

A Faithful Wife is a Submissive Wife

Galatians 5:22; Ephesians 5:22-24

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Rev. Greg L. Price

People may publicly profane and blaspheme the name of God, they may openly discuss their sexual escapades or a recent abortion, and people around them who hear it may hardly bat an eye. But let the word “submission” be mentioned in a public context, and watch the sparks fly. The idea of submission in any context (whether submission to God, submission to lawful rulers, submission to lawful elders, but especially a wife’s submission to her husband) is despised and hated in our egalitarian society in which the idea of submission is considered antiquated, barbaric, but certainly not for a civilized, informed society.

The biblical concept of a wife’s submission to her husband is hated by many **in part because of** gross ignorance as to the true meaning of submission, **in part because of** the abuse of authority in the home, **but especially because of** a hatred for submission to the absolute authority of the Lord God Himself. Dear ones, if we do not find a place of love, safety, and trust in faithfully submitting to the Lord Jesus Christ, we will grow to despise submission in every other context. In such a case, we will only see submission as threatening our independence, our freedom, our equality, our desires, our pleasures, and our dreams.

Thus, in order to understand the biblical and faithful duty of submission, we must begin with the loving submission of Jesus Christ to the will of His Father (in His incarnation and life—Philippians 2:5-8; in His submission to His own sinful parents—Luke 2:51; in His suffering the full wrath of God for His elect—Luke 22:42). Without first understanding that our salvation from the guilt and penalty of sin rests upon the submission of Christ to His Father, women will not appreciate the fact that biblical submission is not disparaging them, is not treating them as inferior in nature to their husbands, and is not trampling upon their conscience. Faithful submission to your husbands, dear women, is ultimately submitting to Jesus Christ as He submitted to His Father to bring about your salvation. Biblical submission in our lives is the way of life—resistance is the way of death.

We continue in our series on the Fruit of the Spirit, looking once again at the fruit of faith (faithfulness) in its application to our homes, as the Holy Spirit (through Paul) tells us to especially provide and care for those within our own house, lest we be worse than an unbeliever (1 Timothy 5:8). The main points for the sermon this Lord’s Day are as follows: (1) The Role of a Faithful Wife (Genesis 2:18); and (2) The Submission of a Faithful Wife (Ephesians 5:22-24).

I. The Role of a Faithful Wife (Genesis 2:18).

A. God created Eve to be “a help, meet for him” i.e. to be a helper to assist Adam in his calling under God. Eve was not created to be Adam’s slave, or his master, or his rival, but to be his HELPER. There was no competition within Eve to struggle with Adam for leadership in the home when she was created by God. She was endowed by God with all of the gifts necessary to be a great helper to Adam.

1. Dear women, to be a helper is not the role of a lowly, worthless slave, for God uses the same Hebrew word (*azar*) to describe His own role in coming to the aid and help of His people (Psalm 70:5; Psalm 124:8). Dear men, we need help! We may be too full of pride to admit it and may think it is only our wives that need our help, but God knew we needed help, and gave us the blessing of a wife to help us fulfill our calling under God.

2. Therefore, let none of us believe or act as if the role of a wife as helper to her husband

in the home is a meaningless and mindless role. For to wives is given the high and holy calling of managing the home under the husband and of bearing and raising children to the glory of Christ. There is neither a higher nor nobler calling for a woman in all of the earth than to be a helper to her husband.

3. In fact I submit that the husband's role as faithful HEAD is no more necessary than the wife's role as faithful HELPER within a blessed Christian marriage. The role of husband and wife are equally important within a Christian marriage, for one without the other is a sure formula for disaster. It's like asking which wing of an airplane is more important, the right or the left wing. Ladies, your divine calling in the home is a noble calling and one without which the marriage will suffer great damage.

4. Although, dear wives, you are not called to lead your husband, you are nevertheless called to come along side of your husband to help him, to encourage him, to lift him up, to give him your input on matters, to pray for him, and to seek to make your home a haven of rest and peace, yea even a picture of heaven to come. That is no small task, but one for which a faithful helper in the home does pray (for this requires the power of the Holy Spirit bringing forth the fruit of the Spirit in your life and in the life of your husband). I dare say when husbands see their wives as helpers, rather than as rivals who compete with them for the rule in the home, home will be a place where he delights to spend time. What husband in his right mind would look for reasons to stay away from a wife who so delights in her calling as his helper?

