

EXCELLENCE IN MINISTRY

Finishing Well—Doing What’s Best in the Challenges of Ministry

Responding Correctly to Authority

1 Timothy 6:1–6



LET’S BEGIN HERE

Few issues are more practical—and sometimes painful—than learning how to submit to authority. Children struggle to submit to parents. Students struggle to submit to teachers. Employees struggle to submit to employers. Citizens struggle to submit to laws. And congregations struggle to submit to pastors and elders. Submitting to authority was just as difficult in the first century as it is in the twenty-first century. So, let’s hear and heed Paul’s teaching on how to respond correctly to authority.



LET’S DIG DEEPER

1. Let’s Admit It

Because everyone is under some kind of authority—and all of us are under the authority of God—we might as well come to grips with and admit some essential truths.

First, *submitting to authority isn’t natural.*

Second, *struggles with authority are complex and not easily solved.*

Third, *some in authority haven’t earned our respect.*

Fourth, *resistance against authority isn’t always wrong.*



Quotable

Submitting to authority isn’t natural for us as sinners. We prefer rebellion. But thankfully, God can change our hearts.

— Charles R. Swindoll



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DOORWAY TO HISTORY

Does the Bible Condone Slavery?

Passages like 1 Timothy 6:1–2 are uncomfortable, partly because of the history of slavery in the West and partly because slavery continues today in many parts of the world. We want the Bible to demand, “Masters, free your slaves!” But it doesn’t. Paul *hinted* that Philemon should emancipate Onesimus (Philemon 10–17)—that’s all. And to believing slaves in Corinth, Paul said if they could obtain their freedom they should, but if they couldn’t, they shouldn’t fret over it (1 Corinthians 7:21–24).

Paul’s preaching emphasized freedom, grace, and equality in Christ, yet he never came right out and decried slavery. He believed slave trading was sin (1 Timothy 1:10 NIV), and by implication so was slavery itself. But Paul was no abolitionist. He wasn’t a social reformer or a cultural crusader. He believed the gospel of Jesus would lead to transformed lives and that transformed lives would lead to transformed civilizations. This formula proved true. In time, Christian societies rejected slavery, but in the first century, the practice was still rampant.

The truth is, slavery in Bible times was an acceptable, though never ideal, way to order society. First-century slavery, as well, differed *significantly* from our modern-day perspective. Under Roman law, masters did have complete control over the lives of their slaves, but most slave owners were not cruel. Besides the fact that slaves were expensive to purchase and keep, they also possessed most of the legal rights of a free citizen. Slaves in the Roman Empire had access to money, could marry and rear a family, and were tried in court according to the same laws as free men. And they often had better accommodations, food, and clothing than some free men.

Nevertheless, God’s character never changes. Throughout the Old and New Testaments, He reveals Himself as a God of justice (Amos 5:23–24). He never approves of oppression and violence against the vulnerable but instead rescues victims and punishes perpetrators (Psalm 72:4–14). We can be confident that He cares deeply about the spiritual and physical well-being of all people, regardless of their position in society. In His eyes “there is no distinction between . . . slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all” (Colossians 3:11).



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2. Let’s Hear It (1 Timothy 6:1–6)

In 1 Timothy 6, Paul addressed three areas of authority that impact all our lives: submitting to non-Christians (6:1), submitting to Christians (6:2), and submitting to the Word of God (6:3–6). And as difficult as Paul’s instructions may be, hear and heed them we must.

Submitting When the Authority Is a Non-Christian

Submitting When the Authority Is a Christian

Submitting When the Authority Is God’s Truth



LET’S LIVE IT

All of us must give an account to someone. Not one of us is exempt from that simple truth. We must pay our taxes, obey traffic laws, and do our duty before the court. If we choose to resist civil authorities we must be willing to pay the price. But few of us find it difficult, if joyless, to submit in these areas. The real challenge of submission comes in day-to-day life lived out at our places of employment. We’ve heard Paul’s commands; now it’s time to heed them.



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If you work for a non-Christian, leave no reason for him or her to question your faith.

If you work for a Christian, refuse to take unfair advantage of your faith relationship.

Regardless of whom you work for or supervise, apply Scripture more than discuss Scripture.

How can you work for your non-Christian boss so that your faith is never questioned? What Scripture can you think of to support your answer?

How can you work for your Christian boss or supervise your Christian employee so that you don’t take advantage of him or her? What Scripture can you think of to support your answer?



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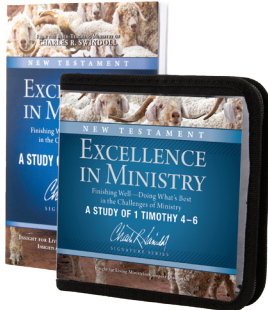
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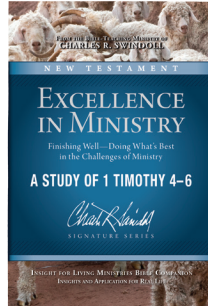
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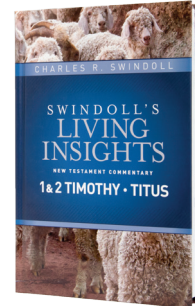
Tools for Digging Deeper



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