

Responding to Ungodly Authority- 2

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We continue today with our series in responding to ungodly authority.

All of us encounter authority at some level or another. Husbands, fathers & mothers, pastors, bosses & managers at work, governmental and municipal authority – they all make up the authority structures in our world. Things are fine when these leaders are godly and righteous. But what happens when they aren't? What should our response be to ungodly authority?

We started by defining ungodly authority last week by looking at the life of Saul. Saul was most definitely an example of a poor, abusive and ungodly leader. Overall, he was a poor leader because in his actions and in his character overall – he failed to reflect the character and leadership of God. A good leader is one through whom the leadership and authority of God is displayed accurately. You have no doubt encountered some of these ungodly leadership traits at some point, perhaps in the form of a cold, abusive husband, a viciously aggressive and domineering boss, or a proud, unapproachable pastor. How do you deal with such leadership? Do you rebel? Quit? Sulk? Get bitter? Comply, but hate them? Do you resist? Do you flee? What is the Godly response to ungodly authority?

Saul was clearly an ungodly leader. David was a godly man who was forced to deal with ungodly leadership. As David rose in popularity, so Saul's jealousy and hatred of him grew till he began to literally seek the head of David. How did David respond? David is a near perfect model of responding to ungodly leadership. David made wrong turns here and there, but overall he shows us three responses to ungodly leadership.

The first was

I. Godly Submission

David knew and practiced the foundation of responding to ungodly authority – submission to that authority. Now immediately that makes us question, doubt and even rebel against the idea. Submit to ungodly authority? That's like condoning evil isn't it?

Well, not if you mean submission in the sense we're describing. See, David was in Saul's court and watched him. He saw the moodiness, the manipulation, and the ungodliness. But I Samuel 18:14 tells us that David behaved himself wisely in all his ways. He didn't kick up a huge fuss about Saul or try to gather a committee to enquire on the king's suitability to rule. He submitted. Here was a boy who had already been privately anointed by Samuel to be king. He deserves that throne!! But he submits to Saul's authority.

But it was really put to the test later on when Saul was now hunting David and had him on the run. Surely now David would strike out and rebel? Surely now he would see the futility in submitting to an ungodly man?

But see the account in I Samuel 24. There David and his band of men encounter Saul sleeping in a cave. Helpless and at David's mercy, he refuses to heed his men's advice to kill Saul. Here is his big chance to throw off the shackles of ungodly authority, but David instead merely cuts off a part of Saul's robe. Even for this, David's heart 'smote' him according to verse 5. Listen to verse 6, as he refers to Saul: "my master" '.

the Lord's anointed' 'he is the anointed of the Lord'. 3 times he states his acknowledgement of Saul's status as his authority. He goes on to show Saul that he had the power to kill him but didn't. Saul promises David he won't hunt him again, a promise which doesn't last long.

The scene is repeated in chapter 26. Again, David encounters Saul sleeping, and has the opportunity to kill him. But listen to verse 9-11. "And David said to Abishai, Destroy him not: for who can stretch forth his hand against the LORD'S anointed, and be guiltless? ¹⁰David said furthermore, *As* the LORD liveth, the LORD shall smite him; or his day shall come to die; or he shall descend into battle, and perish. ¹¹The LORD forbid that I should stretch forth mine hand against the LORD'S anointed: but, I pray thee, take thou now the spear that *is* at his bolster, and the cruse of water, and let us go."

What does all this tell us?

David understood and practiced Godly Submission. Notice I say **Godly** Submission. Not just any submission, because some submission is forced submission, or submission borne out of fear, cowardice or defeat. David's submission was godly submission.

a) Godly Submission Understands the Design of Authority

See, David understood the place of and the necessity of authority in our world. Ever since sin entered our world, every single human being has an overriding motivation – "I will". The "I will" motivation is the desire of every human being to live for self – to put me and I on the throne of the universe. Lucifer's sin was that he said "I will" 5 times – each statement as recorded in Isaiah 14 was a statement of rebellion. No longer – God's will, or Thy Will be done – which are statements of submission – but "I Will". Satan's first trick in the Garden of Eden when tempting Eve was to make her question God's authority. He said 'You won't die!! God knows that when you eat you'll become like Him' I.e. – God is abusing His authority – He's holding out on you – He is using His high place to ruin your life.' And since we bought into that lie all those years ago – we have continued to suspect that God's authority is not good – that he secretly wants to mess up our lives or ruin our fun.

