

Understanding and Embracing Submission

Week 6

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



Women in today's world tend to have two responses when they hear that "wives should submit to their husbands." Some scoff at the very notion, seeing it as an outdated social construct for putting a spiritual veneer over chauvinism, and an outright misuse of male power. Some women respond in fear to the idea of submission because they've seen it twisted and abused by selfish, controlling men so much that they've discarded the entire expectation.

But biblical submission is not an obligation enforced or demanded by a husband. There is never even a hint of such an idea in the Scripture in which a man, through force or manipulation, seeks to bring his wife into submission.

Does God really expect women to submit to their husbands in the 21st century? How does a woman in today's world who wants to become conformed to the image of Christ respond to the biblical admonition of submission? What does biblical submission look like? Why would a woman who is equal, maybe more gifted, maybe more educated than her husband, put herself under submission to him? And perhaps most

significantly, *am I really expected to submit to my husband when he does not yet love me in the generous and sacrificial way Christ loved the church?*

Working through the teaching of submission to your husband's leadership in the family may take you out of your comfort zone. The idea of your husband being the "head" or leader may seem uncomfortable, outdated, chauvinistic, unfair, or unrealistic. Our aim is to understand God's view of what a husband's leadership should look like, but more importantly, what our submission should look like regardless of how well or how poorly our husbands lead.

This is where our focus on becoming like Christ is especially helpful. Jesus modeled submission for us in ways that we can examine and embrace. And this is where we need the principles of the Exchanged Life, perhaps like never before. We simply can't, on our own, live in submission the way God intends. We need the Holy Spirit to help us understand this admonition, and then empower us to live it out in the day-to-day trenches of our lives. Biblical submission may be, for many women, the place where the rubber meets the road in terms of living out our stated desire to become like Christ.

But like all of God's commands, it holds a unique blessing for us as we seek to obey. As we seek to submit ourselves to God, we find ourselves equipped and empowered to submit to the man we married.

Day 1 -- Our Model for Submission

The Father-Son relationship within the Godhead is the foundation for understanding the husband-wife relationship. Both the Father and the Son are fully God, equal in power and glory, but the Father leads the Son, and the Son submits to the Father. There is no thought of inferiority in Christ though He is always viewed as under submission to the Father's authority (I Cor. 11:3; 15:28). In looking at Jesus as our model we see that submission is not demeaning, but a joyful and fulfilling experience of obeying and honoring God.

1. Philippians 2:5-8 draws a picture of submission for us. List five or six marks of Jesus' submission.

2. Which of the qualities Jesus modeled in His relationship with His Father in Philippians 2:1-11 do you find yourself resisting in submitting to your husband?

3. What was the purpose of Jesus' earthly life in relationship to His Father, as He expressed it in John 6:38 and 17:4?

Jesus not only submitted to his Father, who is sinless in his leadership, but he also submitted himself to those who treated him harshly and unfairly.

4. What does Jesus teach us by example in 1 Peter 2:19-23?

5. What was the secret of Jesus' submission (verse 23) and how can this empower us to submit when we feel we are being treated unfairly?

6. In what way does this teaching cause you to feel your need for the Holy Spirit's power to "follow in His steps"?

Day 2 – Scripture Memory

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

1. What questions come to mind when you read these verses?

2. What fears tempt your heart when you read these verses?

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3. Why do you think Paul starts by commanding both husbands and wives to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ, and what do you think that means?

4. If the husband is head of the wife as Christ is head of the church, in what way(s) is Christ the head of the church?

5. What does this tell us about God's ideal for how a husband should relate to his wife?

6. In what way(s) is the church to submit to Christ?

7. What does this tell us about God's ideal for how a wife should relate to her husband?

8. What do we know about the source, the power for, and the benefits of following God's commands that can help us when we come upon commands that seem hard to obey?

Day 3 –Our Unique Roles

Read Genesis 1:26-27; 2:20-25.

Men and women are equal in terms of their relationship before God; both are responsible to love and serve God. In terms of personal worth, intellect, or spirituality, men and women are equal. But in terms of authority and function, men and women are different. A captain in the Navy is not necessarily superior in intelligence, wisdom, spirituality, moral character, talent, or any other ability over a seaman. The captain, however, has authority over the seaman. A position of authority does not mean a person is a better person. It simply means that his function is different, he has a different role. And the Bible clearly teaches that men and women have different roles.

1. What is the implication for male/ female role responsibilities in the use of the plural "them" when describing the creation of mankind in Genesis 1:26-27?

