

Ephesians: What's God Saying to You? What are You Going to Do About It?

Ricardo Campos, Pastor Grace Chapel, Orange, CA August 16, 2020

I. Introduction

God's command to wives to submit to their husbands in everything is one of the hardest for women to accept. Their minds start racing with questions and objections: "Why do I have to submit?" "It's not fair, aren't we equals?" "I won't have a voice." "What if he makes a foolish or dangerous decision?" "I'll be abused." "What if he never asks for my opinion?" "What if he's a tyrant?" "What if he's passive and won't make a decision?" and on and on. How do we balance God's command to submit with all these and other concerns?

II. Ephesians: What is God Saying to You and What are You Going to Do About It?

Chapter 5

5:21-24, as Christian wives contemplate God's command to them to submit to their husbands in everything, they must remember that they and their husbands are united to Christ, Ephesians 1-4. This brings with it certain obligations on both the husband and wife: she must submit to her husband in everything but he must always think of his wife's needs and concerns before himself, Ephesians 5:21-33. And if the husband veers from his command in any way—he decides to abuse his wife, he fails to take the lead and authority in the marriage, he fails to work as a team with his helpmate, or anything else—then he will have to answer to the Lord because as a member of His Body he is subject to Christ, Ephesians 5:24 and because Jesus is the Savior of the Body, Ephesians 5:23, which means He will protect one body part from another.

The husband and wife are not adversaries but teammates, when people hear God say to wives, "Submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord," they think God is saying that the man is superior to the woman: she exists to serve him; she has no voice or vote; she must go along with whatever her husband decides for her and the family. However, this is the farthest thing from the truth. Before God spelled out the roles, He made it crystal clear that marriage is a team but it's not made up of a team captain (the man) and a water-girl (the woman). This team is "one flesh," i.e., it's comprised of two halves that God glues together (Genesis 2:18, 21-24) and are supposed to work in unison. This means that whatever he does to her (and vice versa) will affect him in a wonderful way or a painful way. The team does have a team captain, the man, but the woman is an integral part of him. She's not inferior to him but part of him, Ephesians 5:28-31. Yes, she's his "helper comparable to him" but this doesn't mean water-girl. It means she plays a key role in fulfilling God's two mandates: be fruitful and multiply and have dominion over the earth. Both of them must work together or humanity will come to a grinding halt (Genesis 1:28). For the woman this will take on many forms but she is never the negative stereotype of "housewife," i.e., a woman who has no say in the affairs of her husband or the family, but is only there to serve. A wife will always have valuable feedback and advice concerning the family and her husband's affairs whether or not she has a career outside the home. Sometimes a wife may be a CEO housewife, i.e., she also runs a business. But whether or not she has an outside career, she always puts her husband and family first. (Proverbs 31:10-31).

What does submission mean?

Why do I have to submit to my husband? Because that is how God defined the roles of husband and wife (Genesis 2:18; 1 Corinthians 11:3; Ephesians 5:22-24). To refuse to submit to your husband is not just a sin against your husband; it's a sin against God. He's the one telling you to submit, not your husband. Thus, submitting to your husband has nothing to do with who he is; it has everything to do with the position he holds; his authority and leadership comes not from him, but from the position God gave him.

What does it mean to "submit in everything"? Just what it says, "in everything," i.e., ultimately the husband has the last word on any and every decision pertaining to his wife and family, Ephesians 5:22-24. But remember, marriage is a team and the wife is not a silent partner or a menial servant.

Is submitting not having an opinion? Absolutely not! The fact that God calls the wife a "helper" doesn't mean that she's to speak only when spoken to. It means that sometimes she will remain silent as she waits on the Lord to either give her wisdom to speak or for the Lord to correct her husband's bad behavior (1 Peter 3:1-2). Other times, she *must* speak in order to prevent her husband from committing sin or making a very foolish decision (Genesis 21:8-14).

