

Submission? Are You Crazy?

1 Peter 3:1-6

5/1/2016

Submission has fallen on hard times today. It is not a popular concept. It seems to imply that anyone who submits is automatically acknowledging that they are inferior to the person to whom they are submitting. People who think this way have already forgotten a very important point: Jesus submitted to His Father, and He was in no way inferior to the Father. Submission is not saying anything about the relative worth of the person. It has everything to do with a particular role that the person is supposed to play. Jesus' role on earth was to do the will of His Father, even though, when He came face to face with the full horror of what He would have to undergo, He asked that the cup pass from Him. Submission was toughest at that point, but our Lord said, "Not my will, but Your will be done."

This sermon, then, is primarily directed at women. Our culture has many different viewpoints about women, but the majority of our culture views any difference in role to be an automatic difference in worth. We have already seen how that is not so in the case of Jesus submitting to His Father. The worth of a colonel in the army is the same as that of a general, even though the colonel has to follow the orders of the general. This is true all along the chain of command in the military. That doesn't mean that all aspects of the military should be injected into marriage, mind you. However, the relationship of a colonel to a general has some helpful analogies that can help us understand how this submission thing is supposed to work. In the analogy, the wife is like a colonel, the husband is like a general, and the children are like the enlisted men. There has always been, and should be, lots of delegated authority that goes to the colonel from the general. The general that micro-manages the colonel won't every do well as a general. Now, we will take a close look at our passage.

In the context, we find that Peter has been talking about how slaves are to be subject to their masters. That creates a problem here, because Peter uses the language "in the same way" about wives. Does this mean that wives are no different than slaves? The answer to that question is no. Wives are very different from slaves. When Peter says "in the same way," he is referring to a situation where a believing wife is faced with an unbelieving husband. The point, then, is not that wives are like slaves, but rather that there are situations where a less powerful Christian has to live with a more powerful non-Christian. It can be true in the slave-master relationship (today, think employer-employee relationship). And it can be true in the marriage relationship if the wife is converted to the Christian faith, while the husband is not. Peter is not talking about so-called "missionary marriages," where a Christian seeks to marry a non-Christian. Paul explicitly forbids that kind of marriage. Peter is talking about two people who were both unbelievers when they got married, and then afterwards, one of them converted. Since husbands are the heads of households, and are usually physically stronger, this could create some potentially serious problems. However, the way in which Peter addresses this situation makes it very obvious that all wives can find application here. In fact, we may say that the principles in view here, if they are appropriate for a believing wife to use when dealing with an unbelieving husband, they are all the more appropriate for a believing wife to use when her husband is a believer. So, wives, in no way can you consider these verses irrelevant to yourself.

And, younger women and single women, these verses also apply to you, if you ever think of getting married, or even if you want to live in a godly manner while remaining single, there are similarities here with your situation. Ultimately, then, this passage is for all women.

First, we must ask this question: what is submission? Submission here is a very simple concept: it means that wives are to make their husbands happy. That will look different for different women. However, some principles go across the whole range of marriages. There is the principle of doing what your husband wants you to do. There is the principle of honoring him, especially in public, which we'll get to later. And, negatively, it means that the wife will not nag or be overly argumentative. This does not mean that the wife has to take a vow of silence. A good husband will always listen to and value the opinion of his wife.

Now, I said that Peter is primarily addressing the situation of a mixed marriage, where the wife is a believer, and the husband is a non-believer. We must keep in mind, however, that Peter has all marriages in mind as well. That much is clear from verse 1. Peter says "be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over." In other words, he is saying that some of you have believing husbands, and some of you have unbelieving husbands. Either way, you are to be submissive to your husbands.

Notice a couple of interesting things about verse 1. The text says, literally, that wives should submit to their own husbands. Peter says nothing here about all women submitting to all men, and this is a vitally important point, since there are some out there today who seem to believe that all women should submit to all men. The Bible nowhere says that. Instead, each wife should submit to *her own* husband. The second thing that is noteworthy here is that women are described here as visual sermons. Peter uses a word-play here. He says that if some men do not obey the *Word*, they may be won over without *words*, or literally, "without a *word*." One of the biggest temptations that godly women face when their husbands don't seem to measure up to their wives' standard of godliness is nagging. They nag their husbands about their lack of spirituality. What such wives fail to realize about men is that men almost never give in willingly to such nagging, and even if they do, their hearts are not in it. Proverbs compares the nagging of a woman to a continual dripping of water: annoying, useless, and continual. Even if you win the battle, ladies, you will lose the war, because you will lose the heart of your husband. He may give in to your one nagging. But you will have had to tear him down in order to do what you want him to do, and that is the surest way to lose his heart. And then you will also have to nag him continually afterwards in order to keep him doing what you wanted him to do. But Peter tells us of a different way.

