



The Sustained Marriage: A Submitted Helper

INTRO

We've been discussing the sustained marriage. Marriage takes intentionality and priority to be all that God has designed it to be.

On April 5th, 1943, Dietrich Bonhoeffer was placed in prison. While in prison, he was there he wrote a message for his niece's wedding. He never preached that message because he was executed. But in that wedding message, he wrote a very powerful line:

"Today, you're young and very much in love, and you think your love will sustain your marriage --it won't; it's your marriage that will sustain your love."

Marriages are not sustained by feelings or expectations. Marriages are sustained through decisions to walk in love toward God and one another and walk in obedience to Christ. The Sustained marriage needs:

- A Supreme Sustainer
- A Sacrificial Leader
- A Submitted helper

QUESTION

Last week, I asked husbands, "How would you feel if Jesus loved you the way you love your wife?"

Today, I want to ask wives a question:

Wives, how would your relationship with Jesus be if you honored, respected, and submitted to Him like you do to your husband?

BIBLE PASSAGE

[Eph 5:22-24 NKJV] 22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. 24 Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.

[Col 3:18 NKJV] 18 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.

[1Pe 3:1-6 NKJV] 1 Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, 2 when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear. 3 Do not let your adornment be merely outward--arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel-- 4 rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God. 5 For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands, 6 as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror.

INTRO

You've heard the saying two heads are better than one. That might be true in some cases, but not when it comes to my physical body. If I had two heads competing to be in charge, there would be very little I would ever accomplish.

A married couple, under biblical definition, is one body. The two shall become one flesh. On that body, there can only be one head. It's been said that marriage is like riding a horse.

Only one at a time can ride in the front.

- The last thing your marriage and family need is a battle for rank and leadership.
 - I've heard it suggested in our modern day that the marriage doesn't need a leader. As long as everyone follows Christ, it will all work out. Not only does that practically not work in any institution that humans are a part of, but it directly opposes the picture that Paul paints of the marriage relationship as modeling the relationship between Christ and the church.
- If I asked you, **"As a Christian who is part of the body of Christ (male or female), do you willingly submit yourself to Christ's authority?"** Your answer would probably be **"yes!"** You probably wouldn't say, **"Sometimes I follow Jesus, and sometimes Jesus follows me, and we just make everything mutual, and I don't really ever trust him or follow him unless I agree 100% first."**
- In the same way, God has designed the roles in marriage to include a head and a body. The head leads and provides, and the body follows and helps.
- Just as the body of Christ, the church, is subject to the head, who is Christ, so the wife is subject to the head of the marriage, which is the husband.

APPLICATION

Many wives hear the word submit and have immediate aversion, fear, and even frustration as they imagine what that means. I think there are several reasons for that:

1. **They understand it culturally and not biblically** - In other words, they immediately think that makes them a doormat or a slave without equal value and without a voice, and I'll show you how that couldn't be further from the truth.
2. **They don't see their husband as capable of leading**- This might have some validity. This is why I strongly encourage women in premarital counseling to go in with eyes wide open, having full confidence they respect the kind of man their fiance is and is becoming because they will be called to follow his lead and honor his role. But sometimes, it's nothing more than human pride and desire to be in control.

1. [Gen 3:16 NKJV] [16] To the woman He said: "I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; In pain you shall bring forth children; Your desire shall be for your husband, And he shall rule over you."

2. In other words, the wife's natural temptation, because of sin, will be to usurp her husband's authority and control and try to be the one to have the final say in the

familial decisions.

3. Biblical submission is not a matter of who is smartest, most capable, or has the better ideas. That's why you're a team, you both have strengths and weaknesses that complement each other. I've found that when a wife learns to practice and strive for biblical submission, she is often surprised by what her husband is capable of when he has to take initiative.

3. They've been through an abusive situation with an authority figure - This causes one's lens of authority to be naturally and understandably skewed to define all authority or leadership by their negative experience with an abusive leader.

Submission is never an excuse for abuse, and no woman is called to submit to or live under abuse. But it's also important to realize when you have that lens and why so that when you're in a healthy relationship with a man who is seeking, by God's grace, to walk in his calling in a healthy, spiritual, and godly way, you don't allow your protective mechanisms to choke and smother the relationship.

