

—Understanding the Christian’s Freedom in Christ—

Lesson 15–Question 6

Are Christians freed from obedience to men?

- I. There are two kinds of subjection.
 - A. Some Scriptures seem to say that it’s inconsistent with Christian freedom to be obedient to men. We find in Scripture a double charge: 1) men must not usurp a position of authority over others, Mt 23.9-10; 2) men must not be enslaved to others, 1Cor 7.23.
 - B. Other Scriptures, which appear to be contradictory to the former, charge us to be obedient to men who are placed over us, Rom 13.1-2; 1Pet 2.13-16.
 - C. How do we reconcile these two? The meaning intended by the two charges is this:
 - 1. we must submit ourselves to the authority of men in such a way that we don’t thereby *deny our Christian liberty* which we have in Christ;
 - 2. *and* we must maintain our Christian liberty in such a way that we don’t use our liberty as an opportunity for the flesh and thereby *neglect our Christian duty* as disciples of Christ.
 - 3. We’re to submit ourselves to men as free men and not as slaves *and* we’re to be freedmen who still submit themselves to men.

Thus there’s a twofold subjection to men.

There is a subjection which may be yielded with the preservation of our Christian liberty.	There is a subjection which cannot be yielded without a denial of our Christian liberty.
This subjection is implied in Rom 13 and 1Pet 2.	This subjection is implied in Mt 23 and 1Cor 7.
Pertains to the subjection of the outward man in lawful things.	Pertains to the subjection of the inward man, the soul and conscience, in unlawful things.
A subordinate subjection, a subjection in subordination to God, and so ‘for the Lord’s sake,’ 1Pet 2.13.	An absolute subjection, a subjection of our souls and consciences, for man’s sake.
Thus we may be subject to man’s authority in respect to the outward man in lawful things. We see this charged upon us in Eph 5.7, which speaks of men as our masters according to the flesh. Masters according to the flesh pertain to the outward man in outward things.	But for our soul’s and conscience’s sake we have no fathers and masters on earth, but only our Father and Master in heaven. We see this declared by Christ in Mt 23.10, which forbids us to have any earthly masters according to the spirit. Christ is to be the only Master of our souls and consciences on earth.

- II. Obedience to the civil magistrate. Isn’t it lawful for a magistrate to impose actions upon men which concern their consciences?
 - A. It’s *unlawful* for a magistrate to impose anything on a Christian which it would be *unlawful* in the eyes of God for him to obey. For this is to set up a human authority against Christ’s authority, the power of man against the power of God, Dan 3.4-5, 18.
 - B. But a magistrate *may* require those things of us which are clearly revealed to be the will of God. For in this case, we obey God in man, and not so much man as God, Col 3.22-24; Jn 4.42.

Subordinate masters	Supreme masters
Here we render subjection to a master who is himself subject to another, even God, Col 4.1.	Here we render obedience to one who is supreme and absolute.
Thus we obey subordinate masters in order that we may obey a higher authority, Col 3.22-24.	We obey supreme masters for their own sake, Acts 26.13-20.
	The Roman Catholic church requires absolute, blind submission to the authority of the Church. But it’s treason for any to usurp this authority over another and it’s sin for any to yield to it, Mt 23.9-10.

Subordinate masters	Supreme masters
	If God won't allow a supreme master over us in temporal things and forbids absolute obedience to men in temporal things, but requires us to serve men in subordination to Christ's Lordship, Eph 6.7; Col 3.22-24, much less will He allow a supreme master over us in spiritual things, 2Cor 4.2.
So men may be our masters and we may be subject to them in subordination to God and Christ, Col 3.22-24.	But it's the highest piece of slavery in the world to yield up our consciences to the will of any man, Dan 3.18.
Without trespassing on the authority of Christ or infringing upon the Christian's liberty of conscience, magistrates <i>may</i> require men to obey those things which are clearly revealed to be the will and mind of Christ, Rom 13.1-7. <i>Yet</i> , in doing this, he's the subordinate and Christ is the supreme Master. The magistrate tells us what is God's will, not what is his own will. He tells us it is his will, too, but only because it's God's will first, Rom 13.4.	

- C. What about when magistrates impose things upon men that are doubtful and questionable?
 - 1. In this case, it should be asked whether it's doubtful in itself or doubtful to me. If it's doubtful in itself, then it shouldn't be imposed at all, or "with all tenderness." But if it's only doubtful to me, then it can be lawfully imposed, although I can't yet lawfully obey it.
- D. It's necessary that we maintain a clear conscience before God in our subjection to men, mindful that while they may not be supreme over our conscience, they cannot be disobeyed in lawful things without defiling our conscience before God, Rom 13.5; Heb 13.18; 1Pet 3.16.