
The Transforming Power of Submission

Ephesians 5:22-6:9

Russ Kennedy

How do you react when you hear the word, “submission”?

Submission is a Biblical concept that has so many messed up ideas mixed up in it.

It is denied as a necessary part of relationships. We live in a culture that despises submission. The only people who like submission are control freaks – and they didn’t like submission when they weren’t the boss. Even in the church, people struggle with submitting to the Bible, to the Elders, to ministry leaders.

It is dismissed because we are all equal. There is a wrong application of right truth. We are all equal before God. Some say then that no one has the right to be over the other. Submission implies innate superiority. So, in the church, we are to all be and act as equals. The mistake here is in thinking that equality is based on function. Not true. The three persons of the Godhead are equal; but the Son submits to the Father and the Spirit to both Father and Son. Equality is simply declared.

It is equated with obedience which it is not. You may obey without being in submission. For example, you do what you are told but disrespect the person you are obeying. You may be in submission and disobey without sin. For example, Paul and Silas are submitting to the government by graciously bearing the punishment for disobeying the command to not preach.

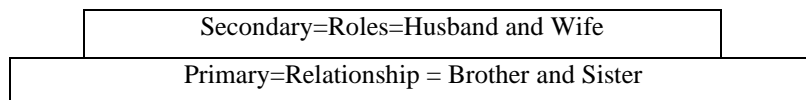
It is practiced as a mindless bowing of your will to another. Never ask. Never appeal. Never check against the Scriptures. Just do what I am told. Unless I am told to do a sin, I must simply do what I am told regardless.

I don’t know what you’ve been taught about submission, but none of those is Biblical submission.

Being under the influence and control of the Spirit produces Biblical submission in our roles and relationships::

¹⁸ And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit,¹⁹ addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart,²⁰ giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,²¹ submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

We move from pleasing God in our general relationships to pleasing God in the relationships within our roles. Let’s talk about that for a moment in the context of marriage.



In the Home (5:22-6:4)

I want to begin in verse 33. Here are the **central commands: to love and to respect**

³³ However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

Paul wrote this in a way to cause us to get to verse 33 and then pause, go back to and reread the texts with that in mind. Why does he summarize what he is going to say in these two sentences? Because of our challenges:

Husbands tend to put themselves first and love themselves ahead of and before their wives. Self-love is the greatest enemy of marital love. While many husbands do not lead their homes well, we are going run into the startling fact that this text does not tell us to lead our wives. It tells us to love them. Other texts may tell us to lead our homes and wives and children; but not this one. Brothers, all of you, you are commanded by the God of the universe, *love your wife*.

Wives who do not respect their husbands will not submit to them. This idea of reverence and respect is interwoven through the text. The point is strong and emphatic: you make sure that you respect your husband. Hopefully God gives you a husband who is easy to respect. Sisters, all of you, you are commanded by the God of the universe, *respect your husband*.

Wives to Husbands – Respectfully Submit (v. 22-24)

²² Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. ²⁴ Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

The Lord requires that Christian wives submit to their own husbands. They are not required to submit to all men or husbands. They are to do so as they would to the Lord. The sense here is of being willing to be persuaded so as to be pleasing to the Lord.

This is required because God has established headship. Headship has to do with authority in the roles. In the same way that Christ is the head of the church, the husband is head of the wife. Now this may not be culturally acceptable, but it is Biblically true. Within the roles in the home, this is the way God has structured the authority of the home. When a husband and wife cannot come to agreement in decisions as brother and sister, then the husband must make the decision. He must do so in a way that reflects the godly character and conduct in the preceding texts. And, the wife is to reverence God and respect the husband enough to be willing to abide by his decisions.

A wife is to look to through the Bible and find how the church responds to the Lord and see in that how she is to think about and respond to her husband. This then makes submission an honor. When you submit, then you reflect to the world how the church submits to Christ.

Husbands to Wives – Sacrificially Love (v. 25-33)

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, ²⁶ that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷ so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. ²⁸ In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, ³⁰ because we are members of his body. ³¹ “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” ³² This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

The Lord commands us to love our wives, brothers. It is as simple as that. If you do not love your wife, you are disobeying God and are sinning. You need to repent, confess your sin to God and set your heart on her. You are to love her in your thoughts. You are to love her by wanting her in all ways. You will then experience the emotions of love. But it is your responsibility to move toward her with your heart and soul. Brothers, love your wives.

We are to love them like Christ loved the church. Christ’s love for the church that we are to emulate has three significant components or pieces. All of these are to be intensely practical and personal.

You are to love your wife sacrificially. You are to “give up yourself” for her. Now means you must be willing and where necessary to give up your comforts, controls (yes, even the remote control), wants, pursuits. You must look to her interests first. If you do not do this, you do not love her as God requires.