Our suspicion of authority continues and bleeds over into everyday life. We are suspicious of all authority – and always ready to defend our rights if we think the authority might be manipulating us. But the truth is – God has placed authority structures in our world and expects us to obey them. He places them in the family, in society, and in the church.

God's authority is to be extended and represented by those in places of authority. Rebellion to earthly authority creates the chaos and anarchy necessary for Satan to be enthroned. The call is for us to obey God's authority **through** the earthly authority. Our allegiance is first to God, and any **GODLY Submission** is obeying the rule of God in our lives as expressed through earthly authority.

But we're talking about ungodly authority here, aren't we? So naturally we say – this leader is disobeying God, I must obey God, so surely I cannot submit to him!!

Well here is where we must follow Scripture closely. God sets up authority. Believe or not, and like it or not – God sets up authority in our world both the good and the bad!!

Saul was an ungodly king. I've heard preachers say that Saul was not chosen by God. But that's not what Scripture teaches. God did indeed select him! He wasn't a leader after God's own heart like David, but nevertheless we read in I Samuel 9:16 – God specifically selected Saul – not the people – who, in fact rejected him at first. God set Saul up – and David understood that. David knew that though Saul's behavior was

ungodly, his position as king was not something that was in question – God had put him there, and that was all there was to it. Notice David saying this in 26:10. God puts them there, God will take them down. It's terribly hard to swallow, but God puts whoever is in power in some authoritative way – there. Consider Nebuchadnezzar – a wicked and evil Babylonian king. Daniel however tells Nebuchadnezzar that God has placed him there Daniel 2:21. Nebuchadnezzar's pride made God afflict him with madness, till he came to his senses and confessed in 4:17: "This matter *is* by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones: to the intent that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men"

Jesus told Pilate in John 19:11 that 'you could have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above'. Romans 13:1-2 puts it beautifully: "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. ²Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation."

Notice this government was not kind & diplomatic. This was the Rome that put Christians to the lions. Yet the call is not for Christians to rise up and create a Christian government to oppose them, but to submit and to acknowledge that even the evil Roman government is there by God's hand, to accomplish His purposes. Proverbs 21:1 sums it up: "The king's heart *is* in the hand of the LORD, *as* the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will." See God sets up who he wants to accomplish a greater plan.

Ultimately, God is shaping His plan on earth to ultimately culminate in the Second Coming of His Son, and He includes ungodly authority in His plan.

Therefore to fight against ungodly authority is to fight against God. When God has put someone somewhere – to rebel against that authority is to resist the very plan of God. The call is to obey God through that person. A man called Gamaliel understood this principle in Acts 5:38-39. "And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: ³⁹But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God." If God has set it up – then your responsibility is to submit to God through that authority and leave it to God to take it down in His time.

This is something that we chafe at. Political activists, hot-blooded people, naturally independently minded individuals find the idea of submission to ungodly authority revolting – like being weak, passive and cowardly.

B) Godly Submission Understands the Distinctions in Submission

Again, we say – David's submission was a godly submission – not just any submission. David, as we'll see later – confronted Saul over his actions – but he never questioned Saul's right to be king. The first is honest confrontation, the second is rebellion. See, and mark this – it's the difference between the **rightness of the rule**, and **the right to rule**. The *rightness of the rule* – refers to the rightness, the correctness of a leader's decisions. There's nothing wrong with questioning a leader's decisions or behavior. But **the right to rule** has to do with a place of authority given by God. And to question this is to be in rebellion – to say 'I won't submit to you'.

You can still be in submission when you question a leader's decisions. But when you question a leader's right to be there, to hold that position or to rule – you are in rebellion. And we tend to blur the two. If a leader makes wrong decisions – you can fight against those decisions. But don't fight the position, for then you're fighting

against God. And don't think that poor leadership gives you the right to question the position.

