

Submit to One Another

The Bible teaches the people are equal in value/worth, yet different in terms of function or position in life. Everyone is made in the image of God and thus has equal value. But everyone has a different position in life. Everyone has different degrees of authority.

Modern culture has largely rejected the idea of authority. Our culture is rather rebellious. Criminals do not submit to the law or to police. Young often people do not submit to their parents. Students often do not submit to their teachers.

Employees sometimes do not submit to their employers. Citizens often do not submit to government officials. People in our culture do not like to submit.

Instead, people demand to be autonomous—free to do whatever they want to do. These days, autonomy—freedom from authority—for many is the highest good. The highest authority for them is themselves, and they will not submit to anyone else.

Even professing Christians deny and neglect biblical principles of submission to legitimate authority. Even Christians demand autonomy—freedom to follow their own desires.

We are continuing in our studies of the “one another” passages in the NT, and our text for today is

Eph 5:21 *Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.*

The Christian faith requires that we submit to one another. What does it mean to submit to one another?

I. Submission Defined

A. The Greek word (ὑποτασσόμενοι) literally means “to arrange under.”

1. It’s a military term meaning “to arrange in a military fashion under the command of a leader.”
2. In non-military use, it was “a voluntary attitude of yielding, cooperating, assuming responsibility, and carrying a burden.”
3. In its most general use, it means to yield to another’s request or advice. Submission is a synonym for obedience to a legitimate authority.
4. We submit to someone else because we recognize his position of authority over us, and we voluntarily yield to that person.

- B. Paul commands that Christians submit “to one another.” That is, we must submit to those in authority over us.
- C. But in what sense do we submit to one another? What is Paul implying here regarding submission?

II. Submission Described

- A. Submit to God. Submission to legitimate authorities begins with submission to God.

1. **.18** We submit to God because we are filled with the Spirit.

- a) The main command in vs. 18 is, “Be filled with the Spirit.” So the primary submission here is to God—the Spirit. To be filled with the Spirit is to submit voluntarily to the Spirit of God.

Vs. 18 Instead of being drunk with wine, we should be filled with the Spirit. Don’t let alcohol control you; let the Spirit control you. Being filled with the Spirit amounts to obedience to the Spirit.

- b) The Holy Spirit is the author of Scripture, so being filled with the Spirit amounts to being obedient to the Word of God.
- c) Being filled with the Spirit is yielding control of your life and submitting to the Spirit. Submission is arranging yourself under the authority of God.
- d) That begins at salvation, and it continues throughout our Christian lives.

2. **.21end** We submit to one another “in the fear of God.”

- a) Submission to those in authority begins with respect for God. God has put people in authority over us, so when we submit to these people, we are demonstrating a respect for God.
- b) Many people lack respect for those in authority because they have no respect for God. Respect for others begins with respect for God.

- c) In some cases, the person to whom we must submit is not honorable—e.g., a boss, a political leader, a teacher, even a parent. Still, we must submit to those in authority over us, not necessary for the sake of the person, but for God’s sake. We are submitting “in the fear of God.” We submit because we fear God, not necessarily because we respect the person in authority over us.
- d) There are some exceptions to submission, as we’ll see, but the normal pattern is that we submit to legitimate authorities because we fear God.

Trans: Because we submit to God and fear God, we recognize other areas of life that require submission. Beyond submitting to God, we must ...

B. Submit in the home (Eph 5:22-33)

- 1. Wives submit to your own husbands.
 - a) .22end The wife submits to her husband “as to the Lord.”
The wife sees Christ standing behind her husband. When she submits to her husband, she submits to the Lord. If she is not willing to submit, she should not get married.
 - b) .23 The husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church. The wife’s submission to her husband is God-ordained.
 - c) .24 The wife submits to her husband as the church submits to Christ. And note the words “in everything.”
 - (1) This implies an attitude of submission of the wife to the husband.
 - (2) And note that the obligation falls on the wife to submit. It’s not the husband’s job to make his wife submit; it’s the wife’s duty to submit voluntarily. The husband should not have to force his wife to submit.

