

Lesson 3:

Joyful Submission

I. Introduction

A. Consider this quote from a former Christian:

“Any honest, thinking person reading through the bible cannot ignore the blatant misogyny and barbarity towards women. The eminent ‘men of God’ who wrote the bible were the product of a patriarchal, tribal, violent, intolerant, monotheistic society. They reflect the ignorance and brutality of that society and at the dawn of a new millennium, fundamentalists insist that we should all abide by biblical law.”¹

1. What does it mean to be a misogynist?
2. Why do many people associate the Bible with misogyny or sexism?

B. Consider this quote from a seminary professor:

Ephesians 5 has been used often as a club, almost a choke-hold, to force sincere Christian women into submission.²

1. Why do many people think that the call for women to submit to their husbands is cruel and demeaning?
2. Does submitting to an authority necessarily devalue a person? Why or why not?

C. One of the great debates raging in Christian circles revolves around gender roles. In one corner you have **egalitarianism**, which teaches that all people are equal before God and both genders can fulfill any function in the home, church, and society. Egalitarians teach that both husbands and wives are called to submit to one another, believing that differing gender roles devalue women and leave them open to exploitation. In addition, they advocate the ordination of women for pastoral

¹ <http://exchristian.net/exchristian/2002/05/god-is-sexist.php>

² Dan Gentry Kent www.txbc.org/1999Journals/December%201999/Dec99Ephesians5teachesmutual.htm

ministry, believing that church leadership should be determined solely by ability without regard to gender.

In the other corner is the **complementarian** position. This view teaches that while men and women are equal in God's sight, He has defined different functions for them within marriage as well as in the church. In this study we will see how Scripture upholds this teaching, and come to terms with God's plan for wives.

II. Key Texts Regarding Submission in Marriage:

A. Genesis 2:18 *Then the LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him."*

1. When God said, "*It is not good for man to be alone,*" He had already created the entire animal kingdom. What does this suggest about the nature of the companion He was about to make for Adam?
2. What does it mean to be "*a helper suitable for him*"?

The term "help" carries the sense of aid and support and is used of the Lord's aiding his people in the face of enemies (Psalms 20:2; 121:1–2; 124:8). Moses spoke of God as his "Helper" who delivered him from Pharaoh (Ex. 18:4). The word is often associated with "shield" in describing God's protective care of His people.

In the case of the biblical model, the "helper" is an indispensable partner—without her, Adam cannot fulfill his divine commission. Woman, as her husband's "helper," will play an integral part in human survival and success (at least in Genesis 2). What the man lacks, the woman accomplishes. As Paul said concisely, the man was not made for the woman "*but the woman for the man*" (1 Cor. 11:9). The woman makes it possible for the man to fulfill his calling and achieve blessings that he otherwise could not do. And, obviously, the woman cannot achieve it apart from the man.³

3. What does the term *helper* suggest about the function of the woman?

³Mathews, K. A.: *Genesis 1-11:26*. electronic ed. Nashville : Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001, c1995 (Logos Library System; The New American Commentary 1A), S. 214

4. How would you respond to the objection, “If we say that a woman’s purpose in life is to help her husband, we are devaluing her worth”? Does submission necessarily imply lesser value (hint: think about the Godhead [cf. John 6:38])?

B. ***Ephesians 5:22-24 Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord.*** ²³ ***For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body.*** ²⁴ ***But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything.*** (See also Col. 3:18; Tit. 3:4-5)

1. What command does Paul give to wives, and on what basis?
2. Why is it important that Paul addresses the *wives* with this command? What would happen if he were to write, “Husbands, subject your wives”?
3. Let’s consider the meaning of the word, “be subject”, as defined below. What elements of this definition stand out to you?

hupotasso **1** to arrange under, to subordinate. **2** to subject, put in subjection. **3** to subject one’s self, obey. **4** to submit to one’s control. **5** to yield to one’s admonition or advice. **6** to obey, be subject. *Additional Information:* 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, and carrying a burden”.⁴

4. Now, look at the ways this word is used in other New Testament verses. In what contexts is a person told to submit? What additional insights does this give us into the meaning of this word?

