

"Following the Blueprint—A Wife's Submission"

Ephesians 5:22-24

- I. Introduction
 - A. The difficult word of this text is *submit*, because it is hard in a marriage relationship for anyone to give up anything
 - B. Submission has become a lightning rod issue in our culture
 - C. We should never be frightened of anything found in the Bible; we serve a loving God who has our best interests in mind—He always wants the highest for us
 - D. People bristle against the word *submit* because this text has been abused
 1. Some men have the domestic prowess of Jabba the Hutt
 2. This text does not condone a husband's overbearing attitude
 - a. That attitude will cause the wife to shut down, because it crushes her spirit, and she then resorts to silence
 - b. This leads to a couple that doesn't communicate
 - E. The text is short—as Winston Churchill said, "All great things are simple, and many can be expressed in single words"
 1. Husbands—love (see v. 25)
 2. Wives—submit (see v. 22)
 - F. Submission is not oppression, it is not slavery, and it is not a right for someone to abuse another person
 1. The submissive role has been dignified, elevated by Jesus Christ
 2. This text should not be ignored by those who don't think it applies to them; it reinforces the response that we, the church, are to have toward the Lord
 3. Marriage is to be a reflection of that response
 - G. These roles, though stated simply, can be difficult to pull off
 1. "As Christ...loved the church" (v. 25)
 2. "As to the Lord" (v. 22)
- II. Submission Is Personal (v. 22a)
 - A. The term *submission* was originally a military term
 1. It means to place oneself under
 2. In the Greek, this is used in the middle voice, meaning the subject acts for oneself
 3. Submission is something you do yourself; it is not forced or coerced
 - B. To understand the role of women in ancient times, it's important to consider the background of the New Testament era
 1. Women owe their liberation to the Lord Jesus Christ, not Gloria Steinem or Kate Millett
 2. Jesus gave honor to women in an era and culture in which women were not just sidelined, but nonexistent
 3. In the Greco-Roman culture, the role of women publicly did not exist
 - a. Men were autocratic; women were acquiescent

- b. Women were excluded from Roman citizenship and were considered to be on the same level as slaves, children, and criminals
- c. In early Roman law, men had the right to sell their wives into slavery or to have them executed
 - i. "Our ancestors made it a rule that women, because of their weak intellects, should have guardians to take care of them" —Cicero
 - ii. Women didn't even have their own names
 - I. The firstborn daughter took the feminine version of her father's name
 - II. Any daughters who followed were literally numbered
 - iii. Marriage was purely contractual; love was coincidental, secondary
- 4. Jewish culture
 - a. Theoretically, no nation had a higher ideal of marriage than Judaism, but a very low ideal of women in general
 - b. According to the school of thought led by Rabbis Hillel and Akiba, a husband could divorce his wife for any reason at all
 - c. A woman had absolutely no rights at all, least of all to divorce her husband (unless he became a leper or an apostate, or engaged in a disgusting trade)
- C. Then entered Jesus Christ
 - 1. Women played a huge role in His life; they were obviously drawn to Him, and none of them had any problem submitting to Him as the Lord
 - 2. Luke 8:2
 - 3. Matthew 27:55
- D. Jesus also treated women with grace
 - 1. The woman caught in adultery (see John 8:11)
 - 2. The Samaritan woman at the well (see John 4:1-26)
 - 3. The Syrophenician woman whom Jesus singled out as having great faith (see Matthew 15:28)
 - 4. Women were the last at the cross, the first at the tomb, and the first to proclaim the resurrection
 - 5. In the early church, women were deaconesses and prophetesses, and there were couples who ministered (Aquila and Priscilla)
 - 6. Paul taught that "there is neither male nor female" (Galatians 3:18)
- III. Submission Is Practical (v. 22a)
 - A. The submission of a wife is a practical role; Paul was simply pointing out how the roles of husband and wife differ
 - B. Everyone has to submit to someone or something as we go through life
 - C. Jesus:
 - 1. Submitted to His earthly parents (see Luke 2:51)
 - 2. Submitted to His Father (see John 8:29)
 - 3. Submitted to other people (see Mark 10:45)
 - D. Submission is a part of the Christian's life
 - 1. In society (see Romans 13:1)
 - 2. In the church (see Hebrews 13:17)

