

Discussing How To Restore The Early Church

Returning Intimacy and Power to the Father's Children

*"I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for,
it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.
For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."*
(Matthew 18:19,20)



SECTION 5 - LESSON 38

THE HOME

The Basic Building Block For Spiritual Growth:

• *Authority In The Home*

7. Deference Produces Trust
8. God's Means to Produce Biblical Character
9. Godly Submission: A Matter of Choice



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The interaction between Jesus and the centurion cited in Matthew 8:5-10 offers an enlightening illustration of this quality. Our Lord was pleasantly astonished to discover in the Roman an understanding of deference to authority that paralleled His own relationship with His Father. That's why this military man in charge of a hundred others could be commended by Jesus for his strong faith.

The godly centurion readily identified in Jesus His submission to His Father's authority. In light of that kind of deference as well as his trust, the centurion was assured that Jesus' promise to heal his servant would be accomplished. Listen to the testimony of this unlikely believer!

*The centurion replied, "Lord, I do not deserve to have You come under my roof. But **just say the word**, and my servant will be healed. For 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." When Jesus heard this, **He was astonished** and said to those following Him, "I tell you the truth, **I have not found anyone in Israel with such great trust**" (Matthew 8:8-10).*

You can easily perceive from this passage the centurion's humility as he felt unworthy to have our Lord even enter his house. How Jesus must have rejoiced at this encounter! Because He was truly under His Father's authority He did only that which His Father directed Him to do. And he witnessed that the centurion understood the interconnection between deference and obedience as well.

The humility that underlies deference always brings honor to the one

who is served. ALWAYS! All that Jesus said and did was aimed at giving glory to His Father in heaven. The throngs readily recognized this motive, for as the gospels record, their response to His miracles was to *praise God* (see Luke 5:26, for example).

Humility penetrates the nature of a person whose heart shows deference, for that individual is able to set aside focus on personal wants and goals in order to meet the needs of others.

*Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, **but in humility consider others better than yourselves**. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the **interests of others** (Philippians 2:3,4).*

[For more on the importance of deference see our [August-September 1999 newsletter: Impudence](#)].

Deference precludes the desire for control over your own life. Through deferring in love and obedient trust to the sovereign right of God to place whomever He wants in authority over you, your character grows in Christ-like deference.

Keep mind that your deference:

- helps you avoid sinning against authorities.
- helps you fulfill your responsibilities.
- enables you to honor those whom our Lord wants to be honored.

That of which we're speaking lies in stark contrast to the values of this Atomistic culture which protects and exalts the ego. Deference empowers you to be poured out on behalf of others without regard for yourself or how you might benefit. Through deference you learn to "die daily" so you can please God and those He's placed over you.

Note that an attitude of deference does *not* mean blind submission. For example, while living under the oppressive regime of the Babylonians, Daniel and his friends were forced into a **decision of conscience**. Rather than rebel against those in authority over them, the young captives instead made an **appeal** to their guard to eat foods which did not violate their conscience.

Because of their deferential attitude, the guard accepted their request, even though he'd be held responsible if their dietary experiment failed:

But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way. Now God had caused the official to show favor and sympathy to Daniel... So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days (Daniel 1:8-12).

Deference is not just a matter of correct behavior. It's an **attitude** that flows from **deep within your heart**. Those toward whom you're deferent know whether they are being honored by your actions. And, true deference often causes those in authority to look favorably on you.

Deference and trust are inseparably linked. God brings about seemingly impossible events so that He may raise up those who **fear Him** and **respond deferentially** toward those in authority. Fear of God brings godly deference!

Despite the faithful service of Daniel and his friends, peril in the oppressive Babylonian culture confronted them often. Let's see how God intervenes when someone fears Him with obedient trust and walks in deference toward those in authority:

Nebuchadnezzar had been agitated by a dream which his astrologers could-

n't interpret. So distraught was the king that he threatened destruction upon every one of his advisors, the young Hebrews included!

If you do not tell me what my dream was and interpret it, I will have you cut into pieces and your houses turned into piles of rubble... So the decree was issued to put the wise men to death, and men were sent to look for Daniel and his friends to put them to death" (2:5,13).

