

Team Ministry - Lesson 5

Team Ministry and Submission to Leadership

I. Foundational Understanding of God's Call to Submission to Authority

- A. 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

[2 Chronicles 30:8; Psalm 68:31; Romans 8:7, 10:3; Gen 41:40; Romans 13:1; 1 Pet 2:13-14; 1 Cor 16:16; Heb 13:17; Eph 5:21,22; Gen 16:9]

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]

God reveals the whole structure of the use of authority and submission to authority as "good" [Genesis 1:31]. 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 13:1ff

The Market -- I Peter 2:13-18

The Church – Hebrews 13:17

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. It is impossible to exist in life and relate on any level without authority/submission issues constantly emerging. Even in "mutual submission" [Ephesians 5:22], in the end someone will be submitting to someone else.

- B. What's the problem? The other inescapable reality: the presence of sin and the flawed, limited human beings who exercise authority

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), 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.

- C. Does God have an answer?

1. 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 [Gen 3:1ff- always questioning the wisdom of God] - 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 and injustice is simply going to be perpetuated by our submission.

2. God and his appeal to the new nature also has an answer: submission means seeing yourself in God's Sovereign, loving care, which is able to accomplish his good purposes of bringing true righteousness into the world, even through your interaction with and submission to sinful and flawed leadership.

God's promise is to bring redemption either through changing the leader, or ultimately removing them; and at the same time, give peace and the protection that is needed to his suffering-servant-people. This gives us the freedom to creatively serve and honor leadership, by seeking to make the team leader successful for God's purposes, resulting in true freedom.

[Daniel 4:19ff, esp 4:27; Acts 2:23-24; I Peter 2:13-25]

II. Attitudes that Feed and Reflect Poor Submission

A. Rationale for lack of submission

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

"Submission" does not mean we do not recognize major flaws or even sinful patterns in leaders - but rather, that we accept the call to learn how to creatively and humbly serve the leader to help bring about the kind of changes God wants to bring.

B. The Look of the surface sins of lack of submission

1. The unsubmitive person who is aware he/she is not submitting

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

2. The unsubmitive person who is not aware they are not submitting

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 passive-aggressive 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.

Some of the traits can include:

- general sloppiness about work
- lack of prioritizing: instant analysis, putting the leadership concerns 3 or 4 notches down the scale of importance
- jobs poorly done
- focusing on own ideas
- not listening carefully to details
- constantly appealing

Your analysis and fears at times may be correct; but don't forget the bigger picture - God is in control and will use even the foolishness of the leader to accomplish his will

C. Biblical example of not submitting: King Saul -- I Samuel 15

Saul "reassessed" Samuel's instructions, motivated out of a self-glorying attitude, and then fiercely defended himself, and shifted blame. In the process he failed to see his own agenda as contrary to God's ultimate glory, and did great evil by turning the "judgment of God" into an agenda of personal gain that portrayed God's people and his purposes as simply one more evil empire [1 Sam 15:17-19]

What are the root, underlying sins in the lack of submission?

1. The fear of losing control of "our" agenda:

a. In the most extreme cases, like Saul, we want to be King and have our own agendas. Submitting to someone else creates fear and we begin seeing ourselves as trapped. We then find ways to subvert the leader [1 Sam 15:22,23]. Rebellion is like the sin of divination because you are rejecting God's control over events and trying to re-define / re-discover the future consequence of current actions in order to justify taking a different (your own) course of action.

b. Even in cases where our concerns about the leader's agenda are legitimate, we still have to wrestle with trusting God to bring about needed change. We often have pre-set ideas of how things should be done that are very hard to give up. The end result - not giving yourself to help the leader at their point of weakness, but using their weakness to attack them. This often moves to embitterment and gossip. In turn, the leader often

feels trapped by his team, reacts, and then, in your mind only confirms your idea of what's going on. **In this process you lose what God is about.**

You cannot have the freedom to creatively serve if you do not believe God is Loving and Sovereign.

2. The blindness of self-righteousness

Like Saul -- so aware of the 7/8ths, that we think the 1/8th is no problem. We assess our rebellion as harmless and see ourselves as pretty good people/workers/citizens. The blindness of our self-righteousness, like Saul, can lead us to a sense that we have knowledge the leader doesn't have, so he/she couldn't possibly be right. This justifies despising their authority [Cf I Sam 13:7-14]

III. The Cure for Lack of Submission

A. God's faithful love + God's sovereignty = freedom

Acts 4:27-30; Romans 8:28ff -- I feel trapped / I look trapped **does not equal** I am trapped. Evil and injustice will not win the day.

B. Examples of God's love & sovereignty working through submission

1. Principle: You cannot learn to be a good leader without also learning to be a person who submits, even in unjust circumstances

David -- 1 Sam 24:1-7, 26:23-24; 2 Samuel 15:23-26; 16:5-14

2. Principle: God will use flawed, even unjust authority to shape your character and at the same time, accomplish his salvation purposes, in His perfect time

Joseph -- Genesis 37-50

The Brothers; Potiphar; the Prison Guard; Pharoah

The freedom in each relationship is found in 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.

So Joseph did “good” to all of his unjust oppressors: Potiphar [Gen 39:2-6]; the prison warden [Gen 39:20-23]; Pharaoh [Gen 41]; his brothers [Gen 42-45]. In the end, here is Joseph’s assessment of the original injustice of his brother’s actions against him -- “Don’t be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives” [Gen 50:19,20]

Many of the issues Joseph would face as the second-in-command, would require a refining of his character: from working for a “pagan” leader; to the temptations of power – sexual temptations; to corrupt individuals seeking personal gain; to “practical” wisdom of following through on tasks; to issues of humility and not overestimating himself because of his position of power.

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. Principle: 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 his bigger, better, faithful, saving purposes in mind. John 15:8, Romans 8:28-29, Ephesians 3:20,21 and 1 Peter 2:18ff always go together.