

What the Bible Teaches About Submission

Special Topical Lesson by Chuck Pike

I. Why This Lesson, and Why Now?

- a. We have been focusing primarily on expository Bible lessons (**1 Corinthians**, **Genesis** and currently in the **Gospel of John**).
- b. Some expressed a desire to have occasional topical lessons included as well.
- c. Last week, after giving a topical lesson in a house church setting in Pennsylvania, my wife Alison asked, “Why can’t we have lessons like that in our group?”
- d. Topical lessons afford the opportunity to take a look at areas that impact our lives, needs that we become aware of. However, we want to make sure we are always reading the Scriptures *in context*. We do not want to cherry-pick to push an unbiblical agenda.

II. Two Different Religions, Both Called “Christian”

- a. Visiting friends in Pennsylvania and my daughter Julia in Virginia over the past year has opened my eyes to the bewildering array of churches that are out there, particularly the various popular ‘mega-church’ type churches that have sprung up. Young people who want to be Christians, particularly, are presented with a confusing array of choices.
- b. Consequently, for my own children growing up in the United States, I see three paths available:
 - i. The world (reject Jesus, live for pleasure).
 - ii. The Christian Life – original version
 - iii. The Christian Life – modern, “new and improved” version
- c. When I look at the scene, I see two very different versions of the gospel being preached. I would consider one “the original version” and the other, “the new and *improved* version.” In many areas (computers, cars, electronics), the newer versions are generally better; in the case of the gospel message, however, that is NOT the case.
- d. In some churches you will find a combination of both messages; different speakers on different Sundays, or sometimes parts of both gospels can be found within the same message!
- e. **The newer, modern, more popular version of the gospel:** This only became popular over the past 500 years, following the Protestant Reformation. The framework of this version of the gospel is as follows:

- i. After the fall of Adam and Eve, all people became totally depraved. Consequently, we are all bad all the time; incapable of doing anything good, incapable of seeking God. Essentially, we are rotten to the core.
- ii. Jesus died for us. Just accept what He did for you on the cross, and you will be saved. Jesus did it all. Since you are totally depraved and can't do anything good anyway, your salvation is a gift that you cannot lose.
- iii. After you "get saved," you can enjoy this life and try to live the best life here that you can. While it is good to *obey* Jesus' teachings (and out of gratitude many people will), your salvation does not depend on it.

f. **In contrast, the old "original" version of the gospel:**

- i. After the fall of Adam and Eve, while we inherited a fallen nature and tendency to sin, there remained something good in mankind. We each choose whether to do good or evil, whether to follow God or the world. A few people over the ages, while not flawless, have been great examples of seeking to live righteously, such as Abel, Enoch, Noah, Joseph, Joshua, Elijah, Daniel and the prophets. Therefore, we are *not all* "totally depraved." While we are all sinners, there was, in fact, something good left in mankind after the Fall.
- ii. Jesus came and died on the cross to ransom us from the grip of Satan, from the power of sin and death. He came to establish a kingdom, where He is the king, and He establishes the laws of that kingdom. Jesus invites us to become part of that kingdom.
- iii. Jesus calls all people to repent and follow him. The ones "with a good and noble heart" (as Jesus said in **Luke 8:15**) will choose to accept the message, obey it, and follow Jesus until death.
- iv. We must do more than just believe in Jesus; we must do what he says.
 - 1. Read **Matthew 7:13-29**.
 - 2. There will be many, on the Day of Judgment who believed in Jesus and even performed miracles in his name, but they did not do what He said. They will be rejected!
- v. The way to life is a difficult path, yet anyone who truly wants to can, in fact, do it if he or she remains in Jesus. If we strive to enter and to stay on the path, God will provide the favor (grace) that we need to make it.
 - 1. Read **Luke 14:25-33**
- vi. Following Jesus is extremely challenging and can bring great hardship into our lives! This is the version of the message we find Jesus presenting in the four gospels. This is what was preached in the **Book of Acts**. This is what we find in the writings of the early church. This is

the original gospel message, “the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.” (Jude v.3)

- g. The difference, “in a nutshell”: *obey* versus *just believe*.
 - i. The original version, which requires obedience, is much harder. Especially because Jesus had some very hard, challenging (yet not impossible to obey) teachings.

III. One of the Harder Teachings for Us Today: On Submission

- a. *(A disclaimer and for transparency, since some may wonder why we are teaching on submission today: I have no hidden agenda here. This is not a back-door way for me to preach submission to my wife; she embraces this teaching and is a great example to younger women in this area, in my opinion. In fact, she was the one who asked me to speak on this, after hearing a similar message I gave last week given to another group in PA. Also, I really do not think our group has a heavy-handed or controlling style of leadership, so this is not particularly about getting people here to “fall in line” with local church leadership, either.)*
- b. Read **1 Peter 2:9-25**
 - i. Peter recalls the language God used at Mount Sinai in **Exodus 19:5-6**, where the Lord had told the Israelites that *if they obeyed His voice and kept His covenant*, they would be “a special people above all nations...a royal priesthood, and a holy nation.” (Notice that this is a conditional promise!)
- c. **Submission as a distinctively Christian way of life, starting with our attitude toward the government.**
 - i. “Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good.” (**1 Peter 2:13-14**, NKJV)
 - ii. This passage and **Romans 13:1-7** on submitting to the government and paying taxes were particularly disturbing to me personally, when I began studying the Bible.
 - 1. I had been an anti-war, anti-draft tax resister before I was baptized. In coming to terms with these challenging teachings, I had to “turn myself in” to the IRS and voluntarily pay years of back-taxes!
 - 2. This should illustrate that submission, in general, was *not something that came naturally to me*.
 - iii. This teaching applies to all Christians worldwide, under any and all forms of government. If you live in the United States, this is regardless of who the president is; it does not depend on which

political party is in control. Remember, the rulers of the Roman Empire at the time of the apostles were extremely corrupt and morally depraved dictators! The governing authorities murdered Jesus, John the Baptist and (from historical accounts) Peter and Paul.

