

CHIEF

MINISTRIES

WITH INTERLUDES

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You need to know something about Joshua if you are going to take the Promise Land: Joshua understood obedience. He lived by God's principle of submission and authority. In fact, every good, effective soldier lives by this principle. No army can wage war successfully without a fighting force that keeps rank and file, respects their officers, and obeys orders. That is why, before Paul dresses us in the armor of God and instructs us in the strategies of spiritual warfare, he explicitly and emphatically tells us in the final verses of Ephesians 5 and the first verses of Ephesians 6 that we must abide in the principle of submission and authority. He explores this vital issue first in the relationship of husband and wife: *Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. v23 For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. (Ephesian 5:22-23 ESV)*. Submission is a key to winning in spiritual warfare. "Wait a minute, Chief, that sounds like giving up in order to win!" Well, as I've said before, His ways are not our ways, His is the kingdom of opposites in regard to our fleshly way of doing things. This is spiritual warfare to win in the spiritual kingdom. This is how we can get His Kingdom come! His will be done, on earth as it is in heaven! Hello?!! Did you catch that nugget in your Spirit? Hold on! There is more to come!

Now in the first verses of Ephesians 6, Paul continues to talk about submission and authority in context of the relationship between child and parent and then the relationship between slave and master.

The mature warrior is an obedient warrior. That's what basic training is all about – bringing a civilian's will into line with military standards, military codes, military rules and regulations, and a military way of thinking. If the church is going to wage war successfully, we must learn to obey our Commander.

Our submission to Jesus Christ is the only relationship in which we know at all times, under all circumstances, His commands are right and true. There is never a question of His absolute goodness and righteousness. Therefore, our hearts should be continuously submitted to His Word and His Spirit, and our actions should always carry out His will. However, in human relationships, there are times when we are placed in positions where the authority we are submitted to is not right, just or gentle. Nevertheless, God calls us to these positions for the purpose of working a submissive heart to Him in us, as we obey those in authority over us and trust Him, we grow in the faith.

God's plan is that we learn obedience as children in the home. As parents lovingly demand that their child's will line up with their will, they are molding and shaping the child's will to line up completely with the will of the Father for the rest of their lives. Obedience is best learned when a person is a child, young in years. Paul wrote to the Ephesians: *Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. v2 "Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise), v3 "that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land." (Ephesian 6:1-3 ESV)*

The adult who was taught obedience by his parent is going to find it much easier to obey the Lord than the adult who was never taught obedience as a child in the home. I firmly believe that a parent who does not teach their child to be obedient is doing their child a great disservice. Structure and order are always much better learned as a child than as an adult. It starts out as simple as setting a rule and holding the child accountable. At 8 PM Johnny goes to bed, no arguing, no discussion. If Johnny does not obey, he quickly discovers the consequences. If Johnny has an un-submissive, rebellious, or sour attitude, he finds out immediately that it is unacceptable.

Paul refers to the fifth commandment found in Exodus 20:12 and tells us that this commandment comes with a promise. When we honor our father and mother, we will live a long and prosperous life. If we want our children to live long and prosperous lives, we must teach them to honor us as parents from the moment they are born. We must

give them this vital key to life and fulfillment. In addition, it will be much easier for them to submit to Jesus as their Lord if we teach them to submit to us as babes.

Moreover, a child who is required to show respect for authority at home will have a more enjoyable time with teachers and reap the benefits of learning in school. They will have a natural respect for any adult in authority, whether it is a pastor or a policeman. When they go to work as young adults, they will get along well with their bosses and work well with other employees.

We see one characteristic again and again in our prison system: Most inmates failed to learn respect for authority when they were children, or they were abused by authority and took that abuse out on someone else continuing this damaging cycle. Many grew up under one of Satan's most vile and destructive deceptions, believing that the rebellion signified strength and power, that they were their own lords and set their own rules. When you have no respect for authority, you believe the lie that you can do anything and get away with it. You have swallowed the serpent's false doctrine, which he spoke to Eve in the Garden of Eden: *Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?"* ^{v2} *And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden,* ^{v3} *but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'"* ^{v4} *But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. ^{v5} For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."* (Genesis 3:1-5 ESV).

Satan's lie is that we can disobey God and not die, that rebellion against His precepts will make us our own gods, strong and independent. But God's word tells us that only obedience to God, to parents, to all those in authority over us will bring blessings and joy to our lives. As believers, our hearts submit to God fully when we make Jesus our Lord, not just our Savior.

Unfortunately, many Christians today have made Jesus their Savior but not their Lord. They are deceived into thinking that they can do what they please without consequences because they are "saved" and "going to heaven". Many Christians find themselves halfway through their lives before they recognize who they are in Christ Jesus or realize that, as believers in Christ Jesus, they are to live in total submission to Him. So many people who call themselves Christians are just playing church – they are going through all the motions and saying all the right words, but they have not truly submitted their entire lives to Him so that they are subject to Him in all things. (See Ephesians 5:22, 24).