4. They are walking in fear or unforgiveness - If you're married to a human man, chances are he's failed you, no matter how good a man he is! That is a trigger for some, "I trusted once, and it hurt me; I'm not going to trust again. I followed his lead and it got us into a pickle, I won't let that happen again, so I'm going to control. He hurt me, and I'm holding onto the bitterness of those feelings and letting them dictate how I will respond to his leadership moving forward."

1. I would remind you that submission to your husband is first about your submission to Christ. If you have trouble trusting your husband, then learn to trust Jesus.

Now I can already sense questions and fear arising, so now, let's talk about the nature of submission, what it is and what it isn't:

BIBLICAL SUBMISSION

Submit - *hypotassō* - to arrange under, to yield to another's will.

- It's the word that is used to describe the willing submission of Jesus the Son to the Father. Within the Godhead, there is perfect equality, but within the role of God the Son, there is a willing submission to the will of God the Father. This is the example we see in the garden of Gethsemane when Jesus said, "Nevertheless, not my will but thine be done."

- It can also be a military term for rank and order. On the battlefield, every man's life is equally valuable, but there is a rank and order that must be observed for functionality. The general's life is not worth more. His role is not more valuable than the soldier who charges the enemy's front lines. But the roles are different. A battle cannot be won if each soldier doesn't respect and honor their chain of authority.
- Paul uses the word like this in Titus 2:

[Tit 2:5 NKJV] 5 [wives are to be] discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed.

But words like submission and authority have almost become synonymous in today's culture with oppression and abuse. When some women, within and outside of the church, hear this command, their minds automatically jump to abuses of authority and power rather than the biblical model of how they are expressed. While this is understandable, Satan has used abuses to manipulate the truth and has pushed a full feminist movement that rejects that God-ordered design for the sexes.

So let's briefly take a look at the scope of a wife's submission within her marriage:

1 A Limited Submission

A. A WIFE'S SUBMISSION IS LIMITED

To HER OWN husband - Every passage specifically mentions this fact. Paul is not saying every woman should be subject to every man. Paul is not saying that every wife must be subject to every husband. No, a wife's submission is to the one she has entered into the covenant relationship with, because it is that marriage that is a picture of Jesus and the church.

- a. Right before Paul tells wives to submit to their husbands, he says: **[Eph 5:21 NKJV] 21 submitting to one another in the fear of God.**
- b. Men and women, in general, are to yield to one another in their interactions. Just because I'm a man and you're a woman doesn't give me the right to wield authority over you. But then he clarifies that the dynamic does change a bit when we enter into marriage where there is a call to fall under rank.

1. **To her obedience to Christ** - Every form of biblical submission, whether is submission to spiritual authority, submission to government, or submission to your husband, has a limit, and that limit is what is "fitting in the Lord," as Paul says in Colossians.

- a. No woman is called to submit to her husband in a way that causes her to disobey the Lord directly. If Adam had been the one to tell Eve to eat the fruit, she shouldn't listen! No woman is called to submit to abuse, physical or otherwise, sexual deviance, or disobedience to God's Word. If a woman is told by her husband you can't go to church, and I don't want you reading your Bible, that is not a reasonable request to submit to.
- b. But here, wives have to be careful not to mix their personal preferences with God's clearly defined will. Now I'll get to the fact in a moment that any husband who is unwilling to see his wife, hear her heart, and consider her desires is a dunce, but for now, wives, you have to develop the ability to trust the Lord's design of leadership when you submit to your husband's guidance for you and your family. Peter even tells us this applies to husbands who are not walking with the Lord, as long as it doesn't conflict with obedience to the Lord.

2. **A husband's authority is limited**- While it is overarching in the sense that a wife should consider her husband's overarching authority, it's not meant to be micromanagement. A Husband's authority is for the sake of causing his wife to thrive, not controlling her. A wife has a scope of authority as well. She has authority in her home, and she has authority over her children. Husbands, God is more concerned with how your decisions affect the spiritual well-being of your family, their protection, and their provision. He is not concerned with you demanding that your wife wear black shoes and not pink, be home by 8:45, and make sure you approve of every decision she makes before she makes it.

- When Peter describes the leadership style and responsibility of elders in the church he writes: **[1Pe 5:3 NIV] 3 not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.**
- If elders can exercise authority without having to be lording control freaks, so can husbands!

