keep my mouth shut and to submit to those elders without questioning them. And I did. I kept a good relationship with them when I was in their assemblies and even after leaving their assemblies.

In those years, I never knew what ministry God had in store for me in the future. But God was preparing me to exercise spiritual authority by breaking me over a period of many years. He broke me time and again and taught me in those years that He was in total control of everything that others did to me. The result was that many years later when God gave me spiritual authority over people, I could never exercise it like a dictator, but with compassion.

God hasn't finished with breaking me as yet. Over the past few years, God has taken me through new and unique trials that I've never experienced before. But His purpose in my life remains the same - to break me even more, so that He can commit more of His life and His authority to me.

Another way in which God breaks our strength and pride is by correcting us through our leaders. Almost all believers find it very difficult to receive correction. It's not easy for even a two-year-old child to receive correction - especially if it's given publicly.

When was the last time you joyfully accepted public correction? Have you accepted it even once in your life? If not, then it's not surprising that you lack spiritual authority.

When someone, who is over you in the Lord, corrects you, it doesn't matter if he did it in a harsh way. You must still humble yourself under the hand of God Who allowed your leader to correct you - even if you didn't deserve the correction and even if it wasn't your fault.

Jesus was publicly humiliated and falsely accused by His enemies of many things. But He never complained. And He has given us an example to follow.

Even if God allows an enemy to criticize you, just ask yourself whether there's any truth in his criticism. That's all that matters. He's actually giving you a free check-up! Don't bother about how he did the "scanning" or what the motive behind the scanning was! Such matters are unimportant. All you need to ask yourself is whether the "scan" revealed some unChristlikeness in your life.

I get a lot of criticism from people in my ministry. I know that true servants of the Lord have always been criticised and falsely accused. So I am not disturbed by criticism. I only ask the Lord to show me if there's any truth in what is said.

Our enemies often tell us more truths about ourselves than our friends do. So we should not write off all criticism as false.

If I've got a black stain on my face and an enemy points it out to me, I should be thankful to him, because he has shown me something that I couldn't have seen myself. I can then go and wash off that stain! It doesn't matter even if he said it to me with an evil motive or to humiliate me. He still helped me to cleanse myself!

This was one big difference between Peter and Judas Iscariot. When Peter told the Lord foolishly to avoid going to the cross, the Lord rebuked him sternly saying, "Get behind me, Satan". That was the strongest rebuke that Jesus ever gave any man. Even the Pharisees were only called "vipers". But Peter was called "Satan". Jesus' strongest rebukes were reserved for those who were closest to Him. He rebukes most those whom He loves the most (Rev.3:19).

Soon after that, when many disciples were getting offended with the Lord's teaching and leaving Him, the Lord asked His disciples if they too wanted to go away. It was Peter who then replied saying, "Lord to whom shall we go. You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:60, 66-68). What were the words of eternal life that Peter had heard? "Get behind me Satan"!

Do we see words of correction as words meant to lead us to eternal life?

That's how Peter saw correction and that's what made him the man he became.

There was yet another occasion when Peter accepted correction from the Lord. Peter had told the Lord at the last supper that even if all the other disciples denied the Lord, he wouldn't. The Lord immediately replied that Peter would deny Him thrice within the next 12 hours. But Peter didn't get offended with that reply. It was such a man that the Lord finally took up and made His chief apostle and spokesman on the day of Pentecost.

Because Peter humbled himself under correction, God exalted him. Having learnt from his own experience, Peter now exhorts all of us in 1 Peter.5:5,6 to humble ourselves always. We'll never lose anything by humbling ourselves. One day God will exalt us.

In contrast to Peter's attitude to correction, look at Judas Iscariot's attitude to correction. When a woman anointed Jesus with an expensive perfume, Judas said it was a waste to spend money like that, when it could have been given to the poor (John 12:5; Matt.26:10-13). Jesus corrected Judas very gently and asked him to leave the woman alone, because she had done a good work. But Judas was offended.

In the very next verse (Matt.26:14), we read that Judas went immediately to the chief priests and agreed to betray Jesus. The timing of this is very significant. Judas was hurt, because Jesus had corrected him publicly.

All that Jesus had told Judas was that his assessment of the woman's action was not correct. But that was enough to upset him. When you're not broken, one small thing will be enough to offend you.

But look at the eternal consequences of Judas' reaction. And look at the eternal results of Peter's reaction. Both of them were tested by correction - one failed, while the other passed.

Today, we're being tested in the same way.

If public correction offends us, it only proves that we're seeking the honour of men. If so, it's good to know it now, so that we can cleanse ourselves from such honour-seeking. God may have allowed such a situation to show us how much we are slaves to man's opinions. Now we can cleanse ourselves and be free.

So, let's have Peter's attitude to correction at all times - whether the Lord corrects us directly by His Spirit or through someone else. This is the pathway of eternal life for all of us. If we humble ourselves, we'll receive grace from God and He will exalt us at the right time.

Unbroken people tend to be lonely people - lonely leaders and lonely believers. They never submit to anyone. They go where they want to go and do what they want to do. Such unbroken believers can work only with those who obey them and accept everything they say. There are lots of believers like that, who flit around from church to church and from organisation to organisation, like butterflies going from flower to flower. They waste their lives, accomplishing nothing. They become wanderers like Cain, because, like Cain, they're unwilling to accept the Lord's correction (Gen.4:12).

God can never commit spiritual authority to such "loners", because He's building a Body and not a bunch of individualistic believers!

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