

Submissive Disagreements

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Kim, thank you for setting the focus on Christ in that last song. Everything that I am about to say today has to be prefaced by that, that overarching desire over everything, to know Christ, to value that more than anything, and if that's not true, nothing that I'm going to say today will actually make sense.

So I need to pray and to pray that the Lord would help us and sharpen our desire to follow him, to do his will, and that he would enable us to do what he has called us to. So let's pray.

Lord Jesus, we thank you that you have saved us. You have saved us from sin, from the valuing of ourselves above you, the worship of ourselves, and of other worldly desires. I thank you so much for the reminder from those songs this morning. Lord, may that be true. Please draw us to you, cause us to let go of the things that we hold so tightly to, that we would hold onto Christ with both hands. So Lord, I pray today that your word would find a place in our hearts that is receptive, that loves Christ and wants to know his ways, and that we would follow you as you have called us to, and I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

So today I am titling this message "Submissive Disagreement." Submissive disagreement. It's not just conflict resolution in general, it is how do you deal with differences with those in authority over you. How do you deal with differences with those in leadership, disagreements?

How many of you have someone in authority over you? Everybody. Oh, so good, this applies to you all. Awesome. We all have authorities in our life. We all have people in charge of us, to some degree. We have parents, the elders of our church, the civil authorities, and we all are under the authority of God, and yet even though these people have been given the place of authority over us, we often have disagreements with those in authority, do we not? How many of you have had a disagreement with somebody who is in charge of you? And I mean, you just disagree with their opinion, their position, their plan, their character? I know I have. If you have never disagreed with someone in authority, you might not be alive.

Disagreements are inevitable in this fallen world. They are inevitable and I'll give you six reasons why they are inevitable. First, we live in a fallen world full of challenges that

need to be overcome and dealt with. 2. Not only is the world fallen, but you are fallen. Your perspective is finite and your heart is tainted by sin. So because you are fallen and sinful, you will even disagree with God at some points, and we do, we wrestle against God's ways. We disagree with his plan. We think our way is better. Because you and I are fallen, it is inevitable that we will disagree with those in authority, even perfect authority we will disagree with. 3. Your leaders and those in authority over you are also fallen. They are imperfect. 4. Our communication is imperfect. We don't always say things the way that we mean to and so, therefore, misunderstandings result. 5. Not only do we miscommunicate, we also misunderstand. Our understanding is often mistaken and with all those things being true, we have to work together under these conditions. 6. So we have to work together within this fallen world and, therefore, disagreements are inevitable. We don't have a choice. We, sinners, have to work with and under other sinners.

But not only are disagreements inevitable, they are necessary. They are inevitable and they are necessary. Disagreements are necessary. That might sound wrong in view of the idea that we are to be unified, right? We're to be one. But the truth is, though we should pursue unity, we are never perfectly unified in our mind; we are never completely of the same mind. That's why it takes pursuit.

Disagreements are necessary. Think about this: if you are sinful and finite, then your opinions and your motives will be wrong at some point, right? Have you ever had wrong motives? Have you ever had wrong opinions? If not, we probably need to talk. If you've never had a wrong opinion, we should probably...I would like to get your opinions, then. Your opinions and motives will be wrong at some point, therefore, because at some point you will be wrong, it is right for your friends, your leaders, and those who are under your authority, it would be right for them to disagree with you at some point because you will be wrong at some point. It is right for your leaders to disagree with you at some point.

On the other hand, because your leaders are sinful and finite, then their opinions, their motives and their decisions, will also be wrong at some point, therefore, you should disagree with your leaders at some point. And I don't mean cause a disagreement or a division, but you should not just accept what your leaders and authorities say as truth, as though they were God. That would be wrong for us to do that. How many atrocities have been committed because people failed to disagree with their authorities?

So there are two different extremes that we can take with regard to disagreements with authority, right? We can take the overly submissive route where we just never address it and we just go on with it. And on the other hand, we can cause all sorts of divisions and rebellions and raise up a grassroots uprising against them. Both of those, rebellion and sticking your head in the sand, those are both not appropriate or godly responses.

