

# Submission & Equality

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First and foremost we must acknowledge that TRUE Godly submission and servanthood are ultimate and eternal principles of a loving God. It's only because of God's mercy that we as believers have any rights, privileges, or claims to inheritance. So let's agree to not fall into the contentious trap that would cause us to stumble in dissension. For surely beloved, it is the apprehension of TRUTH that carries us toward God— propelling us into the glorious end of this age.

Know my friend, that Jesus already paid the highest ransom for your freedom and equality. He made us all -- and that was "Good." He died to set us all free. Now's the time to grab hold of that promised freedom-in-Christ, a liberty not rooted at the expense of our family values, but birthed because of them. Godly freedom maintains honest and just values. Godly freedom never becomes license to live without structure or governmental authority. Rather, true freedom offers us the ability to choose to become all God intends us to be. The church doesn't need a bunch of rebels, but a cooperating team of equals operating within diverse and distinct talents.

Unfortunately, many believers still grapple with man's tradition (Mk. 7:13). Tradition makes God's Word of no effect because it enslaves our thought-life without synchronization to Bible facts. Tradition insists that we affirm the way it's always been. Religion tries to force us to comply with pre-set interpretations. Why has that happened?

Let's hypothesize a need for us to write our own epistle today -- in order to document proper Christian deportment and the beliefs of our times. Those living in the far future who might read our epistle (without understanding the times in which we live, without knowledge of our history or our cultural practices, without speaking or understanding our antiquated language) might also determine legislation that would not reflect the meaning or the significance that we intended.

Culture is the integrated practice of learned behavioral patterns and belief systems by which characteristic people groups live. Paul's assignment was to make the Gospel relevant to the pagan cultures of the Gentile world. To understand Paul's writings (the terms he used and the application he intended), we must examine the cultural influences present in the places where Paul wrote. From archeological and historical evidence, we know that some of these Gentile converts continued their previously inappropriate cultural practices into their newly acquired Christian life.

Many abused their freedom, and caused disorder in the assembly. Paul spoke to them of submission — but most believers today don't know what that concept of submission meant to Paul. When Paul used the term "submission" in reference to women, he addressed several specific situations, which were not intended to be blanket instructions for the behavior of all women in the Global Church Universal- forever!

THE HISTORY: We must remember Paul's mission was to a Gentile congregation who were ignorant of Jewish history. Additionally, those were times of great upheaval. Women were to be kept veiled and hidden without rights. Wives were regarded as chattel. Pagan temple worship was obscene. Wars swept the land. Opposition to Christianity was fierce. Therefore, it wasn't too surprising that Paul spoke of submission. But to the Gentile pagan convert, it was ASTOUNDING that Paul asked the husbands to love and give themselves up for their wives! What? That was unimaginable.

Many church fathers and Bible translators later failed to take the historical information into consideration when explaining Scriptures. And, that matters to us! Because most of their rigid interpretation still defines our outlook, and our church doctrine. That's why we must try to discover what specific occasions prompted Paul to respond.

When speaking of women, Paul addressed many indigenous matters of local or even temporary application. The passages that SEEM to restrict women are confined to those addressed to regions of pagan influence that needed correction. During Bible days, both the Greeks and the Romans understood the context of Paul's restrictions. Some pivotal issues to consider when analyzing the scriptures concerning submission in the Pastoral Epistles are:

1. Greek society and philosophy had an aversion to femaleness.
2. Paul warned against ever present GNOSTIC heresies (so called knowledge 1 Tim. 6:20) that formed within and without the church:

### 3. Converted pagan Gentiles had to learn correct behavior.

Another issue was that the local governments threatened the safety of the church. When Paul told the believers to "submit," he gave them ways to cope within a civilization hostile to Christianity. Paul writes, "SUBJECTING yourself one to another in the fear of Christ" (Ephesians 5:21). Likewise, Peter addressed the same community needs by saying, "Yea all of you BE SUBJECT to another, and be clothed with humility" (1 Peter 5:5). Peter also tells them, "SUBMIT yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution . . . , for such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men" (1 Peter 2:13).

Both Paul and Peter knew that by living carefully amidst foreign governments, believers could experience greater safety. Even though the Christian women were liberated, the pagan women were not; and any demonstration of freedom attracted unwanted attention that jeopardized the believer's communities. So, be silent, dress modestly, don't attract attention, shhhhh.

