

# Embracing God's Plan for Authority in Parenting

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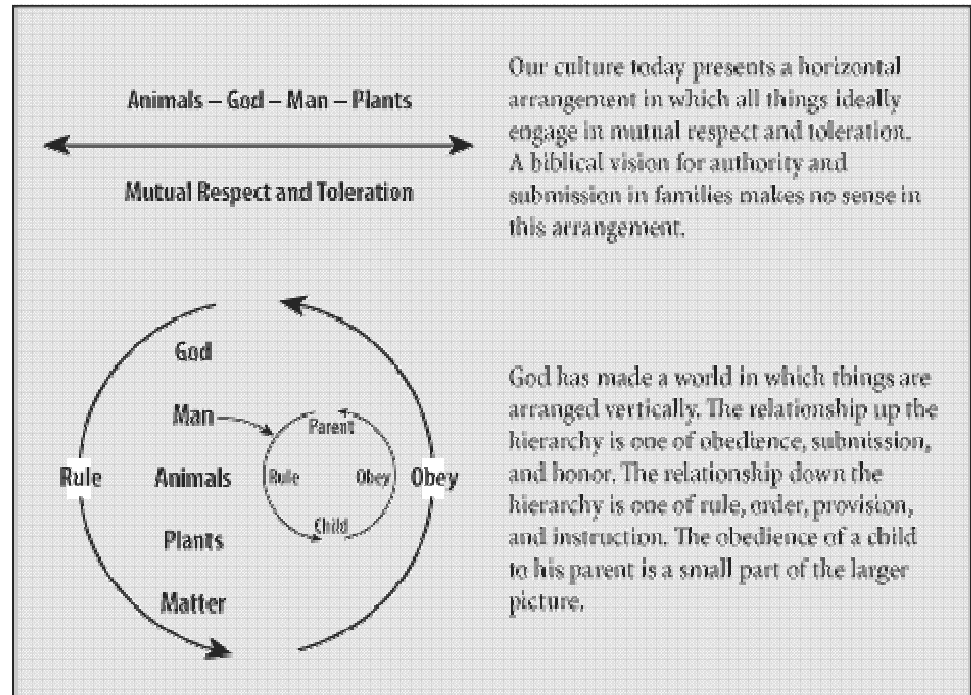
A major portion of your task in parenting is giving your children a distinctively Christian culture. Cultures are always built upon the answers to the most fundamental questions: What is real? What is true? Where did I come from? The answers to these fundamental questions shape a culture's ideas of morality, purpose, etc. Because our culture today is badly off the tracks with regard to these fundamental

questions, it presents a distorted picture of the world. We need to provide our children with a coherent and accurate model of reality, a model of how God has made things and how they are all supposed to function. Our goal must be greater than simply forcing or persuading our children to obey God's commands. Our goal must be to help our children understand and embrace the world God has made.

I have entitled this article "Embracing God's Plan for Authority" because I really have in view something far more profound than merely learning to obey. Don't get me wrong, I don't have less in view, but more.

Embracing God's plan for authority is necessary to understanding the world God has made. One of the first places children encounter authority is in their parents. God has commanded parents to govern their children, and for children to obey their parents. As we teach them to understand authority and submission, we are preparing them to obey God by living obediently and joyfully under all the authorities God has given. Unfortunately, the dominant culture in which we live is not a Christian culture. The dominant culture we live in has rejected God's plan for authority. One of the dangers we can fall into is to insist that our children obey without ever helping them picture the world in such a way that their obedience makes sense.

Because our culture has rebelled against God it tends to present a horizontal relationship between all members of creation. God, Angels, Men, animals are on one horizontal plain. Sweet and seemly interaction between them is presented as them making no demands on one another; as living in mutual respect and cooperation. This same horizontal presentation is made with regard



to human authority. Everyone must be a peer. Obedience is the product of persuasion or overwhelming force. Because our culture has no concept of a vertical hierarchy of authority in which equals willingly place themselves under authority structures that God has ordained, it cannot teach our children how to submit. We do not see submission as dignified and noble; we see it as servile and foolish. We do not believe that it is sweet and seemly for parents to rule and for children to submit.