The deference in Daniel's character opened the opportunity for him to be heard. He wasn't trying to buy time to forestall the inevitable, for the officer would have seen through such duplicity.

When Arioch, the commander of the king's guard, had gone out to put to death the wise men of Babylon, Daniel spoke to him with wisdom and tact (2:14).

First, deference kept Daniel from being killed. Next, he "went in to the king and asked for time, so that he might interpret the dream for him" (2:16). Daniel offered neither excuses nor objections to the king's irrational demand. His deference again gave him a hearing, and His God-given anointing to "understand visions and dreams of all kinds" enabled him to reveal to the king the true and only God.

Remember, deference ultimately leads to the glory of God! King Nebuchadnezzar's response testified that he recognized such power could have come only from the Hebrew's God. Falling prostrate before Daniel, he acknowledged:

Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you were able to reveal this

*mystery.” Then the king placed Daniel in a high position and lavished many gifts on him. He made him **ruler** over the entire province of Babylon and placed him **in charge of all its wise men** (Daniel 2:47,48).*

Your willingness to show deference is foundational to your growth in godly character. Responding as Jesus would to adverse situations that crop up with the authorities in your life is His indispensable means of revealing Himself to others through you.

Once again the king of Babylon was shown the supreme power of the only true God as His faithful servants confronted death because of their obedient trust:

*Then Nebuchadnezzar said, “**Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent His angel and rescued His servants! They trusted in Him and defied the king’s command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God**” (Daniel 3:28).*

Once again Daniel’s character was tested, this time at the hands of a different monarch. Thrust into the lion’s den, the elderly Hebrew committed his life into His Lord’s care and emerged unscathed. God again triumphed! In grateful astonishment King Darius commanded all peoples, nations and men of every language throughout the land: ¶

*I issue a decree that in every part of my kingdom people must **fear and reverence the God of Daniel. For He is the living God and He endures forever; His kingdom will not be destroyed, His dominion will never end**” (Daniel 6:26).*

To bring glory to our Father is His purpose for your deference and godly character development. You reveal Him as your character shines. Keep this perspective toward the authorities He has placed over you at this point in your life journey (see Romans 13:1-5). Those particular individuals are His choice instruments to develop in you certain character qualities.

But remember this warning:

If you resist our Lord’s means of developing deference and other character qualities, you’ll have to face that classroom again and again.

The hurts, letdowns and betrayals you’ve suffered in the past are other effective means through which our Father forms Christ-like character in you. When you’ve left behind the “sting” of those vexing circumstances, you’re able to appreciate His “severe mercy” toward you.

Painful experiences, especially at the hands of those in authority, can be His way of causing you to draw near to Him in the dependent trust of a child.

[For more on deference and character development, see [Lifebyte 9. The Book of Daniel \(Chapters 1-3\) Personal Responsibility—Deference—God-dependence.](#)]

The life of David personifies the deepening of deference as he suffered at the hands of a rash monarch. Anticipating His purposes to come, God through the prophet Samuel anointed young David to be king many years before he received the throne (see 1 Samuel 16).

In the intervening years, David suffered greatly at the hands of King Saul. On several occasions through a variety of harsh assaults the ruler tried to kill David.

Yet, David refused to retaliate. His deference toward both His God and his king would not let him usurp the right to reign. His suffering was God's way to teach David to be a *just* king himself.

[For more on preparing yourself to live in godly deference, see our [January 2001 newsletter, *When the Door of the Ark Closed, The Unprepared Got No Second Chance.*](#)]

Let's bring some application into your own home:

A husband who has a heart of deference toward authorities is able to help his wife set aside the curse of control she inherited from Eve. As a servant-leader, he does this through proper exercise of his God-ordained authority as "head" of their home.

Remember, biblical authority is the responsibility to *include or exclude*, to *commend or correct*. By walking in this responsibility as Jesus intends, a husband helps his wife acquire the key Christ-like character quality of deference. Through deference in the character of Jesus, she can be the *ezer* God intends.

