

Should Wives Submit to Their Husbands?

written by Tim Jennings, M.D. | October 24, 2008



My daughter is in a relationship and is hoping to get married, but her Fiance and her have different views on what it means for wives to be submissive to their husbands.

Also the fiance showed her texts in Corinthians which says that women should remain quiet in church, and if they have a question they should wait until they reach home to ask their husbands about it. I know we serve a fair and loving God so I desperately need clarification on why would God gave these instructions for women.

What does it mean for wives to be submissive to their husbands, and could you please relate this to our present time.

CA

Thanks for sending this question. I receive similar questions from all around the country and I know, on a broader scale, many young people wonder how to find a good match to be their life partner.

First, before we can understand what Paul is dealing with in the New Testament, we must understand God's original design for marriage, then we can comprehend what God is trying to accomplish in this world of sin.

In Genesis 2:18, before sin entered the world God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him." Sadly, too many men through history have interpreted this to mean that women were created to be man's cook, laundry washer, bucket carrier and overall assistant to do what man wanted to do. But this is a gross error.

Adam was made in God's image and God is love (1John4:8). The Bible tells us that Godlike love is "not self-centered" (1Cor 13:5). God wanted Adam to enter into, as far as a created being could, the fullness of the love that exists between the Godhead. Therefore, Eve was created to be the object of Adam's love, someone for Adam to serve, someone for Adam to pour himself into, someone for Adam to sacrifice himself for. Adam could not enter into the fullness of godly love without Eve to give himself to. And Eve was to receive Adam's love and let it flow through her and give of herself to build up Adam; a perpetual circle of giving, love, and beneficence; a true revelation of God-like love!

Sin fractured this divine relationship and infected the heart and mind of mankind with selfishness. No longer would men and women naturally nor automatically seek to love one another, but would instead seek to put self first, because the heart was now infected with self-interest, fear, and selfishness. In this emergency circumstance God made an emergency intervention. He increased in woman the desire for relationships such that when two selfish people within a marriage relationship disagree the woman would be more likely to "give in" on the disagreement in order to save the relationship (Genesis 3:16). This emergency intervention allowed marriages to continue in a world marred by sin giving time for God to heal the damage and restore us into His original ideal. But we need to recognize clearly that any subordination of one partner to the other was not part of God's original design nor is it part of His solution.

Therefore, as we experience more and more of God's healing power in our lives, as selfishness is purged and love is restored within the marriage relationship, we become more and more like God's original ideal - true and genuine equality as each partner sacrifices themselves to uplift the other, to promote the welfare of the other, and to protect the other. Any teaching which perpetuates inequality of moral worth or ability in God's design or service misrepresents God and works against God's plan to heal mankind back to His original ideal. It is an abuse of Scripture to use it in an attempt to subordinate wives under the control of the husband, because Scripture says:

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. 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. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. Ephesians 5:21-25

Please notice the first instruction is for both husband and wife to submit "to each other," not one over the other. Then Paul goes on to say that wives are to submit to their husbands, but the husband is to treat the wife as Christ treats the church and sacrificed himself for her. Thus, the Bible is teaching that wives are **not** to submit blindly to the leadership of their husbands, but are to submit to Christlike treatment from their husbands. And how did Christ treat his bride, the church? He led by example, presenting truth in love and leaving people free to think and decide for themselves. Christ gave of

Himself. He came not to be served but to serve. He sacrificed Himself for the church. Thus a husband who wants to use this passage to invoke submission from his wife first needs to be like Jesus, putting his wife first, building her up, promoting her welfare, happiness, and dreams, using Christlike methods of presenting truth in love and leaving her free, ultimately sacrificing his happiness, his very life if necessary, to protect his wife.

In my experience I have never found a woman who was not eager to submit to such absolute selfless love from their husbands.

My counsel to your daughter – call off the engagement. Step back and reevaluate her fiancé's fitness for marriage. Ask her to define the qualifications a man must possess in order to be qualified to be her husband. Ask your daughter this: Does she want a husband who won't respect her individuality, seeks to command her submission, who will use power and coercive pressure to override her God-given identity and ability to reason and think? Does she want a marriage in which freedoms are undermined under the guise of "godliness?" Such marriages are gross counterfeits to the beauty of God's ideal for marriage in which individuality is respected and each partner works with all their God-given ability to promote the growth, health, and happiness of the other and each would rather die than restrict the liberty of the other!

When we really love like Jesus loved we, want what is best for the other person, not what makes us feel good. If a woman is in a relationship with a man who mistreats his wife by being domineering, overriding her individuality, coercing her to conform to his will, then not only is the wife being damaged in this relationship, not only is love being exterminated, but the husband is damaging his own mind as well. If the wife loves the husband (if your daughter loves her fiancé), then she wants to see him grow up into the full stature of Christlikeness, which means seeing him love like Jesus loves. Therefore, in love she needs to step back and resist attempts by her fiancé/husband to control her, dominate her, or forcefully subordinate her. The submission of God is the submission of voluntary, freely-given love, serving each other in love. It never possesses attributes of control, domination, or overruling authority.

I pray the Holy Spirit may give you, your daughter, and her fiancé wisdom to know and experience His perfect healing love!