



As we've discussed, submission in our culture is limited to those who have earned the right to lead or situations where we stand to gain. Otherwise, we should assert our autonomy and do what we want. Biblical submission, on the other hand, is due to those God has placed in authority over us whether we consider it deserved or not. And instead of being a burden, submission frees us to experience everything God intends for us. Whatever the circumstances, submitting to others is ultimately a reflection of our submission to Christ.

In John 20 the disciple Thomas is confronted with the resurrected Jesus in the face of his own doubt. In Mark 9:14-29 a desperate father similarly deals with his own doubt in the presence of Jesus and the hopelessness of his son's predicament. Jesus, Peter, James, and John return from the Transfiguration to find the other disciples arguing with some teachers of the Law. We don't know why the disciples and teachers are arguing, but we do know that it concerns the healing of the child brought by his father to Jesus. In Jesus' absence the disciples are unable to heal the son or cast out the evil spirit.

As Jesus laments the faithlessness of the people, he tells them to bring the boy, who quickly goes into convulsions as he's brought to Jesus. His father and Jesus clarify some things and in the process the father makes a revealing statement. As he asks Jesus to heal his son, he qualifies the request with "if you can." Jesus immediately tells him that "everything is possible for one who believes" (23). It isn't clear if Jesus means that everything is possible because he, the Savior, trusts the Father or if the child's healing is dependent on the father believing. Either way the father quickly recognizes his own deficient faith and confesses it to Jesus. Paradoxically he says "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" Acknowledging his own shortcomings, he reaches out to Jesus in desperation not only for his son, but also for himself.

Jesus then casts out the evil spirit, healing the child and raising him to his feet. Whether the necessary faith is Jesus' trust in God the Father or the father's trust in Jesus, the father recognizes that Jesus is the basis for his son's salvation. Jesus is different from the teachers of the Law and the disciples he had already consulted. Jesus carries himself with authority and demonstrates it with equal measure, so as the encounter progresses, the father quickly turns from questioning his ability to heal to submitting to it.

The disciples on the other hand, seem more perplexed than awestruck by Jesus' demonstration of power. Their question is simply, "Why couldn't we drive it out?" Jesus' answer that "this kind can come out only by prayer" seems confusing when no prayers are mentioned in the story. Presumably he is referring to either the father's request as a prayer or to his own communion with God the Father as he performs the miracle. Either way, prayer is a demonstrable act of submission, laying before God a matter that we cannot handle on our own. Where the disciples and teachers of the Law, incapable of saving the child, had the impertinence to argue about it, Jesus and the child's father submit and experience redemption.

Discussion Questions

Why do we often rely on things like education, family, insurance, or government programs more than we do God? What risks come with trusting God?

When, like the rest of us, you realize that you have doubts about God and his ability to provide, how do you respond?

What does it take to lean into God in the midst of doubt? How can community encourage submission without minimizing the genuine thoughts and feelings we have in difficult times?