

Submission and authority 1 of 3:Control issues, 1 of 3

Hi all,

I was hired by a college campus ministry in 1981 to bring balance to their staff and members. They had become involved in 'The Shepherding Movement'. That was a mentoring program that soon turned into a program where church members could not make any life decision without permission from church leadership. Soon there was so much hurt, it just fell apart.

A little history, because it's still around today in different forms

The 'shepherding' became so controlling some church leaders were telling people who to marry, or break up with someone they loved because 'they had a word from the Lord', or 'it didn't bear witness', and other such things invoking God to support their counsel.

Soon, the whole movement fell apart. The college ministry and church fell apart and that's why they asked me to bring balance. Nationally, many churches and individuals had their lives destroyed with much hurt and confusion. Many people fell away from the Lord, many marriages that never should have been, that had been put together through the manipulation of elders, ended in divorce.

That off-balance teaching and practice remains alive and well in many churches to this day. Some 15 years after that college campus ministry, when I was on staff with a mega-church, a young, unmarried woman who was a student at the Bible school where I was Director, asked to talk to me. She felt condemned for talking to a church leader who wasn't part of her church, but she wanted someone 'neutral' to talk to about her own pastor's teaching - she needed help.

From the pulpit her pastor had said that anyone who went to church somewhere else was opening themselves up to the devil's attack.

He had said if they aren't there at every service at his church they are opening themselves to the devil's attack. Today we see this type of thing with online ministries as well, telling people if they don't sign on to watch the next meeting, they are opening themselves up to the devil. If they don't give money to their cause, they are opening themselves up to the devil. They don't want to take a chance of 'missing God' so they better tune in, or they are opening themselves up to the devil. And many other such means of manipulation involving and keep people in fear of both God and the devil.

But inside herself, this young woman was conflicted. She knew even though God was invoked by her pastor and leaders, something wasn't right with the idea that if she got out from under their 'covering' she was opening herself to attack, because she realized, she too had Christ in her. Isn't He enough? Something was wrong she felt, that she and Christ in her couldn't make decisions for her life. Something didn't sit well inside her at the idea she had to submit all decisions to the leadership for permission or 'a word' for direction.

She had entered into the 'mentoring' program in her church...

...with an elder in that church who was at least 20 years older than her, and married. The mentoring program had turned into a means to control her, and she felt there might even be some hidden sexual motive for this leader to take charge of her life's decisions. She knew she was being manipulated, but the leadership always showed chapter and verse, so she didn't want to sin against God, nor open herself to the devil.

Her story includes most of the elements we see in church manipulation today: Using God to justify immoral or unethical behavior, taking control over people's decision-making rights, making the person they control feel they would be offending God if they disobeyed their mentor, and having control over another's emotions in the name of God, making lust, fantasy, or other motives part of the dynamic between mentor and the mentored.

In times past and present they talk of the elders 'covering' someone, and of 'covenant relationships'. I've heard of 'prophecy' over someone that included telling someone 'thus says the Lord', but always the prophecy comes from the pastor or elder.

You don't want to miss God - fear based

Submission and authority are often topics of small groups, always set up as a pyramid structure with one at the top telling others what they should or should not do, and always invoking God in their counsel. (See my book, Return of the First Church for more on the pyramid structure of the auditorium church)

I've heard many stories of pastors saying people who left 'their church', have demons, commanding everyone in the church to shun the former members.

Did Jesus act this way in the gospels?

In John 6:66-67 when Jesus spoke a difficult to understand parable which offended many, He asked of the 12: "Are you too going to leave me?" He didn't tell them what to do, He simply asked.

When the Rich Young Ruler of Matthew 19:16-23 left Jesus, did the Lord run after Him? In Luke 9:59-62 two men said they wanted to follow Jesus. One said he first wanted to attend a funeral, and the other said he wanted to first go home to say goodbye. Did Jesus run after either? No. He just commented to each the cost of discipleship, and then let them make the decision.

Jesus is always like that. He will always show us deep in our hearts the consequences of each choice we are thinking of making, and then letting us and Him in us choose. Jesus said the Holy Spirit will 'lead you into all truth'. He doesn't drive us from behind using fear as a motive. He leads, goes ahead of us, and asks us to follow.