Fear of God, Personal Responsibility, Deference and God-dependency—these identify a follower of Jesus.

Deference is a life-giving character quality in those of us who follow Jesus in love and complete trust. Your obedient trust in our Lord is inversely proportional to your fear and your need to be in control of your life.

Only through complete death to yourself can you abide in total trust in Jesus. Deference is His means to get you there. *Other character qualities are built on deference.* We'll discuss these in the next section.

Sue especially for women

Wives, I have a term for the type of devotion God requires of us, the kind our husbands need: ***affectionate deference***. This type of deference means that we lovingly and willingly limit our own freedoms so that we don't contend against the authority of our husband.

Affectionate deference increases as the curse of Eve diminishes. It permits us to be at peace in all circumstances, and our husbands to experience the respect our Lord calls for us to enact. Remember:

Where there is peace, love blossoms!

[For more on deference in marriage, see our [December 2003 newsletter, *Develop Christ-likeness—Destroy the Curse of Eve.*](#)]

We'll discuss instilling deference in your children in later lessons on parenting. But for now, take a close look at how deeply the character quality of deference penetrates your own life.

Do you live in deference toward the authorities our Lord has placed over you? Yes or no? If no, with which particular authorities do you have problems: spiritual, family, government, employer? Describe the nature of your problem and what has caused it. How can you transform your attitude into deference?

Do you humbly view others as those made in God's image and for whom Jesus died? Do Paul's words, "*in humility consider others better than yourselves*" apply to your heart's attitude? Yes or no? If no, describe your inner attitude toward others.

If you're married, are you demonstrating affectionate deference toward your husband? Yes or no? If yes, describe how you do this. If no, why aren't you?

THE HOME

The Basic Building Block For Spiritual Growth: *Authority In The Home*

8. God's Means To Produce Biblical Character

“Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect” (1 Timothy 3:2-4).

Someone once described character as who you are when no one is looking. The Greek word for character means “minting a coin”. An image is impressed on the coin, an image that anyone can recognize.

Character flows out of *your motive*. It's not the behavior—your outward actions—but your motive for doing them that defines good character. Why you do what you do reveals your character.

Paul lists the character qualities an elder must have before he leads a faith community. Do you think a person is born with these qualities? Research on infants has confirmed that's not the case!

Then how are character qualities formed in a child? And, how does a man acquire them in order to be a *zaken*, a wise biblical elder? No matter what the age, character development comes through teaching, role modeling, and correction by those in authority. Remember, a responsibility of a person with authority is to **commend** or **correct**.

Let's review the nature of character. A child isn't born with character. Through genetic influence an infant indeed has a distinct *personality*, but not character. As a consequence of Adam and Eve's disobedience, every child is under the control of his or her sin nature. If left to himself, he would do evil.

Yet our Creator has also formed each person with the spiritual ability to examine his inner self. Each individual *can* be guided to turn away from that innate response to gratify the flesh. And, because the Bible leaves no doubt about the basic nature of children, it's up to parents to walk in the authority God has given them to “imprint” onto their child godly character:

- ***“Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it”*** (Proverbs 22:6).
- ***“Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline will drive it far from him”*** (Proverbs 22:15).
- ***“Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you punish him with the rod, he will not die”*** (Proverbs 23:13).
- ***“The rod of correction imparts wisdom, but a child left to himself disgraces his mother”*** (Proverbs 29:15).

- “A wise son brings joy to his father, but a foolish man despises his mother” (Proverbs 15:20).
- “A foolish son brings grief to his father and bitterness to the one who bore him” (Proverbs 17:25).
- “Even a child is known by his actions, by whether his conduct is pure and right” (Proverbs 20:11).

