

The Faith to Submit to Authority

Of all the people Jesus met when He walked this earth, who had the greatest faith? Was it His mother? Was it a devoted disciple such as John or Peter? Was it a devout Israelite such as Nathanael or Nicodemus? Was it Mary Magdalene? No, it was none of these. The greatest faith Jesus ever encountered was the faith of a Roman centurion who understood what it means to submit to authority (Matthew 8:10). The centurion was “under authority,” and because he believed Christ had authority, he knew that Christ could accomplish His will by speaking a word. Respect for authority demonstrates faith.

THE MAN WITH THE GREATEST FAITH (MATTHEW 8:5-13; LUKE 7:1-10)

A Centurion was the commander of 100 men (more or less) in the Roman Army. Each Roman Legion had sixty centurions. *“Centurions were sometimes employed on detached service... Men like Cornelius and Julius may have been separated from the legion to which they properly belonged for the discharge of special duties. They and other centurions mentioned in the Gospels and Acts are represented by the sacred writers in a favorable light”* (ISBE online).

This centurion came to Jesus on behalf of his servant. The servant was **dear** to him but was sick and ready to die. He sent Jewish elders to plead for Jesus to come. The Jews beg Jesus earnestly, declaring the centurion to be deserving, “for he loves our nation and has built our synagogue.” Jesus says, “I will come and heal him.” The centurion asked Jesus not to trouble Himself with actually coming to his house. The Centurion did not regard himself as worthy. He understood the nature of Jesus’ authority from his experience as a soldier. Jesus **“marveled”** at the Centurion’s faith. *He says, “I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!”* (Matthew 8:10).

On this occasion, Jesus goes on to teach that people will come from all over to enjoy the blessings of the kingdom with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but the “sons of the kingdom” will be cast into outer darkness. (Matthew 8:11-12) ***Faith determines fellowship in the kingdom!***

The centurion was blessed **according to his faith!** His faith had demonstrated itself in respect and understanding of authority. Jesus tells the centurion, “Go your way; and as you have **believed**, so let it be done for you.” His servant was healed that same hour.

TWO IMPORTANT OBSERVATIONS:

- **Humility enables one to respect authority; pride prevents it.** The best men have the least estimate of themselves (Matthew 8:8; 3:11; 1 Corinthians 15:9). Pride is EXALTING oneself or lifting oneself up and is the opposite of putting oneself UNDER another.
- **We too are soldiers striving to please our commander!** (2 Timothy 2:3-4)

TWO KEY DEFINITIONS:

- **Authority:** *The right to expect obedience and submission to commands or direction.* The following story well illustrates the meaning of authority: When Christian Herter was governor of Massachusetts, he was running hard for a second term in office. One day, after a busy morning chasing votes (and no lunch) he arrived at a church barbecue. It was late afternoon and Herter was famished. As Herter moved down the serving line, he held out his plate to the woman serving chicken. She put a piece on his plate and turned to the next

person in line. "Excuse me," the Governor said, "do you mind if I have another piece of chicken?"

"Sorry," the woman told him. "I'm supposed to give one piece of chicken to each person."

"But I'm starved," the governor said.

"Sorry," the woman said again. "Only one to a customer."

Governor Herter was a modest and unassuming man, but he decided that this time he would throw a little weight around.

"Do you know who I am?" he said. "I am the governor of this state."

"Do you know who I am?" the woman said. "I'm the lady in charge of the chicken. Move along, mister."

- **Submission:** Acknowledging ones place in a chain of command; to be ranked under another [Illustrated by military rank]. *Vine's Dictionary*, under the heading **Subject, Subjection, Submit**, defines the Greek word that these words are translated from (hupatasso) as "primarily a military term, 'to rank under' (hupo, 'under,' and tasso, 'to arrange'), denotes (a) 'to put in subjection, to subject.' "

The fact that submission is *primarily a military term* should not go unnoticed. The requirement to respect the chain of command in the military has been highlighted in recent news coverage. Marine Sgt. Gary Stein first started a Facebook page called *Armed Forces Tea Party Patriots* to encourage service members to exercise their free speech rights. Then **he declared that he wouldn't follow orders from the commander in chief, President Barack Obama**. While Stein softened his statement to say he wouldn't follow "unlawful orders," military observers say he may have gone too far.

Navy officer David Glazier, a professor at Loyola Law School in Los Angeles said, "Good order and discipline require the military maintain respect for the chain of command. That includes prohibiting speech critical of the senior officers in that chain of command – up to and including the commander in chief."

In April, Stein was given an "other than honorable" discharge from the U.S. Marine Corp. Was Gary Stein a good soldier? What did Gary Stein do wrong? Were the Marines right to dismiss him?

THE CHAIN OF COMMAND

The Lord has set up chains of command covering many human relationships. Since God is the Designer and Creator of mankind, human relationships work best when God's order is respected and maintained. Here are some of those chains of command that we are considering in our series of studies this weekend:

- God → Christ → Man → Woman (1 Corinthians 11:3)
- God → Government → Citizens (Romans 13:1-7)
- God → Elder → Younger (1 Peter 5:5)
- God → Elders → Church (Hebrews 13:7, 17, 24)
- God → Masters → Servants (Ephesians 6:5-9; 1 Peter 2:18)
- God → Parents → Children (Ephesians 6:1; Colossians 3:20)

Submitting to authority in any of these relationships requires faith in God! Note that human authority reaches its limit when it conflicts with God's authority (Acts 5:29).

*Christ has authority in all these relationships because **He has ALL authority!** He is at the top of every chain of command! We must understand "what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, **far above all principality and power and might and dominion**, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all."* (Ephesians 1:19-23).

The Greek words used here in verse 21 are fascinating:

- "Far above" is ὑπεράνω (*hyper* above)
- Principality is from ἀρχή (*arch* as in Archangel, Patriarch)
- Power is from ἐξουσία (*exousia*, the common Greek word for authority)
- Might is from δύναμις (*dynamis*, from which we get the word dynamite)
- Dominion is from κυριότης (*kyriotes*, which is from the common Greek word for Lord. In the form used here it refers to lords, dominion or government)

Jesus is King of Kings and Lord of Lords! He "is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords" (1 Timothy 6:15).

CONCLUSION:

Faith finds its slot in the chain of command! Abraham is a great example of this principle. By faith Abraham obeyed! "By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going" (Hebrews 11:8).

- "Obeyed" in this verse is translated from the Greek word ὑπακούω (*hypakouō*). Strong's Dictionary defines it: "to *hear under* (as a *subordinate*), that is, to *listen attentively*; by implication to *heed* or *conform* to a command or authority: - hearken, be obedient to, obey"
- It is the same word used to command children to obey parents (Ephesians 6:1), servants to obey masters (Ephesians 6:5).

Do you have the faith to submit to the authority of the Lord? Do you have faith in the position of Christ? If so, "humble yourselves **under** the **mighty hand** of God, that He may exalt you in due time" (1 Peter 5:6).

Comprehension Check:

- If Christ is at the top of every chain of command, who are you really obeying when you obey parents, teachers, law enforcement, bosses at work and elders in the church?
- Can you explain how having faith relates to submitting to authority?