

Submitting (Part 2)

Culture

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I am going to continue the sermon on submitting that I began last week. Since that time, the following two quotes appeared in the *Charlotte Observer* newspaper. As a matter of fact, they both appeared last Sunday and I thought that they tied neatly into the subject that we are covering here, so I am going to give them to you.

The first one is from a man named John Q. Wilson. I have no idea who John Q. Wilson is, but he is apparently somebody of some authority and worthwhile quoting:

The most significant thing in the last half century has been the dramatic expansion in personal freedom and personal mobility, individual rights, the reorienting of culture around individuals.

Now that is the important thing here—individuals, and the reorienting of culture around individuals. Remember the very last verse in the book of Judges says that everyone did that which was right in his own eyes because there was no king in Israel in those days. We see, taking place within the United States, the reorienting of culture around individuals. Culture used to be oriented around the family—around mom and dad and all of the siblings and all of the cousins and all of the aunts and uncles, but now it has reoriented itself around individuals. So what happens is a scattering of, I will say, the authorities to which people used to look, and the traditions have changed. We will see how in just a minute. Now continuing the quote, he says

We obviously value that, but like all human gains it has been purchased at a price. Most people, faced with greater freedom from family, law, village, clan, have used it for good purposes: artistic expression, economic entrepreneurship, self expression. But a small fraction of people have used it for bad purposes. So, just as we have had an artistic and economic explosion, we have had a crime explosion—and I think the two are indissolubly entwined.

In other words, the reorienting of culture and the crime explosion are indissolubly entwined. They cannot be separated from one another. One is the cause, the other, an effect.

This second quote is from something that [Pope] John Paul II said while he was in Denver:

In a culture which holds that no universally valid truths are possible [Guess which culture he is talking about? He is talking about America], nothing is absolute. Therefore, in the end goodness and evil no longer matter [that is to the individual]. Good comes to mean what is pleasant or useful. Evil means what contradicts our subjective wishes. Each person can build a private system of values.

That is exactly what has happened. And so we find that because culture has been reoriented around individuals rather than around family (rather than around community, rather than around a central government that is respected), the individual becomes king. People stop looking to central authorities. They stop looking to the family. They stop looking to the cultural traditions and, instead,

they set their own values. As John Paul said, goodness and evil become equated with what is pleasant and useful—he means to the individual.

Each one of these quotes captures a part of why the subject of submission is so important. The one shows that as people's awareness of their liberty arises, there is going to be a tendency to express that liberty at the expense of others by not submitting to what is traditionally accepted—or what is true and right.

Now the second expresses why that occurs. Those who are free—the individual, you see—those who are free do not accept the traditional cultural values or God's absolutes. So "good" comes to mean, to them, the fulfillment of their desire—that which is pleasant and useful.

We are going to begin in the book of James. This is exceedingly important because we find ourselves living in a culture that is coming apart at the seams. And it is coming apart because each individual wants to execute *his* desires. What James is going to tell us here is what happens when individuals begin to execute their desires:

James 4:1-3 Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure [remember John Paul? What becomes good is what pleasure it will give to an individual]. Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust [or desire] and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.

James' basic question is, to the Christian and therefore to you and me, "Are we going to submit to God, or to our desires for pleasures?" Pleasure here does not mean fun, like when you go to an amusement park. There certainly is an amount of desire to do that kind of thing. He is talking about the desire that normally arises within an individual. The individual, then, has to make the choice of whether or not he is going to follow through and gratify himself by fulfilling that desire. So pleasure here does not necessarily mean fun, but it means that which gratifies.

He is saying to you and me that if we seek our desires, then we had better understand that life is going to be filled with conflict. Why? The reason is because everybody else is probably doing the same thing. Their desire might be different from ours—and so our desire runs headlong into their desire—then comes struggle, war, strife, and arguments over whose desire is going to be fulfilled. When people do what is right in their own eyes, rather than submit to the central authority, desires will crash into each other and conflict occurs. It matters not whether that central authority is the family, the culture, or God's Word!

This is happening constantly, but God has a solution. It is not easy. I do not want to make you think that God's way is easy. The solution is that each son of His bears the responsibility to govern himself, by faith, within the framework of God's laws. Let us expand that out a little bit. Each son of His bears the responsibility to govern himself, by faith, within the framework of God's laws, His principles, His traditions, and the examples that He gives in His Word. We have to submit to those things.