Titus 2:9 ***Urge bondslaves to be subject to their own masters in everything, to be well-pleasing, not argumentative,***

1 Corinthians 16:15-16 ***Now I urge you, brethren . . . that you also be in subjection to such men and to everyone who helps in the work and labors.***

⁴Strong, James: *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible : Showing Every Word of the Test of the Common English Version of the Canonical Books, and Every Occurrence of Each Word in Regular Order.* electronic ed. Ontario : Woodside Bible Fellowship., 1996, S. G5293

Romans 13:1 ***Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.***

“A soldier salutes the uniform, not the man, for whether the man is his superior in other ways or not, in the army he represents a certain level of authority.” (Elisabeth Elliot, *Let Me Be A Woman*, pg. 139)

5. Ephesians 5:23 told us that ***the husband is the head of the wife***. What does it mean to be the “head”⁵? What does this suggest about a wife’s relationship to her husband?

6. What does the correlation between husbands/wives and Christ/the church suggest about the extent of this submission (cf. Col. 3:18)?

7. Evangelical feminists will claim that *kephale* doesn’t mean “headship”, implying authority; it merely means “origin or source”, as in the headwaters of a river. With this understanding a husband does not have authority over his wife, but merely the responsibility to nourish her, like the headwaters nourish the river which flows down from it. So in God’s design, Adam was to nourish Eve as her source; headship has nothing to do with “decision-making authority.” In addition, they make a theological argument: If we are to understand “head” as authority, then Christ is devalued as a subordinate and non-equal member of the Trinity.
 - a. Could an authority-implying definition of *Kephalē* lead to a heretical understanding of the Trinity, as some who maintain the “source” view claim (cf. 1 Cor. 15:28)? Why or why not?

 - b. Let’s flip it around: If “head” merely means “source”, what would be the theological implications for our understanding of the Trinity?

⁵ ***kephale*** (II) Metaphorically of persons, i.e., the head, chief, one to whom others are subordinate, e.g., the husband in relation to his wife (1 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 5:23) insofar as they are one body (Matt. 19:6; Mark 10:8), and one body can have only one head to direct it; of Christ in relation to His Church which is His body, and its members are His members (cf. 1 Cor. 12:27; Eph. 1:22; 4:15; 5:23; Col. 1:18; 2:10, 19); of God in relation to Christ (1 Cor. 11:3). In Col. 2:10 & Eph. 1:22, God the Father is designated as the head of Christ. Generally, of a leader or ruler (Sept.: Judg. 11:11). From Zodhiates, Spiros: *The Complete Word Study Dictionary : New Testament*. electronic ed. Chattanooga, TN : AMG Publishers, 2000, c1992, c1993, S. G2776

1 Corinthians 11:3 ***But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ.***

- c. Would Ephesians 5:21 lead the original audience to perceive that all Christians have equal say in decision-making? (cf. Eph. 6:1; 6:4-5)

Note: The feminist understanding of *head* fails on two fronts. Theologically, it is clear that a “source” view of headship does way more to warp an orthodox understanding of the Trinity than an “authority” view. Biblically, while it is true that Adam was the source of the woman, it is the woman who has been the source of every man thereafter. The original audience would not see headship as a source, but as a functional authority.

- C. 1 Peter 3:1-6 ***In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, ²as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior. ³Your adornment must not be merely external—braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses; ⁴but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God. ⁵For in this way in former times the holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves, being submissive to their own husbands; ⁶just as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, and you have become her children if you do what is right without being frightened by any fear.***

1. What is the purpose of a wife’s submission (v. 1)?
2. Why is submission particularly effective in reaching wayward husbands (v. 2)? How does this contrast with the actions of insubordinate women, as described in the Proverbs?

Proverbs 21:9 ***It is better to live in a corner of a roof, Than in a house shared with a contentious woman.***

Proverbs 21:19 ***It is better to live in a desert land, Than with a contentious and vexing woman.***

3. What character qualities do submissive women exhibit, according to vs. 4?

4. After reading the following definitions, see if you can come up with some concrete examples of a gentle and quiet spirit within a marriage.

