

Responding to Ungodly Authority –3

We continue our study today in Responding to Ungodly Authority. We have been looking at a topic for the past two programmes that affects all of us. All of us encounter authority at some level or another – parents, government, pastors, managers and so on. Life is easier when husbands, father & mothers, pastors and bosses are loving, considerate and righteous. But what do we when faced with *ungodly authority*? What is the godly response to ungodly authority?

We've been looking at the life of David, who had to deal with extremely wicked leadership in the form of Saul. We started looking at David's response last week, and it's true that God's ways are not our ways. We saw His foundation for dealing with wicked leadership is **submission to that leadership**. It's not what we'd expect, and it rubs us the wrong way. We'd prefer to rebel, to leave, to insist on our own way, to overthrow that authority. But as we saw, God has a design for authority in this world, and He includes ungodly authority in His plan. We also saw that there is a design in submission: we submit primarily to God's authority through the human authority. Thus we can obey God in spite of their ungodly example. David understood this and practiced it. Just like we humble ourselves to be exalted, we die to live, we surrender to gain victory, so we submit to ungodly authority to effectively deal with it.

But today we wish to focus on something we touched on last week very briefly. David submitted to Saul's authority, though it was wicked and evil. However, David's submission was not one borne of fear. He was not the man who keeps quiet just to keep the peace – for that is not true submission. David practiced the second important element in dealing with ungodly authority:

II. Humble Confrontation

As human beings, we often tend to gravitate toward extremes. Extremes are easier to understand, and we don't like the uncertainty which balance often seems like. When responding to ungodly authority, people tend to go to two extremes: they either fight back in anger and total rebellion. Or they submit in a heavy heart, either in fear or in resentment, wishing to keep the peace and not make life difficult for themselves. But a godly response to ungodly authority is neither of those. It submits to the authority, as it knows human authority represents God's authority, but it doesn't cower away from challenging the decisions that authority makes.

Last week we defined it this way, borrowing from Jim Berg: we must distinguish between **the rightness of the rule** and **the right to rule**. The rightness of the rule refers to the actual decisions of the authority, the rightness, the correctness of their choices. The right to rule has to do with the actual position given by God. To challenge the right to rule is to challenge a person's God-given position, and that is rebellion. But to challenge the rightness of decisions is a different story. If done in the right spirit and the right attitude, it's a vital part of responding to ungodly authority. It is a balancing element in a leader-follower relationship that calls for the accountability of the leader to those he is leading. David knew how to do it. We read of his humble confrontation with Saul in I Samuel 24 and again in I Samuel 26. And as a bridge between those two, we find another wonderful example of a humble confrontation from the life of a lady called Abigail. Abigail had to confront David, a great leader as he was about to commit a terrible sin. She too, had to confront a

wicked and evil husband, which she did. What do we learn about humble confrontation from these people's lives?

Firstly,

I. Humble Confrontation has the right goal

We said that the primary means of dealing with ungodly authority is to submit to that authority and allow God to deal with it in His time. Now, isn't it true that when we think of confrontation, we tend to think along the lines of, "This is it! I'm going to confront him, and if he doesn't change, then that's it!", i.e. we think of confrontation as an ultimatum. We think of it as the last straw – the final demand – 'shape up or ship out!' But such an attitude is a contradiction of what we learnt last time when we studied submission. If you say, "Change or I'm out of here" you are saying others must submit to you! Your demands may be 100% correct and righteous, but it doesn't change the fact that to say, "Unless you change, I'm not listening to you anymore" is not submission. No, we have to understand that it is God who will take down the ungodly leader, not our confrontation. If we believe that it is God who sets up and takes down, then we must leave that department entirely to him, and see that our goal in confrontation is quite different. What was David's goal? Well notice his words in I Sam 24:12-13. "The LORD judge between me and thee, and the LORD avenge me of thee: but mine hand shall not be upon thee. ¹³As saith the proverb of the ancients, Wickedness proceedeth from the wicked: but mine hand shall not be upon thee."

Here David is in a position to kill Saul. He finds Saul vulnerable and alone. It is time for confrontation. But what does he do? He tells him that 'Wickedness proceedeth from the wicked'. What is he doing? He is showing Saul his sin. He is putting a mirror in front of Saul's face. Likewise Abigail. David has been treated extremely maliciously by Abigail's husband Nabal. David is riding with his men to destroy Nabal when Abigail meets them halfway. What does she say to David? 25:31 "That this shall be no grief unto thee, nor offence of heart unto my lord, either that thou hast shed blood causeless, or that my lord hath avenged himself: but when the LORD shall have dealt well with my lord, then remember thine handmaid." She shows him that he is about to 'shed blood causeless' something which will have repercussions and consequences in the future. In both cases, the confrontation was not an ultimatum **but a rescue attempt**. The goal was to show the leader their sin in hopes of restoring them to usefulness. The goal cannot be to confront them with their sin so that they change or leave, for that is an attitude of rebellion. The attitude is that God alone has the right to remove a person and that this confrontation is an attempt to rescue this person as a leader.