An example of this is found in the life of Moses. Midian, his father in law, noticed a severe defect in his leadership – he was doing too much, and not delegating. He honestly confronted Moses – and Moses agreed. He was not fighting Moses' position – or questioning his right to rule – he questioned the rightness of his rule. But later, a group lead by a man named Korah rose up to question the actual position of Moses as authority Numbers 16:4. They were saying – what right do you have to lead us? God caused the earth to swallow them up and destroyed with fire those who sided with him. That's how seriously he took their rebelling against his chosen authority. He said in I Samuel 15 ' Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft'

Consider some further examples: Jesus who said "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesars and to God the things that are God's." I.e. don't rebel against earthly authority – obeying God and man doesn't have to be a contradiction most of the time. The early church is another example – they lived under tyrannical despotic and evil rulers. Yet they all agree "Submit yourself to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake" Christian rebellion is a contradiction in terms – in the home, in the church, in society.

David realized that to fight against Saul's position as king would put him at odds with God. Throughout 1 Samuel (9:16, 10:1, 10:6; 15:28, "Lord's Anointed") it's clear that God selected Saul. God places even ungodly authority in place.

c) Godly Submission Understands the Design of Submission

Godly submission is obeying God through, and sometimes in spite of earthly authority. Which leads us to another point. What do we do when the authority is telling us to disobey God? A husband demands his wife stop reading her Bible. A government outlaws the preaching of the Gospel. A boss tells the employee to lie on a report. A pastor manipulates the congregation to turn against someone in the church. What do we do?

Well, human authority is there for us to obey God's authority. And when human authority flaunts the laws of God – God's authority must come first. Like the apostles who were instructed to stop witnessing by the spiritual authorities in Jerusalem. Their response? Acts 4:19: "But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye"

But let me say, that I believe that in the vast majority of life's situations, we can continue to obey God's laws through even ungodly authority. There will be some things where ungodly authority clashes with God's authority – but not in most things.

Most often, it is not so much that they are co-ercing us to disobey God, but that their character and attitude is unChristlike, causing us to wish to rebel. But I'm afraid another man's ungodly character is still no reason to rebel against the authority structures that God has placed. That's the hard part. See, ideally authority *encourages* obedience to God. You obey God 'because of'. But when confronted with ungodly authority we must still obey – we must obey *in spite of*. They discourage us, and mar the image we have of God as our Lord and final authority. But we must, like David, obey God in spite of their behavior. This is hard. So hard, it's impossible.

Godly submission is something that we cannot do on our own. We need the Spirit of God to empower us to do it. In Ephesians 5, we read about being 'filled with the

Spirit'. This is not a once off event – like the baptism of the Spirit. This is a moment-to-moment surrender of your life to Him, that He might control you. It is asking Him to take full control of you. Notice the results – v19 speaks of music and worship – v 20 speaks of thanksgiving. But guess what comes next – v21 “Submitting.” After that more verses on submission – wives submit to husbands, children obey parents, servants, obey master. See there's a causal link here. Be filled with the Spirit – be in submission to earthly authority. Why? Because being filled with the Spirit is surrendering to him, as we said. You are submitting to His Lordship – and the outflow will be Spirit-empowered submission to earthly authority. You cannot claim to be in submission to God's authority and be in rebellion to earthly authority. It's a contradiction.

And please remember that. Submission is obeying **God**, through the human authority. So when submitting to ungodly authority – remember – God is my audience. That's why Paul told the slaves of the day, who more often than not did have ungodly abusive masters to obey, “In singleness of heart, as unto Christ, not with eyeservice, as menpleasers, but as the servants of Christ.” See, don't drag your feet, when obeying that ungodly boss. Don't slam the dishes when obeying unfair parents, don't sulk and remain miserable with an ungodly husband, don't merely attend church with a heavy heart when obeying an ungodly pastor. Submission is ‘as unto the Lord’ The same zeal, cheerfulness and hard work, that you do for God. Because you are obeying God finally, not the human authority alone! God will not be pleased with a begrudging, half-hearted, miserable submission – for that is not how He wants you to obey Him.

