

## **Riverside Reflections – Week 7 – Submission to Authority**

Christians by nature of their relationship to God through Jesus Christ have agreed to obey His authority. This includes those parties invested with delegated authority on this earth. All authority starts with God, and from the Supreme authority we recognize delegated authority. Authority structures in human relationships are designed by God to accomplish His purposes. All people who claim the name of Christ are to be involved in submitting themselves one to another (Ephesians 5:21), which is the path to blessing (1 Peter 3:8-12).

Many problems in life can be traced back to a misunderstanding of submission to authority. We thought we could do it our way and it messed up our life. Many ruin their relationships and wreck their faith because of rebellious attitudes. Many want to equivocate on the clear teachings of the Bible regarding the nature of submission in relation to obedience. Obedience is about our *actions* toward authority, while submission is about our *attitude* toward authority. Christian submission, whether a policeman, parent, or person in charge is around or not, should be from the heart, seeking to please God and knowing that He will reward us.

Submission is required for sanctification – Romans 8:7, 13 – we do not naturally submit to God, but believers we have the ability to submit. Our flesh fights against it, but the Holy Spirit can lead us to victory over our flesh through the process of submission.

Heaven has an authority structure, with God the Father, God the Son, God the Spirit, then the archangels and other angels who all submit to those above them. Satan's kingdom has a hierarchy (Ephesians 6:12), and he and his minions war with God's children (1 Peter 5:8).

James 4:7 – Submission involves resistance to Satan. Isaiah 14:12-15 – Lack of submission is the reason for the fall of Satan. By not submitting to authority, we are in rebellion (1 Samuel 15:22-23), and this is why so many suffer so needlessly. There is tremendous freedom in submission. We are set free from the anger and bitterness of wrong actions toward us, and free to obey Jesus' command to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us (Matthew 5:44).

The world teaches us to strive for independence, but biblical submission is concerned with interdependence (Romans 12:4-5 / 1 Corinthians 12:14-27). Submission makes us a servant to others; thus submission is the surrendering of our independence. In submission we place the interests of others above our own personal interests (Romans 15:1-2 / Philippians 2:1-4), which enables us to humble our thirst for recognition.

In the eyes of the world, the greatest is the one who has no one over him. In the kingdom of God, Jesus said that whomever would be the greatest would be the servant of all (Mark 9:33-37, 10:43-44). Being a disciple of Jesus means talking up our cross by denying ourselves (Matthew 10:38-39 / Mark 8:34-35 / Luke 9:23-24 / John 12:24-25). Submission is the attitude which underlies servant leadership. When we subordinate our interests to those of the ones we lead, we die to self. In this way we become models of submission to the church (1 Peter 5:1-7).

God is the key and Christ is the model and the means for submission. In Romans 13, Paul tells us that we are to be subject to all authority because God has orchestrated it (Romans 13:1-7). In

Ephesians 5, the husband and wife relationship is patterned after the relationship of Christ and His church (Ephesians 5:21-33). In Philippians 2, the submission we are to have one to another is to imitate Christ's submission (Philippians 2:5-13). Peter also makes God the focus of submitting to governmental authority (1 Peter 2:13-17), to workplace authority (1 Peter 2:18-20), and to those who cause them suffering (1 Peter 2:21-25, 4:19). Respect for and obedience to authorities is important because it is an expression of God's authority over us.

The Bible teaches unconditional submission, but not unconditional obedience. Submission would include those times when we don't agree with those in authority over us or feel that they are wrong. Even though the Bible differentiates between submission and obedience, the only time we are not to obey is when we are told to do something that is in direct contradiction to God's written Word. That contradiction must be based on fact not feeling. Submission doesn't mean we can offer no opinion, or that those in authority don't need our opinion.

Acts 19:13-16 – You can only exercise authority to the extent that you are under authority. The policeman saying "Stop in the name of the law" says that because he is standing in the place of the law and speaking on behalf of it. To the degree that he speaks for the law, then he can enforce the law and he has authority. When he steps outside of the law, he has lost his authority even though he still says, "Stop in the name of the law." Praying "in Jesus name" is not some magical incantation, it is representative of our being under His authority. It says we come in the name of our great High Priest (Hebrews 4:14-16), on the merits of Jesus, not on our own merits. We must pray consistent with His character and His will, which is what in His name means.