Every Scripture that deals with confrontation in the New Testament carries the idea of rescuing the person sinning (Galatians 6:1, I Corinthians 5:5; 2 Thes 3:14-15).

See, confrontation is not a vent for your anger or resentment. It is not a chance to 'get back' at the abusiveness of the leader, though that is extremely tempting when the leader is extremely abusive. No, the idea is to show this husband, father, pastor, manager, or any other kind of leader that their sin is real and it is damaging the people under them.

Have you ever noticed that a person who smokes does not seem to smell their own smoke? Or how a person with bad odours or breath seems unaware of their problem? So it is with sin in the life of a leader. So often leaders become so caught up in the

administration, the organization, the responsibility, the maintenance of the position, that they start to lose their sensitivity to their own sin. They end up creating their own rules and their own standards, so they have an answer for every objection to their behaviour that comes their way. They build a wall around themselves and have a seemingly good explanation for their fleshliness. They create a standard of righteousness loosely based on the Bible, primarily based on their own terms.

Proverbs 16:2: “All the ways of a man *are* clean in his own eyes; but the LORD weigheth the spirits.” Pretty soon, they have enclosed themselves in their wall of self-righteousness and cannot seem to smell their own flesh, their own evil odour. It is pungent and noticeable to you, but not to them. That is why confrontation is needed. Not to kick them out, but to show them their sin. Listen closely to Jesus’ own testimony in John 15:22: “If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloke for their sin.”

Unless you confront, the ungodly leader has a cloak for his sin. They will exist in their self-manufactured world of self-righteousness. Your goal in confrontation is a rescue attempt – to break that wall, and show the leader his sin. If for just a moment, he sees a mirror, showing a true reflection of himself, you have fulfilled your obligation. Proverbs 27:5: “Open rebuke *is* better than secret love”

II. Humble Confrontation Chooses the Right Time

Now some people miss this step and it’s a crucial one. We know that God has given us different personalities, and what a blessing that is. But if you happen to be of the impulsive, impatient type, beware. Impatient people say, “That’s it! Now is the time for our showdown! No more waiting!’ They see waiting as procrastinating, being cowardly, or putting it off. The truth is, humble confrontation waits for the best and most appropriate time for the confrontation. Don’t equate your impatience with boldness or bravery. Often it’s just foolishness. Read Proverbs 29:11, 20, 14:29 14:33. Wisdom understands the right time combined with the right words. See, David didn’t march into Saul’s throne room and say, “It’s about time we had a chat, king”. He didn’t say, “I’ve got to get this off my chest, and it can’t wait another day”. He understood the wisdom in timing. David confronted Saul when he was alone. I Samuel 24:3. Saul went into the cave by himself. David spoke to him privately. Proverbs 25:9. It is never wise to confront an ungodly leader publicly. An ungodly leader is already driven by selfish pride, self-protectiveness and insecurities. The last thing you need to do is cause them to lose face in front of others. Generally they react with a vicious turnaround, trying to humiliate you and deflect attention from themselves. Don’t think there is strength in numbers. That will give ground to the accusation that you are ganging up against him. Paul tells Timothy I Tim 5:19. “Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses.” Remember, this is a rescue mission, and you ought to do it alone. It may be later, you will take a witness, but let humble confrontation be done privately.

Second, David confronted him when he was essentially in a position to maneuver. What does this mean? Well, David had the opportunity to kill him, but didn’t. He had merely cut off a part of his robe. He was now perfectly placed to show Saul, that his motives were blameless, he had been meek, he was essentially more righteous than

Saul. Effectively, he rewarded evil with good. The time to confront evil authority is when you have been good to them by service, life and kindness. You strip the person of ammunition to say you are a divisive, combative type. You will only be in this position if you are consistently obeying God in spite of the authority, and showing unconditional love. If you show a hard, angry spirit with resentment and fury, it will be hard to find that person vulnerable, because their back will always be up. Likewise Abigail. She confronted David with food and drink for his men, essentially being unconditionally loving to men who were on their way to commit murder. It broke David's heart, just like David's goodness broke Saul's, though Saul's repentance was not long-lived.

Later, Abigail confronts her husband. She did not do it when he was having a riotous feast and was in boisterous spirits, surrounded by his friends. He told him privately the following day. He suffered an immediate stroke, by the hand of God. So humble confrontation, especially with a long-term relationship like a husband, pastor or long-time boss requires choosing the correct moment. Find them alone. Do good to their evil and choose the moment you know they will be receptive to hearing the truth about themselves.

