



A weekly resource to spark biblically-centered conversations with your kids about the issues they face in today's youth culture.

RESPONDING TO AUTHORITY

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God in his authority has delegated authority to certain roles and positions. Are we teaching our children to honor those whom God has placed in positions of authority?



What is Happening?

Have you ever asked a teenager to do something, and they dismiss it because they simply “don’t want to”? It seems that more and more teenagers are developing an anarchist spirit. They consider the idea of submission to authority not only old fashioned, but harmful.

- It is interesting to look at the storylines of the recent Disney movies (*Moana, Encanto, Elementals* etc.), and see the connections between them and the teenagers of today. In the movies, it’s shown that self discovery and personal expression will always trump the instruction given by authority figures. Our media is indirectly teaching us the ideas of critical theory and expressive individualism through engaging storylines.
- If you’re unfamiliar with these terms, critical theory separates all humanity into two categories: the oppressors and the oppressed. The goal of critical theory is to liberate those who are being oppressed from their oppressors
- Expressive individualism speaks to the idea of pursuing one’s authentic self, and finding truth and authority from within rather than from outside sources.
- The ideas of critical theory and expressive individualism can help give language as to why so many teenagers are refusing to respect their teachers, submit to their youth pastors, and obey their parents. Today’s children are subtly being fed the lie that those who are telling them to do what they don’t want to do (even if it’s for their best interest) are “oppressing” them, and they in response must speak/act out against the “injustice” of correction and discipline – cue the Disney Storyline.



WORD

What Does God's Word Say?

Throughout the biblical narrative we consistently come across instructions from God for us to be obedient people and to submit to authorities outside of ourselves.

In Genesis 1 and 2 we are told that God spoke the world into creation and created mankind in his image. The biblical narrative reminds us over and over again that God is creator and that we are his created beings. He is the one who knit us together in our mother's womb (Ps. 139), and that although we are made in his image, his wisdom and knowledge are greater than our own (Job 36; Rom. 11:33). Our world may tell us that "we know what's best for us" but that is a lie. We have been created as finite beings, with limited understanding, insight, and wisdom by an infinite God who is entitled to be the sole authoritative being.

Additionally, God does not only command us to recognize and acknowledge that he is right to be authoritative over all of creation, but that we are to obey his commands. In Deuteronomy 6, God instructs the Israelites to, "fear the Lord your God... by keeping all his statutes and his commandments, which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be long" (v.2). Jesus continues teaching on the idea of obedience to God's authoritative word in his teaching ministry (Matt. 7:21), and also by his own example (Phil. 2:8). God does not give his people an option to obey him when they feel like it or it meets their agenda. Rather he expects that his followers will deny their own will and submit to his will and way.

Why does God command us to respond to his authoritative word in obedience? Because he knows what is best for his creation. He knows what leads to fulfillment, flourishing and freedom, and he fully understands the state of man's heart. Genesis 6:5 says, "The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." This passage tells us that our hearts are evil, and we are in desperate need for an outside source to instruct us of what is good, right and trustworthy. God's Word directly contradicts the teachings of critical theory and expressive individualism.





WALK

“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

(Philippians 2:5-8)

Conversation Starters and Questions:

The good news for all people is that God, in his mercy, has given us clarity regarding the positions of authority he has designed, and instruction for how his people are to respond to those in authority positions. And to be clear, the word submission (*hypotassō*), does not mean that we are not allowed to challenge or disagree with someone who is in authority. Rather it means to position and place yourself under another (*The Lexham Analytical Lexicon of the Septuagint*).

From Genesis to Revelation, God clearly commands us to submit to human authority structures that he has designed. In the family, children are commanded to obey their parents and wives are commanded to submit to their husbands (Eph 5:22-33; Eph. 6:1-4). In the local church, all are commanded to submit to and obey their qualified pastors and elders (Heb. 13:17; Titus 3:1). And in our countries, Scripture teaches us that every person who is in a position of kingship, or political authority, is so because the Lord has allowed them to be (Rom. 13:2, Dan. 2:21), therefore we must submit to them. However, in all these cases, we are not called to submit to abusive authority.

It is our duty then to instruct our children how to submit, obey and position themselves under another’s God given authority. It is critical that we are setting an example to our teenagers of what it looks like to exercise authority and submit to authority in a way that glorifies God and is loving towards our neighbors. This is something that we must teach our children in both word and deed. Still, if an earthly authority ever commands or demands those under them to do something which goes against God’s will, way, and authority (i.e. to sin) we are called to obey God’s authority rather than the earthly authority.

As you consider how to walk this out, here are a four questions for personal reflection:

- What do I think about those in authority over me?
- How do I speak about those in authority over me (boss, pastor, mayor, president)?
- How often do I pray for those in authority over me?
- What is my posture to those in authority teaching my child?

Additionally, here are five discussion prompts that may help you begin the conversation about submission to authority with your teenager.

- Why is it hard to obey people in authority?
- What is God’s involvement with our earthly authorities?
- Why do you think he commands Christians to obey earthly authorities, even when it is really hard to do?
- How can you tell the difference between rules that are hard to follow vs. rules that are harmful, wrong or against God’s will?
- According to God’s Word, is there ever a time to not submit to an authority (See Acts 5:27-29)?



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