**State over Citizens** – Romans 13:1-7 / Titus 3:1 / 1 Peter 2:13-17. This is a command that applies to all. God ordained the role of governments, families, and authority structures to provide order to society. All human authority is derived from God's authority. We question that when we think of the Hitler's, Stalin's, and other evil dictators of world history, but we see examples of God showing that He is sovereign over all leaders, kings and tyrants: Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus, etc. (Proverbs 21:1). Pilate is a case in point (John 19:9-11 / Acts 4:27-28).

Jesus and His disciples paid their taxes to a pagan Roman government (Matthew 22:17-22), and to a corrupt Jewish religious body. Although our Lord questioned the validity of a particular tax (Matthew 17:24-27), He taught His followers to pay the tax anyway (Romans 13:7).

Romans 13:3-4 – legitimate function of civil authority – reward good / punish evil. When a government becomes so corrupt that it fails to perform its legitimate functions, then people must try to institute a new government peaceably and the church must speak against political corruption, public sin, and tyranny.

Acts 4:18-20, 5:17-29 – When any human authority commands what God forbids or forbids what God commands, Christians must resist at that point, yet still be subject to the punishment – Christians first, citizens second, our primary obedience is to God. One can still be in submission to one's authority without always blindly obeying every command. In other words, one can submissively disobey. Daniel and his friends demonstrate submissive disobedience for us (Daniel 3:8-25). They would not submit to idolatry, but would submit for the penalty of disobeying the

king. Daniel submitted to the authorities over him in Babylon, while at the same time he maintained his submission to God (Daniel 4:1-23).

What if the authority endorses what God condemns? They don't make me do it, but they promote or allow what is morally evil, for example abortion. Christians can get involved with crisis pregnancy centers, write letters, and petition for change. What about when a government doesn't enforce laws already on the books that provide protection and justice to others? Clearly, there are times when an authority must be challenged to cease from its ungodly ways. There comes a point where the evil is too great and we must do more, when passive acceptance of an evil perpetrated on another becomes a sin. This doesn't mean bombing abortion clinics or murdering abortion doctors, but it does mean we should jaywalk and strike an attacker who is trying to mug an old lady. We might need to speed to get a person who was shot to the hospital.

When a ruler of a people is engaged in and promoting wickedness, in some cases we should be praying imprecations. In the Bible an imprecatory prayer is the prayer of a righteous man petitioning God to carry out justice by bringing punishment or destruction upon evildoers, and to let God's righteousness prevail in a situation (Psalm 10:15, 28:4, 58:6, 69:22-28, 109, 137:9, 139:19-21, etc.). The imprecatory Psalms are not personal vendettas; they were longings for God to vindicate His cause upon the earth, and to judge sin.

When David or any other biblical character prays an imprecation, the matter is left entirely with God. David might have had Saul in mind, yet he refused to take personal revenge, even when he had the opportunity. David may have prayed fiercely, but his actions were gracious and kind. Moses, the "meekest man on earth" (Numbers 12:3) prayed imprecations (Numbers 10:35). The prophet Jeremiah used imprecations (Jeremiah 11:18-23, 18:19-23). There are numerous imprecations in the New Testament also, such as that of the martyrs (Revelation 6:9-10).

If someone who has authority seems to be against us or actually is our enemy, the New Testament teaches that we are to pray for them (Matthew 5:44 / 1 Timothy 2:1-2), do good things to them (Luke 6:27 / Romans 12:20), and forgive them (Mark 11:25 – recall session 5, Luke 23:34, Acts 7:60). In light of this, we can understand that imprecatory prayers are a truth that must be held in tension, and not just for us to filter our anger through, etc. However, this is part of scripture, it is profitable (2 Timothy 3:16-17), and there is still a place for imprecation in Christianity, especially upon governments gone bad, totalitarian regimes, human rights violators, etc.. Someone who has learned the power of submission in their lives will be better able to discern what to do in these situations.

**Parents over Children** – Proverbs 6:20-21, 15:5 / Ephesians 6:1-3 / Colossians 3:20. You may be in your 20's now, but you should still honor and be interested in your parent's opinions. They know who you are and what you need and what you're about. Did you inherit infallible wisdom along with your emancipation? Parents have a responsibility as well – Ephesians 6:4 / Colossians 3:21. Some parents abuse their authority while other parents abdicate their authority: but that doesn't mean that that no parent should have authority over their children.

