

Trusting God in Life's Most Intimate Relationship

This week's chapter deals with trusting God in marriage. We are all far too inclined to compartmentalize our faith to Sunday morning and occasional disasters in life that require more of us than we possess. The Biblical model of trusting God calls on us to trust God-and to faithfully follow His teaching-in every aspect and area of life. In last week's chapter I dealt with the concept of trusting God sufficiently to implement His teaching in our management of money. This week's chapter applies similar emphasis to trusting God in our interpersonal relationships, particularly in marriage, the most intimate interpersonal relationship of life. As a person views and manages his/her marriage relationship, you can predict how he/she will view and manage every other interpersonal relationship. In all the teaching that we do regarding the "touchy" concept of the husband-wife relationship we typically neglect what I believe to be the most fundamental point. How much do we trust God in the perspective of this relationship? Typically men trust their physical force, an unbiblical idea that they are mentally and intellectually superior to women, or a self-serving demand that the wife submit to them as the church is to submit to Christ. Equally typically, women commonly trust their feminine wiles, their ability to manipulate their husbands into doing what they want, even deceiving them into thinking it is their idea, or to a more brute emotional reaction to gain their wishes. Both attitudes equally reveal an inherent distrust of God, if not an outright rejection of His specific teachings in Scripture regarding a godly marriage. The godly husband will be too busy loving his wife as Christ loved the church to build his position on constant reminders to his wife to submit. The wife will be too devoted to following Christ and obeying Scripture, trusting God, to resort to her ability to manipulate or to using emotions overtly to get her way. Godly transparency and honesty should rule the marriage relationship no less than they should rule every other relationship in our Christian profession. Once a professing Christian sacrifices transparent honesty he/she has lost the convincing power of Biblical faith and credibility. Specifically set forth in this lesson is the fact that both husband and wife voluntarily and willingly agree to follow Scripture as it defines their relationship and roles. The husband or the wife who reluctantly and resentfully attempts to practice the Biblical model will fail! No less here than in the basic premise of discipleship, a joyful willingness to follow Christ and to implement the Biblical model of the Christian life is required if we hope to succeed in our effort to model a better way to live before those outside our faith. The choice for Christian husbands and wives is perhaps clearer here than in almost any other area of our faith-life. Will we ignore the culture in which we live in favor of the Biblical "high road," or will we buy into the corrupt and confused culture of our time? Our decisions will impact our families directly and decisively. They will mirror confusion, outright chaos at times, or they will mirror godly respect for Biblical truth and conduct. The credibility of our Christian witness is at stake. How important is it to us? How fully do we desire to live the faith that we profess? Enough to re-examine and reshape our marriage relationship? Enough to transform our life so that both our words and our conduct speak the same testimony to the wisdom of God in our faith? God bless, Joe Holder

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Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; While they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear. Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands: Even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement. (1Pe 3:1-6) We live in an age that increasingly rejects Biblical values

