

**Shepherds & Sheep: A Biblical View of Leading and Following** By Jerram Barrs, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois: 1983 (16 Quotes selected by Doug Nichols)

1. Iron Fist or Moral Chaos 15
2. The Word and the Spirit 27
3. Some Danger Areas 39
4. Authority in the New Testament 59
5. The Gift of Prophecy 73
- 6 New Chains for Old 87

## **Iron Fist or Moral Chaos**

### **1. Copies of Society**

Too often we as Christians simply recycle the problems and tensions of our culture. Instead of heeding the apostle's warning, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Rom 12:2), we allow ourselves to become copies in miniature of the society in which we live. [Page 16]

### **2. No Stands on Issues**

*The Guardian* ran an article about a large, flourishing church. The reporter asked the church's representative about its stand on various moral issues, such as divorce, homosexuality and abortion. The representative replied, "We don't take stands on controversial issues." The reporter commented, "This is Christianity without commitment, faith without repentance." [Page 18]

### **3. Materialism Plagues Us**

Perhaps the grossest example of license in our culture is materialism, the headlong pursuit of money and possessions. *Things* are our culture's idol, mammon the god before whom so many people bow and to which they dedicate themselves. Shopping has become the pastime which distracts them from boredom, from thought and from facing the emptiness of their lives.

Are we different as Christians? We quite rightly stress that God has created all things good, to be enjoyed and received with thanksgiving (1 Tim 4:4; 6:17), and we point out that material prosperity may be a sign of God's blessing. But this grateful receptivity can subtly come to mirror our culture's materialism. Scripture does speak of blessing for obedience (Deut 28 and 30; Mt 6:33; Eph 6:2-3), but we cannot excuse an indolent, luxurious lifestyle on the grounds of God's blessing.

Jesus warns us against trying to be "both/and" Christians, lovers *both* of God *and* of money and possessions: "You cannot serve both God and Money" (Mt 6:24).  
[Page 20]

#### **4. Human Rules Are for Practical Reasons**

We all need some rules, some structures for orderly family or church life. However, we must never make the mistake of thinking or implying that these are of the same order as God's law. His commandments are absolute and unchanging. They must not be relaxed. "Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 5:19). In contrast, human rules are only adopted for certain practical reasons. They must therefore always be flexible so that they may be abandoned at a moment's notice if they hinder life rather than help it.  
[Page 22]

#### **5. The Holy Spirit Leads EACH Individual**

...we find in the New Testament ... commands to grow in our understanding of the truth, to pray without ceasing, to bring all of our requests to God, and always to be prepared to give an explanation for our hope (2 Tim. 3:14-17; 2 Pet. 1:12-15; Rom 15:14; 1 Thess. 5:17; Phil. 4:6; 1 Pet. 3:15). But we do not find rules about how to do these things. Christians are free to work out for themselves what is most helpful as they read Scripture, bring their requests to God and share the gospel with others. The church reminds new believers of scriptural commands and should provide examples among its members of these commands lived out in practice. But the Holy Spirit leads each individual to his own unique pattern—a pattern of prayer, Bible study and evangelism that fits his unique personality, [Page 23]

### **The Word and the Spirit**

#### **6. Be Filled**

The New Testament has, in fact, as positive an attitude to the Word and the law as it has to the Spirit. Paul writes,

Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Eph 5:18-20)

Compare the Ephesians passage with Colossians 3:16-17:

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Paul then goes on to speak about submission and service in the family, in the home and at work, just as he does also in Ephesians.

Notice how remarkably similar these two passages are. The only substantial difference between them is that the one opens with the admonition "Be filled with the Spirit," and the other with the call to "let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." One commands us to meditate on and fill our hearts with the Word of Christ, the Holy Scripture, God's law; the other commands us to be filled with the Spirit. The implication from these parallel passages is that the two commands express similar thoughts. The Word of Christ, the Scripture, is to be central in our lives if we desire to please the Spirit, to be filled with the Spirit. [Page 31]

## **7. All Centered on the Word of Christ**

We are to have all our thoughts, words and deeds controlled by and centered on the Word of Christ found in Scripture itself. [Page 32]

## **8. The Word Is Our Defense**

The New Testament teaches us that the Word of God is the weapon that the Spirit uses to direct both the church and the individual believer. To depend on the written Word is not to neglect the Spirit, but rather to use the weapon the Spirit has given for our defense and teaching. [Page 33]

## **9. The Word and the Spirit Work in Harmony**

There is no tension in the New Testament between Word and Spirit, between law and freedom; rather the two work in harmony. Why is this? Why can Scripture interchange the terms Word and Spirit, the attributes of the Word and the Spirit, and the effects of the work of the Word and the Spirit?

