

Jesus Condemned Authority Structures and Authority Figures

By Dr. David DeWitt

Jesus did not talk about a pastor. Nobody in the Bible did, because there weren't any. We made them up as a product of the cultural evolution. But Jesus did talk about what most of our pastors are—authority figures over their congregations.

But Jesus called them to Himself and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:25-28).

Jesus condemned leadership as defined by the world. The word for *Gentiles* here is *ethnos*. It's the word the Jews used for Gentiles, but it is also used generally as a word for the unbelieving world (*nations* in Matthew 28:19). So the way the world describes leaders will be those who **(1) lord it over** others and those who **(2) exercise authority over them**. And Jesus distanced Himself from any connection to this world. He said, *"My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm"* (John 18:36).

Of course, every pastor will claim he doesn't do that, and people who like their pastor will claim the same. But then, why do they have a *lord it over them, authority over them* structure with a CEO, a board of directors (called elders or deacons) with lieutenants who carry out tasks? Why does their leadership structure look like the world's pyramid of authority?

Some say, "It's an inverted pyramid with the pastor at the bottom." But all that amounts to is an excuse to keep the world's model. If you have a pyramid, then the one at the pinnacle is the authority figure, no matter what way you tip it. **And if the idea is to use the world's model with the right attitude, then why didn't Christ or the apostles do that?** Why didn't Jesus set up some familiar model of leadership, and then use it in a good way? Probably because the model itself promotes the perversion, since that's what it's designed to do.

If we establish a large or growing organization, we will likely set up a leadership model everyone is familiar with (a CEO with a board, a pyramid with a leader and middle management, a coach over a team, an officer in the military, a president, prime minister, or general security over a country). When it's a church, we call the authority figure a pastor, and everyone expects the pastor we put at the top of that model to act like everyone in the world does in that position. And the pastor himself will feel comfortable assuming that *lord it over them, authority over them* role. As he does, he will be claiming, and probably convince himself, that he is using the role to serve, bringing a new meaning to the position or the idea of an inverted pyramid.

But the reality is, when we create the position, we create the problem

Jesus not only did not form a *lord it over them, authority over them* model of any kind, He resisted being placed in that role by the people. *So Jesus, perceiving that they were intending to come and take Him by force to make Him king, withdrew again to the mountain by Himself alone* (John 6:14-15).

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