

## **POWER IN RELATIONSHIPS**

### ***Issues of Love and Control***

#### **Study Three**

## **POWER AND RELATIONSHIPS IN PRACTICE**

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### **NOT TO BE SERVED BUT TO SERVE**

In the previous study we saw that God's great love, exemplified and put into practice by Jesus Christ in God's mighty action of salvation through the cross, is the true power in the universe, that is to be exercised in our relationships with one another:

whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many (Mark 10:43–45).

We saw that the apostles Peter and Paul were being true to their Master's teaching and action when they said:

Do not lord it over those in your charge, but be examples to the flock (1 Pet. 5:3).

I do not mean to imply that we lord it over your faith; rather, we are workers with you for your joy, because you stand firm in the faith (2 Cor. 1:24).

With the best of intentions we can seek to exercise authority and power in relationships after this manner. But experience shows that it does not always work this way. There is something inherent in the sinful human situation that leaves any exercise of authority open to the abuse of power in relationships with people, and even tends that way.

How can our exercise of power in relationships be safeguarded to be an expression of God's love in action? We have already seen that because of the importance to us of love and relationships—for which we have been made—and because of the power differential present in most relationships, there is an inherent power present in relationships that can be used for good, or for evil. Our concern here is to help ensure that it will be used for good.

## THE AMBIVALENCE OF POWER

The historian, Lord Acton (1834–1902), is well known for his famous saying: ‘Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely’.<sup>1</sup> Part of the genius and resilience of democratic forms of government is that this tendency of sinful human beings is recognised and allowed for in the checks and balances that are set in place, and in the separation and distribution of powers among the monarchy or presidency, the executive government, the legislature, the judiciary, and the voting public, to ensure that no one person or group ever has a monopoly of power that does not have to reckon with the others.

One of the twentieth century’s most significant literary sagas, J. R. R. Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings*, addresses this very issue of preventing all power from coming into the hands of one powerful being, so that the world be not destroyed. Frodo, a humble hobbit of simple, sturdy, earth-bound stock, appears to be ideally suited to be chosen for this colossal task, as one who would be least likely to be carried away by it. But such is the burden of the responsibility he bears for others, that in the end even the heroic Frodo succumbs to the seemingly irresistible lure of taking all power to himself. Only something that occurs from outside himself prevents this from happening. Ever thereafter, in the victory of his achievement, Frodo carries a reminder of his failure, in a wound that throbs periodically.

Jesus told a parable about some tenants who worked in a vineyard that belonged to another, who acted as if it was their own, and violently resisted the rightful claims of the owner. The climax came when the owner’s son appeared on the scene:

those tenants said to one another, ‘This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours’ (Mark 12:7).

Thinking that thereby all power in the vineyard will be theirs, they kill the son. But in that very action their doom is sealed, and the vineyard is secured for the owner and those to whom he gives it.

Instances of this tendency to arrogate undue power to oneself abound in Scripture. Saul, gifted as head and shoulders above all the rest, and chosen by God to be the first king of Israel, objected that he was ‘only a Benjaminite, from the least of the tribes of Israel, and my family is the humblest of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin’ (1 Sam. 9:21). When appointed, he hid himself among the baggage (1 Sam. 10:20–24). This show of inferiority masked an angry, jealous and arrogant spirit, that foolishly took to itself powers that were not his, and issued in decisions that were rash, counterproductive, disobedient to God, and ultimately disastrous (see 1 Sam. 13:8–14; 14:24–30; 15:1–35; 18:10–11; 19:9–10; 28:3–19). David, his successor, chosen by God as ‘a man after his own heart’ (1 Sam. 13:14), was not immune from considering himself above the law, as he took for himself another man’s wife and arranged for her husband to be killed. By this David brought great shame and sorrow on himself, and rendered his own family dysfunctional (see 2 Sam. 11:1–12:14). David’s son, Solomon, given by God ‘a wise and discerning mind’ (1 Kings 3:12) to govern God’s great people, was not prevented from ‘exalting himself above other members of the community’ and going beyond God’s law by acquiring horses, wives and wealth for himself, to end up worshipping other gods (see Deut. 17:16–20; 1 Kings 10:13–11:13). His son Rehoboam, given a chance to moderate his father’s excesses, responded with yet harsher impositions, which occasioned a lasting split in his kingdom:

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<sup>1</sup> The quote comes in a letter written to bishop Mandell Crieghton dated April 1887, referring to Papal power. See <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_Dalberg-Acton](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Dalberg-Acton), 1st Baron Acton> (accessed 25th January 2008).

