

EVIL MEN IN LEADERSHIP POSITIONS

By George Battey

Q: Suppose an evil man walks up to lead a song at church. What should Christians do? Should Christians refuse to sing when this evil song-leader leads the song?

The purpose of this article is to explore the question above. The purpose of this article is not to question whether some leaders are truly bad or not. This point will be conceded at the very beginning. In other words, it will be assumed from the beginning that some men are indeed bad and are also in leadership positions.

LEADERSHIP QUALIFICATIONS

God has always had leaders for His people. God has always had qualifications for men to be appointed to leadership positions. *“Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful”* (1 Cor 4:2). When the problem of neglected widows arose in the early church, here was the proposed solution: *“Seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business”* (Acts 6:3). Three qualifications were given here for the appointed men. The elders and deacons appointed in the church had many qualifications they had to meet before they could be appointed to their positions of leadership (1 Tim 3:1-13). The 1 Tim 3 passage shows that even the wives and children of the elders and deacons had to pass certain qualifications before the men could be appointed to leadership positions.

This article is not trying to diminish the fact that men must be faithful and qualified to be appointed into positions of leadership – including positions of leading songs, prayers and teaching.

BAD MEN

In spite of the fact that God gave qualifications, sometimes bad men are in positions of leadership. This can be attributed to one of two problems: (a) either the qualifications were completely ignored at the time these bad men were appointed to their position or (b) they became bad men after being appointed.

Think about King Saul. He was a very good man at the time he was appointed and he was appointed by God Himself. God is the one who chose Saul. But Saul turned bad. *“So Samuel said, “When you were little in your own eyes, were you not head of the tribes of Israel? And did not the LORD anoint you king over Israel? Now the LORD sent you on a mission, and said, ‘Go, and utterly destroy the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are consumed.’ Why then did you not obey the voice of the LORD? Why did you swoop down on the spoil, and do evil in the sight of the LORD?”* (1 Sam 15:17-19).

In either case, whether a man was bad from the beginning or whether he turned bad after being appointed to leadership, harm comes. *“A bad tree cannot produce good fruit”* (Mt 7:18).

THE BIBLE PATTERN

What is the Bible pattern for God’s people when a bad leader is in his position of leadership?

First, the scriptures clearly teach that bad men should be rebuked in front of everyone in the congregation where they are leaders. *“Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses. Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear”* (1 Tim 5:19-20). Since the work of elders is limited to the congregation where they were appointed (1 Pet 5:1-3; Acts 20:28), the rebuke is limited to the congregation where they lead. In other words, the *“rebuke in the presence of all”* has reference to the assembly of the congregation where they were appointed as elders.

However, God’s people sometimes find themselves in situations where they cannot rebuke the bad leader(s). Sometimes the bad men are able to continue in their evil without opposition – so it seems. What should God’s people do in such situations? What is the Bible pattern for God’s people who find themselves under the leadership of bad men who are not being removed from their leadership position? The Bible pattern is: ***Submission to the rule of the evil leader, provided the evil leader is not demanding everyone else practice evil.***

The scriptures are very clear that no leader has the right to command people to do evil. *“And they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said to them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.”* (Acts 4:18-20). *“We ought to obey God rather than men”* (Acts 5:29).

Suppose, however, that the evil men are not asking others to do wrong. Suppose the evil men are simply using their positions of leadership to serve themselves – to enrich

themselves monetarily (1 Tim 6:5) or to receive glory from men (Mt 6:1ff) or for some other carnal reason. Since they are not asking others to do wrong, the Bible pattern is: ***Submission to the rule of the evil leader.***

Let us notice the pattern:

1) **Eli's sons** (1 Sam 2:12-36; 3:10-21)

A casual reading of these chapters reveals the sons of Eli were wicked men who were in a leadership position. While it is true that some of the women of Israel may have willingly participated in evil with these wicked leaders (1 Sam 2:22), not all women did. Some faithful Israelites would speak out about the evil being done (1 Sam 2:16), but they still brought their sacrifices.

The worshippers were not in a position to remove Eli's sons from office. Yet even though the sons were wicked and abused their position, faithful Israelites were not exempt from bringing sacrifices to God. The faithful brought their sacrifices as they were told to do. They submitted to the leadership of these wicked sons. God eventually judged these wicked leaders.