It is a way without words, but with conduct. The stakes were a lot higher in Peter's day, because it was simply assumed that the wife would believe the same religion as her husband. But if the wife was a Christian, and the husband was not, that was seen as a great shame to a Greek or Roman husband. So Peter is telling wives here that they have to use other ways to please their husbands and show them that they are not trying to shame their husbands. That is why Peter tells them to honor their husbands. Look at the words Peter uses: purity, reverence, gentle and quiet spirit in verse 4. An unbelieving husband might very well want to live with a woman like that, because such a woman is very easy to live with. But there is a mission described here. It is the mission of evangelism. Verse 1 says that the husband may be won over by the conduct of his wife. The husband probably already knows the plan of salvation.

Presumably the wife has already explained this. But what the husband is going to want to know is whether the words are empty or whether they are full, whether this new religion the wife has will actually improve their relationship or destroy it.

Wives in such a situation have one single great temptation, and that is fear. Peter knows this, which is why he says in verse 6 that they should not give way to fear. Wives fear that because their husbands are greater in authority and power than they are, that therefore they will be doormats, unless they fight for the respect they deserve. The world in general thinks this way, and bombards the Christian wife with messages about what marriage is: it is a constant battle of the wills, says the world, and you need to stand up for yourself, stand up for your rights, stand up especially if your husband is brutal and uncaring. If he is a brute, then you need to defend yourself all the more. Wives, there may be a situation where your husband is so abusive that your life is in danger, in which case you need to call the police, and then minister to your husband and serve him while he is in prison. However, if your life is not in danger, and it is clear that your husband wants to continue to live with you, then there is another way, the way of Jesus. When Jesus was reviled, He did not revile in turn. Remember that this passage is another example of the principles of conduct given to us in verses 13-17 of chapter 2. He suffered for you. And he told us that we might have to suffer also. And wives, that might mean putting up with lots of evil and foolishness from your husband. You might respond, "Oh, but you don't know how terrible my husband is! You wouldn't say that if you knew." I am well aware of problems that husbands have. Frankly, if the only husbands alive were those who deserved to be alive, you would be fighting over a fairly small group of men. What Peter is saying here is that even if you think your husband does not deserve honor and respect, *give it to him anyway*. And Peter makes sure that we are aware that this is not just a surface thing. It is a matter of the heart. That's what verses 3-5 say. A woman's true beauty is her character. Peter is not forbidding here the use of all jewelry. What he is saying is that we need to pay a great deal more attention to our inner beauty than our outer beauty. Your inner beauty is the only thing that counts before God, as Peter says at the end of verse 4. Then Peter gives us the example of Sarah and Abraham. Sarah never tore down her husband in public. Instead, she called him "master," or "lord." Literally, the word is "lord." In our modern culture, most wives would only call her husband "lord" only in an ironic, sarcastic way. Wives, there is no quicker way to make a husband angry, frustrated, and unwilling to sacrifice for you than to tear him down where it matters most: his esteem in the eyes of the community. Would you want your husbands to tell everyone that he thinks you are fat and ugly? Then why would you tell everyone you know how little you respect him? This is deplorable, wives. It is directly contrary to this Scripture. Furthermore, it is entirely useless. Women think that their husbands will get insufferably arrogant and proud unless the wives take care to issue some humble pie for their husbands to eat, garnished with a good dollop of the ice cream of humiliation. Let me tell you that the more you attack your husband's ego, the more you will get him to defend it! You will actually accomplish the exact opposite of what you intend. In fact, there is no quicker way to get a husband to be arrogant and proud than to attack him. He will find a way to insure that your comments fall on deaf ears, and he will protect himself. Oftentimes, the way to get a man to be humble is the exact opposite: honor him in public. You are to honor your husband, and whether he deserves it in your mind or not is neither here nor there. People generally live up to the

public expectation. If you tell people that your husband is very insensitive, he will live up to that. If you tell people how wonderful your husband is, he will become wonderful. This is just the opposite of what the world thinks.