My little finger is thicker than my father's loins. Now, whereas my father laid on you a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke. My father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions (1 Kings 12:10–11).

Lest we think that such lapses are reserved to males, let us not forget Athaliah. A daughter of Ahab king of Israel and queen Jezebel, committed to the alternative Baal-worship, she was married to King Jehoram of Judah, who was succeeded by their son Ahaziah. When Ahaziah was killed in Jehu's purge against the house of Ahab, Athaliah as queen mother, in a desperate grab for power, 'set about to destroy all the royal family', including, presumably, all her own grandchildren. When the one who had been rescued was proclaimed king six years later, Athaliah could only see this as 'Treason! Treason!' (see 1 Kings 16:29–33; 2 Kings 8:16–29; 9:21–28; 11:1–16).

Thus, while God has said, 'there is no one besides me; I am the LORD, and there is no other' (Isa. 45:6), we have taken it upon ourselves, in various ways, to say, 'I am, and there is no one besides me' (Isa. 47:8). This is particularly true of those who are in a position to exercise power over others.

Pope Gregory the Great (540–604 AD) wrote a highly influential book 'showing what a Pastor ought to be'.<sup>2</sup> Gregory gives examples of how the exercise of power has a certain ambivalence within it. When Cornelius fell at Peter's feet and worshipped him, Peter was quick to say. 'Stand up; I too am a man' (Acts 10:26, RSV), thus emphasising his equality with Cornelius. When, however, Peter is given to discern the sin of Ananias and Sapphira, he immediately rebukes them, even to the point where they drop dead suddenly, thus demonstrating his power to judge what is evil. Similarly, while Paul says to the Corinthians that he does not 'lord it over your faith' (2 Cor. 1:24), this does not stop him from being willing if necessary to 'come to you with a stick' (1 Cor. 4:21). Such leadership requires both 'compassion justly considerate, and discipline affectionately severe':

care should be taken that a ruler show himself to his subjects as a mother in loving-kindness, and as a father in discipline. And all the time it should be seen to with anxious circumspection, that neither discipline be rigid nor loving-kindness lax.

Such 'circumspection' requires the person in power to pay careful attention to their own inner state:

let those who preside study without intermission that in proportion as their power is seen to be great externally it be kept down within themselves internally.

And in truth he orders this power well who knows how both to maintain it and to combat it.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Gregory the Great, *Liber Regulae Pastoralis (Book of Pastoral Rule)*, also known as *Liber Pastoralis Curae (Book of Pastoral Care)*, book 4. From <[www.newadvent.org/fathers/3601.htm](http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3601.htm)> (accessed 16 January 2008). Translation © 2007 by Kevin Knight. Written at the time of Gregory's appointment as bishop of Rome in 590 AD, this book was given wide provenance among bishops and rulers in Spain and Gaul. Brought to England by Augustine of Canterbury in 596 AD, it was translated or paraphrased three hundred years later into the West Saxon language at the instigation of King Alfred the Great, to be distributed to all his bishops, and until recently remained influential in alerting secular and ecclesiastical rulers to the necessity and difficulty of the exercise of power. See Preface; also Stephen Sykes, *Power and Christian Theology*, Continuum, London, 2006, p. 138. Gregory states that his purpose is to 'consider after what manner everyone should come to supreme rule; and, after arriving at it, after what manner he should live; and, living well, after what manner he should teach; and, teaching aright, with what great consideration every day he should become aware of his own infirmity; lest either humility fly from the approach, or life be at variance with the arrival, or teaching be wanting to the life, or presumption unduly exalt the teaching' (book 1: Introduction).

