

## **A Balanced Look at Submission to Authority**

*By Joyce Meyer*

Maintaining balance in every area of our life is very important. I believe it is a major key to walking in victory. The Bible says in 1 Peter 5:8, *Be well balanced (temperate, sober of mind), be vigilant and cautious at all times; for that enemy of yours, the devil, roams around like a lion roaring [in fierce hunger], seeking someone to seize upon and devour.* Satan cannot devour anyone he pleases. He can only gain access to those who are out of balance—living their life at one extreme or another.

I believe that one of the most important areas for us to be balanced in is our understanding of submission to authority. Believe it or not, *all* authority is instituted by God. In fact, it is His will that you and I submit to the people He has placed over us. Romans 13:1 says, *Let every person be loyally subject to the governing (civil) authorities. For there is no authority except from God [by His permission, His sanction], and those that exist do so by God's appointment.*

In most cases, when you and I choose to go against authority and do our own thing, we are actually rebelling against God. As a result we give Satan an opportunity to bring problems into our life. However, there are times when our submission can actually become enslavement to someone else's manipulation and control. This too opens the door to the attack of the enemy. In order to avoid this, I believe we need to have a balanced understanding of submission to authority—knowing when to submit and when not to.

### **Looking Out for Number One**

Everywhere you and I go, we deal with authority—from the grocery store to the mall, and from side streets to major highways. Every handicap parking sign, speed limit sign, crossing guard and road marking is physical evidence of established authority. When people don't submit to the established authority, the end result is chaos, or even death.

I believe one of the major reasons there's so much strife and rebellion in the world is because of the big "I"—selfish human nature. Nobody wants to be corrected or told what to do. People don't want their boss, their spouse, the government, or anybody telling them what to do. They think they know everything and that they are always right.

I will be the first to admit that I had a hard time submitting to authority simply because it wasn't what *I* wanted to do. James 4:1 says, *What leads to strife (discord and feuds) and how do conflicts (quarrels and fightings) originate among you? Do they not arise from your sensual desires that are ever warring in your bodily members?* This is a perfect description of how I used to be with myself and with others—at war. If people didn't agree with me or I didn't get my way, everybody knew about it. I tried to manipulate people with my emotions of anger, sadness and self-pity, but none of my efforts brought satisfaction; they only enhanced my misery.

### **Held Hostage by Hurt**

The thing that made my selfish attitude even worse was the pain I had experienced in the past. I had been pushed around and hurt so much that I had taken on the attitude, "If I don't take care of myself, nobody else will." Throughout my childhood and into my adult years, I had been abused by my father, as well as many other men in my life. When I was eighteen years old, I married the first man that came along, even though I knew in my heart it was the wrong thing to do. On at least two different occasions, he took me to another state and left me there with no money. I had to cash in soda bottles in order to be able to call someone and ask them to send me money to buy a bus ticket to return home.

I also had a boss who had me come in to work one Saturday and while we were there alone, he tried to abuse me too. It seemed like every time I turned around, some man in my life was trying to take advantage of me. Each abusive situation left me with more and more pain. Over and over I vowed to myself, "When I get away from this situation, nobody is ever going to tell me what to do again." But instead of these promises helping me, they hurt me. My spirit became hardened and closed, and by the time Dave Meyer came along, I was so emotionally wounded that I wasn't willing to submit to anybody.

But shortly after we were married, I began to diligently read the Word, striving to follow God with all of my heart. It didn't take me long to see that God wanted me to submit to Dave's authority. I discovered Ephesians 5:22,23, which says, *Wives, be subject (be submissive and adapt yourselves) to your own husbands as [a service] to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife as Christ is the Head of the church, Himself the Savior of [His] body.* This was very difficult for me to accept. It seemed like everything inside me was screaming, "No!" This wasn't because Dave was a mean husband. The problem was that I was afraid to be vulnerable again and submit to someone, lest I get hurt again.

However, God continued to deal with me, frequently bringing up the subject of trust. I told God, "How can you expect me to trust a man after what the men in my life did to me?" He responded, "I'm not asking you to trust Dave. I'm asking you to trust *Me* with Dave." This was a major point of change in my life. It took some time, but through the power of His Spirit and the truth of His Word, God brought me to the point where I began to release the pain of my past, letting go of the anger I had toward every person in authority who had abused me. Little by little I stopped trying to run everybody's life, and I learned to be submissive.

### **Where to Draw the Line**

I have discovered that in almost every case, God wants us to be submissive to those He has placed over us—even if we don't agree with them or they are in error. The only time God does *not* want us to submit to authority is when we are asked to do something that either goes against our conscience or causes us to sin. In other words, you and I should be submissive to our boss, our governing officials, our pastor, and everybody else that is in authority over us, unless it puts us in disagreement with God's Word.

Many years ago, when I worked as a bookkeeper, my boss wanted me to deduct some money from the account statement of one of our clients. He didn't want them to know they had overpaid their bill and had a credit balance. Well, I went home that night extremely convicted about what he had asked me to do. I wanted and needed my job, but I knew I had to do what was right, even if it meant losing it. Even though I was a new Christian, I had enough of the reverential fear of God in me that I knew it was wrong to help my boss steal this man's money. As scared as I was, I went to my boss the next morning and respectfully told him that I was a Christian and that I could not do what he asked me to do with a clear conscience. He got aggravated and told me to go back to work. It wasn't until ten minutes before closing that he came over to my desk with an answer. He slammed the invoice down on my desk and said, "Here! Write them a check and send it back to them."

This is a perfect example of knowing where to draw the line. If I had decided to do what my boss wanted me to do, I would have allowed him to control and enslave me with the fear of losing my job. I believe that God was pleased by my choice to submit to His Word instead of my boss' request. In fact, after the company was sold and under new ownership, I was promoted to the position of administrative assistant to the company president. The Lord honored me for my honesty by placing me in authority over every person in the building, second only to the president.

### **The Blessing of True Submission**

God has taught me that submission to authority is not an act we put on, but an attitude that must be worked out in our spirit. If we feel like a person in authority is wrong, we need to pray for them and remain silent, resisting the desire to tell others how we feel. As you and I learn how to come

*under* authority, then God can put us *in* authority. Staying under authority actually puts us in a position of protection against satanic attack.

Only God knows what has happened in your life. The stories of what happened to me may not sound bad at all compared to what you've been through. But I encourage you not to play around with rebellion. If you have been rebellious to someone in authority, ask God to forgive you. He'll give you the grace to submit to everyone He's placed in authority over you and the ability to discern when to submit and when not to (see James 4:6; 1 Corinthians 2:15,16). He will also help you develop a reverential fear of coming against His established authority.

I challenge you to trust God with the people that are in authority over you. If they are wrong, sooner or later He will bring you justice. As you walk in submission and resist being enslaved by manipulation and control, you will experience the fullness of the peace, protection and power that Jesus died to give you!