- (3) The secular world absolutely disavows the principle of the submission of the wife to her husband. The old wedding vows state that the wife agrees to “love, honor, and obey” her husband. I imagine that very few wives make such vows these days.
- (4) Most secular women expect a 50-50 relationship with their husbands in which both of them are perfectly equal in the relationship.
- (5) Feminism has taught women not to submit to their husbands.
- (6) Obviously, vss. 22-24 show very clearly that the husband’s duty is to be the head of the household, and the woman’s duty is to submit to the leadership of her husband.

Another aspect of submission in the home pertains to ...

2. Children submit to parents (**Eph 6:1-4**).

Children must honor their father and mother, and that means that they must submit to their leadership and authority.

Culture today just about reverses the order—parents often submit to the children. Parents often allow the children to rule the home. But that is opposite of the order we see here.

Another aspect of submission requires that we ...

C. Submit in the church.

1. Everyone in the church is obligated to submit to Christ (Eph 5:24). It’s his church.
2. Pastors submit to Christ (Eph 5:24; 1 Pet 5:4). Jesus is the head of the church and the Chief Shepherd; pastors are under-shepherds. The church belongs to Jesus, and pastors function under Jesus’ authority.
3. Church members submit to legitimate pastoral authority (1 Cor 11:1; 1 Tim 5:17-20; Heb 13:7, 17). The pastor is the shepherd, the overseer, and the president of the assembly. As long as he is leading biblically, the members of the church should submit to his leadership as he follows Christ.

- D. Submit in the work place: workers submit to employers (**Eph 6:5-9**; Titus 2:9; Col 3:22; 1 Pet 2:18).
1. The NT in these passages is talking about servants/slaves. Slavery is different from modern employment. We recognize some differences here.
 2. But the underlying principle is still the same—employees ought to respect their employers. If you want to keep your job, you have to submit to your boss.
 3. Christians normally submit to their employers, and they try to do it with a good attitude. We are supposed to work “as unto Christ.” (Eph 6:5-6)
- E. Submit in the community.
1. Citizens submit to their government (Rom 13:1; 1 Pet 2:13-17). Even if we do not appreciate certain aspects of the government, we still have to submit, normally.
1 Pet 2:13-14 Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, ...
 2. Young people should submit to elders (1 Pet 5:5). The basic responsibility of young people is that they respect and obey older people.

Trans: The Bible gives us a whole set of relationships in which we must submit to those in authority over us. Many people in our culture today absolutely, passionately deny and reject such structures of authority. People are actively working to eliminate all authority structures. But Christians must retain our commitment to biblical authority.

Civilization itself, and particularly western civ, depends on the majority of people submitting to legitimate authority. We recognize that those in authority are tempted to misuse their power—“all power corrupts”—but that does not mean that we reject all structures of authority. We must submit to legitimate authorities that God has established.

Trans: However, there are limits and restrictions to our obligation to submit.

III. Submission Delimited

- A. Submission to God is absolute; we must always submit to God. God is the final authority over us, and obedience to God is always in our best interests. All authority ultimately extends back to God. All other authorities are delegated to them by God (Rom 13:1)

There is no excuse for failure to submit to God. There are no real exceptions to this rule. When God commands, we must submit.

- B. Submission to others, however, is always conditional and limited. Submission is *not* absolute in human relationships.
- C. Mutual submission does not mean that everyone has to submit to everyone else. It means that we are all in positions where we have to submit to others.

We cannot use this text to claim that sometimes the husband submits to the wife, the parents submit to their children, and the employer submits to his employees. Does Christ submit himself to the church? No, it's the other way around.

So when Paul tells us to submit to one another, he's telling us to submit to those in authority over us in the various relationships of life. That's what Eph 5:21f is all about—the various relationships and positions of life require us to submit.

- D. The Bible gives us a few exceptions to these requirements. In some cases, we need not submit; in fact, we *should* not submit.

The general principle in this regard is that if obedience to someone else would require disobedience to God, we need not submit in that case.

Acts 5:29 “we ought to obey God rather than man.” We are not required to obey human laws or rules or commands when they ask us to violate a God-given law or prevent us from obeying a God-given law.

Context of Acts 5:29 – cf. vs. 28, vs 30-32—they preach the Gospel.