and lifestyles. Since God made a godly marriage and family the foundation of all healthy cultures, we should not wonder that a God-rejecting culture attacks the Biblical model of the family. Periodically in recent years Southern Baptists have published their beliefs regarding the Biblical role for husbands and wives. Immediately the media picks up on the theme and ridicules the "cave-man" mentality of "such an idea." They wouldn't dare attack the Bible directly with such fierce rejection, but they feel free to attack a denominational position statement of the Bible view. The greater concern for Christians should not be the culture's or media's rejection of our values. Since when is that a surprise? Our concern should be that we live the Biblical values in our lives, particularly in our interpersonal relationships, the most intimate of which is marriage. In recent years I have heard professing Christians openly reject this Biblical truth with as much acceptance as the anti-God culture, if not with as much acrimony. In a conversation that I overheard regarding the Biblical qualifications for ministers and deacons, qualifications specifically and simply stated in Paul's letters to Timothy and Titus, a professing Christian stated, "Well, if we really enforced those rules, we'd never ordain anyone." At the point of that comment the conversation was dealing with the husband-wife relationship. The person's viewpoint obviously holds that no man or woman, even Christians, still practice the Biblical model of husbands and wives. In another case a family member of a person who held one of these church offices responded with an observation that was painfully obvious to all who knew the family, "Well, everyone knows who wears the pants in our family," a pointed reference to the fact that the man who held the office was not the head of their house. In another instance a woman whose husband was a minister, and outspoken regarding his belief in the Biblical model of marriage, smugly confided to some relatives that she considered herself to be unusually skilled at manipulating her husband into doing what she wanted while thinking it was his idea in the first place. She used the "He's the head of the family, but I'm the neck" long before the quote appeared in a popular movie. Her quiet rejection of her Biblical role destroyed any effort her husband might attempt to implement in teaching on this Biblical theme. These specific observations could be repeated many times over. What did Peter intend for us to understand about his directive that women should be "in subjection" to their own husbands? Strong's enhanced electronic dictionary identifies the various English words used for the Greek word here translated "subjection," and then defines and illustrates the word, "1 to arrange under, to subordinate. 2 to subject, put in subjection. 3 to subject one's self, obey. 4 to submit to one's control. 5 to yield to one's admonition or advice. 6 to obey, be subject. Additional Information: A Greek military term meaning 'to arrange [troop divisions] in a military fashion under the command of a leader'. In non-military use, it was 'a voluntary attitude of giving in, cooperating, assuming responsibility, and carrying a burden'." {1} There is no indication that the word implies inferiority in the person who is subject to another. Rather the word refers to a functional arrangement, to order. In the setting of a military organization it refers to the "chain of command." In voluntary relationships such as a church or a marriage the word refers to "a voluntary attitude of giving in, cooperating, assuming responsibility, and carrying a burden." Simply put, the word as it relates to a marriage conveys the idea that the wife voluntarily accepts and practices this role. Later (1Pe 3:7) Peter will identify that husband and wife are equally "heirs together of the grace of life." He does not build the Biblical family structure on superiority or inferiority, but on a voluntary relationship. I suggest for our consideration that the alarming frequency with which Christian husbands and wives fail to practice this clear Biblical model for their marriage reveals a refusal to "trust God" as the "holy women" of the past did. I offer that contemporary Christian culture is suffering from a two-fold problem. First, men have resigned themselves to a role of passive submission rather than gentle and godly leadership of their families. They'd rather "switch than fight," but Biblically they have ignored a nobler alternative, leading with gentle, but forceful, love and respect, earned in the eyes of their wife by consistent regard for her and her Biblical contribution to the relationship. Secondly, professing Christian women, have either consciously or unconsciously bought into the feminist philosophy of the day and try to dress it up in Christian clothes so that they can practice it, even as they criticize it. The husband's attempts to force his will onto his wife from the perspective of superiority,

claimed as a Biblical position, leaves the wife with a sense of devalued worthlessness in the relationship, so she feels compelled to resort to a manipulative, clandestine control of her husband based on dishonest gamesmanship more than on godly trust of her God. Both men and women must accept equal responsibility for this alarming breakdown of the Biblical model for the family. How often have we heard men, both in and out of the pulpit, misinterpret Paul's teaching on the husband-wife relationship from Eph 5 by emphasizing that the wife should submit to her husband even as the church should submit to Christ her head? Do you detect the subtle sidestep of this teaching? Paul directed the man to love his wife even as Christ loved the church, not constantly remind her to submit. The Biblical husband is not the brow-beating man who harangues his wife with this reminder that Paul directed to the wife, not to the husband. I suggest that the unhealthy state of many families and churches grows out of an unbiblical application of Paul's true lesson. He and Peter are fully agreed, and both, if we respectfully honor their roles as writing under the direct influence of the Holy Spirit, are teaching the same truth. Which part of their teaching applies to women? Which part applies to men? Women are bound by the Holy Spirit to trust God more than their feminine wiles and to strive to make their family harmonize with the Biblical model of the home. Men, likewise, are to show full respect and honor for their wives and to lead them with unselfish love, not with browbeating brute force that may appear in words and attitudes, even though they never raise a hand physically against their wife. Paul's reason for including the man's leadership of his family in the specific qualifications for church office appears in that context. As a man leads, or fails to lead, his family in love and respectful authority, he will also demonstrate in his leadership, or lack thereof, in his role as an officer of the church. If he fails in his family leadership, he disqualifies himself from church office. Both Paul and Peter affirm the same truth regarding the godly marriage and family. Failure to follow this Biblical model in a marriage reveals at its heart a deep distrust toward God. If the man relies on his legal position of Biblical leadership, he reveals lack of trust in God fully as much as the wife who relies on her feminine wiles to manipulate her husband. What is the solution? It is quite simple. Both husbands and wives should consistently trust God more than themselves and work in partnership to reshape their relationship into the model of New Testament teaching. The husband should avoid playing the "Because the Bible says so" authoritarian attitude, and the wife should avoid dishonest and subtle manipulation. Both husband and wife should be profoundly and intimately transparent and open with each other, voluntarily working to shape their lives and marriage into the image of a godly Biblical marriage. Do you trust God enough to risk it?

{1} James Strong, *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible Showing Every Word of the Test of the Common English Version of the Canonical Books, and Every Occurrence of Each Word in Regular Order.*, electronic ed., SGreek: 5293. hupotasso (Ontario: Woodside Bible Fellowship., 1996).

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