III. Humble Confrontation Has the Right Attitude and Chooses the Right Words

We come down to the actual meeting. We have the right goal: to rescue them. We choose the right time. Now we must choose the right words and display the right attitude. Listen to David's words in I Samuel 24:8 "David also arose afterward, and went out of the cave, and cried after Saul, saying, My lord the king. And when Saul looked behind him, David stooped with his face to the earth, and bowed himself."

Firstly, David humbles himself. He is not here to score points or keep his pride intact. He bows himself to the ground. He disarms Saul by referring to himself as 'a dead dog, a flea' See, he is getting into a low place. It's hard to hit someone who is on their knees in front of you. Abigail did the same, bowing herself to the ground. The point is – your humility and non-threatening attitude must be obvious.

Second, David affirms Saul's authority. The no. 1 excuse that ungodly leaders will use to wriggle out of facing up to their sin is that you are simply a rebel who doesn't like authority. They then proceed to disregard all your statements as those of an ungodly gossip. Notice David's words, "My lord the king" v10 – 'the Lord's anointed' v11 – 'my father' Saul certainly wasn't a good king, lord or father, but David called him such. He was saying, "I believe God has set you up". His attitude was not one of, "You are a fraud and have no authority over me" It was, "you are the chosen authority". Did David know his sin? Certainly. We'll see in our last installment how David writes about Saul's sin in his many Psalms. But he was in submission, and made it obvious.

David is then in a position to highlight his harmlessness to Saul. V 9-10 He shows Saul that he had opportunity to destroy him and didn't. Really, he is highlighting his own blamelessness and harmlessness. He is further disarming Saul. Ungodly leaders will defend their position before all else, and live with almost a permanent persecution complex. One needs to show the leader that you are no threat. You are not seeking

their head, their position or their reputation. Show them it is no ultimatum, and that you are merely a mirror. Explain the purity of your motives plainly.

Then David shows him his sin. He is listening to evil men, and his own character is corrupt v12. Yet he manages to show him his sin without crowing over Saul or appearing arrogant. Remember Galatians 6:1 tells us the spirit in which to show a person their sin – ‘in meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted’. Remember you could end up doing exactly the same thing, and if you doubt it, you have a faulty view of the human heart.

Consider exactly what you will say. Write it down beforehand if necessary. If you think that this seems rehearsed and unspontaneous – consider that Proverbs 15:28 tells us, “The heart of the righteous studieth to answer: but the mouth of the wicked poureth out evil things.”

Finally, to make sure Saul does not use the excuse that this is merely a personality issue, he brings God into the equation. He calls on God to vindicate him, to judge between the two of them. Really, he is saying, “This is a bigger picture than just the two of us. God is involved. I am seeking to restore you to Him.”

Abigail followed exactly the same pattern. She humbled herself before David. She affirmed his authority as a great leader and as the future king. She took the blame for Nabal’s sin and showed her own blamelessness and harmlessness. She showed David his sin without seeming arrogant, but again from a place of humility. She also brought God in to the equation, reminding David that He was the ultimate Avenger, that he would set David up, not his own hand.

See, some think that it doesn’t matter what you say, how you say it or what you say. But the attitude of submission is precisely what may win over an ungodly leader and give your confrontation credibility and authority. For example Peter tells wives I Peter 3:1-2: “Likewise, ye wives, *be* in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; ²While they behold your chaste conversation *coupled* with fear.”

Or listen to his instruction to citizens 2:13-15: “Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; ¹⁴Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. ¹⁵For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men:” The testimony of submission and the attitude of submission is what will give you credibility and authority to confront their evil.

Confrontation is always a difficult thing. Proverbs 29:26 tells us, “Many seek the ruler’s favour; but *every* man’s judgment *cometh* from the LORD.” We like to be in the good books of authority, but God will judge us individually. Avoiding necessary confrontation is like allowing a wound to fester in a loved one. It is avoiding an operation because you can’t stand the sight of blood. It is uncomfortable. But consider what often makes it most uncomfortable is that we want to confront someone and come out with our pride intact. It just doesn’t work that way. You have to go as low as you can go, humble yourself absolutely, if you are to confront successfully. The wonderful thing about humbling yourself is that there is real happiness there, for a humble man never worries about his pride being injured.

It's a difficult call. You may say, well I've confronted already and it didn't work. David confronted Saul twice. God will give you wisdom as to where, how and how many times you are to confront. According to James, let us ask God for the necessary wisdom and he will give it.

What if they don't respond? Well, then we are left with our final response to ungodly authority, which we will look at next week. But this is not multiple choice – the call to expose sin is every Christian's responsibility. Don't expect God to do for you what He has commanded you to do yourself. Godly confrontation goes hand in hand with godly submission. However uncomfortable it may be, the rescue mission may have to be done, as God leads you. Start with godly submission, and take it from there.

Choose the right time, have the right goal – rescue, and use the right words and have the right attitude.