

# ARE WOMEN TO SUBMIT TO THEIR HUSBANDS?

*By Denver Cheddie*

Ephesians 5:22-28. Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself.

Colossians 3:18,19. Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them.

1 Corinthians 11:3. But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.

Are wives supposed to submit to their husbands? In this day and age? This topic provides a perfect example of how culture affects our understanding of the Bible. According to my principle of biblical interpretation, it is essential to try to objectively (as much as one could) understand the culture and circumstances of the original audience of the Bible. But one must admit, that

the culture of the interpreter does affect the way he or she interprets the Bible.

Modern interpretations of the above scriptures are heavily influenced by the feminist movement and the dictates of political correctness of our time. But for those of you familiar with my writing, you know that I care for political correctness as much as a care for a bug on a windshield. I am going to try to answer the title question as objectively as I can, bearing in mind that no one is 100% objective.

The first two passages are fairly clear. Wives are supposed to submit to their husbands, and husbands are to love their wives. So how much of that was culture dependent? It is true that the apostle Paul lived in "less enlightened" times, when the whole idea of female submission was more culturally appropriate. Is this submission to their husbands something that applied solely to women of Paul's times? How different would Paul's commands have been had he lived in 21<sup>st</sup> century America? The third passage (1 Corinthians 11) answers those questions. Paul considered the man to be the head of the woman, not because of the social culture in which he lived, but because he was patterning the husband-wife relationship after the God-Son relationship and the Christ-man relationship. The man's headship over his wife was placed on the same cultural setting as the Father's headship of the Son. If God has not changed with culture, then neither should the husband's headship over the wife. God never intended for this husband-wife pattern to change with culture.

OK so it is not culturally conditioned. What then is the meaning of submit? In what way is the man the head of his wife? The best way to understand this, according to 1 Corinthians 11:3, is to observe God-Christ relationship. This is analogous to the husband-wife relationship. In the same way God is the head of Christ, a husband is the head of his wife. Wives must submit to their husbands in the same way Christ submitted to His Father. Husbands must love their wives the same way God loves His Son. Of course, we could also use the Christ-church relationship as a pattern for the husband-wife relationship and we would end up with the same conclusions. The reason I'm not using that approach though is because the church is divided on exactly what is its relationship with Christ. But the Bible is clear on the relationship between God and Christ. That has not been altered by culture and time.

I am truly amazed how many people have a problem with there being a hierarchical structure of authority within the Trinity. That is because they have a carnal view of submission and authority based on what they've seen on earth, and they can't fathom that same kind of hierarchy in God. Their problem is that they are recreating God after their own image and likeness. They are trying to impose their fleshly understanding of submission on God. What they should be doing is trying to understand how exactly God is the head of Christ, and then redefine our human relationships based on that perfect model.

But how could there be an authority structure within the Trinity? Doesn't the Bible say that God is one (1 John 5:7, and others)? However it occurs, there must be a way to reconcile the concepts oneness with the fact that the Father is the head of the Son. 1 Corinthians 3:8 suggested that Paul and

Apollos were one. Surely it did not mean that they were the same person. It meant that they had one purpose, albeit different functions. Similarly there are ways in which God is one, but there are ways in which God is three. I'm speaking very loosely here. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one in substance, power, omniscience, divinity, etc. They are all equally God. But they have DIFFERENT FUNCTIONS, especially regarding the plan of salvation. The Son was begotten by the Father. The Holy Spirit proceeded from the Son. We come to God the Father through God the Son as God the Holy Spirit convicts us (John 14:6; 16:8). That's all in the Bible.

There are numerous scriptures where Jesus submitted to His Father. See John 5:19; 13:16; 14:12; Hebrews 5:8. The unique feature of Jesus' submission to His Father is that there was no sinful flesh to corrupt that purest model of submission and authority. This submission in no way compromised the oneness between the Father and the Son. This in no way made Jesus less God than his Father.

Interestingly, the same Bible that says women are to submit to their husbands also says that a husband and wife are one (Matthew 19:6, and others). Interesting parallel isn't it? Does the Bible teach that women are inferior to men? Absolutely not. God made mankind (male and female) in his image and likeness (Genesis 1:26). But God does have different functions for male and female. Even in the natural, women get pregnant and men don't. Men have sperm and women don't. Within the God ordained authority structure, men and women have functional differences, even though they are one.