The Bible gives us several examples where, for good causes, people did not submit to those in authority over them. E.g., the Hebrew midwives (Ex 1:15f); Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego; the apostles went on preaching even when the authorities told them to stop. So we have biblical precedent for refusing to submit.

So let's consider the cases in which we need not submit.

1. In marriage, submission of the wife to her husband assumes that the husband is a respectable man. But, in some cases, when the husband is an abusive, negligent, drunken bum, refusal to submit to the man might be legitimate and necessary.

Submission for the wife is far easier when the husband is a respectable, godly, honest, gentleman. When the man loves his wife as Christ loves the church, it should be easy for the wife to submit to her husband's leadership. If the guy does not display that kind of love for his wife, then it might be harder for her to submit.

In some cases, the children might not submit to their parents for good reasons. If their fathers are provoking them to wrath, it might be hard for children to submit to them.

2. Likewise at work—if the authorities at your job require you to violate biblical principles, you might not be able to submit to them.

Employers are supposed to treat their employees fairly and sensitively (Eph 6:9; Col 4:1). Employers should certainly not ask their employees to do anything illegal or immoral. E.g., fraud, dishonesty.

3. In our community, if the local authorities demand that we violate Christian principles, we are not obligated to submit.

- a) In some communities, laws and leaders may be unjust and immoral.

E.g., laws in Muslim countries prohibits anyone from converting to Christianity. Should we not evangelize in countries where it's illegal? Smuggle in Bibles? E.g., Christians under Hitler—should they submit to his murderous schemes?

- b) We are responsible to obey our political authorities, yet those officials must obey God's moral law. The king is under the Law—*Lex Rex*—the law is king. A profound principle of American value is that no one is exempt from the law. When government officials disobey the law, we need not submit to them.

4. In the church, if the authorities lead in the wrong way, the members might determine not to submit to the leaders. Church authorities are supposed to lead and teach biblically, and if they fail to do that, they lose their authority.

If the pastor starts teaching false doctrine or making unbiblical demands, the members have no obligation to submit to him.

No Christian has the right to request or demand something of another Christian that is contrary to the teaching of the Word of God. No submission is necessary to immoral requests or commands.

Christian leaders can easily disqualify themselves, and if they abuse their authority, they lose their position as overseer.

5. Acts 5:33end If we disobey human authority, we must be ready to accept the consequences.

If you decide not to submit to an authority, the consequences might be rather serious. But if it's a decision between obeying God or obeying invalid human authority, you know what you have to do.

E.g., when translating the Bible was unlawful, Christians endured martyrdom rather than obey the law. They accepted the consequences of their law breaking.

Trans: Although we are normally obligated to submit to legitimate authority, we recognize that in some cases, we need not submit.

IV. Practical steps for submission

- A. Submission to God ought to be our highest priority. We should have strong convictions and commitments regarding obeying God's commands. God has absolute authority over us, and we are obligated to submit to God's commands and expectations.
- B. Submission in the home is much easier when everyone is following the biblical principles of a Christian home. The Christian home works a lot better when everyone is carrying out their biblical roles.
- C. In the workplace, we should try to be obedient to those in authority over us. Part of being a good employee is submitting to the orders of those in authority over you.

- D. In the community, we try to be good citizens. We submit to government officials; we submit to the police. We honor those to whom honor is due, including elected officials.
- E. If we decide not to submit, we better have good, biblical reasons for that choice. We don't refuse to submit just because we do not like the person in authority or because we do not appreciate the laws. We refuse to submit only when we have no other options.
- F. And if we refuse to submit, we should be ready for the potential consequences. Failure to submit may be catastrophic in some cases. So we have to be willing to face the results of our refusal to submit.

Eph 5:21 exhorts us to *submit to one another in the fear of God*. Primarily, we submit to God. Because we yield to God, we also yield to those God has put in authority over us—government officials, bosses, parents, pastors.

In some cases, we are justified in refusing to submit, but such cases are relatively rare. In most cases, we are obligated to submit to legitimate authorities.

God has arranged it so that life generally works much better when people submit to legitimate authority. Our country is in so much trouble because many of those in authority are corrupt and abusive, and many people simply refuse to submit to those who have legitimate authority.

As Christians, we are morally obligated to submit to one another in the fear of God. Let's make sure that we are following this clear command.