2. From Genesis 2:20-25, what can we learn about the differing roles of husband and wife?

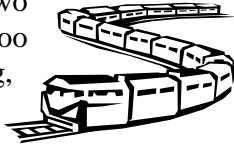
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A couple who follow Jesus have both balance and flexibility. The balance comes from both submitting to Christ, and the flexibility comes from working out the leadership/submission roles in keeping with the personalities of husband and wife.

The two sides are like two trains. If a husband is too heavy-handed in leading, he will miss the track. If the wife fails to



submit to Christ and her husband as the leader in the family, she will get off the parallel track. They will no longer be running together. The mystery of marriage is how this works out between individuals before God.

Consider this description of how submission to your husband's leadership works in regard to a decision in which spouses differ about what to do: The wife clearly, convincingly, and openly presents her view and desire after praying about the topic. The husband does the same, but they desire different directions. What do they do?

The husband goes back to the Lord asking again for direction on this tough decision, knowing that his wife disagrees with his point of view. He does not want to impose his desire and neglect hers. He knows he must hear from the Lord very clearly before he leads contrary to what she has expressed. She knows he must lead and he must wait on the Lord for direction before making the decision to act in a way that is contrary to her desires. However, she is ready to submit if he has received direction from the Lord this second time.

Role and authority are not ends in themselves, but ways for families to function properly. A husband is not the ultimate leader. God is. A husband functions as head of the family for the effective participation of everyone, not to lord it over anyone.

Read 1 Peter 3:1-7.

How does this passage go against worldly wisdom about why a woman should submit, what that submission looks like, and how it enhances her life?

Day 4 – Masculinity & Femininity

The Meaning of Masculinity

While our culture seems to be diminishing the uniqueness of men and women, manhood and womanhood are unique creations of God that He described as "very good." Our differences are much more profound than physical. And in the Bible, differentiated roles for men and women are never traced back to the fall of man and woman into sin, but are traced back to the way things were in Eden before sin warped our relationships.

What difference does it make that differentiation of roles is traced back to Eden before the fall, not after?

In his book *What's the Difference?*, John Piper offers this definition of masculinity:

At the heart of mature masculinity is a sense of benevolent responsibility to lead, provide for and protect women in ways appropriate to a man's differing relationships. - John Piper

Piper chooses every word carefully in his definitions of masculinity and femininity. What are the implications of each of these words?

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➤ *benevolent*

➤ *responsibility to lead*

➤ *provide for*

➤ *protect*

Which aspects of mature masculinity do you appreciate in your husband?

Piper also says that “Mature masculinity expresses itself not in the demand to be served, but in the strength to serve and to sacrifice for the good of women.” How does this understanding impact your thoughts about submission?

The Meaning of Femininity

At the heart of mature femininity is a freeing disposition to affirm, receive and nurture strength and leadership from worthy men in ways appropriate to a woman’s differing relationships. —John Piper

Once again, Piper chooses every word carefully in his definition of femininity. What are the implications of these words?

➤ *Freeing disposition*

➤ *Affirm, receive and nurture strength and leadership*

➤ *Worthy men*

Piper defines submission as “a disposition to yield to the husband’s authority and an inclination to follow his leadership.” What is the significance of the words “disposition” and “inclination”?

1. Piper says that “God does not intend for women to be squelched or cramped or frustrated.” Do you feel that way as you consider submitting to your husband? If so, why, and if not, why not?

2. How do you think you are doing in regard to submission?

3. How would your husband say you are doing in terms of submission to his loving leadership?

4. What walls of resistance or fear do you need the Holy Spirit's power to break down in your heart to more joyfully and fully submit to your husband?



The One Thing

As you look back over what you have studied this week, what is the One Thing that was most significant to you from your personal study? Why?

Day 5 – Pattern for Lovers

Read Chapter 12 in *Love Life for Every Married Couple*.

1. As you read how Solomon loved his wife, which do you see reflected in the way your husband shows his love for you?

What will you do in the power of the Holy Spirit about this one thing?

Prayer Requests

Write down prayer requests here so you can pray for the other women in the group.

2. In what specific ways did Shulamith love her husband well?

3. In what specific ways would your husband say you love him well?

4. In what areas do you need to grow and change in your loving response to your husband?

LEADER'S GUIDE

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TODAY'S TAKEAWAY

While our culture has twisted and misunderstood the biblical admonition for wives to submit to their husbands, it is nevertheless a biblical command. Our model for understanding submission is Jesus, who showed us what it means to submit.

