

We Need the Clarity that Comes from Authority

The Battle of Carentan

Paratroopers of the 101st airborne division, including Easy Company depicted in Band of Brothers, were ordered to cross an open field under machine-gun fire. This was an essential objective, to link the Utah and Omaha beachheads after the D-Day invasion.

The Charge of the Light Brigade

A miscommunication from Lord Raglan sent a British cavalry unit charging headlong into a fortified Russian artillery position. Tennyson immortalized this moment with the poem – “Theirs not to reason why, theirs but to do and die.”

An interesting parallel emerges with the Christian life. We are called to obey the human authorities God places over us. Sometimes their leadership is difficult to follow but necessary. But sometimes their leadership should not be trusted at all. How can we know? What should we do?

Authority Is Not Always Trustworthy

Realms of authority and its abuses

Abraham Kuyper famously argued for three core “spheres” of sovereignty with leadership over them:

Family	God → Parents → Children
State	God → Governing Authorities → Nation
Church	God → Elders → Congregation

But... Parents aren’t always faithful. Governing authorities can be very corrupt. Elders can be exceedingly wicked.

Issues in the church throughout history

1 Timothy 5 shows that even the early church had unrepentant leadership from time to time. Corruption in the church during the Dark Ages was rampant. (Although local Christians did much good!) Need for reformation, such as Johann Tetzel’s slogan “Every time a coin in the coffer rings, a soul from purgatory springs.” Issues continue today in various forms

Biblical examples

Eli the Priest and his wicked sons
King Saul and the succession of Judean kings such as Rehoboam, Ahaz, Manasseh, and others
The high priest Ananias
Many others could be listed

Christians Are Called to Obey Authority

Wide biblical testimony to obeying authority

Hebrews 13:17, 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13, 1 Timothy 5:17, 1 Peter 5:5, Titus 3:1

A challenging example, Acts 23:1-5

The high priest Ananias ordered Paul to be struck.

Paul said, “God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall! Are you sitting to judge me according to the law, and yet contrary to the law you order me to be struck?”

The bystanders commented, “Would you revile God’s high priest?”

Paul replied, “I did not know, brothers, that he was the high priest, for it is written, ‘You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.’” (quoted from Exodus 22:28)

So... trust leadership!

Leaders often have perspectives and information they cannot share that guide decision making. Humility involves trusting their leadership.

Application for Members and Leaders

Exceptions

False Teaching – Galatians 1:8-9 – Don’t even trust an angel if they preach contrary to the gospel.

Immorality – Exodus 1:17 – Hebrew midwives disobey Pharaoh and refuse to kill the Hebrew boys

Idolatry – Revelation 13:15 – Those who refuse to worship the beast are faithful

Evangelism – Acts 4:18-20 – Peter and John refuse to stop speaking about Jesus

What about injustice?

In the case of injustice, endure, but protest through lawful means. (Acts 16, Acts 22:25)

Trust God to remove wicked leaders. (Lev. 10:1-2, 1 Samuel 2:34, 4:11, 1 Sam. 15:23, 2 Tim 3:9)

If possible, remove yourself from ungodly leadership. (Matthew 15:14, Revelation 18:4)

For leaders

Decentralize authority. The Bible promotes a plurality of elders, not a lone leader/pastor.

Embrace the fear of God. Leaders are under authority too.

Stay humble. The best leaders are servants.

Questions for Personal Study

1. How have you been served or mistreated by the leaders in your life?
2. Do you find it easy or difficult to trust leaders? Why does God give you leaders?
3. Are there any parts of our cultural moment (America 2025) that make it harder to trust authority?
4. What does it look like for you to obey the Bible’s teaching on this matter?