<sup>3</sup> Gregory, *Pastoral Rule*, book 2, chapter 6.

Stephen Sykes, in a wide-ranging study of *Power and Christian Theology*, says that the ambivalence inherent in the exercise of power needs to be consciously recognised, along with the dangers that accompany it:

In 1 Peter elders are exhorted not to domineer over those in their charge. At the same time the younger are instructed to be subjected to their elders. Here again the ambivalence of power is acknowledged. It takes very little imagination to think that the very same action could appear either an act of service to the unity of the community, or a piece of domineering presumption, depending on the standpoint from which the action was viewed.<sup>4</sup>

Sykes also draws attention to Gregory's 'insight into both the insidious mechanisms connecting the exercise of authority to conceit, and the human proclivity for self-deception'.<sup>5</sup> This means that it is quite possible for a person in power to be abusing that power at the expense of others and still not be aware or willing to acknowledge that this is the case.

## CORRECTIVE PRINCIPLES?

How are we to handle such an awesome responsibility? How are to know when it is necessary and appropriate to act in equality with compassion and loving-kindness, or with zeal against what is evil? How can we know when we are serving the good of the community, or when we are bringing undue pressure to bear? How can we be aware enough of our own needs and propensities to guard against the misuse or abuse of the power we have in other people's lives?

We can understand those who wish to remove all vestiges of power and hierarchy in the interests of affirming the equality of all. It is interesting to note, however, that attempts to do this are often accompanied by force, exerted by one group of people over another, giving rise to an inherent contradiction. In the French Revolution of 1789, 'Liberty, Equality and Fraternity' were enforced by the guillotine. We are aware of George Orwell's famous dictum in *Animal Farm*: 'All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others'—'a comment on the hypocrisy of governments that proclaim the absolute equality of their citizens but give power and privileges to a small elite'.<sup>6</sup>

We have already seen that a power differential is unavoidably present in many relationships. Some see this as a result of the fall into sin, and so claim that it is done away with in the redemption of Christ.<sup>7</sup> We have seen that a functional ordering of relationships, with power differentials that are to be exercised in love and service, can be traced in Scripture from before the fall into sin, and remain operational after redemption, and on into the new creation.<sup>8</sup> We maintain, then, that it is healthier to acknowledge that these power differentials

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<sup>4</sup> Sykes, *Power and Christian Theology*, pp. 114–115.

<sup>5</sup> Sykes, *Power and Christian Theology*, p. 59.

<sup>6</sup> See <[www.bartleby.com/59/6/allanimalsar.html](http://www.bartleby.com/59/6/allanimalsar.html)> (accessed 25th January 2008).

<sup>7</sup> It appears that Gregory saw the differential ordering of relationships as coming from the Fall: 'it is clear that nature produced all men equal; but, through variation in the order of their merits, guilt puts some below others. But the very diversity which has accrued from vice is ordered by divine judgment, so that, since all men cannot stand on an equal footing, one should be ruled by another' (*Pastoral Rule*, book 2, chapter 6).

<sup>8</sup> For instance, in the creation, the sun is to rule the day and the moon is to rule the night—very beneficent forms of rule—and the human beings are to have dominion over all the other creatures of the earth—for their good (Gen. 1:16, 26, 28; compare 2:15, 18–19). See further: Study One: 'Joint Heirs of the Grace of Life'; and Study Two: 'Power Differential'. In Jesus Parable of the pounds (Luke 19:11–27), servants are given to 'take charge of ten cities' and 'rule over five cities' in the time of the kingdom. In 1 Cor. 6:3, Paul says: 'Do you not know that we are to judge angels'—presumably in the age to come.

are present, and to modify our behaviour accordingly, rather than to attempt to deny it while still taking advantage of the differentials that are there.<sup>9</sup>

Can we then apply to all we do what Jesus said about serving, as the hallmark of the Christian exercise of power?

You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all (Mark 10: 42–44).

