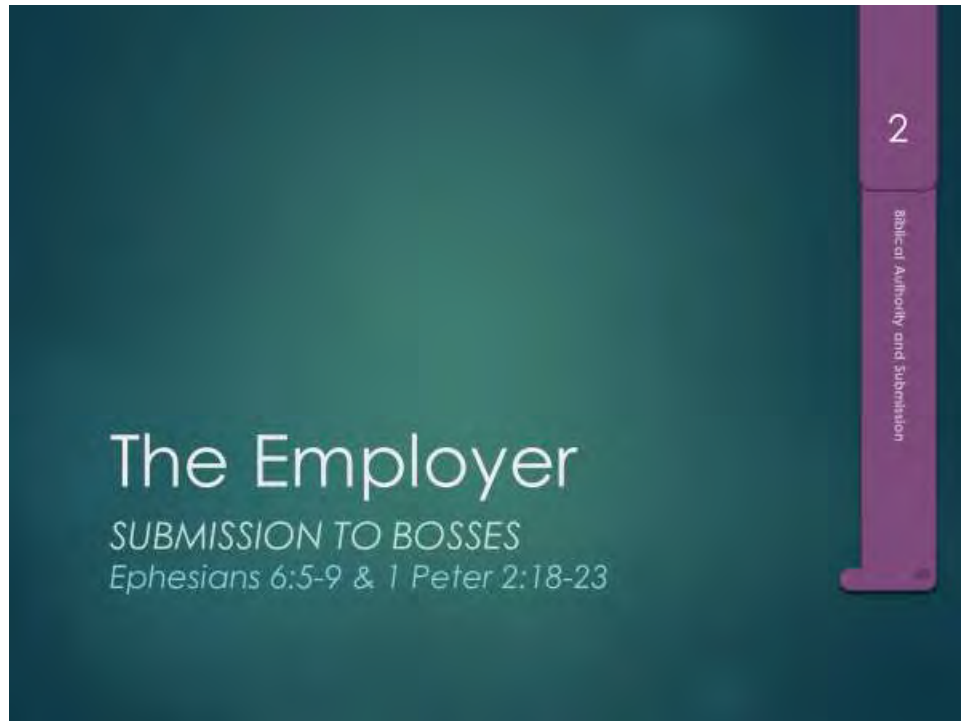


Submission – The Employer

Various Texts

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Have you ever noticed that there is something to our sinful nature that intrinsically questions authority? It's like there is a built-in response to anything that challenges our sense of self-rule. It's there in the heart of a child that from the womb resists obedience to their parents no matter how good it would be for them to heed. It is an independent defiance that is present in our response to governmental laws and officials that view ourselves above their rule. It is the initial resistance we often feel to the leadership and care of Elders in the church who are to shepherd and guide us. And ultimately, it is exposed in a self-centeredness that struggles to bend our wills to God and His word, trusting that His ways are truly best. This is because our flesh is in a constant struggle with authority. Inside, we have a heart of worldly rebellion that will default to saying no to authority whenever it keeps us from getting what we want.

Biblical Submission

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Biblical Authority and Submission



In contrast to worldly rebellion, Biblical submission reveals that God's design is to invert our self-centered, self-ruled world. It literally turns it upside down. As believers, God has placed us first under His authority and then under the God-ordained human authorities we have been exploring in this series of evening messages. Scripture speaks clearly to the authority of elders, husbands, parents, the government, and employers. And while scripture clearly speaks to these five areas of submission to authority, I believe that it also reflects an overarching principle that teaches us to respect and submit to those who have been given authority whether it is to ministry leadership, serving on a school committee, or playing on a sports team.

Turn to Romans 13, verses 1 and 2. Listen and follow along as I read. *"Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. 2 Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment."* Notice the last part of verse 1. Paul gives us the general principle that authority comes from God. And to resist authority is to resist God who has established it.

But why should we submit? It's a good question. What is God up to? First, we submit simply because God has the authority to command us to submit to the authorities he has established. Submission to authority reflects a heart that has put God and others first. We see this clearly in the submission of a wife to her husband as a picture of the church submitting itself to Christ. In submitting to authority, we please God and bring Him glory. It is living by faith as we obey and trust the rightness of what He has asked us to do.

Second, we submit because it is God's goodness to us. Think of what life without any submission or authority would be like. It would be a world of chaos. A world without rule or law where the worst of man's sinfulness would exist unchecked. Imagine a home where

everyone did only what **they** wanted? It is not a family that any of us would want to be a part of. You see, authority is designed to be a blessing that provides order and protection to roles and spheres of life and living. Submission and authority are a divine mercy that give structure and purpose to our relationships; ideally in the context of caring leadership.

