

Obedience & Submission to Authority

- A Word Study -

See the recommended links at the bottom of the page.

1. The World's Hostility to the Concept

Why it is "natural" to have a hostile attitude toward obedience and submission - especially in modern times.

2. Word Meanings

A focus on basic issues. This includes the differences between "obedience" and "submission," as well as the way that modern definitions are often different from the New Testament definitions.

3. A Look at the Greek Words

This is a look at the precise definitions of all the words used in this study, based on New Testament Greek Lexicons & Dictionaries.

4. Preliminary Comments About the Outlines

Warnings; "dangers" to look out for; recommendations; comments on how to use the outlines. To get the most out of the outlines, you need to pay attention to these issues.

5. The Outlines - Obedience

Includes many study questions for help in understanding and applying the concept. [Note: You may want to review some of the articles listed among the "recommended links," in order to be better prepared for answering the questions in the outline.]

6. The Outlines - Submission

Includes many study questions for help in understanding and applying the concept. [Note: You may want to review some of the articles listed among the "recommended links," in order to be better prepared for answering the questions in the outline.]

7. Some Final Observations

Comments about the way the Bible addresses those in authority vs. those under authority, when both are addressed (or given instructions) within the same context.

8. OTHER RECOMMENDED LINKS

A small selection of links which focus on related issues, as well as helps for a better understanding of this topic.

Obedience & Submission to Authority - Part 1

The World's Hostility to the Concept

Ever since the human race fell into sin, there has been a rebellion to the idea of obedience and submission. In some ways, however, the hostility to this concept may be more intense today, than it has been for many years - perhaps for centuries. Today, just mention the word "submission," in some circles, and you open yourself to instant opposition, verbal attack and scorn. You might as well stick your head inside a hornet nest... the hornets will be friendlier! [*Please don't try it!*]

We live in a society in which these words are normally given evil connotations. So quite often, it becomes almost impossible to use the words the way the Bible uses them, without being misunderstood. To many people, for instance, the idea of "submission" implies weakness and cowardice. A person who demands someone else to "submit" is considered a person who delights in abusing others. (Those who make such accusations are rarely concerned about whether or not Scripture gives the person the authority to make such a demand.) To many people, a person who endorses "submitting" is considered a person who loves to beat others on the head with a baseball bat.

It is true that many people *do* abuse the concept. Sin affects not only those who are supposed to submit, but also those who are supposed to be submitted to. Yet the fact the people on both sides distort the concept does not nullify what God has told us. Even if the entire world twists and distorts the concept of "submission," God's Word remains true. And the day will come in which God's words will prove right: It is the human race that will be shown to be speaking the lie. (Compare with Romans 3:4.)

Both leadership and submission - when done the way the Bible instructs - are expressions of strength. And if done in ways *contrary to the Word*, *both* are an expression of weakness. In God's eyes, the person who submits *in the way the Bible's instructs us* is stronger than the leader, who refuses to follow God's Word and who mistreats those under his authority.

Obedience & Submission to Authority - Part 2

Word Meanings

Below are two outlines, one on the concept of "obedience," and the other on the concept of "submission." Though written in English, these outlines are based on two separate New Testament Greek word groups. (A word group will contain various words - nouns, verbs, adverbs, adjectives, etc. - all based on the same "root word." An example in the English language would be this word group: obedience, obey, obedient, obeisance, disobey, etc.)

In many respects, these two N.T. word groups have overlapping meanings. At times, translators will use the same word "obedience" for words from *either* group. But there are instances in which a distinction does seem to exist. And in such cases, the concept of "obedience" may have a greater focus on the *action*, whereas the concept of "submission" may include not only the *action*, but also the *relationship* of the one person to the other. (As seen in the definitions below, "submission" has the idea of "ranking under" an authority. This would include not only "non-authorities" - such as slaves - ranking under someone, but even authorities themselves, who may have higher authorities over them.)

The definitions, below, are based on the way the *New Testament Greek* words are used. Note, however, that these definitions will not match the way most people today use the *English* words. Even though, years ago, the English concepts may have been much closer to the N.T. Greek concepts, meanings have changed, as influences have changed (and have become more opposed to God's Word). Today, many people, use the word "submission" only in a way that implies a brutal mistreatment of the person being "subjugated." This idea is *not* part of the N.T. concept - which condemns the mistreatment of others.

Obedience and Submission to Authority - Part 3

A Look at the Greek Words

These definitions are based on two ENGLISH-GREEK LEXICONS (with the Greek alphabet transliterated into English alphabet characters), and VINE'S EXPOSITORY DICTIONARY OF NEW TESTAMENT WORDS. They are not exact word-for-word quotes, because these sources often intersperse many verse references into the definitions, and the two lexicons include many Greek words and phrases.

SOURCES

<i>In Column 1:</i> "A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature" by W. Baur, trans. and ed. by W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich	<i>In Column 2:</i> "Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (Grimm's Wilke's Clavis Novi Testamenti)" by Joseph Henry Thayer, D.D.	<i>In Column 3:</i> "Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words" by W. E. Vine, M.A.
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SUBMIT - related to the basic idea of "to arrange"

<i>hupotasso</i> 1) SUBJECT, SUBORDINATE - a)ACTIVE: bring someone to subjection / subject oneself to someone; b)PASSIVE: i) become subject; ii) subject oneself, be subjected or subordinated, obey 2) to attach/append (literary documents attached to others) [this usage not found in the N.T.]	<i>hupotasso</i> (active) to arrange under, to subordinate, to subject, put in subjection (middle) to subject one's self, to obey (passive) to obey (imperative) obey, be subject	<i>hupotasso</i> primarily a military term, to rank under (<i>hupo</i> , under, <i>tasso</i> , to arrange), denotes: (a) to put in subjection, to subject (b) (in the Middle or Passive Voice) to subject oneself, to obey, be subject to
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<p><i>hupotage</i></p> <p>ACTIVE - subjecting [this usage not found in the N.T.]</p> <p>PASSIVE - subjection, subordination, obedience</p>	<p><i>hupotage</i></p> <p>1) the act of subjecting,</p> <p>2) obedience, subjection</p>	<p><i>hupotage</i></p> <p>subjection (<i>hupo</i>, under, <i>tasso</i>, to order)</p>
<p><i>anupotaktos</i></p> <p>1) not made subject, independent</p> <p>2) undisciplined, disobedient, rebellious</p>	<p><i>anupotaktos</i></p> <p>1) (passively) not made subject, unsubjected</p> <p>2) (actively) that cannot be subjected to control, disobedient, unruly, refractory</p>	<p><i>anupotaktos</i></p> <p>not subject to rule, insubordinate, unsubjected (<i>a</i>, negative, <i>n</i>, euphonic, <i>hupotasso</i>, to put in subjection <<i>hupo</i>, under, <i>tasso</i>, to order>), is used (a), of things, (b) of persons</p>

