

Wives, Submit to Your Idiotic Husbands

By Steve Burchett



The television shows I grew up watching, especially sitcoms, often portrayed husbands as bumbling fools rarely to be followed. I recall Deborah Barone (from *Everybody Loves Raymond*) looking annoyed at her husband, Ray, and growling, “Idiot!”

The Bible takes a different view of husbands. Paul wrote: “Wives, submit to your own husbands,” adding that a

wife is to “see that she respects her husband” (Ephesians 5:22, 33). An adept student of the Bible might object, saying, “The word ‘submit’ is not even in that verse, but is supplied from verse 21.” Okay so far, but the student continues, “And it’s clearly talking about everybody submitting to one another in verse 21, so it can’t mean subjection to authority in verse 22.” Now he’s gone astray because the word “submitting” in verse 21 is a military term that always denotes submission to an authority. Additionally, “mutual submission” would make no sense of not only what Paul says to wives (v. 22-24), but also to children (6:1-3) and slaves (vv. 5-8).

Definition, Clarification, and Motivation

God’s will is for wives to submit to their husbands — to voluntarily yield to their authority and leadership. Paul clarifies that it is not God’s will for wives to submit to *other* husbands, but to their “own husbands” (5:22). Perhaps some women thought it would be godly to go to the extreme and subject themselves to other men. Or, more likely, Paul was relieving wives of a cultural norm in which men tended to dominate women. I’ve been in places around the world where it’s normal for men to boss women around like children. “Wives,” Paul says, “your responsibility is to *your* husband, and not any other.”

Just because it is God’s will for a wife to submit, it should never be forced on her, like the cartoon I once saw with a man riding on the shoulders of his wife. The caption below it was of the wife saying, “Willard, I think you’re taking this submission thing a little too far.” A Christian woman, though, will be motivated by the reality that she is to submit to her husband, “as to the Lord.” That does not mean she is to treat her husband exactly like Jesus, but that her submission to her husband is ultimately about subjection to Jesus. This fits with the idea in verse 21, “submitting to one another *out of reverence for Christ*.”

But why?

Why is a wife to submit to her husband? “For the husband is the head of the wife...” (v. 23). Submission is God’s design. In this larger passage about marriage (vv. 22-33), Paul grounds what he is saying in Genesis 2 when God instituted marriage (v. 31, quoting Genesis 2:24).

It was John Stott who said that Paul was not a chauvinist, but a creationist, meaning this authority and submission dynamic in marriage is part of God’s created order, just as it is God’s design for Christ to be “the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior” (v. 23).

This is not demeaning to women. A wife is made in God’s image. In Christ she is an heir “of the grace of life” along with her husband (1 Peter 3:7). She is not inferior to him, but has been given a different role. This is made even clearer when we remember why God ultimately created marriage. Paul quotes Genesis 2:24, “Therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh” (Ephesians 5:31), and then he says, “This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church” (v. 32). God created marriage to display Christ’s relationship to the church. It’s not that he instituted marriage and then thought, “I think I’ll use that relationship between a husband and a wife for something else . . . Oh yeah, come to think of it, it’s like my Son’s relationship to his bride!” No! The relationship of Christ to his bride (the church) preceded the relationship of a man and a woman in marriage (cf. 1:4). So when Christ came and gave his life for his people and rose from the grave to save them and purify them and one day bring them to the marriage supper of the lamb, the mystery was revealed.

Here, then, is another reason why a wife is to submit to her husband — because it brings glory to Christ as she pictures his beloved bride, the church.

How to submit

But how is she to do this? First of all, she is to submit “as the church submits to Christ” (v. 24). The faithful church gladly and willingly subjects herself to her head, Jesus. That’s the heart of a godly wife. This doesn’t mean she should not share her thoughts with her husband. After all, the church has warm fellowship with Jesus, just as we sing, “He walks with me and talks with me along life’s narrow way.” That’s what a godly marriage will look like. Additionally, a wife must not forget that she is her husband’s helper (Genesis 2:18). Assuming the best of a husband (that he wants her help), she would be disobedient to remain silent when she should be speaking up. She will not always get her way, but submission is not truly seen until the wife disagrees with the decision but follows him still.

Paul also says to submit “in everything” (v. 24). Of course she must not follow him into sin, or allow him to abuse her without seeking safety. However, a wife must rise above the world’s philosophies of marriage and not pick and choose when to submit, but emulate the church’s disposition toward Jesus and follow her man’s lead, not begrudgingly, but respectfully (v. 33).

Wives, when your husband makes mistakes or behaves idiotically, he must never doubt your respect for him as the man God appointed to love and care for you. Even if you must confront him for some sin in his life, that should be done respectfully. Someone might say, “Certainly you’re free from these obligations if he’s failing.” But God never gave that exemption. It might just be that the way you will win him back to his God-given responsibilities is to happily submit even when the world would call you a fool.

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