2) **King Saul** (1 Sam 13-31)

Here are 537 verses of scripture dealing with an evil man in a leadership position. On one occasion this evil leader commanded his soldiers to kill the priests of God: *"Then the king said to the guards who stood about him, "Turn and kill the priests of the LORD, because their hand also is with David, and because they knew when he fled and did not tell it to me." But the servants of the king would not lift their hands to strike the priests of the LORD"* (1 Sam 22:17). It is never right to do evil. When a wicked leader gives a direct command that someone do evil, *"We must obey God rather than man"* (Acts 5:29).

Yet Saul did not always command his servants to do evil. David submitted himself to Saul in every way possible. *"So David went out wherever Saul sent him, and behaved wisely"* (1 Sam 18:5; see also 18:14, 15, 30). David never tried to kill Saul. On two occasions David rebuked men who would dare to lift their hand and kill Saul (1 Sam 24:6; 26:9). *"David said furthermore, "As the LORD lives, the LORD shall strike him, or his day shall come to die, or he shall go out to battle and perish. The LORD forbid that I should stretch out my hand against the Lord's anointed"* (1 Sam 26:10-11).

David did not see himself as exempt from submitting to Saul's leadership simply because Saul was wicked. If everyone takes the position that they will submit only to leaders who are good, there will be utter chaos in the world and church. Each person will have some reason to think, *"This leader is no good. I'm not submitting."* David realized this very important concept. He submitted to Saul's leadership because of the office Saul held. He honored the office, not necessarily the man in the office.

Submitting to wicked leaders does not show approval of the wicked leader's lifestyle. It merely demonstrates a person recognizes the position held by the leader and respect is being shown for the office (position). If anyone assists a wicked leader to do something evil, that would be wrong – as previously noted (Acts 5:29; 2 Jn 9-11). More about this later.

3) [Nebuchadnezzar](#) (Dan 1-4)

Here are 137 verses of scripture showing that when a bad man is in a leadership position, God's people submit to the leader, not because they think he's actually a good man, but because they respect the position he occupies. Nebuchadnezzar was a very evil man, but he was, after all, the king.

On one occasion the king commanded people to bow to an idol and to worship the idol (Dan 3:1-7). Because this was a direct command to do evil, the faithful friends of Daniel refused to obey on this occasion (Dan 3:8-30). However, it is also true that, when the king was not commanding men to do evil, Daniel and his friends submitted to the king.

Neither Daniel nor his friends were in a position to remove Nebuchadnezzar from his kingship. Since they found themselves unable to remove the king from office, their only choice was to submit to the king's commands, provided those commands were not direct commands to do evil.

4) [Civil Rulers](#) (Rom 13:1-7)

This passage in the NT agrees with the previous OT examples. Nero Caesar was the civil ruler at the time Paul wrote. Nero had the reputation of being an idolater, a liar, a ruthless man and it is believed he may have been homosexual. If and when Nero gave direct orders to do evil, the apostles made it plain that Nero and other rulers should not be obeyed in such cases (Acts 4:19-20; 5:29). Otherwise, the civil authorities must be submitted to because of the position they occupy (Rom 13:1). No one is free to excuse themselves from submission because the civil ruler is evil.

To illustrate, some of the presidents of the United States have been immoral and dishonest men. There are many police officers and judges who are immoral and unworthy. Yet no Christian has the right to ignore rules and judgments and leadership of such men simply because they have judged them to be unworthy of leadership. To refuse submission is a direct violation of Rom 13.

5) [Paul Before The Sanhedrin](#) (Acts 23:1-5)

When Paul stood before this council of wicked men, he was struck in the mouth for speaking. Paul gave a sever rebuke to the one issuing the command (Acts 23:3). When it was pointed out to Paul that the one in charge was the high priest, Paul said, "*I did not*

know, brethren, that he was the high priest; for it is written, 'You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people'" (Acts 23:5). Paul would not have spoken like he did had he realized the position occupied by the one issuing the command. Paul did not view himself as free to disregard the leadership of the high priest simply because he was evil.