One additional word translated "submit" (in some translations) focuses on "yielding" to a person's authority. This word is found in Heb. 13:17.

OBEY - related to the basic idea of "to hear"

<p><i>hupakouo</i></p> <p>listen to</p> <p>1) obey, follow, be subject to</p> <p>2) hear, grant one's request</p> <p>3) open/answer (the door)</p> <p>[technically, of the door-keeper, whose duty it is to listen for the signals of those who wish to enter, and then to admit them if they are entitled to do so]</p>	<p><i>hupakouo</i></p> <p>to listen, hearken</p> <p>1) prop., of one who on a knock at the door comes to listen who it is (the duty of a porter)</p> <p>2) to hearken to a command, i.e. to obey, be obedient unto, submit to</p>	<p><i>hupakouo</i></p> <p>to listen, attend (as in Acts 12:13 - see below), and so, to submit, to obey; is used of obedience...</p> <p>(a) to God, (b) to Christ, by natural elements, (c) to disciples of Christ, (d) to the faith, to Christian doctrine (as to a form or mold of teaching), (e) to apostolic injunctions, (f) to Abraham by Sarah, (g) to parents by children, (h) to masters by servants, (i) to sin, (j) in general.</p> <p>In Acts 12:13, <i>hupakouo</i>, lit., to hearken, with the idea of stillness, or attention (<i>hupo</i>, under, <i>akouo</i>, to hear), signifies to answer a knock at a door.</p>
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<p><i>hupakoe</i></p> <p>1) obedience</p> <p>a) generally the obedience which every slave owes his master,</p> <p>b) predom. of obedience to God and his commands</p> <p>2) (obedient) answer</p>	<p><i>hupakoe</i></p> <p>obedience, compliance, submission</p> <p>(opposite to <i>parakoe</i> - unwillingness to hear, disobedience)</p>	<p><i>hupakoe</i></p> <p>obedience (<i>hupo</i>, under, <i>akouo</i>, to hear), is used</p> <p>(a) in general, (b) of the fulfilment of apostolic counsels, (c) of the fulfilment of God's claims or commands, (d) of obedience to Christ (objective), (e) of Christ's obedience, (Rom. 5:19 referring to His death; cp. Phil. 2:8; and Heb. 5:8, referring to His delighted experience in constant obedience to the Father's will - not to be understood in the sense that He learned to obey).</p>
<p><i>hupekoos</i></p> <p>obedient</p>	<p><i>hupekoos</i></p> <p>giving ear, obedient</p>	<p><i>hupekoos</i></p> <p>obedient, giving ear, subject</p>
<p><i>parakoe</i></p> <p>unwillingness to hear, disobedience</p>	<p><i>parakoe</i></p> <p>1) prop. a hearing amiss [this usage not found in the N.T.]</p> <p>2) unwillingness to hear, i.e., disobedience</p>	<p><i>parakoe</i></p> <p>primarily, hearing amiss (<i>para</i>, aside, <i>akouo</i>, to hear), hence signifies a refusal to hear; hence, an act of disobedience</p>

A few other Greek words are occasionally translated as "obey," but they generally have a somewhat different focus, than the above word group. 1) One group of words focuses on "paying attention" to someone (whether or not that person is an authority). 2) Another group focuses on "being persuaded" that someone/something can be trusted and therefore is worthy of being followed or obeyed. (The end result would be that you would "obey" him/it.)

Obedience & Submission to Authority - Part 4

Preliminary Comments About the Outlines

Don't forget the "complementary" truth

Most, if not all, concepts in Scripture are "balanced" by an *equally-important* complementary concept. In this present study, we are focusing on only *one side of the issue*: the response of the person who has been placed *under* another's authority. Scripture also has much to say to those who exercise authority *over* others - though that a specific group of "complementary" verses is not part of the present study.

It is my recommendation that, as you examine the following outlines, you check the contexts of the passages - at least those that involve commands. In several of the passages, the "complementary" command (given to the one who has authority *over* others) will be found only a few verses away. You are also welcome (and encouraged) to give "balance" to your perspective, by exploring other passages in Scripture that focus primarily on the obligations of authorities.

Don't forget the effect that sin has had on our perception of authority structures

Remember that *both* the people who are in positions of authority, as well as those who are in submission, have tendencies to do things in ways contrary to the Bible. *All* of us have sinned: And *this* is the problem, not the authority structures, themselves.

Perhaps the two types of submission/obedience which receive the most intense opposition - sometimes seething hostility - are the situations which involve slaves submitting to their masters, and wives submitting to their husbands. It is the natural tendency of *each* - the one in authority as well as the one in submission - to introduce sin into the relationship. At the present time, it seems that most people focus on the sin and abuse of those in authority, and ignore - or even encourage - the sin and rebellion of those in submission. But the sin of the one does not justify the sin of the other. One person's sin is not "corrected" by another person adding more sin to the situation. *Both* must repent.

