

Ephesians 5:21-24

Introduction

There are two realities that make a conversation about submission particularly challenging:

1. The historical abuse of this passage by men who use this passage to justify selfish and unloving behavior
2. A culture today that is antithetical to the idea of submission
A culture that values independence, self-empowerment and that is suspicious of authority and power structures

The Passage

I. Defining Our Terms

A. Headship (v. 23)

1. "Head" implies authority, leadership and ultimate responsibility and accountability before God
2. Definition: "headship is the divine calling of a husband to take primary responsibility for Christ-like, servant leadership, protection, and provision in the home." (John Piper)
3. This does not necessarily imply a set of abilities or talents the husband has that are superior to the wife, but rather a role and position he's been given by God in the relationship

B. Submission (v. 22)

1. The original word literally means "to place or arrange under." So it involves intentionally putting yourself under the authority of another.
2. Definition: "submission is the divine calling of a wife to honor and affirm her husband's leadership and help carry it through according to her gifts." (John Piper)

II. Finding the Heart of "Christ-centered Submission"

A. Submit "as to the Lord" (v. 22)

1. The big picture idea is: take the submission you are supposed to give to Christ. That's same type of submission you should give to your husband
 - a. Same kind of submission
Submit humbly, joyfully, willingly (not half-heartedly, or begrudgingly)
 - b. Same scope of submission
"In everything" (v. 24) = In all areas of your marriage
2. Remember, he is called to sacrificially love you just as Christ sacrificially loved the church and died for her
3. To Submit "as to the Lord" is to put yourself in a very vulnerable place
Because you have no guarantee of how he will use that authority
Analogy: feels like giving the car keys to your 16 year child

B. Submit "out of reverence for Christ" (v. 21)

1. "as to the Lord" answers the how question, this answers the why question and is even more foundational.

2. Ultimately, the reason you submit to your husband is not out of reverence for him, but it's out of reverence for Christ who calls you to that posture of submission
3. "reverence" = fear, awe, respect
 - a. It's a posture that acknowledges God is God, he is in control, and we are his creatures who are to give him our allegiance and trust no matter what.
 - b. So we submit out of our allegiance to and trust in our God
4. 1 Peter on submission and trusting God
 - a. Submitting to human authorities (1 Pt 2:13)
 - b. Christ as our great example: "when they insulted him, he did not retaliate. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly." (1 Pt. 2:23)
 - c. Likewise, "those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good." (1 Pt 4:19)
 - d. Wives, submit to your husbands (1 Pt. 3:1-6)
 - 1) Wives put their hope in God (not husbands)
 - 2) Do not give way to fear (because their hope is in God)
 - 3) So, they can submit courageously to their husbands
5. Since your submission is ultimately to Christ, this makes your submission unconditional. You should submit when your husband is leading well and when he is not.
6. Since your submission is ultimately to Christ, this also makes your submission conditional. The moment your husband calls you to do something that is contrary to Christ's command, you cannot follow him.

III. What does submission look like practically?

A. What submission is NOT

1. It is not submitting to men/husbands in general but only to your "own" husband
2. Submission does not mean being passive, wimpy, or a doormat
Submission is a very proactive, courageous, free decision
3. Submission does not mean leaving your brain or your will at the wedding altar
4. Submission does not mean agreeing with everything your husband says
5. Submission does not mean that you get your personal, spiritual strength primarily through your husband.

Submission IS, in every situation, showing your husband in word and action: "I love it when you lead, I want to follow your lead, I want to help you be the leader God has assigned you to be."

B. Submission when you disagree

1. It's asking yourself: "how am I going about disagreeing with my husband?
In a way that treats him with respect, shows I want him to lead?
Or in a way that is harsh, condescending, nagging, or manipulative?"
2. It's taking the default posture: ultimately I will defer to him as a leader

C. Submission when he is not leading

1. How do you help your husband in areas where he is not assuming appropriate leadership (prayer, relational conversations, reading bible, raising kids, etc)

2. One key is positive reinforcement

- a. affirm where he is leading, and do a great job of submitting there
- b. pray for him
- c. find a time when emotions are level, and raise these issues in a respectful, collaborative manner
- d. make sure his first steps towards leadership in a new area is a positive experience by giving lots of affirmation

D. Submission when he is mistreating you

1. Look to the example of Christ: who entrusted himself to God and continued to do right

2. Though there are extreme situations that may legitimate you removing yourself from his leadership for a time (= “redemptive separation”).

e.g. abuse, addiction, unfaithfulness

E. Homework assignment

Wives ask your husbands: “how am I doing in supporting your leadership?”

- a. What do I do to support your leadership that feels really loving?
- b. What could I do that would feel even more loving?

Discussion Questions

1. Opening questions: What struck you most about the sermon/the passage? What surprised you? What confused you? What did you disagree with?

2. Wives, what is the hardest part about the concept of submission for you personally? What difficult issues or emotions does that raise in you?

3. In your own words, explain what Paul means by the phrase “as to the Lord” in v. 22. How does that impact the way you “do submission” in your own marriage?

4. In your own words, explain what Paul means by the phrase “out of reverence for Christ” in v. 21. How does that impact the way you “do submission” in your marriage?

5. In point III.A. above, there is a list of things that biblical submission is NOT. What would you add to that list that you think is important to keep in mind?

6. Husbands, how did you respond to the ideas in the sermon? How did this sermon change your view of your wife’s role or your view of your own role?

7. Wives, what are one or two things you think you can do that make your husband feel particularly supported in his leadership? Then, husbands, how accurate was their answer?