

Bosses & Bossiness In Marriage & Family: God is Boss

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INTRODUCTION

We all have bosses. Even if we are self employed we are under the laws of the land, paying taxes, and accountable to customers. Our sin nature doesn't want one; we dream of a time hopefully in the not too distant future of being our own boss. The truth is that we will never be out from under a "boss." Look at it another way, although bosses are in authority over us, (They tell us how to work, what work to do, and generally when to do it), we are subject to bosses and authority **because God wants it that way.** Ultimately, God is our boss and authority.

The sooner we realize that our peace, safety, and well being is not found in self rule, or rebelling against authority, the better it will be. Biblical authority is exercised differently from the world's mindset. We resent authority in general usually because those over us tend to take advantage of it. In other words, when people in positions of authority use it to serve themselves it creates discontent from those under them. God isn't like that. God exercises authority motivated by love. Jesus said, "I came to serve, not be served." God doesn't command us to do things He's not doing already. This type of authority builds relationships by example, willingness, trust, and good leadership. It is difficult for us when we feel pushed it is much more inviting to be led or follow a leader.

What does this have to do with Parenting? What does it have to do with marriage? More than we might think. Both of these institutions are relationships built around authority, representative ownership (our kids are on loan...), equality, respect, etc. With any endeavor for it to succeed there must be order. Nothing fares well in confusion. Order comes from recognizing the need and purpose of authority in the home, in the family, and in a marriage.

Two combatants with equal power, resources, determination, drive, ambition, strategy, will fight with no winner. In the end it is a stalemate. There will be no direction, no guidance, no purpose but a constant conflict of the wills. Some might describe this as their marriage.

If we see our self as the boss and owner of our life, our marriage and family, we will find an irresolvable situation as just described. Many find themselves in a marriage or parenting situation doubtful and conflicted about who's in charge. This disorder leads to emotional anguish, disengagement, even abandonment as each partner circles the wagons so to speak concerning their own interests.

As strange as it might sound, divisiveness has its most fertile ground where there is no order. Unity cannot occur in a vacuum of authority. Where there is no leadership or vision there is weakness, strife, disappointment, disillusionment, frustration, and chaos. Imagine what it is like for a teacher in a classroom with no respect for his/her authority. The students mock, talk out, disturb, and everyone is doing their own thing—being their own boss. No classroom will be successful in teaching with out authority and control.

There are two things that stand out: the first is without authority being exercised there is no love, security, purpose, or possible success of any program; second, to embrace self rule and self ownership is fundamentally the problem with relating to God's authority.

In the first case, if we don't exercise loving leadership, pastoral (parenting) authority, and provide a safe environment, we are failing to understand the marriage and family institutions. God designed both of them. God intended these institutions to be a safe place, a growing place, a training place, and a maturing place. Love will not sit back and do nothing. Love will not allow disorder, rebellion, and insubordination to continue. Love will not allow violations in relationships to exist.

In the second point we must all accept the fundamental right that belongs to God—ownership. He created us and has the right to establish the rules, authorities, and powers. In giving us free will He didn't intend for it to be a free-fall of authority where none exists. It was given to us to choose to submit, to obey, to come under His dominion because we love Him, worship, and believe wholeheartedly that He alone is worthy of rule—He is worthy of being the boss.

So much more could be explained and unpacked regarding these two areas; however, I wanted to build the case in brief now to address some issues in marriage and parenting.

The issues in marriage and parenting:

What are those issues: Who's the boss? Who's in charge? Yes, to some degree but more importantly some underlying occurrences that manifest from time to time in both institutions.

Have you ever heard or accused someone of being “**bossy?**” Where does this attitude and practice come from? We aren't talking about legitimate expressions of authority when we use this derogative term. We are not accusing a teacher of being bossy when he/she exercises authority to maintain order, teach, or assign work. We aren't thinking of a commander in the army making decisions and then calling him/her bossy. We are thinking of those people in different circumstances who assume authority over another.

A friend who is bossy is someone who dictates and commands others who are in equal positions of authority. Friendship is not a boss/employee, master/slave, or officer/private relationship. When a friend begins to tell friends what to do and when, expecting compliance—that is being bossy.