6) **Masters** (Eph 6:5-9; Col 3:22-25; 4:1; 1 Tim 6:1-2; Tit 2:9-10; 1 Pet 2:18)

In the first century slavery was practiced. Sometimes Christians found themselves as slaves to masters and the masters were not always good men. "*Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh*" (1 Pet 2:18). "*Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, **as to Christ**; not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but **as bondservants of Christ**, doing the will of God from the heart, with goodwill doing service, **as to the Lord, and not to men***" (Eph 6:5-9). This passage is particularly revealing. At least three times servants are told to do their work "*as to Christ*" or "*as bondservants of Christ*" or "*as to the Lord and not to men.*" In other words, they were to basically look past the master, who may be an evil person, and focus their attention on the Lord. In reality, the work a servant does is the Lord's work. If this is true regarding masters, servants and earthly things, how much more concerning Christians submitting to leaders who are less than they ought to be. More about this in the conclusion.

In each passage listed above, servants were never exempt from submitting to the master simply because the master was evil. When servants submit to the authority of their wicked, sinful masters, are they in some sense "fellowshipping" with the evil master in his evil deeds? Of course not. No one would think this. David was not fellowshipping in the sins of Saul when he submitted to Saul's authority. Nor was Daniel fellowshipping with Nebuchadnezzar when he submitted to the king's authority.

7) **Wives** (Eph 5:22-24, 33; Col 3:18; Tit 2:4-5; 1 Pet 3:1-2, 5-6)

Here are 11 verses demonstrating wives are to submit to their husbands' authority. The husband is in a leadership position. A woman who married a wicked man is not free to disobey or divorce for trivial causes (1 Cor 7:10-11; Mt 19:9). A wife may not argue, "I refuse to submit to my husband's authority because he has turned into a wicked person. If I submit to him, it will mean to everyone that I approve of his sins." On the contrary, 1 Pet 3:1-2 demonstrates that if a wife will humbly submit, it is possible to convert the husband to the Lord "*without a word.*" Is a wife in some way "fellowshipping" her husband's sins when she submits as she was commanded? Of course not.

8) **Children** (Eph 6:1-3; Col 3:20; 2 Tim 3:2)

Children are expected to submit to their parents. Not all parents are worthy. Not all parents are good parents. Are children free to disregard their parents' authority simply

because the parent is bad? Of course not. Or, when children submit to their parents' authority, are they in some way "fellowshipping" the error and sin in their parents' lives? The answer is no. Children are not free to disobey and disregard the authority of their parents simply because the parents are evil.

9) Evangelists baptizing converts (Jn 4:1-2)

In the above passage we read about the disciples of Jesus baptizing for Jesus. It is reasonable to suppose that Judas Iscariot was participating in baptizing people for Jesus. Judas was a thief and was not a good man (Jn 12:6). Were the people baptized by Judas lost because the man who baptized them was in reality a bad man? No. Sometimes even bad men are used by God to do good work. In the end, the bad men are lost and the good are saved.

10) Evangelists preaching (Phil 1:15-18)

Paul wrote about preachers who preached from bad motives. Their purpose was to add afflictions to the apostle Paul. These men were unworthy, Paul still rejoiced that some good was done. In the end, these wicked preachers were lost, but good was still done. These evil men filled a position of leadership and some good was done in spite of their evil ways.

SUMMARY

In summary, the Bible pattern for Christians who find themselves under the authority of wicked leaders is twofold. First, if the Christians are in a position to do so, they are to correct, rebuke and even discipline leaders who refuse to repent (1 Tim 5:19-20).

However, Christians sometimes find themselves in other congregations where they have no authority to exercise discipline (1 Pet 5:1-3). After all, the authority of elders is limited to the "*flock over which they have been made overseers*" (Acts 20:28). If elders do not have authority over other congregations, it is certain Christians who are not elders have no authority in other congregations. Hence, when Christians go to other congregations they sometimes find themselves under the leadership of bad men. If the bad leaders are giving direct instructions to do evil, they must not be obeyed (Acts 4:19-20; 5:29). Yet, if the leaders are giving orders that are not sinful within themselves, they must be submitted to. Christians are not free to pick and choose which leaders they will submit to. This leads only to chaos. It is unscriptural.

SONG LEADERS

The original question posed at the beginning of this article concerns song leaders. A song “leader” is in a leadership position. All leaders should be faithful (1 Cor 4:1), but as we have studied, very often bad men find themselves in leadership positions. If an unfaithful brother comes forward to lead a song, are Christians free to not submit to his leadership? Are Christians free to close their songbooks and refuse to sing along? Are Christians free to teach their children to do the same?

First, if the song leader is a member of our own congregation, the leaders of the congregation have authority in that congregation to exercise discipline (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet 5:1-3).

