

## Three Primary Effects of the Spirit's Influence (Part 5)

**Ephesians 5:19-21**

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If you had had the opportunity to walk through Boston in the 1770's, everywhere you went you would have seen a sign that sort of captured the spirit of the times. The sign would've read like this: "We serve no sovereign here." We serve no sovereign here. We understand the tumultuous times that produced that saying as the revolution had begun against Britain. But as you think about that sign for a moment, it seems to me and certainly reflects the heart of the Scripture that that sign is really placarded on every human heart by nature. We are born rebels against God. We are born with a sign as it were emblazoned across our souls which says: "I serve no sovereign here." As one man wrote:

Fallen man's fierce hostility to God is the response of his egotism to God's claim to his allegiance. Determined to assert himself, to assert his independence, to be the center of his own life, to be his own god, he cannot help but hate the real God whose very existence gives lie to all of his self-assertion.

There isn't enough room in the universe for two gods, and so, man rebels. He wants to be his own god. He rebels against the true God. That rebellion that is a part of our human nature the Scripture describes in various ways, and it manifests itself in various ways as well.

One of the chief ways that our rebellion ultimately against God manifests itself in the world is rebellion against the authorities that He has established in our lives. There are any number of places you could go to substantiate that or to hear it set forth. One of them that came to my mind was the words of the poet Percy Shelley who wrote this of obedience. He said, "Obedience, bane of all genius, virtue, freedom, truth, makes slaves of men, and of the human frame, a mechanized automaton."

You see, if you're a rebel against the king, then you also refuse to submit to the officials that he sends to his representatives. So, it makes sense then when you really think about it that even the

idea of submission in our world, submission to those in authority, is very unpopular. It's unpopular to all human beings. It's certainly unpopular in a country that began in a revolution, and it's unpopular in the state of Texas where we don't like anyone telling us what to do.

Instead, our culture is into liberating people, liberating them from their authorities, encouraging them to throw off all restraint. This is true against the government. You can see it occasionally, those who sort of connect via the internet, who live under the sort of loose banner of anarchy will occasionally take to the streets in one of the major cities of the world to express their disdain of governmental authority. You see it unfortunately, recently, we saw it in those who called themselves a Christian militia.

You even see it in some of the more rabid and extreme elements of the Tea Party Movement. Throw off the restraints of government. You see it in the church. There is in churches a sort of hue and cry to do away with things that the Scripture teaches like church discipline, not to have any membership so that I'm not accountable to anyone or anything. I'm my own boss. And don't give us any real preaching or authoritative declarations. Tell us what you think, and we'll sit in judgment on whether or not it's true. You see it in the home and family. You see it with wives' response to their husbands. We have an equal authority, they might say. You see it in children to parents. You see it in the workplace as employees respond to their employers.

You see, the rebel heart that each of us is born with is a rebel against God and therefore, since we can't get to God, we rebel against the other authorities that He puts in our lives who tell us what to do. Sin fosters and promotes that rebellion both against God and against those who are in authority over us. So, it makes sense then (when you think about it) that if sin fosters and promotes that rebellion both against God and His representatives on earth, then sanctification (the process of being made more like Jesus Christ) would promote its opposite. It would promote submission to those duly constituted authorities. If a life of sin produces rebellion, then a life of biblical wisdom is going to promote the principle of submission to authority.

That's exactly what Paul says to the Ephesians in Ephesians 5:21. I invite you to turn there with me this morning. Ephesians 5:21. For those of you who are visiting with us, we find ourselves in

the midst of a several year journey through this wonderful letter of Paul to the church in Ephesus, and we come to Ephesians 5:21. Now let me remind you of the context. In Ephesians 5, Paul has told us that as Christians, if we're going to walk in a way that's worthy of our calling, of all that God has done for us in Christ, then we have to walk in biblical wisdom.

How do you walk in biblical wisdom? Well, really the chief way, and the way that he sort of built to is in verse 18, "Don't be drunk with wine, for that's dissipation [that leads to dissipation of all kinds], but instead [here's how to walk in biblical wisdom] be filled with the Spirit...." That is, as we saw, allow the Spirit of God to fill you with a deep, rich, illuminating understanding of His Word that directs and controls our thoughts, directs and controls our attitudes, directs and controls our actions. That's what it means to be filled by the Spirit with the Word of God.

