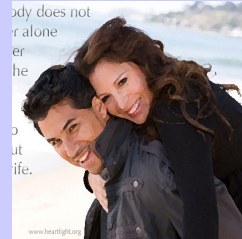




8 Submission

The following excerpts are taken from part 9 of "Building a Joyful Marriage." The full message is available on FoodForYourSoul.net



Willing Submission

Wives are to submit to their husbands as the Church submits to Christ. In brochure #7 there was a list of about 30 different ways that Scripture says the Church is to submit to the Lord. But in Ephesians 5:23 Paul points out just two. And those two are probably the last two that we would naturally expect. In fact, they almost seem inappropriate for the marriage relationship.

The Husband is the Head of the Wife

Ephesians 5:23 For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church his body, of which he is the Savior.

Like a Body

In a healthy person, there is no conflict between the head and the body. You get a splinter in your toe, the my brain sends an order to the hand to remove the splinter, and once it is all done your whole being is happy - toe, head, hand, body, soul, and spirit. That is the way submission works in the body - seamless harmony.

Like a Savior

Think of how a person submits to a savior or rescuer. If you are lost for days up in the mountains somewhere, and about to die, and finally the search and rescue team finds you, you will do whatever they say to do, right? If they tell you to hang on to a rope, you hang on. If they tell you to remain still, you remain still. If it means being rescued, you happily and eagerly do whatever they say. That is how wives are to submit.

"But my husband isn't rescuing me from anything." Exactly! You don't submit to your husband because he is your savior. You submit to him as to a savior, because Christ is the Church's savior, and marriage is a picture of that. Wives, you look at the eager willingness with which people come to Christ - that joyful, excited, grateful enthusiasm Christians have

when they think of Christ as the one who saved them from hell. And you take your cues from that attitude in the way you submit to your husband.

That is the kind of attitude the Lord requires of you toward your husband regardless of how he leads. Do not wait for him to become like Christ before you have this attitude. Even at his best his spiritual leadership is going to be weak and inconsistent and patchy and mixed with all kinds of sin. That is why you are called to submit not based on his worthiness but based on Christ's worthiness.

And please do not think of this as demeaning - it is not. If it wasn't demeaning for Jesus Christ to be submissive it is certainly not beneath you. When the brain tells the hand to remove the splinter from the toe, no one thinks of that signal given to the hand as some kind of burdensome, oppressive domination that is insulting to the hand. When a body part is not responsive to the signals in the brain, that body part is either lame or spastic. And either way, it is an embarrassment to the whole person. No one looks at a spastic, spasming body part and says, "I just admire that independence of that body part," - just the opposite. Well-disciplined athletes are highly esteemed and envied because their bodies obey their minds. But those who are paralyzed or spastic we feel sorry for.

Think of headship and submission like a dance. In the ballroom there must be strong, gentle leading, and eager, submissive following for the beauty of the dance to take shape. That is how the husband-wife relationship should work.

Voluntary

Wifely submission is voluntary. It is not optional - God requires it, but it is voluntary in that it is not something the husband is to enforce by some threat of punishment or discipline. Scripture instructs parents to discipline their children if they disobey their authority. Governing authorities are to use the sword to punish criminals who disobey their authority. Even the Church carries out discipline on unrepentant sinners. But never are husbands told to discipline their wives. The motivation is not punishment, but intimacy. It is crucial for the beauty of the dance, and for the accuracy of the picture of Christ and the Church that her submission be willing and eager.

The Church delights in submitting to Christ. In fact, anyone who does not long, from the depths of his heart, to be obedient to Christ is not a Christian. One hundred percent of all true Christians became Christians because they wanted to become Christians. Jesus died to purchase for Himself not just a people of His own, but an eager, willing people of His own (Titus 2:14). The Church does not submit to Christ out of some begrudging, forced servitude. We come willingly to a Savior we deeply love. And the wife's submission to her husband must reflect that.

The Attitude: Respect

The clear message of Ephesians 5:21-24 is "Wives submit to your husbands." And the message of verses 25-32 is "Husbands love your wives." But when Paul himself gives the summary of what he just wrote, he throws in a curve ball.

³³ each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must... And you expect him to say, "Wives must submit," but he uses a different word in place of "submit." ...the wife must respect her husband.

