

Collab #5: Submission to Authority

Review Last Week: Power, Authority & Leadership

Authority is not a human idea, but part of God's character and how He functions within the Trinity. Authority addresses function, not equality or worth of each Person of the Trinity. God's authority is expressed through servant leadership, generates power for others rather than keeping it all to Himself, and is expressed through structure. Servant leaders reflect Jesus when they lead out of a burden to know God, affirm others, model good character, gently confront, constantly communicate, and lead with stability.



DISCUSSION:

What movie/film comes to mind when you think of “sticking it to the man”, rebelling against authority, or fighting for what’s right?

Our view of submission to authority is often influenced by personal experience and culture. In our currently cultural moment, the concept of submission to authority is seen as immoral, oppressive, and stifling life.

Why would we submit to someone we don't agree with, someone who doesn't understand our individual/group experience?

What do we do if submitting to someone with more power means they use that power to hurt/oppress us?

We need to be aware of how complex and far reaching the discussion on submission is. We won't be able to explore many of these far-reaching implications. So we're going to focus on God's framework for a healthy relationship of authority and submission.

What is submission? How could we define it?

We shouldn't define it like Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu.

Power is directed at bringing the other into submission through joint locks and holds. The other person taps out when submitted, when they relinquish that the other has more power than them. There is a winner and loser. That's not a great image for God's design of authority and submission.



Godly submission is an act of free will where a person voluntarily limits what they would naturally do in order to willingly line up under another's authority. (definition adopted from Abolition Now: The Resource Website of Adorned in Grace).

Submission has to do with function, not value as a person. Submission does not automatically equal oppression. Because God has revealed Himself as Equal in Person (all three members of the Trinity being equally God), but "ordered" Himself functionally according to an authority structure (the Father sends the Son, etc.) submission to authority is one of the foundational issues of life (and ministry) which the Scriptures constantly address.

The great failure of the first Adam was in the lack of humble trust that led to rebellion against God's authority (Genesis 3). The great triumph of the Second Adam, Christ, was precisely the opposite:

"Then I said, 'Here I am –it is written about me in the scroll—I have come to do your will, O God.'"

Hebrews 10:7

In God's created order, submission is GOOD because authority is GOOD.

God reveals the whole structure of the use of authority and submission to authority as “good” (Genesis 1:31). Since we are made in God’s image, the issues of unity and diversity (God is Three and God is One / Humanity is Male and Female), and the issues of equality, authority and submission to authority are an inescapable part of reality. And so without hesitation, the Scriptures constantly call us to issues of submission-



First to God Himself - Exodus 20 (The Ten Commandments), and then in the four major spheres of life:

The Family -- Ephesians 5:21-6:2

The State -- Romans 13:1-10

The Market -- I Peter 2:13-18

The Church -- Hebrews 13:17, Ephesians 4:7-13

It is impossible to exist in life and relate on any level without authority/submission issues constantly emerging. Even in “mutual submission” (Ephesians 5:21-22), in the end someone will be submitting to someone else.

Why do we not trust the concept of submission?

Because of sin, leaders and authorities will ALWAYS be flawed. The abuse of authority in any of these relationships is oppressive and destructive. Frequently, those in authority defend and excuse themselves or focus on the need for those under their authority to “submit” rather than addressing flaws in their leadership.

The worst case scenarios are oppressive governments that inflict systemic injustice (the Taliban, American slavery), oppressive spouses or parents who abuse emotionally and or physically, employers who withhold just wages or gain wealth off of excessive labor practices, or church leaders who morally bind people to man-made rules or in other ways abuse their positions of moral leadership.

The dilemma we often face is what to do with the flawed leadership. Some issues are not difficult: serious spousal abuse – leave the situation; misuse of government authority – seek to change the system; unjust employer –quit and get another job; oppressive church leadership – leave or replace the pastor.

However, two considerations that often create tension:

1)What if we aren't able to remove ourselves from, or change the situation? A government we must live with (Congo, China, American slavery), or a job we can't quit, etc.