Next week I'll share signs of spiritual manipulation, coupled with the balanced of each of those signs, so we can compare God's way with the perversion the devil puts on people.

Until then, blessings,

John Fenn

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Submission and Authority 2 of 3, wives?

Hi all,

The title of this series is 'Submission & Authority', so today I'll define those and share how they are confused and twisted to manipulate people.

Submission is...

A grace in the heart. Submission is not obedience. Submission is a grace in the heart towards someone or something. Obedience is an action.

Obedience is an act of complying with rules, commands, or directions given. Submission is a condition of the heart when someone gives their will over to another's control or will.

Colossians 3:18 says: "Wives submit yourselves to your own husbands as it is fit in the Lord."

Ephesians 5:22 says: "Wives submit to your own husbands as unto the Lord."

Notice these does not say obey. They say submit. Again, submission is an attitude of the heart. He also says: "...submit...as it is fit in the Lord" and "submit as unto the Lord." The Lord would not require submission or obedience to anything not in Him.

The Lord would not ask a wife to do something immoral, unethical, or something that violates her body and control over it. Can a husband picture Jesus asking a wife to do that? If not, she doesn't have to submit nor obey. "As unto the Lord" means according to what Jesus would ask. That's the extent of wives being submitted (a grace in the heart) to their husbands.

That means if a husband asks a wife to do something (obedience) that the Lord would not do or would not agree with, the wife does not have to submit does she have to do. Submit meaning to give their will over to their (husband) - she may withdraw that if he asks something not in the Lord.

The context of Ephesians 5:20-21 provides greater insight: "Submit yourselves to one another in the fear of God. Wives submit to your husbands as unto the Lord." Marriage is a grace of mutual submission.

"Submit to one another" means husbands submit to their wives as their wives submit to their husbands. But it comes with 2 conditions: In the fear of God and as unto the Lord.

This shows husbands who fear God aren't going to ask the wife to do something Jesus wouldn't ask her to do - because they mutually walk in the reverential fear of the Lord - both are accountable to Him.

Obedient, but not submitted; submitted but not obedient

Obedience is the act, submission is a condition of the heart.

A teenager asked to clean their room may do so in obedience, but in their heart they are not submitted - they gripe and complain and have a horrible attitude while they clean. They are obedient but not submitted.

A wife forbidden by her husband of going to church may disobey, but in her heart continue to be submitted to her husband. She is disobedient but she is submitted.

Young children are commanded to obey. Paul doesn't say they must submit, he simply says obey. He also makes the distinction with slaves, saying to obey from the heart as unto the Lord. This brings out obedience with a submitted heart - but a heart submitted to the Lord. Colossians 3:20-22

Consider Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, so stressed his capillaries broke and He sweat blood, as He was making the final decision to obey His Father. He was submitted in His heart, the cross was the plan after all. But that final act of obedience, to allow Himself to be arrested, was a great wrestling match within Himself.

Haven't we all had those internal wrestlings as we struggle with obedience with submission?

Isaiah 1:19 also brings both these elements together: "If you are willing (submitted) and obedient you will eat the good of the land." Many are one or the other but not both, and then wonder why they aren't 'eating the good of the land.'

Parents with adult children

When Barb and I were told our first born (Chris) was handicapped, when he was about 6 months old, my mom suggested putting him in a home for retarded children. That was her generation's thinking, but it wasn't our thinking.

I honored, Barb and I honored, my mom, but we rejected her advice. We were not obedient. There is nothing in scripture commanding adult children to obey their parents, but we are required to honor our parents throughout our lives. That doesn't mean you as an adult have to obey; you're an adult, you may be submitted in your heart to them but you no longer have to obey them.

Signs you are being manipulated: Manipulators search for easy prey

Manipulation is to control, influence, or even negotiate with someone for one's own advantage.

That advantage may be spiritual, it may be financial, it may be physical. The manipulator may get an emotional 'high' from telling someone what to do or not to do. It may be an ego boost, a control issue, that they now control someone. They may manipulate out of their own fears and insecurities. Many people do things because it gives them control over someone.

Manipulation benefits the manipulator in some way, seen or unseen. In their emotions or motives they benefit from gradually removing control and decision making ability from their victim.