3. Children are to submit to their parents (see Ephesians 6:1)
- E. All of us are called to submit, and none of us can fulfill God's purpose for our lives without the attitude of submission
 1. "A man is not far from the gates of heaven when he is fully submissive to the Lord's will" —C.H. Spurgeon
 2. Submission to the Lord has to come before submission in the home
- F. Just because the word *submit* was used in a military sense does not give a husband the right to act like a sergeant in the home
 1. The word Paul used in the Greek is *hupotassó*, which means to willingly subject oneself to another
 2. Women are not told to obey their husbands; submission might include obedience
 3. However, when Paul spoke to children (see 6:1), he used the word *hupakoé*—literally *obey*
 4. So, husbands are not to treat their wives like children, servants, etc.—a wife is her husband's partner
- G. Submission is not about the superiority of the male; it's about the functionality of the marriage
- IV. Submission Is Purposeful (vv. 23-24a)
 - A. If the husband leads as Christ leads the church (see I Corinthians 11:3), *submission* is not a hard word to hear—it's a natural response
 1. Husbands who lead their wives in a self-serving, domineering way miss what Jesus has done for the church
 2. Wives who refuse to yield to their husbands' leadership hide how the church should respond to Jesus Christ
 - B. The purpose of submission:
 1. Submission enables leadership
 - a. Maybe the husband isn't a good leader because the wife isn't a good follower
 - b. Leadership requires someone who will yield power and control to a leader
 - c. Sometimes a wife has the best husband, but usually, a wife makes the best of the husband she has
 2. Submission points to Jesus
 - a. Marriage is an illustration of how Christ and His church are one (see vv. 31-32)
 - b. Marriage is modeled after redemption, but marriage points to redemption
 - C. Jesus' sacrificial love is a model for husbands; the church's submission to Christ is a model for wives
 1. If a human body does not respond to the direction of the head, we call that a disease or paralysis
 2. The purpose of marriage is to reveal God through people
- V. Submission Is Provisional (v. 22b)
 - A. There are boundaries to this submission
 - B. "In everything" (v. 24) sounds like submission without qualification; however, there's a context to this submission—something that goes *with* the "in everything"
 1. "In the fear of God" (v. 21)

2. "As to the Lord" (v. 22)
 3. "As the church is subject to Christ" (v. 24)
 4. "As is fitting in the Lord" (Colossians 3:18)
- C. Christ is the absolute authority in a marriage, not the husband
1. "The husband does not replace Christ as the woman's supreme authority. Therefore, she may never follow her husband into sin" —John Piper
 2. I Peter 3:1
 3. How does a wife respond to a husband's unwise leadership?
 - a. By submitting to that unwise leadership, she's not condoning it; she's saying that she can't deal with it, but God can
 - b. When you cannot trust visible leadership, you can trust invisible leadership; where you cannot trust human authority, you can trust divine authority

VI. Conclusion

- A. If a wife rebels against her husband as leader in their home, she is rebelling against God
- B. What seems like the hardest word in a marriage can actually be the healthiest word in a marriage
- C. With a submissive attitude, even toward unwise leadership, a wife's willingness to want to submit to her husband can win him over to obedience, or to salvation, in Christ

Figures referenced: Winston Churchill, Cicero, Kate Millett, John Piper, C.H. Spurgeon, Gloria Steinem

Cross references: Matthew 15:28, 27; 55; Mark 10:45; Luke 2:51; 8:2; John 4:1-26; 8:11, 29; Romans 13:1; I Corinthians 11:3; Galatians 3:18; Ephesians 5:21, 25, 31-32; 6:1; Colossians 3:18; Hebrews 13:17; I Peter 3:1

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