Can the application of this principle of service guarantee a right exercise of power, and effectively prevent its abuse? Stephen Sykes warns:

The ambivalence of power is not mitigated merely by the invocation of service as the motive for its exercise. Here we must notice the phenomenon of camouflage . . . Those who hold or are attempting to gain power are adept at sensing what are popularly regarded as respectable motives for wanting to be powerful. Within the Christian community the motif of service (*diakonia*) is so prominent a part of the basic theological interpretation of roles, that reference to it is obligatory on every occasion when powers are being conferred. Plainly, the mere statement that all the powers to be exercised are to be exercised as service by no means guarantees that what is eventually carried out will be in accordance with the divine will or even, for that matter, with the moral law. The invocation of service refers to the intention which lies behind the action. It does not describe the action itself, which might be illegal, or monstrously unjust. Nor does it bear upon how the action will be experienced or interpreted by those affected by it. The agent, moreover, could lack insight into his own motivations, with the result that what is spoken of as service in the interest of others is, in fact, self-serving. Or, indeed, while the motivation could be genuine, the consequences of the action could also be deleterious to their interests. The mere invocation of service precludes none of these possibilities.

That the exercise of authority should be disciplined by the recollection of the motif of service is a central and valuable Christian tradition. But it ought not to be possible to invoke that tradition without also being conscious of the political phenomenon of camouflage and the toils of self-deception; and with such consciousness one returns again to the ambivalence of power.<sup>10</sup>

It appears from this that all bases are filled, and we have nowhere to take comfortable refuge on our own terms, not even by the application of sound ‘principles’ that could ensure right practice.

We ask, with Paul the apostle, ‘Who is sufficient for these things?’ (2 Cor. 2:16). Paul’s answer does not reside in the application of principles, but in an action and enabling that God has done in us:

Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our competence is from God, who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant (2 Cor. 3:5–6).

This ‘competency’, which is God’s action in us and not anything we have gained for ourselves, issues in us being ‘the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing’ (2 Cor. 2:15)—Christ himself coming out in our words and actions. If ‘love is from God’ and not from ourselves (see 1 John 4:7–12), then it is not sufficient merely to be told to love. Love itself must come. And come it has, in the person and work of Jesus. When Jesus said, ‘whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all’ (Mark 10:

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<sup>9</sup> Stephen Sykes, who as a bishop has had a clear view of the church’s systems of decision making, is able to observe: ‘the opportunities for devious and covert forms of manipulation under cover of consultation and public expressions of humility, are not inconsiderable’ (*Power and Christian Theology*, p. 137)! This may not be restricted to the church alone.

<sup>10</sup> Sykes, *Power and Christian Theology*, p. 115.

43–45), he was not laying down a principle. He was saying why he had come in person. He went on to say:

For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many (Mark 10:45).

As we have seen, that giving, and our participation in it by obedient faith, is the true power of love.

## A PERSON UNDER AUTHORITY

Jesus commended the faith of a man who recognised Jesus' true relationship with the Father of all:

When he entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, appealing to him and saying, 'Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, in terrible distress.' And he said to him, 'I will come and cure him.' The centurion answered, 'Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; but only speak the word, and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, "Go," and he goes, and to another, "Come," and he comes, and to my slave, "Do this," and the slave does it.' When Jesus heard him, he was amazed and said to those who followed him, 'Truly I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith' (Matt. 8:5–10).

A cursory reading of this may conclude that the centurion's faith consisted in his belief that Jesus had the power to heal with a spoken word from a distance. This would be consistent with a view of Jesus that saw him as having direct power in himself, the way we may wish to have for ourselves. We need to pay close attention to what the centurion says. Why does he say, 'I *also* am a man under authority'? Whom else is he referring to? He is saying that in Jesus he has recognised a person in a similar position to his own: a person who does not exercise power from himself on his own, but who exercises it by virtue of being a person under the authority of another, whose power it is. The centurion was saying that Jesus could cure his servant, not because he has great power in himself to speak a healing word over a distance, but that, because Jesus was directly under the authority of the Father of all, whatever he speaks will have the force of a word spoken by the Creator of the universe, and so will be effective. This is what amazed Jesus. This relationship of Jesus with the Father was denied by the leaders of Israel (see Matt. 12:24; 21:23–27; compare John 5:18; 10:31–33), and was the grounds on which they finally executed him (Matt. 26:63–66). Yet here it is recognised and acknowledged by a Gentile centurion (compare Matt. 27:54).

