

# Authority

## The 'Real' Story on Biblical Submission

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There is a short verse near the end of Paul's first letter to believers at Corinth that provides important insight into the plan and workings of God. The verse: "*Let all things be done decently and in order*" (1 Cor. 14:40). Though this verse specifically refers to the operations of the local church, these instructions are consistent on how He runs His universe. This truth is revealed in the Old Testament in a variety of ways. "*Decently and in order*" is how God organized Israel's march through the wilderness, and how He laid out His instructions for the tabernacle, and later the temple. The Bible student, as he studies further, learns that God always advances His plans "*decently and in order.*" This instruction should also guide us as we interact with the government and in the way we interact with our employer or our employees (1 Peter 2:11-18; Eph. 6:5-9).

For any entity to operate smoothly, there must be someone in charge, someone who is given the authority to lead. There should be no surprise that God has engineered the family to operate under this same principle. For the family to operate with decency and order, there must be singular leadership, with others in the family submitting to that leadership.

***The Power Passages:*** Ephesians 5:22-25; Romans 13:1

Due to ignorance (or worse), the organized church and even Bible-influenced cultures have been through dark periods in which the idea of the wife submitting to the husband was misunderstood and often abused. The result was the women were pushed into second-class status, or seen as inferior to men. This philosophy still flourishes in some cultures, disintegrating even to abuse of women. Looking at cultures across the globe, and observing from history, a true understanding

of what the Bible teaches about the role and significance of women can always be associated with a better life for females. Cultures that are opposed to biblical Christianity, especially cultures influenced by Islam, suppress the basic rights of women. It is sadly ironic that in the West, Christianity has been tagged as anti-feminine when in fact Christianity teaches that women and girls are to be cherished, honored and protected. Men and women are equal in worth and value before our heavenly Father. Men and women, do, however, have different tasks and functions to carry out.

This chapter features three takeaways that will help us in our homes as we relate to our spouses and children.

### ***1. A submissive attitude toward authority produces a healthy society***

The year 2016 was characterized by alarming breakdowns of authority in the U.S. I watched television coverage from Memphis (which is 50 miles north of where I live) recently in which protesters had taken control of a major interstate and in effect shut down interstate traffic across the Mississippi River. Due to controversy over the application of police authority, we have seen violence between protesters and police break out in many large cities. Given a spark, most if not all major cities in our country seem to be at risk of becoming dangerous and out of control. One of the main factors is that rather than submitting to authority, many in our country are resistant and hostile to authority. Another factor contributing to this dangerous trend is the occasional failure of those in authority to exert authority wisely for the welfare of citizens and the preservation of law and order.

So what about those abuses of authority? That is a fair question. There are times when we have seen evidence of authority being handled poorly and unfairly. There are even (rare) situations when authority figures behave in a rogue and dangerous manner. Are there times when citizens should stand up and push back? These are very timely and practical questions for the Christian.

The apostle Paul dealt with similar issues as he planted churches and nurtured pastors to tend to these churches. In fact, life in imperial Rome in Paul's time was rougher than life in our nation (even at present), especially for believers in Jesus Christ. We can complain about whomever may be the President and can experience frustration about those in authority over us, but the hand that had been dealt to those in Paul's day (the emperor Nero was one of the most jaded and

evil men to lead the mighty Roman empire) was far worse. So how did the apostle handle this? What were his instructions to these early Christians? Did he tell them to fight back? To organize a rebellion? To resist?

Not at all! Here are Paul's clear instructions on the matter (specifically to believers living in the city of Rome):

*"Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation" (Rom. 13:1-2).*

The remainder of the chapter fleshes out these instructions, explaining that the government is a *"minister of God"* (v. 4) and thus deserving of our payment of taxes and customs (v. 7). The Greek word translated *"be subject"* in Romans 13:1 is seen again in Titus 3:1, where Paul instructs Titus regarding his flock: *"Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates..."* Peter is on the exact same page with Paul, as evidenced by 1 Peter 2:13: *"Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme."*

So, the Bible is clear on this matter. Believers are to submit to the rulers of this present evil age, even those leaders whom we might believe to be wackos (again, history tells the story that Nero was clearly a deranged leader). The only exception I have found in the Scriptures is when the earthly ruler issues forth an order or directive that is clearly opposed to the directives of our heavenly Father. For example, when the Jewish leaders ordered the disciples to refrain from teaching the doctrine of Jesus Christ, *"[t]hen Peter and the other disciples answered and said, 'We ought to obey God rather than men'"* (Acts 5:28-29). There are other occasions as well, as when Daniel deliberately violated the Persian emperor's ban on any worship other than worship directed to himself (the emperor's pride and hubris had led to his desire to be worshipped as a god). Daniel disobeyed authority *"and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime"* (Daniel 6:10). However, it should be noted that these exceptions are rare and occur when a ruler is blatantly blasphemous, putting the believer's testimony on the line. If believers (or members of society at large) went around willy nilly choosing not to submit, anarchy would be the result.

