

THE GIFT OF SUBMISSION: WHAT IT IS & IS NOT

“Wives: Be in Subjection to Your Husbands in Everything”

Ephesians 5:22-24

Special thanks to Doris Black for her excellent insights into this subject.

Introduction

- A. **Major foundation lesson of the family series** has always been “Honor the Woman.”
- B. However, I confess to you that I think I have been too one-sided and overly simplistic. Today’s society needs to deal just as much with attitudes of the women towards men as vice-versa.
1. Many, even Christian women, have been so influenced by our culture, that they do not have a clue as to what a “*meek and quiet spirit,*” and being “*in subjection to your husbands even as you are unto the Lord in everything*” involves. (I Pet. 3:4, Eph. 5:22-24)
 2. It’s puzzling to me because subjection is not substantively different in marriage than in other areas. It is not unique to marriage. Why do we have so much trouble grasping what it means in the marriage relationship?
- C. One of the reasons why we have trouble with this simple concept is because we have been infected by **our feminist, politically-correct culture** which has thrown out the Biblical pattern.
1. 1970s - “*A woman without a man is like a fish without a bicycle.*”
 2. 1993 - NOW - “*A woman needs a man like a fish needs a net.*”
 3. 1990s - Bumper stickers - “*A woman’s place is in control.*”
 4. Plaque in many homes - “*The sentiments expressed by the man of the house are not necessarily those of the management.*”
 5. Joke: “I know my wife’s in subjection and she told me I could say so.”
- D. **THESIS:** This simple lesson today gets at the heart of many relationships, not the least being our relationship with the Lord. The essence of being a Christian is Jesus’s statement: “Not my will but thine be done.” Look at three areas:
1. What **SUBMISSION IS**
 2. What it **IS NOT**
 3. Interwoven throughout the discussion give some **Practical Guidelines**

I. WHAT SUBMISSION IS:

- A. Ed Wheat - “The key to a successful marriage is: **THE HUSBAND MUST BE 100% COMMITTED TO LOVING HIS WIFE AND THE WIFE MUST BE 100% COMMITTED TO BEING SUBMISSIVE.**” He explains the dynamic this way: “As the **husband loves his wife, she is going to be more submissive to him.** As the wife submits to her husband, his love *for her* will surely grow. “**What kind of love is a husband to bring to his wife?** It is a strong, stable, mental attitude, always seeking nothing but the highest good for the one he loves. It is a love expressed in word and actions which motivates the one being loved to give of herself in return.”
- B. **What does it mean for a wife to be in submission to her husband?**
1. The word submit comes from a military term which actually means *to do an assigned job in an assigned way.* A responsive and receptive wife, therefore willingly, demonstrates that she *surrenders her freedom for his love, adoration, protection, and*

provision. Her response to his love should lead to an eagerness to meet her husband's needs even *before* he asks.

2. **It is an attitude of willing adaptation to that which God is leading her husband to do.**

3. **Submissiveness is the most important gift a wife can give her husband.** We know submission has to be a gift from her to him because it is contrary to all natural tendencies, just as agape (sacrificial love) is a gift from him to her that is also against natural tendencies. However, as both are given, it releases a **supernatural flow of love** between the husband and wife. Both are specially blessed and mutually satisfied as God intended.

C. Any marriage problems among Christians can be boiled down to *spiritual problems* where the husband and/or wife are not fulfilling their God-given roles. Either:

1. **The man is not properly loving his wife, or...**

Illust. #1 complaint women have about men is that they are selfish

2. **The wife is not being submissive to her husband.**

Illust. #1 complaint men have about women is that they nag

3. **KEY!** Both need to concentrate on doing **their jobs well** and not make it their jobs to be parental and constantly complain about how the other is not doing his/her job.

a. However, it is in order to **give the husband or wife feedback.**

b. It will backfire however, if you try to **force** the other party.

c. Marriage partners need to be serious about **giving the gifts of love and submission** as a matter of conscience. This empowers them to do so even when the *feeling* is absent. It avoids bitterness and resentment.

D. We must understand the **dynamics of a marriage** the way God designed it to thrive and prosper and not view any of these in **isolation**.

1. When God tells one party to do something, it is because it *fulfills some need* in the other person. It is not one-sided. There are interrelationships that need to be understood.

2. Eph 5:22-24 – *“Wives, be in subjection unto your husbands, **as unto the Lord**. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, being himself the Savior of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives also be to their **husbands in everything.**”*

a. Be careful. It does not say: *“Submit when they act like the Lord.”*

b. Wow! *“Let the wives be subject to their husbands **in everything.**”* This is a tall order with no loopholes.

1) Similar to *“children obey your parents in the Lord..”*

2) As long as parents don't tell their children to sin, they need to do what their parents say and submit as Jesus did to Joseph and Mary.

3) Women say: *“What if I don't agree?”* Or *“what if I think he is making a terrible mistake, or what if I know better?”* The text is clear, *“Submit to your husband in everything.”*

3. It is good for every husband to memorize and focus on Eph 5:25 and for the wife to

memorize and focus in on Eph 5:22-24. "Be in subjection to your husband as you are to the Lord... and to do so as the church is subject to Christ in everything."

