

Wives Who Submit unto Their Husbands the way that the Church Submits unto Christ

By Al Felder

“²²Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. ²³For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the savior of the body. ²⁴Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.” (Ephesians 5:22-24)

In this passage of scripture we learn something new about marriage. A mystery is revealed that gives a deeper understanding of marriage to man. God designed marriage to represent something very important. Marriage, as God designed it, represents Christ’s covenant relationship with the Church.

In the marital relationship a husband and a wife are to portray to a lost and dying world the relational oneness that exists between Christ and His Church. Wives, you are to portray the Church in this relationship. The Bible says that the wife is to be subject to her husband the way that the Church is subject unto Christ. Wives, are you doing your part to portray this relationship to the world, and bring glory and honor unto God?

The subject of our lesson is not a popular one in our society. For years now, the differences between a man and a woman have been downplayed. We are rapidly moving towards a society where the idea of masculinity and femininity is becoming taboo. Men and women are expected to deny the differences that exist between them because of their gender, and abhor any thought of role distinction between the sexes.

In reality the battle of the sexes is not some twentieth century phenomenon. It may mark the turning point in the relationship between the sexes in our society, but the conflict between man and woman is much older than our society. In order to understand how and why this came about we must look to the Bible.

It all starts in the beginning. *“²⁶And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. ²⁷So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.”* (Genesis 1:26, 27) Here we have the creation of man in the image of God. This is true for both male and female. Neither sex can claim this fact as something the other does not possess. Both male and female are created in the image of God, but what does that teach us?

Man and woman as created by God are equal in value and dignity. There is nothing about a man that makes him more valuable than a woman. Likewise, there is nothing about a woman that makes her more valuable than a man. Consider the following passage of scripture. *“Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honor unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered.”* (1 Peter 3:7) The husband is to live with his wife with an understanding that she is equal to him in value and worth. Both man and woman are heirs together of the grace of life. Each gender is made in the image of God, and with that comes a sense of honor and value that we are to display towards one another. It is for the purpose of establishing this fact that God presents this overall view of creation in Genesis chapter one.

There is, however, another fact that we are to learn from the creation account. In Genesis chapter two, God gives a more detailed description of the creation of man in order to teach something else. Although both sexes are equal in value and worth, they are not equal in authority. Each gender has a role.

By creating man first, God has given him the responsibility of headship. The woman being created from the man has the responsibility of submission. This truth is brought out to us more clearly in the New Testament. In 1 Corinthians chapter eleven, the idea of headship is discussed. *“⁸For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. ⁹Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man.”* (1 Corinthians 11:8, 9) God gives us this closer view of creation in order to show that headship and submission existed in the beginning as a result of the order of creation.

In the beginning we see what God intended for this relationship to be. We have a picture of sinless man who is full of love, and is tender and strong in his moral leadership in relation to his wife. We also have a picture of sinless woman who is full of love and joyful, and responsive in support of her husband’s leadership. There is no belittling on the part of the man towards the woman, nor is there any groveling on the part of the woman towards the man. Both man and woman are living out in beautiful harmony their unique and different responsibilities according to the roles that God has given them.

Then, along comes Satan. He hates God. He rejected his role because he wanted to be god. Satan loves nothing more than taking the order that God has established and twisting it in order to cause confusion. This is exactly the picture we find in Genesis chapter three.

Satan approached the woman. Once again, we read of this event in the New Testament. *“And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression.”* (1 Timothy 2:14) Does this mean that woman can be more easily tempted than man? Is she more gullible or easier prey? The answer to these questions is no. Both man and woman are created

in the image of God. Neither gender is more moral or possesses more integrity than the other, but they do have different roles.

Satan approached the woman, and made her the spokesperson because that's exactly what should not have happened. He is attaching God's pattern of order. By drawing out the woman he made her the moral guardian of the home. The man; on the other hand, stands idly by becoming silent, withdrawn, weak, and passive.

With this in mind, the point to the passage in 1 Timothy is not that the woman can be more easily deceived than man. The point of the passage is that great ruin is the consequence of God's order of leadership being rejected. Both men and women are more vulnerable to error when they forsake God's order.

Satan takes great delight in his work. He has caused a confusion of the sexes that has lasted through the ages. Any distinction between the sexes is to be denied. The order that God created is turned upside down. Men are taught to deny their masculinity, and women their femininity. As a result men are often more passive, and women are often more aggressive today. In general, we are confused about what a man should be and what a woman should be.

When sin entered into the world it had a lasting impact on the relationship between a man and woman. God approaches the man first because it was his responsibility to lead and protect the woman. The effects of sin can be understood in Adam's response to God. *"And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat."* (Genesis 3:12) In other words, don't blame me, blame her. Right here is the beginning of all domestic violence.

Now, as a result of sin, there is conflict between the man and woman. *"Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee."* (Genesis 3:16) The last part of this passage of scripture depicts the struggle that now exists between man and woman because of sin. It is worded similar to another passage of scripture.