Bosses in the Family:

Any sibling (usually the oldest), telling another sibling what to do, when, and where, is a bad situation in the home. This is a violation of authority when one assumes it over another. Children instinctively know that there is supposed to be equality between brothers and sisters. They feel resentment when one is allowed special treatment, special positions, or special authority. This usually occurs because the parents place the oldest in

charge while they are away. What generally happens is that older sibling having authority for the temporary period tries to take advantage of it—using it to serve self. Sometimes the older brother or sister will simply practice it even when the parents are around. Sometimes a parent will triangulate an older sibling into the parental role over the rest of the children. This is a whole other subject unto itself that occurs when the marriage relationship is bad or broken down.

What we must guard against, as parents, allowing “bossiness” to foster. If we love our children we will not allow respect of persons to happen. There are valid reasons for placing an older child in charge temporarily. We must work to make sure that the younger children know why, when, and how much. We must work to create checks and balances. Younger siblings must have recourse to bring to account an older sibling taking advantage of their new temporary authority, etc. The younger siblings need to have it recognized and enforced that this authority is temporary and with restraints **GIVEN BY MOM AND DAD**. The one in charge must realize that the authority given is limited to prescribed areas. It is like a **hat** being placed upon the one in charge that all can see. And the hat is removed immediately when the parents return—preferably when all can see it. The parental authority is not given to a child for keeps and it can be given to any child. There are times possibly that the hat will be placed upon another.

When “bossiness” manifests it must be disciplined. An explanation or teaching should occur with all present. Integrity is the principle guide; treating others as we would want to be. Siblings fundamentally must experience equality between them. This sets up a secure sense of self in relationship to people in the world. When inequality exists it produces inferiority or superiority and creates disconnection in community situations. Community must be based on truth, a child thinking it is inferior or superior (insecurity!) is a lie. Instilling the truth that each person or child has equal rights, equal attention, equal love, and equal importance in the home greatly inhibits **sibling rivalry** and future isolation. There is no other way, we must not have favorites, and this is what establishes security in our children. Can you imagine in heaven that God would show respect to persons?

Parents we need to monitor how our kids speak to each other. There should be a “No-knock” policy that prohibits name calling, disparaging remarks, insults, etc. Punishment of such offenses should be consistent and understood, if not public, by those involved—villain and victim. Along these lines we should not permit any sibling to order around another. We should not ignore, look the other way, or admire how cute it is, when this occurs. It is a violation to assume authority over another in deed or by the words we choose. That is why it has been offensive in the public arena to use racial slurs or words that diminish respect. A prime example has been the practice of white people calling black men, “boy.” It is a verbal example of trying to keep someone who is equal in standing before the eyes of God, in a place of inferiority or subordination.

Bosses in the Marriage:

In the marriage “bossiness” can occur from husbands or wives—I’ve seen both. In visiting a couple years ago I immediately noticed how he treated his wife. He acted

toward her as if he were her father—the boss. She was intimidated by him and pretty much complied with everything he wanted. I wasn't surprised to find out how unhappy she was later on. They eventually divorced because she'd had enough, stood up, and acted his equal. He tried to act repentant, but he'd treated her that way for years. I honestly didn't believe he'd changed either. I counseled her to do what she had to do. Marriage is not a slave relationship. Husband you are to love your wife as yourself. Jesus as our example laid down His life for us. He told us to obey His commands AS HE OBEYED THE FATHER'S COMMANDS.

I know that other world religions and fundamentalist Christianity has interpreted headship for the husband as some kind of boss relationship over his wife. The truth of Biblical sound leadership, headship, and authority is service, example, loving treatment, and integrity. A husband treats his wife with integrity, honoring her, including her, protecting her place beside him, making sure there is a mutual respect and submission to each other and God. This does not deny the husbands place to lead but it greatly tempers its exercise—love does no harm. **“Bossiness” over a wife is childish, foolish, and unfounded.** We lead by example, what would Jesus do? We don't push, command, or dictate authority over our mate. We don't treat her as a child. She is not our employee, slave, or servant—ridiculous. We are married, we are one, and we share leadership, authority, and mutual respect. I speak to my wife as I would want to be spoken to. She is my equal in worth and person, bossing her would be an assumption of authority over her not granted by God. We are to have dominion together. It was and is the curse of sin that has perverted this role into a husband ruling over his wife.

