



Honor and Respect

Two Attitudes
Towards Authorities

1 Timothy 6:1-2a

Aaron Lee | Youth Worship | April 21, 2024

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Context	1
God Works in a Broken World	2
Sermon Preview	2
1. Honor Unbelieving Authorities	3
Representing Christ	3
Public Education	4
2. Respect Believing Authorities	5
Relating to Christ	5
Christian Education	6
*Believers and Beloved	7
Spiritual Families	7
Physical Families	7
The Gospel	8
Big Idea	9
Conclusion	9
We Work and Serve the Lord	10
References	10

Introduction

How should Christians treat those in authority? There's a question I've found myself asking my kids when I need them to listen and obey. I ask them, "Who's the boss?" And they know that the answer is me. I am the boss. I am their father, and I am their boss. What we're communicating here is that I am their authority figure. I have a certain control, power, and influence over their life. And they need to listen and obey me. But what's not being communicated here, and this is where it gets tricky, is *how* they are to listen and obey me. For instance, would it be right if they listen and obey and they do what I say – but they do it with a bad attitude? Or they talk bad about me behind my back? Would this be right? This is the heart of our message today – having the right attitude towards those in authority, and how we relate to authorities is actually grounded in our relationship with God.

Context

Before we start, we must say a word about slaves and masters. Here is a mini apologetic lesson for you before our sermon. Does the Bible endorse slavery? Much study has been done on the differences in slavery during biblical and early Roman times versus the slavery we think of today during the founding of America. That's why the ESV uses the word "bondservant" – it is similar to an employer-employee relationship. I'll share several arguments for why the Bible does not endorse the type of slavery we typically think about. The defining Old Testament story of Moses and the Exodus was an indictment against slavery – and it would shape Israel forever. But the world is still full of sinners, and slavery would continue to stick around.

Jesus would have to change things, but he did not do so directly. It's important to understand that Jesus' mission was not primarily social justice or political reform. These are important to the Christian, but they are not the main thing. The main thing for Jesus was to free us from the slavery of sin. As Christians, we live out the Gospel – and it's the Gospel that transforms our understanding of society and politics. Take Paul's letter to Philemon as another argument against slavery. He entreats Philemon to treat the runaway slave Onesimus as a brother. With the family of Christ as the ultimate reality, the Gospel transforms every relationship.

God Works in a Broken World

So in our passage today, when Paul talks about slaves and masters, he is not endorsing it. He is not saying that it is right. In fact, earlier in 1 Timothy 1:8-11, Paul includes enslavers – those who practice slave trading (Kostenberger) – as people who are lawless and disobedient, ungodly and sinners, unholy and profane. Unless they have found forgiveness in the blood of Christ, those who practice enslavement will be punished eternally in Hell. Paul did not outright condone slavery because this is not the fundamental change that he was seeking. Christ came to change our hearts, and from there the outflowing of God's love would turn the world upside down. But this is the context that Paul and Timothy were working in – a society that was deeply entrenched in their sin. A broken world that would one day be made new. A world that, for now, would need to have the Gospel applied in pragmatic, practical ways.

Sermon Preview

Our sermon will show two attitudes towards authorities. The interpretation and explanation of the text will be quick because it's rather straightforward. We're going to spend more time on our application today. I will also take an extended look at verse 2 in our text, that tells us the Church is God's family, and that all believers are especially beloved by God.

Allow me to give a couple words of warning. There are certain abuses of authority that we do not allow. Physical abuse, emotional abuse, and sexual abuse should be reported. Please reach out if you or someone you know is suffering from this type of abuse. The type of authority we're going to talk about today is the general, everyday authority that we all have to deal with.

Please also note that honoring and respecting authorities does not always mean obeying authority without question — especially if the authority figure is somehow forcing you to sin. Think about Daniel disobeying the laws that said he could not pray to the Lord. Think about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refusing to bow down to the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar. There will sometimes be consequences — but we must have a clear conscience before God as we walk in his wisdom. Let's get started.



