

Christian Growth Course - Relating Properly to Authority

Introduction: Do God and his appointed authorities have the right to tell me how to live? This is a basic issue that every person must deal with before there can be much spiritual growth. Rebellion and an independent spirit is the root problem that we all struggle with in our fallen nature. It is the sin behind all other sins. Desire for independence from God was the downfall of Satan and of our first parents, Adam and Eve. The issue of submission to authority cuts across all areas of our lives and has everything to do with our happiness, well-being, and salvation.

"I can do what I want to." "Nobody can tell me what to do." "Let me do my own thing." This sums up the attitude of many in a culture looking for absolute freedom. Resentment to authority, thinking it is clever to get away with things, and ridicule of the morally obedient, make it hard for Christians today. A Christian must have the courage to be different. To follow Christ, we must accept God's right to direct us, and eliminate pockets and attitudes of rebellion. Growth begins with a broken and contrite heart open to God's will - Psalm 51:17; Matthew 18:3, 4.

Once we clearly settle the issue of submission to authority, many other victories come within reach.

1. All authority originates from God - 1 Timothy 6:15; 2 Chronicles 20:6; Isaiah 44:6; Matthew 4:10; Daniel 4:17; 1 Peter 5:6.
2. God institutes the lesser, earthly authorities - Romans 13:1.
 - A. Parents - Ephesians 6:1-3; Colossians 3:20.
 - B. Husband as head of family - Ephesians 5:22; Colossians 3:18.
 - C. Teachers - Proverbs 5:13.
 - D. Older people - 1 Peter 5:5a.
 - E. Church leaders - Hebrews 13:17; 1 Timothy 5:17; 1 Thessalonians 5:12, 13.
 - F. Work supervisors - Ephesians 6:5; Colossians 3:22.
 - G. Government authorities - Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-17; Titus 3:1, 2.
3. To resist authority established by God is to resist God - Romans 13:2; Matthew 10:40.
 - A. We obey God's appointed authority not because the person is always right, but because of the principle of respect to authority - 1 Peter 2:18; Matthew 23:1, 2.

Those in authority over us should exercise their authority in real submission to God and as servants of those they lead. But whether or not they do this does not change the principle of obedience and respect - compare 1 Peter 3:1, 2.
 - B. When an earthly authority needs to be corrected:
 - 1) Do not lose your attitude of respect and submission.
 - 2) Take up his fault with him/her in a lawful and respectful way.

- 3) Appeal to the authority above him/her if necessary, but only after trying to deal with him/her directly - Matthew 18:15-17.
- 4) Pray to God who is able to deal with him/her - Proverbs 21:1.
- C. When an earthly authority clearly contradicts God's authority, we must obey God - Acts 4:19; 5:29.

(Warning: Remain submissive in attitude and in all other matters. The error of an authority is no license for us to rebel. Our continued respect and general obedience may help open doors to helping the person, as well as protecting ourselves.)

4. Rebellion destroys people.

- A. God hates rebellion - 1 Samuel 15:23; Numbers 15:27, 30; Deuteronomy 21:18-21.
- B. God punishes rebellion and disrespect - Numbers 16:1-35; 1 Samuel 15:10-23; 2 Kings 2:23, 24.
- C. When we rebel against authority, we are of the same spirit as Satan, the first and greatest rebel - Isaiah 14:12-14.
- D. Adam and Eve fell because they wanted to be like gods (independent of God) - Genesis 3:4-6.
- E. God cannot help the proud, but gives grace to the humble - James 4:6.
- F. Our disobedience to authorities causes people to slander the Lord and his teaching - 1 Timothy 6:1.
- G. Disobedience and rebellion against authority remove us from God's protection and open us to Satan's attack - 1 Corinthians 11:10; 5:5; 1 Timothy 1:20; 1 Samuel 15:22, 23; 19:9, 10.
- H. Rebellion in one area carries over to other areas of life. Rebellion against parents leads to rebellion against teachers, church leaders, supervisors, government authorities and God.
- I. My rebellion leads others to rebel - Luke 17:1, 2.
- J. Unwillingness to be responsible to God is behind much unbelief.
- K. Continued rebellion always causes a person to be destroyed - Proverbs 29:1. This spiritual law is as certain as the laws of nature.

5. Submission to authority brings life and happiness.

- A. It is well with those who obey - Deuteronomy 5:29; Ephesians 6:1-3.
- B. An attitude of gracious, willing submission is beautiful to God - 1 Peter 3:3-6.

- C. Submission during youth helps one's whole life - Lamentations 3:27; Proverbs 22:6; Luke 2:51, 52.
- D. Submission brings us into the kingdom of God - Matthew 18:3, 4.
- E. When we submit to authority, we are like Jesus - Luke 2:51, 52; Matthew 17:24-27; John 5:30; Luke 22:41, 42; Hebrews 5:8.
- F. We have authority by being under authority (by serving) - Matthew 8:9; 20:25-28.
- G. Godly submission to those in authority over us does not mean renouncing our own responsibility of moral choice, as is often done in cults. This is wrong.

