

Unwilling

Submitting to God's Hierarchy

Long before the Creator placed Adam and Eve in the Garden, there was one who questioned authority. Rather than humbly submitting himself under God's leadership, he said in his heart, "*I will be like the Most High*" (Isaiah 14:14, NKJV). His desire was to exalt himself above *The Authority*—to act independently of His decisions, His will, and His ways. And as we learned in Lesson One, once Satan's poison entered into the relationship between husband and wife, contentions over headship and submission arose.

The Lord has established the family structure with purpose and intent. Words like authority and headship, submission and subjection paint the pages of God's Word, characterizing the relationships between Father and Son, God and His children, and husbands and wives. A wife's submission to her husband is meant, in part, to teach her of her relationship to the Lord. Submitting to the decisions, will and ways of her husband, requires her to exercise dependence, faith, and trust in someone other than herself. Submission teaches her humility and gentleness, to lay down her ideals and relinquish her rights for the sake of another. In the same manner she submits to God, seeking His will above her own, she must submit to her husband and his decisions.

Mark 14:36 says, "*Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will*" (NKJV).

In his book *Love and Respect*, author Emerson Eggerichs shares a story of a woman who unashamedly stated her beliefs regarding the concept of submission. "I want him to be the head; I want him to be the leader. I just want to make sure that he makes decisions in keeping with what I want." Unfortunately, Eggerichs reported, "the room broke into laughter."¹

This young woman stated what most women believe about submission. What does submission mean to you? _____

How do you demonstrate submission in your relationship with your husband? _____

In what instances have you chosen not to subject yourself to his authority? _____

Hierarchy

Romans 13:1-2 tells us that God has established all positions of human authority—within governments, within businesses, within churches, within families, and more specifically, within marriages.

Why is it necessary for every God appointed institution to have a leader? What generally happens when the lines of leadership are blurred? _____

Do you believe the same will result in a marriage where the partners have equal authority? Why, or why not? _____

Read 1 Corinthians 11:3. List the hierarchy God has established within a marriage. _____

Now read Ephesians 5:21-24, Colossians 3:18, Titus 2:5, and 1 Peter 3:1-6.

As you have just read, the Word of God clearly establishes the husband's position of authority within the marriage. His headship does not mean that the woman is inferior to the man, as God sees them as equals (see Galatians 3:28 and 1 Peter 3:7), but that God has ordained specific functions and responsibilities for the husband and wife within marriage. For a wife, submission to her husband is necessary to carry out her God-given role.

The first obvious aspect of submission is the acceptance and acknowledgment of your husband's authority as the God-appointed leader of the home. Have you acknowledged his right to lead? If so, how? If not, what is keeping you from yielding to his authority? _____

Giving Way

Let's continue by establishing the biblical definition of submission. The Greek word for "*submit*, or *submissive*" in the New Testament passages listed above is *hupotasso*. It means "to subject one's self, to submit to one's control, [and] to yield to one's admonition or advice." *Hupotasso* is "a Greek military term meaning to arrange in a military fashion under the command of a leader. In a non-military use, it was a voluntary attitude of giving in, cooperating, assuming responsibility, and carrying a burden."²

Look back over the definition of submission. Which aspect(s) of submission do you seem to struggle with the most? Circle your answer(s).

As you just read, submission is voluntarily surrendering or yielding your will; it is also an attitude. It is *not* yielding to commands or being forced to do something you do not agree with. Submission differs from obedience in that it leaves room for choice. We are to subject ourselves to our husbands in the same way we would subject ourselves to the Lord (Ephesians 5:22).

Consider the following:

Have you granted the Lord His rightful position in your life? _____

Have you relinquished control of your circumstances to Him? _____

Do you follow the Lord's leading "*in everything*" (Ephesians 5:24)? _____

Do you trust His judgments and His abilities? _____

Also consider *how* you respond to the Lord's requests. On a scale of 1-10, 1 being resistant and rebellious and 10 being fully submitted, circle the number you believe best represents your level of submission to the Lord. Now, mark an X on the number that best describes your level of submission to your husband.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

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SHINING IN THE MIDST OF YOUR MARRIAGE**

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Is there any correlation between your willingness to submit to the Lord's authority and your willingness to submit to your husband's authority? If so, what? _____

When you submit to your husband, are you submitting to the Lord? Is refusing to submit to your husband a refusal to trust in God? Why, or why not? _____

Reluctant

There are many reasons wives are reluctant to submit to their husband's headship. One reason may be that they feel that their ideas and opinions will no longer be heard or valued. Submission does not require a wife to remain silent when conflicts arise, but it does necessitate a "*gentle and quiet spirit*" (1 Peter 3:4, NKJV).

When you disagree with your husband, do you challenge his position of authority by asserting your opinion, or do you state your opinion calmly and reasonably? _____

If a wife strongly disagrees with her husband after discussing a specific issue, she must apply 1 Timothy 2:12 to her situation. This verse tells us that women are not to exercise authority over men but are to remain quiet. The head of the husband is Christ, not the wife. As we learned in the last lesson, a woman will never win her husband to her side by exasperating him with her words (1 Peter 3:1-2).