But there are unique challenges that come when you have disagreements, not just between friends, but when you disagree with your leaders, right? That's uniquely challenging. Okay, it's one thing if you disagree with your wife, it's one thing if you disagree with your brother or sister, it's another thing if you disagree with your children,

but how difficult is it when you disagree with your authority, with your boss, with your leader? Think about that: why is that particularly difficult? 1. I'd say one reason is because they have some kind of power over you, right? If you disagree with them, they have the ability to affect your life in a way that you don't want them to and so you would like them to agree with what you think is best. If you're on their good side, it can benefit you. On the other hand, they might be able to hold their position over you and make your life miserable. So disagreeing with your authorities is a particularly challenging position to be in.

2. Another thing that makes it difficult and uniquely challenging is that we tend to have higher expectations of leaders and when they fail to meet our expectations, we're greatly disappointed and that's not necessarily wrong. We should, Scripture lays a higher expectation on leaders. But that makes it more difficult when you don't trust a leader's judgment, you don't trust their decisions. You start to wonder, "How can that person be in that position?" You might be asking yourself that question right now. I should probably ask that question. This can cause a measure of self-doubt, as well, because if you have that expectation that this person is an authority and they probably got there, somehow, through some kind of merit and I disagree with them but I'm pretty sure that I'm right, but if they disagree with me, well, there must be something wrong with me. You see, there are two ends to that: self-doubt and self-confidence. When you disagree with your leader, that's a challenging thing.

And what makes this a little bit more challenging for a believer is that God has called us to submit to authority. God has called us to submit to authority. God has called me to submit to the elders of this church. God has called me to submit to the governing authorities and when those authorities aren't as they should be, that is a uniquely challenging situation. If you disagree with your kids, okay, that's a pain but, you know, it doesn't bother me that much. But if I disagree with the cop who pulled me over, I mean, we've got a few movements going on these days who disagree with things that are handled, right? It causes an anger and an angst. So there are particular challenges to that.

So in light of that, in light of the challenges that we face, in light of the inevitability and the necessity of disagreeing with your leaders, how should we then respond when these disagreements arise? This is really important. It's not whether or not you disagree but how you disagree and for what reason. What is your motivation? And then what do you do with that? Where do you go with that disagreement? It can either lead to destruction or to building up in edification, your response.

So it's a key question and before we get into that, I think that song that we sang right at the end is key to this whole thing, that if your desire is to know Christ and to please him and that is your chief desire and to be rewarded by him on the last day, and you're not fighting for what you can have in this life but instead you're fighting for the kingdom of God, for the glory of Christ, then we can approach this in a right attitude and a heart. We're not going to handle this, what I don't want to communicate is this is how you influence your leaders to get them to do what you want them to do. This is not a lesson in skillful manipulation. This is a lesson in submissive disagreement that honors the Lord.

So there are three commitments that I think, at least, I mean, there are probably more but three commitments I want to highlight. The first is: commit to submitting to authority. Submit to authority. 2. Pursue unity. 3. Speak the truth in love. These things have to, we have to be committed to these things no matter what if this is what we are about.

So key commitment number 1 is this: submit to authority. What does this mean, to submit? The Greek word, "hupotasso," it means "to subject one's self; to obey; to arrange under, like a military unit lining up under the direction of their leader; to subordinate; to yield." It involves obedience, honor, respect and sincerity.

Look at Romans 13:1. In fact, actually, you might just want to write down these passages because I'm going to run through a lot of them fairly quickly. So write the passage and listen to the concepts and maybe you can go back over them later. I'll also be sending a handout via email with a bunch of references for your benefit later.

