

Submission or Subversion? *By Rev. Chris Meier*

Subversion (noun):

The undermining of the power and authority of an established system or institution.

I never thought I'd see a time in the body of Christ in America where rebellion within our church walls was so insidious. Before you think I'm on a crusade preaching "Submit or Die," I would like to challenge your perspective of submission and the need—or pointless need—for it to be preached in the church today.

Most recent teachings make attempts to corral the body of Christ to be obedient to the leadership of a church. The definition meaning to be good, little Christians who sit on pews and utter sweet nothings to God; never questioning authority and never doing anything of import for the cause of Christ, lest you be seen as a usurper, attempting to minister in place of the authorized leadership. When you peel away the fancy videos, slick book and study guides accompanying these fantasies which claim biblical inspiration, they are nothing more than desires to subvert the body of Christ under the teachings of complacency. This subversion will neuter any Holy Spirit-inspired ministry within the body to go out into the streets to bring in the harvest of lost souls.

They do something else: they put the cart before the horse. What do I mean by that? Very rarely do these teachings start off with what classic, New Testament leadership should look like. I mean, if you're going to claim a people group submit to leaders at all cost, what does a leader look like, from God's perspective?

Before I answer that question, let me make one thing absolutely clear: The New Testament repeatedly tells us to submit. One of the classic Scriptures is from James 4:7: "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." Another important passage is from Ephesians 5:21-6:9, where Paul tells the church worldwide to submit. He tells wives, husbands, children, fathers, employees and employers to submit, one to

another. His parameter for such Christian submission? Love; love for the saints, for the family, for each other, and above all, our love for Jesus.

Let me also state unequivocally that our governmental language is love, but it is fleshed out through the understanding of our New Testament covenant. This covenant is based on the sacrifice and blood of Jesus. The attitude which should be present from leadership and among the brethren is one of family. You would never look upon your family with unclean eyes or with disrespect or with attitudes of superiority. The problem today is we have lost the valuable language of love as well as the life-sustaining principle of covenant.

Let's share another verse from Romans 12:1-3: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." There is no greater level of submission than to present our bodies as living sacrifices to our Lord. This is the first example of submission for any Christian, whether one wishes to claim leadership or not. I would present this as my first rebuttal to any subversive teaching on submission. Christians are to present their bodies before the Lord. For leaders to assume that means the body is to be presented to them, is apostasy. What do I mean when I say this?

We are called to learn Christ under the tutelage of good, Christian leaders. They are called the elders of the church for a reason. This is called discipleship, which we will talk about shortly. This is proper and appropriate submission to those in authority who care for our souls. But to assume that the people "belong" to us as leaders is, again, backward thinking. Even when we are in correct relationship to our Christian leadership, the body belongs to Christ. Leadership become under-shepherds, under our Great Shepherd, Jesus Christ. Our desire is to so care for the sheep that they are presented as holy before our Lord. They will be able to stand before Him on that Day, not lacking in anything— or at least not lacking due to their shepherds' discipling them into the things of Christ with care and brother-sisterly love.

Let me share a few more reasons why I believe many of these submission teachings are backwards. As I said before, if you're going to claim a people group submit to leaders at all cost, what should that leadership look and act like? After all, if you were taught proper discipleship principles when you first believed, you would know that leadership can reproduce good, as well as

bad character attributes in the people they minister to. Are there any hardcore principles or parameters to identify whether we should willingly stay in a church with leadership who do not accurately portray the New Testament standard?

When we view the body of Christ from a New Testament standard, we see all the early leadership, as well as all the apostles— in fact— the entire body of Christ, presenting themselves as sacrifices in the torture chambers of the gladiator games within the Roman era. Persecution and martyrdom are great equalizers. If you've looked at some of these teachings on submission making the circuit now in some churches and compare them to the early church's dynamics, they make no sense.

Imagine these book authors running around first century churches telling them they had this wonderful new teaching about submitting to leadership and do as you're told; i.e., drop your money in the basket, sit on a pew and listen to another sermon, or volunteer clean-up for the church building or some other good cause week after week after week. And what is your reward? Some feel-good willies during worship or by the end of the service. Even writing that seems comical to me.