Now, when we're under the influence of the Spirit like that, we've seen that there are effects or consequences. In fact, there are three primary consequences of being under the influence of the Spirit, and they're listed for us here by Paul in verses 19 to 21. Let me read this section for you. We'll pick up back in verse 18 where the main verb of the sentence is.

And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.

Now, that's one sentence in the Greek text. The main verb of that sentence comes in verse 18, "be filled". Be filled by the Spirit with the word. Then in verses 19 to 21, there are five participles that modify that main verb "be filled". Notice in verse 19 speaking, singing, making melody and, verse 20, giving thanks. And the fifth one is in verse 21. You'll see it in the marginal note if you have a *New American Standard Bible*. It's literally "being subject". There's the fifth participle. Now those five participles explain the results of being filled by the Spirit.

There are really three consequences because the first three all have to do with one thing. So, the three consequences are this: in verse 19, a love for God-centered music; secondly, a pattern of thankfulness in verse 20; and in verse 21, a heart of submission.

Wherever the influence of the Spirit is felt, there will be those three great consequences – a love for God-centered music, a pattern of thankfulness and a heart of submission. Those are the spiritual diagnostic that you and I can take. As we look at our own souls, if you see those things in your own life and heart, then it's an indication that you are under the influence of the Spirit. In addition to being a spiritual diagnostic, there's sort of a target, a goal at which all of us as Christians should aim. We should promote and encourage these things in our hearts as well.

Now, we've already looked at the first two of these: in verse 19, a love for God-centered music; verse 20, a pattern of thankfulness. Today, we need to examine the third and final great consequence of a life under the influence of the Spirit and the Word and that is, in verse 21, a heart of submission. Look at verse 21, "and be subject (literally 'and being subject') to one another in the fear of Christ", "and being subject to one another in the fear of Christ." Here is the third great consequence of a life that is under the influence of the Spirit.

What I want to do today is, I want to again examine this verse by (as we have with the other two verses), asking and answering a series of questions. So, let's take this apart. Let's begin with a first question.

Why is submission so important? Why would it be one of the main effects of being under the influence of the Spirit and the Word? What makes this issue so important to God?

Well, it's a concept that is embedded in God's basic law to us in what we call the Ten Commandments. In fact, let's go back to Exodus 20 where Moses has the people at the mountain of Sinai. And there, God gives them a series of what we call the Ten Commandments. Let me just remind you of what's going on here. Look at the preface to the Ten Commandments. Exodus 20:1 and 2,

Then God spoke all these words, saying, “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.””

That’s the preface to the Ten Commandments, and it underscores the weight and authority of these commands. They are important for several reasons. They’re important because of the way they were revealed. You know, Moses received a lot of God’s law from God personally and privately during the eighty days, the two forty-day trips up to Mount Sinai, but these Ten Commandments, verse 1 says, God actually spoke.

And if we had time, I’d take you to Deuteronomy where it’s clear that the people, all two million plus of them gathered at the foot of Mount Sinai, heard the actual voice of God speaking these Ten Commandments from that awesome scene on the top of Mount Sinai. That underscored their importance. Imagine yourself there hearing God actually speak, feeling the earthquake, seeing the clouds, seeing the lightning and hearing out of that cloud the thundering voice of God as He speaks these Ten Commandments.

They’re also important because of the person who revealed them. Notice verse 2, “I am the LORD”, I am - you’ll see the word LORD in all caps. That’s means it’s the Hebrew word for God’s personal name, Yahweh. I am Yahweh, the “I am”, the One you call “He is”. And notice the people’s relationship to this person: “I am Yahweh your God...” These commands are also important because of the grace God had shown them. Verse 2 says, “[I’m the One] ... who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.” How did these people become God’s people? By His gracious divine act of deliverance. And that becomes the motive then for their obedience to God.

Now then, as the Ten Commandments, as God speaks them, and they flow forth, understand that these Ten Commandments are not all-inclusive. Think of each of these commandments as a summary statement of an area or category of life. It’s not that these ten commands are the only ones that are important. These were like hooks on which all of the other commands could be hung. They reminded the people that God had a right to have authority in a certain area of their lives.

