



How we submit within family relationships often has almost immediate consequences. They are certainly significant. Submission within other types of relationships doesn't always have the same immediacy in consequences, but it still impacts our lives in important ways. The story of the Roman centurion whose servant Jesus heals is a good example of the importance of acknowledging spiritual leadership.

Luke 7:1-10 tells us about an unnamed centurion whose servant is about to die. The centurion hears about Jesus, but instead of going directly to Jesus he consults with the Jewish leaders of Capernaum. He already has meaningful relationships with these leaders. He knows and respects them, he values their scriptural teaching, and he cares for the community enough that he built their synagogue. Considering how much he is investing in the Jewish religious life of Capernaum without any requirement to do so, it appears that he is at least a seeker if not a worshiper of God. At a practical level, he has certainly opened himself up to scrutiny by the elders of the city. Whether through unrequired generosity or through the communication of this personal need, he is demonstrating more vulnerability than one would expect from a typical Roman official.

The fact that the elders point the centurion to Jesus indicates their recognition of their own place in God's order. They are responsible for the spiritual leadership of the people of Capernaum, including the Romans who recognize the truth of the Scriptures. At the same, they recognize their own limitations and the limitation of their authority. Like the centurion they must submit to authority even as they exercise authority and leadership. They do so quite willingly, at least in this case, because they recognize Jesus' authority and their own inadequacy, so they submit the centurion's request to Jesus as their own request with significant pleading.

Once the request is presented to Jesus, the centurion's interaction with the Savior is reflective of his relationships with the city elders. He himself is a soldier possessing authority, but instead of projecting that authority into other areas, he recognizes his limitations and acknowledges the authority God has given others, in this case the religious authorities. Furthermore, his respect for the elders of the city becomes a stepping stone to deferring to Jesus as one for whom they have profound respect. Because he has a healthy relationship with the elders and respects them, recognizing Jesus' power and authority and submitting to him is easily done.

Jesus seems to recognize the centurion's character from the sincere request of Capernaum's elders, but the message he receives directly from the military leader confirms it. He clearly recognizes authority and responsibility and is ready to submit to authority himself. He knows his request of Jesus can be fulfilled at Jesus' word and he says as much. "I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." (7:8). He is hereby submitting himself to Jesus as the authority and will follow whatever he says without condition. Jesus' response is simple but profound. He commends the centurion's faith, and by implication his submission, and heals his servant with a simple word.

Discussion Questions

What are some of the common spiritual pitfalls that we face in life? What are the dangers of trying to navigate them on our own, and how does spiritual community and its leadership minimize those dangers?

How can we tell that our spiritual leaders are themselves submitting to authority? How can those reassurances bring a sense of security and facilitate a healthy spiritual community?

How does submission to human authorities (including spiritual authority) teach submission to Christ and prepare us for the day of judgment?