

18. What, a submissive wife?!?!

February 3, 2013

Not very long ago, I was asked to officiate a wedding for a young man whom I know and his fiancée. Since both of them were unbelievers, I chose to do a pre-marital counseling so that I could have an opportunity to tell them about Jesus. I don't believe that either one of them received Him into their hearts.

At the end of the counselling, I asked the couple if they'd like to use their own wedding vows instead of the traditional one. They said, "No, the traditional one would be fine." So, I prepared my wedding message and went to the ceremony location for the rehearsal the day before the wedding. I told the groom to repeat after me for his vow, then it was the bride's turn to repeat her wedding vow:

for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health,
to love and to cherish, to obey and submit to you

This young lady DID NOT like the portion "to obey and submit to you". She stopped me and asked, "Can you take that out or change it?" I told her, "No, it is according to the Bible." If looks could kill, I would have dropped dead right there on that spot. We managed to finish the rehearsal and I came home.

About three hours later, I received a call from the groom. He was so embarrassed and apologetic to tell me that I've been replaced with her uncle who is a Catholic priest. In other words, I was fired because the bride didn't want to promise to obey and submit to her husband. I just hope and pray that they would not be another statistic of the high divorce rate in this country.

This section of Paul's letter to the believers of Ephesus pushes buttons, I mean BIG buttons, especially to those who have the feminist idea or have been victims of verbal and physical abuse by their cruel and abusive husbands who often used these verses from the Bible out of context. I feel like I am walking through a mine field now.

If those abusive husbands want to use the Bible to set up their authority over their wives, they themselves should obey what Jesus said as well:

Matthew 7:12 Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

John 13:34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.

Do they find anywhere that Jesus added "...except in marriage"? Nowhere.

Let's see what the Lord speaks to us through the apostle. We are going to start from v21.

A. THE CONTEXT OF THIS PASSAGE

Ephesians 5:21 submitting to one another in the fear of God.

Though we studied v21 last Sunday, but let's go over it again now. Ephesians 5:21 sets out the overall theme of not only this passage on wives and husbands but also on the following two – children and parents in 6:1-4 and slaves and masters in 6:5-9.

The key thoughts here is "one another in the fear of God". God's way of submission does not have selfishness, conceit, competition, pulling rank, domination and dishonor. Our Lord Jesus modeled for us:

Matthew 20:28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

Do you see how important understanding context is? It helps us think biblically rather than swing to cultural extremes or our narrow human mindset.

B. A WORD TO WIVES

Ephesians 5:22-23a Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is head of the wife,

He gives two reasons for this command:

1) The lordship of Christ in v22

2) The headship of the man in Christ in the first portion of v23.

When the Christian wife submits herself to Christ and lets Him be the Lord of her life, she will have no difficulty submitting to her husband. This does not mean that she becomes a slave or a doormat, because the husband also ought to submit to Christ. And if both are living under the lordship of Christ, there can be only harmony. Headship is not dictatorship.

This word "submit" was a Greek military term meaning "to arrange troop divisions in a military fashion under the command of a leader". In non-military use, it was "a voluntary attitude of giving in, cooperating, assuming responsibility".

Ladies, you are submitting to your husband, because the Lord puts your husband as the head of your family and gives him more responsibilities and more accountabilities, not because you are any less than him or inferior in comparison with him. Our God is not a gender bias God at all.

Some of you ladies are thinking, "OK, preacher, maybe here in Ephesians it says "submit to your own husbands", but what about other places in the Bible?" I am glad you asked.

Colossians 3:18 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.

1 Peter 3:1 Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands

Are you convinced that it is the Lord's desire and command for you, wives, to submit to your own husbands?

Submitting to your husband should not be taken to mean that wives are to be doormats, allowing their husband to walk all over them; nor are they to be silent slaves who wordlessly carry out their husband's orders. Absolutely NOT.

It means that wives are to willingly support their husband's leadership – not interfering or undermining him, especially in front of your children. They are to be active participants in the challenging task of running a Christian home. They are to do everything they can to encourage and support their husbands' leadership in the home.

When the husband is in error or even in outright sin, it is the wife's responsibility to lovingly confront him, pointing him back to the lordship of Christ as the Ultimate Authority.

The Christian husband and wife should pray together and spend time in the Word, so that they may know God's will for their individual lives and for their home. Most of the marital conflicts I have dealt with as a pastor have stemmed from failure of the

husband and or wife to submit to Christ, spend time in His Word, and seek to do His will each day, rather they want to do what they want to do selfishly .

This explains why a Christian should marry a Christian and not become “unequally yoked together” with an unbeliever as it is written in 2 Corinthians 6:14.

