

Explore the Bible Series for March 25: Submission: The sign of a well-ordered life

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Submission: The sign of a well-ordered life

- 1 Peter 2:13-25

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Life is a dangerous proposition. For even the boldest among us, it is frightening to think we only have one chance to get it right. Of course, that's where God comes into the picture. God, in his grace, has given us a guidebook telling us exactly how to get it right.

Yet having the guidebook isn't always the comfort we imagine it will be. Quite the opposite; it can be very disturbing. After all, what do we do when the guidebook doesn't line up with our daily experience? Where do we find the courage to risk doing things God's way rather than our own way?



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These are questions we must consider this week as we discuss submission. Even when we wholeheartedly believe in it, submission is a difficult issue. It goes against the grain. It demands we lay ourselves down and allow others to treat us however they wish. If life without a guidebook seems frightening, the idea of radical submission is even worse.

Our plan: submission avoidance

Even the best of us must admit we've developed little tricks for avoiding obedience. Let's be honest. Submission is difficult. Of course, as Christians, we don't want to appear nonsubmissive, so we play little games with ourselves. We memorize a few pat answers, say the right words and then evaluate each situation to see if it warrants true submission.

We have learned, you see, that there can be varying levels of submission. We can submit outwardly while our hearts are rebelling. We can submit to only a part of the demand, hoping the rest will be forgotten. We can even agree with words and then do nothing. Our hope, of course, is that we will get by without having to submit completely.

So what do we do with the Apostle Peter's mandate to "submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men" (v. 13)? We need a radical adjustment to our thinking. And we need to rethink the degree to which we trust God. Of course, this will not be an easy task. It

takes real strength and courage to risk obeying God.

Henry Miller says it well: “True strength lies in submission which permits one to dedicate his life, through devotion, to something beyond himself.” If these words don’t ring true, it’s because our thinking has been too influenced by the world. Remember, the wisdom of God is foolishness to man.

The world’s plan: nonsubmission

The world teaches submission is the pathway to abuse. It is the way of cowards and weaklings. It also carries with it the idea we will be giving up our precious freedom, an idea particularly repugnant to Americans. The bottom line is this: Submission suggests a loss of dignity—something we’ll avoid at all costs.

But nothing could be further from the truth. According to Peter, submission is not a dirty word, but a calling by God. As we have discussed in previous weeks, God has a plan. If we choose to obey, we are privileged to join God in his work and will reap the rewards of doing so. You see, God is not asking us to be weak. He is asking us to silence “the ignorant talk of foolish men” through our commitment to doing good (v. 15).

God’s plan: a well-ordered life

Our confusion is a result of minds clouded by worldly ideas. Whereas the world believes submission is weakness and loss of freedom, to God it is the sign of a well-ordered life. Our choice to submit to earthly authorities evidences our acceptance of God’s order, choosing his plan for our lives rather than our own. It is the proof of our submission to him.

Of course, I'm not teaching anything new. We all desire to obey God. The question remains, however: How do we submit without appearing weak? Perhaps the answer lies in a slight adjustment to our thinking. We know submission is obedience. What we need to realize is that it isn't blind obedience.

Verse 17 tells us to love the brotherhood, fear God and honor the ruling authority. It doesn't tell us to follow them into sin. Nor does it tell us to give up our independence. God is not asking us to stop thinking. He merely is asking us to obey him at all costs. Obeying our earthly authorities is just good practice. It keeps us in the habit of doing right.

God also asks us to fear him. True fear of God springs from understanding we will stand before him on judgment day, answering for every word, every action and every attitude. It causes us to evaluate ourselves by a different standard, a higher standard than the one the world uses.

When God asks us to submit, he is telling us to make a choice. Far from requiring mindlessness, God is granting us the ultimate freedom—choice. He wants us to choose to do right in spite of what others think, in spite of how we are treated. It is the choice to stand alone, if necessary, to obey God. It is the choice to be great in the kingdom of heaven.

Honoring authority demands obedience and respect. It is the conscious choice to lay down our own desires so God will be honored. It is not an attitude of weakness, but of strength. Initially, the world may perceive our helpfulness, kindness and unselfishness as weakness. But over time, our strength and courage will become obvious. As we stand firm against opposition, our character will be revealed.

Sound difficult? Frightening even? Peter tells us we will be commended by God for submitting, especially under unjust circumstances (v. 20). But our calling is clear. We are to follow Jesus' example, obeying God even if it

hurts.

Accepting God's plan

It doesn't really matter what we think of God's plan. Part of trusting God is accepting that he knows more than we do. In his wisdom, God has established an order. Those in authority will answer to God for their use and abuse of that power. Those who are under authority will answer to God for the way they submit to authority.

The question we raised was how to submit. Our answer is simply to do it. By submitting to God's plan, we are placing ourselves in his hands, trusting him to take care of us. And there's no better place we could be.

There is a peace that comes from accepting God's will and refusing to argue with him about it. Let's choose today to give up control to God. He will give us grace to make it through any difficulties we might face.

Discussion questions

- What are the authorities God has placed over you?
- In what areas do you find it easy to submit?
- In what areas is it hard to submit?

What is your greatest fear in submitting?

- Choose one of the areas you have difficulty submitting. How could you begin trusting God in this area today?

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