Meekness (Gentleness) toward God is that disposition of spirit in which we accept His dealings with us as good, and therefore without disputing or resisting. In the OT, the meek are those wholly relying on God rather than their own strength to defend them against injustice. Thus, meekness toward evil people means knowing God is permitting the injuries they inflict, that He is using them to purify His elect, and that He will deliver His elect in His time (*Is. 41:17, Lu. 18:1-8*). Gentleness or meekness is the opposite of self-assertiveness and self-interest. It stems from trust in God's goodness and control over the situation. The gentle person is not occupied with self at all. This is a work of the Holy Spirit, not of the human will. (*Gal. 5:23*).

Quiet: This speaks of tranquility or at peace. A quiet spirit results from a deep abiding trust in God and a submission to His will. Often when women do not trust in the sovereignty of God and become anxious, they take charge of the situation through their tongue. Many men are familiar with the term "nagging." Women nag because they don't trust the person who is in charge, whether it be their boss, husband, father, etc. to do what they deem best on their own initiative.

5. What act of Sarah memorialized her as a trusting and faithful wife?

Genesis 12:4-5 So Abram went forth as the LORD had spoken to him; and Lot went with him. Now Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. ⁵ Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his nephew, and all their possessions which they had accumulated, and the persons which they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan; thus they came to the land of Canaan.

6. What insight does **verse 6** give us into why some women have trouble submitting to their husbands?
7. Why does the command to submit to husbands strike fear in the hearts of so many women?

D. Thought Questions:

1. Does the biblical teaching of submission make women into doormats? Why or why not?
2. How will a wise husband involve his wife in decision-making?
3. What parameters limit the wife's scope of obedience?

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

4. How should a woman respond if her husband gives her the following commands:
 - i. I forbid you to go to church. (***Heb. 10:25***)
 - ii. I forbid you to talk to the children about God. (***Prov. 1:7-8; Acts 5:28-29***)
 - iii. I forbid you to reprove me (assume he's a believer). (***Gal. 6:1***)
 - iv. Do not tell anyone about my sin. I want you to lie for me. (***Eph. 4:25***)
5. How can a wife utilize the following safeguards if her husband threatens and/or abuses her?

Matthew 18:15-18 "If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. ¹⁶ "But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED. ¹⁷ "If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. ¹⁸ "Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.

Romans 13:1 Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.

Galatians 6:1 Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.

6. In each of the following scenarios, is the wife being submissive? What alternative actions could have been taken to reflect Biblical norms and mandates?

- a. Linda obeys her husband and believes in biblical submission, but when he tells her to send their kids to public school she refuses on the grounds that it will be harmful to them.
 - b. Claudia goes on a large shopping spree and neglects to tell her husband about the purchases, reasoning that he probably wouldn't care anyway.
 - c. Jennifer will submit to her husband, but only after she is satisfied with his reasoning for the directive.
 - d. Susan's husband is rather quiet and shy, so when they are out in public she tends to act as his spokesperson.
 - e. Sabrina's husband has made several poor financial decisions, so she hides their money in a secret savings account so he will not make another faulty investment.
7. What rationale do many women give for not submitting to their husbands?
8. How can you tell if a young lady will be a submissive wife?
9. Knowing that a wife must submit to her husband, what are some qualities young ladies should look for in a future husband?

III. Conclusion:

Submission is a scary word for many women, and for good reason. A wife who wants to do what is right will submit to her husband, knowing that she is in reality submitting to the Lord. This places her in a vulnerable position, and temptations to resist this command abound. However, few things are more emasculating and disheartening to a man than a wife who refuses to submit. Her refusal to trust and respect her husband leaves him powerless to lead, crippling the marriage and leaving both parties dissatisfied. A wife's submission frees her husband to lead in the ways God has called him to; a beautiful dance ensues, and the audience (God) smiles in approval and blesses them both.