However, if the song leader is leading songs in another congregation, we have no authority to “remove him from the office” of leading songs. The Bible pattern is to submit to leadership – to look past the leader and perform the service “*as to the Lord and not to men*” (Eph 6:7). Truly any scriptural song sung in worship is to the Lord and not to any man leading the song. Christians are not free to rebel against leaders who are deemed “less than worthy” in the eyes of the worshipper. As previously stated, unless the leader is giving a direct command to do something sinful within itself, the Christian is to submit to the authority of the leader. For example, if the song leader is asking us to participate in singing an unscriptural song, we are not required to commit sin (Acts 4:19-20; 5:29).

It may not be successfully argued that, by singing along with an unfaithful song leader, we are thereby endorsing the sin he is committing in his life. Christians are not “fellowshipping” sin in the lives of civil rulers when they submit to the leadership of civil rulers. Only extreme cult leaders (e.g. David Koresh) would think that submitting to civil leaders means “fellowship.” Just as a wife is not free to rebel against an evil husband and just as children are not free to rebel against sinful parents, neither are Christians allowed to rebel against instructions of leaders in leadership positions in the church.

CONCLUSION

This article has presented the Biblical pattern for submission to leadership – even when leaders are wicked. This article is not suggesting discipline is inappropriate. It has been pointed out twice that discipline is very appropriate. The focus of this article, however, has been on those situations where discipline is impossible because a Christian finds himself in another congregation where he had no authority to administer discipline. What should be done in such cases? Should Christians refuse submission? Should Christians rebel and close their songbooks and refuse to sing along, not because the song is unscriptural, but because the leader is unworthy? Should Christians get up and march out the door when an unworthy leader gets up to speak, not because he is preaching false

doctrine, but solely because he is deemed unworthy? The answer is no. These are not appropriate responses. The Bible pattern is to submit to authority. God has not asked Christians to submit only if rulers and leaders are good. God has commanded His people to submit because of the position which leaders occupy.

I believe the scriptures given in this study sustain the premise of submission to wicked leaders. If this conclusion is wrong, and the scriptures presented do not sustain the conclusion, where is scripture authority to close the songbook and refuse to sing because a man is an unfit leader? Do we not have to have Bible authority for all we say and do (Col 3:17)? If so, what scripture or combination of scriptures either explicitly or implicitly teach Christians should refuse to sing or pray with an evil man leading the song or prayer? What scripture or combination of scriptures either explicitly or implicitly teach Christians should get up and walk out of an assembly of the church solely because the speaker is an evil man?

The above challenge is not discussing the issue of: (a) an unscriptural song being lead or (b) an unscriptural prayer being prayed or (c) false doctrine being taught. To bring up these matters is to sidetrack the issue. It is conceded that if an unscriptural song is being lead, people should not sing unscriptural songs. Or if unscriptural things are being prayed for, people should not participate in the unscriptural prayers. Or if false doctrine is being taught, people should not have to sit thru false doctrine being taught. Look carefully at the question above. The question is this: Is it scriptural to walk out of a service or refuse to sing or pray strictly and solely because the one leading is evil? Those who rebel must present scripture showing that rebellion is an appropriate response when leaders are wicked. Where is the scripture?

Remarks:

I consider your article sane, sound, and scriptural. Though not parallel, the same is true of baptism. The administrator in baptism might be an evil man, but that won't affect the candidate's baptism. (Ronny Wade, February 12, 2008)

I thought your article was excellent. (Alan Bonifay, February 10, 2008)

GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION

Five steps in God's plan of salvation:

- 1) **Hear** the word of God (Rom 10:17).
- 2) **Believe** Jesus is the Son of God (Mk 16:16).
- 3) **Repent** of sins (change from living a sinful life) (Acts 2:38).
- 4) **Confess** your faith verbally before men (Rom 10:10).
- 5) **Be baptized** (immersed) in water in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (Mt 28:19) for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38).

Mark 16:16 (NKJV)

*16 He who **believes** and is **baptized** will be saved; ...*

Acts 2:38 (NKJV)

*38 Then Peter said to them, "**Repent**, and let every one of you **be baptized** in the name of Jesus Christ **for the remission of sins**; ...*

After being baptized, one must continue to be faithful (Acts 2:42; Mt 28:20; Rev 2:10).