So notice with that in mind, the fifth word or the fifth commandment in verse 12, “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you.” Now this is a very important commandment and a very important placement because it marks a transition in the Decalogue, in the Ten Commandments. It marks a transition from God, who is the ultimate authority and whose expectations toward Himself are described in the first four commandments. And then in commandments number six through ten, you have our responsibilities to all other human beings, to one another, to our peers if you will. So, you have God as the ultimate authority, and then you have the commands in six through ten to one another.

But standing in the middle of that, standing at a transitionary point as kind of a hinge commandment is this commandment number 5. This fifth commandment is about human authority. It’s not addressed that we should respond this way to everyone as verses 6 - 10 but specifically, as Luther said, to those who are the representatives of God. As God is to be served with honor and fear, Luther said, his representatives are to be so as well. Understand that again the parents described in this fifth commandment are not all that God’s concerned about us honoring and respecting. That is merely a hook to remind us that God has positioned authority in our lives, one of which is our parents, and we are to submit to that authority. They’re merely representative here in this fifth commandment, parents are, of all of those God has placed over us.

So, ultimately then, understand the flow of the Ten Commandments. You have God speaking, commanding with His own voice what ought to be done. And there are specific responsibilities we have toward God, and then there are these specific responsibilities we have toward our peers, toward one another. In between that is our responsibility to authority, to those God has placed over us. So, understand this then. As John Stott says, “Submission is a humble recognition of the divine ordering of society.” It is a humble recognition of the divine ordering of society. That’s why it’s so important – because it is God’s authority mediated through human authority. Ultimately, all human authority comes from God and is based on His authority. He put it into place, and He demands our submission to it.

Now, that brings us to a second question. What exactly is submission? Go back with me to Ephesians 5, and here Paul answers that question. What exactly is submission? He answers it by the word he chooses, the Greek word translated in verse 21 “be subject” or “being subject”. That word literally means, if we took the two - it’s a two-part word in the original language. And if we took those two parts and translated them literally, it literally means to order one’s self under, to order one’s self under; that is, under someone in authority. It’s used some forty times in the New Testament. It is an action of the will. We are not called to subjugate, to brutalize those under authority; instead, those under authority are called to willingly, voluntarily, with an act of their own will, order themselves under that authority.

This word I think is most clearly seen when you look at it in the way it’s used very often and that is in military settings. It referred, in that military context, to the whole issue of order and rank. In the military, there are in each service in our country, there are specific designations of rank and order. When you intentionally as an act of your will place yourself under someone who is over you in rank, you yield your will to theirs. That’s what this word means. It means, one of the leading lexicons of the Greek language calls it voluntary yielding. You yield your will to theirs.

Really, when you look at this idea of submission, it includes two basic concepts. It includes, number one, acknowledging the rightful authority of that person, and number two, voluntarily ordering yourself under that authority. That’s what submission is. It is acknowledging their rightful authority over you and yielding your will, putting your will under their will. We’re not talking here about mindlessness. We’re not talking about not presenting your own ideas, your own opinions to the authority, talking about issues. We’re not talking about a sort of wallflower approach to submission. We’re talking about, when ultimately there is a conflict between you and the person over you in rank, you yield your will to their will. That’s what this is about. It’s an attitude of mind and heart that remembers that you have, by God’s own divine design, been put under the authority of others, and you yield to that authority.

Now, that brings the third question: to whom are we to submit? Well, look at verse 21. Paul tells us here, “and ... [being subject] (or submitting) to one another”, to one another. Now what does

that mean? Now, I'll just tell you honestly, there's been a lot of debate about what that means. There are two basic positions of what this means you'll see in various commentators. Two options – option number one is this is talking about mutual submission of every Christian to every other Christian. We are to kind of mutually submit to one another. So, I submit to you. You submit to me. We all submit to one another. There are men I highly respect who take that position, but I can't take it because of the evidence, and I'll tell you what that evidence is in just a moment.