From this standard of the first century church, a good portion of our American, Christian church leaders are backslidden. Our next area of apostasy comes from our lack of evangelization. According to Barna, almost half of practicing Christian millennials believe it is wrong to evangelize.¹ Frankly, I was floored when I read that. The cornerstone and, in my opinion, the only way to prevent demons and other religious spirits from infecting a church is to have a Holy Spirit-led evangelization outreach up and running within a congregation. This is where people are taught how to share Jesus.

Notice I didn't say share your faith, but to share Jesus. This is where we fail. We want to share our church; we want to share our love for Jesus, thus subtly making it about us. Quite frequently, I'll hear people brag about how much Jesus has done for them, making them seem more spiritual because they passed some unseen test. I'm not criticizing the very real need to share a testimony about how God brought us through a fiery test; unfortunately

¹ <https://www.barna.com/research/millennials-oppose-evangelism/>

though, and quite frequently, it ends with a not so subtle jab at how spiritually superior we are. We share a lot of things surrounding Jesus, but rarely do we know how to share Him and make it all about Him. I think if we do that more often, people will want to know Jesus.

These millennials who falsely believe evangelism is wrong are the next generation of leadership, if they're not in that place already. That attitude is the epitome of apostasy—evidence of a lack of submission to Jesus—but a perfect example of submitting to human leadership which also doesn't do what our Lord says. Remember, leadership has the potential to reproduce good ideas, bad ideas, characteristics and attitudes within a congregation.

It's also a perfect result of our next area of apostasy in the American church. How did these millennials get this basic doctrinal understanding so wrong? We convert but we don't disciple and we don't disciple according to New Testament standards. Converts won't fall in love with Jesus; they'll follow Him, possibly even try to do what He instructs, but they will never have a deep and abiding relationship with the Holy Spirit, which is the next step in a relationship with Jesus when you disciple people.²

The early church had a first lesson of discipleship. It is seen in Hebrews 6:1-3. This is what the writer to the Hebrew believers wrote: "Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this will we do, if God permit."

From what we read, this writer is wanting to go forward in their discipleship, not go back in studying the first or foundational principles. What are those? The first is repentance from dead works. Can you remember being taught that you must flee your desires for doing things your way, and instead take on how the Holy Spirit does things? The next is faith *toward* God. Can you

² Conversion doesn't work, only discipleship works, as viewed by this alarming statistic. According to Pew Research, Christianity loses more people than it gains from religious conversion. It found that 23% of Americans raised as Christians no longer identified with Christianity, whereas 6% of current Christians were converts.

remember when you realized that you didn't have to do all the work in a church? Do you remember when it dawned on you that Jesus is quite capable of caring for His creation, without your help?

The next is baptisms; notice the plural ending. What did you learn about water baptism? Have you received the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking with other tongues since you first believed? This was not an option for the early church. It's also not one for us either. Were you ever taught about the baptism of fire? I have to ask these questions because I know many weren't even baptized in water since they believed as an adult.

The next is the doctrine of the laying on of hands. How do I know we don't disciple properly in this area? Have you seen the explosion of child molestation in the church? Do you know how often 'Spouse X' wants someone else's 'Spouse Y' and off they go in an affair? If we viewed one another as brethren— family— we may finally understand why it is wrong to covet another's family or spouse.

Jesus: "You heard it was said, 'Do not commit adultery,' but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman/wife (same Greek word) in order to covet her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:27-28). The problem here is in the action of coveting or action of seducing to get what is not lawfully yours. Seduction or grooming people or manipulating them to do something is the problem. Grooming victims is a molester's habit. If we would disciple concerning the parameters of the proper laying on of hands, I dare say we wouldn't see molestation, abuse and adultery by church leaders either.

If we understood the resurrection of the dead and what eternal judgment looks like, from a New Testament perspective, many of those who aren't sure about their salvation would finally get some answers. These are all first steps in any discipleship program in a church. I don't have the space to go in depth concerning them (Hebrews 6:1-3). There are many other aspects to discipleship, like intercessory prayer, moving in the gifts of the Holy Spirit, as well as making new disciples as you lead others to Christ.