In any event, chaste women were especially appointed as church leaders; they ran house churches and were listed as apostles. Paul set up and acknowledged churches with several women in charge (Rom. 16:5, etc.) and as co-laborers (yokefellows) with him (Phil. 4:2-3, Rom. 16:1-2). Responsible for their own behavior, women actively led in ways that appeared to be no different in function from male leadership.

**THE WORD:** Submission (hupotasso) means to get under and lift up, or to put in order. Submission does not mean, "to obey." The Greek word for "obey/obedience" is hupakoe, which means to listen to or to harken to. Submission (hupotasso) means to get under and lift up, or to put in order. Other scholars point out that the German translation of that word, sich unterstellen, means "to place oneself at the disposition of." It can also be a military term referring to the equal sharing of tasks, to support, to fulfill one's part of the assignment.

Submission can be explained as a voluntary yielding of one's preferences, except when principle is involved. Another good definition is, "To come along side as to give meaning." This certainly isn't subordination, nor control, but the love of God to bless the partner, and put the other first. Submission is mutual. We subject ourselves willingly, not by forced rule. Only God subjects others and expects obedience. Submission is a voluntary giving of oneself and never implies duty or subordination. It should be mutually and purposefully directed to bring pleasure and blessing to one another.

Schleusner's Greek-Latin Lexicon to the Septuagint declares that the verb form, "to submit," does not necessarily indicate "servile subjection." When Jesus was a boy, He was subject to His parents. However, He didn't bother to consult them when He stayed in the temple stating, "I must be about my Father's business" (Luke 2:49,51). From this example, we see that Jesus considered His own necessary submission as volitional and conditional to His own individual judgment/discernment.

**ONLY ONE CAN BE IN CHARGE:** Does the man have the "final say"? Paul describes the office of an overseer or a bishop as, "One who RULES his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence" (1 Tim. 3:4, 3:12). "Proistemi" is the word used here to mean guide, rule, or manage. Oooops. Well, there's the proof that the man's in charge — a Bishop gets to be the "boss" of his home.

This particular Scripture is often used to imply control, headship, and male supremacy. But, just a couple chapters later in 1 Timothy 5:14, which says, "So I counsel younger widows to marry, to have children, to manage their homes and to give the enemy no opportunity for slander." That word for "manage" (oikodespoteo) is rightly translated "to rule the household, guide the house, manage and direct the household affairs." Strong's Dictionary defines "oikodespoteo" as meaning "the head of (i.e. rule) a family." In other words, Paul tells Timothy that bishops rule their house with dignity (1 Tim 3:4), and in the same letter (just a little later 5:14) also tells women to manage (or rule) their home.

We see from Paul's letter to Timothy an expectation for equal rule by the man and woman. No wonder Paul tells Titus to have the older woman (presbutis or female elder) teach the younger, because there's a lot to learn on how to rule. Since both the man and the woman rule their home, shouldn't the church today be teaching both the men and women how to do that?

**EPHESIANS 5:22:** Paul urges believers to be filled (drunk) with the spirit while giving thanks and submitting "yourselves one to another in the fear of God." There is no greater submission than "one to another." To that directive he then adds that wives submit to husbands, children obey their parents, and slaves obey their masters. For Paul, the idea of mutual submission was not contradictory; we all must submit. Volitional submission is required from all Christians.

Interestingly, verse 22 is usually quoted out of context. "Wives, submit." This is one of the first verses learned by most Christians, and yet the word submit doesn't even occur in the original language! The original

Greek reads, "Wives to your own husband..." The verb understood from verse 21, rather than stated should be "Subjecting yourselves to one another, wives to your own husbands." However most English translations do not show a connection between these two sentences.

For many centuries now, we've been taught "women are to submit." However, by reading further we find that the New Testament says that women are to submit "as to the Lord," or "as the church is subject to Christ." This qualification becomes the conditional extension of submission. All believers need to be subject to Christ. None are second rate or inferior to each other. Interestingly, women are now free to judge what is "in the Lord." This reveals a whole new dynamic in marital association.