There's a second view that's very common, very well-defended, and it's that it is submission to all human authorities - that verse 21 is not talking about mutual submission where you submit to me, and I submit to you, and we all submit to each other, but rather we are called upon as individuals to submit ourselves to whomever the authorities are in our lives. I believe the evidence is very strong in favor of this second option. Let me tell you why. Let me give you the arguments. Argument number one: the meaning of the word "submit". The very meaning of the word translated here "be subject" argues for the second position. Over the last several weeks just to make sure, on two different occasions I've gone through the Scriptures - both the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, as well as the New Testament - and looked at the use of this Greek verb in all sixty-eight cases in which it occurs. Every time this Greek verb occurs in Old Testament or New Testament, it always refers to submitting to someone who is over you in position or authority. Let me just give you some examples. Here are some of the examples of how this word is used.

It's used of people submitting themselves to a king. It's used of demons submitting themselves to the apostles. It's used of all things being subject to or submitting to Christ. It's used of wives to husbands, children to parents, slaves to masters, church members to elders, Christians to governmental rulers and ultimately Christians to God and Christ. Those are most of the contexts in which this word is used. And in all of the contexts without exception, it is always a reference to yielding our will to someone who is over us in a position of authority. If verse 21 doesn't mean that, it would be the only exception of all sixty-eight occurrences in the New Testament. And by the way, even those who take view number one agree with that.



Number two, argument number two, why it has to be submission to authority: the flow of the context. Look at verse 21. You have the word “be subject”. It’s there in the English and the Greek. But notice in verse 22 it says, “wives” and then the word “be subject” is in italics in our *New American Standard Bible*. That’s because the words don’t appear in the Greek text. Paul borrows the idea from verse 21. He doesn’t even repeat the verb in verse 22. So, it’s clear then, that Paul intends that the wives’ response to their husbands be an example of the kind of submission he’s talking about.

In fact, all of the examples of submission that follow verse 21 are talking about submitting to people in positions of authority – wives to husbands in verses 22 down through verse 33, children to parents in 6:1 to 4 and slaves to masters in 6:5 to 9. While those in authority, those in leadership are told in these passages to be kind, to be considerate, to be understanding, to be loving, to be self-sacrificial, what they are never told to do is submit to those over whom they exercise that authority.

The third reason it has to be I think submission to authority is the expression “to one another” doesn’t always mean all Christians to every other Christian. It often does mean that. We talk about the “one anothers” of the New Testament. It means you’re to love me, and I’m to love you, and we’re all to do that reciprocally. And so, I think that leads us to think, “Well, maybe it means that here.” But it doesn’t always mean every Christian to every other Christian or every person to every other person.

I’ll choose a real obvious example. In Revelation 6:4, you don’t need to turn there, but in Revelation 6:4 you have the tribulation period. And this is what’s said about the tribulation period, “it was granted to take peace from the earth, and that men (listen) would slay one another ...” Now think about that for a moment. That doesn’t mean that, at the exact same time, everybody is killing everybody else. It means some people are killing others. And so here that’s what you have. When it says “submit yourselves to one another”, there are people submitting themselves to others, and then he goes on to explain who those people are – wives to husbands, children to parents, slaves to masters.

So, kind of summing all that up - in Ephesians 5:21, we are told to voluntarily submit ourselves to all God-ordained authorities, human authorities. That's true in marriage. That's true in family. That's true in work or society, in government and in the church. Now, I've just sort of answered the question, but what are these primary human authorities? Well, government is an obvious one – all city, state and federal officials.

First Peter makes this very clear. First Peter 2:13 says, “Submit yourselves (there's our word) for the Lord's sake to every human institution” and then he goes on to list all these governmental offices – kings, their officers sent out, etc. He's talking about all political, civil, judicial, governmental authority. It includes, in our case, the president, the Congress, the state legislature, governor, mayor, city council, judges, police and all the representatives that include those who write the codes for buildings, those who even those who work for the IRS. I hate to tell you that. It includes the authority of government.

It includes the authority of church. In Hebrews, we're told to obey and submit to those who lead in the church - of course, in the authority of the Scripture. It includes marriage, wives to husbands, as we'll see as we work our way through this passage. It includes home and family, children to parents, as we'll see again when we get to chapter 6. It includes our work. In chapter 6, he talks about slaves and masters or servants and masters. In our context, that would be employer and the authorities that represent them.