I began last week's sermon by quoting John 8:32 where it says that the truth sets free. But it will never *set free* unless it is submitted to. Truth is good only as it is used. So it has to be submitted to.

Now it is inevitable that differences are going to arise on how things should be done, or what things should be done. But God has a way of resolving these if we will submit and not be impatient; if we do not force our will and, thus, force conflict.

I want to begin to pull this subject together and so I am going to backtrack over something that we covered last week. I think it is necessary that we understand what Paul was driving at in chapter 12 of the book of Romans. You might remember that I said the epistle was written in a very orderly fashion. Paul puts in alignment the most important, the central doctrines of the church of God in regards to salvation itself. And those things occur between the opening of the book, chapter one, and the end of Romans 11.

In Romans 12, Paul begins to give ethical advice regarding what we are to do. He says, "Look, we have all of this doctrinal information regarding God's plan of salvation, we're under the blood of Jesus Christ, we're living by faith, now what should we do with it?"

The first thing he makes sure we understand is that we must not allow ourselves to conform to the world. But rather (I am going to say it in different words) he is saying, "Submit to God so that your mind can be changed." That is the only way it is going to be changed. It will be changed by re-education in the way, in the traditions, and in the culture of God. Our conduct, too, must be re-educated as we put into practice the ways of God.

We may know it intellectually, but not until it becomes our way of living—our conduct—does it become really written in the heart. We have to fight being conformed to the world. That has to be resisted and we have to continue to work on educating our minds in God's way and putting it into practice. Then he begins to attach things to that, as to what needs to be done. We are going to skip over some because our subject here happens to be submission and some of those things do not directly apply at this point.

Romans 12:14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse [this is important in regard to what he is leading to in chapter 13]

Romans 12:16-19 Be of the same mind toward one another [remember, differences are going to arise; it is inevitable that they will occur, but there is a way to resolve them]. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion [those people will not submit]. Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord

Romans 12:21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good [Forget about the chapter break].

Romans 13:1 Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.

Now in chapter 13, Paul speaks primarily of our response to civil government. The subject here is submitting. But the principle holds true, we are going to see as we go along here, for other authority as well. What principle are we talking about here? It is given in chapter 13 and verse 1: there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are *appointed* by God. The Christian must

recognize and live by this principle. All power is from God! If we say it is not, we are denying His rulership and involvement in His creation. God rules!

Do you see God? The ungodly do not. The psalm says of the wicked that, "God is not in all their thoughts." The Christian sees God ruling over everything. Paul says we are to be subject to authority because of God. Our submissiveness to authority has nothing at all to do with equality; it has nothing to do with us being weak. It is an act of faith in God's governance of His creation. Our submission is an act of trust in our God. It is an act of trust in our government.

I want us to plainly see that the Christian consciously chooses to suffer evil rather than to do evil. He does this, not because he is a masochist, but by faith he is taking a step to establish peace and prevent conflict by recognizing that two wrongs do not make a right. Evil is not overcome by evil. Let us understand that!

We would all agree that an abuse of authority, by someone in authority, is evil—whether that authority is the governor, the king, a police officer, or a husband in a family. God has set that authority and He has made that very clear in I Corinthians 11:1-3. It is as clear as anything that God has established the authority in the family. If the husband is an abuser (and we agree that is evil, it is bad, and should not be done) it is just as evil for the person under that authority to rebel against the abuser. That is not easy to do—to not rebel!

I have to put a limit on this and that, of course, is that God Himself says that we ought to obey God rather than men. If the abuser is trying to force us to sin, to break the law of God, then we have the right to not submit to the abuser. Instead what do we do? We submit, in faith, to God who says that it is alright in that case to not submit to the one who is abusing. But if the abuser is not causing you to break the law of God, then we have to submit.

Let me add something else here. Just because God requires that we submit in no way prohibits us from appealing to the one who is the abuser and, above all, appealing to God for relief, or for protection, or whatever.

Let us add still one more thing. Jesus said that if we are persecuted we are to flee! It is better to flee and appear weak than to rebel against the abuse that is not forcing us or causing us to break the law of God. And in that case, again, we are following God. We are submitting to His command, through Jesus Christ, to flee persecution.