Each child’s personality, and thus his response to correction, is different. It’s the responsibility of the parents to discover which manner of discipline best suits their son or daughter. As an expression of love for God, molding the character of their children is not optional! It calls for persistent, intense dedication:

*Love the LORD your God with **all your heart** and with **all your soul** and with **all your strength**.*

*These commandments that I give you today are to be **upon your hearts**.*

***Impress them on your children.** Talk about them when you **sit at home** and when you **walk along the road**, when you **lie down** and when you **get up**. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the **doorframes of your houses** and on **your gates** (Deuteronomy 6:5-9).*

Can you sense God’s intensity in His command to parents to diligently train their children in their home (see Ephesians 6:4)? This isn’t a hit and miss situation as you rush out the door each morning or dash off to activities or meetings. It’s a devoted response to our Lord’s heart that your children increasingly encounter Him *through you* each and every day.

[**Lessons 42-44** explore the motives and goals of godly parenting.]

The value you place on loving God and walking in His ways will be picked up by your children. How needful it is that when you all rise up, you *together* thank Him and seek His strength and purpose for that day’s opportunities.

As you purposely sit *together* without the glare of television or slavish response to the phone, you’re prioritizing your children and their chance to receive from you that which is vital from our Lord’s perspective.

As you pass from the gates of your home *together* to walk (or drive), you again respond to that teachable moment by turning it into a character-development occasion.

And finally, at day’s end, once again make it a family custom to “debrief”, making sure each one of you in the family has a clean slate before going to bed. “*Don’t let the sun go down on your anger*” (Ephesians 4:26) should be a nightly tradition to keep the evil one from lodging a foothold that can lead to a stronghold!

The world’s values and humanist-controlled public education’s goals are geared to inculcating the *antithesis* of God’s goals and values. Only within *your home* will your children find the purposeful structuring of what it means to love their Lord in obedient trust.

So many Christian parents have forfeited this responsibility, propelling their children ever more deeply into the Atomistic mindset that so mirrors western culture. As you’ll discover from the character development chart on the next page, your child *will* fill each characteristic one way or another. You know which way the sin nature will attract them! It’s up to you to overcome the evil tendency with God’s ways. And that purpose must be *intentional*.

Let's review this reality one more time: Character is *learned*, and it begins to be impressed on you from your earliest years.

As parents instill biblical character in their children through teaching, role modeling and correction, the child's propensity to give in to his sin nature diminishes.

that until the early 1900's the word "education" was defined as the relationship of a mother with her children. As a child grows, godly character will continue to be imprinted on his way of life if his parents are both diligent and faithful themselves to keep deepening in Christ-likeness.

Ever-increasing godly character counters the inclinations of their sin nature and develops a sense of personal responsibility and accountability. For instance,

We mentioned in an earlier lesson

Godly Character Development

You were born with the sin nature motives on the right. The biblical characteristics on the left must be nurtured. Place an "X" on each attribute that best describes you on the spectrum of character development. Then go over this with your spouse or others close to you in the faith and have them evaluate you. Discuss what you've discovered about yourself and how you can grow in godly character.

<u>Biblical Characteristics</u>	< <i>versus</i> >										<u>Sin Nature Motives</u>	
Open-handed	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Tight-fisted
Joyful	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Depressed
Yielding	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Defiant
Accessible	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Aloof
Zealous	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Lazy
Courageous	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Fearful
Forgiving	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Bitter
Caring	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Selfish
Honest	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Deceptive
Confident	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Worried
Longsuffering	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Irritable
Trusting	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Cynical
Chaste	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Sensual
Thankful	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Grumbling
Organized	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Sloppy
Merciful	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Indifferent
Just	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Biased
Humble	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Proud
Gentle	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Harsh
Submissive	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Bossy
Vigilant	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Careless
Hospitable	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Isolated
Frugal	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Wasteful
Generous	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Greedy
Prompt	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Late

- Good manners are motivated by respect for others as worthy of your consideration.
- Healthy relationships are nurtured because godly companions spur each other on in good deeds and self-sacrifice.
- Responsible work attitudes begin in the home as burdens are shared to mutually benefit one another.
- Proper deference toward others who deserve it prepares the heart for both godly submission as well as godly exercise of authority.

None of these purposes comes automatically! They're either a lifestyle pattern to be inculcated, or just wishful words in the wind. What adjustments will it take for you as a parent to give them the same precedence our Lord does?