Now the key question here is why. Why are we to submit to human authority? Why does he emphasize that here when he talks about the influence of the Spirit and not submission to God? Well, think about it for a moment. Let's take loving God. We're supposed to love God. How does the Bible say that we most clearly demonstrate our love for God? By loving one another. So how then do we best demonstrate our submission to God? By submitting to the authorities He's put in place. Show me a Christian who struggles submitting to duly constituted authorities in his life or her life, and I'll show you a Christian who struggles submitting his or her will to God and His Word. You show me a person who has an eager, glad, willing, from the heart desire to submit to human authority, and I'll show you a Christian who also has a submissive heart to God. They go together, and so it reflects the reality of our submission to God.

Now that brings us to a fourth question. What are the limits of submission? What are the boundaries of submission? Where does it stop? How far does our submission to authorities go? What is the extent of submission to human authorities? Well, let me show this to you here with the authorities he's going to walk through in this passage. Look at Ephesians 5:24 – “But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in (what? in what? I didn't hear you yet, in?) everything.” I didn't make that up. Okay? That isn't me. That's Paul. That's ultimately the Lord.

What about children? Well, keep your finger here in Ephesians, and turn to the parallel passage in Colossians, written at the same time from the same prison cell. Colossians 3:20, “Children, be obedient to your parents in (what?) all things...” What about slaves, workers? Verse 22, “Slaves, (in what?) in all things obey those who are your masters on earth...” Now folks, there's not much way to misunderstand “in everything”, “in all things” and “in all things”. That's pretty clear, wouldn't you say?

Now, it's important that I qualify it because the Bible qualifies it. Our submission to authority is not unconditional as it is to God and His authority. There are two clear biblical exceptions for submitting to human authority when you do not, you should not submit.

Number one, exception number one is when that authority commands you to do what God forbids, when that authority commands you to do what God forbids. And exception number two is when that authority forbids you from doing what God commands.

Let me say that again. The two exceptions are when God tells you what to do, and the human authority commands you to do what God forbids, or forbids you from doing what God commands. Really, it's just one exception - when the commands of that human authority run contrary not to your own wishes and desires, but to the revealed Word of God.

How do we know that? Turn with me to Acts 4 because, twice in the early chapters of Acts, the apostles run up against the authority of the government in Israel, and they teach us how we ought

to respond when governmental authority and God's authority, when any human authority and God's authority conflict. Look at Acts 4:18. The council summons the apostles and commanded them not to speak or to teach at all in the name of Jesus. Verse 19, "But Peter and John answered and said to them, 'Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge.'"

What does that assume? It's not right. It's not right to listen to you even though you're a human authority over us because what you're telling us to do runs contrary to what God tells us to do. Now here he hints at it. In chapter 5, they make it crystal clear. Look over in chapter 5, and notice verse 27. They bring them in again. You know, this isn't working real well. They bring them in again.

... they stood ... before the Council. The high priest questioned them, saying, "We gave you strict orders (didn't we tell you not to do this) not to continue teaching in this name, and yet, you have filled [all] Jerusalem with all your teaching and [you] intend to bring this man's blood upon us." [In other words, you're not listening to our authority. And what does Peter say?] Verse 29, "... Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men."

When human authority contradicts obedience to God, we have to choose to obey God and take the consequences for it. That's the exception.

Now, I want you to think about the authorities in your life. Think about for a moment the authorities. We all are under the government. Some, some of you are wives under husbands. Some of you are children under parents. You're under elders here in the church. Just think about the authorities that God has placed in your life – in the workplace, your boss. Do you voluntarily order yourself under them? Do you intentionally, gladly yield your will because you recognize their rightful authority in your life - that God has put together this order, this system of authority and submission – and you yield your will to them? Can you honestly say that you do that, as we've seen here in this text, in everything except when the Word of God would be violated? That's the standard for submission.

Now a fifth question we need to ask quickly is what is the motivation to submission? Go back to chapter 5 of Ephesians, verse 21. What is the motivation to submission? He says, “being subject to one another in the fear of Christ.” Now that shouldn’t surprise us, because in the Old Testament, fear of God was a motivation to right living. Proverbs 1:7 - “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge....”