Our society is sick right now, because this principle of submitting to authority has been neglected. This principle may not seem to directly connect to the operation of the home and our

marriages, but, in fact, this broad Scriptural mandate to submit to authority also forms the foundation for a healthy home. Sadly, this principle is being neglected in the home as well.

## **2. The most effective way to exert authority is through love**

When I worked as a school headmaster, I enjoyed some parts of the job and struggled with other responsibilities of the job. Being responsible for discipline in a school isn't a glorious job, but it does provide a great platform from which to touch lives. When a student is "in trouble," he will give you his undivided attention when he is put on the "hot seat," which creates a great teaching moment and the opportunity for the young person to really learn something. But when a student is in serious trouble, the lessons can get very serious. Perhaps the toughest moments came when students committed a major infraction as defined by the school handbook, bringing forth the possibility of expulsion. It was emotionally wrenching to everyone involved to have to remove a student from the school that I operated, but sometimes this had to be done to protect an atmosphere of authority and order and to protect the welfare of the remaining students. But it was very difficult.

Over the time I worked in a school, I learned how to relate to students better, and how to do a better job as a disciplinarian. I learned a powerful "secret" along the way. It is this: the best way to lead students, the best way to deal with discipline, the best way to get children to pull with you toward good objectives, is to love them! That's right, the best, most powerful way to exert authority is through love. I learned that when children and teens know that they are truly loved, and that their welfare is truly important to the authority figure, the majority will get in line and follow a leader who loves them. This became my number one strategy in dealing with school discipline, and it created a very good environment in the schoolhouse. Full disclosure: it was my experience that about 90 percent of students responded to being loved by almost always behaving within the boundaries (with some even blossoming into leaders). What about the other 10 percent? Sadly, they had to be conquered by force, and be shown tough love. Again, sometimes they even had to be removed from the school. Typically, the students who behaved in this way had a completely unsettled home life and had experienced intense disruption in their families. But, even in those cases, later in life many of these individuals would filter back through my life and acknowledge that they had done wrong and would later appreciate the school's past attempts to love them and reach them. Bottom line: love is a powerful force for leadership and the exertion of authority.

Because “agape” is of God, and so very powerful, we should not be surprised that this principle is exactly what the Word of God prescribes for the home. It is the very simple-but-powerful flow of love that holds a home together. This is the core of our Ephesians 5 study. God loves His Son. God loves man that He created with a love so powerful that our sin and rebellion could not thwart His purposes. God sent His beloved Son to die for our sins, and to pay our sin-debt of death. When I accepted that gift—the gift of His Son’s death for me—God gave me the righteousness of Jesus Christ...again, it’s a gift! As a man who now possesses a new nature in Christ, I am to respond to Christ’s love by walking with Him in faith and obedience. As a husband, I am to lead my wife and my family in the spirit of this love. Not as a tyrant. Not as a power-hungry, insecure man. But I am to stand up in my home as a leader who walks in love by the power of the Holy Spirit of God. That is where it all begins. For families, this verse continues to emerge as the key: “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it” (Eph.5:25).

In this context, and only in this context, can we then understand and apply Ephesians 5:22: *“Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord.”* This is to be done by the wife voluntarily (*“submit yourselves”*), not under duress or threat. This has nothing to do with her interactions with other men, but is *“unto your own husbands.”* This rules out these male-dominated cultures in which men try to hang onto power and push all women into a subordinate status. And holding this entire teaching from Ephesians 5 and 6 together is that this concept and lifestyle is to be carried out *“as unto the Lord,”* such that the husband and wife both know their ultimate accountability is to the Lord Jesus Christ. We will see this same principle in Ephesians 6, where children are instructed to *“obey your parents in the Lord”* (v. 1), and fathers are to bring up their children in the *“nurture...of the Lord”* (v. 4). If the husband is not abiding in the Lord Jesus Christ for his source of love, the formula breaks down. If the wife is not abiding in the Lord Jesus Christ to supply her source of submission, the formula breaks down. Based on this, I would not counsel a woman to submit to a husband who is blatantly or rebelliously outside the Lord’s will and is not the lover-leader described here in Ephesians 5.

There are many voices out there telling us how to lead, how to parent, and how to do just about anything better. The Bible teaches that of all of these principles and philosophies, *“the greatest of these is love [agape]”* (1 Cor. 13:13). The catch is that this love is only available from the Lord!

In conclusion, submission to authority in the home produces a healthy home. Even better, submission to authority “in the Lord” produces a godly home.

### 3. Submission and equality are different concepts

So it's no secret that controlling men have pulled the phrase "*wives submit*" out of the context of the entire message of Ephesians 5 and 6 and used this phrase to run roughshod over their wives. But, when looking at the Bible's teaching on authority and submission, it is very important to see that submission to authority is driven by the various roles that play out in our lives. Never in the Word of God do you find the person who is instructed to submit being asked to submit because he or she is unequal or less of a person. In the matter of submission, equality is not the issue.

