

“But How Can I Submit When I Know He Is Wrong!?”
Biblical Conflict Resolution Involving Authority Relationships
by Tara Klena Barthel (www.tarabarthe.com)

We know from Scripture that we are called to “seek peace and pursue it” (1 Peter 3:11). We also know that God works out His will through authority (Romans 13:1-5). *So what do we do when our leaders make bad decisions?* Though often godly and wise, sometimes our leaders—both men and women—make foolish, immature, and unloving decisions. At other times, we may simply disagree with them. Join us at this workshop as we consider what it means to pursue unity in relationships that have authority dimensions.

GOD ORDAINS AUTHORITY

- We are always under authority: *the state/authorities* in the land (Romans 13:1-4; 1 Peter 2:13-15), the *church and its leaders* (Hebrews 13:17), the *home* (Ephesians 5:22-6:4), and *employers* (1 Peter 2:18).

- As we meet these divinely appointed authorities, we meet God’s authority, for all authority is established by God (Rom. 13:1; Matt. 23:1-2) and God is sovereign over all authorities (Dan 2:19-22; Acts 2:22-24; 4:28; Gen. 45:8).

- The Fall has distorted our attitudes toward and our experience of authority (Genesis 3:16 and 4:17).

HOW ARE WE CALLED TO RESPOND TO AUTHORITY?

- We are called to honor, respect, and submit to the one delegated with God’s authority (Exod. 20:12; Matt. 22:21; Rom. 13:1-5; Eph. 5:22; 6:1-8; Col. 3:18-25; 1 Tim. 2:1, 5:17; Titus 2:9-10; Heb. 12: 9, 13:17; 1 Pet. 2:17-18; cf. 1 Samuel 25, 26).

- We submit absolutely to God’s absolute authority. We submit—but not absolutely—to delegated authority because God places *limitations* on delegated authority (Acts 4:18-20; 5:27-42). I.e., no one has authority to command another person to sin, because God has not delegated that authority.

- *Our natural tendency is to rebel against authority* and try to “justify” our rebellion. We are quick to insist on “our” way, blame our leaders, and claim “legitimate grounds” *not* to submit. Such *rebellion is a serious and wicked sin* (1 Samuel 15:23) because any *perceived deficiencies in our leaders do not release us from our obligations to them* (Matt. 23:1-3; Acts 23:1-5; 1 Pet. 2:18).

SO WHAT CAN WE DO WHEN OUR LEADER IS “WRONG”?

- If it is a clear *sin* issue (i.e., your leader is *ordering you to sin—compelling you to sin*), it is not only permissible, but *it is required that you respect your leader but not obey* (Exodus 1:15-2:10, Exodus 7-12, 1 Kings 18:4, Daniel 3, Daniel 6, Matthew 2:13-18 & 23:1-3, Acts 4:19 & 5:28, Revelation 13). *In this tragic situation, be sure to get help!*

- What if you are *not* being commanded to sin yourself, but the leader persistently abuses his authority or neglects his responsibilities, or he is physically or emotionally hurting the very people he has a responsibility to serve and protect? *We are called to gently and lovingly confront such sinful behavior.* (We may need to get help from other jurisdictions of authority—like the church or the state. See Matthew 18:15-20 and Romans 13.)

- What if we just disagree with our leader? *We are called to practice biblical peacemaking—especially a biblical and respectful appeal* (Ephesians 4:15, Philippians 2; and remember Abigail!). Practice the *PAUSE Principle* and submit (1 Sam. 25; Esther; Eccl. 8:2-6; Dan. 1:8-16; Prov. 22:11; 1 Pet. 2:13-21). *Don't forget the leaders have the right to be wrong.*
- Careful! Most conflicts we experience with our leaders are *not* over commandments to *sin*. They usually arise over disagreements as to what is best, most efficient, wise, or loving (i.e., *wisdom issues*).

WHAT IF HE DOES NOT LISTEN TO ME OR CHANGE HIS MIND?

- If he does not listen to you; if he disagrees with you; or if he continues in his foolish or even sinful behavior, *we are called to live by faith and submit by “commit[ing] ourselves to our faithful Creator and continu[ing] to do good* (1 Peter 4:19). It is more important to be loving (of God and neighbor) than to be “right.”
- Remember the doctrine of suffering—this life is not our home. God’s bitter providence is *good* even though suffering is painful (Psalm 55:12-13, Psalm 57). God works *all things* together for His glory and our good—we can trust Him! (1 Pet. 2:13-25; Rom. 12:19; Isaiah 30:15)

- Remember that your leader is growing too. *No one is perfect at delegated authority!* Don't forget the doctrines of *justification* (2 Cor. 5:21, once and for all, already perfect) and *sanctification* (Phil. 2:13 & 1:6, Rom. 8:29, an ongoing process until we reach Heaven, growing in perfection) *apply to leaders too*. Our leaders are just as in need of grace as we are!
-

Tara Barthel (www.tarabarthel.com), a former director at Peacemaker Ministries and “recovering lawyer,” currently serves her husband, Fred, and toddler, Sophia Grace, as a homemaker while regularly mediating and speaking on peacemaking. In between chasing Sophie and her Golden Retriever, Tara coauthored her first book: *Peacemaking Women—Biblical Hope for Resolving Conflict* (Baker Book House Co., 2005).