I almost can hear some of you ladies’ thoughts now , “I married to a heathen or almost heathen. What do I do? Do I dump him?” Let see what the Lord says about that:

1 Corinthians 7:13 And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him.

In the last portion of v22, the Scripture says, “as to the Lord” in God’s instruction for wives. Sadly, some men have twisted this to say that a wife should treat her husband as if he were her Lord. Nothing could be further from the truth. We have one Lord – the Triune God, made visible in the flesh by Jesus Christ. And wives gladly support their husbands out of their reverence for the Lord.

C. HONOR THE LORD

Ephesians 5:23b-24 as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. 24 Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.

If a husband loves and sacrifices himself for the sake of his wife, as Christ did for us, then his wife will joyfully love and sacrifice herself for him in return, as the church does for Jesus.

Now, some of us may have cast a wary glance at the words “in everything .” We have to be very careful not to overstate this biblical teaching on authority . If husbands misuse their God-given authority – for example, by commanding what God forbids or forbidding what God commands – then the wife’s duty is no longer conscientiously to submit, but conscientiously to refuse to do so. For to submit in such circumstances would be to disobey God.

Here is a simple principle: Wife must submit to her husband right up to the point where obedience to human authority would involve disobedience to God.

D. SUBMISSION FROM YOUR HEART

Since we talk about theological aspect of submitting to husband, ladies, let’s talk about the practical side as well.

1) Respect

Ephesians 5:33 Let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

You really cannot say that you submit to your husband if you don’t respect him in words and actions. You are NOT married to a child, rather you married the man whom you were deeply in love with. I hope that you still are in love with him in the same depth. Do not treat him like one of your children.

Then, an objection might come up from some of you, “But my husband is so childish and so selfish.” OK, here is your secret weapon for you: Tattle on him to God in your prayers. He is far more capable to change him better than you can. At the same time, expect that the Lord will start to change you as well.

By the way, don't try to change him unless he is on diaper, because you only get frustrated with yourself.

2) Be careful how and what you say about your husband

Late Ruth Graham, wife of evangelist Billy Graham, was married over sixty years, once said, "It is God's job to keep Billy humble; it is my job to love him." There are too many Christian wives who think that it is their God-given job to keep their husbands humble, even belittle them. Guess what, the Lord has never given you that job.

When someone says nice things about your husband, please don't cut him down or belittle him, especially in front of him. It only shows your disrespect for him no matter what you say afterward, like "I was just kidding, Sweetheart."

If you are thinking, "Come on, preacher, have some sense of humor." OK, let me put it in this way and see if you still think that it is a joke to you:

Let's say, a friend of your husband or your friend complimented how you look nice in your dress. Your husband who was standing next to you said, "Nah, she doesn't look good in that dress. She looks like a fat cow." Then, followed by, "I was just kidding, Sweetheart." Do you still take what your husband said as a joke? Why not? Don't you have a sense of humor?

When was the last time you gave a good honest hearty praise to your husband? If you have to think for sometime, you are well overdue. Please look for good things that your husband does even though he may not meet your high standard. You will be surprised how much your husband is pumped up and looking for next good thing to please you.

3) Don't be historical

An exhausted man who had another argument with his wife the night before he came to work. It was obvious that he had a rough night. His coworkers asked him if everything is OK with him. He gasped and said, "Whenever my wife and I argue, she doesn't become hysterical, but historical."

Ladies, if your husband sincerely had asked you to forgive his sins or mistakes and you forgave him for it, then, please do not bring that back to haunt him or bash him. Aren't you glad that our gracious and merciful God doesn't remind us of your previous sins each time you come to Him in prayer?

E. AT THE SAME TIME

At the same time, I must say this. "Authority of husband" in the biblical sense is not a synonym for 'tyranny.' If you are being abused or know someone who is, please know that God doesn't sentence women to a lifetime of verbal, emotional, or physical violence. That is not God's will and design for marriage. If your husband is hurting you, or if you know someone who is being abused, God is not expecting you or them to take it. Get help, contact police or sheriff.

A word to husband, if any of you are physically abusing your wife, you are a total coward. You do that because she cannot hit you back or she is too weak to fight back to protect herself. If you need a sparring partner to show off your male chauvinist pig attitude, come see me. I will spar with you. I will make sure that you will think twice about abusing your wife next time.

F. APPLICATIONS

1) Wife submit to her husband in order to bring honor to God.

2) Submitting to her husband requires respect of him from her heart.

Every wife either can build the home or tear it down. If she walks with the Lord, she will be a builder. But if she disobeys His wisdom, she will be a destroyer .

Proverbs 14:1 The wise woman builds her house, But the foolish pulls it down with her hands.

3) Wife must submit to her husband right up to the point where obedience to human authority would involve disobedience to God.