2 A Reflective Submission

B. A WIFE'S SUBMISSION IS REFLECTIVE

When a wife submits to her husband and assumes her role as helper, to come alongside him, lift Him up, and help enable him to be the man God has called him to be, she reflects a gentle spirit that quietly shouts, "I am a picture of what it looks like to be submitted to Christ." When a wife portrays that example, it is the strongest conviction to a husband about how he's leading and if he is rising to the occasion to be more like Jesus.

The wife is called to imitate the church in the way she interacts with her husband.

- In the same way that your husband can never be Jesus, but that doesn't give him an excuse not to push toward imitating Christ, a wife should push toward trust, respect, and obedience to her husband's leadership. We already discussed the limits of that, but outside of those limits, a wife should take the church's attitude toward honoring and following Christ.
 - This is the kind of attitude that will win them over when they are failing to lead.

1 Peter tells us what this kind of submission reflects toward a husband

[1Pe 3:1-6 NKJV] 1 Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, 2 when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear. 3 Do not let your adornment be merely outward--arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel-- 4 rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God. [1Pe 3:5-6 NKJV] [5] For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands, [6] as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror.

A.) It reflects Purity: Chaste conduct accompanied by fear

- These words indicate having a passion and zeal for holiness and purity in the fear of God.
- **[Pro 31:30 NKJV] [30] Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing, but a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised.**
- As the years go on, bodies change, and so do the things that matter. A godly man is attracted to a woman who saves herself only for him, and who conducts herself with integrity and kindness in her home and with friends and family.

- **[Pro 31:11 NKJV] [11] The heart of her husband safely trusts her; So he will have no lack of gain.**

C.) It reflects Serenity: Hidden person of the heart; Incorrutable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit

- Everyone has an outward beauty that they focus on and present to others, but Peter says there's another person that's hidden, the person of the heart. It's not visible to the naked eye, but it comes out when it matters most.
- This isn't a verse completely disqualifying or condemning taking care of your physical appearance. As the late, great expositor, J. Vernon McGee always said, "*Ladies, if the barn needs painting, paint it!*"
- This scripture encourages you to prioritize which person you make beautiful. What good is your outward beauty if the inward person doesn't reflect the fruit of the Spirit? **[Pro 11:22 NKJV] [22] As a ring of gold in a swine's snout, So is a lovely woman who lacks discretion.**
 - **What might look differently in your life if, like the hour or two you spend in front of a mirror, you spent in front of the mirror of God's word or invested in building your spiritual character, serving others, time in prayer, exercising spiritual disciplines to see Christ formed in you?**
 - **Here, Paul says that beauty is incorruptible, and the outcome is a gentle and quiet spirit as opposed to a boisterous, rebellious, and loud spirit that lacks discretion.**
- Gentle and quiet doesn't mean a pushover who never speaks. Gentleness is a fruit of the spirit. It means action without the intent to harm. Quietness is not the inability to speak, it's a demeanor and attitude that accompanies what is being said.
- Believe me, your respect and gentle, quiet spirit will further convict your husband of what he does wrong and how he needs to change rather than your nagging or criticism. (Husbands, this doesn't give you an excuse to respond harshly to your wife's weaknesses.)
- A critical spirit may succeed at forcing your husband to do something you want him to do, but he will do it while building resentment, further fueling his sense of inadequacy and insecurity.

[Pro 21:9 NKJV] [9] Better to dwell in a corner of a housetop, Than in a house shared with a contentious woman.

[Pro 12:4 NASB20] [4] An excellent wife is the crown of her husband, but she who shames him is like rottenness in his bones.

I've heard it applied like this: **"The things you encourage in your husband will multiply, and the things you constantly criticize will metastasize."**

With her words, a wife can have the power of a surgeon's scalpel or a sawed-off shotgun. Speaking of the wise woman, Proverbs tells us:

Pro 31:26 NKJV - She opens her mouth with wisdom, and on her tongue is the law of kindness.

- God can take care of the conviction and changing; you take care of honoring your husband's role.

D.) It reflects Courage: Not afraid with any terror

- Sarah honored Abraham's lead, even when Abraham led from his fear. He put her in quite a few precarious situations, to say the least, but she followed her husband's lead because even when she was not able to trust him, she still trusted the Lord. The word indicates an ability not to be intimidated. In other words, Christ wants to develop an inner strength that, though quiet and gentle, is also confident and fearless.
- Ladies, willful and kind obedience is your greatest tool in your marriage. Respect can transform your husband into the man that God wants him to be.
- This is actually what it means to be a helpmate equal to him.