Notice that God expects the authority to be kind and non –abusive, “Husbands, love your wives, Fathers provoke not your children to wrath, Masters forbear threatening” There's supposed to be a balance. But take note, the command to submit is not a conditional statement, hinging on the authority treating you right. It's a non-negotiable command to submit under the power of the Holy Spirit. See – consider that submitting to a nice boss, a loving husband, a kind and intimate pastor does not require any supernatural help- it's quite natural. But submitting to ungodly authority really requires that we humble ourselves, have great faith and depend totally on the Holy Spirit. It is one of the greatest trials you will endure – and hence make no mistake that God will use it in your life to shape and mold you. God is testing

- 1) Are you humble like Jesus – who when He was treated unfairly by ungodly authority did not strike out for Himself, but submitted?
- 2) Do you trust that God is fair and just, even in a seemingly hopeless situation? That He will vindicate you eventually? That your ultimate hope lies in heaven, not in this world?

I know, dear believer, that in the middle of an awful experience with ungodly authority, all you want is to get out of there. To leave, to find greener grass on the other side. But God has lessons for us to learn. He seldom takes us out a trial; He usually takes us through a trial. David submitted to Saul insofar as it was possible. He had to flee to save his life. This is perhaps the only route for believers in a country where they are killing you for preaching, or a wife that has a physically brutal and abusive husband – there their actual life and physical well-being is in anger and fleeing is often necessary for survival. But most often, ungodly authority is not threatening our actual life. And we are called to submit to it.

Submission is really what salvation is about – the end of your rebellion to God – your sin, and the beginning of a new life of obedience to Him. And often, He must test our humility and submission by using ungodly earthly authority – to show us how proud and unbroken we really are- to get us to depend totally on Him for a godly response of meek submission. Not covering sin, Not hiding or being passive. But acknowledging authority as being God-given – and obeying Him through, and sometimes in spite of, that authority.

So David practiced Godly Submission. He understood that even ungodly authority was placed there by God. He understood **the design of** authority. He didn't fight God's man, he fought the decisions of God's man. He understood the **distinctions in** submission. We'll see more of that next week. He never fought the man's right to rule, only the rightness of his rule. David could do this because he knew that submission is ultimately to God, in spite of ungodly authority. Thus he understood the **design of** submission. Thus He was empowered by God, as we can be today, if we first bow the knee to God every day and submit to His authority each day. This is a Spirit-empowered obedience and submission – not a drag-your feet, miserable and oppressed type of submission. David understood that God would ultimately vindicate him and therefore obeyed 'as unto the Lord'. He never tried to take down the earthly authority, but submitted to it insofar as it was possible. He could see the distinction between questioning leadership's decisions and questioning the leadership's right to be there. David practiced godly submission.

Godly submission is the first key to dealing with ungodly authority. There are two more that we must still look at from David's life, but perhaps the hardest one we have covered today.

Perhaps you are a wounded hurting wife. Perhaps you are an adult, still carrying with you the scars of abusive parents. Perhaps you are a tired and hurt employee, struggling with a power-hungry and vicious boss. Perhaps you are a bruised, hurting and humiliated church member, feeling like your zeal for God has been all but crushed by a cold, distant and ungodly pastor. Oh, friend, my desire has not been to rub salt into the wound. I know it seems almost hopeless, but God's ways are not our ways. Submission is God's call for you to triumph over ungodly authority. Often God's ways seem paradoxical and upside-down. He tells us to humble ourselves to be exalted, to be poor in spirit to be truly rewarded, to give in order to gain, to surrender in order to be victorious, to die to truly live. And in the same way, He calls us to submit to truly triumph over ungodly authority. Resisting, rebelling, becoming bitter, indifferent will not bring you peace. Rather, it will bring you pain, unhappiness and sorrow. Worse, you will not have God's blessing and empowerment, because you are choosing an option out of His will. He will only vindicate those who are themselves blameless. Rebellion, anger and striking out for yourself disqualify you as an innocent that requires God's protection. You remain on God's list of those that need to be delivered insofar as you do not seek to deliver yourself.

Practice Godly Submission – humble yourself in the sight of the Lord – and He will lift you up.

We're still to see how David confronted ungodly leadership. We'll see that next week.