In Genesis chapter four we read of the conflict between Cain and Abel. Both offered a sacrifice unto God. Abel's sacrifice was accepted while Cain's was rejected. Resentment began to grow in Cain towards his brother. God warned him about his anger. *"⁶And the Lord said unto Cain, Why art thou wrath? And why is thy countenance fallen? ⁷If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? And if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him."* (Genesis 4:6, 7) Cain was on the verge of sin dominating him. It was going to overpower him, subdue him, and make him its slave. God told Cain that he must master sin, or rule over it.

The ends of both of these passages of scripture are amazingly close. The reason why this is so important is because it helps us to better understand the meaning behind the word desire. Sin desired Cain. It wanted to subdue him. In the passage where God addresses Eve, we read of the conflict that will exist in the relationship between a man and a woman because of sin. The woman's desire shall be to her husband or she will seek to rule him, and he shall rule over her. It's the battle of the sexes.

Men have often taken advantage of their physical strength in order to rule women. Sin has lead men to be abusive both physically and verbally to women. It is sin that causes a husband to mistreat his wife, view her as an object for his gratification, and treat her as a slave.

Women may not possess the strength of men, but they know how to subdue men nonetheless. A woman can often run circles around a man with her words, and when they fail she knows the weakness of his lust. The number one marketing force in the world is the female body. A woman can manipulate a man in order to get her way.

In Christ God calls both man and woman to break the bonds of sin, and return to His original design for marriage. He reveals His ultimate intention for the headship and submission of marriage. A husband is to portray Christ's loving headship of the Church, and a wife is to portray the Church's joyful submission to Christ.

Our focus at this time is on the wife's part of the relationship. She is to submit unto her husband. The word submit is a military term that means to rank under.¹ The wife has a different position or ranking from her husband. Submission involves more than just the idea of obedience. It also involves one having the attitude to subject their judgment and will to another.

As we stated before, this does not mean that the woman is inferior to the man as a person. Consider the example of Christ. *"⁵Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: ⁶Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: ⁷But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: ⁸And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."* (Philippians. 2:6-8) Christ is not inferior to the Father. He is God. Yet, Christ submitted Himself to the Father in order to carry out the plan of redemption. Likewise, the wife submits herself to her husband so that God's plan for the family can be carried out.

¹ Vine, W. E. 1996. *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*. Nashville, TN : Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1996. p. 606.

The Bible tells us the extent of the wife's submission to her husband. *"Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything."* (Ephesians 5:24) The husband is the leader, protector, and provider in the relationship. This covers all aspects of life. Therefore, the wife's submission to her husband is to be in everything.

In considering this point there are two things that must be clarified. First of all, a woman's submission to her husband does not mean she is not allowed to think or have an opinion. Woman was created for the purpose of being a helper to man. She was not created to be helpless. In submission, a woman is to honor and affirm her husband's leadership.

The virtuous woman portrays the true sense of a wife's submission. *"¹⁰Who can find a virtuous woman? For her price is far above rubies. ¹¹The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil. ¹²She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life."* (Proverbs 31:10-12) Notice the closeness of this woman and her husband. The Bible says that his heart safely trusts in her. In other words, nothing is hidden between them. He can tell her any and everything without the fear of ridicule or rejection. They are one. Instead of being just two individuals who are living together, they are husband and wife functioning as one.

In this picture of submission we find that the wife does what God designed her to do. She uses all of her gifts and her abilities to help her husband. She contributes her ideas and suggestions. She offers her wisdom and insight. She prays and encourages. She does these things not in an attempt to lead, but in order to help and support her husband in his leadership. When a difference of opinion does arise, she doesn't seek to manipulate her husband in order to get her way. Instead, she submits by following his lead.

Second, by submitting unto her husband a wife does not put him in God's place. God comes first. Therefore, if a husband asks his wife to sin; her obedience must be to God first. This principle is taught in the Apostle's response to the chief priests when they commanded the Apostles to no longer preach in the name of Jesus. *"Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than man."* (Acts 5:29) As the governing authorities, the apostles were to obey the chief priests; but when such obedience called for them to disobey God, the greater authority won out.

The husband has delegated authority from God, not absolute authority. He has been placed as the head of the home in order to carry out God's plan, not his own. Therefore, the husband has no authority to ask his wife to disobey God. In such instances the greater authority wins out. In regards to human relationships, the husband is to always come first. God, however, takes precedent over all.

In conclusion, a wife honors God when she submits unto her husband. *“¹⁶Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. ¹⁷And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him. ¹⁸Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord.”* (Colossians 3:16-18) By following her role and submitting to her husband, a wife demonstrates that obeying God is more important to her than getting her way. She displays an appropriate reverential fear of the Lord. She lets the word of God direct her life, and she shows a lost world God’s pattern for marriage by portraying the Church’s submission to Christ.