Here, Paul tells us to submit to human authority out of our fear for Jesus Christ. Now why should we fear Jesus Christ? Well, look back in verse 20. Because He’s our Lord Jesus Christ. Remember, we looked at that word last week. “Kurios” is the Greek word. It means master. He’s our Master. We are His slaves. He’s our Sovereign. We are His subjects. And therefore, because we fear the ultimate authority in our lives, the Lord Jesus Christ, therefore we submit ourselves to the under-authorities He’s put in our lives. That’s the point this passage is making. All Christians are subject under His authority; and therefore, we respond to those He places over us.

Let me show you how this idea just permeates this passage. Look at 5:24, “the church (that’s all of us by the way, every believer) is subject to Christ...” We’re under, we submit to Him. Verse 1 of chapter 6, children are to obey their parents in the Lord or under the control or domination of the “Kurios” over both parents and children. Verse 4, fathers are to be careful in how they use your authority because both they and their children are under one “Kurios”, one Lord. Verse 5, slaves are to serve as to Christ with fear and trembling. Verse 6 says we are slaves of Christ.

Verse 7 – you’re to render service as to the “Kurios”, the Master, yours and mine. Verse 8, “knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the “Kurios”, whether slave or free.” And verse 9 - masters, be careful, don’t threaten, knowing that you have a (and the word “master” here is the word “Kurios”). Both their “Kurios” and your “Kurios” is in heaven, and there’s no partiality with Him. This idea dominates this passage. We are to have a healthy fear of those who are over us in authority because we fear our mutual “Kurios”, the One who’s over us all.

Now how does this healthy fear of our “Kurios” express itself? Well, as you work your way through this passage, it expresses itself in a couple of ways. First of all, to those who are under

authority – if you’re under somebody’s authority, you are to submit to that authority as if that authority were Jesus Christ. This is clear. Look at verse 22. Wives are to submit themselves to husbands, as to the Lord. I’ve already shown you 6:1 - children to parents in the Lord or under the authority of the “Kurios”. Chapter 6:5 - slaves to masters ... as to Christ.

Now folks, I want you to just apply this very practically. Think about the people who are over you in authority. How would you respond if it wasn’t that sinful person, but it was Jesus Christ? How would you respond to your government if Jesus Christ were the President of the United States? How would you respond to the elder in this church if the elder were Jesus Christ? How would you respond, ladies, if Jesus Christ were your husband? How would you respond, kids, to your parents if Jesus Christ were your father? How would you respond if Jesus Christ were your boss? That’s the standard.

We are to respond to those in authority as if they were Christ and yield our will to them as we would if Jesus Christ were in that position - the exception being of course that they’re sinful human beings and they will sometimes ask us to do things that are contrary to God’s revealed will. It stops there.

There’s another implication of this healthy fear of our “Kurios”. Not only for those who are under authority we’re to serve as if our authorities were Christ, but for those in authority, those who have a position of authority, they are to use that authority as Christ would use that authority – with the same love and self-sacrifice that’s demonstrated here in this chapter. Note the pattern in all three authority relationships here and in Colossians. In all three, Paul reminds those in authority to remember that they too are under authority. They’re in a position of authority, but they’re also under Christ’s authority.

In Ephesians 5:23 and 24, husbands are under the authority of Christ, the head of the church. And they better be careful to carry out authority in their homes toward their wives as Christ would. The same loving, sacrificial way that He responds to the church, husbands are to respond to their wives. In 6:4, fathers – yes, you have authority, but you’re to respond to your children as Jesus Christ would if He were the head of your home. You’re to use that authority as He would –

not some dictatorial, authoritative, angry, harsh leadership. You're to be Christ to that one under your authority. In verse 9, if you're in charge of others in the workplace, you're to remember you have the same Master. Treat them as your mutual Master would treat that employee.