4. **A man's deepest need as a man is to be respected.** (When a woman submits, the man feels respected.)

a. A man who does not feel *admired* by his wife will not be happy in the marriage or function at his full potential. That is why the command of Eph 5:33 "...and the wife see that she **reverence** her husband."

b. Def. Greek: "The wife is to *respect, admire, enjoy, fear or be in awe of, defer to, revere, adore, be devoted to, esteem, praise, and deeply love* her husband." This is her job and the Bible indicates she will be personally benefited as she does it.

c. If the wife **does not trust and respect her husband**, it is devastating to him and finally to the marriage.

"If a man's wife is able to look at her husband with *eyes of reverence*, he becomes a *king among men!*"

5. On the other hand, the **deepest need of a woman is to feel loved and cherished.** She needs to be honored and given a special place of privilege and preciousness. (Eph 5, I Peter 3:7) That is the atmosphere in which she blossoms and functions best.

a. Ladies, isn't it true you can put up with a lot as long as you know you are loved and *feel loved* by your husband? Isn't it easier to submit to someone you *know* loves you?

b. **Many men have second-rate wives because they treat them in a second-rate manner. Therefore, they never gain the real princess they would like to be married to.**

c. **In many ways the wife is a reflection of her husband.**

6. That is **WHY** God tells the man to love and cherish his wife as his own body. The wife needs it!! That is why God tells the wife to submit to her husband – **nothing makes a man feel more respected than when his wife is lovingly and cheerfully submissive to him.** He desperately needs that to fulfill his potential as a man!!

7. Gen 2: Tells the man he is to "Depart from his father and mother and cleave to his wife..."

a. Why? **A woman needs to know she is the #1 woman in his life, ahead of his mother. She is first place under God!!**

b. This command is given in order to fulfill a *deep need in the woman*, so that the marriage will be strong.

E. **What is submission?** To fully understand the reasons behind it, go back to Eden.

1. Some think Eve's first sin was eating the fruit – no, it was **thinking she had a better idea than God.** The root of her sin was that she had her reasons for eating and doing the opposite of what God said.

2. In marital conflict, a major problem is that the wife **thinks she knows better** than her husband, (just like the teens think they know better than their parents). Even if the wife does, someone has to be in a position to make the final decision so there is not constant conflict.

Illust. A wife was given to Adam as his helper. Instead she takes the lead, thinks she knows better than God, and commits the first sin. One of the consequences is that she is not to be the leader.

3. This seems strange at first. **I Tim 2:11-14** tells us that Adam sinned **knowingly, willingly**, while *Eve was deceived* and convinced herself that what she was doing was okay. Isn't that worse?

- a. **Adam's first willful sin was to eat** simply because Eve asked him to. His second sin was to blame his wife and not take responsibility for his actions.
- b. In marital conflict today, men still frequently struggle with shifting blame onto the wife.
- c. Why did God make man the head of the house? It was not so much a reward as a responsibility that would force him to *grow up and not shift blame*.
 - 1) God is saying: **The buck stops here, buddy!** No more blaming the wife.
 - 2) When a woman rebels against her husband and puts her foot down, she gives him an "out" to avoid responsibility. She becomes more his mother than his adult lover.

4. **Does that mean I have to do everything he tells me?** Yes, as long as it is not sinful.

II. WHAT SUBMISSION IS NOT:

A. It is **not** being a doormat or mindless servant.

1. **A woman has the right of appeal.**

- a. Esther came in to the King and risked her life to ask that the king reconsider a decision he had made based upon some information she needed to share with him.
- b. She was **respectful and he listened and saved the day**. But it was simply a request, not a demand or willful defiance. God moved the King's heart to listen.

2. Ladies, you have an obligation to **speak the truth and point out sin** in *Eph 4:15*.

- a. **If he tells you to sin**, to engage in a lustful dance in public, like Vashti, refuse. You might respectfully say: "I submit to you because that is what my Lord tells me to do. However, in this case you are asking me to contradict my conscience and violate His higher law. I can't do that." (In essence she is saying the Lord pulls rank on a husband).
- b. **What if he is doing something sinful?** Tell him *why* you feel it is sinful and how deeply offended you are and concerned about him.

- 1) After you have clearly expressed why you think something is wrong, pray that God will touch his heart and haunt him with the truth of what you have said.
- 2) *Don't* become like a dripping faucet.
- 3) You can and should confront tyranny in love as did Jesus.
- 4) The pattern of Matt. 18:15 applies to fellow Christians and is appropriately applied between and husband and wife who are also brother and sister.
- 5) If there is physical abuse or one is fearful for one's safety - RUN! Early Christians were not masochists; they fled the Roman authorities who persecuted them. However, it is not grounds for divorce and the goal is reconciliation. (I Cor. 7:5)

3. Ladies, you have an **obligation to give your husband your best thinking**. (A husband is a fool who doesn't solicit counsel).

a. True oneness comes from sharing your *mind, your body, your soul, and your emotions*.

b. Do not give him "a piece of your mind" but your best thinking. Otherwise you are cheating the husband of **important insight** he needs from his wife. (I Peter 3:7)

c. However, after you have:

- 1) Determined that sin is not involved...
 - 2) Given him your best thinking in a good discussion...
 - 3) Exercised the right of appeal, as did Esther...
- If the answer is still not what you prefer...**submit**.

d. Not because I say so, but because *Eph 5:22-24* says so.