The fact that Paul can use the word "respect" to summarize a discussion about submission tells us that submission is fundamentally an issue of respect. Submission is not mainly about what you do. It is mainly about the attitude of your heart toward your husband. Grudging obedience is not obedience at all. The priests in Malachi 1 were rebuked even though they were doing what God told them to do because they were doing it and then saying, "What a burden." God does not accept grudging service because the purpose of our serving God is relational. God does not need our service. He does not benefit from it. He is not enriched by it. He gains nothing from it. The only reason why there is such a thing as working to serve God is for relational reasons. It is a way to express love to Him. Therefore the only kind of obedience to God that means anything is willing, eager, happy obedience. If you help a needy neighbor and have a grudging attitude about it, he still benefits some. He may not get your love, but at least he gets your help. But if we offer our "help" to God without our love He gets nothing out of it. The ONLY thing that makes our service to God mean anything is if it is an expression of love from our hearts. And so if the submission of wives is designed to put on display the relationship between the Church and Christ, obviously the attitude behind the submission is of paramount importance. If there is a bad attitude there is no submission - no matter what you do.

Fear

The word in Ephesians 5:33 for wives is translated "respect," but it is actually the word "fear." In fact, it is the same word as in verse 21.

²¹Submit to one another in fear of Christ.
³³and the wife must fear her husband.

There are different kinds of fear—a good kind and a bad kind. And the good kind protects us from the bad kind (Exodus 20:18-20). The bad kind alienates and causes you to withdraw because you are afraid your husband might harm you. The good kind of fear—the kind we are to have for God, is based not on the possibility of Him being bad in any way, but rather it is based on His goodness. God is so good that doing anything to forfeit access to that goodness is a frightening thing. The more highly you regard someone the

more terrifying is the prospect of that person being displeased with you. That is the good kind of fear because it is rooted in love, and unlike the bad kind it can coexist with love (Psalms 2:11)

Psalm 2:11 Serve the LORD with fear and rejoice with trembling.

Serve the Lord with happy fear – joyful trembling. Happy fear is what you have when you love the one you fear. It is when you tremble before Him and you are glad to be trembling before Him, because He is worthy of it – and because it is good for you to tremble before Him. Something inside you can feel that it is right, and profitable, and beneficial, and good.

His nearness is so dear to you that you are afraid of becoming estranged from Him. His smile is so sweet to you that you that nothing scares you more than the possibility of Him turning His face away from you. His laws and will are so perfect and so delightful that you fear breaking them. To fear God means to take Him seriously both as the punisher of the wicked and as the only source of good.

You see, whatever you regard as the main source of good is what you are going to fear. Those who struggle with fear of man – people-pleasing, caring more about what people think about you than what God thinks – those people fear man because they regard man as a source of good. They crave respect and love and acceptance, and they see people as the source of the respect and love and acceptance that they want, and so they conform their lives to the pursuit of winning human favor, because they fear their disfavor. And they fear their disfavor because that will mean the loss of the benefits they have to offer—with a happy, delighted, joyful fear.

Fear Your Husband or God?

That is how the Church fears the Lord Jesus Christ, and so that is the model for how wives are to fear their husbands. But if God is the only source of good, how can you fear your husband as a source of good? And if Scripture calls us to fear God alone and not to fear man, why does this verse call wives to fear their husbands? The answer is this – you are to fear your husband as part of the expression of your fear of Christ. It is not a competing fear; it is an expression of that same fear.

Your husband is a source of good because he is a key channel through which God pours out so much of His grace on you as a married woman. God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone.” Why? Because God wasn’t able to pour out enough grace on the man to satisfy him without Eve’s help? No. God could have easily thrilled the soul of Adam with indescribable joy and satisfaction without any help from Eve or anything else. But God didn’t want to do it that way.

He wanted to pour out his grace and favor on the man through the woman. And it is the same the other way around. As a married woman God wants you to receive blessing from Him in great measure through your husband. God provides food and clothing and protection and comfort and strength and leadership and guidance and a host of other benefits, and so much of that He wants to give you through your husband. So when you place yourself in a submissive role toward your husband, you open up the floodgates of blessing from God to you through your husband. And regarding the loss of that blessing as a serious threat is part of what it means to fear your husband.