Let us carry this out a little further and go to Ephesians 5:21. This appears in a book whose major theme is unity. Within a group of people there will arise differences of opinion about how things should be done. There are going to be doctrinal differences, as well, that need to be resolved.

Ephesians 5:21 . . . submitting to one another in the fear of God.

Paul's practical, ethical instruction in this case is interwoven in the midst of the theological material. He clearly states the Christian's responsibility. Here the subject is not the civil authority. Here the subject is the church and our responsibility is very clear. We are to submit because of our fear, our reverence, for God. Do we see how this agrees with Romans 13?

We are to recognize, in Romans 13, that civil authority is from God. We are told, in the book of Ephesians, that we are to submit to one another out of our respect for God. God is in the picture here.

Why? Because we must recognize that *all* authority is from God: civil authority, church authority, and family authority. These are from God. God is the one who established it. God is ruling. God is choosing. God is passing judgment on His whole creation!

Without that authority the family, the society, and the church will break down into anarchical chaos because of our conflicting desire for power and control. It is good to recognize something here.

Let us deal with the reality: there is no such thing as equality among people! That is an impossibility!

Think of the history that you have had in school. Draw upon that knowledge and you will recall that in almost every revolution that has taken place, whether it was the French revolution, the American revolution, or whatever, the cry always goes out about equality. But I also want you to think about what always happens whenever people remove one area of the culture in which they perceive an inequality.

You will remember in the French revolution that there were kings, there were dukes, there were counts, and there were marquis, and whatever else there may have been. They had the power because they held title to the land. So everybody who did not hold title to the land was a serf. And the serfs were not equal to the dukes, to the marquis, to the counts, or to the king—and all of their officers! So the French wanted equality. So they overthrew the government! Do you know what happens whenever things are leveled out in one area? A new inequality arises to fill the vacuum. It always occurs.

Now they may have political equality—with everybody having a vote, a say in the matters. But there still remains the inequality of power. There still remains the inequality of wealth. There still remains the inequality of intellect. Everybody is not equal that way. Some people, I do not know what it is, seem to have better minds than other people. They are able to take advantage of the system and get an unequal footing ahead of others.

The Bible recognizes that reality. There is no such thing as equality. We are never going to be equal with God the Father. We are never going to be equal with God the Son. We are never going to be equal with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and David and the apostles. There will always be an inequality in life. We have to deal with that. So we have to recognize this reality.

What does God call upon us to do? He is saying here that the only way a society can work, and in this case the society is His church, is to submit to each other because of our respect for Christ. And then let God judge, because with God there is no respect of persons. He will judge absolutely fairly. Do we believe that? The Christian has to live with it. Do you see what we are doing? We are following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ—who followed this pattern in His life, as we are going to see very clearly. And He did it so that we would understand that it works!

The Christian is directly called upon to discipline himself, control himself, govern himself within the framework of that organization which Christ has established—or permitted, if I can put it that way. Even if He did not have a direct hand in establishing it, He has at least permitted it—whether it is civil government, church government, or family government.

Let us jump from here to the book of Colossians. We will keep adding layer upon layer to this.

Colossians 3:22 Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God.

Now it is extended out into the workplace. And again, we have to understand that what Paul is writing—"servants obey in all things"—excludes those breakings of the commands of God. He means all things pertaining to your occupation.

I do not know whether you are aware of it, but slavery was an accepted practice in the Roman culture. Everybody who was anybody had slaves. Rome's population (just the city of Rome) has been estimated at well over one million people during the time that this book was written. One-half of those people in the city were slaves! And they were not, in most cases, just menial workers. Slavery extended into what we would call today the professions. Doctors in those days were slaves. They were owned by somebody. The schoolteachers were slaves. They were owned by somebody. And so it extended into every area of society.

What is the Bible doing here? Were the apostles social re-organizers? No, they did not do that. They did not try to change the society. Their job was to work on changing individuals. God permitted slavery to exist. And He told the Christian people to "operate within it! Don't overthrow it; operate within it!"

Nobody is saying that the Bible says slavery is good. The Bible does not say that slavery is good. God wants everybody to be free. In this case, slavery was a part of the culture and God did not instruct His people to overthrow it, but to work within it. I doubt very much whether anybody within the sound of my voice has ever been a slave like the people that Paul was addressing here. We all do work for a living and so the principle holds true for that area.

