

CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

Lesson 11

The Christian Wife

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Most men and women go into marriage with little or no understanding of the biblical view of marriage. Consequently each partner comes into marriage with his or her own version of what a marriage should be and his or her ideal for the other partner based on human reasoning fantasy and myth. The result of all this idealistic thinking about marriage is great disillusionment, and the result of disillusionment with our mate is an invisible battle line is drawn across the soul of the marriage and the siege begins.
- B. Most marriages end up a battle of the wills because each person tries to get the other person to conform to his or her ideal. Someone has said, “Every marriage begins with the wife thinking her husband will change and the husband thinking she never will.” Someone else said, “At every wedding when the wife enters the Chapel, she looks down the aisle at the altar and sees her bridegroom, and the thought in her mind is, “I’ll alter him.”
- C. What really needs to happen is that each partner in a marriage is to stop working on the other partner to change and start working on changing himself or herself according to the Word of God. The greatest way to change our partner is to change ourselves. It is not a 50-50 commitment but a 100-100 commitment by both partners to find their biblical role in a marriage.

II. SUBJECTS OF SUBMISSION (22a): “Wives”

- A. Ephesians 5:22-24 must be put into its context. The Apostle Paul has been instructing the Ephesian Christians on how to live in the unsaved world. They were to walk as children of light and the last command for them was to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Then Paul shows that three virtues characterize one who is filled with the Spirit—making music, a spirit of thanksgiving for all things and a submissive spirit to the brethren. (Eph. 5:18-21).
- B. Immediately Paul begins to show how submission works out in a practical way in real life: submission of wives to husbands, submission of children to their parents and submission of slaves to their masters.
- C. Notice Paul addresses “wives.” What kind of wives? Obviously, Christian wives who acknowledge the Lordship of Jesus Christ over them and have a willingness to obey scripture.
- D. Most women in this world are not Christians. Many unsaved women will say, “You Christian women are crazy. This is the 20th century. Women don’t submit to men any longer. You Christian women are still living in the Victorian Age.” This command is to Christian wives of every age of history and they are to obey the Bible no matter what the non-Christian world is thinking, saying or doing.
- E. Again, these were Christian wives. Because of Christ, these women had been brought into great liberty in Christ. In New Testament times, women were frowned upon. They were thought of as a piece of property just a little more valuable than horses in the stable. In the Jewish culture, a Jewish men would pray every day, “Thank you, God, that you did not make me a Gentile, a slave or a woman!” In the Greek and Roman cultures,

women even had a worse situation and were thought of as bearers of children only. Demosthenes said, “We have courtesans for the sake of pleasure. We have concubines for the sake of daily cohabitation. We have wives for the purpose of bearing children legitimately and we have a faithful guardian for all of our household affairs.”

The commentator Barkley said, “The women of respectable classes in Greece led a completely secluded life. She took no part in public life. She never appeared on the streets alone. She never even appeared at meals or social occasions. She had her own apartments and none but her husband could enter into them. It was the aim of the Greek that she might see as little as possible, hear as little as possible and ask as little as possible.”

- F. These Ephesian women were relatively new Christians and with their conversion came an elevation from bondage into a freedom they had never known before. There may have been a tendency to rebel against their husbands with their new liberty. Now Paul commands them to draw the line at submission to their own husbands.