Consider a scenario in law enforcement, for example. If I am cruising down the state highway—and maybe cruising just a little faster than the law allows—and I look in my rear view mirror and see bright, flashing blue lights, what happens next? Do I stop my car, get out of my car, and say to the trooper: "Hey man, what's the deal? Why are you stopping me? You are a man. I'm a man. You're not any better than I am. We are equals. So, I'll tell you what I'm gonna do. I'm gonna get back in my car and drive off, and you're gonna deal with it." How would you expect that to work out for me? It would be a true statement for me to protest that, as equals, he shouldn't have jurisdiction over me. Should he?

Here is probably what plays out next. After he handcuffs me and gets me into the back of his car, the trooper will likely explain the following: "Look pal. You are right. We are equals, and I'm not any better than you. But, on this road, I have a job to do, and the state gives me jurisdiction to run things. When you accepted your driver's license, that's the system that came with it. So now you are charged with resisting arrest in addition to speeding." The state would side with the trooper, and I would be in double trouble. This is as it should be. This gives society a better shot at operating "*decently and in order*." If this so-called rule of law breaks down (and it is certainly fraying in many cities), we are in big, big trouble as a nation.

The truth is that use of authority has nothing to do with equality. Authority is instead necessary for the roles that we play as we move through life (and I would argue that these principles will move with us into eternity based on the consistency of God's character). In an orderly society—and in an orderly home—the party who submits does so voluntarily, for the sake of organization and function. The party who submits is not submitting because he or she is inferior. Those who teach or infer this are guilty of perverting the biblical truths about submission and authority.

Thus, when a wife submits to the husband as the lover-leader of the family unit, she does so voluntarily, in keeping with a role in the family to play, and not because she is less of a Christian or less of a person than the man to whom she submits. And if the man is smart, he will champion her thoughts, desires and opinions as he attempts to lead the home. My two sons have now reached ages 23 and 19. My daughter is 16. Already the boys are physically stronger than their dad, and in many areas they are mentally stronger than I. Therefore, they, too, submit to dad and mom based on principle, not inequality. In many ways, my wife and my children are superior to me, yet they, in a spirit of love, submit to me as the lover-leader. There will be more to discover on this when we move into Ephesians 6.

#### **4. The Lord Jesus Christ was submissive to the will of the Father**

If you feel a little uncomfortable with all of this talk about submission, it may be the case that you have fallen victim to the subtle lies of a prideful heart. Pride can be blatant; it can also be sneaky. Because of the sin nature that we inherited from Adam, our minds and in fact our entire beings struggle with the idea of submitting to another person or authority figure. That is pride, and we are reeking with it in the natural man. This pride infected mankind through Satan himself. When Eve yielded her mind and her will to Satan's alternate plan, and when Adam shirked his responsibility to be the lover-leader and also joined the rebellion, the poison of pride entered the human race, with devastating results playing out in our lives and playing out on our planet at this very hour. This pride can be cloaked in many disguises, so be alert.

And before any of us start pushing back or rebelling in the roles that require us to be submissive, we must consider that heartbeat of Jesus Christ's earthly life was submission to the will of His Father. The Bible teaches that the Lord Jesus voluntarily and lovingly emptied Himself of all rights and all honors that were rightfully his as the Creator, and in humility He submitted—day after day, situation after situation, to the Father. Jesus Christ reveals that the proper relation to the Father is to have no will, no rights, and no claims of our own and instead to let His will fill us for His purposes. Philippians 2 teaches this truth very clearly and powerfully. Also consider these statements from Jesus Christ:

"I can of mine own self do nothing; as I hear, I judge; and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me" (John 5:30, emphasis added).

“For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me...and this is the will of Him that sent Me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on Him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise Him up at the last day” (John 6:38, 40, emphasis added).

If we still have reservations about this business of putting the interests of others ahead of our own, or if we are chafing at the very idea of yielding to a spouse, supervisor, or police officer, then we are absolutely missing the divine program of God and are in bondage to pride. We are guilty of attempting to throw the biblical message of decency and order out of the window, and saying instead, “Let’s do this my way!” When we resist authority, we are rebelling against God Himself (again, the only exception is when the authority figure is attempting to force the believer to act in a way that contradicts the Word of God).

The freedom from this bondage of pride comes from the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. His humility and submission is available by faith for the believer, supernaturally, at each point of need in our life and in our daily walk. The walk of humility is pleasing to our Lord. The walk of humility and submission opens the door to God’s power to flow into our lives and service. As we submit when and where we are required, God deems this to be submission to Him. As we obey those in authority over us, we are to obey not as “*men pleasers*” but at the heart level “*as to the Lord, and not unto men; knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ*” (Col. 3:23b-24).

In the next lesson, we will see how this truth is to flow specifically into the home and into the lives of our children. It is critical that our children see the truths taught in this lesson, or they will have some painful battles ahead of them.