The truth of redemption means that Jesus Christ lived, died, and resurrected to equally redeem all humanity. Redemption supercedes the causes and effects of the fall. Now, through faith in Christ we are all children of God, one in Christ, and heirs together in salvation without regard to gender, class, or racial distinctives (Jn. 1:12-13; Rom. 8:14-17; 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 3:26-28). "As to the Lord" suddenly reveals that the sole purpose of volitional submission is to reflect the nature Christ Jesus.

Sooooo... Who's the "head of the house?" Only Jesus. Who's the priest of the home? Every believer who lives there (1 Pet. 2:5-9, Rev. 1:6, 5:10, etc.).

No further penance or atonement was necessary to receive the completed work of God. Believers were baptized into ONE BODY.

1 PETER 3: Peter tells believers in the previous chapter to submit to the Lord, to kings, and governors. Slaves were to submit to their masters. Chapter 3 tells wives, "in the same way," and like everyone else "be submissive! She's to be a hidden person of the heart, dressing modestly, serving as an ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price" (vs.4).

And husbands, (v7) "in the same way," be considerate that your prayers be heard. "Likewise, you husbands, live considerately (kata gnosis literally means according to knowledge) with your wives...as the weaker sex, since you are joint heirs of the grace of life..." (v.7 RSV). Notice that Peter doesn't say that the wife is weaker, but to treat her "as the weaker vessel." This statement of "weaker vessel" is also culturally specific (ancient women couldn't read or write, they couldn't go out in public, couldn't sign their name, or own property, etc.).

These comments were certainly not an indictment against later generations being able to function independently. Paul also uses similar wording to describe the devil walking about "as a roaring lion" (5:18), but we know that the devil isn't actually a lion. With that analogy, we know that the wife isn't necessarily weaker -- still, it meant that the man should be gentle and kind.

Through GREATER KNOWLEDGE about her, he discovers how to relate to her. Now, they're joint heirs of a common inheritance of the grace of life. Now that she is an heir, if he fails to respect her as such then his prayers will be hindered.

**IMPORTANCE:** Why is this subject of equality of humanity important to us in these last days -- the third day?

1. Paul described this collage of various races and types of humans comprising the church as "a great mystery" (v.31-33). Do we understand this mystery? Well, unity and oneness will only be found in poems, songs, and lofty ideals until we realize the truth of equality.

2. Divorce is rampant in the church. Yet, we all know that Paul likens one-flesh human marriage to the one-flesh relationship of Christ with this composite church (Eph. 5:32). But how can we imagine what this relationship (Christ and the church) could be like -- when marriages decline and contention rises? What is this comparison between Jesus and marriage? We'll not unlock this "great mystery" in the church until we find equality in the home and with all of humanity.

3. Submission surpasses age, gender, sex, nationality, and economic status. Biblical submission replicates the character of God: submission is completely and totally all-encompassing. All believers are called to LIVE in submission -- inclusively-- beyond gender, beyond race, and beyond class difference.

YES, the principle of submission should rightly govern the church, the home, the work place, and our citizenship in the world. We're ALL to emulate Christ in our day-to-day lives. Jesus taught submission and servanthood as eternal principles. Don't misunderstand, accurate Biblical submission is good -- but obedience and deference isn't submission. Patriarchy and domination were consequences of the fallen Adamic nature.

New Testament wives were called to be "Joint heirs of the grace of life." Godly submission occurs only

because WE WANT TO BLESS-- and not because WE HAVE TO. When submission is no longer voluntary then it becomes obedience &ndash; and that&rsquo;s a different &ldquo;word&rdquo; entirely. God didn&rsquo;t tell wives to &ldquo;obey&rdquo; anyone but God. Only children are to obey -- their parents. Married partners submit; that command is to submit to each other -- &ldquo;as to the Lord.&rdquo; The purpose of submission is not for one person to be designated as superior &ldquo;dictator and boss&rdquo; with another as inferior.

It&rsquo;s true! A marriage can have only one head-- and that&rsquo;s God! He intends for His body to stand on equal footing in camaraderie, cooperation, and affection. Equality doesn&rsquo;t necessarily imply equality of function. Whoever&rsquo;s the best at a duty should do it!! Being submissive to one another constitutes principles of agreement and symmetry.