HELPER

[Gen 2:18 NKJV] [18] And the LORD God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him."

Within the marriage relationship and the church, God made man the **head** and woman the **helper (not the neck as My Big Fat Greek Wedding suggests)**.

Now, before all the ladies walk out, please understand that when I say "helper," I don't mean slave help, hired help, or managed help. I don't mean people who are under the authoritarian thumb of a selfish dictator of a man.

- I mean help like how the offensive guard helps the quarterback. The quarterback has to lead the team, but the only reason he doesn't look like a hamburger is because of the help of his offensive line.

The word helper comparable to him:

- **The word in the Hebrew is "Ezer." It means a support in time of need. This is a word that is used speaking of God in relation to Israel on numerous occasions. David declares in Psalm 33, "Our soul waits for the LORD. He is our (help) EZER and our shield."**
- **Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit is referred to three times by Jesus as the "Parakletos," or the helper who comes alongside us.**

In England, there's a subway system called the London Underground. When you step on the train, you have to step over a large gap. When the doors open, you'll hear a British voice kindly tell you to, "Mind the gap." Well, a wife is someone who "fills the gaps." If a helper is someone who "fills the gaps," that means your strengths as a wife don't exist to chide your husband for his areas of weakness but to help him in filling those areas.

- If your husband is not very organized, and that frustrates you, perhaps your organizational abilities can "fill the gap."
- If your husband is not the most romantic egg in the basket, but you are, perhaps contributing, communicating, and planning can help him find his way a little bit.
- **I'm not suggesting that husbands shouldn't grow, learn, and change, but I am suggesting that as a God-ordained helper, if you find ways to support before finding ways to criticize, you might be shocked at the man who shows up on the field.**

ILLUSTRATION

In her book, "The Proper Care and Feeding of Husbands", Dr. Laura Slesinger quotes a number of letters she received from men. While not written from a Christian worldview, it does give a glimpse into what happens within the hearts of most men.

- Dan – men need only appreciation, honest love, and respect. The husband will repay his wife with the laying of the moon and stars at her feet.
- Gary – a husband is like a horse. If his owner drives and beats him, he will go only so far until he bucks and rebels. But if you love him, if you coax him, he will drive himself until his heart explodes before he lets down the one he loves.

APPLICATION

if a wife looks at her husband and says, "he needs to be my helper so I can be his leader," then you will find a marriage with a lot of disappointment and resentment because the expectations are placed in the wrong arena.

Many people often miss the fact that the scripture also calls wife's to love their husbands, but in a bit of a different way:

[Tit 2:4 NKJV] 4 that they (older women) admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children,

love - philandros (Phileo) - to be fond, friendly, and affectionate.

Husbands are to love (agape) in a sacrificial, Christ like manner, but wives are to love by showing affection, kindness, and friendliness toward their husbands.

ILLUSTRATION

As I was preparing, I remembered something one of my old pastors had said in a sermon when I was leading worship at his church. I went back, found the message, and listened. I couldn't agree with it more:

"When I asked Josh to come 2,000 miles across the country and become our worship pastor, his biggest reservation was Ashley's college. She had about a year or so left and wanted to make sure that she finished. And I promised Josh that I would help her finish her college, we'd do whatever it took. But she had no idea whether I would fulfill my promise. She didn't know me from the man in the moon. But when I think of submissive wives, I think of Ashley. Because she put her plans for college on hold, she trusted her husband, and she came 2,000 miles across the country to help him in his ministry, and to help him be the man God had called him to be."

And to this day she hasn't stopped. She's endured my immaturity, my ignorance, my foolish decisions, our moves from family, community, and friends, new churches, new salary structures, and new communities, my ministry schedule, and the distraction of my heart and mind, and there she stands, by my side, faithful for 20 years. I would be nothing without her.

[Pro 31:28 NKJV] [28] Her husband also, and he praises her:

APPLICATION

Husbands, may I emphasize again that if you're actively creating an environment that makes your wife feel unsafe to submit to your leadership, then you criticize her for her lack of respect; as the head, God is holding you accountable. But ladies, if you can see glimmers of hope, a godly man trying to overcome his humanity, die to himself, and lay down his life for your sake, then come to his aid, be his support, lift him up when the world beats him down, make his home an environment of joy, fill in the gaps and help him rise to the calling God has placed on his life.