A biblical picture of authority presents a world in which there is a hierarchy of authority established by God. The Bible describes the relationship between authorities and those under authority as vertical, as in "Therefore God exalted him to the *highest* place and gave him a name that is *above every name*," (Philippians 2:9 emphasis mine). With regard to lordship, then, Jesus Christ is not our peer; he is not on the same plain as we are. He is above us. All the relationships that God has established between the governors and those governed follow this pattern. They are vertical, not horizontal. In this vertical hierarchy of authority, it is sweet and seemly to honor and obey those who are above us, and to govern those below us.

Psalm 8 makes this clear. The Psalm begins with the majesty of God and his glory which is *above the heavens*. "*O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens. When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?*"

Next note the precise expression of hierarchy and structure in the created order. "*Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas.*"

The place of human beings is described precisely. Man is *lower than* God and angels, and all else is *under* his feet. The place of man is to obey God, who is *above* him, and to rule the rest of the creation, which is *below* him. That is the way God has made the world. The concept of hierarchy does not end with mankind's relationship to the rest of the created order; the same sort of hierarchy exists even within mankind. All human beings are equal in the sense that they are made in God's image, are crowned with glory and honor and are given rule over the rest of creation. In relationship to God and saving grace all human beings are equal; all come to God on the same basis and God is no respecter of persons. God has, however, established hierarchies of authority amongst human beings. Put another way, God has established authority structures and various spheres of responsibility for mankind. He has placed some in authority over others. We see this in the workplace, in the church, in the state and in the home.

We have authority structures in the workplace. *Col. 3:22 (ESV) "Slaves, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord."* (See also Ephesians 6:5, Titus 2:9). There is an interesting passage in 1 Timothy 6 that combines both submission and equality. The slave is to recognize that his master is above him in terms of authority in the workplace, even though they are peers in the body of Christ. *1 Tim. 6:1-2 (ESV) "Let all who are under a yoke as slaves regard their own masters as*

*worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and the teaching may not be reviled. 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. Teach and urge these things."*

God has established authority structures in the church. Elders, pastors, overseers, (terms used interchangeably in the New Testament) are called to direct the affairs of the church (1 Tim 5:17). They are to shepherd the flock (1 Peter 5:2). People under their care are to listen to them and heed what they say (Hebrews 13:17). Obviously, the authority of elders is not absolute. They are not to lord it over those under their care; they lead as examples (1 Peter 5:3), but God has given authority to those who are called to lead.

God has established authority structures in the state. Romans 13 reminds us that the magistrate is God's servant and exercises authority that God has given (Romans 13:1–4). That is why the policeman who lawfully and appropriately takes a life in the course of his public duties is not a murderer. He is acting not as a civilian, but as a representative of God's authority. In the same way, the President, when he gives orders that result in bombs falling and loss of human life, is not a terrorist, because he is not acting as an individual, but as a head of state. A ruler may be wrong-headed in his judgments, and he will be held responsible by God for his acts as God's appointed ruler, but his lawful acts as a head of state are performed in his God-given role as a magistrate.

God has established authority structures in the home. Men are to provide loving leadership, laying down their lives for their wives. Wives are to receive and follow the leadership of their husbands (Ephesians 5:22–33). Children are to honor and obey their parents (Ephesians 6:1–3).

All the authority structures described above are part of the orderly and magnificent way in which God has arranged the world for his glory and our good. God's blessing is on those who live obediently under them. (Romans 13:4, Ephesians 6:2,3, Hebrews 13:17)

If you are going to get beyond merely teaching your children to obey, you must provide a more thorough picture of God's world than "Obey or you'll get in trouble." Or "Obey and I'll give you. . . ." You must give them a vision for how obedience reflects an understanding of the world God has made. You are not looking, ultimately, for children who can be threatened or persuaded to follow your commands. You are looking for children who live self-consciously and joyfully in God's world as people who submit to God and to the authorities whom God has ordained. The best place for children to learn to live that way is in the home, under the authority of Mom and Dad. To live joyfully in the world, as God has ordained, is the most glorious and dignified way for creatures to live. It is, indeed, sweet and seemly.