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**POWER STRUGGLES  
IN THE LOCAL CHURCH  
STUDY GUIDE**





# **POWER STRUGGLES IN THE LOCAL CHURCH**

## **SCRIPTURE READING**

### **Matthew 16:18**

Moreover, I declare that you are Peter. **I** will build **My** church upon this rock, and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.

### **Acts 20:28**

Therefore pay close attention to yourselves and to all the flock over whom **the Holy Spirit has made you overseers**. As a shepherd, look after and take care of the **Church** that God, through Jesus, purchased with His own blood.

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

- A. Many churches never realize their potential because of internal power struggles.
- B. Power struggles occur when people fail to realize that the church belongs to Jesus, not people.
- C. The majority of power struggles within the church can be eliminated with proper church structure.
- D. Departments, boards, committees, men's ministry, women's ministry, children's ministry, etc., are to be parts of the local church; they are not to be entities within the local church.
- E. A power struggle occurs when someone or some group opposes the God-ordained leadership of the church.
- F. In order to understand how to deal with and eliminate power struggles, we must first understand biblical principles and structure.

## **II. BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES AND STRUCTURE**

- A. A principle is a fixed or predetermined policy or mode of action.
- B. Structure is the way in which parts are arranged or put together to form a whole.

- C. The Bible is a book of principles and structure.
- D. From the very beginning, God demonstrated His mode of operation with structure and principles. The book of Genesis reveals that creation explicitly follows structure and principles.
- E. The structure for family authority is revealed in Genesis 3:16. God made man the authority of his wife. This structure is reiterated in I Corinthians 11:3.
- F. The structure for governmental authority is revealed in Exodus 3:10 through Exodus 4:12. This structure is an example for the church.
- G. God gave the constitution for the nation of Israel to one man, not a committee or board of men.
- H. God has never asked for people's advice; He encourages people to ask for His advice.
- I. From Revelation, chapters two and three, we learn that Jesus has one person per church whom He holds accountable for the activity of that church.

### **III. STRUCTURING THE CHURCH**

- A. Starting or planting a church should be God's idea, not man's. Churches should be conceived and birthed as a result of a God-given vision.
- B. God's name and blessing rest on what He initiates. We must be certain that we are in both the will and timing of God before planting or accepting a work for the Lord.
- C. When God lays it on someone's heart to start a church, that individual should seek the wisdom of God for properly structuring the church.
- D. Structure begins with organization. Organization flows from the top. There should be only one direct authority in the church. All other authorities are to be delegated by the direct authority.
- E. The direct authority is the overseer of the church. He is not a dictator; he is God's messenger to the church. The overseer is accountable to the Lord for the activity that occurs within the church. (Revelation 1:20)

- F. The structure of the church must be compatible to the vision of the church. Each church has a unique mission. The church should be structured to best fulfill its mission.
- G. Always remember that the church is designed to be mobile. We must go to the people. The churches in the book of Acts were actively reaching out to people with the Lord Jesus Christ. They were not building structures to entice people to come.
- H. Structure begins with recognizing the positions needed to fulfill the vision. An organizational chart is helpful in laying out these positions and determining who answers to whom.
- I. Placing people in these various positions must be done under the direction of the Holy Spirit; otherwise, potential problems will be present from the outset.

#### **IV. GOD'S PATTERN FOR STRUCTURE**

- A. Chapters three and four of Numbers are excellent illustrations for solid operational structure.
- B. God selected Moses to be His civil representative to the nation of Israel.
- C. God selected Aaron to be His spiritual representative in the area of worship and sacrifice.
- D. Moses was directly accountable to God. Aaron was accountable to both Moses and God.
- E. Levi had three sons: Kohath; Gershon; and Merari. From the family of Kohath, Moses was chosen as the civil leader and Aaron and his descendants were chosen to be priests before God.
- F. The remaining members of the Kohath family were chosen to bear the holy vessels of the Lord.
- G. The family of Gershon was responsible for the curtains and hangings of the tabernacle.
- H. The family of Merari was responsible for the framework of the tabernacle.

- I. Although the aforementioned are all from the tribe of Levi, it is obvious that they did not all have the same duties or responsibilities.
- J. Korah, who was a Kohathite, was not content to operate in his God-ordained position; consequently, he challenged God's ordained authority. (Numbers 16:1-33)
- K. When authority is challenged, it must be reestablished.
  - 1. When Korah challenged Moses' authority, Moses did not contend for his position; he referred Korah to the One Who gave him the position.
  - 2. Authority is not up for debate. If one is truly placed in a position by God, he will not be afraid to let God reiterate His appointment.
  - 3. Insecurity challenges and contends; confidence rests in its appointment.
- L. Authority must submit to the will of God; it must not yield to the desires of the people.

