

Pyramid or Team Yoking

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One of the most damaging paradigms in the spiritual realms is that of authority. The two words used to describe the two kinds of authority is plenary (complete, full) and delegated (given, entrusted). Neither of these exact words are ever used in the New Testament, however, so we must look for the ideas rather than the words.

Then Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Mt. 28:18-20) If we look carefully at the New Testament, we find that this *all* (plenary) authority that Jesus has is only *given* (delegated) in connection with a very few concepts: casting out demons and healing sickness (Lk. 9:1) and to obey this command to make disciples who obey Christ’s commands. Nowhere in the New Testament does Christ ever give this authority to anyone to be a lord over other believers – in fact, this kind of authority usage is expressly forbidden. (Mt. 20:25-26, 1 Pet. 5:3, etc.)

The closest thing we can find to delegated authority is what Jesus calls “Nicolaitan” (Rev. 2:6, 15) The Greek word refers to those who “conquer or rule over the people” and it is a thing that Jesus *hates!* Why? Because it places someone between Himself and His beloved sheep and people and it severely limits how much of His Spirit can work and flow through the hearts and lives of His people. There is much more commonality between Jesus’ hatred for abuse of authority and His command about authority, “It shall not be so among you!” (Mt. 20:26) than in any other interpretation historically offered for the word “Nicolaitan.” “Delegated authority” is condemned by Christ because a key element of delegating is that the one possessing the original authority sends the delegate somewhere else to operate in that authority while being apart from the sender. Jesus still says, “Apart from Me, you can do nothing.” (Jn. 15:5)

There are two realms that are particularly impacted by the usage of delegated authority: 1) “church” leadership and 2) husbands and wives. In both of these instances of this “delegated authority,” which cannot be found in the New Testament unless one presupposes that it is there, one person is placed over or above others. The bishop or overseer of the denomination is considered to be above the “pastor” or priest who is considered to be over or above the local assembly. This division of clergy and laity – having someone stand in the place of Christ and God over the people – does not come from the New Testament but from the writings of Ignatius of Antioch, the first historically recorded Nicolaitan.

The “church” pushes this idea of trickle-down authority into the family. The usual “church” headship pyramid teaching is that God is above the husband, the husband is above the wife (but they’re supposed to still somehow work together), the wife is above the children. And sometimes the oldest children are put in charge of the younger. This is a significant part of the headship “theology” taught to “Christian” husbands and wives. This pyramid, which cannot be

found anywhere in the New Testament, is the usual picture used to teach husbands how to manage their own households.

But “over” and “above” aren’t the best words to use because, in the world, someone who is “over” or “above” is the master, the boss, the owner, the president, etc. That’s just not exactly or always right about a husband and wife any more than it is accurate about the “pastor” or overseer. A better picture of the people of Christ, as well as the marriage union, is that of an animal team trying to pull a plow or a wagon. God is the driver of the wagon or the plow. Among the people of Christ, the lead animal represents the leadership (the New Testament includes both elders and deacons as leadership but knows nothing of a single “pastor” lording over the congregation – except for a man named Diotrephes who resisted the work of Christ’s apostles and workers. See 3 Jn. 9) – the leadership (plural, represented by the lead animal) is teamed up with the people (also plural, represented by the second animal in the team) to bring the people of Christ into spiritual maturity and the unity of the faith. (see Eph. 4:11-13) The wagon or plow is representative of the work of the ministry and the animals are the leaders and the people who pull the wagon or plow appropriately to accomplish the purposes of God (the driver).

In the marriage union, the husband is the lead animal and the wife is the second. This analogy of an animal team, unlike the pyramid scheme, better shows that the union is not at all about an over/under chain of command because this is simply not God’s ways. Rather, the union is about getting the wagon or plow (the lives of all the people involved) to the right place at the right time and in the right way. As the team works together, the will of God for the family is accomplished through the order of godly responsibility. Because the authority pyramid is the worldly authority type with which we are most familiar, this godly responsibility *is* easily confused with the authority to command. But this responsibility is as different from worldly authority as the spirit is different from the flesh. Anyone who has worked with horses or dogs or oxen will readily recognize how appropriate this picture is, particularly when one begins to think of the children produced by the marriage union as the other animals behind the lead and second animal.