When each person is attempting to fulfill his role as an expression of love for the other (the obligation we *all* have), even *slavery* can become a pleasant situation! The problem is not the slavery, but the sin that controls both master and slave. Masters need to express love just as much as the slaves do. Most people today are familiar only with the *modern*

concept of "slavery," which associates the concept with "oppression." Yet the word, *as used in the Bible*, had a much broader range of meaning - even including situations in which a person would *desire* (as an expression of love) to be another's slave! (Example: Deuteronomy 15:16-17) The range of meaning is wide enough that the N.T. teachings pertaining to slavery are applicable to many of the modern types of relationships that involve one person working for another - *even to employer / employee relationships!*

There are things that *all* of us can learn - not only about how we should fulfill *our own* role, but also how we can make *the other person's* role easier for him to fulfill. We should remember that the way *we* fulfill *our own* obligations toward others will often have a strong influence on the way *they* fulfill *their own* obligations toward us. And even when it doesn't help - when the situation remains bad - at least it will not be our fault. Remember that the day is coming in which each of us will give account to the final Judge who is over all - and it will be for *our own* actions and responses, not for *another's*.

Don't forget Jesus

If you have an instinctive opposition or repulsion to the concept of "submission" or "obedience," perhaps you should spend some time thinking about this: Jesus himself willingly learned submission and obedience. (See the outlines, below.) He willingly became a slave (Philippians 2:7). He lowered himself (as an act of obedience), even to the point that he was willing to die like a criminal. And he did this so that *we - the unsubmitive rebels* - might be saved and have eternal life.

He calls us to be his disciples: to *submit* to him and to learn from his example.

Concerning the FORMAT of the Outlines

Questions and comments are included in the outlines, but it is up to *you* to allow the Word of God (not the comments I might make) to lead you to your conclusions. *Examine the passages themselves* (and their context); ***use the Bible!*** (The verses in the outlines are paraphrased or summarized, rather than being exact quotes from a specific translation of the Bible. At times, information will be included from the surrounding context, for better clarity.)

Obedience & Submission to Authority - Part 5

OBEEDIENCE / TO OBEY

[to "listen to" what is said... and then to act accordingly]

Outline

- A. Jesus Obeying
 - B. People Obeying [Or Not Obeying] God / Jesus Christ
 - C. People Obeying [Or Not Obeying] People
 - D. Things Obeying Jesus
 - E. Things Obeying People
 - F. People Obeying Sinful Desires [& Application of a Basic Principle]
 - G. Obedience [Or Lack of Obedience] to the Message / the Way of God
 - 1. The Faith
 - 2. The Truth
 - 3. The Good News
 - 4. The Message Given by Moses vs. The Message/Salvation Given by Jesus
 - H. Obedience [Or Lack Thereof] to Teaching / Instructions / Requests
 - I. "To Listen To" Someone
-

A. JESUS OBEYING

Romans 5:19 - Many will be made righteous because of his obedience.

Philippians 2:8 - He humbled himself and became obedient, to the extent that he was even willing to die on a cross!

Hebrews 5:8 - He learned obedience through what he suffered.

QUESTIONS:

- How important was obedience to Jesus? In what ways is he to be an example for you?
 - How important is/was his obedience to *you* (and to your future)?
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B. PEOPLE OBEYING [OR NOT OBEYING] GOD / JESUS CHRIST

Hebrews 11:8 - By faith Abraham... obeyed God and went to a land he did not know anything about.

1 Peter 1:2 - God's elect [those who are truly saved] have been chosen ... for obedience to Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 1:14 - [More said about God's elect:] As obedient children, they must not conform to the evil desires they had when they lived in ignorance (i.e., before they knew the truth). Rather, they must be holy.

Hebrews 5:9 - Jesus is the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.

Romans 16:19 - Everyone has heard about your obedience to Jesus. (see v. 18)

Romans 15:18 - Christ worked through Paul, to lead the Gentiles to obey God.

Romans 16:26 - The gospel message (etc.) was revealed so that all nations would have the opportunity to believe and obey God.

Romans 1:5 - The purpose for which God gave us the apostles: so that they could call people out from among all the Gentiles so that they could have the obedience that comes from faith.

Romans 5:9 - Many people [the entire human race - all the offspring of Adam] were made sinners because of one man's [Adam's] disobedience. [Contrast with the second half of the verse, mentioned in Section 1, above.]

2 Corinthians 10:5-6 - How Paul planned to deal with the false perceptions (etc.) present among the Corinthians: use "spiritual weapons" (rather than the world's methods of fighting such things) to "capture" every thought and make it obedient to Christ. And then (after their obedience was completed) deal with those who were determined to remain disobedient.

[Note: It may be that the majority of the Corinthians were not being *disobedient*, as much as *not* being *actively obedient*. (The *absence* of *disobedience* is not the same as the *presence* of obedience.) Or, it may be that they were disobedient, but that it was more out of ignorance, than out of a rejection of the truth. Perhaps their obedience needed simply to grow, so that a distinction could be made between those who were truly disobedient and those who were not.]

QUESTIONS:

- Do you consider holiness an obligation, or just one option among many that you could choose?
 - Do you obey Jesus? What does your answer reveal about you? [Note that a weak, but growing/increasing obedience is not the same as the *absence* of obedience. Note also that obedience is more than merely the absence of *disobedience*; it is active, rather than passive.]
 - How is the gospel message related to obedience? How did it affect the lives of those who received it?
 - How serious is disobedience? Why?
 - What are some of the contrasts between Adam's disobedience and Jesus' obedience (previous section)? [In 1 Corinthians 15:45+, the Bible describes Jesus as the "last Adam"!]
 - In what ways should our thinking be made obedient to Christ? What must be done about the way we think, if our thinking is distorted? (Also, how can we find out whether or not our thinking is distorted?)
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C. PEOPLE OBEYING [OR NOT OBEYING] PEOPLE

Acts 7:39 - Our forefathers refused to obey Moses. (Result: God turned away from them.)

1 Peter 3:6 - Sarah obeyed Abraham and called him her master. [The pattern for godly wives - the "daughters" of Sarah.]

Ephesians 6:1 - Children: obey your parents in the Lord. It is right to do this. [Also: A promise is attached to this command: an increased likelihood of having a long life.]

Colossians 3:20 - Children: obey your parents in everything. This pleases the Lord.