The evil behind manipulation in church is that the person in authority uses God to support their practice of exercising control over a person's decision making.

They know where to find victims

Very often it is impressionable young women or men, often single and not in a relationship. Very often these people are at a life changing moment - school, job, moving away from home. In older people it may be the break up of a marriage, the loss of a loved one, loneliness, illness, or needing purpose and/or direction in life.

With older people manipulators seek that moment in a person's life of raw emotions in their victim. With a young person they often have no one else speaking into their life, don't have life experience so seek someone older for advice, so are vulnerable.

Paul warned the elders of Ephesus that wolves would enter the flock and make disciples of themselves, not disciples of the Lord. (Acts 20:29-30) Church manipulators direct their victim to look to them for advice rather than to Christ in them first and foremost.

Who is your covering?

That's where we'll start next week. Until then, blessings,
John Fenn

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Submission & Authority 3 of 3, Who is your covering?

Hi all,

"Who is your covering" is the belief that all believers must be under the 'covering' of a church or church leader. That leader acts in authority over them so God's blessings may flow to them and they are protected from the devil. That is why very often, an off balance mentoring relationship is based on fear. It makes the person mentored afraid of missing or failing God, but also afraid of what the devil might do if they make a wrong decision or go against their mentor.

Is the 'covering' teaching Biblical?

This teaching is what remains of The Shepherding Movement mentioned in part 1. It is widely accepted as Bible fact, but it is not scriptural. Jesus is your 'covering', and then after that we are each other's 'covering', and I will discuss marriage order below.

Consider what 'who is your covering' teaching says. It says every person must have another person or organization between them and God. It ignores Christ in every believer, directing a submitted person to get instruction from another person, rather than Christ in them, leading them.

It believes that other person (who also has Christ in them), is not capable of making decisions for themselves; that they need someone to make those decisions for them. How evil!

Healthy example of spiritual guidance

A spiritual leader, a mentor, should act as one confirming what the Lord has first put in your heart. The watch is over one's soul, not their life in the natural world - job, home, school are natural things. A pastor or other leader's guidance should be focused on spiritual things and of the soul. Of course natural things come into the discussions, but a healthy mentoring relationship will always point the one mentored to Christ in them and doing what He wants.

Acts 20:22-23 tells us Paul is determined to go to Jerusalem.

He says 'I don't know what is going to happen to me, but everywhere I go the Spirit witnesses that bonds and affliction await me there.' He knew something bad was going to happen. But in Acts 21:10-11 Agabus the prophet gives a specific word to Paul. He says the Jewish leaders will arrest him and turn him over to the Romans.

These details were confirmation of something Paul already had in him, the core truth that trouble awaits. The details were new, but the core revelation was something already in Paul. The detail Agabus added was a confirmation. Consider also when Simeon in Luke 2:25-32 came by the Spirit and proclaimed baby Jesus was Messiah, it was not new information to Mary and Joseph - it confirmed what they had each been told by the Lord.

When Peter proclaimed 'You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God', Jesus said that no man told him that, he received that word from the Father. Jesus confirmed the revelation.

Initial revelation is within, from the Father or Lord by the Holy Spirit, THEN confirmed by 'the mouth of 2 or 3 witnesses.'

Husbands and wives

The scriptures abusive husbands and pastors use to subjugate their wives or women are: I Corinthians 11:1-16 about veils, I Corinthians 14:26-40 about wives silent in church, and I Timothy 2:9-15 about order in marriage; often used to tell women they can't talk in church.

In I Corinthians 11:1-16 the context is the wearing of veils. In that day and that region, wives wore a veil in public, and removed them at home or among family. The veil was the equivalent of our wedding ring today. We are told in Acts 18:1-9 that they met in the house of Justus, a Roman, and there were Jews, Greeks and Romans all meeting together for 'church'.

Some wives once inside the home removed their veils as they were among family in Christ. But that act dishonored their husbands in that culture. Paul said removing the veil at 'house church' dishonors their husbands, the angels in charge of their family, and the Lord. That was the issue in Corinth with no other 'veil' instruction anywhere else in the NT.

In verses 2, 13, and 16 Paul calls wives leaving on their veils a custom. It isn't a command from God, it is a custom. In some countries today this passage would still apply, but in most of the world the custom of wives wearing veils as a sign of their marriage is not in use.

