
The Transforming Power of Submission: In the Workplace

Ephesians 6:5-9

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Without the submission, nothing will survive. We take great pride in being independent, our own persons, the sun of our system. We forget too often, at the root of sin is rebellion. The Bible has many ways to talk about sin. Fundamentally, sin is an unwillingness to submit to God and His Word. From the fall forward, this is the most basic question: “Will you submit to God?”

Being under the influence and control of the Spirit produces Biblical submission in our roles and relationships::

¹⁸ And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit,¹⁹ addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, ²⁰ giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

We move from pleasing God in our general relationships to pleasing God in the relationships within our roles. We have talked about this first section of submission in the home. Let’s take a moment to get the back story to what we will focus on together.

In the Home (5:22-6:4)

Briefly, let’s have a look again at the Lord’s commands for us.

Wives to Husbands – Respectfully Submit (v. 22-24)

The Lord requires that Christian wives submit to their own husbands. This is required because God has established the headship of the man in the home. Headship has to do with authority in the roles. In the same way that Christ is the head of the church, the husband is head of the wife. Now this may not be culturally acceptable, but it is Biblically true. Within the roles in the home, this is the way God has structured the authority of the home. Wives, when you submit, then you reflect to the world how the church submits to Christ.

Husbands to Wives – Sacrificially Love (v. 25-33)

The Lord commands us to love our wives, brothers. It is as simple as that. If you do not love your wife, you are disobeying God and are sinning. Brothers, love your wives.

We are to do this as husbands and wives. But the reason we do this is because we are members together in Christ’s body. In other words, you are to each other as husbands and wives *because* you are to each other as brother and sister.

Sisters, see to it that you respect your husbands so that you are inclined to submit.

Brothers, see to it that you love your wives so that they are cherished and nourished.

Children to Parents - obey and honor (v. 1-3)

¹ Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ² “Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), ³ “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.”

Why are children to obey and honor their parents?

IT IS RIGHT. God has said it is the right thing, so it is the right thing.

IT IS BEST. If you obey and honor your parents, then things will go better for you in your home and in your life.

Children are to obey their parents while they are under their authority. Even once they are on their own, they are to honor their parents.

Children, obey your parents. Do so because it is right, and it is best.

Fathers to Children - bring them up (v. 4)

In the context of children being required to obey parents, a very important set of commands are addressed to fathers.

⁴ Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

William Barclay writes: ‘A Roman father had absolute power over his family. He could sell them as slaves, he could make them work in his fields even in chains, he could take the law into his own hands, for the law was in his own hands, and punish as he liked, he could even inflict the death penalty on his child.’ [Cited in Stott, p. 245]

In contrast, the Christian father was to be a self-controlled, consistent, nurturing, disciplining and teaching parent. The Biblical parents is to stand in sharp contrast to the world’s ways. And yet, so often, there is little real difference. Too many Christian fathers get their cues from the world. This is addressed to fathers who have the primary responsibility for child rearing. The actual implementation is to be shared by both parents, but the responsibility for Biblical child-rearing is placed on the father’s shoulders. You may delegate to your wife, to tutors, to schools – but you must not surrender it and you had better be engaged with what is going on and ensuring that your children are Biblically reared.

I want to press home Paul’s emphasis. This is addressed to fathers.

Do not provoke

The following is adapted from The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Ephesians

To “provoke . . . to anger” suggests a repeated, ongoing pattern of treatment that gradually builds up a deep-seated anger and resentment that boils over in outward hostility.

Such treatment is usually not intended to provoke anger. Here are eight ways in which parents can provoke their children to anger:

Well-meaning overprotection is a common cause of resentment in children. Parents who smother their children, overly restrict where they can go and what they can do, never trust them to do things on their own, and continually question their judgment build a barrier between themselves and their children—usually under the delusion that they are building a closer relationship. Children need careful guidance and certain restrictions, but they are individual human beings in their own right and must learn to make decisions on their own, commensurate with their age and maturity. Their wills can be guided but they cannot be controlled.