Let us tie this in to something that is very important and we will go back into the Old Testament to the book of Exodus. We are going to look at where this principle arises—this principle that Paul is talking about—being submissive to the master, right on up the line. We are going to go back to Exodus 16 chapter and what we are going to be reading about took place about one month after Israel came out of Egypt.

Exodus 16:2 Then the whole congregation of the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness.

Just one month out of Egypt and what were they doing? Murmuring, moaning! Now I want us to notice who they are murmuring against—Moses and Aaron. I want us to see Moses' interpretation of their murmurings.

Exodus 16:7 "And in the morning you shall see the glory of the Lord; for He hears your murmurings against ["murmurings against Moses"? It does not say that, does it?] the LORD.

The people thought that they were murmuring against Moses and Aaron. Moses said, "No, you are murmuring against God." The people did not think that. But they did not see God in the same way that Moses did. Moses saw God *ruling* over His creation. He understood that he was God's servant. When you complained against Moses you were really complaining against God. The way that Moses

interpreted it was that if God wanted something done differently then He probably would have moved Moses to act differently.

Exodus 16:7-9 . . . But what are we, that you complain against us?" Also Moses said, "This shall be seen when the Lord gives you meat to eat in the evening, and in the morning bread to the full; for the Lord hears your complaints which you make against Him. And what are we? Your complaints are not against us but against the Lord." Then Moses spoke to Aaron, "Say to all the congregation of the children of Israel, 'Come near before the Lord, for He has heard your complaints.' "

We will see another example of a people who, again, were murmuring. And in this case, if I can put it this way, they forced God's hand.

Numbers 16:2-4 And they rose up before Moses with some of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty leaders of the congregation, representatives of the congregation, men of renown [and so we have the leadership of Israel, representing other people; and they had a complaint, a gripe, murmuring against Moses again]. They gathered together against Moses and Aaron, and said to them, "You take too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation is holy [just another way of saying, "We are all equal!"], every one of them, and the Lord is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the Lord?" So when Moses heard it, he fell on his face . . .

He must have had a premonition of what was coming. So then Moses called upon God to make a visible choice between him and these men who were the representatives of those who were complaining.

Again, we have to see God as the Head of His creation—He rules and governs over everything. And what is He looking for on earth? He is looking for people who will submit to that rule—once they recognize where the real power and authority in the creation resides. He is looking for people who will submit to it voluntarily, of their own free will; people who will consciously choose to submit to the rule, the way, of God. These men were not. All they saw was Moses. And all they saw was that Moses seemed to have a lot of authority.

Numbers 16:9-10 "Is it a small thing [apply this to yourself, please. This is what Moses said to Korah] to you that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to Himself, to do the work of the tabernacle of the Lord, and to stand before the congregation to serve them; and that He has brought you near to Himself, you and all your brethren, the sons of Levi, with you? And are you seeking the priesthood also?"

These people wanted more authority, more autonomy. They did not see that God had appointed the authority and that they were actually *part* of the authority. Some of these leaders came from the tribe of Levi and they were part of that constituted authority within Israel. God had separated them and yet they wanted more. So you see that their desire, the way their pleasure was going to be gratified, was that they wanted *more* than they already had been given.

God has separated *us* from the congregation of Israel to serve Him. He has made us a part of a spiritual house; to be a holy priesthood, and to do the work of the church. The result of this is that we become part of His body. This makes it exceedingly important to you and me. This is what Paul is

explaining in I Corinthians 12. We are a part of the Lord's body. It is a spiritual body and who is the Head? Jesus Christ is the Head. If we attack, or we rebel, against some other part of that body, we are attacking Jesus Christ! That is the principle that is involved here. We do not like to see it that way, but that is the principle that is involved.

Let me show you this very clearly in Matthew 25. You are going to recognize this right away.

Matthew 25:38-40 'When did we see You [this is right in the midst of the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats. And the sheep are speaking] a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? 'Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' "And the King [Jesus Christ] will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'

That is the way God looks at His Family, at His church, at His nation. That is why Paul says if one part of the body is injured the whole body suffers as a result of it. This goes up and it goes down. It can be used for good—we see this in Matthew 25; or it can be used for evil—as we saw in Numbers 16 and in Exodus 16.