But Romans 13:1, "Let every person be subject," that's that word "hupotasso," submission, "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." So why submit? Why submit to these authorities? Because God has placed them there. In his sovereignty, he has put them in authority over you. "Whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment," from those rulers, from those authorities. "For rulers are not a terror to good conduct," he's elaborating on what kind of judgment they're incurring, right? The judgment they incur is from these rulers, they are not a terror to good conduct, "but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority?" Would you rather not fear them? "Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain."

Okay, we can go on but we are to submit to the governing authorities. Why? God has ordained this authority, that's the first one, God has ordained it. The second reason why we submit is in 1 Peter 2:13-18. Your Gospel witness is your highest priority, okay? 1 Peter 2:13-18, "Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor." And then he goes on to talk about other instances of submission. "Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust."

All the way down in chapter 3, verse 1, it talks about wives submitting to disobedient husbands. Why? "So that they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives," so they would be won over, so that they would be won to Christ. You see, the priority is the kingdom of Christ, not our pleasure and not our ease and not our comfort, not our own kingdom. If that is your priority, then you are willing to endure suffering at

the hands of even unjust people so that you might have the opportunity to be a testimony for the kingdom of Christ. That is why. That is primarily why we submit. God has ordained them there and we want Christ and his kingdom to be put on display and we want to throw no stumbling block in the way. Okay? When we go out and we make a real, there are different words for it, but when we're mean about things in protest to our governing authorities, we might win the legal battle and lose the spiritual one. And I'm not saying we shouldn't fight for justice but we fight for the Gospel, we fight for the cause of Christ. So we're to submit to them.

Now, who are the different people we're to submit to? We mentioned some of them already: the governing authorities, human institutions, slaves to masters, wives to husbands, children to parents, and every church member to their elders. These are the different people that we are to submit to. So that's the first key commitment: submit to authorities.

Second key commitment is this: pursue unity. Ephesians 4:1, we are to eagerly pursue unity. Let me turn there. We bring this up all the time because we don't do this naturally. Ephesians 4:1, "Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called." You see, it's about the Gospel. It's about the calling. It's not about self-righteousness, it's about walking worthy of the Lord, for his honor. Verse 2, "with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Diligent, eager to preserve that unity. It's something we are to pursue.

So keep these things in mind as you think of disagreements with your leaders, okay? For those who don't know Christ, your priority is that they would know Christ; that they would come to a saving relationship with him; to remove stumbling blocks so that you can get to that conversation with them. For those who do know Christ, those who are in authority over you, you are one body with them and you're to pursue unity and peace with them.

Then key commitment 3 is this: speak the truth in love. So it doesn't say ignore problems, sweep them under the rug, pretend like everything's awesome. It doesn't say that. It doesn't say smile and wave and shake hands and slap people's backs. That's not pursuing unity. This is how the body is built up: speaking the truth in love. Ephesians 4:15, "speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head," Christ, we're to be like Christ. None of us are like Christ in any area. None of us are completely like Christ. We're stronger in some areas than others. To the degree that we're not like Christ, we need to be speaking the truth to one another in love to build each other up. This is a commitment that we have, but there are some parameters, right? It's not just speak the truth, it's not just say what is true, it is to do that in love. Now, we're going to talk from here on out of how to approach that. By the way, these things are commitments for every relationship that we have, not just toward those who are in authority. This applies to everyone, how we respond to everybody, speaking the truth in love.

So in light of these commitments, how should we respond? Okay, so I've got three main headings on this. How do we respond? 1. Stop and consider how to respond. Stop and consider. Stop and ponder. 2. Respond submissively. 3. Trust and fear the Lord. Trust and fear the Lord.

1. Stop and consider before you respond. Don't just fly off the handle, shoot from the hip; don't just say the first thing that comes to your mind. We live in an age where authenticity is prized, which is good, honesty is prized, that's good, but we often excuse foolishness with saying that it's authentic, saying that it's, "I'm just being honest." You see, we're to speak the truth in love and we often speak the truth, which means what we're feeling right at the moment, we're speaking what we feel is true or what we want to say, and often it is destructive.