The first authority you encounter in life are your parents. They're our Father's initial primary means to sanctify, or set apart for His purposes, each of His children. A significant amount of Christ-likeness is acquired as a result of your response to the authorities He sets over you. A sinful response leads to **rebellion, independence** and **control**.

Many young parents today have been handicapped in their childraising. They were outsourced themselves as children by parents who were too preoccupied with their own motivations to fulfill God's parameters for childraising. With little or no role modeling of godly parenting, even good intentions to raise children of character rest on shaky foundations.

For followers of Jesus, the Bible presents clear guidelines of the type of Christ-like character He wants to impress onto our personalities. Sadly, so few parents are aware of these character qualities, and certainly haven't practiced them.

[See chapters 7 and 8 of our book **Pastoring by Elders** for more on character development.]

Don't think that character development in your children can be put off. That which is instilled early can keep maturing and expanding! Certainly the character of the teenaged Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego had been impressed early and deeply by God-honoring parents.

Our God doesn't waste the influence of those who love and fear Him and walk uprightly to represent His character. Even in the darkest of societies, those who have both acquired and practiced His character can be raised up to strongly impact unbelievers.

Whether you're a parent or not; whether you were raised in a godly home or not, this is our Father's desire for you: to represent His Son Jesus to all who meet you. Your *character development* is key for others to see Him in you! And, His instruments to bring this about include the authorities He sets in your life (see Romans 13:1,2).

In your own home, how high a priority is character development, not only for your children but also for you as parents?

How has your character changed in the years you have followed Jesus?

THE HOME

The Basic Building Block For Spiritual Growth: *Authority In The Home*

8. Godly Submission Is A Matter of Choice

You'll discover right away as you pursue the path of sanctification into Christ-like character how much you depend on the Spirit of Jesus! And, that dependence deepens the more you grow in His character.

As you yield to His will, the Holy Spirit within you will change your heart's motivation to conform to that of Jesus. Out of your changed heart your behavior will follow to please our Father. The fruit of this process is that the world will see Jesus-in-the-flesh in you:

*This is to My Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, **showing yourselves to be My disciples** (John 15:8).*

Again a significant influence in your character change is directly related to:

- Your response to the authorities over you, both past and present.
- The completeness of these authorities to instill godly character in you.

The **Godly Character Development** chart on page 8 gave you some idea of how well your character has been developed in the past. Keep in mind:

**Our Father knows what you lack.
Your solution? Yield in cooperation
with His Spirit as He uses authorities
and other means to help you
be more like Jesus.**

At the retreat ministry, we led a singles group which represented over fifteen congregations. When the group first began, most of the women lived alone, away from their family.

The average age of the ladies was around thirty, and most of them REALLY wanted to be married.

After several months we helped a number of the women realize that they'd developed a strong attitude of **independence** and **self-will** when they'd fled the protection of their father's authority. By allowing themselves to be available to almost any guy who called, many had become emotionally hardened. Since they chose not to trust God for a husband, they used dating to find one.

Out of deep concern for these young ladies, Mike initiated an unusual requirement: Before any man could date a woman from the group, he had to first ask permission from either the woman's father, her pastor or Mike!

At first there was some moaning, but soon the women began to feel cherished as jewels of the Lord. Their willingness to have a male authority person weed out the men with wrong motives gave them great peace and security. Another interesting point surfaced as well: the women were able to treat the men in the group as brothers rather than as potential dates.

Mike was able to help the women understand that a man needs to be *needed*. In particular, a man has a deep need to *protect*. The men shared that the women's independence from the protection of their fathers was a barrier to the very relationship the women desired, marriage. By being out from under their father's authority, they'd unconsciously been training themselves to *need no one*. That was a wall the men couldn't deal with.

As a result of this insight, a number of the women repented and moved back home to come under their father's protection once again. Not long after this change in the group's outlook toward godly authority, a number of weddings took place!

Whether you're a man or a woman, **rebellion against authority** and **avoidance of authority** are inherent in the sin nature we all inherited from Adam and

Eve. Through pride and rebellion Satan was cast out of heaven, and he's adept in using our sin nature against us.