The centurion had indeed seen and trusted what Jesus maintained was the heart of his own being and ministry:

Jesus answered them, 'My Father is still working, and I also am working . . . Very truly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise. The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing' (John 5:17, 19–20).

Jesus said, 'When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own, but I speak these things as the Father instructed me. And the one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to him' (John 8:28–29).

Jesus was not a person acting or speaking on his own from himself. He was always in relationship with the Father, as a person under authority, and so speaking the words and

doing the works of the Father. This active relationship of love between the Son and the Father lay at the heart of the saving action of the cross:

For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father (John 10:17–18).

I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. Rise, let us be on our way (John 14:31).

It would be a mistake, however, to see Jesus as a person under authority, to refer solely to his divinity as the Son of God. The reason Jesus went to the cross was so that the relationship that he has with the Father might be also experienced by us:

Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world . . . I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them (John 17:24, 26).

Jesus anticipated this when others objected to his aligning himself with the Father:

The Jews took up stones again to stone him. Jesus replied, ‘I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these are you going to stone me?’ The Jews answered, ‘It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you, but for blasphemy, because you, though only a human being, are making yourself God.’ Jesus answered, ‘Is it not written in your law, “I said, you are gods”? If those to whom the word of God came were called ‘gods’—and the scripture cannot be annulled—can you say that the one whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world is blaspheming because I said, “I am God’s Son”? If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me. But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father’ (John 10:31–38).

This is the very relationship that Jesus prayed would be ours as well:

As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us . . . so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me (John 17:21, 23).

This is what we have been made for as human beings in the image of God (see Eph. 1:4–5; Rom. 8:29; compare Gen. 1:26; 5:1–3). What the centurion saw, then, was not only the divine Son of God. He also saw at last the true human being—not one who says, ‘I am, and there is no one besides me’ (Isa. 47:8), but a person wholly under the very authority of God in love, and so moving in the true power of God.

## **SERVANTS OF ANOTHER BEFORE THEIR OWN LORD**

Paul makes it clear that this understanding and reality of human beings as persons under authority is to govern our relating with one another, especially from positions of power. It is not just those in authority who represent the power of God under the authority of God. Every human being—power differentials notwithstanding—is a person under the authority of God first and foremost, and is to be treated accordingly.

In Romans 14, when Paul is addressing the disputed matters of what food may be eaten and what days should be observed as special, he makes it clear that a proper response is to be determined by the reality that each person in the Christian community has a direct relationship and responsibility under the Lord, which is to be respected. The welcoming Lordship of

Christ and of God is paramount in all things. As all regard each other as belonging and responsible to the one Lord, we will be restrained from lording it over each other:

Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgment on those who eat; for God has welcomed them. Who are you to pass judgment on servants of another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall. And they will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make them stand (Rom. 14:3–4).

As each honours the Lord in what they do or refrain from doing, fully convinced in their own minds, they are to be respected in so doing. The underlying reality is enunciated clearly:

We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living (Rom. 14:7–9).

The practical conclusions follow:

Why do you pass judgment on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. For it is written,

‘As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me,  
and every tongue shall give praise to God.’

So then, each of us will be accountable to God.

Let us therefore no longer pass judgment on one another, but resolve instead never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of another (Rom. 14:10–13).