How do I submit when my husband's decision is foolhardy or even dangerous and will most likely hurt the family? If it's a sinful, illegal, or truly dangerous situation, then you don't submit, which is to "obey God rather than man" (Acts 5:27-29). If it's foolish but not sinful, illegal, or truly dangerous, then you must submit to your husband's decision. But you should ask the Lord for wisdom to voice your concerns to your husband and once you voice them, wait on God to correct his folly (or your's or both). If his foolishness persists and it's damaging your marriage or the family, you can reach out to your church family by asking an elder or trusted member to help your husband overcome his foolishness (1 Corinthians 12:26). But make sure that you tell your husband first that you're getting help.

But isn't submission unfair; aren't my husband and I equals before God? First, it is true that men and women are equals before God *as individuals* (Genesis 1:27; 1 Peter 3:7). However, in the roles of husband and wife, the man and woman are not equals. God has clearly placed the man as head of the woman in marriage (1 Corinthians 11:3; Ephesians 5:22-24). Second, no one is immune to submission; everyone has to submit, even God (1 Corinthians 11:3). Third, the God who told wives to submit to their husbands in everything is absolutely just and fair; He is also pure love (Psalm 25:8; 89:14; Ezekiel 18:25; 1 John 4:8). So if you say that a wife's submission is unfair, you're saying that God is unloving and unfair. Fourth, submission is actually a great thing, not a bad thing. That is, submission is seen by many as a horrible thing, as something that demeans. But submission doesn't demean you or rob you of anything; it does the contrary: it glorifies you (Philippians 2:5-11; 2 Timothy 2:12).

How do I submit to my husband? The first thing you have to do is submit to God; trust that when He tells you to submit, He has your best interest in mind. Trust that He will protect you no matter what your husband does, Ephesians 5:23-24. The next thing you have to do is realize that God gave you the gift of wife not primarily for your benefit but for the benefit of your family, i.e., for the godly work that He is going to do in your husband and family (you are a godly instrument in His hands). Finally, to submit simply means to respect your husband, Ephesians 5:33, especially when he's failing as a husband (1 Peter 3:1). And if you're willing to do this, then God will transform your husband; and his transformation into a loving husband who constantly sacrifices for his wife and family will bless you beyond your wildest dreams.

How does submission work when the woman is meant to be a helpmate; how do the two work together? God designed the husband to be the leader and authority in the home and the wife to be his helpmate. However, this doesn't mean that the husband is the supervisor and the wife his underling. When God made the wife a helpmate, it meant that she would work "alongside" him and provide valuable input, advice, and wisdom that the husband is missing (Genesis 2:18). So, on the one hand, he has the final say in everything but on the other, he's never supposed to make decisions independent of her needs, concerns, or advice, Ephesians 5:21-33. Both are to work together, in harmony, not as superior and underling.

What if the husband never asks for help in decision-making; how can the wife be a helpmate in this situation? "Helpmate" means that you help your husband avoid anything that is ungodly (sin, illegalities, and foolishness). So, if your husband never asks for your help, he's violating a key tenet of marriage: oneness with his wife as the "helper" (Genesis 2:18, 20-24). In this case, your job is to help him see his error. However, how you point it out will be key. Never tell, command, or nag your husband about anything. This will only irritate him *and you*. Whenever speaking to someone who has authority over you, always ask or suggest, never command. You're there to help him see his folly not be his sin police. Remember, you're a godly instrument in the Lord's hand in order to make your husband better. If you're unsure what to say or how to bring it up, ask the Lord for wisdom. If you do this 2-3 times and he refuses to accept your help, then inform him that you'll be seeking the help of an elder or other trusted member of the church and why: "Because I love you and this is not how God wants us to live our marriage. Your refusal to treat me as your helpmate is damaging me, you, and our marriage." That's what the Body of Christ is for, to help the members who are suffering (1 Corinthians 12:26).

But if I submit to him in everything, won't it leave me vulnerable to abuse? If he abuses you, God will discipline him for it. Jesus is your Savior and it's not just from hell, Ephesians 5:23-24. He came to save you from everything (Luke 4:18), including your husband if need be. So, if he abuses you, you have two recourses to protect you: the local authorities (Romans 13:4) and the authorities of the church (Matthew 18:15-17). When you obey God and submit to your husband even though it may cause you suffering and he then abuses you, this is you putting your life in God's hands the way Jesus did and He will protect and avenge you (1 Peter 2:21-23).

III. Conclusion

...submitting to one another in the fear of God.