S -- Sincerely desiring to bless your partner.

U &ndash; Ultimately seeking for unity and God&rsquo;s best.

B &ndash; Becoming bone of their bone, and flesh of their flesh &ndash; together &ldquo;in Christ.&rdquo;

M &ndash; Maintaining faithfulness and trust, even in difficult times.

I &ndash; Involving yourself affectionately with each other.

S &ndash; Sustaining a cooperative relationship.

S &ndash; Satisfying the relationship with communion and deep knowing.

I &ndash; Initiating encouragement for the partner to become the best they can be.

O &ndash; Obeying the revealed will of God.

N &ndash; Nurturing one another&rsquo;s needs.

The pre-eminent New Testament concept of submission deals with mutual respect. It never conveys the loss of one's right to make choices. It should not be viewed as an attitude required only from women/wives in relation to husbands or men. Submission becomes an &ldquo;adjustment ethic,&rdquo; which means that it spontaneously arises from both partners, from a softened heart that wants to &ldquo;get under and push up with support.&rdquo; It&rsquo;s a compatible rapport of interdependence with another person &ndash; one that promotes complimentary harmony, partnership, and admiration. Paul viewed marriage as a reciprocal proposal, &ldquo;ONE TO ANOTHER,&rdquo; and &ldquo;in like manner,&rdquo; which means a mutually loving sacrifice, not domestic tyranny.

The key: MUTUAL SUBMISSION

&ldquo;Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?&rdquo;  
(Amos 3:3)

As we see the potential within our mates, let us lay down our own lives for one another (1 Jn. 3:16). Identity is found in true reciprocal relationship. We don&rsquo;t need to compete for supremacy, because self-importance and dominance belongs to &ldquo;fallen humanity.&rdquo; True submission is loving, kind-hearted support. Jesus (Who was God) was totally submissive to the Father&rsquo;s will, yet He did not think it robbery to be EQUAL with God.

Marriage should be an unbreakable exchange of pledged fidelity, affection, and belonging. It&rsquo;s a bond of agreement through which God multiplies His power (Mt. 18:19-20). That&rsquo;s why the Lord calls us to embrace an unconditional type of love (agape 1 Cor. 13) which EXPECTS NOTHING IN RETURN. Interestingly, the word for submission is almost identical in meaning to the word love, (Agapao -- husbands, love your wives). This agape concept involves responsiveness to the needs of the other. Agape love unites compatible minds. It allows us to enter the other person&rsquo;s consciousness and make their dreams part of our inclination.

This kind of love slips past our resistance and opens us to the depth of someone else. True intimacy results from mutual love. Holy covenant means we willingly invest our lives into one another. What a difference! We imitate Christ.

When the husband loves his wife as Christ loves the church -- that means that he&rsquo;s willing to die in the ways that will help bring her to functioning completion. That&rsquo;s what Jesus did. The husband should encourage his wife (wash her) with the truth of the Word that was stolen long ago&hellip; the truth of her worth, the truth of her equality! A liberated husband helps buffet impending opposition. A secure husband isn&rsquo;t threatened by his partner&rsquo;s abilities. He&rsquo;ll make way for her, knowing that their mutual benefits increase when each of them is optimized. As a fulfilled woman flourishes, a light shines from her eyes with vision and hope for the future. She will honor her husband and choose to bless him. They will live in peace.

The confident husband of the virtuous (strong) woman (in Proverbs 31) isn&rsquo;t intimidated by her abilities. Instead, he sings her praises: &ldquo;Many a woman shows how capable she is; but you excel them all&rdquo; (V.28b 29 NEB). Her family rises up and calls her blessed.

Beyond the sexual union emerges the even greater union of minds and spirits... With Jesus as the &ldquo;head&rdquo; of the relationship, there is true koinonia (defined as communion, interchange, intercourse, and fellowship) in every area of life -- the spirit, soul, and body. The cross reversed the curse of the Fall. Now couples can approach the throne of grace as the NEW CREATION -- ready to serve one another. And when they lose themselves for Jesus' sake, they find

themselves.

Liberated marriage unleashes a complementary ONENESS that releases God's miraculous power. True "submission" means a mutual sacrifice -- for both parties. In this DIGNITY of being friends in partnership, GOD LIVES.

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