

RESPECT AUTHORITY • SUBMISSION TO AUTHORITY



WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW?

READ EPHESIANS 5:21-6:9

Background

In Ephesians 5:21, Paul gives the general command to submit to one another. Yet Paul is quick to qualify that this general ethic does not replace God-ordained leadership structures that actually do require a leader to govern, and that are critical to harmonious life in family, church, and community. He gives three qualifying relationships where servant leadership is required, not simply mutual submission.

Wives and Husbands

God's design for the marriage relationship is beautiful in both form and function. But, to truly see this beauty, one must understand the biblical view of submission and leadership.

Submission of the wife to the husband is "as to the Lord." This means that the foundation of a wife's submission is respect for God's design for marriage and reverence for the Lord. Thus, submission is not based on how well a husband leads, how smart he is, or how well he makes decisions. When a wife submits, she is doing it out of recognition for the Lord's authority expressed in the leadership structure that He has erected. If a wife only submitted to her husband on the qualifications and "rightness" of his leadership, then the marriage structure would become extremely unstable.

Submission does not mean a wife must agree with her husband. She must help lead by giving her own input. Yet, she must continue to lead the family by her willingness to submit to the leadership of her husband. She is also not obliged to submit if her husband's direction requires, or leads to, definite sin. This also doesn't mean submitting to an abusive relationship. Ironically, the best way to serve an abusive leader is not to enable (support) his behavior.

Complimenting the wife's submission is a radically different form of leadership—one that is modeled by the Lord in His sacrificial love for the church. Not only is it sacrificial, it is subservient. In Mark 10: 41-45, Jesus defines leadership as servanthood.

When you put both pieces together you see a beautiful design. It's very difficult to have a stalemate on family governance when the wife is willing to submit to her

WHAT'S THIS ABOUT?

As Paul writes to the Ephesian church, he is concerned for their unity and that they enjoy the greatest possible fellowship together. Submission to authority, as well as loving servant leadership, are critical to this end.

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husband's leadership, and when the husband sees his role of leader as that of a servant to his wife and family.

The study makes special note, and so should the study leader, that this authority structure does not extend to any non-marriage relationship. This authority is only delegated to the husband and its submissive response on the occasion of marriage.

Children and Parents

Likewise, the call to mutual submission does not eradicate the leadership role of parents over their children. Paul says that children must "obey" their parents. While the word "submit" would carry some of the same meaning, unlike a marriage, children are not intellectually and emotionally the equal of their parents, and so, there seems to be some distinction made by Paul's word choice.

The command that is being referred to is the command in Deuteronomy 5:16 to honor (reverence, respect) your parents. In Deuteronomy, the command is followed by the blessing "that things may go well with you." Paul is implying that there is a blessing for children in honoring their parents, although what it is remains unclear.

Fathers are told here not to exasperate their children. This seems to relate to how they use their authority. They are to use their authority to urge, prod, and encourage to godliness.

Slave and Master

While this relationship, on the surface, seems inapplicable today, slavery in first century Rome functioned drastically differently than it did in the U.S. It was more like an employer/employee relationship. Seen in this light, there is a great deal of application as we deal with authority in our lives. Respect for leadership once again is not based on the qualifications of the leader. An employee should work hard "not only to win the favor (of their employer) when their eye is on you," but even when no one is looking, because the respect and submission shown them is primarily to the Lord. One shows respect for the Lord's leadership in his life by how he treats the master the Lord has placed over him.

This kind of work, Paul says, is more concerned with the heavenly reward that will be received for loyal and faithful service, than any earthly paycheck.

As in the other two relationships, the leader (in this case, employer) is called on to see his authority as a stewardship that God has entrusted to him, that he must use graciously, and for which he will one day give an account.

This study is accompanied by an article. Take the time to read it.

WHAT IF THERE'S A PROBLEM?

There are several questions that relate to how children, who are now adults, should obey and honor their parents. This is a difficult dilemma. Children are to show their reverence for God's leadership through obeying their parents. Yet, at some juncture, a child becomes an adult in the eyes of the Lord. What happens if God at this point calls them to do something contrary to their parents' desires?

Several things are somewhat clear: First, God will never destroy His own leadership structure by leading a child to disobey his parents. Second, there is a time where a child does become an adult in the eyes of the Lord. Third, when this happens, an adult must honor God's personal leading over the leadership of the parents, or anyone else. Fourth, even at such times, the parents are to be treated with the utmost honor and respect.