MAIN POINTS

1. Jesus is our model for choosing to submit, not out of weakness or being “less-than” but out of strength, love, and obedience to God. He even shows us how to submit to unfairness and injustice, entrusting ourselves to God.
2. God’s ideal is that a husband should love his wife in the sacrificial, servant-hearted way that Jesus loves the church. And His ideal for wives is that we would submit to our husbands in the way that the church is to submit to Christ.
3. God designed masculinity and femininity for unique roles within marriage, the church, and society.

KICKOFF

(5 minutes)

1. **Opening Prayer:**

Pray for the grace of God to understand this difficult principle of submission, helping us to figure out how to apply it in our marriages in the culture in which we live without lessening its demands, while also eliminating false teaching that has caused us to resist it.

It doesn't get any easier, does it? Who is beginning to feel the burden of great expectations as a godly wife? How did you do in the past week in terms of showing the respect to your husband that we talked about last week? Let's pray about that situation.

2. **Prayer Partners:**

How did you make out as you reviewed all the verses? Are you ready to run through them? At what point during the Home Study did the flesh fail and you realized you needed to let the Holy Spirit take over? What happened? Let's pray about it.

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

(60-75 minutes)

Our feelings about this lesson likely depend a great deal on our individual marriages. Some of us are married to men we find it easy to submit to. Some of us find submission difficult, or even impossible. Some of us have a real aversion to the word “submission.” Let's work our way through this discussion, seeking to hear from God and opening our hearts with a bent toward obeying Him.

1. What marks of Jesus' submission did you find in Philippians 2:5-8?
2. Day 1, question 4: What does Jesus teach us by example in 1 Peter 2:19-23?

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

3. What questions came to mind when you read these verses, and what fears tempted your heart?
4. Why do you think Paul starts by commanding both husbands and wives to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ, and what do you think that means?
5. What do these verses tell us about God's ideal for how husbands and wives should relate to each other?

Work through this passage, quoting it out loud to each other, and getting with partners to practice it from memory.

6. Day 3: What were your thoughts about balance and flexibility in the leadership-submission teaching using the illustration of the two trains?
7. What did 1 Peter 3:1-7 add to your understanding of a wife's submission?

In his book, *What's the Difference?* John Piper offers this definition of masculinity:

At the heart of mature masculinity is a sense of benevolent responsibility to lead, provide for and protect women in ways appropriate to a man's differing relationships. —John Piper

8. Piper chooses every word carefully in his definitions of masculinity and femininity. What are the implications of each of these words (benevolent, responsibility to lead, provide for, protect)?
9. How does the statement that "mature masculinity expresses itself not in the demand to be served, but in the strength to serve and to sacrifice for the good of women" impact your thoughts and feelings about submission?

At the heart of mature femininity is a freeing disposition to affirm, receive and nurture strength and leadership from worthy men in ways appropriate to a woman's differing relationships.

—John Piper

10. Once again, Piper chooses every word carefully in his definition of femininity. What are the implications of these words (freeing disposition, affirm, receive and nurture strength and leadership, worthy men)?
11. Piper defines submission as "a disposition to yield to the husband's authority and an inclination to follow his leadership." What is the significance of the words "disposition" and "inclination"?
12. How do you think you are doing in terms of submission, and how do you think your husband would say you are doing?

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From Chapter 12 of *Love Life*:

(30-40 minutes)

1. What ideas did you have for letting your husband know that you want to become more spiritually intimate without challenging his spiritual leadership?
2. What was meaningful to you in chapter 12 as you read the love story of Solomon and Shulamith?
3. In what areas do you need to grow and change in your loving response to your husband?

EMPOWERING PRAYER

(20 minutes)

1. **Rubber Meets the Road:** Share with your prayer partner your answer to question 11 in Day 5, “What walls of resistance or fear do you need the Holy Spirit’s power to break down in your heart to more joyfully and fully submit to your husband?”
2. **Prayer:** Pray with prayer partners that God will break down the walls of resistance and fear in regard to submission.

DEBRIEFING WITH THE CO-FACILITATORS

Some women for whom this is a hard teaching may feel a burden from this lesson. Don’t rush in to relieve anyone from experiencing conviction of the Holy Spirit, but encourage all to open their lives for God to work on them in this area, believing that a breakthrough in obedience in this area could actually become a breakthrough in their relationship with God in all areas of their lives.

HELPFUL HINTS

As the leader, read the first three chapters of the short book *What’s the Difference?* by John Piper from which the definitions for masculinity and femininity are drawn. Suggest that group members still struggling with this command read the book, and offer to get together to discuss it with them outside of class.