That's why godly authority must be exercised in our homes—it confronts human sin nature. Godly exercise of authority takes love and courage, especially when it comes to *excluding* and *correcting* those for whom you're responsible.

(How far short the Nicolaitan system has fallen from biblical parameters of true fellowship with our Lord. Biblical authority is all but dead in law-less Nicolaitanism. Few are confronted with sin or corrected, and even fewer are excluded because of unrepentance. Holy fear of God is sorely lacking in contemporary Christian practice; few regard God's Word as anything but pleasant stories.)

Numerous examples of godly authority and God's call to submit are presented in the Bible so that we as Jesus' followers might learn from them.

Few men were as publicly identified with God as were Moses and Aaron. Yet even with the authority God gave them over the Israelites, rebellion and hostility always seem to be lurking under the surface:

Korah son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, and certain Reubenites ... became insolent and rose up against Moses. With them were 250 Israelite men, well-known community leaders who had been appointed members of the council. They came as a group to oppose Moses and Aaron and said to them, "You have gone too far! The whole community is holy, every one of them, and the Lord is with them. Why then do you set yourselves above the Lord's assembly?" When Moses heard this, he fell facedown (Numbers 16:1-4).

Note that God makes sure we can learn as much from what NOT to do as how to obey! This instance of rebellion against the authority He gave Moses was agitated by people of presumption. Korah, the great-grandson of Levi and a member of the tribe associated with the care of God's Tabernacle, prided himself as an influential leader. His co-conspirators, descendants of Jacob's presumptuous firstborn Reuben, also prided themselves as leaders of men.

Finding a familiar spirit among 250 of the encampment's council, these rebels discounted the authority of God's handpicked leader and set themselves above His sovereign will. They sought through mob mentality to inspire fear in Moses, the one who had God's ear.

Motivated by jealous hearts that refused to submit, these arrogant men operated from a false and deadly assumption. Discounting their own sin nature, they proclaimed that by the very fact that God had called them out of bondage in Egypt, they were innately holy and worthy of God's election. Yet time and again God had dispelled the lie:

The LORD did not set His affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath He swore to your forefathers (Deuteronomy 7:7,8a).

How often throughout history have those raised within Christianity viewed themselves as superior to others and cut off contact with the very unbelievers our Lord died to redeem from the bondage of sin? And how often have those within the Nicolaitan system exercised a counterfeit authority not of God to

wreak havoc on both the flock and the world around them?

True authority does not have to lord itself over those it serves in leadership. Rather, backed by the power and will of God, those who walk in His authority respond as Moses did in the face of rebellion: humbling themselves before Him that His Power be revealed.

Those in authority need to remember that God is with them because *He gave them* their authority. God has His ways to deal with unrepentance and rebellion. Note the approach He commanded through His servant Paul:

Hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord (1 Corinthians 5:5).

Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme. (1 Timothy 1:20).

God's response to rebels and the unrepentant isn't pleasant. It's severe enough to bring them to the point that they decide to repent or not. He'll even use disease to chastise people and turn them from their course of destruction. Studies have shown a strong connection between some types of cancer and unresolved bitterness. God's perspective always sees through the lens of *eternity*.

As for the unrepentant Korah and his followers, even their families suffered the disastrous consequence of their rebellious, arrogant presumption. The penalty was fitting for the crime. Had they been shown mercy in their unrepentant resistance to Moses' authority, others would have been tempted to rise up as well:

The ground under them split apart and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them, with their households and all Korah's men and all their possessions. They went down alive into the grave, with everything they owned; the earth closed over them, and they perished and were gone from the community (Numbers 16:31-33).

A submissive spirit toward authority is a safeguard against falling into God's hands of chastisement (see Hebrews 10:31). And don't think you're exempt from discipline if you choose to forsake the path of Jesus and willfully abide in sin!

Keep in mind that God's people are commanded to submit to *all* authority, not just to those who are godly or just. For example, "benevolent" would hardly describe the rule of first century Rome. Oppressive and tyrannical, the Roman authorities could, and often did, steal, maim, or kill for little reason, particularly those perceived as enemies of the State.