A couple of areas need to be addressed that are relevant for our community here. I know that I will be treading on thin ice here, so just know that I am trying to be careful only to say what Scripture says. The first thing is outward appearance and inward heart attitudes. Peter talks about this in verse 3. He says do not let your adornment be merely external. Peter is very careful here not to say that dressing nicely is bad. Rather, he is talking about the only too common mistake that many women make, which is to spend ten times more money, effort, and time on their outward appearance than they do improving their soul. Peter says that the wife should yearn for and strive for an incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit. What is a gentle and quiet spirit? It is a person who is not thinking all the time about criticism. It is a person who does not get angry when everything is not perfect. It is a person who is not always trying to fight the battle of the wills. It is a person who is not always trying to argue and get their way.

A first area of submission, then, is the issue of modesty. Modesty in dress is something that the Bible talks about. Notice how the Bible talks about it, though. There is no precise definition of what clothes are modest and which are not. There are no inches in Scripture on our clothes. In fact, there is more than one way to be immodest. One can be immodest in dressing so flashy that the whole point of the outfit is to draw as much attention as possible. Showing too much skin is not the only way of being immodest. But how do we know what is modest and what isn't? Here we have to be very careful. There are ways in which a situation can change that. What you might wear at the beach or the pool is not what you would wear in church, hopefully. What is considered modest in one culture and situation might not be modest in another situation and culture. So, instead of putting a rule out there that is more than what the Bible says, I'm going to address the inner aspects of modesty. Why do you wear what you wear? Do you wear it show off every curve? Do you wear it to get as much attention as you can? Where is your heart in all of this? If you want more specific opinions on this, I'm going to have to disappoint you, but I will give you one helpful bit of advice. If you are wondering whether something is modest or not, ask one of our senior ladies in the church for an honest opinion (and then make sure you're not offended if she tells you that what you're wearing is not modest). Your husband can also be a good resource in this. Husbands should not want their wives dressing in such a way as to get too much attention. Does this mean that ladies have to look like a dump, and dress as out of fashion as possible? Of course not. There can be such a thing as a false modesty that winds up being every bit as immodest as if a person goes out not quite fully dressed.

Here is a passage that I am fairly well convinced that most ladies have forgotten is in the Bible. 1 Corinthians 11:14-15 says this: "Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him? But if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her; for her hair is given to her for a covering." Believe it or not, the length of hair is actually addressed in the Bible! God thought it was something worth mentioning! Our culture says that hair length is simply a matter of style and personal preference. Paul says that it is, by nature (in other words, not limited by cultural preference) a matter of glory. Paul does not say that short hair for

women is a sin. Instead, he says that long hair is a glory for a woman. How many ladies out there are missing out on some glory? And men, long hair is something that Paul says here is a shame for you. It is not, then, a matter of cultural preference, or stylistic differences. Paul says that nature itself teaches us on this point.

A third area of submission that wives need to think about and pray about is birth control. I know that I am hitting all the difficult issues in one sermon, being a glutton for punishment, but we cannot be silent on these matters. This one gets people's feelings riled up. I will only say this: the Bible does not say much about birth control, but it does teach that life begins at conception. David says that God formed him in his mother's womb. He was a person inside the womb. The point here is that there are some forms of birth control that can kill a fertilized egg. A fertilized egg is a human being. Therefore, there are some methods of birth control that can murder children. Do your research and find out all you can about it, and submit to the Bible's teaching concerning life.

One last thing needs to be said. The Bible does not suggest that wives submit to their husbands, because it is a good idea. The Bible commands wives to submit to their own husbands as to the Lord. It is not optional, just because there are areas where you might feel that it would be dangerous to submit. Feel free to research a particular issue so that you can give a thorough reason to your husband for why you don't want to do something. But if, after all the information is in, he still asks you to submit, then you should. Husbands, if you want your wives to do something huge, and you are haven't done your homework on the issue, don't even think about forcing the issue until you understand all the ins and outs, all the pros and cons of a particular path to take. Only a fool asks his wife to do something without knowing what the possible consequences are. Nevertheless, the Bible teaches submission to wives, just as it teaches that we must all submit to Jesus Christ, being part of His church.