1) Not because your husband is always right, but because **God says so**.

2) Not because your husband is smarter or superior, but because of *Rom 13:1-5*.

3) God made man the head of the house. He **who rebels against one of God's authorities is rebelling against God!**

a. You're not just telling your husband no. You are telling God no! That is open defiance!

b. Going head-to-head with God is a very serious thing to do. (*Heb. 12:29*)

B. It is **not** teaching a woman to trust in her husband but to trust God as he works through lines of authority. Some object: **How can God command me to submit when He doesn't know my husband?**

1. Some women have good husbands, others don't.

a. God set this up because He knew He would be directly involved through His lines of authority.

b. Even Jesus submitted to lines of authority. He said over and over again "**Not my will but thine be done.**"

1) He stood before Pilate and was passive. *Jn 19:11* "Don't you know I have the power of life and death over you? Jesus said, You would have no power if it was not given to you from above."

2) You may think you are the boss. You are not! God is the boss.

3) The same thing is true with your husbands, ladies. Ultimately God is in control.

2. **How does this work in the lives of Christian women today?**

Three practical steps:

- a. When a decision is in the making, go off and **pray and plead your case to God**. Ask God to **move and work in your husband's heart so that the best decision will be made**.
- b. Then **go to your husband and tell him you are praying for God to give him wisdom**. Let him realize he is God's authority in the home.
- c. Then tell him that **you will submit** and cheerfully go along with the decision even as you submit to the Lord. That scares him because then he has to face up to responsibility and can't blame you. It forces him to grow up!!

3. **When you submit to your husband, you are not trusting in your husband, you are trusting in God**. When you do *His* will and submit you can be confident there will be a blessing in it and that *His will* will be done.
 4. This is difficult because submitting to lines of authority is not in the American spirit!
 - a. Your children need to see how you subject to lines of authority so they will have modeled before them how to handle similar battles of will in their lives!
 - b. You can be a strong-willed woman and very persuasive, yet when the chips are down, **you can be submissive**.
- C. This is **not void** if your husband is not a Christian.
1. **God works through lines of authority, even if the individuals are not godly**.
 - a. What if my husband is not a Christian? He is still your husband. It doesn't say, "*Submit to your husband as long as he follows Jesus,*" but "*Submit to your husband as you submit to the Lord Jesus.*"
 - b. Consider Jn 11:49-52. The high priest was not a godly man, but appointed by the Romans as a political crony. Nevertheless, God used Him to carry out His will and bring Christ to the cross to atone for the sins of man.
 - c. Consider how Jesus blasted the Pharisees as hypocrites. Yet He said, "Because they occupy Moses's seat, do what they say, but do not do what they do!!" (Matt 23:2)
 - d. **Moses went to Pharaoh and asked permission** for the children of Israel to go. God was behind Him, so why did he ask permission? God had a purpose that he worked *through Pharaoh*.

(Ex 7:4-5). The whole world would know that He is God and that He would execute judgments against Egypt. The plagues attacked the entire religious system of Egypt.

D. It cannot be forced.

1. No one can **force you to be submissive, even your husband.**
 - a. Illust. He might grab your arm and twist it until you agree to do what he says like leading a horse to water but you can't make him drink. When you stop the force, it is over and usually lacks cooperation.
 - b. Stephen Covey says, "You can **hire a man's back and his hands, but he has to volunteer his head and heart, which is the enthusiasm and the creativity you need for a truly productive employee.**" This is also true in marriage. Love and submission are gifts that each one gives to the other. They cannot be forced or it damages the relationship!
2. Someone can **oppress you but no one can make you be submissive because it comes from the heart.** Husbands and wives are to give their hearts to each other until death.
 - a. Submission is more than just going along. It is making it work so that it is successful even if it is something you disagree on.
 - b. It is not rubbing it in later and saying "I told you so" when it turns out your husband was mistaken.
 - c. It is realizing that being the head of the house is not always easy, just as being submissive is not always easy and having a compassionate, instead of a resentful spirit.

CONCLUSION:

- A. We have looked at **what submission is, what it is not, and given some practical guidelines.**
- B. May we all have the faith to follow God's pattern for the family and not the worldly standards that are all around us, but that are failing miserably.
- C. We must realize that when Christians have marital problems, it is an indication of spiritual problems that point to deeper issues. May we have the courage to deal with them and not ignore them so that God is glorified and we all receive the blessings God intended for His children.