

Faithful Submission to a Husband is Faithful Submission to Christ

Ephesians 5:24
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Rev. Greg L. Price

When Nehemiah feared the attack of enemies against God's people, a means of defense that was best suited to protect the entire city of Jerusalem was established by Nehemiah. It was simply this: each one guarded the wall that was immediately in front of his own home where his own family depended upon his faithfulness and watchfulness for their safety. Dear ones, God calls each of us to be faithful in providing for our families by way of the duties He has given to us. In so doing, we each one become a faithful guard against the onslaught of the enemy, who desires not only the destruction of our family, but ultimately the destruction of the entire holy city—the church. Thus, it is so important that we realize our faithfulness to the Lord Jesus Christ and our faithfulness within our families is the means God uses to protect our family and to provide for them, that the Church of Jesus Christ might grow and abound.

This Lord's Day, let us press on in our understanding and application of the fruit of faithfulness to the duty of biblical submission by considering the following main points which flow from our text: (1) What is the Example of Biblical Submission (Ephesians 5:24)? (2) What Is Biblical Submission (Ephesians 5:24)?

I. What is the Example of Biblical Submission (Ephesians 5:24)?

A. The Apostle Paul by inspiration of the Holy Spirit commands wives: "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord" (Ephesians 5:22). Paul then gives the REASON for this submission on the part of wives in verse 23.

1. The REASON given for your submission, dear women, is

because God has made your husband the head or leader within the home (Ephesians 5:23). Realize, therefore, dear ladies, that you cannot resist the leadership of your husband without resisting Christ Himself (“as unto the Lord”). Whether he is as loving as he should be, whether he is as righteous as he should be, whether he is as wise as he should be, as long as he is lawfully your husband, he remains your leader and head by divine appointment. Only death or a lawful divorce may lawfully terminate that headship (though a woman may certainly flee persecution when that headship is used to abuse and to destroy the wife he is called to love and to protect).

2. The husband is not a self-appointed leader, nor is his leadership the result of a majority vote within the home—it is God’s divine appointment that he is the LEADER. In fact, the Apostle Peter speaks to this issue when he calls Christian wives to submit even to the leadership of their unbelieving husbands (1 Peter 3:1). If then submission to unbelieving husbands is required, how much more to believing husbands who seek to follow Christ (however falteringly they may do so).

3. Remember the words of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram who rebelled against the divinely appointed leadership of Moses by saying: “Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them: wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the LORD” (Numbers 16:3)? As an example to us in all succeeding generations, the Lord revealed His righteous anger against the insubordination of and power-grab by these Levites and opened the earth to swallow them alive. God despises insubordination and rebellion against lawful authority, for it is to rebel against the authority of God Himself (1 Samuel 15:23).

B. The example of biblical submission given by the Apostle Paul to wives to emulate is that of the Church to Christ Himself (“Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ”). Just as Christ has been appointed

Head of the Church and so the Church must submit to His leadership, so must a wife likewise recognize that her husband has been appointed head of the home by God, and she is to submit to his leadership.

1. But it will no doubt be asked, “How can this example be followed in as much as Christ is perfect and sinless in His leadership, but my husband is weak, frail, and sinful in his leadership?” It should be obvious as we look at the lives of husbands (even Christian husbands) that perfection is not the basis for a wife’s submission to her husband. It is God’s divine appointment that the basis for a wife’s submission is her husband’s divine appointment to be the leader of the home. And to willingly and cheerfully submit to your husbands, dear ladies, is to willingly and cheerfully submit to Christ. Therefore, a wife is not to wait until her husband reaches a certain level of sanctification before she begins to submit to him as the Church does to Christ.

2. God doesn’t tell us to submit only when we are loved and respected, or only when we are asked nicely. Just as the love of the husband is not based upon the loveliness of the one loved, neither is the submission of the wife based upon the kindness of the one to be submitted to. It is based upon the lawfulness of the authority possessed. Wives are you waiting for your husbands to become the loving leader that God calls them to be before you submit to them? Dear women, the Lord does not call you to wait for your husband to obey Christ before you obey Christ. Submission to the Lord is always a present duty of faithfulness to God, and not a duty contingent upon the obedience of your husband (or others). Such submission is never easy, but it is right and is the fruit of faithfulness. I doubt, dear women, that you would like to hear you’re your children say they will submit to you when you first reach their standards for you as a mother. When submission is our duty before God, we must pray for the grace to submit cheerfully even when those in authority are not the loving leaders they ought to be.

