

The Beautiful Gift of the Dance

Titus 2:3-5, 1 Peter 3:1-2, Ephesians 5:22-33, Colossians 3:18

The Christian marriage is a strange thing. The husband is called to act like Christ, a standard much too high for consistent success. The wife is called to voluntarily place herself under the leadership of this man, as she would to Jesus. Submitting to Jesus perfectly is hard enough for a woman, so imagine the difficulty submitting to a less than perfect man who is not Jesus!

Christian marriage involves two people, both born again and indwelt by the Spirit of God, and seeking to live for Jesus and to interact with each other as they would if they had no sin. The leadership of the man is to be as loving and good as Adam's was before the fall into sin. The woman is to enjoy her husband and serve him with the same passion and joy as Eve did before she fell into sin.

Several weeks ago, we discussed what it was for the man to lead his wife, as the Bible defines in Ephesians 5. Today, we discuss how the woman is to follow that lead.

To do this, first we must establish, without question, that the Bible calls for this following, or "submission" from the wife. We live in a time of Bible illiteracy. Many know that they are Christians, but do not read nor know their Bibles. Many women say, "Well, I just don't think the Bible says that wives are to submit to their husbands." My goal in this message is to demonstrate that the Bible does indeed call for wives to submit in marriage, and then to generally define the qualities of that submission. Finally, I would like to show how this arrangement in marriage is pleasing to God.

Biblical Evidence that Wives are to Submit to Their Husbands

22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. . . .33 However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband. (Eph 5:22-33 ESV)

18 Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. 19 Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. (Col 3:18-19 ESV)

Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, 2 when they see your respectful and pure conduct. (1Pe 3:1-2 ESV)

3 Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, 4 and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, 5 to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled. (Tit 2:3-5 ESV)

These examples make clear that the duty of the Christian wife is to submit to the leadership of her own husband. There is a teaching that says that this interpretation is a mistake. According to this interpretation, the Bible teaches mutual submission, meaning that both the husband and wife are to make themselves subject to one another. To that objection, I make two rebuttals. First, a style of leadership that is like Jesus's will, of course, seek to serve others. However, servant leadership does not mean "no leader." It means that the leader has a humble heart. He is still the leader. My second rebuttal of the idea of mutual submission is that the claim is contradicted by the text itself, as we have seen.

General Qualities of a Wife's Submission to a Husband

First of all, the submission of a wife to a husband is voluntary. I have made the point previously that **a man may not demand obedience from a wife.** He is instructed to "love" His wife like Jesus loved the church. Leadership is part of that love, but it is a subset. His love, like the Savior's, is liberating, not enslaving, bringing a constant focus of the care and well-being of the one being loved and led. Likewise, the wife's submission is commanded by God, but it is not commanded by the husband. It is a voluntary submission, a choice to place oneself under the authority of another.

This is an act of showing great honor to another human being. Let me take this sort of submission out of the realm of marriage for a moment so that we can see the beauty and honor within. In the Bible, we see David and Jonathan's friendship. In that friendship, Jonathan, because of his love and admiration for David, chose to make himself a servant of David, even though Jonathan's father was the King:

As soon as he had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. . . Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul. . . And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was on him and gave it to David, and his armor, and even his sword and his bow and his belt. (1Sa 18:1-4 ESV)

David, the shepherd boy, after beating Goliath and the Philistines in battle, had won the loyalty of the very important Jonathan, the Prince and the son of the King. He showed this loyalty by giving him his royal robe and royal armor. This was a sign of commitment. 1 Samuel shows that Jonathan stayed loyal to David, even to death.

Alternatively, perhaps we could consider Ruth, who, when her husband died, vowed to be loyal to her mother-in-law. When her mother-in-law, Naomi, told her to go home to her own people, for she had nothing to share with Ruth, Ruth vowed to loyally serve Naomi to the death:

But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the LORD do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you." (Rut 1:16-17 ESV)

This is a picture of submission. This has nothing to do with which woman is greater, but with the loving gift of oneself to serve the other. This is the sort of submission God wants from His church. He wants us to lovingly offer our all to Him in order to serve Him.

Women, this is the submission that God wants for your husband. Do you honor him in this way? There is no great love or honor that one person can give to another then to offer himself in love, saying, "I will be second to you, and follow you, because I love you and trust you." Like Sam with Frodo, like Spock with Kirk, and like Alfred with Batman! Your husband is to be your hero, the one you choose to knit your soul to.