Obedience is the foundation of who we are in Christ, a key to our success in spiritual warfare and the lesson of obedience is best learned in our earliest years. It is the sapling – still bendable and pliable – that can be best trained to become a strong tree able to withstand every storm. However, whether we were brought up in the council and admonition of the Lord or not, whether we were taught the principles of submission and authority or not as children, right now, before we put on the full armor of God, it is imperative that we submit ourselves completely to Jesus Christ as our Lord as well as our Savior.

Notice that Paul does not command children to understand everything their parents tell them to do. He merely commands them to obey. Paul does not command the church as a whole to understand all of the mystery of Christ Jesus, nor does he command the believer in Ephesians to understand all of the profound, prolific concepts he illustrates and presents to them. He does require them, however, to obey the truth of God's word.

This principle holds true for us in every area of our spiritual growth and development, regardless of our age. We must obey those who are more mature in the Lord. We must do what they teach us and command us to do, especially if they hold positions of authority over us. God is a God of principles and concepts. If you learned these principles and concepts, and the principle of submission and authority is one of them, you can apply God's principles to any situation.

One of my first jobs in the church was to play the piano at 8 years of age. I figured out right away that once you learned the 7 white keys and the 5 black keys, you had figured out the rest of the 76 keys. Those 12 notes plus the 13th create the octave which repeats itself over and over to create the keyboard. A similar illustration is our numerical system, which is based on the numbers zero to nine. If you can count to ten, you can count to a million because the same numbers, with only slight variations in name, repeat themselves over and over.

So it is in the kingdom of God. Jesus taught, *"If you are faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things."* (Matthew 25:23). When God gets ready to teach His people and to raise them up into greater spiritual maturity, He always starts with basic concepts that are readily comprehended and applied. It is for this reason that the Lord admonishes us not to despise small beginnings or the "small things" he does; *"The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also complete it. Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you. ^{v10} For whoever has despised the day of small things shall rejoice, and shall see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel. ^{v11} These seven are the eyes of the LORD, which range through the whole earth."* (Zechariah 4:9-10 ESV). Anything God originates has the potential to increase, produce a harvest, and be refined into perfection. As we read in Job 8:7: *"Though your beginning was small, yet your latter and will greatly increase."*

If you learn to be faithful on one level, you can be faithful on every level. The person who learns to tithe faithfully on one dollar is a person who is going to tithe faithfully on a million dollars. Those who say they can't afford to tithe have missed the key issue of obedience and faithfulness. They have missed the principles God wants to teach them.

While God is no respecter of persons – meaning that He does not favor one person over another – He is a respecter of principle. *God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?* (Numbers 23:19 ESV). He always upholds His absolutes, and the principle of submission to the Lord is a foundation principle that must be learned before other principles can be built upon it.

Obedience is bordered on rules, routine, structure and order. Within the heart and soul of every fallen human being, however, is a natural, fleshly tendency to rebel against these things. Some of us become very subtle in our rebellion, claiming that rules, routine, structure, and order are contrary to the flow of God's Spirit. God's Word, however states clearly that godly rules, routine, structure and order are not contrary to the working of the Spirit (see 1 Corinthians 14). They make it easier for the Holy Spirit to flow through the church and for God's people to obey what the Spirit says. Structure and obedience to God's commandments are essential to the work of the Spirit.

In Acts 6 we read about a dispute that arose in the early church. The apostles responded by appointing seven men of "honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom," over the practical business of the church. These seven, called deacons, were to make certain that the needs of the believers were addressed and met with fairness and equity, while the apostles devoted themselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word; *Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. ^{v2} And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. ^{v3} Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. ^{v4} But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."* (Acts 6:1-4 ESV). Seven men were appointed for ministry, and the apostles laid their hands on them and prayed for them. The church was getting organized, and here was the result: *And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.* (Acts 6:7 ESV).

Structure and order caused the Gospel to go forth with greater effectiveness, more souls were added to the kingdom of God, and even the hardest-to-reach souls - the priest in the temple – became convinced of the truth about Jesus Christ! Therefore, we can see that requiring obedience of our children is not going to inhibit their creativity or dreams. On the contrary, it will make their creativity and dreams flourish! They will be more useful and effective in God's hands. Requiring obedience of a child will not make the child resistant to the Holy Spirit; it makes the child more sensitive and compliant to the Holy Spirit.

Rules, routine, structure, and order are required if any person is going to learn these basic principles of God:

- Relationships have boundaries, including the relationship of an individual to the greater group or community. Every relationship has boundaries built into it and those boundaries have to be learned and respected. For example, when a person says no to your kisses and hugs, respect that no and back away; or, just because the stores closed doesn't mean you break in and get what you want.
- Respect must be shown for those who make and enforce rules. Every relationship, every culture, every society and every church is governed by certain rules, written and unwritten. Those rules must be learned. Thou shalt not lie. Thou shalt not commit adultery. Thou shalt not bring your perversions, favoritisms, racisms into the main sanctuary!
- All behavior has consequences. Good behavior brings reward, even though that reward may be only the good feeling and self-respect that comes with knowing we have done what is right. Bad behavior brings discipline, chastisement and punishment. Those who live in accordance with God's law put themselves in a position to receive God's blessing. Those who routinely and willfully break God's law put themselves in a position to be chastised by God, and if they do not repent, they will eventually withdraw from His presence and protection.