Naturally, when a fellow-believer ‘is detected in a transgression’ (Gal. 6:1), action is to be taken to restore such a one. This is the responsibility together of those ‘who have received the Spirit’, not just of the elders. It is to be done in the fullness of the gospel of repentance and the forgiveness of sins, with great care and gentleness, and with marked self-watchfulness. Jesus set out the proper approach in Matthew 18:14–20, and we see Paul implementing it in 1 Corinthians 5, 2 Corinthians 2:1–11, and 1 Timothy 5:17–22 (in the case of disciplining elders). All of this is done consciously in the presence and under the Lordship of Christ, in a way that precludes persons from taking the law into their own hands.<sup>11</sup>

Accountability under God, for both groupings, is to govern relationships between elders and younger:

Now as an elder myself and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as one who shares in the glory to be revealed, I exhort the elders among you to tend the flock of God that is in your charge, exercising the oversight, not under compulsion but willingly, as God would have you do it—not for sordid gain but eagerly. Do not lord it over those in your charge, but be examples to the flock. And when the chief shepherd appears, you will win the crown of glory that never fades away. In the same way, you who are younger must accept the authority of the elders. And all of you must clothe yourselves with humility in your dealings with one another, for

‘God opposes the proud,  
but gives grace to the humble.’

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you (1 Pet. 5:1–7).

Belonging together under the one Lord also governs relationships between masters and slaves or, as we would put it today, between employers and employees:

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<sup>11</sup> This is considered in more detail in the Monthly Ministry Study for May 2007, ‘Sin and Others—2’. The bulk of Gregory’s *Pastoral Rule* (book 3) is taken up with a wide range of different conditions of persons and how they are to be approached accordingly in each instance. It repays attentive study. In pastoral care, there is no ‘one size fits all’. Compare Isaiah 28:23–29.

Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything, not only while being watched and in order to please them, but wholeheartedly, fearing the Lord. Whatever your task, put yourselves into it, as done for the Lord and not for your masters, since you know that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward; you serve the Lord Christ. For the wrongdoer will be paid back for whatever wrong has been done, and there is no partiality.

Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly, for you know that you also have a Master in heaven (Col. 3:22–4:1).

Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as you obey Christ; not only while being watched, and in order to please them, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. Render service with enthusiasm, as to the Lord and not to men and women, knowing that whatever good we do, we will receive the same again from the Lord, whether we are slaves or free.

And, masters, do the same to them. Stop threatening them, for you know that both of you have the same Master in heaven, and with him there is no partiality (Eph. 6:5–9).

We have already looked at the subtle differentiation, mutuality and rightful ordering of the relationship between husbands and wives.<sup>12</sup> A re-reading of Ephesians 5:21–33 and Colossians 3:18–19, in the light of what we have been saying here, will highlight how they are to relate with each other through the relationship that each has with the Lord Jesus Christ: ‘as is fitting in the Lord’. Similarly, children are to relate with their parents ‘in the Lord’, and parents with their children ‘in the discipline and instruction of the Lord’ (see Col. 3:20–21; Eph. 6:1–4).<sup>13</sup>

It is not just within the Christian community that this reality operates. The Old Testament made clear that non-believing nations and their rulers, whether they acknowledged God or not, were no less under God’s authority and accountable to God (see e.g. Isa. 10:5–19; 45:1–7; Dan. 2:20–21; 4:17). This is carried over into the New Testament:

For the Lord’s sake accept the authority of every human institution, whether of the emperor as supreme, or of governors, as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right . . . As servants of God, live as free people, yet do not use your freedom as a pretext for evil. Honor everyone. Love the family of believers. Fear God. Honor the emperor (1 Pet. 2:13–14, 16–17).

See here how the rulers are to conduct themselves as sent by God with regard for those under them (compare Rom. 13:1–7), and those subject to them are to relate freely with the rulers in the fear of God ‘as servants of God’.

It has been wisely said that we should never relate directly with any other human being. We should only ever relate with another person through the Lord Jesus Christ. The presence of the Lord Jesus Christ, active among us in love, is what will keep us from lording it over one another.

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<sup>12</sup> See Study One, ‘Joint Heirs of the Grace of Life’.

<sup>13</sup> When I baptised my eldest child, I remember well being taken by surprise at a sudden given consciousness that he was now my brother in Christ before he was my son. This makes quite a difference to how parenting is practiced.