




THE COMPASS

A TOOL FOR DISCIPLERS

Pride and Submission

Conversation On the Journey

We have two macro issues to discuss. The first is authority. The second is submission - a godly response to authority.

So let's begin with authority. Turn to Ephesians 5:21, which reads, "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." We live in a very egalitarian society that has sought to flatten most types of pecking orders, and this verse is nicely at home within our culture - all of us mutually submitting to one another. But you'll notice this verse is followed by three sections: wives being called to submit to husbands; children to their parents; and slaves (or employees) to their masters. In other words, Paul is giving three exceptions where there is a clear authority structure, and where mutual submission is not the missing ingredient.

You might ask your disciple, "Why do most people bristle at the mention of authority structure?" or "Why does our society value mutual submission but not submission to authority?" You also might want to discuss the negative way the media presents figures and structures of authority (though there are notable exceptions). What is behind most people's apprehension is that, historically, leaders (whether, parents, employers, politicians, or husbands), have abused their authority - the obvious result of living in a fallen world.

So what is the solution? Our society has understandably tried to pull away from hierarchical authority structures as a protection against abuse. In contrast, God desires us to make authority structures work, because there is nothing sinful about authority and it cultivates certain virtues that are, in fact, quite godly. To get at this issue you might ask a question like, "What might be some reasons that God has ordained authority structures? What benefits do you see?"

This leads us into our second topic. Humility and submission are two of those godly virtues that arise from authority structures - someone leads, and others must humbly submit to that leadership. Ask your disciple what submission means, and what humility means. You also might ask them if they find it difficult submitting to authority, and if so why. Submission is willfully ordering ourselves under the leadership of another, and is a recognition and respect for their position of authority. This submission is based on the delegated position of authority, not the person's ability, intelligence, or

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This Week's Excursion

Discipleship takes place within a culture. The difficulty comes when you must teach a biblical concept that is contrary to the culture. In this lesson, you have such an issue, (submission to authority), and your job is to help your disciple see the beauty and God's purpose in something they have perhaps been conditioned to repel.

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competence to wield it. Humility is an accurate appraisal of oneself and acknowledgement of our limitations.

Now, while the culture sees submission as weakness, Scripture describes submission as a unique way to show reverence for God. You might ask your disciple, “How does submission show love and respect for God?” It might also be interesting to ask, “In what ways, and to whom, did Jesus demonstrate submission?” Or you just might turn to this passage (1 Peter 2: 13-21) and see what lessons they can pull from it as it relates to humility, submission, and authority:

Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by Him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God’s will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men. Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God. Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king. Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

Some questions you could ask to probe the passage might be: “What reasons are given in this passage for how God is glorified by submission?” Why should we submit to authority? Is authority based on greater competence, wisdom, or intelligence? What is it based on?

Amongst the lessons to be learned from this passage are: our submission shows a respect for God’s establishment of authority structure, and any acknowledgement of authority is ultimately a respect for God’s design and authority; the more harsh or unjust the authority, the greater the opportunity to express devotion to God; and unjust suffering is part of what it means to follow Christ. The major way we will experience this is through submitting to unjust leaders.

There are a couple of other aspects of submission worth citing, so simply flip over a few pages to 1 Peter 5:5-6:

Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that He may lift you up in due time.

The passage points out that submission and humility are really the antithesis to pride. We are all susceptible to pride, yet as long as we are practicing the virtue of submission, we keep ourselves from being infected by pride. Last, submission expresses a trust in God to be the one to lift us up and put us in authority, rather than grasping to take hold of authority ourselves.

Next Steps

Ask your disciple: “Who are those who have been given authority over you? How have you demonstrated your love to God through following leadership? What can you do this week to encourage and show respect for the authority God has placed in your life?”

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Now you may want to clarify a few things. I'd ask a couple of questions. "does submission mean we can not disagree or express disagreement?" and "Is there any Scriptural situation you can think of where the godly choice of action was not submitting to authority?"

And the answers are... you can voice disagreement in ways that are still supportive of leadership (you might give some examples). And, in answer to the second question, the only instances in the Scripture where God seems to sanction disobedience to leaders and authority is when they actually command something contrary to God's laws, such as daniel being ordered to bow before an idol, or the disciples refusing to stop speaking about Christ.

Summary

Our society is not very positive toward authority structures, but God is. Not because they are perfect, but because they mirror God's authority (which is not democratic). They encourage the virtues of humility and submission. They provide opportunities to demonstrate our respect for God's authority, and to express faith in Him to be the one to "lift us up" and place us in authority. Lastly, they allow us to participate in unjust suffering.

†End

Side Trails

Descending Into Greatness. Bill Hybels. Zondervan.

Improving Your Serve. Charles Swindoll. Thomas Nelson Publishers.

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