1. Honor Unbelieving Authorities

The first attitude toward authority is that you are to honor unbelieving authorities:

*1 Let all who are under a yoke as bondservants **regard their own masters as worthy of all honor**, so that the name of God and the teaching may not be reviled. (1 Timothy 6:1)*

Paul is speaking directly to Christian slaves and how they are to regard their masters. When compared to the next verse, it's clear that Paul is speaking to those who have masters who are unbelievers. These are masters who do not know God. Paul says that the slave who is a believer carries the name of Christ, and this is *why* they must honor their masters. Christian slaves *represent* Jesus to their masters. If Christian slaves did not honor their masters, the name of God would be reviled. God's name, his renown, his reputation, would be insulted, slandered, defamed. And it wouldn't just be God's name – but it would also be the teaching that gets taken down. The doctrine, the Gospel, the Bible – gets blasphemed. You represent Christ wherever you go.

Representing Christ

So, will you represent Christ? Let's take your public school teachers as an example – let's say that some of them might be unbelievers. Your teachers have authority over you, and to honor them means to give value. Do you value your teachers? Not just as those who will give you a grade or a diploma – but do you value them as people who play maybe the most important part of your education?

I want to talk specifically to some of the younger ones here. It may be helpful here to remember that sometimes we separate our different spheres of living – the different areas that we attend to in our lives. Christians strive to be the same person – the same follower of Christ – whether at church, at home, or out in the world. We have all heard stories about how the hypocritical lifestyles of those who claim to know Jesus can dissuade and deter people from the Christian faith. Imagine singing on the worship team, and then swearing while you're at school. This is not an accurate representation of Christ. As Christians, you represent Christ everywhere you go. You represent

Jesus when you're on the court or field playing sports. You represent Jesus when you're in the band or orchestra. You represent Jesus when you're at home and talking with your parents or hanging out with your siblings. And you represent Jesus to your teachers. When you represent Jesus, you reflect him. This doesn't mean that you have to be perfect. This doesn't mean that you have to try to fake your faith. It just means being authentic and unashamed of who you are as a child of God. Your friends also see how you honor your teachers. You are witnessing and representing Christ to your friends when you treat your teachers with honor.

Public Education

I asked my Sunday School co-teacher Tiff some questions to see if she could give me some insight into my sermon as a public school teacher. I asked her if she could tell if her students were Christians or possibly Christians. She said overall, yes! She could tell if they straight up told her in conversations or in their journal writings. She sometimes had a feeling based on their conduct, speech and the values they seemed to have. She said that she felt honored as a teacher when her students showed her kindness by greeting and connecting with her. She really appreciated words of affirmation, like when students would tell her they enjoyed the lesson or valued her hard work. She remembers students who she connected with – whether it was celebrating academic achievements, spending time with students before, during lunch, or after school in her classroom where they really had the opportunity to build a relationship, or students who shared their lives with her and had stories of resilience. She also remembers students whose character really stood out – being helpful and kind, thoughtful and reflective, and those who loved helping others. We remember our teachers, and Tiff made it clear to me that teachers remember their students, too.

Granted, Tiff is a good teacher – and she's a Christian. But if you haven't encountered this already in high school, when you get to college you will find teachers who will speak offensively towards Christianity. You are still called to honor them. You have the freedom to engage with them, even try to persuade and evangelize them, but you must do so by honoring them. As you grow older, you will see this need for honor to be played out in regards to your managers and bosses, as well as your local law enforcement and government officials. When you honor your teachers – those with authority over you – you honor God.



2. Respect Believing Authorities

The second attitude towards authority is that you are to respect believing authorities:

2 Those who have believing masters must not be disrespectful on the ground that they are brothers; rather they must serve all the better since those who benefit by their good service are believers and beloved. (1 Timothy 6:2)

Paul pivots to believing masters. If the master is a believer, the slave might be tempted to be disrespectful. The slave might say that because they're both Christians, they can take it easy. They don't have to work as hard. Paul says no – you must still respect them. And not only that, but you are actually called now to serve all the better. This is given on the grounds of the Gospel, with the basis of them being brothers. Brothers here does not mean “bros” or “friends” – it actually means that they are family – bound together by the blood of Christ. As Christians, we relate to each other but we must also remember that we all relate to Christ.