III. FACT OF SUBMISSION (22b): “Submit”

- A. Christian women are commanded to be in submission to their husbands. A command is to be kept. It is not an option, but a necessity for women to submit to their husbands. This does not mean a woman has to be submissive to all men because she is a woman. She must submit to her husband only.
- B. The word “submit” means “to put or place under.” It was a military word which conveyed rank, position or office. It was a voluntary submission where one placed himself under the authority of someone else. So, the submission of a Christian woman is also voluntary. Can you imagine what an army would be like if all were generals or privates? On a football team, there can be only one quarterback who calls the plays and all other team members must be in submission to him, voluntarily placing themselves under his authority if they are going to win the game.
- C. Before we spell out what submission is, we best discuss what submission is not.
1. First, submission is not inferiority.
 - a. There are many male chauvinists who believe all women are inferior to all men, but that is not scriptural because positionally in Christ men and women are spiritually equal (Gal. 3:28).
 - b. In her basic nature, the woman is not inferior to a man anymore than a private is inferior to a general in the army. Just in the same way, a private could be superior to a general intellectually, morally, socially and in spiritual maturity. However, the private is always below the general in rank, and so the wife is in rank, position and office subordinate to her husband.
 - c. Submission has nothing to do with inferiority, but everything to do with subordination.
 - d. Just as God the Father and God the Son are one in essence and yet in rank Christ is submitted to the Father, so the woman is one in position and nature with man, but is subordinate in rank (1 Cor. 11:3).
 2. Second, submission is not suppression.
 - a. Just because a woman submits to her husband does not mean she has to be a wallflower with no personality. A husband must never suppress her talents, creativity or leadership skills.

- b. Being a submissive wife does not mean she must say, “Yes, dear. No dear. Whatever you say, dear.” That is not submission, but stupidity.
- c. Submission is not suppression.
- 3. Third, submission is not resentment.
 - a. Just as it is possible for a private to be in subjection to the general with gritted teeth, but all the time wishing he could spit in the general’s face, so it is possible for a Christian wife to grudgingly submit to her husband with no joy in her heart.
 - b. Submission does not carry with it the idea of resentment on the part of the person being subjected. It does; however, carry with it the idea of respect for the one to whom she is subjected.
 - c. “*However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband*” (Eph. 5:33). She respects the position her husband occupies before God.
 - d. When out with other women, she does not speak negatively about her husband, but she respects and honors him before others.
- D. Submission then is yielding to rank, submitting to position and complying with the office of leader. Women are making progress in the area of rights, but what are their limits as a Christian wife? The one limit is submission to their husband in the biblical style.
- E. Five times it says in the New Testament that wives are to submit to their husband (Col. 3:18; Tit. 2:4-5; 1 Pet. 3:1, 5) but it never tells a woman to love her husband with *agape* love. It does teach in Titus that older women are to teach the younger women to love their husbands. But the word for love is *phila*—a love of affection not volition.

IV. THE SPHERE OF SUBMISSION (5:22c): “*To your husbands*”

- A. The Christian wife is to submit to her own husband, not to all men because she is a woman, or to someone else’s husband. She is to submit to the man she has consented to marry and with whom she has developed an intimate and exclusive relationship.
- B. Let’s assume that a Christian woman someday becomes president of the United States. There is, by the way, nothing scriptural that says this is wrong. She may lead the nation during the day, but at night, when she comes home, she is to be in submission to her husband. The tragedy is that most women, especially in western cultures, want the references to obedience and submission taken out of the marriage vows.

V. MOTIVATION FOR SUBMISSION (5: 22d): “*As to the Lord*”

- A. Some have taken this to mean the Christian wife is to obey her husband as though he was Christ. They say, “Whatever my husband says, it is really Jesus talking to me.” This is wrong and a form of husband idolatry.
- B. What Paul is saying is that when a wife submits to her husband she is not doing it primarily out of obedience to her husband, but out of obedience to Christ. She does submit to her husband because Christ has asked her to do it.
- C. It is not an easy thing or a natural thing for a wife to be in subjection to her husband. The thing that can change a tedious and difficult situation is the attitude, “I’m going to submit for the Lord even when I do not agree with my husband’s decision.” A woman can submit with joy when she does it for the Lord. Then she doesn’t care what the results are because the results are Christ’s business. Actually, a woman is never freer to be herself than when she joyfully submits to her husband’s authority.
- D. Submission is a joyful experience when it is motivated out of love for Christ first before it is motivated out of love for the husband.