2)What about flaws, sins and weaknesses that don't measure up to the level of changing the authority structure, but still result in undesirable consequences- a depressed or angry spouse; an overbearing employer; a government whose policies we disagree with; a church leader who doesn't seem to see crucial issues in the same way we see them?

Poor Submission:

Satan and his appeal to our "flesh" have an answer: the appeal here is strong and has been fundamentally the same since the Garden of Eden - if God calls us to submission in such circumstances it would be harsh, and justifiable to rebel. Submission basically means putting ourselves under the control of a flawed leader and mindlessly submitting to their authority, which is going to lead to a total loss of freedom.

Rationale for a lack of submission:

- a. "If I do what he/she says, I'll be trapped"
- b. "If I do what he/she says, others will be trapped and/or crushed"
-money wasted, years of labor undone
- c. "His/her decisions are based on sinful principles and will ultimately lead to destruction."

Which one of these are you feeling right now? Circle it.

Surface Sins Related to Refusing to Submit:

1. *Not submitting and knowing you're not submitting (Rebellion)*

This person usually won't submit to any authority they are not in full agreement with. The most positive about this kind of person is that they and everyone else know where they stand and what to expect.

2. *Not submitting but unaware you're not submitting* (Passive-aggressive rebellion)



This person can be much more frustrating to deal with. It's a form of passive-aggressive behavior that even people who aren't normally that way, can slip into. It comes from an unwillingness to acknowledge the difficulties of the situation and yet fully embrace the liberty of honoring and submitting to leadership in a way that trusts God to keep his word. Ex: general sloppiness about work, lack of prioritizing, poorly done job, not listening carefully, constantly appealing, focus on own ideas

Don't Believe Satan's Lies:

1. **I have lost control and must regain it.** As soon as we fear this, we fulfill our own fears. Often pre-set ideas about how things should work are very hard to give up. End result? Not giving yourself to help the leader at their point of weakness but using their weakness to attack them. Embitterment and gossip follow. The leader then feels trapped, then reacts, and this only confirms your suspicions.
2. **I am mostly right and that is close enough to being completely right.** I am right b/c I know some things the leader doesn't know. So I may be a little wrong, but they are more wrong!

How do we cure our lack of submission? The Gospel God's Love + God's Sovereignty = FREEDOM

Submission means seeing yourself in God's Sovereign, loving care, which is able to accomplish his good purposes even through sinful and flawed leadership. This gives us the freedom to creatively serve and honor that leadership, by seeking to make the team leader successful for God's purposes, resulting in true freedom.

Acts 2:23-24; I Peter 2:20-25 cf. Daniel, Esther, Nehemiah, etc.

Gospel-Related Truths to Tell Yourself

- 1. Just because I feel trapped, and I perceive I'm trapped doesn't mean I'm actually trapped.** (1 John 4:16-18, Romans 8:28ff)
- 2. God will use flawed, even unjust authority to shape you.** (Joseph's Story in Genesis 37-50 - he found freedom by not being immobilized by the injustice, but learning to serve for the good of the leader, knowing that God will be faithful to work out his purposes. God's "redeeming power" is that he is able to take to the very sinful and unjust intentions and actions of men, and still work them for his saving purposes – which is exactly what he did in Joseph's life.
- 3. God will use flawed authority to position us to accomplish his will in his time.** If Joseph had been released from prison when he thought the time was right (Genesis 39:23, 40:1), all he would have received was his freedom. God had much bigger purposes in mind- the saving of many lives and the display of mercy to many nations- Genesis 50:19
God always has bigger purposes in mind. John 15:8, Romans 8:28-29 and Ephesians 3:20, 21 always go together.

We all submit to something. One of the biggest challenges now is that we are tempted to submit our minds, hearts, and wills to ideologies, cultural narratives and stories that replace the story of Jesus, the story that brings us perfectly into God's love and sovereignty.