

Heart to Heart

Week Six – The “S” Word: Understanding What God Meant When He Said “Submit”

How did Jesus answer the disciples when they asked him what the greatest commandment was?

Matthew 2:37, 22:37-39; Mark 12:30, 31; Luke 10:27; I Corinthians 6:19, 20

Virginia Fugate concludes that women have thrown away or traded old-fashion love by:

1. giving up on oneness in marriage
2. replacing it with autonomy/self-interest
3. discarding commitment
4. making instant gratification the criterion for determining life's choices

From “*The Beautiful Faith of Fearless Submission*” by John Piper

What Biblical Submission IS NOT

Here are six things it is not based on 1 Peter 3:1-6.

1. Submission does not mean agreeing with everything your husband says.

You can see that in verse one: she is a Christian and he is not. He has one set of ideas about ultimate reality. She has another. Peter calls her to be submissive while assuming she will not submit to his view of the most important thing in the world—God. So submission can't mean submitting to agree with all her husband thinks.

2. Submission does not mean leaving your brain or your will at the wedding altar.

It is not the inability or the unwillingness to think for yourself. Here is a woman who heard the gospel of Jesus Christ. She thought about it. She assessed the truth claims of Jesus. She apprehended in her heart the beauty and worth of Christ and his work, and she chose him. Her husband heard it also. Otherwise, Peter probably wouldn't say he “disobeyed the word.” He has heard the word, and he has thought about it. And he has not chosen Christ. She thought for herself and she acted. And Peter does not tell her to retreat from that commitment.

3. Submission does not mean avoiding every effort to change a husband.

The whole point of this text is to tell a wife how to “win” her husband. Verse 1 says, “Be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives.” If you didn't care about the Bible you might say, “Submission has to mean taking a husband the way he is and not

trying to change him.” But if you believe what the Bible says, you conclude that submission, paradoxically, is sometimes a strategy for changing him.

- 4. Submission does not mean putting the will of the husband before the will of Christ.** The text clearly teaches that the wife is a follower of Jesus before and above being a follower of her husband. Submission to Jesus relativizes submission to husbands—and governments and employers and parents. When Sarah called Abraham “lord” in verse 6, it was *lord* with a lowercase *l*. It’s like “sir” or “m’lord.” And the obedience she rendered is qualified obedience because her supreme allegiance is to the Lord with a capital *L*.
- 5. Submission does not mean that a wife gets her personal, spiritual strength primarily through her husband.** A good husband should indeed strengthen and build up and sustain his wife. He should be a source of strength. But what this text shows is that when a husband’s spiritual leadership is lacking, a Christian wife is not bereft of strength. Submission does not mean she is dependent on him to supply her strength of faith and virtue and character. The text, in fact, assumes just the opposite. She is summoned to develop depth and strength and character not *from* her husband but *for* her husband. Verse five says that her hope is in God in the hope that her husband will join her there.
- 6. Finally submission does not mean that a wife is to act out of fear.** Verse 6b says, “You are her [Sarah’s] children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening.” In other words, submission is free, not coerced by fear. The Christian woman is a free woman. When she submits to her husband—whether he is a believer or unbeliever—she does it in freedom, not out of fear.

What Biblical Submission IS

If that’s what submission is not, then what is it? I suggested a couple weeks ago from [Ephesians 5](#) what is true here as well: *Submission* is the divine calling of a wife to honor and affirm her husband’s leadership and help carry it through according to her gifts. It’s the disposition to follow a husband’s authority and an inclination to yield to his leadership. It is an attitude that says, “I delight for you to take the initiative in our family. I am glad when you take responsibility for things and lead with love. I don’t flourish in the relationship when you are passive and I have to make sure the family works.”

But submission does not follow a husband into sin. What then does submission say in such a situation? It says, “It grieves me when you venture into sinful acts and want to take me with you. You know I can’t do that. I have no desire to resist you. On the contrary, I flourish most when I can respond joyfully to your lead; but I can’t follow you into sin, as much as I love to honor your leadership in our marriage. Christ is my King.”

The reason I say that submission is a *disposition* and an *inclination* to follow a husband’s lead is because there will be times in a Christian marriage when the most submissive wife, with good reason, will hesitate at a husband’s decision. It may look unwise to her. Suppose it’s Noël and I. I am about to decide something for the family that looks foolish to her. At that moment, Noël could express her submission like this: “Johnny, I know you’ve thought a lot about this, and I love it when you take the initiative to plan for us and take the responsibility like this, but I really don’t have peace about this decision and I think we need to talk about it some more. Could we? Maybe tonight sometime?”

The reason that is a kind of biblical submission is 1) because husbands, unlike Christ, are fallible and ought to admit it; 2) because husbands ought to want their wives to be excited about the family decisions, since Christ wants the church to be excited about following his decisions and not just follow begrudgingly; 3) because the way Noël expressed her misgivings communicated clearly that she endorses my leadership and affirms me in my role as head; and 4) because she has made it clear to me from the beginning of our marriage that if, when we have done all the talking we should, we still disagree, she will defer to her husband's decision.

The Goal: Everlasting Holy Joy

So I end with the reminder that marriage is not mainly about staying in love. It's about covenant keeping. And the main reason it is about covenant keeping is that God designed the relationship between a husband and his wife to represent the relationship between Christ and the church. This is the deepest meaning of marriage. And that is why ultimately the roles of headship and submission are so important. If our marriages are going to tell the truth about Christ and his church, we cannot be indifferent to the meaning of headship and submission. And let it not go without saying that God's purpose for the church—and for the Christian wife who represents it—is her everlasting holy joy. Christ died for them to bring that about."

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Submission is yielding to another's desires without resistance.

Greek ***hupakouo*** = typically used for obedience in the New Testament
"under the hearing of commands"

The subordinate is offered no alternative but to obey

Ephesians 6:1, I Thessalonians 1:7-9

Greek ***hupotasso*** = submission in the New Testament
"under placement or position, status or rank"

The subordinate consciously and freely gives their own will to the will of the authority

Ephesians 5:22, I Peter 2:13-15, Hebrews 13:17

- Obedience is an external act of compliance, typically to "rules"
- Obedience involves consequences
- Submission is a respectful attitude before, during and after ALL actions
- Submission involves freedom of choice

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What if marriage was for purpose of...

- **Becoming more like Jesus?**
Romans 8:26-29; Philippians 2:3-9
- **Learning to love others like God does, unconditionally?**
Romans 5:8; I Corinthians 13:4-8/I John 4:8; Galatians 5:14
- **Sharing in His suffering and in His glory?**
Romans 8:15-17; I Corinthians 4:6-18

I Peter 3:1-6

I Peter 2:21-25

Greek definition of meekness = strength under control

Ephesians 5:21-23 (Amplified Bible)

21 Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ (the Messiah, the Anointed One).

22 Wives, be subject (be submissive and adapt yourselves) to your own husbands as [a service] to the Lord.

23 For the husband is head of the wife as Christ is the Head of the church, Himself the Savior of [His] body.

Genesis 3:1-8; II Corinthians 11:3

- crafty = skilled in deception
- deceived = to be cheated
- beguile = deceived through false reasoning

"Eve" = life saver