[opening prayer]



As we begin to look at submission in the workplace, I want to start by considering two foundational biblical views around work and the workplace. To understand submission in the workplace we must first have a biblical view of work. This provides us a foundation with which to understand the context and application of the instruction we find in Scripture.

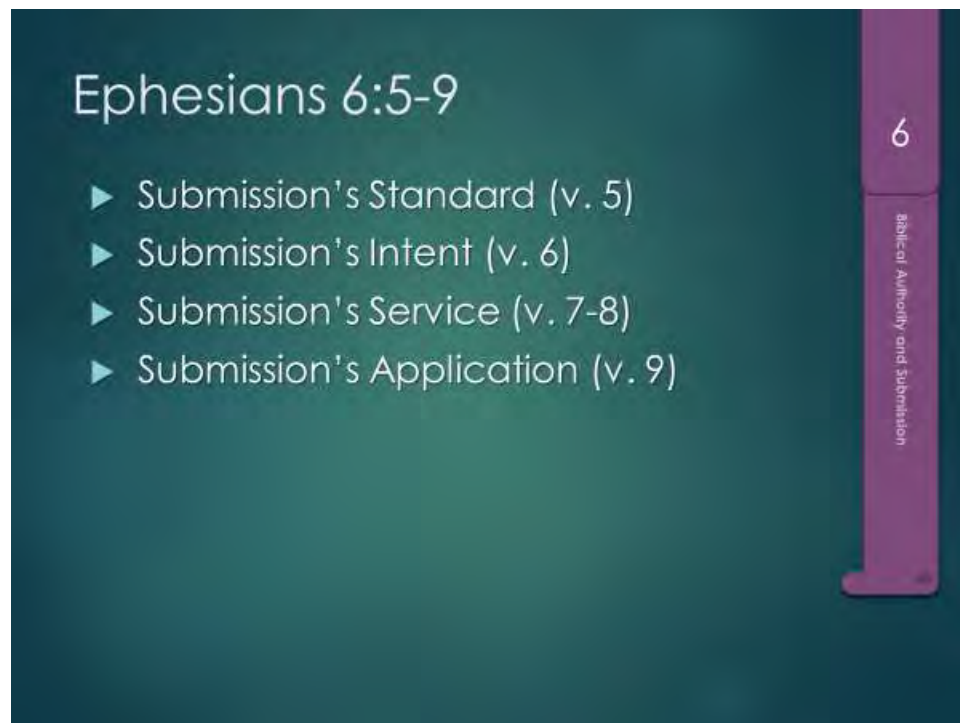
The concept of work in the Bible takes us back to Genesis. There we see God at work in six days of creation and resting on the seventh day. We see Adam made in God's image and created to also be a worker with responsibilities in the Garden. It continues to the nation of Israel where in Exodus 20 God established a pattern of six days of work and a single day of rest. Work reflects God's intentional plan for our life and living. This means reflecting His righteous character in all that we do; even when it means submitting to others in our work.

We should also consider that work was established **before** the fall. This means that work was not a result of the curse, but rather was a part of God's creation prior to it. It was a part of creation upon which He placed His stamp of approval by declaring it to be "good". But just as the relationship of the first husband and wife was changed by the fall, so also the nature of work was corrupted by man's sin. The fall brought upon man a curse that destroyed the harmony and purity of our relationships with God and one another. But the fall did not remove

the legitimacy of work nor did it destroy the design for work that God created. Why is this important? Because it establishes that our work still has spiritual purpose and meaning.

The last important area to consider is that the context of work in the New Testament is one of household relationships. We have to put ourselves in the cultural mindset of the time when the New Testament was written. In that culture household slaves and servants worked along with their master supporting his occupation and home. The Bible is not condoning this practice nor is it condemning it. Rather it speaks to the relationships of workplace authority to those who found themselves in what was a common situation at this point in history.

We are fortunate that in our modern culture, we no longer must give up our freedom to receive provisions for life. We have relative freedom to pursue careers and move to the places where we choose to work. But regardless, the principle of workplace authority still applies whether we work in someone's home or in a business. So when Scripture refers to the master-servant or master-slave relationship, I believe the same principles apply to the relationships of believers as those under the authority of another. The challenge to us today is that Scripture uses one of the most difficult workplace settings as the context to set the standard for our submission at work. And if submission is expected in the difficult context of masters and servants, then how much more should we work submissively within the relative freedoms of modern employment.



Let's turn to Ephesians, Chapter 6 and verse 5. As we hear this passage, keep in mind that the context of these instructions is living "according to the power at work within us" (Chapter 3, verse 20) and walking "in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called" (Chapter 4, verse 1). Follow along as I read God's word.