So stop and consider. Listen to Proverbs 15:28, "The heart of the righteous ponders how to answer, But the mouth of the wicked pours out evil things." It's not just a good idea to ponder, it is something that a righteous man does. It is righteous to ponder, to consider, to weigh your answer. People believe that they should be able to say whatever they want off the top of their head and not suffer any consequence or criticism for it, and the minute that someone thinks or feels something, all of a sudden it's on Facebook and Twitter forever and you can't reel it back in. That is so important to understand the impact of your words and that it's not a light thing. Your words are not neutral and, therefore, we are to ponder and to take consideration carefully. Jesus said, "You will be brought into judgment for every careless word."

So what is it that drives this righteous man to ponder? So the first thing: the righteous man fears the Lord. That's the first thing that causes him to ponder. He knows that God is watching. He knows that God hears what he is saying. Have you noticed how much more careful you are about what you say when you're in the presence of someone you respect? Take your favorite preacher, would you just say whatever crazy thing off the top of your head if he was right there? You are more careful about what you say when someone you respect is right there. Jesus is here and he is the most holy, amazing, perfect, and yes, he is gracious but he is majestic. The righteous person is aware that God is right here and, therefore, he is careful about what he says.

The righteous person is purposeful to make sure that what he says is beneficial, wise and true, and often the first thing that pops into your mind is not beneficial, wise and often is not true. Proverbs 29:20 says this, "Do you see a man who is hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him." In fact, it's better to keep your mouth shut, "Even a fool seems wise when he doesn't speak," that's Proverbs 17:28. This quote was attributed to Lincoln and/or Mark Twain, "It's better to keep silent and be thought a fool than to open your mouth and remove all doubt."

So the first thing that we should do when we are faced with a disagreement with our leaders is to stop and to consider how to respond. Let's think about the sorts of things that we're to consider. I've got four categories, four considerations, to think about before you respond. 1. Consider, ponder the impact of your response. Consider the impact of it.

There are potentially negative consequences for your words, terrible consequences. Ecclesiastes 9:18 says this, "Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good." One sinner destroys much good. In a moment, you can destroy much good by not responding appropriately and thoughtfully. Proverbs 11:9, "With his mouth the godless man destroys his neighbor, But through knowledge the righteous will be delivered." A godless man can destroy his neighbor. Proverbs 11:11, "By the blessing of the upright a city is exalted, But by the mouth of the wicked it is overthrown." Do you see that? Your words have potentially destructive consequences.

It can also lead to ruin. Proverbs 18:6, "A fool's lips bring strife, And his mouth calls for blows. A fool's mouth is his ruin, And his lips are the snare of his soul. The words of a whisperer are like dainty morsels, And they go down into the innermost parts of the body." You see, a fool doesn't only bring destruction on others, on an entire city, on much good, he not only brings destruction on that, he brings ruin upon himself.

The words of a whisperer, what's a whisperer? "Oh, can you believe that decision that they made? That was stupid." Do you see that? Why do you whisper? Because you don't want other people to know what you're saying, right? It's not usually something good that you're whispering. It's not something praiseworthy and beneficial and something that would just benefit everybody. When you start and you say, "Oh, you don't want to know what I think about that. Oh, wait, what do you think about that? Oh, well. Oh, yeah, well, give me more. Give me more." They were dainty morsels. Oh, it feels good to be in-the-know.

That's destructive. Watch out for that temptation to have to know everything and only to believe the worst possible story, to attribute false motives to every situation. Those whisperers, it goes down into the innermost parts of the body. It goes in and it stays with you. It becomes part of you. When you eat food, it becomes part of you. All of a sudden these whisperings now become part of the suspicion that you just look upon whoever it's about, you just look at them with suspicion, these dainty morsels.