I didn't learn prayer firstly by a discipleship class. I learned it as I went to prayer meetings and listened to the church mothers and fathers intercede in

the Holy Ghost. Frankly, I've talked to young Christians who have never been taught the doctrine of the Trinity, let alone principles laid down by the early church elders of the first through fourth centuries. I don't have the time and space right now to go into hearing the voice of God, casting out demons or other areas of sanctification and transformation for the Christian. These are all places where we disciple unto the things of Christ.

But none of this will take place until one last area of apostasy can be eradicated within the American, Christian church. This crucible for pastors and five-fold ministry did not end with the New Testament era. It is as viable today as it was back then, and it is this: each shepherd or five-fold minister must be willing to spend their lives for the perfection of the sheep. All too frequently church leaders within denominations view their time in a church or ministry as a stepping stone to another bigger, better job. My husband calls this the plague of the BBD; the Bigger, Better Deal. We call these people hirelings. They're in it for the notoriety and the conference invites so they can fulfill that need for ambition and fame.

I can also prove, if I haven't already, that teaching a lopsided doctrine of submission is akin to subversion tactics. Do you know what Jesus' name means in Hebrew? It comes from a form of a verb meaning, "Oh, God Save." Its literal translation is *to rescue and deliver*. Do you know what Christ means? It is the Greek word *Christos*, derived from a verb meaning *to anoint*. This is from the original Hebrew word *Messiah*, meaning *anointed one*. This Anointed One has come to deliver, save and heal, according to most Hebrew texts. When we submit to leaders, this is what we are submitting to; the example of the One, willing to die so we may be rescued, delivered and healed. He was sexually pure, dying a virgin, without wife or children.

Now, let's look at another religion. Islam is the name given to the Muslim religion. Muslims believe that there is only one God, and the Arabic word for their god is Allah. A simple definition or meaning of Islam is to live in submission to the will of Allah. In practice, this means that Muslims must try to live their daily lives by showing faith in Allah; and that submission to Allah brings peace, thus the famous quotation that Islam is a "peaceful" religion.

The leader representing this was named Mohammed. The name literally means *the praiseworthy*. Mohammed is the prophet and founder of Islam. Born in Mecca in 570, most of his early life was spent as a merchant. He received a vision which sent him conquering other lands and peoples through force to bring them into submission of Islam. As a result of the timeframe he lived in, it was acceptable to allow himself and his followers multiple wives. Within many Muslim countries today they are allowed to consummate these marriages as young as nine years of age because Mohammed did so as well.

While that may be all well and good for Muslims, let me ask those of you who are Christian, does this accurately portray the New Testament's idea of submission? I say that because over time, as we leave the foundation stones of Christianity, it may be possible to agree with many other religion's ideas of submission. I mean, if we're going to go into lopsided teachings of submission, what's to stop us from eventually adding some of the ideas of Islam— whose very name means submission— onto our own ideas of Christian teaching?

It's no wonder present-day socialists are clamoring for Christian citizens to submit to government, turn the other cheek and do as they're told by paying more taxes and touting the media's political talking points. They've been taught the same lie that Christians are to submit at all cost and to never question leadership. We've got an in-depth teaching page on our website concerning this topic.³ We are to submit unto death when we are preaching the Gospel. Otherwise, self-defense and the need for Christians to expose corruption, especially in leadership and government is necessary— no, it's mandatory if we are to maintain a healthy church as well as healthy government. Do you know how our government's laws and early parameters were given birth? Through early church government covenants. That's right, church governmental documents birthed many of our most cherished governmental foundations in America.⁴

³ <https://www.ccm4worldwideworship.org/living-jesus-today.html>

⁴ "70 Years of American Captivity: The Polity of God, The Birth of a Nation and The Betrayal of Government." Go to Section 3. Amazon Clicking on the link will bring you to the Amazon page where my book description is located.

If you think it's unnecessary for Christians to address these issues, and Christians should abandon the government we started all those centuries ago, you have believed a lie. I can prove it. Do you know what the most atheistic country in the world is? It is China. Christians have not been allowed to influence anything in their government. The results are telling: According to sociologists Ariela Keysar and Juhem Navarro-Rivera's review of numerous global studies on atheism, there are 450 to 500 million positive atheists and agnostics worldwide (7% of the world's population), with China having the most atheists in the world (200 million convinced atheists).