"5 Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as

you would Christ, 6 not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, 7 rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, 8 knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free. 9 Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him."

How does Paul describe the submission of the believing worker to those in authority over them? First, we see submission's standard in verse 5. The simple standard that is set is for us to be obedient. The clear instruction here is to submit to authority in the workplace in the same way we would to Christ. Note the high standard here. The standard is to submit to our employer just as if we worked for Christ. Paul then adds to this that we are to do so with "fear and trembling"; meaning with all respect and eagerness to obey those in authority over us. He continues by saying that it is to be a submission with a sincerity of heart and effort. We are to have a steadfastness and desire to serve and submit not because our bosses deserve it, but because it please God and brings Him glory.

Paul continues in verse 6 by focusing on the intent of our submission. Note how Paul speaks pointedly to the selfishness and laziness of our sinful hearts. We are to submit, whether or not we are being watched. We are to submit, not so that we can look good to those in authority over us. And we submit, not to please men but to be Christ-pleasers serving at His authority and will. Do you see how this goes against a sinful nature that seeks to serve self rather than our employers?

What are some ways that our hearts expose our sinful lack of submission? How many of us have pridefully believed that we know better and can do better than those in authority over us? How many of us were able to keep those thoughts to ourselves? Are we tempted to fear or fight back to what we see as opposition from those in authority over us? Have we ever found ways to submit in principle to those over us, but then find ways to quietly rebel, undermine, and subvert workplace authority?

Look at verses 7 and 8. Paul now speaks to submission as a service rendered our earthly masters. Don't miss this important principle here. Paul is saying that submission to those in authority over us in the workplace is a means of serving the Lord. The ultimate aim of our workplace submission is to the Lord and not to man. This is such an amazing and freeing truth. No matter how difficult our circumstance, how corrupt our boss, or how humble our work, what we do at work matters because it is offered to God, for His glory and pleasure.

This too goes against our human nature. What is that our hearts long for in our work? For some it is the pursuit of excitement and job satisfaction. For others is the prestige and power that comes with our work. For many, their work is all about the financial rewards and material gain work provides. Not that all of this is inherently bad. But we must never believe that any of it compares to working for the glory of God. Submission is necessary to learning that pursuing the things of Christ is far more deeply satisfying with rewards that will last beyond this life.

Paul challenges us to have a right focus on the rewards of our work. Godly submission and service has no expectations. They make no demands for reward. Paul exhorts us that whether slave or free, we are to render good service to the Lord. And in doing good to those in authority over us, our greater reward will be received from Him. Again, our expectation is not on material reward and the praise of men, but on the joy and blessings received from glorifying and pleasing the Lord. Submission is a mindset of humility that does not make demands of those in authority over us. Rather it places our trust and hope in Christ alone.

For most of us, our hearts struggle to let go of what we perceive to be workplace rights and rewards. How do we respond when we believe that we are being treated unfairly? Does our conduct and speech seek to glorify God and respect those in authority over us? Do we complain and grumble about our pay? How do we respond when we feel we have been treated unfairly? Do we speak poorly of our employer to our co-workers? Do we plan and plot our revenge? All such thoughts and deeds demonstrate our lack of submission to God and those he has placed in authority over us. Remember that it is our heavenly Master who has sovereignly allowed us to be at work where we are.

The last verse in this passage provides an important reminder to those who are in authority at work. Here we see that submission applies to all. Believers in positions of authority at work must remember that they also are under the authority of Christ. As a manager, executive, or business owner, do not forget that you are to serve those in your employ for the sake and glory of the Lord. Our Lord shows no partiality or favor to you. He expects the same attitude of working for the glory and will of the Lord as believing employees. In the same way, submit to God by trusting in Him for your reward as you serve God and others in a way that seeks His will above all things.

1 Peter 2:18-23

- ▶ Submission's Respect (v. 18)
- ▶ Submission's Suffering (v. 19-20)
- ▶ Submission's Example (v. 21-23)

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Biblical Authority and Submission

Let's look at one more passage on submission in the workplace. Turn to 1 Peter Chapter 2 verse 18. In this passage we will hear similar themes from Peter. But Peter's focus here is on living as a holy people even when it is hard and means we have to suffer. Again, as we read this, consider the incredibly difficult and harsh conditions that slaves and servants would face during the time that this is written. Listen carefully as we read from God's word.

"18 Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. 19 For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. 20 For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. 21 For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. 22 He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. 23 When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly."