Although the Bible does not state it directly, the command to honor your mother and father clearly implies that your days will be lengthened. Therefore, if a child dishonors or disrespects his father or mother, his days will be shortened. I would be terrified to train up my children to disrespect me, knowing that because of their disrespect their days would be shortened. We only need to look at the latest edition of any newspaper in this nation to see what is happening to our children when they have no respect and honor for their fathers and mothers. Their lives are being shortened through their violence of the streets and their association with neighborhood gangs who are taking the place of father and mother in their lives.

I would want my children to live and I want them to live in blessing. I would want them to experience the promise that their respect and honor will cause it "to be well with them." (Ephesians 6:3). Not only do I want these blessings and long life for my own natural children, but I also want these things for the hundreds of spiritual babes in Christ that read these letters. I desire to see the entire body of Christ live long and prosperously on the earth.

Why aren't more of God's people experiencing the full blessings of God? Perhaps it is because as new believers in Christ Jesus they aren't taught to respect their elders in the Lord, their spiritual mothers and fathers, and to have a respect for God's authority over their lives. God cannot entrust the full blessings that go with His kingdom to those who do not submit to Him in their hearts and obey Him in their lives.

I love the fact that Paul expresses so clearly God's balance. The exhortation for wives to submit to their husbands is followed immediately by the command that husbands are to love and nurture their wives, to lay down their lives for them. Then the charge to children that they should obey their parents is balanced by God's command to fathers that they "provoke not" their children to wrath. Paul writes: *Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. (Ephesians 6:4 ESV).*

God's plan for His people is filled with checks and balances. A child must learn to obey and respect his parents, but at the same time, he is to learn that lesson in an atmosphere of love, kindness, patience, self-control, joy, peace and mercy. A parent must not be unduly harsh and never abusive. Such behavior only provokes or prompts a child to imitate the harsh and abusive behavior. A child who is treated with anger is a child who is going to respond with anger.

This passage represents a vivid contrast. One of the definitions of "provoke" is to "send a way" or "drive away". Paul says that fathers should not drive away their children to the point of wrath but bring them up and nurture them in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. To nurture is to love unconditionally and to instruct is to enlighten. We do not just make rules and enforce them. We explained them to our children and discipline them in love.

Pastors, teachers, prophets, evangelists - all who function in roles of authority in the church – must admonish God’s people with the same attitudes as a loving father in the home. Those who provoke their congregations to wrath by man-made teachings and man-made rules that are harsher than God’s laws are going to find they are raising up angry, harsh people. We are to win the world by the manifested strength and power of God’s love, not the strength and power of men and women seeking to build their own empires.

Notice that Paul admonishes fathers to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. So often in our society we leave the nurturing of children to mothers. As men, we have a tendency to shirk the responsibility of raising children, saying, “That’s a mama’s duty.” Scripturally, however, we fathers are commanded to love and instruct our children, to raise them up to fear, love and serve the Lord. This does not mean that a father is to replace the role of a mother and a family, but God expects him to actively contribute and oversee the guidance of his children.

The fact is, children ultimately emulate the authority figure in the home. They learn their value system from the head of the household. Mothers often fight a losing battle trying to instill values and godly behaviors in their children by themselves. Those children need to see both their mama’s tender devotion to the Lord and their daddy’s unshakable commitment to biblical values and godly behavior. Fathers need to become strong advocates of good values in the home, and their children need to know that these values are important to them. This means more than just setting high standards of morality for his family. It means that daddy lives them before his children so that they can learn godly principles just by watching him. And if you think that your responsibility is diminished because you are locked up, you have all the more a mandate to write those children or talk to them at visit – as a godly man.

In the church the senior pastor is the final authority figure who embodies the values held by the members of the church. If the leadership is lax in character, the church will be permeated with undesirable character, no matter how much good may be going on in the various outreaches, classes, worship services, etc. The leaders who teach the people, both in word and by example, to obey the truth of God’s word and fully submit their hearts in a lifestyle of worship before the Lord, are leaders who are going to raise up there “children” to live long and prosperous lives. These first verses in Ephesians 6 tell us clearly that God is extremely concerned with the training of our children. He wants them to learn early to serve Him and obey His commands because He wants them to live long and be blessed. He knows that the sooner they learn obedience to His will, the sooner they will become mighty men and women of valor in the body of Christ. Then they will do great exploits in the kingdom of God and bring glory to His name.

Who are you leading? How are you living?

I pray we all continue to be submitted to God and His authority.

Live it, men of God!

Chief

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Christ’s

Heart

In

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