In I Corinthians 14:26-40 the context is how to be a guest in someone's home for 'church'. This was needed because all 3 cultures were suddenly thrown together with only Christ in them held in common. Paul states the context in v26; let all things be done in a way that builds up all, decently and in order. He states the same in v33 and v40 - three times in 15 verses repeating the subject as concern for decency and order, so there is no misunderstanding. It isn't about wives being silent, it's about meetings involving multiple cultures being done decently and in order.

In v27-28 are about having a word but no one to interpret or opportunity to share. He says don't demand to be heard. If there is no opportunity to share, speak it to yourself and God, you have not sinned. In v29-33 he tells them not to insist on talking, and that if they share something they feel is from God, it will be judged by at least 2 or 3 others. It may be accepted or rejected.

Having said that, he then said 'the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets', meaning just because you feel that urge to share, you don't have to, God leave you in charge no matter what is in your spirit. He says take turns, God is not the author of confusion so be considerate the direction the meeting is going. Go with the flow instead of pushing your private favorite belief.

God is not the author of confusion, but of peace

Telling them once again God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, he tells the wives in v34-35 to ask their husbands at home if they have questions. The subject is confusion in the meeting, not a blanket doctrinal statement for wives to be silent.

He says the law says they must be quiet. There is nothing in the Mosaic law that says that. In Judaism oral law (traditions) were also called 'the law.' The 'law' Paul is speaking of is the law of the synagogue where the women are separated from the men and have no right to speak.

But now in Christ they are equal and seated with their husbands so the wives are catching up in knowledge, disrupting the flow of a meeting by their constant questions. So he said for the sake of peace, and things done decently and in order, let them ask their husbands at home.

People forget or don't know this is written to a room full of men and women from 3 different cultures meeting together to learn about Jesus, in a home.

I Timothy 2:9-15 is about marriage order and not a 'church service'. In those days Romans women showed their wealth and status by weaving jewelry in braids, with wigs being a common way

to add room to add more jewels. Paul said focus on inner beauty not showing off outer beauty and wealth. This instruction has nothing to do with church, it is about husbands and wives and how the wives focus their attention - outer show of wealth, or inner and true wealth in Christ.

He then said he is not allowing wives to usurp authority, or more closely to the Greek, have dominion over their husbands. Again, this is marriage order by context, not anything to do with being in church. I would add that in many marriages the wife is the 'talker'. We see this in Priscilla and Aquila who are mentioned 6x by Paul, with 4 of those 6x Priscilla is mentioned first, indicating she was the main speaker.

She was not usurping Aquila's authority when teaching or talking, but by his permission, for he recognized the gifts in his wife. The same is true today. When a couple recognizes each other's gifts and strengths, we submit to those God-given gifts in them, so each does not usurp authority over the other.

These words to Timothy...

...who was overseeing the body in Ephesus do not supersede his instructions to the Ephesians in 5:21-33. In other words all three letters; Ephesians and I & II Timothy, are to Christians in Ephesus. They are consistent with each other for Paul is writing to and about the same people. In Ephesians 5:21 he said to 'submit to one another in the fear of God, wives submit to your own husbands in the Lord'. What he later wrote Timothy does not supersede what he wrote in Ephesus, but compliments it. It isn't about obedience, it is about a condition of the heart, to follow marriage order set by God.

In Christ that means husbands and wives are equal, but creation order shows God created Adam first and then Eve, showing the husband is to be a picture of Christ and the wife is a picture of the church, in a living parable, married as one in God. Ephesians 5:21-33.

Submission is of the heart. Obedience is an act. We are submitted to the Lord and obedient to Him - the discipleship process is applying the submission in our hearts to our often rebellious body.

It is a process, but always keep in mind that Christ in you, and you must commune together to consider how you live your life. You and He get together to decide where to work, or go to school or what career to choose, where to live, or what to buy or sell. A mentor you may be submitted to may offer ideas and wisdom, but you don't have to obey them. They should not demand obedience. In marriage and in any discipleship relationship, submitting to one another has borders of morality, ethics, honoring one's personal space, and directs such to the Lord.

New subject next week, until then, blessings,

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