Another reason many wives choose not to submit to their husbands is because they lack confidence in their husband's judgment and ability to make wise decisions. The fact is some wives *do* have better discernment and *are* able to make better decisions than their husbands. Even so, this is where a meek spirit and trust in God collide. A wife is to voice her concerns with gentleness, while acknowledging that her husband has the final say.

Do you believe that God is able to work in and through your husband's life? Why, or why not?

How does trusting God for the outcome of the situation enable you to submit to your husband's decisions? _____

Why is it imperative that you demonstrate grace towards your husband when he makes a bad decision? _____

How does a gracious attitude keep your heart from becoming haughty, resentful, or bitter towards him when he does make poor decisions? _____

Read Ephesians 5:25-33. A woman may choose not to submit to God's established hierarchy because her husband is unlike the ideal man described in this passage. Perhaps he doesn't treat her as he should. Perhaps she feels her husband does not deserve to be respected because he is an unbeliever, or because he struggles with a specific sin. Again, 1 Peter 3:1 exhorts a wife to submit to her unbelieving, or wayward husband, in the same manner Christ submitted to the Father.

According to 1 Peter 2:23, what does this look like? _____

Perhaps your husband's advice is not in line with biblical teaching. This brings us to yet another question of submission: Are there instances when a wife should not submit to her husband's authority? The answer is: absolutely!

When our submission to God conflicts with our submission to our husband's authority, we must draw the line. A wife's obedience to God always takes precedence over her obedience to her husband. If a wife must sin in order to yield to her husband's wishes, she is *not* to go along with him. If he is involved in something illegal, unethical, or just plain evil she is not to submit.

The story of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5 vividly illustrates this point. Read verses 1-11. Likewise, Acts 5:17-42 teaches us that we are not to disobey God's instructions in order to obey human authority.

Record Acts 5:29 in the space provided. _____

Lastly, some women do not allow their husbands to take the lead because they fear the consequences of their decisions. The definition of submission stated that the "voluntary attitude" of submission may require wives to carry a burden. Read Luke 22:39-46 and Hebrews 5:7-9.

Christ submitted Himself to the Father's decisions, will and ways, knowing it would bring pain and suffering for a time. Will you place yourself under His authority, and then under your husband's authority, as He has asked, trusting that His plan for your marriage is best? If so, initial here. _____

In closing, David Hocking states, "The Bible teaches that submission to authority pleases God. If our desire were truly centered in the glory and pleasure of God, it would be easy for us to submit to authority. We obey because it is right to do so. It doesn't matter whether [we] feel like it or whether [we] have a reason for it...Obedience to authority is an act that demonstrates we are living our lives to the glory of God."³

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Generally, a woman will submit to outside authority figures (government officials, her boss, or church leadership) before she will submit to her own husband. Why is this?

Is this true of you in your relationship with your husband? If so, why?

2. In Romans 13:1 we learned that God has established all positions of authority and that He expects us to yield to those authorities. Our willingness to do so provides order and protection.

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How has our disregard for God's authority structure within marriage negatively affected our society and our marital relationships?

Which of the society's ideals for marriage have you adopted? How does God's plan for marriage conflict with these ideals?

3. Have you attempted to smother your husband's authority by making him feel guilty when he is firm?
4. Antonyms for the word "submit" are resist, refuse, defy, oppose, withstand, and withdraw. Synonyms are surrender, yield, defer, accept, comply, and agree. Which of these words characterize your marriage? Circle your answers.

What does this reveal about your level of submission to your husband?

5. Have you ever said, "If he would _____, then I would submit."? If so, what contingencies have you placed on your submission?
6. How often does fear keep you from submitting yourself to your husband? Are you afraid to relinquish control?

If you do not feel that you are able to trust your husband, can you trust God to work in the situation?

7. First Peter 3:5-6 says, "*The holy women of old...trusted God and accepted the authority of their husbands. For instance, Sarah obeyed her husband, Abraham, when she called him her master. You are her daughters when you do what is right without fear of what your husbands might do*" (NLT). Explain how fear represents a lack of trust in God.
8. If you were to make a bad decision would you want your husband to say, "I told you so!" or "You should have listened to me!"? How can comments of this nature cause a man to become discouraged and passive?
9. How will negative responses to your husband's admonition and advice affect his willingness to lead?
10. Yielding to your husband requires you to slow down and let him take the lead. How can you apply the concept of yielding to your marriage?
11. Submission requires you to lay down your will and put your husband's needs before your own. In what ways can you show your husband that you are willing to honor his need to be the leader of the home?

¹ Eggerichs, Dr. Emerson. *Love and Respect: The Love She Most Desires, The Respect He Desperately Needs*. Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 2004. 215.

² Strong, J. (1996). *The exhaustive concordance of the Bible : Showing every word of the text of the common English version of the canonical books, and every occurrence of each word in regular order*. (electronic ed.) (G5293). Ontario: Woodside Bible Fellowship.

³ Hocking, David L. *Pleasing God*. San Bernardino, California: Here's Life Publishers, 1984. 114.