Jewish believers Aquila and Priscilla were summarily ordered along with all Jews to leave their home in Rome (see Acts 18:2). Yet in this severe environment Paul could still write to the believers in the heart of that Empire:

Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves (Romans 13:1,2).

Even the worst of despots is allowed to be in that position only by permission

of God. *Our Lord is sovereign* despite the cruelty with which an authority figure misuses his position. That's a hard reality to swallow in light of the atrocities occurring daily even now in nations worldwide. Yet God's purposes *will* be served, even if we are unable to make sense out of it.

*Do you want to be free from fear of the **one in authority**? Then do what is right and he will **commend you**. For he is **God's servant to do you good**... He is **God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer** (vv. 3,4).*

Again we see the role of authority to commend and correct. Note that the one in authority represents God as *His servant*, whether to reward those who submit or to punish those who rebel.

*Therefore, it is necessary to **submit to the authorities**, not only because of possible punishment but also because of **conscience**. This is also why you **pay taxes**, for the **authorities are God's servants**, who give their full time to governing (vv. 5,6).*

These commands must have been particularly difficult for believers to comprehend, much less obey, given the subjugation and outrage to which they were exposed.

Yet Paul does not mince words. Obedience to that which does not violate God's higher law pleases Him. And, willingness to suffer the consequences for refusing to obey that which is against His ways is also His plan for His children (see 1 Peter 2:20; 3:14).

God's goal and purpose for that which you endure is much higher than your personal comfort or even what you

perceive to be fair or unfair. By responding to injustice with loving trust in their Sovereign Lord, the early Christians were able to win over the hearts of many of their persecutors and expand the Kingdom of God in a way that zealous rebellion could never have done: "***It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil***" (1 Peter 3:17; see also Hebrews 11).

The pride that caused Satan to be thrown out of his heavenly home is exactly opposite the humble, deferential heart that our Father requires of His children:

Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another (Colossians 3:12,13).

When you submit to authority, you're giving them the responsibility to discipline you, that is, to correct you if necessary. As we wrote earlier, *correction* comes with the position of authority.

Correction and discipline cover a range that extends in degree from instructing in the way of truth, to a mild chiding, to admonishment. If correction fails to bring about a change, the one with authority can expel or excommunicate you. In that way, others won't be tempted to follow your rebellious steps.

Your sin nature is dead in its hold over you *if* you choose to walk in the righteousness of obedient trust in Jesus. However, just as with self-willed Cain, willful rebellion can breathe power into that old nature.

God requires those in authority to confront any tendency in you to give way to that sin nature and help you

grow in godly character. Discipline is part of our Father's loving design to train His people. He shows His love for those in His Kingdom through His discipline:

*Endure hardship as discipline; **God is treating you as sons.** For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are **not disciplined** (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and **not true sons.***

*Moreover, we have all had **human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it.** How much more should we **submit to the Father of our spirits and live!** Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but **God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness.***

*No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. **Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it** (Hebrews 12:7-11).*

The painful discipline that our Father knows we need helps us to better understand His love and sovereign authority over us. This concept flies in the face of worldly-inspired platitudes: "Love means your self-esteem is lifted," and, "A loving God wants me to be happy."

The truly loving Father Whom the Bible depicts has ordained that the road to intimacy with Him means *self-denial*—trustingly picking up a cross of obedience each day to submit to *His* will, not your own. Yet mastering obedience comes by training that is repeated over and over in the classroom of submission to God-given authority.

Jesus affirms the importance of discipline to bring about His goal of repentance in those He loves. Your response to learn from His rebuke calls for diligent

effort on your part:

***Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent** (Revelation 3:19).*

As we've shared, the first people to correct you are generally your parents. Part of the training process involves learning to respect their position of authority rather than giving in to rebellious self-will.

Learning to bring joy to your parents by submitting with a pure heart is valuable preparation for marriage. Those who succeed in this character classroom don't fear correction later in life. They see the beauty of God's ways in using authorities in their character development.