3. In the previous sermon we considered the question, “How

are wives to be submit to their husbands ‘in every thing’ when their husbands are capable of leading them into sin?” It was noted that biblical submission to lawful human authority (even in the home) is never absolute. Only submission to God is absolute, for only God is lord of the conscience (Acts 5:29). In fact, when a wife submits to that which is unlawful, she has entered into a conspiracy with her husband against the Lord to do what is evil, as did Ananias and Sapphira in lying to the Lord in Acts 5. For example, if a wife’s husband commands her to believe what is false or to teach the children what is false, commands her to lie for him, commands her to break the Sabbath, commands her to agree with and to practice birth control, commands her to break any of God’s commandments, or not submit to any duty authorized in God’s word, she must refuse to comply with that command falling back upon God whose authority alone is absolute and to whom she must submit at all times.

4. Moreover, biblical submission to lawful authority (even in the home) is always submission to that which is reasonable and not to that which is destructive to the wife (2 Corinthians 13:10—“according to the power which the Lord hath given me to edification, and not to destruction”). Therefore, even though a husband’s command or decision may not strictly be forbidden in God’s Word, there is no reason to submit to that which is absurd and unreasonable (e.g. lift one arm for a minute, stand on one leg for a minute, and sing a song). What commands or actions have no tendency to edify in themselves are destructive. However, ladies, be ever so careful that whatever decision your husband makes that you do not like that you do not put it into the category of an unreasonable, absurd decision which you need not follow. Even if you do not think it is a very good reason, you should submit. Only when it is clearly unlawful, not agreeable to Scripture, absurd, or completely unreasonable should you choose not to submit. Mr. Gouge, a faithful minister and member of the Westminster Assembly, (*Domestical Duties*,

p. 326) concisely summarizes the extent of submission required of a wife in these words:

Subjection must be yielded to the husband as to Christ, whence will follow two conclusions, one negative, which is this,

The wife must yield no other subjection to her husband than what may stand with her subjection to Christ.

The other affirmative, which is this,

The wife must subject herself to her husband in that manner that she would or should subject herself to Christ.

4. Thus, when in Ephesians 5:24 a wife's submission to her husband is said to be "in everything", it cannot mean in every single word without exception that proceeds from his mouth (unless the word "everything" is qualified by "everything that is agreeable to Scripture, and reasonable).

II. What Is Biblical Submission (Ephesians 5:24)?

A. In the previous sermon dealing with the faithfulness of a wife in biblical submission, I concluded by removing several false ideas often associated with biblical submission: (1) Biblical submission IS NOT servitude or slavery; (2) Biblical submission DOES NOT imply an inferiority as to nature, essence, or being; (3) Biblical submission IS NOT the mindless act of a wife who cannot think for herself; and (4) Biblical submission IS NOT an unqualified submission on the part of a wife to her husband. Having considered what biblical submission IS NOT, let us now positively identify what biblical submission IS.

1. **Biblical submission within the home IS a God-given grace that willingly and cheerfully acknowledges the husband to be the lawful, God-ordained leader of the home.**

a. I begin at this point because the grace of God is absolutely necessary for a woman to practice biblical submission to her

husband (and for a man likewise to practice biblical submission to all lawful authority as well). Like any other good work or gracious affection that should be manifested in the life of a Christian, biblical submission is not the basis of a wife's acceptance before a holy God. It is not her submission that merits salvation, but Christ's submission to His Father's will in everything, even to the point of suffering the full wrath of God for His people (Galatians 2:16). It is by means of the grace of God that the seed of biblical submission is sown in the heart of the child of God, and that seed must be watered with the Word and prayer, if it is to grow. Submission may be the way of life, but it is not the meritorious ground of life—that meritorious ground of life is Christ's righteousness and submission alone, which is imputed to us by faith alone.

b. Ladies, you have no doubt noticed that submission is very easy as long as you and your husband agree concerning matters, but let a decision go contrary to the direction you think it should go, and then it is not so easy to submit. That is why it is impossible to speak of biblical submission apart from the work of God's Spirit and the fruit of faithfulness in the life of a woman. It is not natural for a wife (or anyone else) to submit in cheerfulness, in peace, and in contentment. Our sinful nature is one of rebellion against the lawful authority of God and man. Thus, apart from the free and powerful grace of Christ in giving you the desire to submit in the fear of the Lord, and in subduing and crucifying your natural desire to lord it over your husband, it is not possible to submit as the Lord calls you to do.

c. Is biblical submission a desirable and good quality? According to God it is. Then come to your Heavenly Father and earnestly beseech Him to grant it to you each and every day (Matthew 7:11). This grace may indeed be despised as worthless by the world around us, but it is of great value in the sight of God and in the sight of your husband. It makes a woman truly beautiful in God's sight and ought to in her husband's sight.