So it causes destruction and ruin; the whispering becomes part of how you think; it affects your whole body; it separates intimate friends. Proverbs 16:28, "A perverse man spreads strife, And a slanderer separates intimate friends." What does it say about the person who spreads strife? Is it just a benign thing? "Oh, you know, they mean well." No, they spread strife, this is a perverse person. Let our categories be biblical. If that is what you're doing, you can repent. You don't have to stay there, but if that is what you're doing, you are perverse and the destruction that it can cause is to separate close friends.

James 3:5 says, "the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things. See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire! And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell." Wow, that's pretty intense. We could go on and on with James but that illustrates the point that the tongue, though it is small and seems fairly harmless, it is like a wildfire. It sets a spark to the

kindling of the division and the gossip and the slander, it sparks that and sets it ablaze. All by the tongue.

Think about all of the rebellions that have taken place in history. You know, the Arab Spring in Egypt, how was that brought about? You know, the primary driver of that was Facebook. Organizing and communicating ideas through Facebook. The words, the power of words and millions and millions of people rose up and caused a massive rebellion in that country. Words. Your words have potentially dangerous and destructive consequences. Proverbs 26:20 says this, "For lack of wood the fire goes out, And where there is no whisperer, contention quiets down. Like charcoal to hot embers and wood to fire, So is a contentious man to kindle strife." Whispering is like throwing more wood on that bonfire and pretty soon it's out-of-control.

Well, not only are there potentially destructive consequences, there are potentially positive. Okay, so there are two ends of this spectrum. What are the positive possibilities? Well, Proverbs 27:18 says honor. If you handle it right, you will have honor and the people involved will receive honor. Proverbs 27:18, "He who tends the fig tree will eat its fruit, And he who cares for his master will be honored." Proverbs 16:17, "The highway of the upright is to depart from evil; He who watches his way preserves his life." Romans 14:19, "So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another." So peace. 1 Corinthians 12:25, unity and no division and the members of the body having the same care for one another. So honor and peace and unity.

So consider the results. Consider the impact of your response. Second, consider the issue. What kind of an issue is this? And I'm just going to jump through these really quick. What kind of an issue is this disagreement? Is it a matter of opinion? Is it a matter of preference? Is it a matter of conscience? Is it a legitimate sin or a character flaw? What is the issue? It demands a different response depending on the issue.

If it's a matter of opinion, that's different than if it's a matter of sin. If it's a matter of opinion, Scripture calls us to yield, to not quarrel over opinions. Now, if you're asked your opinion, speak the truth in love for their benefit, offer help, but don't start a riot, don't go on a whispering campaign.

If it's an issue of sin, Scripture lays that out for us. Matthew 18, go to that person in person privately. Go to them privately. Show them their fault. This is your brother. From there, only involve those who can help. Only involve those who can bring it to a good resolution. If one of your leaders, you've seen them, a character issue or a sin, you go to them and they disregard you and ignore you, then go to their leader and say, "Hey, I have a concern about this. Can you help me sort this through? I think this is an issue." Don't go to, you know, whatever random person that you happen to be sitting next to and just voice all of your problems. That's destructive.

So, number 3, and I'm sending a hand-out to kind of flesh some of this out a little bit more, but number 3: consider your role. What is your role in this situation. Are you an adviser? Do you have any sort of influence in the situation? Have you been asked your

opinion? Do you have information that would be helpful for those making the decisions? What is your role in this situation? Or are you on the fringe kind of a bystander, like at a distance? You're not called to get involved in every problem that you see. It's like grabbing a passing dog by the ears is one who meddles in someone else's business. You're going to incur pain on yourself. Consider your role.

4. Consider your motives. Okay, this is probably the most important part. What is your reason for dealing with this? Why? Why do you handle these things the way that you do? Why? What governs how you approach this? Let me pull something up here and then we have to end on this. Maybe we can talk more in the future. But think about why you are involved or why you care about the situation when you disagree with a leader. You can be motivated to do, you can do the right things for the wrong reasons. You can speak the truth in pride. You can speak the truth in selfishness. It is possible that you can think that you're fighting for God when you're actually fighting for your own kingdom and glory. That's why we are to ponder how we answer.