6. Other truths about authority and submission:

- A. Rebellion can spring from pride, from believing a lie about those over us, and from a wounded, bitter spirit - Genesis 3:4,5; Hebrews 12:15. For many, rebellion started with resenting and kicking at their parents.
- B. Real submission has to begin in the heart and thought-life - 2 Corinthians 10:3-5; Romans 6:17; Matthew 5:20-22, 27, and 28.
- C. If I don't believe something is God's will, doing it is sin for me - Romans 14:23. Also, if I believe God wants me to do something and don't do it, this is sin for me - James 4:17.
- D. One can be very active religiously and yet be unsubmitted to God and other authorities - Matthew 15:8, 9; 7:21; 23:23, 24.
- E. The first sacrifice God wants is a broken, contrite and obedient heart - Psalm 51:16,17; James 4:4-10; 1 Samuel 15:22.
- F. Godly submission is not slavishness or the loss of one's personhood. It is actually the freedom to be a real, whole person. The Christian submits because he has freely chosen to. He is still a person and can express himself as long as he does so respectfully.
- G. Submission, not rebellion, is a mark of maturity. Anybody can rebel and kick at authority. Not everyone has the wisdom, strength and self-control to obey.

7. Steps toward real submission:

- A. Improve your concept of God. J.B. Phillips wrote a book called, Your God is Too Small. When you begin to see his glory, wisdom, greatness and goodness, respect and submission grow.

Note: Our concept of God is closely connected with our attitude toward our parents, especially our fathers. If your relationship to your father was not good, it will color your view of God. You need to free your concept of God from any distortions due to feelings about your father, parents or other authorities you have experienced on earth.

- B. Get things right with your parents. Repent of any rebellion or disobedience. This relationship sets the tone for all relationships to authority. If you resented the authority of your parents, other authorities will remind you of your parents and you will have trouble

with them as well. Even if your parents are dead or are unreachable, you can repent to God of wrong attitudes toward them.

- C. Get rid of the false, worldly idea that having to submit to authority is bad. Exchange false ideas for true ones.
- 1) Media and our culture often glorify rebellion.
 - 2) Realize that "absolute freedom" is a myth.
 - 3) Realize that submission to authority is foundational for peace, order and well-being.
- D. Realize that rebellion is rooted in our old, fleshly, sinful fallen nature. It follows Adam and Satan. Submission to authority is part of the result of "crucifying the old nature" - Romans 6:6-14; Colossians 3:5-10. Repent of your whole spirit of independence and rebellion.
- E. Check every authority-relationship in your life for signs of rebellion, insubordination or disrespect. For example:
- 1) To parents:
 - < Putting things over on them.
 - < Considering them a bother.
 - < Trying to get by with partial obedience.
 - < Having no time for them.
 - < Kicking at their values through activities, music, appearance, lifestyle, friends, beliefs we choose.
 - 2) To husband:
 - < Carrying resentments instead of communicating.
 - < Undermining his discipline of the children.
 - < Criticizing him behind his back or before others.
 - < Using sexual coldness as a weapon to punish or control him.
 - < Manipulating him through emotional or physical illness.
 - 3) To teachers:
 - < Paying poor attention, doing your own thing.
 - < Short-cuts on assignments.
 - < Persistent lateness to class.
 - < Questions designed to disrupt.
 - < Inattention, disorderly behavior.
 - 4) To church leaders:
 - <Criticizing them behind their backs instead of taking objections to them personally.
 - <Counseling people to do differently than the leaders have requested.
 - <Baiting the leaders with insincere questions.
 - <Counting only their faults, forgetting to be grateful for the good they do.
 - <Not responding to their calls for action.

- 5) To work supervisors:
- <Goofing off when unsupervised.
 - <Shortcuts, sloppy work.
 - <Lateness.
 - <Calling in sick when not sick.
 - <Bad-mouthing supervisors.
 - <Blaming supervisors when your own irresponsibility is the problem.
 - <Not trying to please.
 - <Stealing, and unauthorized use of company property or facilities.

- 6) To civil authorities:
- <Traffic violations because no one is looking.
 - <Incorrect reporting of taxes.
 - <Ignoring regulations.
 - <Slanderous, disrespectful criticism.

- F. When you see an issue of obedience coming, deliberately submit. Every time you do this, the habit of submission to authority is strengthened.
- G. Find concrete ways to practice submission and respect.
- H. Decide to submit cheerfully, in good grace. This is a choice you have.
- I. As far as possible, do not associate closely with people who have a rebellious spirit. Rebels always seem to find and reinforce each other.
- J. Discover anything in your appearance, activities or lifestyle that expresses inner rebellion. Eliminate these, but realize that the inner root attitude must also be dealt with.
- K. Stop rebellion at whatever stage it has reached, and retrace your way so as to restore relationships. Steps in rebellion (listed by Bill Gothard) are:
- 1) Communication breakdown.
 - 2) Ungratefulness, consideration of hurts more than of benefits received.
 - 3) Stubbornness.
 - 4) Defending wrongdoing.
 - 5) Condemning others.

When you see these danger signs, back up!

Conclusion: God and those appointed by him do have the right to tell us how to live. This should be something to celebrate, because God only wants the best for us. Rebellion against God's authority is rebellion against life. The only cure for rebellion is repentance. When our stubborn spirit is broken and willing to obey; when our purpose in life is to please God, then we are starting to live!

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