First, in verse 18 Peter commands that submission be given with all respect. The idea here is that we submit to those in authority over us with a right attitude. Peter is not talking about an attitude of submission that is concerned about a legalistic outward compliance to the letter of the law. What is required is a humble inward compliance of the heart that gives full and due regard to workplace authority. What's more is that Peter says respectful submission is to be given not only to authority that is good and kind, but to those who are harsh and unjust.

Peter answers the question of why in the next two verses as he speaks to submission's suffering. What is the reason we submit to authority? Because it is an act of grace when for the sake of our Lord, we submit even when it means enduring under mistreatment and injustice. There may be times we will be mistreated or misunderstood through no fault of our own. And there may be times that we suffer because we choose to follow God rather than our earthly masters. Peter commends those who suffer for the sake of doing what is right whether submitting to earthly authority or to the authority of God.

The last three verses of this passage give us submission's example. There is a purpose to this kind of sacrificial submission. It is a divine calling that should not surprise us. Rather than seeing submission as something negative, we are to view it as something positive that God places in our life for His glory. Christ is our example; who suffered, was mistreated, was reviled, and endured injustice for our sakes. In the midst of intense suffering he did not revile or threaten those who mistreated Him. Rather, he trusted Himself to God the Father who judges justly and is sovereign over all things. Such is the example He set for us in submitting to unjust authority.

Reflect and Respond

- ▶ Unbiblical Submission Is...
 - ▶ Checking Out
 - ▶ Complaining and Grumbling
 - ▶ Challenging Authority
- ▶ Biblical Submission Is...
 - ▶ Humility
 - ▶ Respect
 - ▶ Honoring Authority

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Biblical Authority and Submission

Let's wrap this up tonight by looking at what biblical submission is and what it is not. As we reflect on this contrast notice how unbiblical submission seeks to maximize our sense of self-rule and to reduce dependence on others. The point here is that biblical submission seeks out dependence on God and others and surrenders self-rule for the glory of God.

Let's look at unbiblical submission first. There are many ways we could identify a lack of submission. Tonight, I'd like to briefly reflect on three key areas. First, unbiblical submission can sometimes be simply checking out at work. In essence, we just give up when it comes to workplace submission. We no longer even try to submit, to put in a good day's work, or to help others. We disengage with attitude of doing as little as possible at work. It is a passive response meant to communicate that you don't rule me.

Unbiblical submission can also be expressed as sinful complaining and grumbling. We rarely express these thoughts directly to those in authority over us. But we respond to the loss of self-rule by letting everyone know how unhappy we are, how much better we could do, or speak poorly of those in authority over us. The ironic result is that such conversation does nothing but reinforce our own self-importance by attempting to bring other others down.

Lastly, unbiblical submission often sinfully challenges authority. This may be open rejection of authority or a silent resistance to it. Regardless of the form, it is a rejection of God-given authority in the workplace. It reflects a desperate fight in our hearts for our rights and self-rule at work. It is a failure to trust God and accept the role of workplace authority in our lives. And ultimately, it is a rejection of God's authority and rebellion against Him.

Now let's contrast that with what biblical submission is. Again, this is not even close to an exhaustive list, but we will focus on three key areas. First, biblical submission is a heart attitude

of humility. It is an understanding that while equals, you are willing to prefer the will of another. It is not weakness, but an attitude that understands and values the leadership of others. And it is a recognition and appreciation of our mutual dependence on others over our own self-rule.

Biblical submission is also an attitude of respect for authority. In the context of work, it is a voluntary placing of ourselves under the authority of another. It seeks to serve them and their leadership with your whole heart. It is respect that is given to them even when they are not perfect. It is respect that is given even when they are harsh and unjust. In doing so, we demonstrate our respect for the authority God has given them.

Lastly, biblical submission is honoring. This may be the hardest area for someone struggling with workplace authority. It means that we will speak well of those over us when they are in the room and when they are not. It hopes the best, thinks the best, and gives those in authority over us the benefit of the doubt. It appreciates their strengths, supports them in their areas of weakness, and stands with them in the face of challenges. It is words of encouragement and a steadfast support for their leadership.

I'd like to close with this thought. Submission in the workplace, or for that matter in any area where we are under the authority of others, must reflect our submission to Christ. This is because biblical submission to human authority requires a greater submission to God. Submission is also the essence of walking by faith in Christ. We are called not only to believe in Christ, but to follow Him. You see a true disciple is a follower who submits themselves to their teacher. Find someone who struggles with submission to human authority, you will often find someone who struggles with submission to the authority of Christ and His word. Find someone who embraces submission to human authority, and you will find someone who lives in submission to the authority of Christ and His word.

[Let's pray]

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