So, if you're in authority, don't abuse that position. As one writer says, "Authority is not a synonym for tyranny." We're not to use that authority selfishly. Listen. Nothing in biblical submission suggests that it's right to abuse authority - to encourage the subjugation of women or to take advantage of workers for financial profit or to brutalize children or to condone the abuses and inhumanities of the slave trade. None of that is allowed for in this text. As John Stott writes,

Nothing in the paragraphs we are about to study is inconsistent with the true liberation of human beings from all humiliation, exploitation and oppression. On the contrary, to whom do women, children and workers chiefly owe their liberation? Is it not to Jesus Christ? It is Jesus who treated women with courtesy and honor in an age in which they were despised. It is Jesus Christ who said "Let the little children come to me" in a period of history in which unwanted babies were consigned to the local rubbish heap and abandoned in the forum for anybody to pick up and rear for slavery or prostitution. And it was Jesus who taught the dignity of manual labor by working Himself as a carpenter. We must not (Stott says) interpret what Paul writes to wives, children and servants about submission in a way which contradicts these fundamental attitudes of Jesus Christ.

One final question, quickly, and we'll be done: why is there authority and submission? Why is there this system? Why did God even bother to establish such a system? Well, we could suggest a number of possibilities that would be right to some degree. We could say this whole system of authority and submission on the human level is to help curb sin because if one authority, like the parents for example, don't exercise that authority and help their children learn self-restraint, there's always the government to punish evildoers. So, there's a curb on human sinfulness.

There's also, (we could say) it exists to structure and order the life of the planet. God is a God of order, and He simply wanted order among humans as well. We could say that it exists to teach us

how to submit to God. If we learn how to submit to authority, we learn how to submit God. And all of those things are true.

But ultimately, you have to ask yourself, “What is it ultimately a reflection of?” When did this authority-submission structure begin? Did it begin in Genesis 9 when God established human government after Noah got off the boat? Did it begin back in the Garden when God gave Eve to Adam, and their authority and submission began? Or did it begin before He created the world with the creation of the angels when He created that hierarchy within the angelic system? No, it didn’t start in any of those places.

Listen. Submission and authority started in eternity past when there was nobody but God within the triune person of the godhead. In the New Testament, if I had time, I would take you to several texts where it’s very clear that eternally the Spirit submits to the Son and the Father, and the Son submits to the Father. He’s eternally the Son, and the first person is eternally the Father. That implies that submission. And yet, there is equality. God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are absolutely equal. And yet, the Son eternally yields His will to the Father. You know what this says about submission? It doesn’t make anybody a second-class citizen. Listen. If you think submission to authority demeans you, you’d better get in line to argue with Jesus Christ who has for eternity submitted His will to the Father with whom He is absolutely equal.

Look at the life of our, earthly life of our Lord. In Luke 2:51, it says, “... He went down with ... [His parents] ... came to Nazareth, and He continued in subjection (there’s our word) to them....” Jesus is the perfect model of submission in this life and in eternity past and forever. He has submitted His will to His Father. You remember what He said in the garden? “Father, not My will, but Yours be done.” He said, “I didn’t come on My own initiative. I came because of the One who sent Me.”

And here’s the good news. You and I have violated, we have violated every authority-submission structure in our lives. Not one of us has perfectly honored and obeyed the authorities God has put in our life because we’re rebels. But the One who perfectly has submitted for all eternity and through His earthly life and will through all eternity – He died in our place to pay the debt for our acts of rebellion against authority.



Listen. God has established this comprehensive system of authority and submission in His world. It is a reflection of His own character and His own person. When a person is under the influence of the Spirit, Paul says, he or she sees those who are over him or her in authority as exercising an authority given by God. And because they have a heart that wants to submit to God, submit to Christ, they submit to those who are over them in authority. May God give us submissive hearts to our Lord and to those whom He places over us.

Let's pray together.

Father, thank You for Your Word. Thank You for how it rebukes us, it confronts us in our pride and rebellion, how it reminds us of why we so desperately need the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Lord, we have owned this passage. We are rebels. We see it in our lives. We've seen it all our lives. Not only have we rebelled against Your authority, but we've rebelled against all the other authorities You've placed in our lives. Father, may we know You through Christ, and may that rebellion be wiped away with His sacrifice.

But Father, for us who have come to know Him and follow Him, may (because we fear Him, because we own Him as our "Kurios"), may we own the others whom He places in our lives in the system that You established as this imperfect, faint reflection of the perfect submission that has occurred within Your person for all eternity. Father, give us hearts that are eager to submit to You; and therefore, eager to submit to the authorities You've placed in our lives.

We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.