**Husbands over Wives** – Ephesians 5:22-24 / Colossians 3:18 / 1 Peter 3:1-6. Husbands have a responsibility as well – Ephesians 5:25 / Colossians 3:19 / 1 Peter 3:7. Christ showed us

submission and love perfectly, and it is the pattern for marriage. We submit ourselves to God and to one another by submitting to our God given roles. For the woman the question isn't, "Is he worthy?" the question is "Are you willing?" For the man the question isn't "Is she submitted?" but "Am I serving?" The man must serve his wife even when she isn't submitted, and the wife must submit to the man even when he isn't serving. The opposite of this is when both man and woman are both just looking to say no to each other. She is looking for excuses not to submit, and he is looking to avoid giving himself completely to her service. They don't respect each other, they don't respect their God given roles, and they don't actually respect God's Word. That isn't a marriage where Christ is the center and you are a couple at war with the devil; that is a miserable existence where Christ is only a figurehead and you at war with each other.

The family unit has roles that were designed by God. If we don't submit to God's design, we don't submit to God, and the devil will not be resisted (James 4:7). It's not about ability it's about authority. That authority is established upon the priority of God in our lives. It isn't about talent it's about team. It isn't about intelligence it's about order. If everyone is out of order, all your energy goes to getting everyone in line first, and the leader cannot even see if the decisions are right, he is just trying to get things in order first. Conversely, when everyone is in line and things go wrong, then he can see what needs to be changed. Submission is not about inferiority, or about women keeping their mouth shut. It is about glorifying God. When a wife doesn't submit to her husband she is failing as a disciple of Jesus Christ, not just as a wife. Submission is about honoring Christ, not a husband's talent, intellect, or decision-making skills.

Women are required to submit to their husbands entirely. That doesn't mean the man is to rule as a tyrant, or that she has no say. No, the man and the woman should be consulting one another on most everything, but in case of a tie, the man bears the responsibility and accountability for the final decision. This frees the woman; it doesn't constrain her like a shackle.

The Christian wife may believe that submitting to her husband means she must never speak in a way that seeks to correct him if he is wrong. This is not true. The biblical commands related to discipline in the church apply as much to marriage partners as to anyone else. If all of us are to submit to one another, we must somehow carry out the discipline commands in a way that does not violate the principle of submission. Submission and rebuke are not incompatible. The wife is not to submit to any other man in the same way as she does to her husband.

A woman is not required to submit if her husband asks her to sin. Now this is not simply your definition of it, but a clear biblical case. If it violates the woman's conscience she should speak up while still submitting. Of course a woman is not required to submit to one who is insane, or when they are being violently abusive, or when they are drunk or drugged up (not just because they got drunk one time, but when they are drunk and would be making an irrational decision, like, "give me the keys"). A woman is not to submit to an adulterous relationship.

**1 Corinthians 11:3-12** – God has established principles of authority, order, and accountability. In the relationship between the Father and the Son; Christ is not inferior, it is a functional subordination (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:27-28). In no case is inferiority implied with any of the examples of submission mentioned in Scripture. The head covering is a cultural matter, but the principle of submission is universal. How does this apply to us today, since in our culture head

coverings are not indicators that women are submitting to male headship? Women can demonstrate submission by their attitudes, by taking on their husband's name, by wearing a wedding ring, and by dressing in ways that are feminine and not masculine (does not mean no pants, men wore "dresses" in Deuteronomy 22:5 times).

What about 1 Corinthians 14:34-35? Clearly, from all Paul says, there are times and places in which a woman may speak and others in which she may not. 1 Timothy 2:12 makes it clear what the key is. A woman is not permitted a pastoral or governmental position over men in a New Testament church. There is no question but that a woman may be every bit as spiritual and spiritually gifted as any man. That is not the point. A submitted woman will find many opportunities to exercise her gifts (Titus 2:4 / 2 Timothy 1:5, 3:15).

In vs.11-12, Paul says that women and men are to maintain their gender roles in interdependent ways. Although the woman was made on behalf of the man, apart from women there will be no more men. Paul is reminding everyone that their gender roles are God given. Men should hold their authority under God, and women are to submit to men under God. No one is to regard themselves as autonomous. Women may pray and prophesy in the church setting, and they do not have to physically cover their heads. They must be in subjection to the authority of their husbands, and cannot assume a teaching or governing role over men in the church.

**Employers over Employees** – Ephesians 6:5-8 / Colossians 3:22-25 / 1 Timothy 6:1-2 / Titus 2:9-10 / 1 Peter 2:18-20. If you're going to be a Christian employee you must see yourself as working for Jesus Christ. The goal is to please God with what you do. In most cases these are voluntary associations, and we don't have to stay in them. They are not like slavery but the principle of submission applies. What if you're the boss? Ephesians 6:9: God says we are in this together. Don't go around threatening people. Everywhere there is a command to submit there is a command to be righteous in our dealings (Colossians 4:1).