2. Biblical submission IS a matter of willing and cheerful obedience to all the lawful and reasonable commands of your husband.

a. Not a begrudging, reluctant, hesitant obedience, but a sincere, willing, and even cheerful obedience to all lawful and reasonable commands. A godly and loving husband who understands how to lead his wife will only resort to an outright command when other forms of request and persuasion have been unsuccessful. “A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger” (Proverbs 15:1). But even if the husband should issue direct commands to his wife, and even if he does so harshly, and even if we could criticize the way in which he did so, nevertheless, her duty before God is to look beyond the way in which the command was issued or the way in which a decision was reached and to consider whether the command is sinful or destructive to herself or the children in some way. And if not, then she is bound to obey her husband as she would obey the Lord.

b. Is that hard? Absolutely! It requires the grace of God to obey willingly and cheerfully in such circumstances. And it is so much wiser to bite your tongue, dear ladies, when you would like to give your husband a piece of your mind. Let matters cool down and respectfully raise your concerns at a suitable time. Such is the obedience Christ calls a Christian wife to practice (Titus 2:4-5).

c. Thus, how foreign and inconsistent with this truth is the wife who rails against her husband when the women get together, or the wife that berates her husband over his faults, or is like a dripping faucet that will have her way by nagging, anger, or weeping, or refuses to live within a budget for which a husband’s income will provide? When you honor your husband in word and in deed as your head, you honor God who placed him there. Thus, ladies just as you will teach your children not to demonstrate a disrespect for your lawful authority by shouting, by speaking in a condescending manner, by weeping uncontrollably when they do not get their way, by nagging you

continuously, by refusing to speak to you, by carrying a chip on their shoulder, by moping around as if the world had come to an end, or by slamming the door as they leave the room, so likewise, do unto others (namely your husband) as you would have others (namely your children) do unto you.

d. Where there is a disagreement between the husband and the wife in regard to a decision that must be made, it is the husband's duty under God to lead his wife in love by making that final decision according to God's revealed will and for the well-being of his wife. It is also the wife's duty to follow in meekness the decision of her husband (unless that decision leads her to sin or leads her to destruction in some way). And it is precisely at that point, dear wives, that you are tested in the whole matter of submission. It is amazing in God's wise plan how ordinarily when a husband sincerely seeks to love his wife as Christ loved the Church, that love is far more likely to draw forth a response of cheerful submission from the wife; and when a wife cheerfully submits to the leadership of her husband, that cheerful submission draws forth from the husband an even greater expression of love (which compels a greater degree of submission which constrains even more love and affection and so forth in an ever continuing circle of blessing).

B. As I close, let me apply these truths to our lives today.

1. First, wives pray much for your husband in his role as leader. It is no easy job to lead and to love a wife as Christ leads and loves His Church. Remember, wives, you are called to imitate an imperfect Church, but he is called to imitate a perfect Christ. The burden is indeed great for any Christian husband who takes his duty seriously before God. Therefore, cover his weaknesses in love, rather than exposing all his faults.

2. Second, wives do not lose heart that your meek and quiet spirit goes unnoticed by your husband. A wife who adorns herself with

godly submission is indeed a beautiful creature and will more likely have a direct effect upon her husband than a wife that is loud, contentious, disrespectful, and is a dripping faucet. Even if nothing ever changes in the life of your husband, you are of great price in the sight of God.

3. Third, wives focus more on your own growth in godly submission than upon your husband's growth in Christ-like love (just as the husbands should focus more on their own need to grow in love than upon their wives need to grow in submission). This is not an "if he loves, then I will submit" proposition. You will give an account before the Lord on that final day as to your biblical submission to your husband.

4. Fourth, you single women and young ladies, take care who you consent to marry, for you will be called to submit to him as your head. Make sure you do not fall into some emotional swoon in which you overlook some glaring faults. How does he submit to the authority of God and others? For those men who have learned by God's grace to submit to Christ and others in their lives will most likely lead their own wives in love. Is he respectful to his parents and to his elders? How does he treat women in general? Is he courteous and gentle?

5. And finally, dear ladies, remember that Christ does not call you to do something He Himself was unwilling to do. For a sinless Christ willingly submitted to his sinful parents (Luke 2:51), and for the joy set before Him He willingly submitted to the suffering of the cross ("who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross" Hebrews 12:2). Christ is not only an example to the husband as to how he is to love his wife, but Christ is also an example to the wife as to how she is to submit to her husband. Remember, dear ones, submission is the way of life—rebellion is the way of death and destruction. Let not the world feed you its poisonous lies to the effect that submission is demeaning or belittling. To the contrary, biblical submission is actually the way to honor and exaltation in the sight of God.

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