Does the opposite occur? Absolutely, have you ever heard a man complain about being “hen-pecked?” I remember watching my grandmother lord it over my grandfather. He was a mild man, jovial, pleasant, kind, and soft hearted. I got the feeling that over the years he never put his foot down on her demands. She ordered and he complied. After so many years the pattern set. I was and am disappointed when I think of it. A wife is to respect her husband. She is not to usurp authority over him, dictate, demand, or tell him what to do. Furthermore, “nagging” is disrespectful too. **Insecurity may pay a major motivation behind such assuming behavior.** A wife may reason that she has his love and attention, devotion, loyalty if she can get him to do whatever she says. After all, no one else has the right to tell him. A wife may try to manipulate her man by claiming he doesn't love her if he doesn't do or respond to her. She may have a legitimate need but take heed how she asks or how she gets what she wants—again let integrity be her guide.

It can be “bossiness” in a wife that sets a marriage on edge. It is also a lack of order continuing to manifest. A husband should explain and establish the proper relationship. He is not a slave, employee, or servant either. A loving wife will not humiliate her husband in public by such attitudes or commands.

Eventually, the marriage relationship will be harmed by either case of “bossiness.” The wife will shut down her affections or the husband will turn away. The intimacy or closeness sought will be lost. Resentment, anger, and the disrespect will destroy true communication that must be built upon mutual love and respect.

CONCLUSION

Bosses are a part of temporal and eternal life; bossiness however is not to be. The difference is legitimate versus assumed authority. The difference is also in recognizing how authority is expressed in the home or marriage. Authority when exercised properly provides safety, love, security, order, unity, and peace. When it is exercised for self-serving motivations it is destructive, out of place, and divisive. We need to know the difference and separate ourselves from the bad while practicing the good.

What to do?

In the case of the home with children:

- 1) Monitor and establish the sense of equality with respect.
- 2) Ask our children if they feel a sibling is “bossy.”
- 3) Teach good leadership skills such as: being an example, going before, serving first, leading not pushing; only asking others to do what we’ve done, leadership serves and doesn’t take advantage...etc. Hopefully this is the kind of parental leadership in our home.
- 4) When older children are placed in charge, explain it, talk about it, lay down the ground rules, and make sure there are checks and balances. Make sure that all involved know where the authority comes from—dad or mom.
- 5) Ultimately make the connection to all authority coming from God. Bring to their attention the scriptures concerning parents, children, and siblings. We are under authority as parents our children need to know we recognize God’s the boss over all of us.

I remember telling Greg to go upstairs and tell Ryan to do something or another. I deliberately told Greg to say to Ryan, “Dad says....” He went upstairs and promptly told Ryan without the dad says part. A fight ensued. When I found out what happened, Greg was in trouble for not following directions. Ryan was upset that Greg had told him what to do. Greg had done this probably because Ryan had taken advantage and told him what to do on other occasions. One session will not suffice it is repeated discipline and teaching that makes the difference, we must be consistent.

In the Marriage:

- 1) If it is not clear, talk about how each sees the husband and wife relationship.
- 2) Ask if our mate feels he/she is being bossed?
- 3) Practice Biblical leadership: serve not be served.
- 4) Practice friendship priorities such as, faithful, protecting not exposing of the other, looking for their “betterment” as a person, etc.
- 5) Try to communicate areas of conflict. For example: “When you tell me to do this or that, I feel like a child.” Or, “I feel like you are telling what to do when...”
- 6) Practice CONSIDERATION. This means we treat our mate as our self. We don’t inform, we consider, we don’t decide on our own, we include. No one dominates; no one dictates, love serves and submits desires, opinions, and wants, to each other. All decisions are subject to our mate. We work for agreement and each other’s blessing. God is in this, not in a mate acting on their own. We, our marriage, are subject to God’s word, period.
- 7) Watch what we say. Watch how our parents related and keep the good. If there are bad patterns, look inside, they are there, imprinted, wanting to be loosed. Repent.