- VI. BASIS FOR SUBMISSION (5:23):** *“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.”*
- A. In the organizational structure of the world, God has ordained and constituted Christ to be the head of the church. Because of the priority of man in creation, God made him the functional head of the woman. Man is head of the woman because God ordered it that way in His own good providence and according to the counsel of his own will.
 - B. What would it be like if there were two heads of the church? There would be competition, struggle and war. What if there was no head of the church? There would be disorder, division and anarchy. God has ordained man to be the head (leader) and woman to be the helper (follower) submitting to her husband’s decisions. A marriage cannot survive with two heads or no head. With leadership comes tremendous responsibility.
 - C. Christ is the Savior of the church and by analogy, the husband is the savior of the marriage. The husband is the protector and provider of the wife. It is very easy for a woman to be in subjection to a man who vitally cares for his wife. What a challenge this is to every husband.
 - D. Being head of the woman does not give a husband the right to boss her around as though he were a first sergeant or be a tyrant over her like a field general shouting irresponsible and ridiculous commands. He must rule out of love and this then gives the woman the desire to submit.
- VII. EXTENT OF SUBMISSION (5:24):** *“Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.”*
- A. Immediately I can see the gleam in the eyes of some wives who say, “Exactly how is the church generally submitting to Christ? Usually, it is in rebellion not submission. And if that is the way I’m suppose to submit, then I will gladly do it.” Or they reason, “OK, my husband is the head, but I’m the neck who moves the head.” Or she might think, “The real issue is not who rules the roost, but who rules the rooster.”
 - B. When Paul says, “submit in everything,” he is speaking about the ideal, not the actual working out of submission practically. All women have a problem with submission to their husbands just like all Christians have a problem with submission to Christ. Furthermore, each time the church fails to submit, it spells trouble for the body of Christ, and so every time a wife fails to submit to her husband, it spells trouble for the marriage.
 - C. It clearly says the wife is to submit to her husband in everything—not some things, a few things, the convenient things or the things she feels comfortable about, but everything. A woman might recoil at this and say, “You don’t know the brut I live with. That monster is cruel, mean and inconsiderate.” But the Bible says everything! I did not write this, Paul did, and he wrote it under divine inspiration so it is authoritative.
 - D. Are there are any exceptions to this rule? Yes. If your husband asks you to do something morally wrong, something contrary to the moral law of God, then you must obey God rather than man. If he asks you to lie, steal, cheat, have an affair or whatever, then your answer is a categorical “NO.”
 - E. Just exactly what is the decision making process between the husband and the wife?
 1. In the decision making process, the woman is not to be passive. She is not to say nothing, do nothing and think nothing while her husband makes arbitrary decisions as some tyrant or dictator.

2. The husband is to encourage his wife to give him input. She is to express her desires, speak her viewpoint and even set forth a sanctified argument if necessary to make her point.
 3. The husband must not squelch her wisdom and insight. Women have practical and intuitive insight that most men do not have.
 4. Then they pray together and the final decision belongs to the husband.
 5. There is a complete democracy in the decision making process until a final decision is made and then it is a total dictatorship.
 6. In most cases when this procedure is followed, there will be harmony. But in 5% there will be contrary opinions. Then the wife must submit to her husband, trusting God for the final outcome.
- F. What if the wife violently disagrees? Say nothing and pray. Perhaps the husband will change his mind. Don't argue. Don't nag. If after awhile it looks as though a bad decision has been made, don't say, "I told you so!" Man is a very proud creature. This kind of an attitude will just drive a deeper wedge between you and your husband.
- G. A husband and wife may disagree over child discipline, finances, housework, women working outside the home, recreation, sex or whatever but the final decision always rests with the husband and the woman must submit. The woman must remember God holds the man responsible for these decisions.

In our family, my wife kiddingly says that she leaves all the big decisions to me and she makes the smaller decisions. She decides if we are going to buy a new house or move to a new city or where to send the kids to college. But she allows me to make the big decisions, like should China get out of the UN or should the US invade Iraq or should we put a freeze on nuclear weapons!

VIII. CONCLUSION

- A. Christian wife, you are to be subject to your husband like the church is subject to Christ. The next time you have a problem accepting your husband's ultimate decisions, perhaps it might be well to go around your house singing hymns, but changing the words slightly: "I'll go where you want me to go, my dear, I'll do what you want me to do." "Have thine own way, Love, have thine own way." "Anywhere my husband leads me. What have I to ask besides?"
- B. Now there are also some hymns you must never sing such as "Sound the Battle Cry" or "The Fight is On."