Ephesians 6:5 - Slaves: obey your earthly masters just as you would obey Christ, your "heavenly master": with respect, fear, and sincerity of heart.

Colossians 3:22 - Slaves: obey your earthly masters in everything.

QUESTIONS:

- In these passages, what reasons are given for obedience? Do any of these reasons apply to you? If so, how?
 - What are the "complementary" concepts given in these passages (most of them), which pertain to those who have positions of leadership? (This question is primarily for "balance" - so that there will be less tendency for someone to conclude that all the responsibility falls on the heads of those who are told to obey.)
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D. THINGS OBEYING JESUS

Mark 1:27 - Evil spirits obey him.

Matthew 8:27 - The winds and the waves obey him.

2 Corinthians 10:5 - Our thoughts need to be made obedient to Christ.

QUESTIONS:

- Inanimate things and evil things obey Jesus. What does this tell us about Jesus' *worthiness* of being obeyed? In what ways should this truth influence our views about Jesus and the way *we* relate to him?
 - How did the Corinthians have to make their thoughts obedient? [Example: What are some of the attitudes they had about various issues that Paul mentions in 1 and 2 Corinthians?] Are there some ways *you* need to make *your* thoughts obedient to Christ?
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E. THINGS OBEYING PEOPLE

Luke 17:6 - If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can tell this mulberry tree to be uprooted and planted in the sea. It will obey you!

QUESTIONS:

- What is the nature of this "faith"? Faith in what? and for what purpose? (For instance, is it for entertainment - to see trees moving from one location to another?) What is Jesus teaching us in this passage?
 - Is it mulberry trees that God is concerned about, in this passage? Are there things more important to trust God for, than moving trees around? Most - if not all - people will *not* really have a good reason for commanding trees to move around. After all, miracles were *not* intended to get people out of hard work (such as using a shovel to dig-up the tree) or to entertain people. So if you have no legitimate reason to command trees to move around, is there any principle in this passage that will still be applicable to you? [Remember that many of Jesus miracles were given as signs, to point to more important spiritual matters. And many of his teachings - especially the parables - used physical things to teach spiritual principles.]
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F. PEOPLE OBEYING SINFUL DESIRES [& APPLICATION OF A BASIC PRINCIPLE]

THE PRINCIPLE: People are slaves to what they choose to obey.

Romans 6:12 - Do not let sin be the ruler of your mortal body, so that you end up obeying its evil desires.

Romans 6:16 - [The principle stated:] When you give yourself to someone, to obey him as a slave, you are a slave to the one you have chosen to obey. [The application to this present topic:] You are either a slave to sin (this will lead to death), or to obedience (this will lead to righteousness).

QUESTIONS:

- How serious is it, when you choose to give-in to sin? If this is characteristic of your life, what does Scripture say about you? It may be good for you to seriously study this passage, if you find yourself characteristically living a life of sin. [Don't forget this: Sin includes not only the *bad* things we do, but also the *good* things we don't

do. (James 4:17.) It also includes the doing of things that are of secondary importance, while at the same time neglecting things of primary importance. (Compare with Matthew 23:23-24.)

G. OBEDIENCE [OR LACK OF OBEDIENCE] TO THE MESSAGE / THE WAY OF GOD

1. THE "FAITH"

Acts 6:7 - The message about God spread. In Jerusalem, many people were becoming disciples. Many priests became obedient to the faith.

[Romans 1:5 - ... obedience that comes from faith. (see Section 2, above)]

QUESTIONS:

- What is the relationship between faith and obedience? [Other verses in this study may also help in answering this question.]
- Examine your life: Does this relationship between faith and obedience exist in you? What does your answer indicate (about your spiritual condition)?

2. TRUTH

1 Peter 1:22 - ... you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth ...

QUESTIONS:

- What is the relationship between purity and obedience? Read the context of this verse, to find out what else you can learn about these issues (and the effect they are to have in your life).
- Examine your life: Does this relationship between purity and obedience exist in you? What does your answer indicate (about your spiritual condition)?

3. THE GOOD NEWS [= "GOSPEL"]

Romans 10:16 - Many of the Israelites did not accept/obey the good news.

2 Thessalonians 1:8 - God will punish those who do not know (acknowledge) God and are unwilling to obey the good news about our Lord Jesus.

QUESTIONS:

- What is the relationship between the "gospel" [good news] and obedience? The good news is free [it cost us nothing], but it is also priceless beyond comparison [it cost Jesus his life]. Salvation is free [it is a gift given by God]. But does that leave us free to sin... or to *not* sin? [Remember what the Word says about "slavery to sin" (examined in a previous section)?]
- Again, examine your life, to see the extent to which this relationship is present in you. Are there any issues you must deal with... perhaps even at this very moment?

4. THE MESSAGE GIVEN BY MOSES VS. THE MESSAGE/SALVATION GIVEN BY JESUS

Hebrews 2:3 [examine the context] - (Moses' message) - given through angels - every act of disobedience was properly punished. [If this is so - and it is - then how much worse punishment do people deserve, who reject the message of Jesus himself!]

QUESTIONS:

- How great is the message of salvation? How serious is it to refuse/reject it? [You may want to include a comparison of Moses' message (which had a focus on external conduct) with Jesus' message (which focused on the heart). This is one of the themes of the book of Hebrews.]

H. OBEDIENCE [OR LACK THEREOF] TO TEACHING / INSTRUCTIONS / REQUESTS

2 Thessalonians 3:14 - Concerning those who do not obey the instructions in 2 Thessalonians: Take note of who they are. Do not associate with them, so that they may feel ashamed [of their disobedience].

Romans 6:16-17 - [A principle stated:] When you give yourself to someone, to obey him as a slave, you are a slave to the one you have chosen to obey. [The application to what Paul was teaching:] You are either a slave to sin (this will lead to death), or to obedience (this will lead to righteousness). But thanks be to God! Once you were slaves to sin; but now you have wholeheartedly obeyed the teachings to which you were entrusted.

