

Rethinking Submission & Authority

People get the wrong idea about authority. They think that by following an authority they will lose freedom. But actually, the reverse is true. God establishes authority to help protect and guide us. Consider the following:

Hebrews 13:17

Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They **keep watch over you** as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.

“We should only **think of the authority, not the person**, because our submission is not to a person but to God’s authority in that person.”

“Some may say, ‘What happens if the authority makes mistakes?’ If God dares to trust those who are entrusted as authorities, then we should dare to submit. Whether or not the authority makes mistakes...is a matter for which he has to be responsible directly before the Lord.”

“Those who submit to authority do not act by sight. A servant of the Lord must be blind. He must be delivered from a life of reasons. Reasoning in the heart is the first cause of rebellion.”

“If a man is always conscious of his authority, he is not qualified to be an authority.”

– Watchman Nee, Chinese church leader and prophetic writer

“Within the church, there are leaders. And those leaders are given authority by God. Those people who are under their authority are to submit to their authority. I always like to say that **it’s not really submission until you disagree**.”

– Mark Driscoll, teaching pastor of Mars Hill Church in Seattle

God as the Only Supreme Authority

Acts 5:29

Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than men!"

The above Scripture shows that the only supreme authority is God. Whenever any man or authority sets itself against the spoken Word of God or God’s will as revealed by the Holy Spirit, that authority is in rebellion and should not be obeyed. Even though the apostles did not obey the words of the religious leaders, they still **kept a respectful tone** and acted in an honorable way.

God Establishes All Authority

Romans 13:1-2

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. Consequently, **he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted**, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.

Authority is God focused not man focused. How we respond to authority really shows more what we believe about God than the earthly authority. If we really trust God, we would honor and submit to those authorities who are poor leaders because God can still accomplish His good purposes through our right actions.

Numbers 16 The Israelites rebelled against God's authority figure in Moses. They claimed that they were all equal and no one should assume any position of leadership. And their sin resulted in dire consequences. Moses did not rush to defend his position. God did.

Dealing with Bad Authorities

1 Samuel 24 David shows us the perfect example of how to trust God and honor really bad authorities. Even though David had already been anointed king and God had rejected Saul, David refused to slay Saul or raise his hand in rebellion. While David did flee to save his own life, he never tried to assume control of the throne. He decided to trust God and let Him be his defender. David set aside his own personal interest and honored a poor leader because he did not want to seize the throne through rebellion.

Obedience vs. Sacrifice

1 Samuel 15:1-26 God desires obedience above sacrifice. We see that from the story of King Saul refusing to destroy his enemy as instructed by God. He presented the spoils of war to God, who rejected them because Saul did not follow His command.

Here are some more Scriptures covering issues of authority:

Exodus 19:4-6

John 14:22-24

1 Timothy 2:1-3

2 Thessalonians 3:14

Romans 2:13

1 Peter 2:12-14

1 John 3:24

1 John 5:3

The End Result

What is the **end reward** for those who follow God and honor the authorities that He has established? According to Rev 2:26, those people will be **given authority over the nations**.