This study does not attempt to answer the question, when this occurs.

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WHAT'S YOUR POINT?

First, it is critical to see how important respect for authority, submission, and loving servant leadership is to God; and to see how important it is to maintain unity within the family, and the family of God.

Second, it is critical to consider the different authority relationships you are in, and how you can better show reverence for God by your loyalty, respect, and submission to leadership.

MEMORY VERSE

Ephesians 5:21 "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ."

WHAT ARE THE ANSWERS?

1. The passage teaches that Christian submission is based on reverence for the Lord, not primarily to the one in authority.
2. Respect for the Lord and the leadership structure He has established.
3. Respect for the husband's superiority. Today, submission is not a very popular topic in this country.
4. This would create a very unstable environment. Who is to say when he is leading well? At any moment, his authority could be usurped.
5. Submission means ordering yourself under the authority of another. This doesn't mean one can't disagree or give input to decisions. It also doesn't mean the wife must submit to anything that's sinful or abusive. It simply means a willingness to support and follow her husband's leadership.
6. As a servant, who puts others' needs above his own.
7. It seems that he could have. But, perhaps men and woman were specifically made for these roles, in which case switching the roles would have negative ramifications.
8. While the word "submit" would carry some of the same meaning, unlike a marriage, children are not intellectually and emotionally the equal of their parents; and so, there seems to be some distinction made by Paul's word choice.
9. Jot down your experience.
10. See "What If There's a Problem?"
11. Reflect.
12. Communicating love and respect.
13. Take time to record your answers and then reflect on them.
14. Take time to record your answers.

RESPECT AUTHORITY • EPHESIANS 5:21-6:9

1. Read Ephesians 5:21-25. Verse 21 sets the tone for the entire section to follow. What critical lesson does it teach about submission?
2. What is the basis for a wife submitting to her husband?
 - Respect for the husband's superiority?
 - Respect for the husband's ability to lead?
 - Respect for the husband's character and godliness?
 - Respect for authority?
 - Respect for the Lord and the authority structures He has established?
 - Respect for the culture in which one lives?
3. This model of submission would have been out of place in both the first century and ours, but for different reasons. From the above list, what do you think was the common view of submission in the first century? What is the view held today?
4. What would happen if submission was based on the husband's abilities to lead?
5. What does it mean to submit? Does it mean one can't disagree? Are there any circumstances where God would not want wives to submit to their husbands?
6. Read Mark 10:41-45, and Ephesians 5:25-33. How does Jesus define the role of a true leader?

7. This passage makes clear that the authority of the husband is not grounded on his qualifications, but on the Lord's design for marriage. Could God have just as easily reversed the roles? Why or why not?

It's important to note that this authority structure does not extend to any non-marriage relationship.

Read Ephesians 6:1-4

8. Why do you think the word "obey" is used rather than "submit?"
9. In what way have you honored your parents?
10. Once a child becomes an adult, what should they do if the Lord leads them to do something contrary to the wishes of their parents? What do you think godly parents should do?
11. In this family leadership structure, God leads the child through the direction and authority of the parent. At what point or age might God begin to lead someone separately other than through the parents? What have you experienced?
12. As an adult, how can you follow God's personal leading for you, contrary to parental advice, and still honor and respect them?

Read Ephesians 6:5-9

13. In what way can we make application of this passage to an employee/employer relationship? Write down your thoughts.
14. Given God's high esteem for human authority, write down how you could be more submissive and supportive in the following relationships:
- Teachers
- Parents
- Employers
- Spiritual Leaders

Memory Verse

Ephesians 5:21 "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ."

SUBMISSION IS NOT FOR WIMPS • ERIC SILVERMAN

There are many things within Christianity that our culture would applaud. Character, honesty, deep relationships, and commitment to unity across racial boundaries, all get positive marks from non-Christians. Submission is a different story, though. If you are like most people in our culture, even the word brings a subtle but defiant clench deep in the pit of your stomach. It is a pity that the topic of submission is often discussed only in the context of marriage, because the problem in our culture is not that wives do not want to submit to husbands, but that no one wants to submit to anyone. The Bible has much to say about submission: to God (James 4:6-7), to political authorities (Romans 13:1-7), to church leadership (Heb 13:17), within marriage (Col 3:18), and even a general submissiveness of all Christians to one another (Eph 5:21).