2 Corinthians 2:9 - I wrote you for this reason: to test you, to see if you would be obedient in everything. [Obedient in what? Refer to 1 Corinthians! (The immediate context suggests the things mentioned in 1 Cor. 5-6.)]

2 Corinthians 7:15 - Titus' affection goes out for you, all the more, as he remembers your obedience, and the way you received him with fear and trembling.

Philippians 2:12 - Dear friends, you have always obeyed, not only when I was present, but even more so when I was away. So, as you have done so in the past, continue to do so now: work out your salvation with fear and trembling. [Verse 13 - After all, it is God who is working in you, not only enabling you to obey, but also enabling you to have the desire to obey!]

Philemon 1:21 - I am confident that you will obey. So I am writing to you, knowing that you will do even more than what I have asked you to do.

QUESTIONS:

- Examine the obedience of these different people. What are the similarities/differences between these different examples? What principles can we learn from these examples - principles that show us how we ourselves should live?
- How are you going to put into practice the principles you discovered (to whatever extent they apply to you)?
- What is the relationship between your actions and God's work in your heart? (Don't expect to comprehend everything about such issues, especially in just a few verses! We have all our lives - including all eternity - to *grow* in our understanding of the ways God works in our lives!)

I. "TO LISTEN TO" SOMEONE

Acts 12:13 - Peter knocked at the outer door. A servant girl named Rhoda came to answer the door [i.e., to "obey" the knocking for the door to be opened]. (Note that when she saw Peter, she was so overjoyed that she momentarily forgot to "obey" the knocking!)

QUESTIONS:

- This verse describes a servant girl who was simply doing her job as a servant. It was not intended to be a "deep theological statement" about anything, so we do not need to "discover" some type of "super-spiritual principle" in the passage! However, maybe it would be a good time for us to reflect on our own willingness to do the things we know we should be doing. After all, if we are genuine Christians, aren't we *God's* servants?
- Sometimes unexpected blessings occur as we are simply doing what we know we're supposed to be doing! (You do not need to pursue this type of blessing. God gives it without warning; we need only to be willing to see - to not be ignorant and blind about the way God works in our lives.) Can you think of any instances in which this has happened to you, or to someone else you know?

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Obedience & Submission to Authority - Part 6

SUBMISSION / TO SUBMIT

[to be ranked under / to rank one's self under, and then to act accordingly]

Outline

- A. Jesus Submitting / Obeying
 - B. General Category: People Submitting / Obeying [Or Not Doing So]
 - 1. Not Submitting
 - 2. Submitting to God
 - 3. Submitting to Human Authorities
 - 4. Submitting to Those Who Serve You
 - 5. Submitting to "One Another"
 - C. Specific Categories: People Submitting / Obeying [Or Not Doing So]
 - 1. The Church
 - 2. The Jews
 - 3. Women / Wives
 - 4. Young Men
 - 5. An Elder's Children
 - D. Obedience / Submission [Or Lack Thereof] Connected with the Gospel
 - E. [All] Things Obeying Jesus Christ / Submitting to Him
 - F. Misc. Things That Are [Or Are Not] in Submission / Obedience
 - 1. Spirits of Prophets
 - 2. Demons / Spirits
 - 3. The Sinful Mind
 - 4. The World / Creation
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A. JESUS SUBMITTING / OBEYING

1 Corinthians 15:28 - [After everything else is made subject to the Son (= placed under his authority)...] Then the Son himself will be made subject to the Father (the one who put everything under the Son), so that God may be all in all. [Note: This passage talks about the *resurrected* Christ. The primary focus here is on the submission of Jesus as a human (the "father" of a new humanity - see v. 47-49), rather than as deity. However,

even as deity, the proper submission of Jesus as "Son" to his "Father" can be seen throughout the New Testament - especially in the gospels.]

Luke 2:51 - Jesus returned to Nazareth with his parents and was obedient to them.

Note: Some people try to use the 1 Corinthians passage in an attempt to deny Jesus' deity. They try to convince people that the idea of "submission" cannot apply, unless Jesus was *not* deity. Remember, however, that the N.T. concept of "submission" has to do with one's *relationship* to another (in the sense of "rank" or "order"). It has nothing to do with the definition of an individual's *nature* or *being*!

QUESTION:

- In what ways is Jesus' submission an example (or pattern) for us? Note that his submission is directed not only to God his Father, but also to his human parents - even to Joseph, who was only a step-father to him. [Note, also, that Jesus was fully aware that he had no human father. This is why, when Mary and Joseph found him in the temple, he was surprised that they didn't expect him to be there - in *his Father's* house!]

B. GENERAL CATEGORY: PEOPLE SUBMITTING / OBEYING [OR NOT DOING SO]

1. NOT SUBMITTING

1 Timothy 1:9 - Law is not made for righteous people, but for ... rebels [unsubmissive people], etc. [Note: Whether the apostle is talking about "law" in general terms, or specifically the Ten Commandments, his conclusion is the same: The ones who need to be shown what is right (= the law) are primarily the ones who *aren't* following it. The others already know what it is and are doing it!]

Titus 1:10 - There are many rebellious [unsubmissive] people ...

QUESTIONS:

- Read the context of these two verses. What does Scripture say about people who are unwilling to submit to those placed in authority over them (or to law that is over them)? How can these verses guide you in the way you respond to authority?

2. SUBMITTING TO GOD

Hebrews 12:9 - [We respect human fathers who (properly) disciplined us.] How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits! [... so that we will live eternally!]

James - 4:7 - Submit yourselves to God.

QUESTIONS:

- Why should we submit to God? What are the consequences of doing so? Of not doing so?

3. SUBMITTING TO HUMAN AUTHORITIES

Romans 13:1 - Everyone must obey/submit to the governing authorities. [They have been put there by God.]

Romans 13:5 - It is necessary that we submit to the authorities. [2 reasons given]

Titus 3:1 - Remind the people to submit to the authority of rulers and government leaders. [See the contrast in v. 3+ (about our past way of life, contrasted with the changes God has made in us).]