## **V. PROBLEMS IN THE LOCAL CHURCH**

- A. Democratic rule within a church is disastrous to the welfare and vision of the church.
- B. Most all power struggles within the church are the result of democratic government. In a democratic government, people with the most influence rule.
- C. When people are in control, God is not. When God is in control, people are not. The oversight of the church must set order in the church. Jesus must be the Head of the church; otherwise, you have only a religious organization.
- D. When setting order or dealing with problems, DO NOT attack the people causing the problems; teach them. Act; do not react.
- E. Many problems arise within a church because people are ignorant of the Word of God. Before dealing with any problem, learn and thoroughly teach the biblical solution.

- F. When people hear the truth and rebel against it, it is the responsibility of the overseer to confront the problem in a Christ-like manner and to take appropriate action to resolve the problem.
- G. Whenever possible, salvage; whenever people are not salvageable, dismiss them. God's will and purpose for the church must be accomplished. (Titus 3:10-11)
- H. Communication is vital to the welfare of the local church. When vision and purpose are not properly communicated, people tend to think the leader has a hidden agenda.
- I. The constituency of the church is a team. The team cannot cooperate if it is not informed. Communicate!
- J. The overseer of the church is accountable for the entire operation of the church; therefore, he must properly deal with any struggles in the church.

## **VI. RESOLVING CONFLICT**

- A. Patience and a godly attitude are mandatory for resolving conflict.
- B. Always remember that what you say and do can and will be used against you. Make accurate statements and conduct yourself in a godly manner.
- C. Resolving conflicts begins with scriptural instructions.
  - 1. Teach the Bible; do not use the Bible as a weapon for retaliation.
  - 2. Present the scriptures in proper context; do not misquote or distort the scriptures.
  - 3. Present God's viewpoint, not your personal opinion.
- D. Power struggles often originate from insecure people who desire power or recognition.
- E. Insecure people are usually defensive; therefore, correct approach is critical.
- F. Accusations should be evaluated. Legitimate complaints must be recognized, admitted, and corrected.

- G. Do not defend your position; let the Lord defend it.
- H. Church problems will not go away on their own; they must be confronted with a planned course of action.
- I. When confronting church conflicts, be certain that you are led by the Spirit, not the flesh. (The weapons of our warfare are not carnal.)
- J. The purpose for confronting church conflicts is to resolve problems and to salvage people. Excommunication should be a last resort that is directed toward rebellious people who refuse to change.
- K. If conflicts arise over insignificant issues, do what is in the best interest of the church; however, never compromise God's standard of structure!
- L. Areas of potential conflict must be closely supervised.
- M. Never give authority or responsibility to potential conflict people.
- N. Overseers must oversee the entire operation of the church; otherwise, conflict is inevitable.

## **VII. COMMUNICATION OF ORGANIZATION**

- A. Organization without communication is futile.
- B. All authorities must know where their authority begins and ends and to whom they are accountable.
- C. Overlapping of authority is a problem waiting to happen.
- D. Communication can be accomplished through a policy and procedure manual, job descriptions, and verbal interaction.
- E. We strongly encourage written communication with signatures confirming that communication has occurred.
- F. The fact that instructions have been given does not ensure that the instructions were understood.
- G. Be certain that people know what you say and mean and that you know what they say and mean.

## **VIII. SUMMARY**

- A. Always remember that the church belongs to Jesus, not the people.
- B. Jesus is responsible for building His Church; we are responsible for hearing and obeying so His Church can be built.
- C. If you are in the will of God, the Holy Spirit set you as the overseer of the church. Listen to Him and you will do what is right by the people.
- D. Departments, boards, ministries, etc., are all parts of the local church; do not allow them to become entities in the church.
- E. Structure the church according to God's pattern, not man's.
- F. It is the responsibility of the overseer to recognize and resolve problems within the local church.
- G. Most problems can be resolved through proper structure, good communication, and teaching.

## **IX. CONCLUSION**

- A. Church leaders must lead the people, not follow the people.
- B. Problems do not go away; they must be faced and resolved.
- C. Act; do not react. Resolve; do not defend.
- D. Setting order in an existing church is not easy, but it is vital to the health and effectiveness of the church.
- E. Power struggles must not be tolerated; they must be eliminated.
- F. Eliminating power struggles does not always mean getting rid of people; it means getting rid of the problem.
- G. Proper structure and communication will eliminate most power struggles within the local church.
- H. We must always remember that the church is like the physical body; it consists of many members. When all the members are properly placed, the body is complete and functional.

- I. The individual members of the local church, including the staff, must complete, not compete.