The simple answer is that the Spirit himself is the author of the Word and has given his commandments there for our instruction. Therefore, if we want the Spirit's liberty, any church structures we create must be subject to the guidelines

the Spirit has laid down in the written Word. The new wine of the Spirit can be contained only in the Spirit's own wineskins. [Page 34]

## **10. God Made Us to Be Like Him**

Because God is infinite, because his knowledge is complete rather than finite, he knows how we are to live, for he has made us to live in a certain way. God made us in his image to be like him and to reflect his character. His commandments point the way for us to live as his image bearers. [Pages 36-37]

## **11. God's Word Has Given Us Life and Liberty**

God is the one who is big enough to tell us what is right. So the law reflects God's holiness and prescribes what our lives ought to be like, as made to reflect his image. Jesus said that the Pharisees' yoke was heavy; they put burdens on people's shoulders which nobody could bear. But he went on to say, "My yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Mt 11:30). God's law is not restrictive; it is not a burden to us, and it will not crush our lives as human restrictions do. Rather it is directive. The law is God's Word given to show us how to live.

Because this is true, we may echo the exclamations in Psalms 1, 19 and 119, where the psalmist extols the commandments of God: "How I love your law! I meditate on it all day long" (Ps 119:97). The commandments of God are sweeter than honeycomb and finer than gold.

The Christian today ought to be able to say or sing these psalms with conviction and gladness because the law of God is given to us for our life and our liberty. Therefore James can write, "The man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it he will be blessed in what he does" (Jas 1:25). And thus Paul can say the Word of God is the sword of the Spirit (Eph 6:17). If we want forms which will give us life, we are to listen to God's Word. We are to read God's Word and see what he says we should do.

This truth is something we should delight in, for it is profound in its implications. In any area of human life-in our individual lives, in our marriages, in our families, in the society as a whole, in the church-as we obey God's commandments and conform to the structures he has given, we have liberty. Form and freedom are not opposed to each other if the form we adopt is the form that God has given. Any church structure we adopt or authority we impose in the church must be subject to the guidelines in Scripture. No matter how much we stress the liberty of the Spirit, we will lose it unless we humble ourselves before the Word. [Pages 37-38]

## **Some Danger Areas**

### **12. Open to Correction and Rebuke**

All of us are sinners -- parents and children, elders and congregation. God is the only person who never has to apologize. As sinners saved by grace we all stand equal before him, needing to confess and needing forgiveness. We may be given different positions of responsibility and authority in the home and in the body of Christ, but never does our position set us apart from our fellow human beings. We must always therefore be ready for our behavior and decisions to be questioned, discussed and criticized. We must be open to correction and rebuke. [Pages 47-48]

### **13. Look to the Interests of Others**

We are not to be like the world, lording it over one another (Lk 22:24-27; 1 Pet 5:3), seeking status for ourselves (Lk 11:43; 20:46), afraid of losing face before others. Our confidence is in Christ, not in our authority; in Christ, not in the pretense of always being right. Our authority is to be expressed in service, just as Jesus himself, at the very end of his ministry, washed his disciples' feet (Un 13). "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus" (Phil 2:3-5). This model is for the Christian leader as well as for the congregation. The humility of Christ is the leader's model. [Pages 48-49]

## **Authority in the New Testament**

### **14. Go to the Lord by Ourselves**

...those who are in a position of authority, rather than taking advantage of the respect that they hold, must be careful to restrict what they say to the application of God's Word. The elder must resist the temptation to tell other people what God's will for their lives is. Never should he become the Holy Spirit for anyone else.' No person in authority in the church has the right to think that he has superior insight into the will of God for other people, because in effect he then becomes the Lord to the other person; he becomes the Holy Spirit.

An elder or minister, of course, is responsible to counsel people, to offer advice and to warn about the possible consequences of decisions. But he must encourage people to make their own decisions before God and resist the temptation to make their choices for them, for doing so would imply that he knows God's will for their

lives better than they do. In fear and trembling, trusting the Lord, the elder is to encourage people to go to the Lord themselves. The Lord has given them the freedom to make mistakes and to learn. What seems unwise to an elder may be the Holy Spirit's means of helping a person through difficulties and toward maturity. Human authority must never be added to the authority of God's Word and the Spirit in the person's own life; it must always be subordinate to the Word of God. [Page 71]

## **The Gift of Prophecy**

### **15. We Often Err As to What God Is Saying to Us**

If we could be certain that we were speaking the very words of God when we exercise the gift of prophecy, there would be no problem. But we can have no confidence of infallibility except where the Scripture speaks. Even though we are forgiven and have fellowship with the Spirit, we still make mistakes about what God is saying to us. [Page 83]

### **16. Prophecy Will Be Words of Encouragement and Comfort**

The gift of prophecy should be encouraged. It may include predictions about the future or particular messages from the Lord (Acts 13:1-2; 1 Tim 1:18; 4:14). Generally prophecy will be words of practical encouragement and comfort which all of us should seek to exercise in wisdom. Individuals must hold themselves responsible for their exercise of the gift of prophecy. Prophecy in the church is never a word of command from God, binding on its hearers, and it must not be used as such by either the elders or others anxious to get their way. When prophecies are given, even if predictions or specific messages are included, they must be weighed and tested; and the hearers are not bound to obey them. Rather, the hearers must seek the Lord's face to confirm for themselves what God's will is for their lives, just as Paul did when he decided to do the opposite of what the prophets suggested. Finally, only Scripture is binding. Prophecy today, just as any other teaching of the Word of God, is binding only when it is exposition of what Scripture clearly says. [Pages 84-85]