Another aspect of the good kind of fear involves taking seriously your husband’s authority over you – taking it very seriously. It is not a joking matter to you. It is not something you take lightly. It is not something you fudge on here and there or regard as a small issue. You tremble at the thought of being found by God to be a rebellious wife. The thought of resisting your husband’s God-given authority is a terrifying thought that you dismiss the moment it enters your heart. You hold his position of authority as so sacred that your respect for it is evident even in the way you speak and in your body language. That too is a happy kind of fear, because there is something deep inside you that knows it is proper and right and pleasing and good.

Markus Barth put it well: “When a husband loves his wife with a love inspired by Christ’s love and (however feebly) resembling it, she would be a fool to prefer or seek autonomy apart from him, sufficiency in herself, or a dominant position over him (e.g. in applying to him a ... managerial motherly love, care, or anxiety). Instead of attempting to move him in the manner or by the tricks by which she may be able to move other men, she will be moved by him. Instead of shaping and changing him after her (preferences), she will feel thoroughly changed by him. Instead of bringing him under control, she will be overwhelmed by his love. ... A woman moved by this ‘fear’ will by no means seek to make herself autonomous in relation to him who loves her and she will receive him as one who in his own imperfect way reminds her of the true head of all the world, the church, her lover and herself: Jesus Christ. There is nothing degrading in ‘fear’ thus interpreted.”

1 Peter 3 is another text where respect is strongly emphasized.

1 Peter 3:5 For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands, ⁶like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master.

Literally it says, “like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham, calling him lord.” When did this happen? Some have assumed it was when Abraham told Sarah, “Just say you’re my sister, and don’t let them know you’re my wife.” However the grammatical

structure requires that the obeying and the calling Abraham lord occurred at the same time. And the only instance we know of when Sarah called Abraham lord was in Genesis 18, where Abraham told her to bake some bread and she obeyed, and while she was baking the bread she referred to Abraham as her lord in her thoughts. So the act of obedience was not lying about their marriage, but rather it was baking bread for some visitors. It is about as ordinary and mundane as an act of submission can be. But what Peter picks up on is not so much that she obeyed Abraham, but that she did so while referring to him with a very respectful title.

It should be noted that even in Abraham’s day it was not a common thing for a woman to refer to her husband as “lord.” That was a term of unusual respect and honor. There are no other instances of a woman referring to her husband that way in Scripture, and scholars assure us that it was not commonly done in that culture. Sarah uses a term that was normally used to address kings and high dignitaries and officials. It would be kind of like you calling your husband “sir,” although probably quite a bit stronger than that. But even if most women – even Christian women – tried to call their husband “sir” it would probably be so out of character that the husband would assume she was joking around or being sarcastic. And he would probably be right. Not many women have such admiration and respect and fear of their husbands that they would say “yes, sir” in a serious, respectful way when he said to do something.

So it is remarkable that Sarah refers to him as lord. But there is something even more amazing than that. The thing that makes this such a perfect illustration for the kind of attitude Peter is teaching about here is the fact that it is not even something Sarah said out loud. Any woman could force the word “sir” out of her mouth if she thought it was required of her, or if she thought it might do her some good. But Sarah didn’t say it. She thought it. When the angel of the LORD said that she was going to conceive a baby...

Genesis 18:12 Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, "After I am worn out and my lord is old, will I now have this pleasure?"

She was not thinking about anything to do with authority or leadership or some heroic thing Abraham did. She was just thinking about the fact that his body was old and incapable of procreation. Her thoughts were just ordinary, plain, everyday type thoughts - in fact, they were thoughts about his weakness and frailty, but when she thought of her husband she thought of him as “my lord.”

What that shows us is that this was her genuine attitude. It wasn’t for show. It wasn’t to manipulate him. It wasn’t to butter him up or prove anything to him. It wasn’t to prove anything to us (when she had these thoughts she didn’t know anyone would be listening). It was just her natural way of thinking about her husband.

No doubt her attitude did come out in her speech. If you think you have a respectful attitude toward your husband but it doesn’t come out in your speech and actions, you are kidding yourself. What is in the heart comes out of the mouth. So I am not saying that it as unimportant what you say as long as you think the right thing. What I am saying is that it has to be such a genuine part of the fabric of your heart that it comes up not only in your speech and actions but even in your most private thoughts.