Another common cause of provoking children to anger is **favoritism**. Isaac favored Esau over Jacob and Rebekah preferred Jacob over Esau. That dual and conflicting favoritism not only caused great trouble for the immediate family but has continued to have repercussions in the conflicts between the descendants of Jacob and Esau until our present day! For parents to compare their children with each other, especially in the children’s presence, can be devastating to the child who is less talented or favored. He will tend to become discouraged, resentful, withdrawn, and bitter.

Favoritism by parents generally leads to favoritism among the children themselves, who pick up the practice from their parents. They will favor one brother or sister over the others and will often favor one parent over the other.

A third way parents provoke their children is **by pushing achievement beyond reasonable bounds**. A child can be so pressured to achieve that he is virtually destroyed. He quickly learns that nothing he does is sufficient to please his parents. No sooner does he accomplish one goal than he is challenged to accomplish something better. Fathers who fantasize their own achievements through the athletic skills of their sons, or mothers who fantasize a glamorous career through the lives of their daughters prostitute their responsibility as parents.

A fourth way children are provoked is **by discouragement**. A child who is never complimented or encouraged by his parents is destined for trouble. If he is always told what is wrong with him and never what is right, he will soon lose hope and become convinced that he is incapable of doing anything right. At that point he has no reason even to try. Parents can always find something that a child genuinely does well, and they should show appreciation for it. A child needs approval and encouragement in things that are good every bit as much as he needs correction in things that are not.

A fifth way provocation occurs is by parents’ **failing to sacrifice for their children and making them feel unwanted**. Children who are made to feel that they are an intrusion, that they are always in the way and interfere with the plans and happiness of the parents, cannot help becoming resentful. To such

children the parents themselves will eventually become unwanted and an intrusion on the children's plans and happiness.

A sixth form of provocation comes from *failing to let children grow up at a normal pace*. Chiding them for always acting childish, even when what they do is perfectly normal and harmless, does not contribute to their maturity but rather helps confirm them in their childishness.

A seventh way of angering children is that of *using love as a tool of reward or punishment*—granting it when a child is good and withdrawing it when he is bad. Often the practice is unconscious, but a child can sense if a parent cares for him less when he is disobedient than when he behaves. That is not how God loves and is not the way he intends human parents to love. God disciplines His children just as much out of love as He blesses them. “Those whom the Lord loves He disciplines” (Heb. 12:6). Because it is so easy to punish out of anger and resentment, parents should take special care to let their children know they love them when discipline is given.

An eighth way to provoke children is *by physical and verbal abuse*. Battered children are a growing tragedy today. Even Christian parents—fathers especially—sometimes overreact and spank their children much harder than necessary. Proper physical discipline is not a matter of exerting superior authority and strength, but of correcting in love and reasonableness. Children are also abused verbally. A parent can as easily overpower a child with words as with physical force. Putting him down with superior arguments or sarcasm can inflict serious harm, and provokes him to anger and resentment. It is amazing that we sometimes say things to our children that we would not think of saying to anyone else—for fear of ruining our reputation!

In the discipline of the Lord

Discipline is everything you do to help your children become pleasing to God. It is both preventative and corrective. It is not only about what they do wrong, but it is to help them develop life skills as well as pleasing God.

In the instruction of the Lord

Fathers, you are not only responsible for the discipline of your children, but also for their instruction. You are to ensure that your children are given all the instruction they need to live in God's world with God's people God's way. Now, others may do that actual instruction, but you are responsible for it.

Fathers, be sure that you are pleasing God in your childrearing.

Why is submission so important?

Authority and submission are a part of the Godhead. Jesus submits to His Father and the Spirit submits to both the Father and the Son. Yet all are co-equally God.

All created beings live in submission by virtue of being creature, of being created. Cherubim, Seraphim, angels, Satan, demons and all the intelligences that inhabit the universe are defined by whether they are in submission to God or in rebellion against Him.

All human beings, because we are created in the image of God, are equal in God's sight. Submission does not define nor deny equality. Equality is declared. But submission is commanded in our roles and relationships.

One of the marks of the Lord Jesus Christ was His absolute and total submission to His heavenly Father. This ought to characterize us as well. Wise submission in the will of God directed by the Word of God is required all Christians in their roles.