You are to love your wife for her good. Sometimes I hear this quoted as though the husband is responsible for the wife’s holiness. That is not what Paul is doing. Christ does all of this for his church *because He is serving her best good*. Now, that includes helping her to grow spiritually. But the point here is that you love your wife enough to always be willing to serve her good. If you do not have your wife’s good in mind, then you do not love her as God requires.

You are to love your wife for God’s glory. Christ presents the church before His Father *for the glory of God*. You are not going stand before God someday and walk her up to the throne and present her to God. No, what is in view here is loving your wife for the glory of God. You love her in such a way that God is magnified, made much of, seen to bright, weighty and valuable. You are not to love your wife so as to be able to boast. If you do not seek God’s glory, then you do not love her as God requires.

We are to care for our wives more than we care for ourselves. Paul turns something on its head here. It is our responsibility to care, cherish and encourage the growth of our wives *more than we do ourselves*. Many Christian husbands crash and burn on this point. They think of the wife as serving them so that they can achieve their life’s goals. While it is commendable when a sister-spouse does that, this is the husband’s responsibility. You are to love your wife in a way that is filled with care, tenderness, kindness, and comforts. You are to cherish, treasure, value, relish, enjoy them. You are also to nurture them so that they grow and become

magnificent women of faith and wisdom and grace. If your wife is not growing as a person and as a Christian, if your wife does not feel cared for and cherished, then you do not love her as God requires.

We are to do this as husbands and wives. But the reason we do this is because we are members together in Christ's body. In other words, you are to each other as husbands and wives *because* you are to each other as brother and sister. Therefore our oneness as husband and wife expresses a mysterious spiritual reality. This quote from Genesis shows that our physical and spiritual union in marriage is a symbol of a greater and deeper reality. That reality is the union between Christ and the church.

Why isn't this text talking about "loving leadership" since the command to the wife is to submit? Other texts set forth our responsibility to lead. Particularly the standards for a godly man as listed in the qualifications for an elder or deacon require husbands to be leaders. But here that is not so much Paul's concern. His concern here is that a woman is in a very vulnerable position in submission. Therefore, Christian men are to cultivate an environment in which their wife thrives and submission is easy, even when it is hard.

Sisters, see to it that you respect your husbands so that you are inclined to submit.

Brothers, see to it that you love your wives so that they are cherished and nourished.

Children to Parents - obey and honor (v. 1-3)

¹ Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ² "Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise), ³ "that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land."

I want you to note that the children are being addressed directly. Paul expects that children will be in with their parents when this book is read. He wrote directly to them expecting them to hear and heed what was being said.

So, children, listen to me. God is telling you something that He expects you to do. Obey your parents. While your mother is to submit to your father, you are to simply obey your mom and dad. You are also to honor your parents. This means you to think well, respect, hold up your parents. You are not to criticize them or look down on them in your heart or in your words. Children, do you talk bad about your parents to others? Do you obey your parents, doing (or stop doing) what they ask as soon as they ask it with a good heart? If not, you sinning against God and He is going to deal with you.

Why are you to obey and honor your parents?

IT IS RIGHT. God has said it is the right thing, so it is the right thing. This is what God requires. Your parents are required by God to teach you obedience. If you are a believer you are accountable to Jesus through His Word and people.

IT IS BEST. This is the first of the commandments that has a promise if you do it. If you obey and honor your parents, then things will go better for you in your home and in your life. What God is saying that not only is it right, but it is best for you to obey and honor your parents.

How long are you to obey your parents? As long as you are under their authority. In our culture this means as long as you live in their home. Now, parents, this does not mean that you should exercise authority over them – you are supposed to be moving towards counsel and advice as they reach the teen years. Even once you are on your own, you are to honor your parents. This means to esteem them and look up to them. As they get older, you are responsible to honor them by caring for them and providing for them as you are able.

There is question this text raises that is more difficult. Is Paul saying, "Children, honor your parents because the Ten Commandments tell you to?" That is not what the text says. He is not using the Ten Commandments to command children. He is using them to point out how important this command is. The command to children is the first one with a promise; in fact, the only one. So, this command to children is a very important one. Now, make not mistake: this is a New Testament command to children. Christian parents may be raising unbelieving children, but, for the peace of the home, and their own good later, young children must be taught self-control, impulse-control by parents teaching them to obey.

Children, obey your parents. Do so because it is right and it is best.

Reflect and Respond

The Bible calls on Christians to live in submission. We are first in submission to the Lord. Then we live in submission to those He has placed over us.

Submission is tested and demonstrated in how we respond when we are asked or told to do what we do not want to do.

Sisters, see to it that you respect your husbands so that you are inclined to submit.

Brothers, see to it that you love your wives so that they are cherished and nourished.

Children, obey your parents. Do so because it is right and it is best.