God takes seriously what we do within the framework of His body. He does not want us upsetting the order of things, but rather, He wants us to be contributing to its welfare. This is in perfect harmony with Romans 12 where He says, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay!" He is saying, in effect, "I am the Judge. I'm the Governor. I do things without respect of persons. Don't take things into your own hands. I can rule and I can judge better than you can!"

Now perhaps we have difficulty comprehending that it matters all that much to God, or that God is aware of what "tiny, little old me" might be doing. But it does matter to Him and He is aware. That is something that is shown throughout the entirety of the body. He may not do anything for a while. In fact, does it not say in Ecclesiastes that because sentence is not executed speedily against an evil work, the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil? God delays, in many cases a long time, before He acts. He has His reasons for doing that. That reason may be beyond us. We may not be able to see it. But our responsibility is to be patient until God acts—and He will act! He will either change you, or He will change the other person—one or the other. He will change the situation in some way. And usually it involves changing people—changing their attitude, changing their outlook, and therefore, changing their conduct.

It is good to remember Psalm 139 in light of what Jesus said about God having every hair of our head numbered. Is God aware of us? I do not know if God goes around counting every hair on everybody's head, but Jesus used that as an illustration to help us understand that God is closely involved in what is going on. He has not gone way off somewhere.

Psalm 139:1-12 O Lord, You have searched me and known me. You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off. You comprehend my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word on my tongue, but behold, O Lord, You know it altogether. You have hedged me behind and before, and laid Your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain it. Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me. If I say, "Surely

the darkness shall fall on me," even the night shall be light about me; indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You, but the night shines as the day; the darkness and the light are both alike to You.

God is aware. He knows what is going on and He loves us and will work with us. He will work with our situation. We can appeal. We have that right—both to the abuser and to Him. If we are being persecuted, we can submit to His instruction, which is to flee. God's blessing will be on you within it. This happened to Jesus Himself. Did not His family flee the persecution of Herod and go off to Egypt? Sure they did!

You probably remember Mr. Armstrong frequently saying, "No one will be in God's Kingdom that He does not govern." The central issue for us, then, is whether we will voluntarily submit to His governance in the circumstances He permits in our lives.

So biblical submission is, then, respecting divinely appointed authority out of respect for Christ. It matters not where that authority lies—whether in the civil government, family, or church—a Christian has to respond with the understanding that God, in the governance of His creation, has allowed that authority to be there.

Let us notice Peter's very pointed instruction:

I Peter 2:11-12 Beloved [notice the way he addresses you and me], I beg you [first, a word of endearment—and then he pleads! Do you think he pleaded with these people because he could see the principle involved in what we are talking about here—our response to the government of God?] I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts [James 4:1—the desires that push at our minds and our conduct] which war [there is that word, the same word that James used! If desires are followed—bang! They are going to clash into one another!] that war against the soul [or life], having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.

We had a sermonette today by Martin Collins on the bulk of I Peter showing that the book was written about the time (the mid 60's AD) when the persecutions against the Christians were beginning to arise. Nero was central to those taking place in Rome. He burned the city down and blamed it on the Christians. The instructions here are clear. There was nobody with more power in the Roman Empire than the emperor. Now, look at verse 13. This is a concluding statement: because we are sojourners; because we are pilgrims (meaning from God).

I Peter 2:13 Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake.

There it is again. This agrees perfectly with Paul (Ephesians 5:21). It agrees with Romans where it says that all authority comes from God. We submit, not because we are weak, but out of respect for God because He is governing everything. He is permitting these things to take place.

It is interesting, but this word "ordinance" is really not translated well. It does not mean "law." It is more closely related to the English word "institution"—every *institution* of man. What is even more interesting is that this word is never really used in this kind of a context in relation to men. It is always used in relation to God! So what this scripture is saying, in effect, is that we must submit to every institution of God!

Let us see this in the context because it is important. Peter was really talking about agencies of the Roman government. He was talking about the Roman equivalent of the FBI, the CIA, the Department of Finance or Defense. He was talking about the Roman equivalent of the Secret Police or the DEA, or the NEA, or any other part of the Roman government that may have had some police power or administrative power over the lives of Christians. Peter is saying that God has permitted these institutions to be organized. We should not look upon them as though God condones them, but rather recognize that these governmental authorities exist for His ultimate purpose. They, therefore, have His authority behind them.