Submission is tested and demonstrated in how we respond when we are asked or told to do what we do not want to do. Too many people think they are in submission. But when you are put in a position to submit to an authority over you who asks or tells you to do something you don't want to do, submission will get tested. Will they be humble? Will you appeal? Will you seek an alternative that meets the purpose, goal or aim of the person in authority? Or will you simply assert your freedom, your independence your rights? Maybe you will simply rebel. You simply will not do it. This is a heart of rebellion.

Since the filling of the Spirit will produce submission, then the Lord commands submission within the spheres or roles within the homes. When men as husbands and fathers are addressed, their commands are in view of the power for harm their authority gives them

Sisters, see to it that you respect your husbands so that you are inclined to submit.

Brothers, see to it that you love your wives so that they are cherished and nourished.

Children, obey your parents. Do so because it is right and it is best.

Fathers, be sure that you are pleasing God in your childrearing.

We come to the next sphere and the relationships in it.

⁵ Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, ⁶ not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, ⁷ rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, ⁸ knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free.

⁹ Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him.

What jumps out at us right away is that he is talking to masters and slaves. Well, we don't have masters and slaves in our culture so does that mean this isn't speaking to us today? How do we relate it to our own situation?

In Paul's day there were three primary kinds of employment in the Greco-Roman world. You could work for the state in some way, the most prevalent being as a soldier. You could work for yourself, in partnership or an employer in what we would think of as a company. Or, you could work for a master as a slave.

I think Paul does two simple things here:

He addresses masters and slaves as an accepted part of the Christian community. There were both in the church and that was a normal part of life and living. As such, then slaves and masters are being treated as equals in the church while their roles outside the church are being acknowledged.

He addresses the lowest form and most prevalent form of employment. He gives the instructions on how they are to be pleasing to God. Those are worded in such a way that they are applicable to all similar relationships.

The effect is that this text is applicable to the job and to the school. I will speak primarily to the job. Students, as you listen you will hear how God expects you to interact with your teachers and other authorities and how you are to approach and do your school work. We will look at this briefly today and then with a great deal more in depth explanation and application in next spring when we come back to it.

Slaves and Employees (v. 5-8)

First, Paul addresses those who are under authority.

⁵ Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, ⁶ not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, ⁷ rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, ⁸ knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free.

Your Responsibilities (v.5-6)

The Lord requires that you do what your employers want you to do, except when they require you to sin. You are to do so because you are a servant of Christ. You are to do your work as though Christ were your ultimate boss. You are to engage your supervisors and bosses with respect. You are to treat them honorably but not be driven by a fear of man or being a people pleaser.

You are to do your job with a good heart, a genuine desire to do well. You are to work hard at what you do. You are to work hard even when the bosses are not looking. You are to treat the work you do as the Lord's will. It is what he requires.

Your Reasons (v.6-8)

Your motivation is that God will reward you even if the job does not. You will receive back from the Lord what you are due. Now the Lord's reward may not be monetary. He may reward you in other ways. But, He will reward you for the good, honest, hard working effort you put in.

Employees and students, work hard at your work as though the Lord were your boss or your principal.

Masters and Employers (v. 9)

⁹ Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him.

Your Responsibilities

Christian bosses are to respond to their employees in much the same way. They are to recognize that the owner or supervisor or boss must also set the example for the employees. Apply yourself to your work. Treat your employees with respect. Realize that God is looking out for them and respond to them accordingly. Do not use threats and fear causing tactics to get employees to do what you want.

Your Reasons

You do so because you have a Master in heaven. You will give an account to Him. And you do so because you and your Christian employees all are on equal footing before God at the cross. You may be their employer, their master, their boss, but they are your equal.

Employers, treat your employees the way you want to be treated by God.

Reflect and Respond

The Bible calls on Christians to live in submission. We are first in submission to the Lord. Then we live in submission to those He has placed over us.

Submission is tested and demonstrated in how we respond when we are asked or told to do what we do not want to do.

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Brothers, see to it that you love your wives so that they are cherished and nourished.

Children, obey your parents. Do so because it is right and it is best.

Fathers, be sure that you are pleasing God in your childrearing.

Employees and students, work hard at your work as though the Lord were your boss or your principal.

Employers, treat your employees the way you want to be treated by God.

May God be pleased to help us wisely live as husbands and wives, parents and children, employees and employers according to God's will.