B. Dear wives, rather than envying the role of leader that God has given to your husbands (which is a violation of the 10th Commandment, "Thou shalt not covet"), learn to be content and even appreciate the role God has given to you as his assistant. Is the role of an assistant to the President or to the Prime Minister an insignificant and menial role? Of course not! Nor is an assistant to the leader within the home. Study to be the best helper a husband ever had. Don't be like Eve to whom God gave every tree in the garden, but because He withheld one tree from her, she viewed God as unfair. She was not content with what God had graciously given her—she wanted it all. In like manner women, don't despise the calling of being the HELPER to your husband simply because you cannot be the HEAD. Don't be like Eve in envying what God has not given to you. By God's grace, find that place of service and joy in being your husband's helper.

II. The Submission of a Faithful Wife (Ephesians 5:22-24).

A. Just as the duty of a faithful husband (as head) is summarized in the word "love", so the duty of a faithful wife (as helper) is summarized in the word "submit".

1. Paul here uses a word in the Greek language (*hupotasso*) which means "to place or arrange under" (which word was used in the military to refer to those who held subordinate ranks to their superior officers). Thus, the Lord through the Apostle Paul calls wives to recognize their proper role and place within the marriage as that of a subordinate officer to that of their husband, as it relates to good order and lawful authority within the home. These are not my words, but rather God's inspired word.

2. Moreover, this is not a suggestion offered to wives for their consideration, but rather a command from the Lord to be obeyed and one to be obeyed continuously (in as much as this command is in the present tense): "Wives, continuously submit unto your husbands."

B. The specific Spirit-filled duty of the faithful wife to her husband is stated in Ephesians 5:22: "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord." Just as God calls a husband to love his wife as Christ loved the church because the weakness within a husband will be to abuse his authority, so God calls a wife to submit to her husband as the church submits to Christ because the weakness within a wife will be to compete for her husband's authority within the home. A sincere and cheerful submission is the work of God's Spirit in the life of a Christian wife—it is the fruit of faithfulness in action. Here is one of the evidences of God's work of grace that Christian wives ought to look for in their lives: cheerful submission to their husbands.

1. No Christian wife will be sinlessly perfect in her submission to her husband any more than a Christian husband will be sinlessly perfect in his love for his wife. We all fail in these duties and fall short of God's holy standards. That is why we need Jesus Christ and His righteousness, Jesus Christ and His forgiveness, Jesus Christ and His power. Without Christ we can do nothing, but we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us.

2. Thus, as many times, dear wives, as you may fail to be the submissive wife you know you should be, flee to Christ, confess your sin, receive His mercy, and then go to your husband to seek his forgiveness and press on (just as we husbands should do when we fail to love our wives as we ought to do).

3. Husbands, if we want our wives to cherish the biblical concept of submission, then let us lead them in love, cast our protective wing about them, honor and appreciate them for all that they do, and treat them as those who with us are made in the image of God and are heirs together of the grace of life. When our wives truly know that our authority is being used for their benefit and for their spiritual and physical well-being, our wives will learn (by God's grace) to embrace submission rather than to despise it.

C. In order to better understand this faithful duty of biblical submission that the Lord gives to wives, let us first state in the sermon this Lord's Day what biblical submission IS NOT, then we will consider in the sermon next Lord's Day what biblical submission IS.

1. **Biblical submission IS NOT servitude or slavery.** The wife is distinguished from a servant or slave (for servants and slaves are addressed in Ephesians 6:5-8). The wife is said by the Apostle Peter to be an heir together of the grace of life with her husband. For that reason, husbands are warned that if they do not honor their wives (i.e. treat them as those who are a special treasure), their prayers will not be answered (in 1 Peter 3:7). Remember that God did not create Eve from Adam's foot to be his slave, but created her from his side to be his companion and helper.

2. **Biblical submission DOES NOT imply inferiority as to nature, essence, or being.** God created BOTH man and woman in His own image (Genesis 1:27). Submission on the part of a wife to her husband no more implies her essential inferiority than does Christ's submission to His Father (1 Corinthians 11:3). To infer inferiority of nature from biblical submission is to deny the Trinity! For, dear ones, the Son perfectly obeys the will of the Father in all things, and yet the Son is not inferior to the Father as to nature or essence. God has bestowed upon the husband and wife different roles within the family, but they are equal in nature and status before the Lord.

3. **Biblical submission IS NOT the mindless act of a wife who cannot think for herself.** Biblical submission does not imply stupidity or lack of intelligence in the least. Wives may in fact be superior to their husbands in knowledge and intellect, or in particular gifts and graces. Again I ask, does Christ's submission to His Heavenly Father imply his intellectual inferiority? Such a thought is blasphemous. For, dear ones, just as the Father knows all, so does the Son know all (John 16:30). Although Christ grew in knowledge and wisdom as He was a man (Luke 2:52), He knew everything as He was God. Biblical submission does not mean that women must leave their minds behind when they become married. Their input, counsel, and advice in various areas will prove to be an important asset in a good marriage. It is only the proud and arrogant man that cannot receive counsel from his wife. Remember God told Abraham that he should listen to the counsel of his wife, Sarah, in casting Hagar and Ishmael out of the camp (Genesis 21); and God commended the wisdom of Abigail who appeased the wrath of David rather than inciting his wrath as did her foolish husband, Nabal (1 Samuel 25).