This picture holds a surprising depth for husbands and wives. Again, the animals represent the husband and the wife. One animal is the lead and the other is to follow that lead. This allows the driver to work primarily with only one animal to get the plow or wagon to go where he wants it to go. But both animals must work together according to the wishes of the driver. And this is a much better picture of how we are to be in submission to God and to the marriage union. A lead animal that wants to go its own ways is a huge problem – as is true with the second animal. While this is only a limited analogy, it is much more accurate than the pyramid authority structure that the world uses and thinks of when the word “above” is used. Using the phrase “beside one another to accomplish a common goal” is also a more appropriate and accurate description.

There are some who would object that this analogy would place the man under the control of the woman – these same people are also likely to be unable or unwilling to see that Paul’s command to everyone, “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Eph. 5:21), has any application to the marriage union whatsoever so this objection may be because these follow their flesh or have not yet opened their spiritual eyes! But all this is really just a failure to understand the analogy. It is in viewing the workings of making the marriage union practical in everyday life and still able to produce godly fruit that it is not the woman the man submits to so much as it is the yoke the man submits to. Both the man and the woman submit themselves to

the yoke, the marriage union as designed by God, whereby in obedience to God alone the husband puts her needs before his own desires and the husband shows his wife the love of Christ (Eph. 5:25-28), the wife follows and respects her husband (Eph. 5:22, 33) and both husband and wife seek to follow God's will in unanimity (Eph. 4:3) while submitting to the directions of the driver (God). The yoke belongs to God and it represents our commitment to follow only His ways: fidelity, faithfulness, honesty, openness, loyalty, etc. In practical terms, it is the husband who is given the responsibility to make the final decision – but it is also his responsibility to choose, as best he is able, to obey the will of God and not his own ideas or desires. And it is in this way that if the flesh of the husband or wife does come out in any way, neither husband nor wife needs to follow that and neither partner needs to let the other partner dominate or control their life. The control of each partner rightly belongs to God alone and if one partner or the other is pursuing any other agenda, it will become readily apparent – the fruit will show – and proper steps to curb the sin can be taken. The yoke is where both husband and wife put their flesh to death as they submit to the roles of being husband or wife by submitting to the will of the Driver who bought them with His blood. It is not the partner but God to whom we give control of our life. Putting wives under an inappropriate load of tyranny and oppression is yet another way in which the pyramid headship “theology” is skewed and is damaging and even destroying many marriages.

Single mothers are forced to assume and take up the responsibility for all the family does and has and is. Thus, single moms clearly recognize the loss of the husband as the proper agent of this responsibility and can often more clearly see God's ingenious and loving design that is for her benefit. The two animals pulling a plow or wagon analogy is simply much more accurate and in tune with God's design for married couples and families than is the over/under pyramid authority structure. The second animal follows the lead of the first animal who follows the commands of the driver but neither animal is over the other – only the driver is over the animals. As a picture of the transcendence of God, this is an accurate picture!

Of course, this analogy does have a limitation in that God does lead each person individually. Jesus still says, “My sheep hear My voice...” (Jn. 10:27) The person who does not hear His voice and is not led by Him is not His sheep and does not possess His abundant or eternal life and will be severely crippled in their ability to pull the marriage “plow” or “wagon” toward God's purposes! And even though He does speak to each one of us individually, He still leads the wife to learn her roles and not the husband's. He also trains the husband to lead the “plow” or “wagon” and He trains the wife to learn to support the work of the lead animal, the husband. God does not train the wife to be the lead animal except in situations where the husband is gone. In such cases, He is quite able to use the wife to take on the additional responsibilities as necessary.