That's why the Bible so often repeats a parent's responsibility: "**Discipline your son, and he will give you peace; he will bring delight to your soul**" (Proverbs 29:17). Discipline develops in your life as you learn to conform your will to that of those in authority over you.

When a willful spirit keeps a child from recognizing the importance of obedience, God's Word again has an answer: "**The rod of correction imparts wisdom, but a child left to himself disgraces his mother**" (Proverbs 29:15). Again, you know whether your child is disobeying out of willful rebellion or from childish ignorance and immaturity. Discipline or correct accordingly.

Let's return to the singles group we mentioned earlier. Over a several month period we encouraged these individuals to ask their parents, "Is it *a joy* for you to have me as your child?" The vast majority of the singles were held captive by their fears. They couldn't get up the courage to ask their folks that question.

Seven of the group did humble them-

selves to inquire. Their testimonies to the others were filled with wonderful love and affirmation from the parents, much to the young adults' surprise. Still, most feared the response of the very people who had once changed their diapers.

Understand this:

The degree to which you embrace the position of authority your parents had in your character development is the degree to which you'll either accept or fear correction all throughout your life.

Those who don't see God using their parents in their character development will hold ill feelings or begrudging bitterness against them. Afterwards, any form of correction from *anyone* will always be perceived as rejection.

Do you remember the **Unchangeable Characteristics** we discussed in Lesson 33? Your parents, their nature, and how they would treat you were already known by our God *before* you were born. All the correction you were given and the emotional wounds you endured were His way to help you grow in Christ-like character. And, two of the key features of His character that you need are **deference** and **forgiveness**.

We know that it's painful to realize that foolishness is hidden in the heart of all of us. As adults we like to think that "We've arrived!", and that we're beyond any further need for correction and character development. But our Father looks at us with love and responds, "Not so!"

Think of this phrase when you hear someone excusing the bad behavior or deficient character of another:

People who enable others to stay in sin are hiding sin in their own lives.

If a husband or wife excuses the bad character of a spouse, or if parents overlook the ongoing sin of their children, they're hiding sin in their own life. Prove this yourself!

Parents who continue to offer excuses for their child's stubborn disobedience or blame parental weariness for their failure to correct their child(ren) are plotting a path of destruction and pain: "*Discipline your son, for in that there is hope; do not be a willing party to his death*" (Proverbs 19:18). These parents are abdicating their authority and will condemn their child to resist authority all their lives. You have a choice!

Please refer back to the chart on page 8, **Godly Character Development**. As an adult who follows Jesus, your *desire to receive correction* in character qualities that are lacking in godliness is a sign of wisdom.

Paul reiterated the need for confrontation to Titus as one who was preparing elders for leadership responsibility: "*These, then, are the things you should teach. Encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you*" (Titus 2:15).

Remember: "*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline*" (Proverbs 1:7). To fear God is to submit to His authorities.

Describe your own feelings toward your parents pertaining to their discipline of you.

Do you hold any ill regard toward your parents or other authorities because of how they dealt with you? Yes or no? If yes, describe the nature of what they did and how you responded then and now.

Ask those who know you well if they see a submissive spirit in you. Ask them for specifics and write them down.

The Bible commands that we not speak evil about those in authority (Acts 23:5). Review the people in authority over you. Do you speak disparagingly about any of them? Spouse? Boss? Faith community leader? Yes or no? If yes, in what manner do you do this, and with whom?

Remember that you are responsible to ask forgiveness from the people you maligned.

“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will” (Romans 12:2).

If you’ve discovered things in this lesson that need to be changed in you:

- 1. Repent of any sin (Psalms 103:11,12; Isaiah 43:25).
- 2. Don’t let up on seeking the Spirit’s help until the way that is in the character of Jesus is formed in you (Matthew 7:7,8).
- 3. And don’t lose sight that our Father is merciful and longsuffering. If you stay repentant, He will continue to readily forgive and restore (Isaiah 30:18).

Don’t stop on your pilgrimage until the character of Jesus is completely formed in you! Press on, dear ones:

Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is (1 John 3:2).