4. **Biblical submission IS NOT an unqualified submission on the part of a wife to her husband.** Does Paul require an unqualified submission in Ephesians 5:24 ("in everything")? Absolutely not! Such a view would make a husband the lord of a wife's conscience, and would make him to be God (to God alone we owe an unqualified submission). Such a view would be a total abrogation of the First Commandment: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." Submission is always to be in only those things that are agreeable

to God's Word ("as it is fit [becoming, proper—GLP] in the Lord" Colossians 3:18). If the husband commands a wife to believe or to do that which she knows to be contrary to God's Word, she should humbly and respectfully explain why she cannot submit at that point, for her ultimate submission must be to God just as the Apostle Peter stated: "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). When Paul states that a wife should submit to her husband "in all things", he means in all things lawful, in all things agreeable to Scripture (cp. "all things" in 1 Corinthians 10:23). Paul does not at all require a wife to disobey God in order to obey her husband (as if whatever the husband tells the wife to do, she must do). Let me also add that a wife's submission to her husband's word implies that the husband's word is not only agreeable to God's Word (and not contrary to it), but also that the husband's word is reasonable and edifying. For example, if a husband tells a wife to stand on her head for 5 minutes, then jump up and down for 5 minutes, and then throw 5 rocks out the window, there is no reasonable or edifying reason or goal in doing so. Such a command may not be specifically prohibited by God's Word, but it is neither reasonable nor edifying. Since a husband's authority is not arbitrary and is not for the whim of his mere will, the exercise of his authority must have some good, edifying, and reasonable end in view (2 Corinthians 13:10). The godly and learned Samuel Rutherford was addressing the limited authority of church officers in the following quote, but what he wrote equally applies to all who are in places of authority (even to husbands).

No wise man would say that the Church might make a law, that all [its people-GLP] should cast stones in the water.... for what actions hath no good, nor lawfulness, nor aptitude to edify in themselves, these the [mere-GLP] will of man can never make good, lawful, and apt to edify, because only God, whose will is the prime rule of all goodness can create moral goodness in actions.... what rulers can in law and reason command, that they must will as good and apt to edify, before they can bind others to will it.... Rulers commandeth as God's ministers for our good, Rom. 13:4 (*The Divine Right Of Church Government And Excommunication*, p. 648).

This also means that biblical submission to the lawful **office** of a husband is not contrary to fleeing the abusive threats and actions of a wicked husband (in accordance with the Sixth Commandment and Christ's own word to flee persecution, Matthew 10:23).

In closing, men, we are not really prepared to be the leader God has called us to be until we have first learned the principle of biblical submission ourselves. Let us not play the hypocrite expecting our wives to be submissive to us while we refuse to submit in all things lawful (and with a willing and peaceful heart) to those in authority over us. Young men and single men, how do you prepare to lead your future wife in submitting to you? By learning now how to submit to those over you (in the home, at work, and in the church).

When we become upset and frustrated by what we deem to be a lack of submission in our wives, perhaps it would be a good time to take inventory in our own lives. For the word of God not only commands wives to practice submission, but husbands to practice submission in various areas of their lives as well (whether to God supremely, James 4:7; or to a boss, 1 Peter 2:18; or to those who are older, 1 Peter 5:5; or to lawful elders in the Church, Hebrews 13:17; or to lawful civil magistrates, Romans 13:1; or to one another, Ephesians 5:21). Since lack of submission is a sin that manifests itself in all of our lives, it is always important, men, to begin by taking the beam out of our own eye before we seek to remove the speck out of our wife's eye. Husbands, our humble submission to those who are in lawful authority over us will set an example for our wives to follow.

Wives, this truth should encourage you. For you are not the only ones called by God to be submissive. God does not despise women and therefore call them to submit to their husbands any more than God despises children and therefore calls them to submit to their parents, or despises your husbands and calls them to

submit to their Elders. Wives and mothers, if you want your children to submit to you, set an example of submission before them by the way you submit to your husbands. Submission is not evil. It is good. Submission is simply the keeping of the Fifth Commandment in all areas of our life: "Honor thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee." Dear ones, submission carries with it a glorious promise of blessing. Do you desire the blessing of God in your life? Repent and seek forgiveness for your lack of submission. Fall continuously upon Christ to fill you with the beautiful grace of godly submission. And know and be assured that a willing and humble submission leads to exaltation (Jesus—Philippians 2:9-11; wives—1 Peter 3:1).

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