All this is a built in function of the laws God has written on the hearts of the husband and wife. (Heb. 8:10) That is, we all know “instinctively” in our spirits that the husband is to be the head, the covering, the lead in the union of man and wife. (1 Cor. 11:3, etc.) But under the worldly pyramid picture, the marriage relations are far too often turned into manipulation and control tactics that are very much like the “church's” pyramid scheme. God does not control us in this sense or in this way, neither from the top down nor from the outside in. God liberates and grows us up internally so that we are free to choose to do His will because we love Him. (Jn. 14:23) If we were controlled into being good little “Christian” puppets, then we simply could not function in love. The shepherd who walks along behind the sheep to ensure that none are injured or lost is a good picture of how He watches over us and leads us. He doesn't control us

or beat us or force us but rather sets the direction and lets the sheep walk under His guidance and supervision and care. It is His love for the sheep that causes us to love Him and it is what keeps us in close formation and orbit around Him.

The question of bringing correction to those in sin or error also shows the deficiency of the pyramid scheme. In the pyramid structure, those who are “over” or “above” are supposed to bring correction and, quite often, are those who are immune to correction no matter how oppressive or abominable their lives are. In the New Testament, the exalted clergy simply does not exist so any brother who is sinned against has equal protection and remedy under Christ’s teachings whether the sinning brother is a leader or not. (Mt. 18:15-17) In the marriage union, both husband and wife – because they are brother and sister in Christ – have this same equal protection and remedy under Christ’s teachings. A wife whose husband is sinning against her is not bound to silence or locked under his oppressions just because she is the wife! When someone is doing damage to themselves or to others in the marriage relationship in Christ, since there is no question of “over” and “under” to deal with, correction and healing is much easier to implement.

One very real and prevalent problem with the “above” idea is that those who think themselves to be “above” the others just won’t listen to those “beneath” them even when those “below” have a real, genuine truth from God. And because they’re “above” everyone else with no one “above” them, no one gets to correct them when they’re wrong! The whole over/under thing just falls apart when you reach the top of the pyramid because Jesus isn’t really the top! This is equally true in “churches” and “apostolic” cults as it is in families.

Look at how hard it is to get “pastors” or celebrity “ministers” to submit to correction! They have put themselves at the top of their headship pyramid and they surround themselves with sycophants (yes men) who are so enamored with them (and often their ability to bring in great amounts of cash!) that they wouldn’t dare contradict the man at the top. And if some young upstart comes along, even if every word he says is true, these won’t listen to the truth because it contradicts the established status quo by which they gain their fame, fortune and/or significance. The pyramid scheme often isolates the leadership away from anyone else who could see what is wrong with how they are thinking and living. As a result, God is merciful and sends various people to get involved in their life and “ministry,” not as an authority over them but as a more experienced “animal” who can teach them better how to submit to and work within God’s “yoke.” Often these people are rejected from the “church” but in the marriage union, God sends friends, family members or counselors into the situation to bring about His health and order.

One of the errors that is made is to assume that the yoke is only about learning some “ministering” techniques or “husbanding” or “wifely” techniques. The yoke is not just about “surface tools” but rather it is all about being submitted to God in the innermost depths of our being and then being spiritually interactive with one another. Spiritual leadership is all about imparting to others what the grace and unity of God has done in one’s own life (Eph. 4:4-7, 11) The husband and wife yoke is supposed to make us one – and this in turn makes us able to be better friends and better brothers and sisters to others just as our Father/child relationship with God is supposed to also make us a better husband or wife, father or mother, brother or sister, friend or even acquaintance. It’s all interconnected and not at all compartmentalized. Compartmentalization is really a deception the devil uses to help us be more relativistic (lawless). God intends for us to be *whole!* (Mt. 5:48)

The “over” or “above” authority teaching (the pyramid authority structure) is all about the clergy having a right to be lords over the people and about husbands being over their wives in a trickle-down chain of command and it is a long-time favorite for men who want to lord over other people and over their wives. But it is error. It is one of the deceptions of the devil that far too many people have bought into and it is the source of a great deal of the oppression that the people of Christ languish under and struggle against.

Let he who has ears hear.

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