Carol King wrote a song out of affection long ago, singing a sentiment that no feminist would embrace, but which poetically explains the heart of a wife's submission to her husband:

*Wanting you the way I do
I only want to be with you
And I would go
To the ends of the earth
'Cause darling
To me that's what you're worth
Where you lead, I will follow
Anywhere that you tell me to
If you need ...
I will follow where you lead
...
Where you lead, I will follow
Anywhere that you tell me to
If you need, you need me to be with you
I will follow where you lead
I always wanted a real home with flowers on the window sill
But if you want to live in New York City, honey, you know I will*

This honor of submission is a great gift to give to another person. As the church should submit to Jesus like this, so should a wife to her husband.

Second, submission to a husband is the practical outworking of your submission to God.

*Wives, submit to your own husbands, **as to the Lord.*** (Ephesians 5)

*Wives, submit to your husbands, **as is fitting in the Lord.*** (Colossians 3)

*submissive to their own husbands, that **the word of God may not be reviled.*** (Titus 2)

Submission to a husband is a way of trusting the leadership of Jesus, who is above your husband. You submit to your husband's leadership because you are submitting to the Lord. If you don't submit to your husband, it is unfitting in the sight of God. If you don't submit to him, then the word of God itself is reviled or hated. We are all to be obedient to God's word.

The Bible says,

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. (Rom 13:1-2 ESV)

God is the only One in the universe who has authority over all things. That means that anytime anyone exercises authority on the earth, he is borrowing that authority from God. This includes your husbands.

A couple of implications of this truth:

1. Young women, make sure you know the man you are choosing to date and to marry. Is he going where you want to go? Because once you tie the knot, God will require you to support him and the direction he wants to go in life.
2. Because wives submit to the Lord above, this excuses them from submitting to participating in sin when and if their husbands lead them in that direction. If a husband abuses the children or the wife and tells the wife to do nothing about it, she cannot submit to him. After all, to submit to participation in that sin would mean to rebel against Jesus, who is above all. If a man calls a woman to follow him in plots to defraud insurance companies, the government, or other people, she must disobey him, for she has to submit to the Lord above all.
3. This principle of submission is true, not just for wives, but for all Christians. We are all under human authorities of some kind. For the sake of our submission to Jesus, we should submit to these authorities. We should be supporters of our employers and their mission, of our government, of our teachers, of our parents, of our babysitters, and of anyone who has been given authority over us. Of course, because we are obeying Jesus, we must never follow them into sin.

Jesus, as a man, submitted to all the human authorities that His Father put over Him. For example:

And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart. (Luk 2:51 ESV)

He submitted to His own parents. He was the one kid who always knew better than His parents, but He still submitted to them.

Third, when a woman submits to her husband, she is in the strongest position to display Jesus to her husband. As the text said:

Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they see your respectful and pure conduct.

Women, do not marry men who don't know Jesus. It is not wise. You are a child of light, and he is a child of darkness. You will create problems you can hardly fathom as you walk the lonely road of giving all to Jesus, while the man you are united to runs in the other direction. However, if you are already married to an unbeliever, it is your godly conduct as a submissive wife that shows him that Jesus makes the difference in his happiness.

That brings me to my last point. **Your loving, respectful, submission to your husband, and to your God, has the greatest potential for bringing joy and satisfaction to your husband.** Married women can give something to a man that no one else in this world can give him. A wife can break a man. A wife can make a man.

An excellent wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels. The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain. She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life. . . Her husband is known in the gates when he sits among the elders of the land. . . her husband also, and he praises her: "Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all." Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised. (Pro 31 ESV)

There are godly men in our midst here at Harvest Community Church. Some of them, it is obvious, are built up by their wives and their confidence, and their peace shows through. But there is an alternative:

It is better to live in a corner of the housetop than in a house shared with a quarrelsome wife. (Pro 25:24 ESV)

A continual dripping on a rainy day and a quarrelsome wife are alike; (Pro 27:15 ESV)

It is better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and an angry woman. (Pro 21:19 KJV)

A wife has the power to destroy her husband, to take away his confidence, to undermine his dreams, to criticize, and to humiliate. A wife also has the power to make her husband stand with courage, and to go forward with confidence. The woman who would rule her man, or usurp his leadership, will destroy him. She who seeks to build up her man through loyalty and encouraging commitment to him and his dreams, will give him a gift more precious than all the riches in the world.

CONCLUSION

What are the practical ways that a woman can encourage her man? What does godly submission look like on a daily basis? I could answer these questions, but they are best answered by the people that Titus instructed to answer them: Older women in the church. Seek out wise women who have been married at least 10 to 20 years. Learn from them. It is their job to...

train the young women to love their husbands and children, 5 to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled.

But I do have a practical conclusion to this message that is for wives, husbands, and single people alike. We all are to embrace submission as the path of joy. As our text said in Ephesians 5:24,

Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands

We who believe are the church. What does that mean? It means submission.