1 Peter 2:13 - Do this for the Lord's sake: Submit yourselves to every human authority who is over you.

QUESTIONS:

- Why should we submit to human authorities? Are there any exceptions to this rule? (This last question may require you to think about verses NOT mentioned in this study.)

4. SUBMITTING TO THOSE WHO SERVE YOU

1 Corinthians 16:16 - You should/must submit to people such as these (= Stephanas and his household) - people who devote themselves to serving others.

QUESTIONS:

- Little is known about Stephanas and his family, other than that they were distinguished by their willingness to serve other believers. (They are mentioned only here and in 1 Corinthians 1:16.) What can you learn from their example?

There are two possible ways to interpret this passage - and both are acceptable interpretations that we can learn from:

1. Submitting to their *authority*: The Bible's concept of authority includes the idea of "serving" others (rather than "lording over" them - compare to 1 Peter 5:2-3). Stephanas and his household may have been leaders in the church. Why should we submit to such people - that is, why should we place ourselves under their authority?
2. Submitting to their *example of serving others*: It is also possible that Paul is telling us to follow their example of serving others. This view does not deal with the question of whether or not they were leaders, but focuses on their willingness to serve others - an obligation that all believers have. In this case, why should we submit to (= learn from) their example?

5. SUBMITTING TO "ONE ANOTHER" [BUT SEE CONTEXT]

Ephesians 5:21 - Submit to [= place yourselves under the authority of] one another, out of [an attitude of] fear/reverence for Christ. [Note: The context that follows defines this submission. The verb "submit" in this verse is connected directly to the relationship described in the verse that follows. (Verse 22 has no verb.)]

1 Peter 5:5 - <only in KJV-type translations; many N.T. Greek manuscripts do not have this phrase> [Submission of younger men to elders/older men is mentioned - in *all* translations. Then the KJV says: ...] Yea, all of you be subject one to another,...

NOTE - In recent years, these verses have often been used to "prove" that the one in authority is supposed to "submit" to the one under authority. Such a view may be compatible with the current trends in the world, but if those promoting this view would pay attention to the context (especially in the Ephesians passage), they would not be able to find it in the Bible. The phrase "one another" does NOT mean that *everyone* submits to *everyone*, but rather that each person submits *to everyone who has legitimate authority over him*. (And it would be different for different people.) In Ephesians 5:21, the apostle Paul finishes his sentence by defining the first of three such legitimate situations. [Of course, he tells the leaders that **THEY** also have obligations - but he does so *without* attaching the word "submit" or "obey" to those instructions. Nowhere in Scripture are leaders told to submit to those under their authority! They are to fulfill their *leadership* obligations in a way that expresses love for those under their authority, but Scripture does not call that "submission." It is to *God*, that the leaders are to submit - as well as to any human authorities that may be above them.] In the 1 Peter passage, examples of submission occur in previous verses, and define this admonition to submit to "one another."

QUESTION:

- Examine the contexts of these verses. (For 1 Peter 5:5, focus on the last half of the verse.) Specific examples of submission (found within the context of the above verses) will be examined below. At this point, focus on general principles. What do these passages tell us about the basic reasons that people should submit to those who have authority over them?
-

C. SPECIFIC CATEGORIES: PEOPLE SUBMITTING / OBEYING [OR NOT DOING SO]

1. THE CHURCH

Ephesians 5:24 - The church submits to Christ.

QUESTIONS:

- Is this verse a command, or a statement of fact? In your opinion, does this seem to be occurring among the churches you have seen or heard about? If not, why the contrast? [If this issue seems troubling to you, it might be beneficial if you study the Bible's concept of "church" - which, sometimes, is almost synonymous to the idea of "a group of Christians" - and contrast it to the modern-day concept of "church" - which is more like a human "institution." (The closest N.T. word to this modern "institutional" concept of "church" would probably be "synagogue"!)] If a "church" (using the modern-day concept of the word) does *not* submit to Christ, what does the *lack of submission* (also known as "rebellion") tell you about that "church"?

2. THE JEWS

Romans 10:3 - The Jews were unwilling to submit to God's righteousness. [They wanted to make their own "righteousness" and rely on that, instead.]

QUESTIONS:

- What is the significance of this fact - especially to those who are non-Jews? Romans 11 has much to say about this issue, and its relationship to the Gentiles (non-Jews) being saved. What attitude should we have about the Jew's condition? (Look at Paul's attitude in Romans 9:1-5; 10:1; and the warnings he gives us in Romans 11:11-36.)

3. WOMEN / WIVES

1 Corinthians 14:34 - Women ... must be in submission (in the church) [i.e., silent - in the context of teaching men?], as the Law says.

Ephesians 5:22 - Wives... (submit) to your husbands. How? - as to the Lord. [The verb "submit" is not found in most manuscripts; the verb is carried over from v.21. (See Section 5, above, for further information.)]

Ephesians 5:24 Wives should submit to their husbands in everything. How? - as the church submits to Christ

Colossians 3:18 - Wives: submit to your husbands. How? - in a manner that is fitting/appropriate in the Lord.

1 Timothy 2:11- Women should learn [in contrast to teaching / having authority over men - v. 12]. How? - quietly and with full submission. [reason given in verses that follow] Compare with 3:14-15, which gives the reason for Paul's instructions.

Titus 2:5 - [What the older women are to teach the younger women.] ... to submit to their husbands [etc.]. Why? - so that no one will speak evil against the word of God.

1 Peter 3:1 - Wives are to submit to their own husbands. How? - "in the same way" [i.e., like the way described in ch. 2]

1 Peter 3:5 - The holy women of the past (= the women who put their hope in God): they were submissive to their own husbands. Example: Sarah - she obeyed Abraham and called him her master (Gen. 18:12). [The focus is on her attitude, not the fact that she uttered the word, "Master."]

SOME OBSERVATIONS:

[Since, in recent years, this specific issue has become a very "explosive" topic (though in times past, it was once generally accepted as "the way God intended it to be"), a greater focus will be placed on understanding these verses. The comments and questions are intended for the purpose of exploring what the *Bible* says about the issue, when accepted "as is." Each person, however, is accountable to God for his own final conclusions. (Many people will most likely dismiss the entire group of verses as "culturally bound and not relevant in modern society" - even though nothing in the contexts makes a distinction between these commands and the others found in nearby passages.)]