How do Christians act in these other relationships where we are supposed to be submissive? When it comes to being submissive to church leadership, we're quite bad at it. So bad in fact, that there are now HUNDREDS of different denominations. Do we really believe that all of those splits were justified? On the personal level, how many of us are quick to switch churches because of relatively minor issues. Instead of praying for our Christian leaders, many of us spend more time complaining about them. Instead of submitting to them, we ignore or even oppose their instructions.

How do we treat those in political authority over us? The Bible is not difficult to decipher on this issue: "Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God ... Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor" (Rom 13:1,7). Remember, these words were written in a society where most people had little or no say over who their leaders were. And many of those leaders persecuted Christians. They jailed, enslaved, tortured, and killed Christians. We have freedom and safety on a level that first century Christians could barely dream of. And yet, if someone gets elected that we disagree with, many of us treat them with massive disrespect. During election season one very effective way to win is for the candidates to slander each other, to exaggerate the others flaws, and even to tell bold-faced lies. Even we as Christians tend to reward this behavior. We ought to pray more for our political leaders, and complain about them far less.

Before we go any further, it seems wise to discuss what submission is and isn't:

- Submission to human authority does not mean that we are never involved in the decision making process. In fact, respectfully communicating with our leaders about issues is an important part of the American political process.
- Submission does not mean that we follow human authority when it clearly involves sin. Just as the early disciples had to ignore the religious establishment's command to stop teaching about Jesus (Acts 6:27-32), there are times when following God requires rejecting sinful instructions by human authority.
- Submission does not mean that those who submit are less important, less intelligent, or less godly than those to whom we are told to submit. Even Jesus was submissive to the plans of God the Father, "Who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant...he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!" (Phil 2:6-9 NIV; see also Luke 22:39-44)
- Submission does mean that we have a strong tendency to defer to the judgement of the authority unless it involves obvious sin before God.

- In relationships where we are told to submit, the authority involved will have to answer to God for how they used their authority. (Hebrews 13:17)

The only absolute command to submit, is when we are commanded to submit to God “.... God is opposed to the Proud, but gives grace to the humble. Submit therefore to God...” (James 4:6-7 NASB). However, many of our lives look more like the concluding verse of Judges, “...everyone did what was right in his own eyes.” (Judges 21:25 NASB) Submission to God is the cornerstone response that is needed in all of our lives before we can meaningfully address other issues. Why would someone submit to their pastor, if they wouldn’t submit to God? How can we expect Christians to be submissive towards political authorities, if they ignore God on issues like sexuality, materialism, greed, and pride?

One widely forgotten area of submission is the general submission of all Christians to one another. “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Eph 5:21). This is not just contained within marriage relationships, but every Christian friendship or relationship of any kind ought to contain an aspect of mutual submissiveness. Simply put, we don’t always need to do things our way. We should always consider the well being and desires of other Christians in every decision that affects them or our relationship with them. This mutual submissiveness can take many different forms. Even your Pastor is called to be “submissive” in these “one another” relationships. Pastors are still called to have spiritual authority; but just as Jesus came to serve others, those in spiritual authority are called to serve, not to lord their authority over others.

Finally, we reach the topic of marriage. If all of these other teachings on submission were meaningfully embraced by Christians, the topic of submission within marriage would quickly become a much more minor issue. “Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church... Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands... Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her... Each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband” (Eph 5:22-33 NIV). The relationship between husband and wife is compared to the relationship between Christ and the church. How did Christ love the church? Christ loved the church unconditionally, sacrificially, selflessly, and He suffered to the point of death for the church. That is the example that Christianity gives for husbands. Wives are called to respectfully submit to their husband’s servant-leadership, just as the church is called to follow Christ.

We all have a lot we can learn about submission. Submission can be a very hard thing. When Jesus prayed for an alternative to the cross (Luke 22:39-44), he wanted another way so badly that he actually sweat blood. But, He chose to follow the Father’s plan even when it was hard. All of us should be incredibly grateful that He did. But while submission can be hard, the plans of our heavenly Father always have our best in mind and they result in immense blessings. As a result of Jesus’ obedience, the Bible tells us that, “Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father” (Phil 2:9-11 NIV).