- iv. The only limits on the command that we submit to our governing authorities appears to be when a command of the authorities contradicts a command of God. Since we are first and foremost in submission to God, we must respectfully decline to submit to a command from the government that contradicts a command of God. Classic inspiring examples from the Scriptures:
 - 1. Daniel's three friends, after they were commanded to bow down to the golden image, in **Daniel 3:16-18**
 - 2. Daniel, when he was told to stop praying to God and threatened with the lion's den, in **Daniel 6**.
 - 3. The apostles, when they were taken before the Jewish leaders (**Acts 4:6**) and ordered to stop preaching in the name of Jesus (**Acts 4:16-20**).
- v. If you respectfully decline to obey the governing authorities because you are aware that doing so would cause you to disobey God, and this leads to your punishment, know you are in great company. That includes Daniel, his three friends, Peter and John!
- d. **It gets more challenging: Christian servants** (some translations render this "slaves" or "domestic servants/slaves") are called to be submissive to their masters. Even if they are beaten though doing nothing wrong!
 - i. Think about that. Don't they have any rights?
 - ii. The example they are to follow: Jesus on the cross. "For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: 'Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth'; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed." (**1 Peter 2:21-24**, NKJV)
 - iii. We are to follow Jesus in his suffering. He did nothing wrong but submitted himself to God when He was being unjustly treated.
 - iv. Try to imagine being a household servant in the year 60 A.D. You are being beaten unjustly for something you did not do, and Peter is telling you to *endure your suffering with patience and with respect toward your master*. This is a very hard teaching!

- e. Now things get more personally challenging for many of us today! Read **1 Peter 3:1-12**, where Peter addresses **wives and husbands**.
- i. Wives need to be submissive and respectful, *even when their husbands are not Christians*. (Just as Christian servants must to their masters, and all of us are called to submit to the governing authorities.)
 1. Being *a man* who giving this lesson, this topic (wives submitting to their husbands) is difficult for me to teach on. Obviously, I have never had to face this personally; therefore I cannot fully relate. This is one reason why it is so important that *the older women in the church* teach the younger women how to put this into practice, as it says in **Titus 2:3-5**.
 - ii. Wives are called to adorn themselves (make themselves more beautiful) "by their gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God." (**1 Peter 3:4**).
 1. It is totally appropriate for Christian women to put off the outward adornments of the world, regarding how they dress.
 - a. (This is incredibly challenging in our modern society: to dress plainly, to stop using make-up and lipstick, especially in a city like Boston. We appreciate our sisters in Christ who are wrestling with this counter-cultural teaching and are putting it into practice!)
 2. Yet the *primary thrust* of the Peter's challenge here is for women to make themselves beautiful in a different way, as Sarah did in how she treated her husband, Abraham.
 - a. If a woman dresses plainly and avoids wearing cosmetics, *yet does not have quiet and gentle spirit*, she is not putting this command into practice! Again, we realize that this is an extremely challenging teaching.
 - iii. Husbands are called to treat their wives with honor and understanding. If they do not, God will not listen to them in their prayers.
 - iv. All are called to be humble, non-retaliating, returning kind speech for reviling. God listens to those who put these things into practice!
 - v. Consider also what Paul says in **Colossians 3:18-25**. There he gives similar instruction and also specifically addresses the need for children to obey their parents. This passage shows the order God wants to have in Christian families.
- f. Read **1 Peter 4:1-6**
- i. We must have the same attitude that Christ did: willing to suffer.
 - ii. We are called to please God, not the desires of our flesh.

g. Read **1 Peter 5:1-11**

- i. Elders in the church called to lead *by example*.
- ii. Younger men called to submit to their elders.
 - 1. This was challenging to many of us in past situations: to be respectful and submissive to our church leaders, yet not disobey important commands of God.
 - 2. What should we do when we are in this situation? We must follow God, not man, but we are never justified to be rebellious. We must respectfully decline to disobey God's commands.
 - 3. While this is incredibly difficult, we can be refined through this struggle if we strive to remain righteous through it.
- iii. For those feeling challenged in this area of submission, Peter calls us to humble ourselves under God's mighty hand, and cast our anxieties upon Him, knowing that He cares for us.
- iv. Never forget that we have an enemy who is trying to destroy us and the church. As Jesus prayed before his death for unity among his followers (**John 17:20-23**), Satan is out to sow disunity in Christian households and churches. We must resist the temptations to retaliate, to be rebellious, to be divisive, etc.!

IV. Conclusions

- a. Follow the original gospel: we must *obey* Jesus, including all the hard teachings of the gospels.
- b. We are called to follow the example of Christ and submit to the various authorities in our lives, out of our submission to God. However, we never disobey God's commands. Where the word of God is in conflict with what the authorities require, we always obey God rather than men.
- c. There are challenging implications for all of us today: wives, husbands, children, citizens under challenging governments, and members of churches with imperfect leadership. Consider what the Bible says regarding submission, take inventory of your life, and repent where you need to!