- In some of these passages, the phrase "submit to" could also be translated as "place yourselves under the authority of..." You may wish to take another look at these verses and read them this way.

- Submission is associated with the concept of fear/reverence. It not only includes "obedience" (compare to 1 Peter 3:6, which uses the word "obedience" after mentioning "submission" in the previous verses) but also the attitude of the heart, that should be present (compare to Ephesians 5:33, which mentions "fear" or "reverence" - depending on translation - after mentioning "submission" in the previous verses). If the proper attitude is present, the proper actions will also be present.
- Two passages make reference to a woman's attitude in the church - that is, when believers are gathered together for the purpose of instruction. In some passages, such as 1 Corinthians 11, a woman's participation in the activities is assumed to be right and proper. But within the specific context of the passages found in this section, the mention of "silence" and "quiet attitude" seems to make reference to the issue of teaching and having authority over men.
- The other passages make reference to a woman's attitude in the home - specifically in reference to her *own* (Col. 3:18) husband. Of course, most of these passages also place obligations upon the husband.
- In some passages, the reasons for this submission are also stated. Some passages point out the consequences of submission (or lack thereof) - even eternal consequences. Even things that some people might consider unrelated to a woman's attitude may be influenced. (Example: The attitude people have toward the Word will be influenced by the woman's conduct.) And in some contexts, the issue of "silence" is also addressed. (See the context for the reasons for the command.)
- Some of the passages link this submission to other events or authority situations. One passage makes reference to "holy women of the past," who submitted to their husbands (including having the proper attitude). Another passage points out that the relationship of husband/wife is to reflect that of Christ/church.
- Three passages make reference to the events that happened in the Garden in Eden - the creation of man and woman, as well as their fall into sin (Genesis 3, esp. v. 16). Paul does not treat those events as a mere "story," but as "what really happened back then." The human race is viewed not only as a large number of *individuals*, but also as a *unit*. There is a "solidarity" to the human race: in many ways, we are seen in our original parents and our original parents can be seen in us. What they did back then (when we were part of them) affects us today.
- Just for the record (in case someone forgot!), there are situations in which men also have to submit to someone. Younger men are told to submit to those who are older (1 Peter 5:5). And in any situation in which they would be working for ("serving") someone else, they would be under obligation to submit to the person they were working for. (The commands given to servants and masters apply to *any* such situation - even employer/employee relationships.). And all people (men and women) must submit to governing authorities and to the leaders of the church.

QUESTIONS:

- What does the Bible say about a woman's submission? (This may include not only *what* the Bible says, but *why* it is said, what the consequences are, etc. Make every attempt possible to distinguish between what the Bible says, and the world's *distortion* of what the Bible says. (Some people may try to make it sound more compatible with the world, to make it more acceptable; others may try to make it sound very horrible and brutal, so as to turn people against the Bible.)
- How important is attitude, in this matter?
- In these passages, what examples are given for women to follow? [Example: What does the phrase "in the same way" (1 Peter 3:1) connect to?]
- Regarding the issue of submitting "in everything" (Ephesians 5:24), are there any exceptions? [You may wish to examine the concept of "Civil Disobedience," before you answer this question.]
- In what ways are the requirements given to women/wives complemented by the requirements given to men/husbands? (God is *not* one-sided!) What happens when *either* men or women neglect to fulfill their obligations? [Notes: 1) A look at the sad condition of the "typical" family might be a good indicator of what happens when obligations are neglected. 2) Don't forget that men and women sometimes sin in different ways. Many of the sins that women tend to commit are more "politically correct" and socially acceptable (in our modern, unregenerate society) than many of the sins that men tend to commit. But in God's sight, *both* are just as sinful. And sometimes, less obvious "non-physical" sins can cause greater *long term* harm than "physical" sins, because their attack goes beyond just the physical body - penetrating to the very depths of one's soul.]

4. YOUNG MEN

1 Peter 5:5 - Young men must submit to those who are older [i.e., the "elders"/leaders of the church]. How? In the same way [as the previous examples given in 1 Peter].

QUESTIONS:

- In what way(s) must the younger men submit to the older ones? Why? [Generally speaking, the older men (who were more experienced, and hopefully wiser) were the leaders (or "elders").]

5. AN ELDER'S CHILDREN

1 Timothy 3:4 - An elder must ... manage his own family well. He must have/maintain a family in which his children obey him and have a right/proper respect for him. (See also v. 5.)

Titus 1:6 - An elder's children must not have lives that leave them open to accusations of being wild and rebellious [not submissive].

NOTE: Other passages, which make a general reference to children (Ephesians 6:1 and Colossians 3:20), use the word "obedience," rather than "submission." Children are to "obey" even when that obedience is nothing more than mere compliance. An elder's children, however, must have grown beyond that point - to the point that their obedience is becoming a willing expression of the heart (in contrast to a heart filled with rebellion/unsubmissiveness).

QUESTIONS:

- What are the implications of these passages? How important is this to an elder's qualification as a leader?
-

D. OBEDIENCE / SUBMISSION [OR LACK THEREOF] CONNECTED WITH THE GOSPEL

2 Corinthians 9:13 - [The Corinthians'] obedience went right along with their confession/acknowledgment of the gospel (message or good news) about Christ.

Galatians 2:5 - We did not give in [submit] to the false brothers - not even for a moment - so that the truth of the gospel might remain with you [preserved & without compromise].

QUESTIONS:

- How is submission (willing obedience) connected with "confessing" the good news (message) about Christ? (You may also want to consider passages that are mentioned in the "obedience" outline.)
- How is "submission" to the teaching of false teachers incompatible with the "submission" mentioned in the 2 Corinthians 9:13 passage?

E. [ALL] THINGS OBEYING JESUS CHRIST / SUBMITTING TO HIM

1 Corinthians 15:27-28 - [concept mentioned 4 times in these verses] God has put ("submitted") everything under Christ's feet / under Christ / etc. [Also mentioned: the submission of Christ to God, as being the first resurrected *man* (who is Lord over all else).]