**Church Leaders over Church Members** – Hebrews 13:17 / 1 Corinthians 16:15-16 / 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 / 1 Peter 5:5. How much authority does the pastor have over you? The practical answer is however much you grant him. God only holds the pastor responsible for warning, rebuking, teaching, sounding a clear message, and doing the things that he can do. He doesn't hold him responsible for making you do what you have to do.

When submission to one authority conflicts with submission to another, we are obliged to submit to the highest authority. The Bible teaches that Christians should relinquish our relationships if it becomes necessary to do so in order to put God first (Luke 14:20, 24). Looking for instances where you don't have to be submissive might mean you are looking for a way out of being submitted (Example: Child being told she can't ride her bike to the playground, so she walks instead). In such a case, lots of rules must be set down to cover every conceivable situation. However, if we are submissive, you only need a few guiding principles. True submission is undermined by stereotypical submission, defined by very precise rules and practices rather than a matter of the heart.

**1 Corinthians 6:1-8** – if two Christian parties can't agree between themselves, instead of going to the secular court system, they ought to submit to the church and its due process, and then be

willing to abide by their decision. Certainly there are times we have to appeal to or appear in court, to answer a charge or to testify in a criminal matter, or when we need legal clarification of different kinds of agreements. Those possibilities having been stated, the gospel truth is that submitting to God means that we also have to submit to one another.

**1 Corinthians 7:21-24** – Paul is not advocating slavery; he is saying that slavery is no barrier to being a Christian. Paul would like slaves to be free, but if they aren't they can still serve God well. Physical freedom is an implication of the gospel. When Christianity is planted into the hearts of people, emancipation will eventually happen. Titus 2:9-11 – even slaves can wear the garments of grace, and be adorned by the beauty of the gospel. 1 Timothy 1:10 – this includes the kidnapers of free men, the stealers of the slaves of other men, and slave traders. The New Testament doesn't seem to directly rail against the institution of slavery. It does speak against it, but it does not condone a societal revolution that would have turned to violence in the midst of the original spread of the gospel. Christianity does clearly teach principles that undermine it, and did end it, as is the case wherever Christianity is developed (cf. Matthew 7:12 / Philemon).

**Philippians 2:5-13** – Think about Jesus and His relationship with the Father, and you will realize that the essence of spirituality is submission. Man's nature is not submission but rebellion. Even in the Garden of Eden there really was only one thing to submit to and they wouldn't do it. We have to learn to be submissive. Let us learn from Christ. Jesus was totally submitted to the Father (Luke 22:42 / John 5:19). His destiny included investment by submission; so does ours.

Jesus submitted (vs.5) – Matthew 23:12 / James 4:10.

- To God as a son (vs.6) – Jesus 1<sup>st</sup> act of redemption was submission; without it there is no salvation. The Gospel started by the submission of Christ, it comes to us when we submit to God. John 5:17-19, 14:10 – He was still God but He did the Father's will. In the wilderness temptation (Matthew 4 / Luke 4), Satan presented "alternatives", but Jesus stayed in submission.
- To men as a servant (vs.7) – He had to be born as a baby, cleaned and fed, with all the mundane aspects of being human. He grew in stature, but still had to endure the waiting period before His ministry. Hebrews 5:8 / Matthew 20:25-28 – He was a servant leader.
- To death as a sacrifice (vs.8) – Matthew 10:28, 26:39 / Hebrews 2:10-15. He would be resurrected (Acts 2:23-33) but He submitted to the wrath of God (Isaiah 53:6-12).

Therefore...

- The Father has exalted Him (vs.9) – He was already the creator and sustainer (John 1:3 / Colossians 1:15-18 / Hebrews 1:2-3), yet now His name is magnified.
- Everyone will submit to Him (vs.10) – Matthew 28:18 / Ephesians 1:21-23 / 1 Peter 3:22.
- The Father is glorified in Him (vs.11) – 1 Corinthians 15:24-28. Jesus sought God the Father's glory just as the Holy Spirit seeks to glorify Christ (John 16:13-16).

Most people don't want to do something "beneath their dignity", but to submit to Deity is true dignity no matter what the world says. How miserable would Jesus have been if He had argued with the Father all the time instead of submitting to His will? The submission of Jesus wasn't just talk; His submission took action. Therefore, because of Christ, as we learn submission we experience His power (vs.12-13).