So in what way did Christ have to submit to God? For one, Jesus was on earth doing His Father's business (Luke 2:46). He did nothing unless He saw His Father do it (John 5:19). That suggests to me that the husband is supposed to be the spiritual leader of his household. He is supposed to have a "vision for his family", just to use commonplace terminology. Unfortunately, most men today are far from this ideal. Don't think for one minute that my intention is to bash women. The problem today is that men are not men of God, and women are not like the women of old (1 Peter 3:5). It's a combination of both, and who knows how that ties in to the 50% divorce rate? Admittedly, if a husband is a true man of God, it makes it easier for a woman of God to submit to his authority. So what if he isn't a man of God? There is still 1 Peter 3:1-7, which urges women to be submissive anyway, since that is the best way to win him to Christ, or to pursue a closer walk with God if he is already saved.

How did God and the Son handle conflicts, if any? The closest the Father and the Son came to a conflict was in Matthew 26:36-45. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed, "Lord, if it is possible let this cup pass from me, nevertheless not as I will but as you will." Jesus agonized over this for 3 hours. It was not just a one line prayer. It was a monumental travail to the point where Jesus started sweating blood. The phrase "not as I will" strongly suggests that part of Jesus – perhaps his human side – did not want to go to the cross. He could have got out of it if He wanted to. He could have called twelve legions of angels (Matthew 26:53). It would not have made Him any less God. But He chose to submit to His Father's will.

How should husbands and wives handle conflicts? You tell me. By mutual discourse conducted in the spirit of understanding and submission? A big complaint that women have is that their husbands just sit around all day doing nothing. He doesn't help and he doesn't seem to have any plan. But when a man finally musters the courage to make some proactive decisions, she fights him every step of the way. If a woman only knew that a man's natural inclination is to delegate all the responsibilities to her (Genesis 3:17), she should be glad when he makes proactive decisions and should encourage it. I don't even know why this whole submission issue is such a problem.

Note that the Father was never domineering over the Son, neither should men be domineering over their wives. Authority is certainly not a means of flexing one's muscles. If a woman is in an abusive relationship, she has the option of leaving.

Let us consider one final passage of scripture. Matthew 8:5-9.

Now when Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, pleading with Him, saying, "Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, dreadfully tormented." And Jesus said to him, "I will come and heal him." The centurion answered and said, "Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to his one, 'go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."

What exactly did this centurion say to Jesus? And why was Jesus so impressed by what he said, as the passage goes on to explain? The centurion was a man UNDER authority and IN authority. The word, "also" suggests that someone else fit that same description. That person was, of course, Jesus. The centurion recognized that same authority in Jesus. Just as the centurion was under authority and in authority such that his servants had to obey his words, He saw that same authority structure in Jesus and thus requested that Jesus just "speak a word". The unmistakable implication is that Jesus was also UNDER authority and IN authority. He was under his Father's authority, and because He was in authority, He could just speak a word and demons and sicknesses would have to obey. The centurion recognized this authority, and Jesus was amazed.

Could it be that the real key to female empowerment does not lie in feminism, but rather in submission to authority? The same is true for all of us, not just women. Doesn't this passage put submission in a whole new light? Submission is not about carnal and chauvinistic subjugation, but about placing oneself in God's order of things such that one's functional uniqueness may be fully explored.

OK so I painted a pretty picture of the theory using flowery language. Does this make a difference in real life? Or is it just theory? I submit to you that one's theology – what one believes deep down inside – significantly affects the way one lives one's life. Why is it that so many good Christian women are dating unsaved men or men who are at best feeble Christians? Is it

because, deep down inside, they don't see the need for strong male authority in their lives? If the answer to the above question is yes, then I say feminism is a disease that has eroded the foundations of family life, and ultimately the effectiveness of the body of Christ. And the sad thing is that we never even saw it. We are like the frog in cold water which was slowly heated to boiling. Now we are in hot water and we don't even know it.

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