Relating to Christ

So, will you relate to Christ? Let's take your pastors, counselors, and Sunday School teachers as an example. There is a certain type of authority here. With your public school teachers, you actually have an incentive to honor them because they have something you need from them – namely, your grades. But with your pastors, counselors, and Sunday School teachers – our relationship is not based off an incentive of grades or money. Christ is the grounds of our relationship. And because of Jesus, we actually have more incentive to respect authority.

There's a new book on Authority by Jonathan Leeman. In his book, he says that there are two broad spheres of authority – authority of command and authority of counsel. Those who hold the authority of command can insist on things happening now – and they have the means to make it happen. He argues that government, parents of young children, and the church have the authority of command. They can all exercise some sort of discipline with their authority. But pastors, and I would say counselors and Sunday School teachers as well, have the authority of counsel. There is no ability to enforce discipline on those that sit under this type of authority. So there is a

sense of willful submission to this type of authority. Assuming that pastors, counselors, and Sunday School teachers are serving for your spiritual good – it would be wise to apply Paul’s command to not be disrespectful. To be disrespectful would be to look down on them or disregard them. Do you pay attention to your pastors, do you consider your counselors, do you esteem your Sunday School teachers?

Christian Education

I want to reference the Student Voice survey my class did a couple weeks ago. We took the time to listen and learn about your experience at our church. There was a response that said that small groups can be unproductive. Some are fed up at times in small group when students are immature, goofing off, and not staying on track. I’m going to exhort all of you here to respect your counselors as they try to lead your small group. We’re not here for your entertainment. We’re here for your edification. And we’re here because we love you. Some of your pastors, counselors, and Sunday School teachers have been here for a long time – don’t discourage them. When new pastors and counselors come into your life, will you show them respect? I understand that it takes time to get to know someone. It even takes time to build up trust. But there’s a difference between saying I will respect you now under God’s authority versus saying you don’t deserve my respect until you’ve earned it. Some of you will be in a position of authority as you serve in VBS. I encourage you to model this type of respect for spiritual authority in a loving way as you lead your students.

If you ever find yourself where someone in authority over you – whether a teacher or a boss – is a Christian, you should be grateful to God. You don’t use your Christian commonality as an excuse to be aggressively assertive and brash in your attitude or lazy or sloppy in your work. Instead, you use it as motivation to work even harder because you are brothers in Christ.



*Believers and Beloved

I want us to zoom in now on the phrase “believers and beloved.” This is the reason for why we respect each other. It’s because those who are believers are especially beloved by God.

*2 Those who have believing masters must not be disrespectful on the ground that they are brothers; rather they must serve all the better since those who benefit by their good service are **believers and beloved**. (1 Timothy 6:2)*

Spiritual Families

This phrase is about the love that God has for his family. All believers are especially beloved by God the Father. And in turn, we love each other as a spiritual family with the same special love that God has for us. Think about the context of this passage. There is an obvious gap – a deep divide – between the slave and the master. There’s an obvious gap between the employee and the employer. But when you are Christians, that dividing wall gets broken down. Yes, the roles remain the same, but any hostility between the two is ended. There is a certain camaraderie in Christ that supersedes social status. Thinking about that survey I mentioned earlier, some responses said that guys and girls were unable to interact for fear of being teased. We’re not experiencing the full family of God when we do this. Imagine if in your home you have a brother or sister and you don’t talk to them at all. There’s something not right about that relationship. Some would say it’s wrong. So let’s remember that all believers are beloved – we need each other. This is what it means to belong to the family of God.

Physical Families

I want to take some time out now to talk about our physical families. There is a sense of stewardship that comes with our physical families. God has given you and your parents to each other. The Bible is explicit about our earthly families – we are to honor our fathers and mothers. This does not change even as you grow older, move out, make money, and get married – you are still to honor your parents. They have a special type of authority over your life. Think of the ways you can apply the principles of this passage to the way you relate to your parents. Some of your parents are believers. Some of your parents are not. Some of you already honor and respect your parents. Some of you do not. Belonging to the family of God does not erase the relationships we have with our earthly families. Instead, it gives importance and urgency to them. To evangelize and encourage those who are close to you.