Now, it is also critically important we understand how and with what attitude we expose corruption. Whether within government or the church, a healthy dose of humility, with an eye toward restoration is necessary. Within a church it's also important to know when it is better for a family to leave a church rather than cause division if they fall into some kind of disagreement with a specific church leadership.

It's also important for church leaders to have some kind of overseeing or ordinating authority made available to the body of believers as a system of checks and balances, so areas of sin, either doctrinally, in character issues or in morality can be addressed. These are all-important issues, which should be taught with proper Scriptural foundation. The reason why this is important is so we speedily remove leaders who are going to cause sin to become rampant in the body, and so the sheep can remain in an attitude of holy submission to God. This is also important to weed out false accusations and disagreements, which can cause strife and problems for the local church.

I'm not saying the body of Christ doesn't have a job to do in helping America with her issues of rebellion toward God, which goes hand in hand with her rebellion toward appropriate leadership. We have a huge responsibility to display our relevant love relationship with Jesus while we portray a Holy Spirit-inspired life. But if, as you can read on our website, the only time we are to lay down our lives as believers is when we are preaching the Gospel—and half of today's future church leaders don't believe we should preach the Gospel— exactly what are these submission study guides and teachings telling the church to do?

Are these teachings just a dressed-up rouse created to subvert a fiery Holy Spirit-filled church? Are they a distraction, taking our time away from evangelism and discipleship? Will the result of some of these lopsided teachings give birth to an apostate, reprobate church, reproducing blind leaders of the blind? According to Jesus, they will both fall into a ditch. Looking at our declining numbers today in American Christianity and church attendance, I'd say that's already been done.

I also don't want to ignore what a real Holy Spirit-led church looks like. By the way, it has nothing to do with its size of building or numbers of people. The true bride of Christ is alive and well today. It is true that she may be in other parts of the world, but there are embers growing in America.

She looks like a church where you don't have to preach submission because the love of Christ is so evident among the saints that they would never dream of causing division and strife to get their own way. She looks like a church where humility by the Holy Spirit is evident and the saints wouldn't harm leadership or each other through gossip, rancor or immorality. She looks like a church discipling folks concerning healthy evangelism, not a works mentality.

She looks like a church where worship is vibrant and the love of the leaders is so evident that you know they would die for the Gospel, while giving their lives for the perfecting of the saints. Each gives of themselves without broadcasting it. They just do the work of Christ with humility and love. She also looks like a church where you're not exhausted by doing good works, because the very Holy Spirit of God refreshes and keeps you healthy and moving forward.

These churches and leaders have made healing, signs and wonders all about Jesus. Remember, these things are a sign of correct Gospel preaching, not a sign of leadership perfection. Mark 16:20: "And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen."

Saints moving in signs and wonders, which would entail miracles, healings as well as other unusual occurrences, are not a seal that the leadership is perfect. Signs and wonders do not confirm the people or the leadership. Signs and

wonders confirm the Gospel message. All Christians must die to self, taking on the character and nature of Christ. The Holy Spirit is here on earth to help us. Leadership is made such to work as the Holy Spirit directs in order to perfect the bride of Christ; to present her as holy, blameless and spotless on the last day (2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:27; Revelation 19:7).

Here is the Apostle Paul speaking in Ephesians 4:1-16: “**I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord**, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.) And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.”

No leader is perfect. We are all as flawed as the next human. But leaders who make it all about Jesus are those who understand human frailty because they live it and can help everyone else overcome it through the testimony and the blood of the lamb.

“And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death (Revelation 12:11).”

You never even have to give submission a thought in those churches because the desire of the Holy Spirit envelopes those places. The God of glory delights and sings over His people in those places. The love of the risen Christ is palpable within their midst. The joy in sharing Jesus to a lost and dying world (neighborhood) is infectious. Moving in deliverance, signs and wonders propels the saints forward to continue to want to get closer to the Lord who is confirming their preaching with signs following. And the righteous of the Lord say so in those places. This is what healthy submission looks like, and you don't need to buy a new-fangled book on submission to explain it.