



Ephesians: Masterpiece in Progress
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“Authority in the New Humanity”
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Key Verses: Ephesians 5:21-6:9

Key Thought: As opposed to refusing or abusing authority, Paul casts an anti-oppressive, redemptive vision of authority for the new humanity in Christ: those under authority are to embrace it— in view of Christ as their motivator— and those in authority are to leverage it for the sake of those under their authority— in view of Christ as their model.

Points to Consider:

- The impulse to want to discard authority is understandable in view of the pervasiveness of abuse. However, authority structures within the Trinity confirm that authority cannot be discarded and can serve as a powerful force for redemption.
- Paul addresses those under authority before he addresses those in authority. He gives one core instruction to each, which he supports with an appeal to Christ— as motivator for those under authority and as model for those in authority:
 1. **Wives:** Submit to your husbands, out of reverence for Christ (as the church).
 2. **Husbands:** Love your wives, imitating Christ loving the church.
*(*Typical Greco-Roman household instructions address the husband on how to rule his wife. Here, by contrast, submission is portrayed as the wife's prerogative, whereas the husband is to concern himself with loving— and not ruling— his wife. Observe, too, that love excludes abuse, and that a husband's authority cannot override God's.)*
 3. **Children:** Obey your parents, out of obedience unto and trust in Christ.
 4. **Parents:** Rear— instead of anger— your children, imitating Christ nourishing the church.
*(*Paul does address “fathers” here but modern mothers can be just as educated and capable— if not more so— than modern fathers to disciple their children.)*
 5. **Workers:** Obey your managers, out of worship unto and trust in Christ.
 6. **Mangers:** Reward— instead of threaten— your workers, imitating Christ rewarding His workers (as stewards of Christ).
*(*Rather than endorse the evil institution of slavery, Paul here concedes to it as a fact of life— and even undermines it with Christian theology. For more on Paul's view of slavery, see Philemon. Paul's instructions do, however, have relevance and wisdom for modern*



relationships between workers and managers due to the basic similarities of work and authority, notwithstanding some obvious differences.)

- Rather than discard authority due to abuse— and thus lose what could be a powerful force for redemption, let us thus embrace and leverage authority in view of Christ, that we would be able to experience authority as a powerful force for redemption in some of our most basic relationships (and truly anywhere that we interact with authority).

Discussion Prompts:

- In view of abuse, do you relate with the common impulse to want to discard authority structures? Explain.
- Where in your life do you interact with authority structures (either as one under authority or as one in authority)?
- Unpack Paul's anti-oppressive, redemptive model of authority, in your own words.
- In view of Paul's model, rate how you tend to interact with authority from 1-5. → Explain.
- How might it look for you to grow in your interaction with authority?
- Close in prayer for one another. Ask for the Holy Spirit's healing from the abuse of authority, and for His empowerment to interact with authority as a force for redemption.