Americans love to rebel. They love to feel as though they are free and that they are just as good as anybody else. But I hope I am convincing you that it is not a matter of being "just as good as anybody else." I hope, brethren, that in the eyes of God, you are *far better* than anybody else! Even those who are far better than anybody else in the eyes of God are still required by Him to submit to the authorities that He has permitted to be in place—whether in the civil government, church government, or family government!

I Peter 2:14-15 [O]r to governors, as to those who are sent by Him [see that? The governors are sent by God!] for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.

"Do not render evil for evil, but overcome evil by good." Peter and Paul agree perfectly with one another about our responsibility to government, to authority. This word "ignorance," incidentally, is a little bit more revealing than it appears. It does not indicate ignorance simply because somebody does not know, but an ignorance that is there because of obstinacy or a refusal to know. This is referring to somebody who has set their mind against the truth of God. It indicates that the truth of God was preached in Rome and the authorities were consciously rejecting it. Their reaction was to persecute the Christians.

I Peter 2:16 [As free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God.

There it is—we are to submit because we are servants of God! All of us are servants of God. And so our submission is out of respect for God. We are His servants. Do you know what your liberty is in this context? Your freedom, your liberty, is to consciously *choose* to submit. The world does not have that liberty. If it submits it is because it does so out of fear of the power of the authorities. We are free to submit out of deep respect and an abiding love for God. They do not have that freedom.

I Peter 2:17-21 Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God [there it is again]. Honor the king. Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear [There it is again. Not fearing the master, fearing God.], not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh. For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God [that is the way we are to use our liberty] one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults [has anybody here been beaten for their faults?], you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. For to this you were called . . .

Do you see that? There is oppression and abuse all over the world. Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. People abuse when they get power—whether it be in the family, whether

it be in the community, or whether it be in the nation. There is abuse of authority. And we are moving rapidly toward the time in this country when Christians are going to be abused far worse than they have ever been in the past in this country. We were called to this—to submit to evil out of respect for God, out of faith. I do not mean submit to do evil; I mean submit to God in the face of evil.

I Peter 2:21-23 . . . for to this you were called because [here comes the example] Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: "Who committed no sin [therefore He was not guilty of abusing His power and authority. He was not guilty of breaking the laws of the land; not guilty against the Romans or the Jews. He committed no sin], nor was guile found in His mouth"; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously.

There it is! The world will not submit to God and that is why the world is in the state that it is! Rather than submit to God, men seek to gratify—or satisfy—their desires. The pattern began early—when Helel did it! The result was that he went to war with God! Then came Adam and Eve. They did not submit to God. God said, "You may eat of all of the trees (there may have been hundreds of them), but there is that one there of which I do not want you to eat." Instead what they did was to follow their own desire and they took from the very tree of which God said to not eat. And that brought them into conflict with God!

The Christian is called to suppress his lusts. It is not wrong to have desire. But it is wrong to not suppress the lust which can lead one to exceed his own authority and, therefore, bring oneself into a state of disobedience or non-submission to the authority that God permits in this world.

So to this we were called. We are going to be among the first harvest—the size of which I have no idea. But it is going to include all of those people, beginning with righteous Abel, who submitted to God rather than man. These are they who *submitted* to evil rather than rebelled against it. They did what they did for the same reason that we will do what we will do—we all see God ruling His creation and know that our first priority in life is to submit to Him.

Christ, it says, committed Himself to Him who judges righteously. Christ knew that Pilate was wrong. Christ knew that Ananias was wrong and that all the Sanhedrin was wrong. But He submitted to death and to the authority that was constituted by God in those men. He knew there was going to be a judgment, did He not? Those men are going to be judged for what they did by the very God that Christ, by faith, was submitting to. He would let God make the decision as to whether He did what was right or whether Ananias and Pilate did what was right. He did not resist the government, but allowed them to take His life. The resurrection shows that He was right. And the resurrection shows God's judgment because He vindicated His Son.

I hope we are getting the point because God will vindicate *us* by a resurrection because we submit to Him and to His way even though we may be caught in the evil of abusive people in positions of power—whether husband or in the community.