Now, think about this: there are potential evil motives, right? Power, pride, covetousness, selfish ambition, jealousy or fear. Often we're fearful of where our leaders are going to take us and we can lash out of that fear and seek to control the outcome of the situation. But what has God called us to do? What are the righteous motives that God has called us to?

Well, 1 Corinthians has three things that it says we should always do. The first, 1 Corinthians 16:14, let everything be done in love. What is love? It is seeking the benefit and the good of those involved. How do you know it's love? 1 Corinthians 13 says love is patient and it's kind. It's not provoked. It does not insist on its own way. It's not easily angered. It does not boast. If you find yourself being easily angered, if you find yourself being impatient and unkind, if you find yourself bragging and wanting credit for something, you know that love is not your motivation in that moment. So repent of that. That's 1 Corinthians 16:14.

The next is 1 Corinthians 14:26, let all things be done for edification. So do what you do to build up, not to destroy. If you're whispering around to people about what So-and-so did, what are you wanting to do in that moment? You are elevating yourself and your own opinion at the expense of that other person. You are destroying. You are destroying confidence in that person. You are destroying the relationship that others might have with that person. That is destructive. It's not edifying. 1 Corinthians says that knowledge puffs up but love builds up. Knowledge for pride's sake is destructive.

So love that edifies the church and, lastly, that glorifies God. 1 Corinthians 10:31. This is not something that we just automatically do is glorify God. How do we know it glorifies God? It obeys him. It does what he asks and we want him to be valued. We want the attention to be on him. We want him to receive the credit. We want his way.

This is why we must stop and consider how to respond because the two choices are destruction or edification, for the glory of God, for the benefit of the body. And at the end

of the day, we need to trust and to fear God. He is the Judge. He will make everything right in the end. We will all give an account of ourselves to him. You will. I will. All of our leaders will stand before him.

You know, you're concerned about your leaders and whether or not they're competent or whether or not their character is in line. Do you know what? That last day, 1 Corinthians says, the purposes of the heart will be revealed. Hebrews 4:12 says everything is laid bare before Christ. When you consider that that leader that you're having a hard time with is going to stand before Christ and be completely exposed, that changes my attitude towards him and I think, "He's going to stand before Christ."

That's the same thing as you look across the room. Look around at each other. You're going to stand before the Lord. You're going to stand before the Lord. You're going to stand before the Lord. We're all going to stand before the Lord and it's before him, it is from him that our praise comes, our commendation. He is the one. He is the Judge. He is the one who determines whether or not what was done is good or bad, right or wrong, and he will name it and he will judge it rightly on that day.

We want that day to be a good day for our leaders. He will reward good. He will deal with evil. And just as the passage that Ty read earlier, that Christ entrusted himself to him who judges righteously, then enabled him to submit to bad treatment for the ultimate glory of God, but he trusted God for that final judgment.

So to end, we need to end right now, the last passage is Hebrews 13:17. Go ahead and turn there if you have your Bible. There is so much more that could be said in terms of the practicalities of these things, but let us be determined to honor the Lord in this way. Hebrews 13:17, "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you. Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a good conscience, desiring to conduct ourselves honorably in all things."

Let's pray for grace that he would help us to handle all of these disagreements that we have with one another and with our leaders, to handle them in a way that genuinely pleases him and we desperately need that because it only takes a spark, one sinner, one divisive person, to cause much destruction. Let's not let any of us be that person.

Let's pray.

Father, you know what resides in our hearts. You know that our motives are often mixed between pride and selfishness and also a genuine desire to please you. And I pray, Father, that we would fight hard against the careless words and the spouting of our opinions that are ungodly. Guard us from being destructive. Guard us from being divisive. Protect this body, Father, knowing that every single body of believers is dealing with the same sorts of temptations, Lord, and we are not immune. I pray that you would just help us to respond well. Thank you so much for your grace, that you forgive us, and that you grow us. We pray all this in Jesus' name. Amen.