Ephesians 1:22 - God put ("submitted") all things under Christ's feet... [= He is Lord over all.]

Philippians 3:21 - Christ's power enables him to bring everything into submission to him [= under his control / authority]. (That same power will transform our bodies at the resurrection.)

1 Peter 3:22 - Angels, authorities and powers are in submission to Christ (= are under his authority).

QUESTIONS:

- As you consider what these verses say, where do you fit in? [Example: Do you (or will you in the future) submit to him?] What is your reaction to that?
- Two passages mention God placing ("submitting") things under Christ's feet; one passage mentions Christ as having the power to make everything submit to him. How do these passages complement each other?

F. MISC. THINGS THAT ARE [OR ARE NOT] IN SUBMISSION / OBEDIENCE

1. SPIRITS OF PROPHETS

1 Corinthians 14:32 - The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets. [Those who have the ability to speak what God has revealed also have the ability to control themselves... (and they must do so).]

QUESTION:

- Consider the context (especially the verse that follows). How must they be in submission? Compare this to the general concept of "self control" - which is applicable to all.

2. DEMONS / SPIRITS

Luke 10:17 - The demons submit to us [the 72 disciples] in your name [that is, when, on your behalf, we command them to leave]."

Luke 10:20 - The focus of your joy should not be on the fact that the spirits submit to you, but rather on the fact that your names are written in heaven.

QUESTIONS:

- [Within this context, the words "demon" (v. 17) and "spirit" (v. 20) are referring to the same creatures/beings.] Why (according to the context) did these spirit beings submit to the apostles? What attitude were the apostles to have, regarding this fact? What can we learn about our own attitude (that is, what it should be), when God accomplishes something great through us?

3. THE SINFUL MIND

Romans 8:7 - the sinful mind (or, the mind set on the flesh, the mind controlled by the corrupt nature) is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law [to the law's authority]. In fact, it cannot do so!

QUESTIONS:

- Explore the context. Describe these two ways of living. How incompatible are they? (In other words, to what extent (if any) does Scripture say they can co-exist within a person?)

4. THE WORLD / CREATION

Romans 8:20 - Creation was subjected to frustration (wearing out, becoming useless, decaying, etc.), not because it chose to be that way, but because God chose to subject it, ... [so that there could be a future hope for it...]

Hebrews 2:5 - God did not subject the world to come to angels. (He did not place the future world under their authority.) [See the verses that follow.]

Hebrews 2:8 - "God put everything under him [man] (= under his authority)." [Quote from Psalm 8.] In saying this, God left nothing that is not subject to him. Yet at the present time, we do not see everything subject to him (= under his authority). [But we do see Christ... (who has everything under his authority).]

QUESTIONS:

- The present world is well described by the word "frustration." Things wear down and decay; things get old and deteriorate. Things never seem to be quite as good as they are "supposed" to be. Perfection remains always beyond our reach. Yet the fact that God did not utterly destroy it, on the day sin entered the world, means there is hope. Someday there will be a restoration of things to the way they were intended to be. According to the context in Romans, how is this restoration linked to our own restoration (salvation)?
- The Hebrews passage makes reference to Psalm 8, which describes the dominion (rule) that God intended humanity to have over creation. Sin (and its effects on creation) has partially destroyed this relationship between people and creation. All is not lost, however, because there is a prophetic (future) dimension to this passage. At present, we see only a glimpse of its fulfillment - in Christ. But the day will come, in which its fulfillment will be made complete - because of Christ. Again, there is a connection between the future restoration of the world and us (that is, we who are truly saved), as well as a connection between our own future restoration and Christ. What are these connections? In what ways do they interrelate?

Obedience & Submission to Authority - Part 7

Some Final Observations

If you have examined the contexts of these passages, you will have noticed that, in most (not all) instances, when both the one who is to lead and the one who is to submit/obey are addressed, it is the one who must submit who is addressed first. Some of the reasons for this may include:

1) The larger group is being addressed first. There seems to be a greater tendency for those in submission to be saved, more often than those in leadership positions. This may be partly due to the fact that there are more "servants" in the world, than leaders. But it is also true that God normally (not always) chooses the "weak" (in the world's perspective) to display his strength (1 Corinthians 1:18-31).

2) Those under submission have a strong tendency to use the leader's injustices and sins as an excuse for their own sins. Yet they need to obey God *whether or not* those over them *ever* do.

3) The change that occurs in the "servant's" life (when he begins to obey God) is one of the ways God uses him to change his "master's" life. Changes don't always happen, but when God does use a "servant" in this way, it will normally be his *actions*, rather than his *words*, that are the greatest influencing factor. (This is also mentioned in 1 Peter 3:1-6, in which a wife is told how to respond to an unsaved husband.)

Obedience & Submission to Authority - Part 8

OTHER RELATED LINKS

Since the primary focus in this group of outlines has to do with obedience and submission, you may also want to examine the *complementary* concept: the role of leaders/authorities.

- One such study is "**Leadership Within the Church**" (www.journal33.org/lovenbr/authorit.htm#leadership). If you aren't familiar with the idea of "complementary concepts," you may also want to read: "**The Boundaries of Truth**" (www.journal33.org/bible/thinking.htm#boundaries).

Various other related articles would include:

- An article that focuses on the topic of "**Civil Disobedience**" (www.journal33.org/lovenbr/authorit.htm#leadership). There *are* some instances in which we have an *obligation* to disobey people.
- "**The Necessity of Following the Spirit**" (www.journal33.org/living/growup.htm#followsp) focuses on our need to obey God.

What about our relationship to sin?

- Many people choose to "obey" sin - and thus become sin's slave. *A follower of Jesus does not have to do this.* He will still struggle with sin, but he does not have to become its slave. See: "**The Civil War Within Us**" (www.journal33.org/living/struggle.htm#civilwar). [Though we still struggle with sin, it is no longer a part of our real nature - which has been created new in Christ Jesus.]