Paul shows another step in what our attitude has to be between us and our brethren. This is a part of submitting to one another

I Corinthians 6:1-7 Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints? Do you not know that the saints will judge the

world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life? If then you have judgments concerning things pertaining to this life, do you appoint those who are least esteemed by the church [meaning those who are on the outside] to judge? I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you, not even one, who will be able to judge between his brethren? But brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers! Now therefore, it is already an utter failure for you that you go to law against one another. [Paul is saying, "If you go to man's law in charging your brother, you have *already lost!* It does not matter how the judge decides it, as far as God is concerned you have lost the case!"] Why do you not rather accept wrong?

The Christian's instructions are very clear. In a case involving brothers you had better be prepared to "lose," as an act of faith, out of respect for Christ. Christ is the Head of this church. By faith you know that He is going to judge the situation. Does Christ have enough wisdom to do that? Does Christ have enough power to carry out His judgments? Do we have enough faith to allow Him to do it?

Is there a legal basis for this? Absolutely—He owns us! We are His slaves. He purchased every single one of us with His blood! He has legal right to make a judgment between brothers. Is that clear? We are to submit to the authority of Christ by faith and allow Him to do the judging if no judgment can be reached within the church. And if a judgment is reached within the church, but the church has judged wrongly, then the brothers have to be willing to accept it with the knowledge that there is a higher court to which they can appeal by faith and that Christ *will* vindicate the righteous. It may not happen right away, but if we in faith pray for that and then patiently wait for it, He will do it.

Matthew 5:38-42 "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also [that is pretty clear]. If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also [it seems like Paul was following Christ's advice—be prepared to lose]. And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away."

Normally and customarily, self-defense is legally right in virtually every nation on earth. But in our case God says, "No, that's not a right. There's a better way to do things!" Notice especially verse 39: "whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn your left to them, as well." The picture here is of a slap, something which every culture views as insulting rather than damaging. It may do damage to the person's ego, but it is not something that is ordinarily intended to really harm. It is intended to put down. Not only does a person get a slap on the right cheek, even worse is to be back-handed on the left. So you go "whack" across the face this way; and then "whack" with the back of the hand which is even more insulting than the first slap with the open palm.

Jesus is trying to open our minds to something here. What He is describing are cases involving offense or insult. He is telling us here that an insult or offense may not come by means of an actual slap, but rather by us being the subject of gossip or maybe being taken advantage of at work. The boss finds out that you are a good worker so he piles more and more on you than you can actually handle. Then your good attitude begins to get sour because the boss is taking advantage of you and you begin to feel offended.

The first action (or reaction) in such cases is what? Our first impulse is usually to retaliate, or to get even in some way—to get some measure of satisfaction. "It's our natural right, isn't it?" Natural, yes; but spiritual, no! God says to submit because He is teaching a Christian to think in a certain way: to think of his duties, not his privileges; to think of his responsibilities. To whom are our duties and responsibilities? They are to God, not to the self. The first responsibility, the first duty is always to God. The first and great commandment is toward Him. The second one is toward us and toward others. And so He is telling us to submit to Him in cases where we are insulted.

Now why—why does God want us to go to this extent? I will tell you what John Ritenbaugh thinks a major reason is. It is not the only reason, but a major reason is that God has His mind on what is coming in the future. God is going to give us awesome power to rule over nations. He wants to be absolutely sure that we will rule with restraint; that we will not unleash such power in a moment of losing sight of who we are. He wants to be sure that we will not just strike back at offense that might come our way from some unconverted person over whom we are ruling. There are people who would just lash out as quickly as anything with a cutting word, or maybe their fists, or whatever at somebody who they think has done something offensive against them. You unleash the power of God against somebody like that and half the universe disappears! He wants to be sure that we are going to be able to keep our cool and not lash out!

A second major reason is that He wants us to be peacemakers. It takes two to fight and when one refuses, the fight goes out of the other person very quickly. They may not lose their anger, but the fight usually stops. We are to be peacemakers. Once peace begins to be restored, then you can appeal your case and begin to work it out.

These things that Jesus is talking about here in verses 39-42 are showing us that we are to make a certain kind of response. That response can be done either as a grim duty to be resented, or a service that is gladly rendered; not so much for the other person's benefit, but for God's—out of respect, out of fear for Him. So we have a choice as to how we can respond. God has instructed us as to how He wants us to respond. We have already seen here that we are to be willing to go the extra mile.

Colossians 3:22-24 Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God. And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.