The Gospel

Let's zoom out for a minute. Talking about respect and honor towards authorities might give the impression that we're just talking about being good people and contributing a positive influence on society. This is not the Gospel that we preach. We actually believe that we are not good people – we have sinned against God, and we sin against each other. Adam and Eve were the first humans to rebel against God's authority in the Garden. The Good News is that Jesus died on the cross for sinners. If you admit that you are a sinner, believe that Jesus is the Son of God who died on the cross for your sins, and confess him as the resurrected king over your life – you will be saved. The Holy Spirit will transform your life, so that you are able to live in a way that worships God and loves others – and this includes honoring and respecting those in authority. You will follow Christ here on earth and you will follow him up into Heaven.

Our example, inspiration, motivation, and foundation for how we work under others actually comes from Christ:

*who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, **by taking the form of a servant**, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:6-8)*

Jesus took the form of a servant, a bond-servant, a slave. It was his perfect submission to earthly authorities, even though he was clearly above them, that earned our salvation. As a child, Jesus submitted to his sinful earthly parents as a perfect obedient son. Jesus held authority in the Garden of Gethsemane, where legions of angels were told to stand down as he was headed for the cross. Jesus submitted to an earthly judge although Christ will one day judge the whole earth. On the cross, he submitted to mockery and ridicule from soldiers, though Christ is the one who gives orders to the stars and the sun in the sky. But with his resurrection and ascension, he gave us a taste of his true authority and glory. Jesus is the King, and one day every knee will bow before him, and every tongue will confess him as Lord. He is supreme and sovereign over our lives. He holds the world together and nothing happens without his word. We follow in his footsteps by copying Christ's example to worship God and to win others for him.



Big Idea

Christians honor and respect those in authority as we represent and relate to Jesus.

Conclusion

Let's go back to the beginning again for our conclusion. I asked you: How should Christians treat those in authority? We learned that Christians honor and respect those in authority as we represent and relate to Jesus. I instructed you on how to apply this truth to your teachers and pastors, and I hope you will apply this as you grow up to be men and women who have managers and bosses and sit under our local law enforcement and government authorities. And I talked about parental authority, and how the love from the family of God flows into the way that we relate to our earthly, physical families.

As I was preparing this message, I thought about that question I asked my kids: "Who's the boss?" They know that the answer is me. So I asked my kids another question: "Who's *my* boss?" They were unable to answer. I taught them that God is my boss. God is my authority. And he is the one who shows us how we are to relate to each other. It's not just about our actions. It's about the attitude and the affections behind them. The more I think about it, the more I see that I don't want my kids to know me as their boss. I want them to know me as their father. I encourage you not to think about God as a boss or an authority figure – but as a perfect and loving Heavenly Father. And I exhort you to work hard and witness well in this world, showing honor and respect to those in authority as a means to share the love and spread the glory of God.

Paul wrote a letter to the Christians in Colossae, and though writing to the bondservants there he was also addressing all Christians, both back then and now to us today:

*Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that **from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward.** You are serving the Lord Christ. (Colossians 3:23-24)*

The work that we do, the honor and respect we give to authorities, is not in vain. Our work is for the Lord. And if we work for our Redeemer, it will be rewarded. There is joy in serving Jesus.



We Work and Serve the Lord

At home, or work, or school
We strive to do our best
We work and serve the Lord
With honor and respect
And those who he gives charge
To counsel or command
We work and serve the Lord
For all flows from his hands
With Christ, our light, our guide
Our eyes fixed on the cross
We work and serve the Lord
For he has won our hearts
It is our joy to worship
Our life, an offering
We work and serve the Lord
We work and serve the King

References

- 1 Timothy: Defend the Faith, A 13-Lesson Study by Philip Graham Ryken and Jon Nielson
- 1-2 Timothy and Titus: Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary by Andreas J. Kostenberger
- Authority: How Godly Rule Protects the Vulnerable, Strengthens Communities, and Promotes Human Flourishing by Jonathan Leeman
- The ESV Study Bible by Crossway
- The Gospel Coalition Bible Commentary on 1 Timothy by Paul Jeon