There are two ways of submitting. Both of them are good, but one is better than the other. It is better to submit grimly, even with resentment, than not to submit at all. But it is *far better* to submit as cheerfully and sincerely as we possibly can. We do it, not because the other person is better, not because we are cowards, not because we are weak; we are doing it, again, because we see God on His throne in our mind's eye. Our submission is always a response to Him. And so we can do it with a smile, with gracious courtesy, and with a determination. I think God is making the point very clearly that even though a person has done wrong in abusing us, we do not have the right to retaliate. God expects us to submit cheerfully as an act of faith.

There is another reason why God wants us to do this. When a person is retaliating, their mind is never pure. There is revenge on the mind; there is anger. We might go so far as to say there is vindictiveness. And revenge is not sweet; it is a poison that breeds war! If the person who is injured or abused does not lower his standard to that of the abuser, then it leaves God free to work—the oppressor might even be changed to the high standard of the oppressed.

You can write down Hebrews 13:17 because there is instruction there that is basically telling the church member to submit to the ministry. He is saying, "Help them. Help the ministry do their job!" That is basically what He is saying there in those couple of verses.

Philippians 2:5-7 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.

Here is an example of Christ showing submission as a voluntary act of love. In this case faith is in the background, but love has come to the fore. And Christ did it as an act of well-being for all concerned. He did it for our sake. He humbled Himself. He divested Himself of the majesty of His office in an effort to ensure that there would be others with whom to share the inheritance!

Christ is the archetype. Remember we saw that He is the example there in I Peter 2. Now we are seeing here that He is the archetype in another area. Not only is it an act of faith, but submission is now also an act of love! It is both!

The important thing in this section right here is that Christ did not think of His equality. It even says here that He did not consider it robbery to be equal with God. So His rights, then, were not a thing to be dearly clung to—clutched by Him. Jesus was not like the gods of Greek mythology who became men and women, yet retained their divine privileges. Christ became a man and He was *subject* to all the space and time limitations that we are. He was not play-acting! He was encumbered by humanity and He, God, submitted to it knowing that He could lose it all! Christ did not disguise Himself as a slave; He *became* one—and became servant to all. He had no rights superior to anybody!

We might think that if anybody had the right to revolt, or rebel, or to exercise his authority, it was Jesus Christ before Pilate. He did not exercise them because He was encumbered by the same laws, principles, and the way of God, as you and me. And so He humbly submitted to having His life taken from Him. He had no advantage and He submitted to life in that way.

We can see now that Christ, in the way that He approached things, was not to dominate, but to serve. He did not desire His own way, but He submitted to God's. He did not exalt Himself. He did not establish His "turf," as we would say today. Instead, He renounced Himself and, whatever befell Him, patiently submitted all the way to the death. The wonderful thing is that Paul goes on to show that by submitting, all these things brought Him greater glory. Remember, He is the archetype, the One we are to follow.

James writes a great deal about the kinds of people who are applauded, lauded today in our society—businessmen, actors, actresses—those kinds of people who are very aggressive and assertive—people who try to establish right away their superiority over you. James says that is nothing but private ambition. God is showing us here that if Christ had grasped at private ambition He would have failed.

Does Christ win you over by blasting you with power? Not at all! The lesson is that He wins your loyalty by demonstrating a love that we cannot resist! There is actually a veiled reference here to Adam and Eve—and to Helel. They all *grasped* at being God. They desired to have complete control without the spirit—without the character or the wisdom—to rightly use it. It leads to destruction. Again, I think we are seeing that the reason God wants us to be so restrained is because He wants to see how we are going to conduct ourselves when we are really given power.

So I think we can conclude by saying that submission, in the true Christian sense, is an act of faith in God—believing that He is, indeed, ruling over His creation and that He is active in what is going on. He knows what is going on, even down to every last person in His creation. If He wants to know, He can know. And for those who are a part of His family, He is *deeply* involved. We are the apple of His eye. We are the focus of His attention. He has every hair numbered. He knows what is going on and He wants us to respond in the way that Jesus Christ did. So, first of all, submission is an act of faith.

Second, it is an act of love for the well-being of all. Those who are truly submitting demonstrate a sacrificial love, a sacrificial attitude, in that they are willing to go all the way to the death for the well-being of all concerned. They are also found working at establishing peace. If we are not doing that—if we are not doing the two of them—then it is very likely we are going to create a situation in which there is conflict!